

A 'history of influence' study of John Baptist de La Salle's recourse to the Bible, with particular reference to the Gospel of Matthew 4.23-10.8

John Cantwell BA, DipEd, GradDipEd(Rel), BA(Hons), MTh

Flinders University

Faculty of Education, Humanities and Law: Theology

September 27, 2015

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

	<i>page</i>
SUMMARY .....	vi
DECLARATION .....	vii
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS .....	viii
ABBREVIATIONS .....	ix
PRELIMINARY REMARKS .....	x
<b>INTRODUCTION</b> .....	<b>1</b>
1. MY INTEREST IN DE LA SALLE AND HIS ENGAGING WITH THE BIBLE	
2. THE THESIS	
3. DEFINING THE TERMS	
4. SIGNIFICANT EARLIER WORKS ON DE LA SALLE AND THE BIBLE	
5. A BRIEF OUTLINE OF THE LIFE OF JOHN BAPTIST DE LA SALLE (1651-1719)	
6. A BRIEF OUTLINE OF DE LA SALLE’S THEOLOGICAL AND BIBLICAL EDUCATION	
7. OUTLINE OF THE THESIS	
<b>CHAPTER 1</b>	
<b>DE LA SALLE’S APPRECIATION OF THE BIBLE</b> .....	<b>25</b>
INTRODUCTION	
1. THE EXTENT OF DE LA SALLE’S RECOURSE TO THE BIBLE	
Terminology and statistics	
Mentions of the terms ‘Scripture’, ‘Gospel’ and ‘Old and New Testaments’	
Biblical quotations in the Meditations of De La Salle	
2. TWO SIGNIFICANT MEDITATIONS	
St Jerome	
St Catherine of Alexandria	
Characteristic aspects of De La Salle’s biblical references	

3. DE LA SALLE’S APPRECIATION OF THE BIBLE: NINE PRINCIPLES

4. DE LA SALLE’S PRINCIPLES REFLECT THOSE OF AUGUSTINE

5 THE BIBLE IN OTHER WRITINGS OF DE LA SALLE

- The Bible in De La Salle’s catechetical writings
- The Bible in the De La Salle’s Meditations
- The Bible in *Explanation of the Method of Interior Prayer*
- The Bible in the *Rule* of 1718

CONCLUSION

**CHAPTER 2**

**A HERMENEUTICAL FRAMEWORK ..... 67**

INTRODUCTION

1. HISTORICAL-CRITICAL EXEGESIS: PASTORALLY DEFICIENT IN ISOLATION
2. DE LA SALLE AND THE GOD WHO ‘TOUCHES HEARTS’ THROUGH THE BIBLE
3. HISTORICAL-CRITICAL EXEGESIS: ‘DISTANCE’ BUT NOT ‘SIGNIFICANCE’
4. POSITIVE ASPECTS OF HISTORICAL-CRITICAL EXEGESIS
5. DE LA SALLE AND THE ‘BLENDING’ OF TEXTS
6. ULRICH LUZ AND THE ‘HISTORY OF INFLUENCE’ APPROACH

- Definitions and overview
- De La Salle’s France: a Christian and biblical culture
- The Church Fathers within a ‘history of influence’
- De La Salle: the Church Fathers
- A history of influence ‘writ small’
- Intelligence and education in the service of the word
- The word expressed in deed

7. A HOLISTIC APPROACH TO BIBLICAL INTERPRETATION

CONCLUSION

**CHAPTER 3**

**DE LA SALLE’S CONSCIOUSNESS OF A VITAL HERITAGE ..... 103**

INTRODUCTION

1. A 'SPOKEN WORD' RATHER THAN A TEXTUAL REFERENCE
2. CONSCIOUSNESS OF A LIVING TRADITION
3. JESUS' BIBLICAL WORD ADDRESSED DIRECTLY TO THE CONTEMPORARY READER
4. A WORK CONTINUOUS WITH THAT OF PAUL, AND AS BEGUN BY JESUS AND HIS FIRST DISCIPLES
5. A SPIRITUAL LINEAGE

CONCLUSION

**CHAPTER 4**  
**THE TEXTUAL FOCUS, MATTHEW 4.23-10.8 ..... 121**

INTRODUCTION

1. THE STRUCTURE OF MT 4.23-10.8
2. MT 4.23-25 AS ENCAPSULATING THE MINISTRY OF JESUS-EMMANUEL
3. INTERRELATED THEMES: KINGDOM, TEACHING, HEALING, PRESENCE, SALVATION

Kingdom, teaching, and healing in the Gospel of Matthew  
 Kingdom and presence  
 Presence and salvation  
 Salvation and healing

4. DE LA SALLE'S UNDERSTANDING OF 'KINGDOM' AND RELATED CONCEPTS

Kingdom  
 The Presence of God  
 Salvation

5. 'KINGDOM' AND EDUCATION: A DIRECTION FOR FURTHER STUDY

Michael Trainor: the gospel stories as both window and mirror  
 Education: 'a sign of the Kingdom and a means of salvation'

CONCLUSION

**CHAPTER 5**  
**DE LA SALLE'S REFERENCES TO MATTHEW 4.23-5.12 ..... 139**

INTRODUCTION: DE LA SALLE AND MATTHEW 4.23-7.19

1. MATTHEW 4.23-25: PROCLAMATION BY TEACHING AND HEALING

- Introduction
- Reading the text in another context
- Reflections from contemporary exegesis
- Conclusion: De La Salle and Mt 4.23-25

2. MATTHEW 5.3-12: THE BEATITUDES

- Matthew 5.3
- Summary: De La Salle and Matthew 5.3
- Matthew 5.4-12
- Conclusion: De La Salle and Matthew 5.3-12

**CHAPTER 6**

**DE LA SALLE'S REFERENCES TO MATTHEW 5.17-48 ..... 184**

INTRODUCTION

1. MATTHEW 5.17-48: THE TEACHING CONTINUES

CONCLUSION: DE LA SALLE AND MATTHEW 5.17-48

**CHAPTER 7**

**DE LA SALLE'S REFERENCES TO MATTHEW 6-7 ..... 223**

1. MATTHEW 6.1-6

2. MATTHEW 6.9-13: THE LORD'S PRAYER

3. MATTHEW 6.14-34

4. MATTHEW 7.2-19

5. CONCLUSION: DE LA SALLE AND MATTHEW 6.1-7.19

CONCLUSION: DE LA SALLE AND THE SERMON ON THE MOUNT (MT 5-7)

**CHAPTER 8**

**DE LA SALLE'S REFERENCES TO MATTHEW 8-10 ..... 274**

INTRODUCTION: DE LA SALLE AND MATTHEW 8.1-10.7

1. MATTHEW 8.1-4: JESUS HEALS A MAN WITH LEPROSY

2. MATTHEW 8.5-13: JESUS HEALS A CENTURION'S SERVANT

- 3. MATTHEW 8.18-22: THE DEMANDS OF DISCIPLESHIP
- 4. MATTHEW 8.23-27: JESUS CALMS THE STORM
- 5. MATTHEW 9.2-8: JESUS HEALS A PARALYZED MAN
- 6. MATTHEW 9.9-13: THE CALL OF MATTHEW
- 7. MATTHEW 9.18-25: JESUS HEALS A WOMAN AND A YOUNG GIRL
- 8. MATTHEW 9.37-38: THE LORD OF THE HARVEST
- 9. MATTHEW 10.1-8: JESUS COMMISSIONS HIS DISCIPLES TO HEAL AND PROCLAIM
- CONCLUSION: DE LA SALLE AND MATTHEW 8.1-10.7

**CONCLUSION** ..... 309

**BIBLIOGRAPHY** ..... 318

## SUMMARY

This thesis proposes that a ‘history of influence’ (*Wirkungsgeschichte*) hermeneutic provides a critical framework within which to appreciate John Baptist de La Salle’s (1651-1719) recourse to the Bible. De La Salle, a well-educated and initially wealthy French, Roman Catholic priest, established and led a new community of lay, male teachers dedicated to the education of boys for whom no realistic educational alternative existed. His substantial writings, of a pedagogical, catechetical and spiritual nature, are replete with biblical quotations and allusions. In many cases, these are interpreted as having direct relevance to the teachers’ life and work, and even of being personally addressed to them.

De La Salle’s works reflect a consciousness of his and his teachers’ being part of a ‘history of influence’: his approach to biblical interpretation is influenced by a wide range of Church Fathers (leading figures from the second to eighth century), and he draws inspiration for Christian practice from a similarly wide range of women and men throughout history.

Nine ‘principles’ derived from two short works of De La Salle reflect his appreciation of the Bible as a means of communion with God and a living word to be actualized in the lives and ministry of his Brother-teachers. These principles are seen to align well with the characteristics of a ‘history of influence approach to biblical interpretation as expounded by Ulrich Luz.

The particular textual focus for the thesis is the Gospel of Matthew, 4.23-10.8, as interpreted by De La Salle. This section of the Gospel is also suggested as a potential paradigm for a contemporary understanding of ‘human and Christian education’, especially when viewed from the perspective of an ongoing ‘history of influence’ that integrates De La Salle’s insights, those of contemporary biblical and theological scholarship, and the experience of educators in their relationships and work with young people.

## Declaration

---

I certify that this thesis does not incorporate without acknowledgment any material previously submitted for a degree or diploma in any university; and that to the best of my knowledge and belief, it does not contain any material previously published or written by another person except where due reference is made in the text.

John Cantwell

June 10, 2015



## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I dedicate this thesis, hoping that it is not too unworthy of them, to three people who have been outstanding figures in its 'history of influence': the Rev Dr Marie Isaacs, Baptist pastor and former head of Biblical Studies at Heythrop College in the University of London, who with the learned and hospitable members of her department stimulated and nurtured my first serious study of the Bible; Brother Gerard Rummery fsc, who over many years has fostered my interest in and shared so much of his knowledge of John Baptist de La Salle, his writings, and the history of the Institute he founded; and the Rev Dr Michael Trainor, who has over an embarrassing length of time been both patient and unfailingly encouraging in shaping, re-shaping and supervising my work.

I am very grateful also to many people who have ensured that the thesis has finally emerged: the Rev Dr Vicky Balabanski, for her generous co-supervision and freshly critical eye; Brothers David Hawke fsc and Chris Gorringe fsc who as superiors of our Province thought to give me the opportunity of study leave to finish the thesis; Brother Ambrose Payne, a previous Provincial, for his endeavours to make that happen and his more recent encouragement as it became possible.

Many others have played significant roles: Brother William Firman fsc, who first steered me towards biblical studies; Brother Kevin Moloney fsc, who supported my continuing them; Brother Peter Gilfedder fsc, for the provision of valuable source and reference materials; Ms Trish Carroll, my immediate past Director in the work of formation in our Province, from whom I have learned a great deal; Br Jeffrey Calligan fsc, a former colleague and expert on De La Salle and his relevance today; my Lasallian community of 'Brothers and others' at Bankstown, Sydney, who have been both understanding and supportive; and my colleagues at the Provincial Office who have conscientiously satisfied my need for frequent distraction. The interest shown in my work by Brother Christian Moe fsc and Brother Peter Bray fsc has always been heartening.

I add a word of thanks to the members of the theological faculty formerly of the Adelaide College of Divinity, who are now part of the Australian Catholic University. I am also very grateful to the Faculty Office Staff at Flinders University, who have been patiently helpful over several years.

Finally, I record my gratitude to my parents, Elva Sutherland and Stephen Cantwell, for the unknown sacrifices they made many years ago to ensure that their four children received a good education. In my case, that excellent grounding was provided by the Sisters of the Good Samaritan, and the Marist Brothers.

## ABBREVIATIONS

For the abbreviations used for references to De La Salle's works, please see the alphabetical listing in Preliminary Remarks.

Abbreviations of biblical books are those of the *New Revised Standard Version* of the Bible (1989).

Amelote *Le Nouveau Testament de Nostre Seigneur Jesus-Christ traduit sur l'ancienne edition latine, corrigée par le commandement du Pape Sixte V. et publiée par l'autorité du Pape Clement VIII. Avec des Notes sur les principaux difficultez, la Chronologie, la Controverse, & plusieurs Tables pour la commodité du Lecteur, par le R.P.D. Amelote Prestre de l'Oratoire, Docteur en Theologie* (Paris: François Muguet, 1688).

CL *Cahiers lasalliens* (See below, p. 12).

Dict. 1694 The 1694 edition of *Le Dictionnaire de L'Académie française, dédié au Roy* (Paris: Coignard, 1694), accessible at The ARTFL Project, <http://artfl-project.uchicago.edu/node/17>.

Huré *Le Nouveau Testament de Nôtre-Seigneur Jesus-Christ, nouvellement traduit en François selon la Vulgate, par M. Charles Huré, ancien professeur en l'Université de Paris, & Principal du College de Boncour* (Paris : Jean de Nully, 1709) [2 volumes: Gospels, and Acts to Revelation].  
*Les Epistres de S. Paul, les Epistres canoniques, l'Apocalypse* (Mons: 1667) [Epistles to Revelation].

Mons *Le Nouveau Testament de Nostre Seigneur Jesus Christ, traduit en François avec le Grec, & le Latin de la Vulgate ajoûtez à côté* (Mons: Gaspard Migeot, 1673) [Gospels and Acts].

MonsE *Les Epistres de S. Paul, les Epistres canoniques, l'Apocalypse* (Mons: Gaspard Migeot, 1667).

NT New Testament.

OT Old Testament.

PL *Patrologia Latina. Patrologia cursus completus, series Latina*. Edited by J.-P. Migne. Paris: Migne, 1861.

Vg The Vulgate, a Latin translation of the Bible.

## PRELIMINARY REMARKS

This thesis concerns the interpretative approach to the Bible taken by John Baptist de La Salle (1651-1719). It is therefore essential to engage with his writings, especially those in which he incorporates passages from and references to the Bible.

To assist the reader, the following preliminary information is provided regarding the referencing system used for the writings of John Baptist de La Salle. I have also provided information regarding related matters: the *Cahiers lasalliens* series; the particular structure and referencing system for De La Salle's meditations; the translation into English of excerpts from his works, which were, of course, written in French; references to the French versions of the New Testament De La Salle is known to have used; issues of language and gender; and the means of indicating emphasis.

### 1. REFERENCING SYSTEM FOR THE WRITINGS OF JOHN BAPTIST DE LA SALLE

References in the thesis to De La Salle's works are according to the system used in *Œuvres complètes*. For each work, the abbreviation, short title, and a translation of the short title are provided below.

Beside each title is the volume number of the series *Cahiers lasalliens* (CL) in which the work is to be found. Currently in sixty-seven volumes, these represent much of the intensive research into De La Salle and his works from 1959 up to the present. They include facsimiles of *princeps* or early editions of De La Salle's works.

The list below also indicates the volume in which is to be found an English translation of the work in question. These English translations can be freely downloaded from <http://www.lasallian.info/downloadable-books-by-the-founder/>.

- CA Cantiques spirituels I (CL 22) – ‘Spiritual hymns I’  
Eugene Lappin, ed. *Religious Instructions and Exercises of Piety for the Christian Schools: John Baptist de La Salle*. Landover, MD: Lasallian Publications, 2002.
- CB Cantiques spirituels II (CL 18) – ‘Spiritual hymns II’  
Eugene Lappin, ed. *Religious Instructions and Exercises of Piety for the Christian Schools: John Baptist de La Salle*. Landover, MD: Lasallian Publications, 2002.

- CE Conduite des écoles (CL 24) – ‘Conduct of the Christian Schools’  
William Mann, ed. *The Conduct of the Christian Schools by John Baptist de La Salle*. Landover, MD: Lasallian Publications, 1996.
- DA Devoirs d’un chrétien I (CL 20) – ‘Duties of a Christian I’  
Alexis James Doval, ed. *The Duties of a Christian to God: John Baptist de La Salle*. Landover, MD: Lasallian Publications, 2002.
- DB Devoirs d’un chrétien II (CL 21) – ‘Duties of a Christian II’  
Alexis James Doval, ed. *The Duties of a Christian to God: John Baptist de La Salle*. Landover, MD: Lasallian Publications, 2002.
- DC Devoirs d’un chrétien III (CL 22) – ‘Duties of a Christian III’  
Alexis James Doval, ed. *The Duties of a Christian to God: John Baptist de La Salle*. Landover, MD: Lasallian Publications, 2002.
- E Exercices de piété (CL 18) – ‘Exercises of piety’  
Eugene Lappin, ed. *Religious Instructions and Exercises of Piety for the Christian Schools: John Baptist de La Salle*. Landover, MD: Lasallian Publications, 2002.
- EM Explication de la méthode d’oraison (CL 14, CL 60) – ‘Explanation of the method of interior prayer’  
Donald Mouton, ed. *Explanation of the Method of Interior Prayer by John Baptist de La Salle*. Landover, MD: Christian Brothers Conference, 1995.
- EP Écrits personnels (CL10, CL 2) – ‘Personal writings’  
Augustine Loes and Ronald Isetti, eds. *Rule and Foundational Documents: John Baptist de La Salle*. Landover, MD: Lasallian Publications, 2002.
- FD Règle du Frère Directeur (CL 25) – ‘Rule of the Brother Director’  
Augustine Loes and Ronald Isetti, eds. *Rule and Foundational Documents: John Baptist de La Salle*. Landover, MD: Lasallian Publications, 2002.
- GA Grand abrégé des devoirs (CL 23) – ‘Long summary of Duties’. Not available in English translation.
- I Instructions et prières (CL 17) – ‘Instructions and prayers’  
Eugene Lappin, ed. *Religious Instructions and Exercises of Piety for the Christian Schools: John Baptist de La Salle*. Landover, MD: Lasallian Publications, 2002.
- LA Lettres autographes – ‘Letters in autograph manuscript’  
Augustine Loes, ed. *The Letters of John Baptist de La Salle*. Romeoville, IL: Lasallian Publications, 1988.
- LC Lettres copies – ‘Copied letters’  
Augustine Loes, ed. *The Letters of John Baptist de La Salle*. Romeoville, IL: Lasallian Publications, 1988.
- LI Lettres imprimées – ‘Printed letters’

Augustine Loes, ed. *The Letters of John Baptist de La Salle*. Romeoville, IL: Lasallian Publications, 1988.

- MA Méditations additionnelles (CL 12) – ‘Additional meditations’ (not thought to be by De La Salle).  
Augustine Loes and Francis Huether, eds. *Meditations by John Baptist de La Salle*. Landover, MD: Christian Brothers Conference, 1994.
- MD Méditations pour les dimanches (CL 12) – ‘Meditations for Sundays’  
Augustine Loes and Francis Huether, eds. *Meditations by John Baptist de La Salle*. Landover, MD: Christian Brothers Conference, 1994.
- MF Méditations pour les fêtes (CL 12) – ‘Meditations for the Feasts’  
Augustine Loes and Francis Huether, eds. *Meditations by John Baptist de La Salle*. Landover, MD: Christian Brothers Conference, 1994.
- MH Mémoire sur l’habit (CL 11) – ‘Memorandum on the Habit’  
Augustine Loes and Ronald Isetti, eds. *Rule and Foundational Documents: John Baptist de La Salle*. Landover, MD: Lasallian Publications, 2002.
- MR Méditations pour le temps de la retraite (CL 13) – ‘Meditations for the time of the retreat’  
Augustine Loes and Francis Huether, eds. *Meditations by John Baptist de La Salle*. Landover, MD: Christian Brothers Conference, 1994.
- PA Petit abrégé des devoirs (CL 23) – ‘Short summary of Duties’. Not available in English translation.
- R Recueil de différents petits traités – ‘Collection of various short treatises’  
Daniel Burke, ed. *John Baptist de La Salle: Collection of Various Short Treatises*. Landover, MD: Lasallian Publications, 1993.
- RB Règles de la bienséance (CL 19) – ‘Rules of decorum’  
Gregory Wright, ed. *John Baptist de La Salle: The Rules of Christian Decorum and Civility*. Romeoville, IL: Lasallian Publications, 1990.
- RC Règles communes (CL 25) – ‘Common rules’  
Augustine Loes and Ronald Isetti, eds. *Rule and Foundational Documents: John Baptist de La Salle*. Landover, MD: Lasallian Publications, 2002.
- RD Directoires (CL 150 – ‘Directories’. Not available in English translation.

## 2. THE *CAHIERS LASALLIENS* SERIES

*Cahiers lasalliens* (abbreviated to CL) is a series of publications begun in 1959 and which now includes 67 volumes, including facsimiles of *princeps*, or at least the earliest available, editions of the works of John Baptist de La Salle, his early

biographies, historical documents relevant to his life and works, and works of ongoing research.

### 3. THE STRUCTURE AND REFERENCING OF DE LA SALLE'S MEDITATIONS

It may be helpful to recognize that De La Salle's meditations, which are generally reflections on a gospel passage (*Meditations for Sundays*) or on the life of a saint (*Meditations for Feasts*), are invariably in three sections, called 'points'. In using this term I have capitalized the word so as to distinguish it from its normal usage. Reference to a meditation is therefore, firstly, by its number in the series, and secondly by one of the three Points. Thus a reference to the second Point of the meditation for the Third Sunday after Easter, number 34, will be MD 34.2. In *Œuvres complètes*, each Point has been subdivided into two parts, to facilitate locating a reference. Thus MD 34.3.2 refers to the second half of the third Point of that meditation.

### 4. TRANSLATION OF EXCERPTS FROM DE LA SALLE'S WORKS

I have set out the many quotations from De La Salle's works in my own translation from the French. The published English versions of his works, of which I have made considerable use, tend naturally to have been translated and punctuated so as to be more easily grasped by modern readers. De La Salle's style tends to favour long sentences,<sup>1</sup> and his vocabulary does not always have the same meaning or nuance in modern French.

For the purposes of close analysis, I have opted for a more literal translation, in the hope of its being more representative of the original. As James Leslie Houlden said of his translation of the Johannine letters, 'it is utilitarian rather than elegant'.<sup>2</sup> A second reason for making my own translations is that the published versions sometimes translate the biblical texts or terminology within De La Salle's writing so as to conform with modern English versions of the Bible, whereas I have attempted to

---

<sup>1</sup> Poutet, *Le XVII<sup>e</sup> siècle*, 159, attributes this to De La Salle's early study of the Latin classics.

<sup>2</sup> James Leslie Houlden, *A Commentary on the Johannine Epistles* (London: Adam and Charles Black, 1973), ix.

identify these texts as cited from some of the French versions known to De La Salle, and to translate them accordingly.

It is hoped that the resulting provision of sometimes expansive quotations from De La Salle's works will save the reader from having to locate them elsewhere. I have also frequently indicated the words or phrases from the original languages, so that the reader can make his or her own judgment as to the appropriateness of the translation.

Readers will no doubt be aware that in the late seventeenth and early eighteenth century, and thus in the *Cahiers lasalliens* facsimiles of early editions of De La Salle's works, French spelling and accentuation had not been standardized. In general, I have cited De La Salle's French from the (standardized) version in *Œuvres complètes*.

## **5. REFERENCES TO FRENCH TRANSLATIONS OF THE NEW TESTAMENT**

Reference in this thesis to three French translations known to have been used by De La Salle has often been helpful in differentiating between a more or less general allusion to a biblical text and a more or less direct quotation, as well as in clarifying whether De La Salle is quoting from the Gospel of Matthew, or from a parallel text.

Scholars have identified which versions De La Salle used in regard to two sets of his works, notably the *Meditations for the Time of Retreat*, and *Meditations for Sundays and Feasts*. Since the present thesis endeavours to consider De La Salle's use of the Gospel of Matthew, 4.23-10.8, throughout a wide range his works, I felt that, even as a tangential interest, a modest contribution might be made to this dimension of Lasallian research.

The three New Testament versions consulted are those of Denis Amelote (Paris, 1688), Charles Huré (Paris, 1709), and the 'Mons' version (1673/1667), of which Joseph Bergin remarks that until its provision by Isaac Le Maitre de Sacy of Port Royal, there was 'no satisfactory version of the New Testament in French.'<sup>3</sup> Richard

---

<sup>3</sup> Bergin, *Church*, 331.

Sayce describes it as ‘the outstanding translation of the period’.<sup>4</sup> The editions I have been able to access are not those identified as having been used by De La Salle in the two sets of meditations, but they will still be indicative of which of the three versions he may have used in particular instances.

In his study of the New Testament citations in De La Salle’s *Meditations for the Time of the Retreat*, Michel Sauvage concludes from a comparison among several versions and editions that, for this work, De La Salle made extensive use of the Amelote translation in an edition of 1707 or later. As well as thereby establishing a *terminus a quo* in dating these meditations, his study also gives us ‘an idea of the way in which John Baptist de La Salle worked; in short, it provides the evidence for the way in which his teaching on the ministry of the Brother is entirely based on Holy Scripture’. Sauvage notes the need for the study to be extended to the whole of De La Salle’s work, particularly the *Meditations for Sundays and Feasts*.<sup>5</sup>

The latter task was taken up by Luis Varela, who similarly compared a substantial number of De La Salle’s New Testament citations in *Meditations for Sundays and Feasts* with those from a range of contemporary Bibles and New Testaments. He concludes that De La Salle’s principal source here was the New Testament of Charles Huré, 1702, or a later edition reproducing the same text. He notes that De La Salle made some use of the Amelote New Testament in the version first published in 1683, but not that of 1707 identified by Sauvage as being the main source for *Meditations for the Time of the Retreat*.<sup>6</sup>

One of the Bibles considered by Varela as a possible source of De La Salle’s quotations from the Old Testament was the ‘Bible of Le Maitre de Sacy’, known as the ‘Mons’ Bible from the putative place of its publication. Varela found that it was used only sporadically, with De La Salle drawing most of his OT quotations from memory or else translated directly from the Vulgate.<sup>7</sup> Jean-Guy Rodrigue, on the

---

<sup>4</sup> Richard Anthony Sayce, ‘Continental Versions from c. 1600 to the Present Day: French’, in *The Cambridge History of the Bible: The West from the Reformation to the Present Day* edited by Stanley L. Greenslade, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1963), 348.

<sup>5</sup> Michel Sauvage, *Citations*, xiv.

<sup>6</sup> Varela, *Sacred Scripture*, 86-87.

<sup>7</sup> Varela, *Sacred Scripture*, 93.



other hand, has more recently determined that some of the New Testament quotations in *Meditations for the Principal Feasts of the Year* are in fact from the Mons translation.<sup>8</sup>

Charles Huré's (1639-1717) translation was described as 'little more than that of Mons retouched in several places', on which grounds 'the bishops of Marseilles, of Toulon and of Apt censured it almost as soon as it appeared'.<sup>9</sup> While to modern sensibilities Hure's work may therefore smack of plagiarism, Huré was, with Sacy, associated with the Jansenist-inclined convent of Port-Royal, and it would seem that it was his *notes* on the New Testament that were especially valued.

Denis Amelote (1609-1678), an Oratorian priest, was commissioned in 1655 by a general assembly of the clergy to produce a new translation of the Bible, which he did in three stages between 1666 and 1670. There appears to have been little love lost between the anti-Jansenist Amelote and the men associated with Port-Royal, who in retaliation against a slur by Amelote on an abbot (Saint-Cyran), published what Amelote then charged them with being 'a libel' against himself. In return he used his influence to prevent the Mons translation from receiving the King's privilege.<sup>10</sup> According to Michel Sauvage, Amelote himself was accused of plagiarizing Port-Royal.<sup>11</sup> There is therefore a degree of correspondence among the three translations!

Varela rightly considers the possibility that there may have been some editorial modification of the biblical texts used by De La Salle, especially in works published after his death. He suggests that texts which De La Salle has integrated into his own writing, but which still furnish clues as to the possible versions used, are less susceptible to interference than quotations which stand alone.<sup>12</sup>

---

<sup>8</sup> Jean-Guy Rodrigue, *Contribution à l'étude des sources des Méditations sur les principales festes de l'année* (Cahiers lasalliens, 47; Rome: Maison Saint Jean-Baptiste de La Salle, 1988), 18.

<sup>9</sup> Louis Moréri, *Le grand dictionnaire historique, ou le mélange curieux de l'histoire sacrée et profane* (Paris: Les Libraires associés, 1759), 6:141.

<sup>10</sup> *A New and General Biographical Dictionary; Containing An Historical and Critical Account of the Lives and Writings of the Most Eminent Persons in every Nation; Particularly the British and Irish; From the Earliest Accounts of Time to the present Period* (London: T. Osborne, J. Whiston and B. White, 1761), 1: 276.

<sup>11</sup> Michel Sauvage, *Citations*, x, n. 2.

<sup>12</sup> Varela, *Sacred Scripture*, 81-82.

## **6. LANGUAGE AND GENDER**

Since De La Salle's community consisted entirely of lay men, and in accordance with the conventions of the time, their students were all boys, the language associated with both is invariably masculine. Similarly, God was normally referred to in masculine terms. Both conventions have been respected in translation, though I have tried to redress the balance in other discourse. It is notable that of the 'lay' personnel engaged in our schools worldwide, 41,002 are men (in addition to some 1700 Brothers), while women educators number 50,189.<sup>13</sup> All told, these are responsible for the education of over one million students, in 993 schools.

## **7. INDICATING EMPHASIS**

Emphasis is indicated by italics.

---

<sup>13</sup> Bureau du Personnel, 'Statistics 2014', Rome: Casa Generalizia, 2015.

## **INTRODUCTION**

### **1. MY INTEREST IN DE LA SALLE AND HIS ENGAGING WITH THE BIBLE**

As a member of the lay religious congregation of teachers, the De La Salle Brothers (formally, ‘Brothers of the Christian Schools’), I have come to admire their founder, John Baptist de La Salle (1651-1719), as a man of courage, determination and wisdom. Not long ordained as a Roman Catholic priest in seventeenth century France, he gradually felt called to forsake what would probably have been a distinguished and fruitful ecclesiastical career, and to accept responsibility for the leadership of a group of teachers who were offering an education to the poor boys of Reims. He saw that this project was not going to succeed unless the teachers lived and worked as a community of educators motivated by faith in a God who loved children and desired their full human development. These men responded to his leadership, calling themselves ‘Brothers of the Christian Schools’: brothers to one another, and to the young people in their care. They constituted themselves as a new form of religious community for men within the church: entirely lay, except that their leader, and their first leader only, was a priest – John Baptist de La Salle.

De La Salle’s courage was demonstrated in his abandonment of social and ecclesiastical standing, and of the wealth associated with both. His determination was evident in his steadfast execution of an educational project in the face of considerable opposition and hardship. His wisdom is evident in his substantial writings, almost all of them produced for his Brother-teachers for the sake of their personal, community, and professional lives. Many of these writings are characterized by a rich weaving of biblical passages and references into the weft of his own work. De La Salle’s approach to the Bible and its engagement with the life of this Brother-teachers reveals what might be called today, albeit retrospectively, his ‘hermeneutic’.

I believe that a modern ‘history of influence’ hermeneutic provides a helpful framework for appreciating the significant engagement with the Bible that characterizes John Baptist de La Salle’s writings. This chapter will therefore serve to introduce my interest in that theme, as well as introducing the thesis itself. I shall also review some of the significant literature on De La Salle and the Bible. I believe that some information regarding both his life story and his educational experience are

indispensable for an understanding his approach to the Bible, hence I shall provide an outline of both. Finally, I shall set out an overview of the way in which the thesis will be developed.

### **The Gospel of Matthew**

As indicated below, the thesis has a particular focus on De La Salle's appropriation of texts from the Gospel of Matthew. I shall discuss my interest in the Gospel of Matthew, and particularly the chosen section (Mt 4.23-10.8), in Chapter 4 of the thesis. In brief, I am attracted to this Gospel because of its overarching theme of the presence of God to God's people. Frequently reminding ourselves of the presence of God is a fundamental practice among Lasallians.<sup>1</sup>

I am especially interested in the chosen Gospel chapters' potential for giving positive affirmation to the work of educators. I believe that in word or deed or both, they are 'proclaiming' in their own way 'the good news of the kingdom' as they work with young people, whether in secular or religious areas of the curriculum, or more broadly, in less conventional educational settings.

As well as reflecting this general interest, the thesis particularly concerns the ways in which John Baptist de La Salle has related texts in the section Mt 4.23-10.8 to the life and work of his community of Brother-teachers. An implication of the thesis is that he thereby provides a defining example for his latter-day followers of how they might similarly appropriate the Bible in relation to their own lives and their work on behalf of the young people in their care. Our own 'history of influence' includes the ways in which De La Salle continues to affect us.

## **2. THE THESIS**

*In this thesis, I show that a 'history of influence' (Wirkungsgeschichte) hermeneutic provides a critical framework within which to appreciate John Baptist de La Salle's*

---

<sup>1</sup> I use the term 'Lasallians' to include both the Brothers and the many more women and men who are engaged in the same ministry of education, however broadly conceived. In Australia, that extends to the work of BoysTown on behalf of marginalized young women and men.

(1651-1719) recourse to the Bible, and in particular to passages from the Gospel of Matthew, chapters 4-10.

### 3. DEFINING THE TERMS

As I shall discuss in Chapter 3, I find the ‘history of influence’ hermeneutic congenial, especially because I believe that it can deepen an appreciation of De La Salle’s approach to the interpretation of the Bible. I understand by the ‘history of influence hermeneutic’ the approach to interpretation that is based on the work of Hans-Georg Gadamer and expounded especially by Ulrich Luz in his commentary on the Gospel of Matthew.<sup>2</sup>

In the statement of the thesis, above, I use the term ‘critical’ to reflect the fact that a *history of influence* approach is a recognized scholarly method of biblical interpretation. It thus provides a credible framework for understanding how De La Salle appropriates biblical texts and actualizes them.<sup>3</sup> As such, it also provides a credible framework within which people who see De La Salle as a significant part of their own ‘history of influence’ can continue to interpret the Bible in a way that is relevant to their lives and work.

In using the term ‘framework’ I want to indicate that the *Wirkungsgeschichte* approach can be seen as accommodating the key interpretative aspects of De La Salle’s approach to the Bible, but without any anachronistic claim that he was consciously employing a twenty-first century hermeneutic.

I use the term ‘appreciation’ to include both an *understanding* of De La Salle’s approach, and a recognition of its *value* in the context in which he wrote. I believe that its value is enduring. The word ‘recourse’ is intended to reflect the fact that De La Salle tends not to *use* the Bible – as a source of proof-texts, for example, but rather to incorporate biblical texts into his own writing as ‘living and effective’ words (cf. Heb 4.12) that relate to the lives and work of his Brother-teachers.

---

<sup>2</sup> Ulrich Luz, *Matthew: A Commentary*, 3 volumes (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2001-2007).

<sup>3</sup> The meaning of ‘actualization’ is discussed below.

The value of De La Salle's interpretations of biblical passages 'in the context in which he wrote', as mentioned above, can be stated as his tendency to *actualize* the biblical text. Since this is a term used at various points in the thesis, some discussion of its meaning is appropriate here.

### **Actualization**

It is indicative of differences among languages that Ulrich Luz can use the word *Aktualisierung* without any apparent need to explain it.<sup>4</sup>

The English word 'actualization' is both rare and differently nuanced from its counterparts in German and French. In these languages it carries the connotations of 'updating', and 'making current', so that its meaning is predominantly temporal. The English sense is more to do with 'making actual or real', as distinct from 'potential'. Hence in the context of biblical interpretation 'actualization' in the French and German sense refers to the activity of reflecting on the original meaning of a text and determining its significance in the present. The difficulty of translating the term is evident in the English version of the document of the Pontifical Biblical Commission, *The Interpretation of the Bible in the Church*, originally composed in French. While the French *actualisation* and *actualiser* are sometimes rendered literally, they are often paraphrased as, for example, 'a presentation truly valid for our time', 'an interpretation valid for contemporary times', 'to make the biblical message real for today'.<sup>5</sup> Such paraphrases reflect the meaning of the term in relation to De La Salle's concern to relate the Bible to the lives and work of his Brothers.

---

<sup>4</sup> *Das Evangelium nach Matthäus* (Zürich, Einsiedeln, Köln: Benziger Verlag), 78. Cf. Luz, *Matthew 1-7*, 61, where it is translated as the verb, 'actualized'.

<sup>5</sup> See Joseph A. Fitzmyer, *The Biblical Commission's Document "The Interpretation of the Bible in the Church": Text and Commentary* (Subsidia biblica, 18; Roma: Editrice Pontificio Istituto Biblico, 1995), 68-69; 116; 160-161. The French text of the document is available at 'Port Saint Nicolas,' portstnicolas.org, accessed January 8, 2014. <http://www.portstnicolas.org/l-accastillage/vatican/article/interpretation-de-la-bible-dans-l-eglise>. The German text is available at 'Päpstliche Bibelkommission,' vatican.va. [http://www.vatican.va/roman\\_curia/congregations/cfaith/pcb\\_documents/rc\\_con\\_cfait\\_h\\_doc\\_19930415\\_interpretazione\\_ge.html](http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/cfaith/pcb_documents/rc_con_cfait_h_doc_19930415_interpretazione_ge.html).

#### 4. SIGNIFICANT EARLIER WORKS ON DE LA SALLE AND THE BIBLE

De La Salle's own written works were almost entirely directed towards his community of Brother-teachers and to their educational work with young people, especially those who were poor. Some of those works were written in collaboration with the Brothers, with De La Salle responsible for their final editing.

The thesis develops a fundamental dimension of these writings, namely their recourse to the Bible, which has in various ways been addressed in three significant previous works, each by a Brother of the Christian Schools. As will be evident, I have drawn on these foundational works in varying degrees.

The first, by Michel Sauvage, *Les citations néotestamentaires dans les Méditations pour le Temps de la Retraite* ('The New Testament quotations in the *Meditations for the Time of the Retreat*'),<sup>6</sup> published in 1959, is a very detailed study of De La Salle's frequent New Testament (especially Pauline) references in a set of sixteen meditations he wrote late in life, to be read during the Brothers' annual retreat. Sauvage also identifies the most likely French version of the New Testament from which De La Salle quotes in these highly significant meditations, and thus indicates a *terminus a quo* for their composition.

The second, by Luis Varela, *Biblia y Espiritualidad en San Juan Bautista de La Salle* ('Bible and Spirituality in Saint Jean Baptist de La Salle'), was published in 1966. An English translation by Francis Vesel, *Sacred Scripture in the Spirituality of Saint John Baptist de La Salle*, was published in 2000.<sup>7</sup> As its title suggests, Varela's work on De La Salle's approach to and interpretation of the Bible is in relation to his spirituality, and focuses in particular on references to the Bible in the broader collection of meditations, including those De La Salle wrote on the Sunday Gospels and for the feast days of various saints venerated in the Roman Catholic liturgy.

---

<sup>6</sup> Michel Sauvage, *Les citations néotestamentaires dans les Méditations pour le Temps de la Retraite* (CL 1; Rome: Maison Saint Jean-Baptiste de La Salle, 1959).

<sup>7</sup> Luis Varela Martinez, *Biblia y Espiritualidad en San Juan Bautista de La Salle* (Tejares-Salamanca: Instituto Pontificio San Pio X, 1966); *Sacred Scripture in the Spirituality of Saint John Baptist de La Salle* (Landover, MD: Lasallian Publications, 2000). I have consulted both the original and the translation.

The third is the two-volume, highly regarded doctoral thesis of Miguel Campos, *L'itinéraire évangélique de saint Jean-Baptiste de La Salle et le recours à l'Écriture dans ses Méditations pour le Temps de la Retraite: Contribution à l'étude sur les fondements évangéliques de la vie religieuse* ('The gospel itinerary of Saint John Baptist de La Salle and the recourse to Scripture in his *Meditations for the Time of the Retreat: Contribution to the study on the gospel foundations of the religious life*'), published in 1974.<sup>8</sup> Its title conveys both its intention and its biblical focus on the same sixteen meditations that were the subject of Michael Sauvage's ground-breaking monograph.

I wish to consider De La Salle's recourse to the Bible from the perspective of a modern, critical hermeneutic, and with a particular focus on a gospel. My own searches of De La Salle's works, building on the index compiled by Varela and references established by Alain Houry in the French edition of the complete works of De La Salle,<sup>9</sup> show that there are references to the Gospel of Matthew in seventeen of the twenty-four works as listed in *Œuvres Complètes*. Of the over 650 references, more than 160 fall within the scope of this thesis.

The distinctiveness of the thesis in relation to the three seminal works noted above is, therefore, a particular focus on a Gospel, involving all but seven of De La Salle's works, and from a comparatively recent hermeneutical perspective. It will be noted that two of the earlier works were written before the authoritative Roman Catholic document on the Bible, *Dei Verbum*,<sup>10</sup> which emerged from the Second Vatican Council in November 1965.<sup>11</sup> It does not undervalue their enduring significance for Lasallian studies that all three antedate a more recent, semi-official and

---

<sup>8</sup> Miguel Campos, *L'itinéraire évangélique de saint Jean-Baptiste de La Salle et le recours à l'Écriture dans ses Méditations pour le Temps de la Retraite: Contribution à l'étude sur les fondements évangéliques de la vie religieuse* (CL 45-46; Rome: Maison Saint Jean-Baptiste de La Salle, 1974).

<sup>9</sup> Jean-Baptiste de La Salle (1651-1719), *Œuvres complètes* (Rome: Maison Saint-Jean Baptiste de La Salle, 1993), and Alain Houry, 'Écrits du Fondateur', LaSalle.org, accessed December 27, 2012. <http://www.lasalle.org/fr/ressources/publications/ecrits-du-fondateur/>

<sup>10</sup> See for example, Second Vatican Council, 'Divine Revelation', in *The Church and the Bible*, ed. Dennis J. Murphy (New York: St Pauls/Alba House, 2007), 336-352.

<sup>11</sup> Official church approval for the publication of Varela's work was granted the previous month, in October 1965; see Varela *Biblia*, 6.



comprehensive document on biblical interpretation *The Interpretation of the Bible in the Church*, issued in 1993.<sup>12</sup> A contemporary hermeneutical perspective may provide a different if more modest contribution to our appreciation of ‘the Founder’.

## **5. A BRIEF OUTLINE OF THE LIFE OF JOHN BAPTIST DE LA SALLE (1651-1719)**

### **Introduction**

Because I regard both the nature of his own education, and the disruptive response De La Salle made to an emerging need, as being critical to an understanding of his approach to biblical interpretation, I shall provide as part of this introduction a brief outline of his life, especially up to the point of his unanticipated involvement in the education of poor youth. I shall also offer an overview of his own educational journey.

Neither of these is merely background information. It was his response to the need for effective schools for poor boys which eventually gave rise to all his extant writings, and it was his own education which enabled and encouraged him to express himself with constant reference to the Bible, interpreted for his Brother-teachers in a way that engaged them in fruitful reflection on its empowering role in their life and work.

It is therefore important to be aware of the radical change of direction De La Salle’s life took in his late twenties and early thirties, in order to appreciate the experience which eventually led him to formulate a biblical theology of education for the community he founded and led. He encouraged them to see their work, carried out together as ‘Brothers’,<sup>13</sup> as a ministry that was continuous with that of the Jesus of the gospels, and of Jesus’ immediate and subsequent disciples. He encouraged them, in

---

<sup>12</sup> Fitzmyer, *Interpretation*.

<sup>13</sup> ‘Brothers to one another, and older Brothers to the young people in their care’. See Jean-Baptiste Blain, *La Vie de Monsieur Jean-Baptiste de La Salle, Instituteur des Frères de Écoles chrétiennes*, (CL 7 and 8; Rome: Maison Saint Jean-Baptiste de La Salle, 1961 [1733]), 240-241. ‘Brothers of the Christian Schools’ (*Frères des Écoles Chrétiennes*), as they decided to call themselves, remains the formal title. In the United States they are referred to as the ‘Christian Brothers’. In Australia they are known as ‘De La Salle Brothers’, in deference to the Christian Brothers of Ireland founded by Edmund Ignatius Rice (1762-1844), who had opened a school in Melbourne in 1869, some 36 years before the De La Salle Brothers arrived in the country.

other words, to see their work as part of the ‘history of influence’ of Jesus himself, who was indeed active within their own history as Brothers and teachers.

Similarly, his own schooling, seminary training and theological studies contributed directly to his capacity for an intelligent and dynamic understanding of the Bible, and of his own interpretative ministry within a long history of hermeneutical activity, particularly on the part of the Church Fathers of the first to the eighth centuries.<sup>14</sup> It is that historical consciousness, together with his concern to actualize the Bible for his community of Brother-teachers in seventeenth-eighteenth century France, which suggests a certain affinity with a modern ‘history of influence’ approach to biblical interpretation.

### **A life-journey disrupted**

This outline of the earlier part of De La Salle’s life has been drawn from some of the standard modern biographical and historical works.<sup>15</sup>

Nicole Moët de Brouillet (1633-1671), married to Louis de La Salle (1625-1672), gave birth to John Baptist on 30 April, 1651. Nicole was from a noble family, but lost the privileges of her nobility in marrying Louis, a magistrate of the Reims royal presidial court. John Baptist was thus the eldest of eleven children born to a leading bourgeois family of Reims. Four of his siblings died in infancy or childhood.

---

<sup>14</sup> John Cavadini, ‘Fathers of the Church’, in *HarperCollins Encyclopedia of Catholicism*, ed. Richard P. McBrien (New York: HarperCollins, 1995), 520, describes the ‘Fathers of the Church’ as ‘an informal designation generally reserved for those early figures whose teaching collectively regarded is considered the foundation of orthodox Christian doctrine’. The age of the Church Fathers is generally held to close in the East with John of Damascus (d. 749) and in the West with Gregory the Great (d. 604), though it too is sometimes extended to the eighth century.

<sup>15</sup> Yves Poutet, *Le XVII<sup>e</sup> siècle et les origines lasalliennes: Recherches sur la genèse de l’œuvre scolaire et religieuse de Jean-Baptiste de La Salle (1651-1719)* (Rennes: Imprimeries Réunies, 1970); Luke Salm, *The Work is Yours: The Life of Saint John Baptist de La Salle* (Washington, DC: Christian Brothers Publications, 1996); Alfred Calcutt, *De La Salle: a city saint and the liberation of the poor through education* (Oxford: De La Salle Publications, 1993); Henri Bédel, *An Introduction to the History of the Institute of the Brothers of the Christian Schools* (Lasallian Studies, 5; Rome: Brothers of the Christian Schools, 1996). Given that this is only background information, I have not included the tedious number of footnotes that would be necessary if every detail were to be referenced.

He received the tonsure at the age of eleven, an indication of his likely pathway towards the priesthood, and in 1666, at the age of 15, he was named a canon of the cathedral chapter of Reims, a very distinguished position for a young man still at school.

John Baptist learnt to read and write at home until in 1661 he started school at the Collège des Bons Enfants, attached to the University of Reims, where he remained until graduating from secondary school as ‘Master of Arts’, *summa cum laude*, in 1669. He then began his studies in theology at the University, before moving to Paris in 1670 to attend the seminary of Saint Sulpice and to continue his studies at the Sorbonne. His mother died in July 1671, and following the death of his father less than a year later John Baptist returned to Reims.

A few days short of his twenty-first birthday, then, he assumed his duties as guardian of his brothers and sisters, and manager of the family estate, soon also resuming his studies at the University of Reims. In due course he was granted the degrees of Bachelor of Theology (1675), Licentiate in Theology (1678, the year in which he was ordained a priest), and Doctor of Theology (most likely in 1680).

Without his realizing it at the time, a crisis moment in De La Salle’s life was his seemingly chance meeting with Adrien Nyel, a very committed schoolteacher. Having had some success in the running of schools for poor boys in Rouen, Nyel arrived in Reims in 1679 with the intention of establishing similar schools in that city. As an influential resident De La Salle was able to facilitate Nyel’s opening of a school in the parish of St Maurice, though without having any interest in further involving himself in the project. Before the end of 1679 Nyel had set up two more schools in Reims, and was looking beyond it. In his absence the inadequately trained schoolmasters were without support, and the schools began to falter.

If only because his name was associated with these schools, De La Salle took on the responsibility of rectifying the situation. Gradually he became convinced that the schools would fail altogether unless the teachers were working together, from a religious motivation, and providing the sort of schooling that, unusually for the times, was attractive to parents and boys and successful in its religious, educational and social outcomes. As he himself later reflected, he was being led from one

commitment to another that in a relatively short time became an all-consuming engagement in a project that meant abandoning a distinguished ecclesiastical career and accepting a fall in social status, which shocked his family and his peers.

A few years later he reflected on this dramatic change of direction in profoundly spiritual terms. His often distressing engagement with the teachers, he says,

was obviously for this reason: God who guides everything with wisdom and with gentleness, and whose practice is never to force people's inclinations, wishing to involve me in taking complete responsibility for the Schools, did so in a most unobtrusive way, and over a long time, in such a way that one commitment led me into another, without my having foreseen it at the start.<sup>16</sup>

### **A new kind of educational community**

In effect, committing himself to this project involved the development and leadership of new kind of male religious community: one comprising only lay men, with a priest as its initial superior,<sup>17</sup> and which achieved no formal royal or ecclesiastical status during De La Salle's lifetime. It also meant the development and leadership of a new approach to the education of poor boys, gradually synthesised by reference to a variety of other available systems, and refined by experience. To the astonishment of some, for example, reading was taught not through Latin, as had been the practice, but through the children's native language. Young people were taught in classes, not by personal tuition, but with careful attention to individual needs and progress. They were taught not only to read, but also to write, which was not the universal practice.<sup>18</sup> The teacher-student relationship was one of the reasons for the community members calling themselves 'Brother': they were to be brothers to one another, and to the young people in their care, so that even by their *Rule* (1718), punishment was to be rare and self-awareness was to be of primary importance:

The Brothers will exercise all possible attention to, and vigilance over themselves so as not to punish their pupils except rarely, convinced as they must be that it is one of the principal means of running their school well and of establishing very great order.<sup>19</sup>

---

<sup>16</sup> Blain, *Vie*, 69.

<sup>17</sup> In 1694, at De La Salle's request, the community agreed that no future member or superior would be in Holy Orders: it was to be (and remains) an entirely lay Institute.

<sup>18</sup> See Joseph Bergin, *Church, Society and Religious Change in France 1580-1730* (New Haven / London: Yale University Press, 2009), 308.

<sup>19</sup> RC 8.1.

Because of his increasing responsibility for the teachers and the schools, De La Salle in consultation with his spiritual advisers gave up his position as canon, and divested himself of his share in the family estate, giving his wealth away to the poor of Reims, probably in the winter of 1683-84. At first he had taken the teachers into his own home; not long afterwards he moved with them into new premises. Predictably, some of the teachers found the strictures of a religious community life unpalatable, or were unsuited to teaching, and they left. Others joined, and some stayed.

In 1691 De La Salle and two of his close companions made a vow, invoking 'the Most Holy Trinity', to remain together even if they had to 'beg for alms and to live on bread alone' for the sake of establishing 'the Society of the Christian Schools'. Three years later he and twelve of the Brothers made a similar vow 'to live in society with' one another and 'to conduct together and by association gratuitous schools' for the education of poor boys.

As the community grew in numbers and the schools acquired a sound reputation, the Brothers took their new pedagogical approaches to Paris and beyond, until at the death of John Baptist in 1719 there were more than twenty-five schools from Calais to Marseilles, and some one hundred Brothers in the Institute, including one in Rome.

### **Developing an effective approach to education**

Establishing and maintaining a community of lay men religiously committed to the secular and religious education of the poor was no easy task. Since they charged no tuition fees, even from families who could afford to pay but wanted the sort of education the Brothers were offering, the schools and the Brothers' communities were dependent on often inadequate funding from benefactors or other sources. Aside from the privations and ridicule resulting from his own dramatic change of social and ecclesiastical status, De La Salle had to face ongoing challenges and opposition from clergy who wanted personal and territorial control of this increasingly successful community of teachers, and from other professional groups who saw them as a threat.

He also had to lead and train a diverse group of men whose own education was sometimes meagre,<sup>20</sup> as well as continuing to encourage them to see their work with young people as an estimable ministry within the Church – at a time when, according to a seventeenth century pamphlet, schoolmasters were lampooned as a motley collection of ‘low pot-house keepers, second-hand shop proprietors, silk-weaver flunkies, wig makers, and marionette string pullers’.<sup>21</sup> Poverty, though not initially among the vows made by the Brothers, was simply an economic reality – as it was for most of the families whose sons they educated.

The education of the poor was itself a cause of ongoing criticism, even among the educated classes. This is well illustrated by Voltaire’s appreciative response to the proscribing of the education of ‘ploughmen’ (*laboureurs*) by Louis-René de La Chalotais (1701-1785), attorney-general of the parliament of Brittany. In an essay published in 1763, La Chalotais writes of the ‘Brothers of Christian Doctrine, who are called “ignoramus” (*Ignorantains*)’,<sup>22</sup> teaching people ‘to read and write who

---

<sup>20</sup> In a ‘memorandum’ written early in 1690, of which the surviving manuscript’s condition hinders confident interpretation, De La Salle comments that ‘those who compose this community are all lay, without higher learning [*sans étude*] and of mediocre intelligence [*esprit*] at best’. See Maurice-Auguste Hermans, *L’Institut des Frères des Écoles chrétiennes à la recherche de son statut canonique: des origines (1679) à la bulle de Benoît XIII (1725)* (CL 11; Rome: Maison Saint-Jean-Baptiste de La Salle, 1962), 350. Cf. Ronald Isetti’s introduction to ‘Memorandum on the Habit’ in Augustine Loes and Ronald Isetti, eds., *Rule and Foundational Documents* (Landover, MD: Lasallian Publications, 2002), 151.

<sup>21</sup> Quoted without reference by Edward Everett, ‘Introduction,’ in *The Conduct of the Christian Schools by John Baptist de La Salle*, ed. William Mann (Landover, MD: Lasallian Publications, 1966), 21.

<sup>22</sup> Adrien Hoverlant, *Essai chronologique pour servir à l’histoire de Tournay* (Courtray: Hoverlant, 1808), 297-298, witnesses both to the incorrect identification of the Brothers as ‘Brothers of Christian Doctrine’, and to the offensive epithet, *Ignorantains*. The *Dictionnaire de l’Académie française* (1835) has an entry indicating that *ignorantin* is used only in the expression ‘the ignoramus Brothers’, referring to ‘the Brothers of the Congregation of Saint-Yon, who conduct elementary schools’. Saint-Yon, a property outside Rouen, was at one time the Brothers’ headquarters in France. For the same entry, Émile Littré, *Dictionnaire de la langue française* (1872-77) indicates that the name was first applied to, and accepted by, the Saint John of God Brothers in the fifteenth century and that ‘by confusion, and sometimes in mockery, the name is given to the Brothers of the Christian Schools’. ‘Dictionnaire d’autrefois,’ [artfl-project.uchicago.edu](http://artflsrv02.uchicago.edu/cgi-bin/dicos/pubdicollook.pl?strippedhw=ignorantin), accessed May 19, 2015. <http://artflsrv02.uchicago.edu/cgi-bin/dicos/pubdicollook.pl?strippedhw=ignorantin>.

should only have been taught to draw and to handle the plane and the file'.<sup>23</sup> In a letter to La Chalotais, Voltaire writes that as one who 'cultivates the land', he requests that he be sent 'labourers, not tonsured clerics'. 'Send me especially,' he says, 'some ignoramus Brothers (*des frères ignorantins*) to drive my ploughs, or to be harnessed to them'.<sup>24</sup>

De La Salle exercised his leadership by personal contact as far as the difficulties of travel permitted, by gathering the Brothers together at holiday times for retreat, rest, and professional development, by maintaining a system of personal correspondence on a monthly or bi-monthly basis, and through a substantial collection of written works of both a professional (educational and theological) and a spiritual nature. Some of these, notably the *Rule* and the manual for running the schools, *The Conduct of the Christian Schools*, were produced collaboratively with the Brothers themselves.

## **6. A BRIEF OUTLINE OF DE LA SALLE'S THEOLOGICAL AND BIBLICAL EDUCATION**

De La Salle's own educational experience was a major factor in his approach to biblical interpretation. It gave him a significant facility in Latin (the language of the Vulgate Bible) and Greek, in whose *koine* form the New Testament was written. As well as providing a rich theological perspective on the Bible, his education included right from his secondary school days a growing exposure to the works, including the biblical commentaries, of the Church Fathers. To that degree his approach to biblical interpretation was always characterized by a consciousness of a history of interpretation – a 'history of influence'.

### **De La Salle's initial education in the classics, 1661-1667**

As was the custom at the time for the sons of the upper-middle class, De La Salle's education at the Collège des Bons Enfants was in the classics. It was a humanist curriculum on completion of which students could enter any of four faculties: arts, law, medicine or theology.<sup>25</sup>

---

<sup>23</sup> Louis-René de Caradeuc de La Chalotais, *Essai d'éducation nationale ou plan d'études pour la jeunesse* (No place or publisher indicated. 1763).

<sup>24</sup> Voltaire [François-Marie Arouet], 'Letter XXXIV' in *Œuvres complètes de Voltaire* (Basle: Jean-Jaques Tourneisen, 1789), 73: 70-71.

<sup>25</sup> Poutet, *Le XVII<sup>e</sup> siècle*, I: 139.

Among the Latin authors set for study, at least in part, Yves Poutet mentions Terence, Cicero, Virgil, Sallust, Caesar, Ovid, Horace, Propertius, Juvenal, Plautus, and Quintilian.<sup>26</sup> The Greek texts included the Iliad and the Odyssey, and authors such as Hesiod, Theocritus, Plato, Demosthenes, Isocrates and Pindar. On the assumption that the Collège des Bons Enfants was not to be outshone by its local Jesuit counterpart, Poutet adds others to the list, including Thucydides, Plutarch, Sophocles and Euripides. Significantly for De La Salle's later familiarity with the Church Fathers and their approaches to biblical interpretation, these also included John Chrysostom (c. 349-407) and Basil (c. 330-379).<sup>27</sup>

### **Philosophy, 1667-1669**

The two-year program in philosophy began with Logic and Ethics, the text of the former being Aristotle's *Organon*, possibly supplemented by a more recent French text, and even by discussion of Descartes. For Ethics, the basic text was Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics*. Luke Salm suggests the likelihood that the philosophy teacher, who was also a theologian, would have included in 'Topics', one of the sections of Logic, references to the Bible, Church tradition, Church councils, and the teachings of the Church Fathers – all particularly pertinent for De La Salle's later writings, including those in which he incorporates biblical passages.<sup>28</sup>

In the second year of philosophy the day began at 7:00 am, with two hours of Aristotle's *Physics*, followed by an hour of mathematics which included algebra, geometry, cosmography, theories of measurement and musical theory. Afternoons were devoted to Aristotle's *Metaphysics*.<sup>29</sup>

Salm notes that the final examination for the conferral of the Master of Arts was oral, and conducted entirely in Latin, over two separate sessions.<sup>30</sup> The Rector's 'letters'

---

<sup>26</sup> Poutet, *Le XVII<sup>e</sup> siècle*, 1: 154-159.

<sup>27</sup> Poutet, *Le XVII<sup>e</sup> siècle*, 1: 159-160.

<sup>28</sup> Luke Salm, *John Baptist de La Salle: the Formative Years* (Romeoville, IL: Lasallian Publications, 1989), 34-35.

<sup>29</sup> Salm, *Formative Years*, 36.

<sup>30</sup> Salm, *Formative Years*, 37.



testify that De La Salle had attained to the rank of ‘Master’: ‘...gradum Magisterii...summa cum laude adeptus est’.<sup>31</sup>

### **Theology – Reims**

According to the statutes of the University, the schedule of classes in theology comprised lectures on the *Sentences* of Peter Lombard (c. 1100-1160) for one and a half hours in the morning, and three hours on the Old and New Testaments in the afternoon, with a half-hour break at 2:00 pm. The Bible was studied ‘according to the mind of the ancient fathers’,<sup>32</sup> so that De La Salle’s familiarity with the Church Fathers’ approach to biblical interpretation, most likely initiated during the ‘Topics’ of his Logic course, was deepened as an essential part of his first year in theology.

This initial study of theology in Reims was, then, among other aspects of theology, De La Salle’s third academic exposure to the Church Fathers and their engagement with the Bible that was to be further deepened both intellectually and spiritually in his later studies both in Paris and back in Reims. It was later to come to fruition in the approach to biblical interpretation he took in actualizing the Bible for his Brothers.

### **Theology and seminary education – Paris**

Having completed a year of theology in Reims, De La Salle moved to Paris in October 1670, to begin his training for the priesthood. While living at the seminary of Saint Sulpice he continued his studies at the Sorbonne, opting for the cycle in dogmatic theology which in 1670-71 provided courses on the Incarnation and the Trinity.<sup>33</sup> His second year was interrupted following the death of his father in April 1672, when he returned to Reims to assume responsibility for the family.

The seminary had been founded by Jean-Jacques Olier (1608-1657), a leading figure in the seventeenth century ‘French School’ of spirituality whose origins are associated especially with Pierre de Bérulle (1575-1629). Olier’s thought was nourished

---

<sup>31</sup> Léon-de-Marie Aroz, *Jean-Baptiste de La Salle: documents bio-bibliographiques* (CL 41; Rome : Maison Saint Jean-Baptiste de La Salle, 1979), 2: 212-213.

<sup>32</sup> *ex antiquorum patrum mente*, Aroz, *Documents*, 221.

<sup>33</sup> Salm, *Formative Years*, 57.

particularly, says Yves Krumenacker, by the texts of Paul and those of the Fourth Gospel which speak of ‘the dwelling of Christ in the souls of the baptised’.<sup>34</sup>

At a time of intense renewal of the church in France, the seminary program had the aim of training clergy whose spiritual life would sustain their ministry. It is likely that De La Salle’s spiritual director was the priest in overall charge of spiritual direction at the time, Louis Tronson (1622-1700), who Alfred Calcutt observes was the one who ‘by his example and his teaching, set De La Salle on the road to taking seriously the Christian life’.<sup>35</sup> The routine was rigorous: rising at 5:00 am, spiritual exercises, vocal and interior prayer, the Divine Office with its cycle of Psalms and Bible readings – described by Tronson as ‘the summary, the précis of the holiest words and most sublime discourse of God that one can have in this life’<sup>36</sup> – the Eucharist, spiritual reading, silence, spiritual conferences – and lectures at the Sorbonne, a few minutes’ walk from the seminary. Among the practices which, as Saturnino Gallego observes, De La Salle adopted much later for his Brothers, was every day to read the New Testament for some time, while kneeling.<sup>37</sup>

The title of one of Tronson’s works, its 1669 edition current during De La Salle’s time at the seminary, is indicative both of Tronson’s regard for the Church Fathers and of the sort of influence which would have reinforced De La Salle’s own appreciation of the patristic traditions: *Forma cleri secundum exemplar quod Ecclesiae sanctisque Patribus a Christo Domini summo sacerdote monstratum est* – ‘The figure of the cleric according to the example which has been shown to the Church and to the holy Fathers by Christ the Lord, the high priest’.<sup>38</sup> In his *Manuel du Séminariste* (‘The Seminarian’s Manual’), the teaching expressed in twenty-three ‘talks’ is derived from ‘holy Scripture and the Fathers of the Church’.<sup>39</sup> Poutet reports that De La Salle had a copy of Tronson’s *Selectae conciliorum et Patrum sententiae de sacratissimo clericorum ordine ac de eorum vita, praecipuisque virtutibus* (Paris,

---

<sup>34</sup> Yves Krumenacker, *L’école française de spiritualité: Des mystiques, des fondateurs, des courants et leurs interprètes* (Paris: Les Éditions du Cerf, 1999), 285.

<sup>35</sup> Calcutt, *De La Salle*, 60-61.

<sup>36</sup> Jacques Paul Migne, *Œuvres complètes de M. Tronson Supérieur général du séminaire de Saint-Sulpice* (Paris: 1857), I: 113, cited in Aroz, *Documents*, 87.

<sup>37</sup> Saturnino Gallego, *Vida y Pensamiento de San Juan Bautista de La Salle* (Madrid: Biblioteca de Autores Cristianos, 1986), 70.

<sup>38</sup> Aroz, *Documents*, 90, 92.

<sup>39</sup> Aroz, *Documents*, 87.

1664), ‘Select teachings of the Councils and of the Fathers on the holy order of clerics and of their life and outstanding virtues’. Comprising one hundred and ninety three texts, it contained as well as conciliar documents, excerpts from Church Fathers and other luminaries some of whose influence is evident in De La Salle’s interpretations of biblical texts: Clement (c. 150-215), Ephrem (c. 306-373), Ambrose (c. 339-397), Jerome (c. 340-420), John Chrysostom (c. 349-407), Prosper (c. 390-456), Leo (d. 461), Gregory (c. 540-604), Isidore (c. 560-636), Bernard (1090-1153), Lawrence (1559-1619).<sup>40</sup>

### **De La Salle and the ‘Divine Office’: a life-long biblical and patristic formation**

The continuing influence of the Divine Office on De La Salle’s ongoing biblical and patristic formation should not be overlooked. It represents what soon became a daily exposure not only to the Bible, but to the ‘history of influence’ of the Church Fathers on his sense of how the Bible was to be interpreted as relating to the lives and ministry of his Brother-teachers.

De La Salle was invested as a canon of the cathedral of Reims on 7 January 1667, aged 15. Among the duties of a canon was to take part in the liturgical ceremonies of the cathedral, including the singing of the Divine Office, prayed, in Latin, as ‘Hours’ up to eight times a day, and comprising hymns, psalms, prayers, and readings from the Bible. At the hour of Matins, readings also included passages from the saints, especially the Church Fathers, often as commentaries on the Biblical passage of the day. De La Salle had been introduced to the Divine Office as a young boy by his maternal grandfather, Jean Moët de Brouillet, so it was a prayer with which he was already familiar.<sup>41</sup>

While he was a schoolboy and *canon minoré*, that is, still in minor orders to the first of which he was ordained in 1668, De La Salle was dispensed from full participation in the Divine Office. However, in order to benefit from the prebend attached to the office of canon, he was obliged to be present at least for the three ‘great hours’, Matins, Lauds, and Vespers on Sundays and feast days.<sup>42</sup> Hence, from 1667 until his departure for Paris in October 1670, and then on his return to Reims in April 1672 he

---

<sup>40</sup> Poutet, *Le XVII<sup>e</sup> siècle*, 1: 326.

<sup>41</sup> Salm, *Formative Years*, 26.

<sup>42</sup> Poutet, *Le XVII<sup>e</sup> siècle*, 1: 211.

would have been immersed in these three ‘Hours’ every week, and on every feast day. From June of 1672, when he was ordained to the subdiaconate, the obligation extended to the full Office, and even after resigning his canonry in order to concentrate on his work with the teachers (1683), as a priest he continued to recite the Divine Office all his life.

A sampling from the Breviary, the book used for the Divine Office, gives an idea of the exposure to the Bible and the Church Fathers which De La Salle experienced as an integral part of his prayer life.<sup>43</sup> The Autumn volume (*pars autumnalis*) of a 1698 edition of the Roman Breviary includes a section entitled ‘Homilies and Prayers for Sundays’, from the eleventh Sunday after Pentecost until Advent.

For the eleventh Sunday after Pentecost, the reading is from Mark 7.31-37, about the healing of a deaf man who was also unable to speak. The Gospel reading is followed by one from a homily on Ezekiel by ‘Saint Gregory, Pope’ (c. 540-604) which, notwithstanding the title of the work, addresses that healing. The following Sunday’s reading is from Luke 10, with a reading from a comment on that chapter by the Venerable Bede (c. 673-735). On the next Sunday the reading is from Luke 17, and the commentary is from Augustine’s (354-430) homily on that Gospel. Readings from other works of Augustine, ‘on the Sermon on the Mount’, and ‘on the Words of the Lord’ are part of the next two Sundays, with gospel readings from Matthew 6 and Luke 7. On the following Sunday the commentary on Luke 14 is from ‘St Ambrose, Bishop’ (c. 339-397).

---

<sup>43</sup> McBrien, *Encyclopedia*, 196, notes that the Breviary represents ‘a late medieval compilation’ from several books, including the psalter, a book of readings, and a hymnal, first fashioned during the eleventh and twelfth centuries for itinerant religious who could not carry several such books for their prayer while travelling. The nature of the ‘Breviary’ was evidently well known in France at least as early as the beginning of the seventeenth century. Among its meanings for *breviaire* as a ‘summary’ work, Jean Tricot, *Le Thresor de la langue francoyse* (1606) includes, for example, Suetonius’ *De illustribus grammaticis* (‘on famous grammarians’). It also refers at some length to the work ‘used by people of the Church’ divided into two seasons, winter and summer, where there is ‘in brief’ whatever of the Old and New Testament and of the principal Doctors of the Church, that ecclesiastics must every day throughout the year say for their *office*, which consists of Matins, Lauds, the hours of Prime, Terce, Sext and None, Vespers and Compline. ‘Dictionnaires d’autrefois,’ artfl-project.uchicago.edu. <http://artflsrv02.uchicago.edu/cgi-bin/dicos/pubdico1look.pl?strippedhw=breviaire>.

Subsequent Sundays (seventeenth to twenty-second after Pentecost) include readings from, in order, John Chrysostom (c. 349-407), Peter Chrysologus (c. 406-450), Gregory (twice), Jerome (c. 340-420), and Hilary (c. 315-367).<sup>44</sup>

Hence De La Salle's immersion in the Bible and the Church Fathers was not only academic; it was an essential component of his daily prayer. This bears out what Poutet notes as being part of his education at the seminary of Saint Sulpice, De La Salle's relatively short sojourn at which had such an impact on him:

A third characteristic of Saint-Sulpice lay in the union of spiritual direction and theoretical teaching. La Salle thus learned how exegesis, patrology [the study of the Church Fathers], and speculative theology can serve to orient the Christian life and how the best spiritual counsels are of no value if they are not founded on doctrinal certainties.<sup>45</sup>

Here is articulated the sort of holistic approach to biblical interpretation which typifies a *Wirkungsgeschichte* hermeneutic, as will be shown in Chapter 3. It is a rich interplay of spirit, intellect, study of the history of interpretation, theological reflection and 'the Christian life'.

### **Resumption of studies in Reims**

Following the death of his parents and his return to Reims, De La Salle soon resumed his studies at the University there. He completed the interrupted third year of theology in 1672, then began the two years of advanced philosophy in order to be awarded the Bachelor of Theology. To be accepted for the next stage, the Licentiate, he had to submit to another oral examination by three professors 'to prove his competence in the areas of historical theology, speculative theology, church history, and Sacred Scripture'.<sup>46</sup>

Not much is known of the content of De La Salle's Licentiate program, except that there seems to have been little by way of course work, the candidates preparing themselves by private study under the supervision of the professors. Three theses (in

---

<sup>44</sup> *Breviarum Romanum ex Decreto Sacrosancti Concilii Trid. restitutum, Pii V. Pontificis Max. jussu editum, et Clementis VIII. primùm, nunc denuò Urbani PP. VIII. auctoritate recognitum. Pars autumnalis* (Antwerp: Ex Typographia Plantiniana apud Viduam Baltharis Moreti, 1698), 270-281.

<sup>45</sup> Poutet, *Le XVII<sup>e</sup> siècle*, 1: 233.

<sup>46</sup> Salm, *Formative Years*, 98.

speculative theology, moral theology, and a ‘theologically controversial’ topic) had to be prepared during the two years, for an intensive oral defence. The degree was conferred on De La Salle in 1678.<sup>47</sup> A few months later, on 9 April, he was ordained to the priesthood.

Luke Salm observes that at the time in France the doctorate was not so much a matter of further research as the payment of a fee by a candidate who held the licentiate, and participation in the requisite examination.<sup>48</sup> De La Salle delayed his until, probably, 1680, the year after he had first begun what he thought was to be a temporary and purely supervisory involvement with Nyel’s schools for poor boys. The examination procedure involved two phases: the *Auriculaire* thesis, followed by the *Tentative* presided over by the Master of Studies. In the evening came the *Vespérie*, with two theses, the *Expectative* (with two Bachelors) and the *Vespéries*. The latter involved disputation with two professors in turn, for half an hour each, on a list of theses printed in six columns, covering the Bible, church history, and moral theology.<sup>49</sup>

### **The value of learning**

One of Louis Tronson’s favourite sayings was that ‘Learning without piety produces a proud cleric; piety without learning produces a useless one’. He insisted that knowledge was necessary if the priest was to be an effective ‘leader of people, a doctor of souls, a judge of consciences, a guardian for the house and city of God, a herald and ambassador of the divine majesty, a master and teacher for all nations’. Before becoming a master, he reminded his seminarians, they had first to become disciples. Hence the need ‘to be diligent in the study of Sacred Scripture, the mysteries and articles of faith, the science of moral and sacramental theology’, and, above all, in prayer.<sup>50</sup> There is evidence here of an integrated spirituality – of learning, piety, the study of the Bible and of theology, prayer, and ministry. It is also therefore a fair description of the approach to the interpretation of the Bible embraced by a ‘history of influence’ hermeneutic.

---

<sup>47</sup> Salm, *Formative Years*, 98-99; 106-107.

<sup>48</sup> Salm, *Formative Years*, 110.

<sup>49</sup> Aroz, *Documents*, 468.

<sup>50</sup> Salm, *Formative Years*, 83.

The decided influence of the Church Fathers on De La Salle and his appreciation of the Bible will be discussed in Chapters 1 and 2, but in this context I note that, even while upholding the value of theological and biblical study, De La Salle does not refrain from mentioning that many of the Church Fathers, as well as others such as Jean Gerson, Chancellor of the University of Paris, were highly educated in other areas. He remarks that Gregory the Great (c. 540-604), studied literature (*belles-lettres*)<sup>51</sup> in Athens, even if ‘he applied himself more to the perfection of his soul’.<sup>52</sup> Cyprian (d. 258) was admired both for his holy life, his ability and ‘his knowledge of literature’ (*belles-lettres*).<sup>53</sup> Hilarion (c. 291-371) had made himself competent in ‘human letters’ (*les lettres humaines*).<sup>54</sup> Jerome (c. 340-420) is described as having ‘an excellent mind and an extraordinary knowledge (*science*)’, and was well versed in ‘human letters’.<sup>55</sup> Benedict (c. 480-547) regarded education as very important, and instructed many children in ‘the sciences and in piety’.<sup>56</sup> Denis (d. 250), supposedly the bishop associated with the founding of Paris, but whom De La Salle and others have confused with Dionysius the Areopagite (cf. Acts 17.34), is said to have been ‘well informed in the human sciences (*les sciences humaines*)’. His (putative) conversion by St Paul then leads De La Salle to remark that ‘it is thus that God makes use of natural insights and accomplishments to lead people to himself, as he did in Saint Denis and in others’.<sup>57</sup>

There is a statement in *The Conduct of the Christian Schools* (1720), the collaborative work influenced and edited by De La Salle, detailing what the Brothers’ experience yielded in terms of running an effective school, that an artisan ‘who can read and write is capable of anything’.<sup>58</sup> De La Salle was certainly well placed to understand the depth of that potential. Not only did he believe that education in the faith was essential for ‘salvation’, as he and others understood it at the time; he could see that a good grounding in the fundamentals of literacy, writing, and arithmetic was an

---

<sup>51</sup> Defined in Dict. 1694 as ‘Grammar, Rhetoric [*l’élouquence*], and Poetry’.

<sup>52</sup> MF 126.1.1.

<sup>53</sup> MF 166.1.1.

<sup>54</sup> Defined in Dict. 1694 as ‘Grammar, Poetry, Rhetoric (*rhétorique*), History, antiquity, and the ancient Authors who treat of it’.

<sup>55</sup> MF 170.1.1.

<sup>56</sup> MF 111.3.1.

<sup>57</sup> MF 175.1, 2.

<sup>58</sup> CE 16.2.21.

essential step in liberating children from poverty. That he devoted his life to ensuring its realization amongst marginalized young people is an instance of his commitment to effective practice. It also underlines the significance of his own education, including the development of a way of actualizing the Bible for himself and others in such a way that the provision of schooling for poor children was seen as a ministry continuous with that of Jesus, as will be discussed in Chapter 2.

## **Conclusion**

This account of De La Salle's life and education has been extensive, but I believe that it is necessary to be aware both of the choices he made and the nature of his education in order to appreciate his motivation in writing for a community of men committed to teaching poor children, and the perspective from which he interpreted the Bible for them.

Not long after the conferral of his doctorate in theology the focus of John Baptist de La Salle's ministry as priest and leader had narrowed rather unexpectedly onto his innovative community of teachers, though he was also in frequent demand as a spiritual counsellor to other individuals and groups. There is no doubt that he put his theological acumen to fruitful use in his written works for the Brothers, as well as in conferences and conversations of which we have few records, apart from a relatively small collection of letters.

As regards his knowledge and interpretation of the Scriptures, the above outline indicates a constant biblical thread throughout his studies. His earlier classical education provided a solid linguistic basis in Latin and Greek, and his interpretative frame of reference was deepened and broadened by frequent exposure to the works of the Church Fathers in both his study and his prayer. He was well prepared for an interpretative approach to the Bible which for his Brother-teachers would be both intelligent and inspiring.

## **7. OUTLINE OF THE THESIS**

In Chapter I I shall explore the extent of De La Salle's references to the Bible, and consider two of his meditations as indicative of his *appreciation* of the Bible. From these two meditations I derive a set of nine 'principles' which characterize De La



Salle's approach to biblical interpretation. These principles provide a basis for comparison with the approach taken by St Augustine, De La Salle's most quoted Church Father, and hence a significant part of his 'history of influence'. I shall then review De La Salle's appropriation and appreciation of the Bible in four writings or sets of writings: his catechetical works, the meditations as a whole, his *Explanation of the Method of Interior Prayer*, and the Brothers' *Rule* of 1718.

The hermeneutical framework which I believe provides an appreciative perspective on De La Salle's interpretation of the Bible is outlined in Chapter 2. This will involve a discussion, based on the work of Ulrich Luz, of the relative merits of historical-critical exegesis and a history of influence hermeneutic – and the value of a fruitful relationship between them. The *Wirkungsgeschichte* approach seems to accord well with what De La Salle describes as the Bible's capacity to 'touch hearts'. Luz' comments regarding the 'blending' of texts as he reflects on a statement by Karl Barth is a helpful way of considering De La Salle's incorporation of biblical texts into his own writing. The chapter concludes with an attempt to demonstrate an affinity between a modern 'history of influence' approach, and De La Salle's own interpretative approach as he seeks to relate the 'living and effective word' to their life and their work with children that was the purpose of his community of Brothers in seventeenth century France.

Chapter 3 seeks to establish De La Salle's consciousness that, as a biblical interpreter and as the leader of an educational community, he was immersed within a living tradition. Rather than citing biblical texts as references to sacred literature from the past, he tends to weave them into his writing as communications in the present. His frequent references to and reflections on the Church Fathers and a long list of 'saints' are further witness to his consciousness of a living tradition of biblical interpretation, just as he is concerned to have his Brother-teachers realize that their educational ministry is part of a living tradition which is continuous with that of Jesus and his first disciples.

In Chapter 4 I set out in more detail my choice of Matthew as a gospel focus, and Mt 4.23-10.8 in particular. Following a discussion of Mt 4.23-25 as the first bracket of an

important *inclusion* within the Gospel, I consider interrelated themes important to both Matthew and De La Salle: kingdom, presence, teaching and healing, and salvation. These themes, reflected on in the context of Matthew's Gospel, are especially relevant in a continued actualization of De La Salle's biblical hermeneutic in a modern context. In the Conclusion I have indicated one direction in which such an actualization may be fruitful.

Chapters 5 to 8 concern De La Salle's references to the focal section of the Gospel of Matthew, Mt 4.23-10.8, and an attempt to see them as consistent with a set of characteristics of the *Wirkungsgeschichte* approach as I understand it.

Chapter 5 takes up Mt 4.23-25, the prelude to Mt 5-7 which articulates what is to follow as the 'proclamation of the good news of the kingdom' in word (Mt 5-7) and deed (Mt 8-9). The chapter then considers De La Salle's understanding of the Beatitudes (Mt 5.3-12).

Chapter 6 considers De La Salle's interpretation of texts within the rest of Mt 5. Chapter 7 focuses on his approach to the remainder of the Sermon on the Mount, Mt 6-7. It includes De La Salle's substantial reflections on the Lord's Prayer (Mt 6.9-13), for which he draws on the works of Church Fathers such as Augustine and Tertullian.

De La Salle's references to the two chapters of Matthew (8-9) relating healing stories are considered in Chapter 8, together with his reflections on the commissioning of the disciples in the opening verses of Mt 10.

In the final chapter I shall summarise and consolidate what has emerged from these discussions: that a 'history of influence' hermeneutic does indeed provide a helpful framework within which to appreciate De La Salle's approach to the interpretation of the Bible. One implication of this conclusion is that his twenty-first century followers would do well to acknowledge that he, in turn, is part of their 'history of influence', and therefore that his reflective, prayerful, and action-oriented approach to biblical texts should continue to inform their lives and work. Integrating his understanding of 'kingdom' and 'salvation' with those of modern exegetes and theologians may enhance our understanding of the school as 'a sign of the kingdom and a means of salvation', as the Brothers' revised Rule encourages us to believe.

## CHAPTER 1: DE LA SALLE'S APPRECIATION OF THE BIBLE

### INTRODUCTION

In this chapter I shall set out something of the extent of De La Salle's references to the Bible within the categories of his writings as designated by the French complete works, *Œuvres complètes*. I shall then discuss the two meditations in which I believe he provides his most sustained appreciation of the significance of the Scriptures. From these two meditations I wish to derive nine 'principles' which help to spell out that appreciation in a more analytical way. It will then be a matter of taking a broader view of the ways in which mention is made of the Bible and the Gospels in his other writings: the catechetical works, the meditations as a whole, the *Explanation of the Method of Interior Prayer*, and the *Rule* of 1718. This chapter and the next will provide a background against which to consider in more detail, in Chapters 4-8, De La Salle's engagement with one section of a particular Gospel, Mt 4.23-10.8.

### 1. THE EXTENT OF DE LA SALLE'S RECOURSE TO THE BIBLE

#### Terminology and statistics

As Luis Varela remarks, John Baptist de La Salle has left no 'systematic treatise' (*tratado sistemático*) on the Bible.<sup>1</sup> It is incontestable from De La Salle's writings, however, that he regards the Bible as being of fundamental consequence in his own life, the lives of his community of teaching Brothers, and, in turn, those of the young people whom they educate. As I shall outline below, the most sustained expression of what he understands the Bible to be is to be found in two of the meditations written for his community.

De La Salle's preferred term for the Bible is 'the Scripture', usually 'the holy Scripture', or 'the holy Scriptures'. He uses the word 'Bible' only seven times: twice

---

<sup>1</sup> Varela, *Biblia y espiritualidad*, 31; *Sacred Scripture*, 13. I have consulted both the original and the translation.

in *Duties of Christian II*,<sup>2</sup> and five times in the community's *Rule*, but there in reference not to the Bible itself but to a Bible history.<sup>3</sup>

### **Mentions of the terms 'Scripture', 'Gospel' and 'Old and New Testaments'**

From the *Vocabulaire lasallien*<sup>4</sup> we learn that 'Scripture' (*Écriture* or its variants) appears 110 times in 14 of his 19 collected works.<sup>5</sup> 'Old Testament' is mentioned eight times, and 'New Testament' 35 times, while the word 'gospel' [*évangile*] appears 471 times in 16 works. A breakdown of these numbers among the five categories adopted by the French edition of his collected works, shows that the preponderance of references to 'Scripture' is in the 'spiritual' and 'catechetical' categories, that is, in writings intended both for the Brothers themselves, and those directed specifically towards their Christian education of young people.

#### ***Mentions of 'Scripture' in the works of De La Salle***

1. Rules [for the Brothers]	17 times
2. Spiritual writings intended for the Brothers	36 times
3. Letters	0 times
4. Pedagogical writings	6 times
5. Catechetical writings	51 times
<b>Total</b>	<b>110</b>

The expression 'Old Testament' is not often mentioned as such. However, Varela's survey of just the *Meditations* indicates 149 references among twenty-eight books of the Old Testament (including some deuterocanonical works), the highest number being to the Psalms (42), Genesis (13), Proverbs (11), and Isaiah (10).<sup>6</sup>

---

<sup>2</sup> DA 101.3.5, as an alternative term to 'the holy Scripture', and DA 101.3.10, as a term in its own right.

<sup>3</sup> RC 27.34; 30.20.13; 30.20.16; and 30.20.17, all regarding readings from *The History of the Bible* by an unnamed author.

<sup>4</sup> Maurice-Auguste Hermans, ed., *Vocabulaire lasallien*, (Paris: Frères des Écoles Chrétiennes, 1984).

<sup>5</sup> *Œuvres complètes* lists the works as 25 in number, a difference accounted for by its subdivision of some works, such as the *Letters* and the *Exercises of Piety*.

<sup>6</sup> Varela, *Biblia*, 80.

What is significant about references to the ‘New Testament’ is the proportion of mentions in the category ‘Rules’ (for the Brothers), of which 15 are in the *Rule* itself (1718), to be discussed below.

***Mentions of ‘Old Testament’ in the works of De La Salle***

1. Rules [for the Brothers]	0 times
2. Spiritual writings intended for the Brothers	1 time
3. Letters	0 times
4. Pedagogical writings	1 time
5. Catechetical writings	6 times
<b>Total</b>	<b>8</b>

***Mentions of ‘New Testament’ in the works of De La Salle***

1. Rules [for the Brothers]	19 times
2. Spiritual writings intended for the Brothers	7 times
3. Letters	0 times
4. Pedagogical writings	1 time
5. Catechetical writings	8 times
<b>Total</b>	<b>35</b>

A similar distribution for the word ‘gospel’ indicates its much more frequent usage.

***Mentions of ‘Gospel’ in the works of De La Salle***

1. Rules [for the Brothers]	16 times
2. Spiritual writings intended for the Brothers	232 times
3. Letters	0 times
4. Pedagogical writings	22 times
5. Catechetical writings	201 times
<b>Total</b>	<b>471</b>

But such statistics themselves, while indicative of its extent, do scant justice to De La Salle's actual recourse to the Bible, because they take no account of his abundant quotations from and allusions to the texts of the Bible which, as we shall see, are woven into his own writing and often not formally referenced.

### **Biblical quotations in the Meditations of De La Salle**

De La Salle wrote more than two hundred meditations in what are now three collections: Meditations for Sundays (MD), Meditations for Feasts (MF) and Meditations for the Time of Retreat (MR). Six meditations of disputed authenticity has been categorized as 'additional' (MA).

At least as published, the meditations were intended for the Brothers.<sup>7</sup> The 77 Meditations for Sundays tend to be based on the Gospel reading for the Mass of the day as determined by the diocesan lectionary. Those for Feasts (109 meditations) are reflections on the life of the saint of the day, while the sixteen Meditations for the Time of Retreat, written towards the end of De La Salle's life were to be read, one in the morning and one in the evening, on each of the eight days of the annual retreat. They focus on the Brothers' work with young people as a ministry of the Church.

Averaging about two pages in length, and invariably set out as three 'Points', the meditations were to be read out and listened to by the Brothers as a basis for their prayer. As a general rule, each of the Points tends to conclude with a specific reference to the life and work of the Brother-teacher, sometimes in the form of a challenging question, sometimes as a clear indication of what they ought to do in the light of the point being made, often in reference to one or more biblical texts.

The Meditations comprise three of the four works in the second category, above, 'Spiritual writings intended for the Brothers'. In these alone, which account for only 20 of the instances of the word 'Scripture' (or its variations), Luis Varela has identified 149 quotations from the Old Testament and 1,114 from the New Testament. In the same works, in which the word 'gospel' appears 222 times, Varela has identified 538 quotations from the four Gospels. It should be noted that he also

---

<sup>7</sup> See 'MD-MF Présentation', Houry, *Écrits*.

identifies 424 quotations from ‘the Epistles of Saint Paul’ (in which he includes Ephesians [60] and Hebrews [32]).<sup>8</sup>

Varela categorizes these quotations as either ‘explicit’ (the majority – 65% overall, and up to 78% in the *Meditations for Sundays*), ‘implicit’ (18%), ‘implicit allusions’ (12%), and ‘reminiscences’ (3%) (pp. 82-89). Miguel Campos, while acknowledging the value of this classification in *locating* quotations, in his own extensive work on De La Salle’s *Meditations for the Time of Retreat*, finds it less helpful in other respects, particularly as regards their purpose.<sup>9</sup>

In connection with this thesis: Varela has identified – again, just in the three sets of meditations – 198 quotations from the Gospel of Matthew, making it his most often-quoted individual biblical *work* within that subset of his writings, while St Paul is the most often-quoted *author*. The Gospels of Luke and John are also well represented: 157 and 156 quotations respectively, while from the Gospel of Mark there are only 27.

The following table summarizes Alan Houry’s attribution of citations (of varying degrees of explicitness) to the Gospel of Matthew, in terms of the same categories of De La Salle’s complete works as above.<sup>10</sup> The first column of instances concerns the whole of the Gospel of Matthew; the second concerns that section of Matthew on which I intend to focus.

***References to the Gospel of Matthew, and Mt 4.23-10.8 in De La Salle’s works***

	<b>Mt 1-28</b>	<b>Mt 4.23-10.8</b>
1. Rules [for the Brothers]	40	8
2. Spiritual writings for the Brothers	313	81
3. Letters	1	0
4. Pedagogical writings	15	9
5. Catechetical writings	283	64
<b>Total</b>	<b>652</b>	<b>162</b>

<sup>8</sup> Varela, *Biblia*, 72, 79.

<sup>9</sup> Campos, *Itinéraire*, 2: 20-21.

<sup>10</sup> Houry, *Écrits*.

The greatest numbers of identified references to the Gospel of Matthew are thus in the categories ‘spiritual writings intended for the Brothers’, and ‘catechetical writings’ (for their use in the religious instruction of young people).

Given the preponderance of biblical references in these categories, it is perhaps unsurprising that De La Salle’s most coherent account of his thoughts on the Bible is to be found in two of his meditations, those for the feast of St Jerome and for the feast of St Catherine of Alexandria.

## **2. TWO SIGNIFICANT MEDITATIONS**

I shall first set out these two meditations in full, in continuous numbered sentences (‘lines’) for ease of reference. For the sake of an initial analysis, and later comparison with key characteristics of the ‘history of influence’ approach to interpretation, I shall then derive nine ‘principles’ that appear to characterize De La Salle’s appreciation of the Bible, at least as reflected in these two meditations.

### **St Jerome**

De La Salle’s meditation on Saint Jerome (c. 340-420) is presented below. Jerome was born at Stridon, in Dalmatia (part of modern-day Croatia), and educated in Rome. He is said to have had a dream in which he was accused of being ‘a Ciceronian rather than a Christian’, as a result of which he devoted himself to biblical studies and ‘a severe asceticism’. He revised the Old Latin Gospels on the basis of Greek manuscripts available to him, began a Latin translation of the Septuagint from Origen’s *Hexapla*, but abandoned it in favour of translating from the Hebrew, which language also influenced his view of what constituted the canonical books. The translation of the Gospels and the Old Testament are his substantial contribution to the Latin Vulgate version of the Bible, which in its revision in the sixteenth century became the authoritative Roman Catholic version of the Bible until approval was given in 1943 for translations from the original languages.<sup>11</sup>

### **For the Feast of Saint Jerome, MF 170**

---

<sup>11</sup> McBrien *Encyclopedia*, 689-690, 1320.



### 170.1.1

1. Saint Jerome had an excellent mind and an extraordinary knowledge.
2. He first applied himself to the human sciences, but as he recognized that they turned him away from God, rather than giving him a taste for God, he left them
3. and spared neither pains, nor labour, nor effort in being instructed in Holy Scripture,
4. and in acquiring a perfect knowledge of the mysteries which are contained there.
5. It is in these sacred books that one finds an outpouring of *all the treasures of knowledge, and of the wisdom* [Col 2.3]<sup>12</sup> of God.
6. These are the divine books [cf. Ezek 2.8] which the genuine servants of God must *eat* [Ezek 2.8], according to the expression of the Prophet, and of which they must *fill* [Ezek 3.3]<sup>13</sup> themselves,
7. so as to communicate and explicate<sup>14</sup> the mysteries<sup>15</sup> to those whom they are obliged to instruct<sup>16</sup> and to form as Christians<sup>17</sup> at God's behest, as Saint Jerome did,
8. for he was consulted from all parts of the world about the difficulties of Holy Scripture which he had so well fathomed, and whose resolution he had so well found, that he left no doubt concerning them for those who consulted him.

### 170.1.2

9. That is how that this Saint enlightened the Church with insights<sup>18</sup> he had received from God.

---

<sup>12</sup> All three versions, Mons Amelote and Huré, have the wording used by De La Salle: *tous les tresors de la science & de la sagesse*. The fact that Mons and Huré use the verb *renfermer*, which concludes De La Salle's previous sentence, may suggest one of them as the source. Amelote uses *caler*. As will be evident, Huré appears to be the source for NT quotations in these two meditations.

<sup>13</sup> As one of only three passages (five citations) from Ezekiel to which De La Salle makes explicit reference in the *Meditations*, it might be assumed that it was carefully chosen. He cites the Old Testament only 149 times (42 of which are from the Psalms). whereas there are 1,114 citations from the New Testament; see Varela, *Biblia*, 72, 80.

<sup>14</sup> *Développer* [*sic*] had the primary meaning of 'unwrap', which seems to be what is intended here.

<sup>15</sup> *les secrets*.

<sup>16</sup> Michel Sauvage, *Catéchèse et laïcité: Participation des laïcs au ministère de la Parole et mission du Frère-enseignant dans l'Église* (Paris: Liget, 1962), 599-560, explains that, in De La Salle's meditations, the words 'instruct' and 'instruction', even when used absolutely, refer to *religious* instruction (which was, of course, but one part of the curriculum in the Brothers' schools).

<sup>17</sup> *au Christianisme*.

<sup>18</sup> *lumières*.

10. To be more abundantly filled with these, he withdrew from the environment of the world, so that secular impediments could not prevent him from deepening the holy truths which God wanted made known to people.
11. If you wish to be filled with the mind of God, and fully capable of your work, attend above all to your study of the holy books of Scripture, and particularly of the New Testament,
12. so that it may serve as a rule of conduct both for yourselves and for those whom you instruct.

### 170.2.1

13. Saint Jerome traversed almost the whole world so as to be able to confer with the greatest people of his time, and especially with those who were the most competent in the knowledge of Holy Scripture.
14. But while he was in Athens he there found Saint Gregory Nazianzen, who told him that to learn the Holy Scripture well, it was necessary to begin by putting it into practice.
15. That is why he followed the advice of this great saint, whom he began from that time to regard as his teacher, and he went immediately into the desert in Syria to lead a holy and penitential life.
16. As soon as he arrived there, he applied himself to prayer, to meditation on Holy Scripture, and to the practice of all that it teaches, keeping vigil and fasting continually in a separation from all engagement with the world.

### 170.2.2

17. It was there that he understood the full meaning<sup>19</sup> of what Saint Paul says: that *knowledge sometimes puffs up*, but *charity builds up*<sup>20</sup> [1 Cor 8.1],<sup>21</sup> and *if someone thinks that he knows something, he does not yet know how he must know it*, but that *if someone loves God, he is known and loved by God* [1 Cor 8.2-3].<sup>22</sup>

---

<sup>19</sup> *il aprit [sic] solidement.*

<sup>20</sup> *édifie.* In these two meditations I have italicized words which are biblical quotations or allusions.

<sup>21</sup> Again, the expressions are the same in the three versions, with Amelote having *au lieu que* in place of *mais* in Mons and Huré.

<sup>22</sup> De La Salle's wording of this awkward sentence may be his own reworking of one or more available versions for the sake of greater clarity. However, 'and loved' is to be found only in the texts of Mons and Huré, while Amelote has a footnote to say that 'known' [*connu*] by God is to say 'loved by God'. Greek and Latin have only 'known by him'.

18. Of what use is knowledge without the fear of God, says the author of the *Imitation*? Of what use is it, he adds, to speak loftily of the mystery of the most holy Trinity, if one displeases God because one lacks humility?<sup>23</sup>
19. It was in this solitude, where Saint Jerome lived as though in a paradise, that he learned to look down on himself, and not to attach importance to<sup>24</sup> anything on earth.
20. You are obliged to know in order to teach; but be persuaded that you will learn the Gospel more by meditating on it, than by learning it by heart.

### 170.3.1

21. Saint Jerome applied himself forcefully to working against the heretics, so as to make himself the defender of the Church. It is true that he was so humble that, while being a priest, he did not dare exercise any priestly function, considering himself quite unworthy.
22. Nonetheless in that state as a minister of God he made himself most valuable to the Church, protecting it from the assaults which were made on it by its enemies, who were conspiring all the more vigorously for its downfall, because it had not yet attained to the extent and external glory that it has had since.
23. This saint displayed such vigour, such zeal, and even such graces<sup>25</sup> in combatting the heretics, that they regarded him as their scourge, and did not dare to pit themselves against him, because the reasons he put forward to destroy their tenets were so sharp<sup>26</sup> and so powerful, that he easily convinced them of error.
24. It was penance and interior prayer, together with the natural incisiveness of his good mind which put him in this situation.

### 170.3.2

25. This is how this saint exercised his ministry as a priest of Jesus Christ.
26. Although *there is only one and the same Spirit* [1 Cor 12.4b] *who distributes graces to all* [1 Cor 12.11] says Saint Paul, *there is however a diversity of graces* [1 Cor 12.4a].<sup>27</sup> And even though *there is only one and the same God who works*<sup>28</sup> *everything in everyone* [1 Cor 12.6], *there is a diversity of*

---

<sup>23</sup> The reference is to the opening section of the first chapter of the *Imitation of Christ*. See Thomas à Kempis, *The Imitation of Christ*, ed. William C. Creasy (Macon, Georgia: Mercer University Press, 2007), 3.

<sup>24</sup> *faire cas*.

<sup>25</sup> *graces*. Augustine Loes and Francis Huether, eds., *Meditations by John Baptist de La Salle* (Landover, MD: Christian Brothers Conference, 1994), translates as ‘showed ... even such grace’. However it seems likely that De La Salle is anticipating *graces* in the sense of ‘gifts’ in the passage from 1 Corinthians, below.

<sup>26</sup> *vives*.

<sup>27</sup> *Diversité de graces* is only in Huré. Mons: *diversité de dons spirituels*; Amelote: *des graces différentes*.

<sup>28</sup> *opere*.

supernatural workings.<sup>29</sup> One receives from the Holy Spirit the gift of speaking with great wisdom, another [...] the gift of speaking with knowledge [1 Cor 12.8], another the gift of prophecy, another the discernment of spirits, another the gift of speaking different languages, another the interpretation of languages [1 Cor 12.10, 28], another the gift of governing [1 Cor 12.28e], another the gift of assisting the brothers [1 Cor 12.28d].<sup>30</sup> Accordingly, those who have been employed for the good of the Church [cf. 1 Cor 12.28] have done so in various ways.

27. Ask today through the intercession of Saint Jerome for some part of the grace which he was given by God for the good of the Church, and prepare yourself to work there, according to the gift which is your own.
28. Like this saint, love seclusion and interior prayer;<sup>31</sup> that will be the means of making you of service to the Church.

### Summary: Meditation on Saint Jerome

In regard to this meditation on Jerome I note in particular that he is a ‘Church Father’, and hence, as will be discussed in Chapter 2, part of the patristic tradition which influenced De La Salle’s approach to biblical interpretation. Other important aspects of the meditation are the emphasis on Jerome’s classical education, valuable in itself but in second place to his later biblical work; De La Salle’s own description of the Bible as ‘sacred books’ to be appropriated and communicated; his weaving of biblical texts into those of his own; and his drawing out for his readers the implications of Jerome’s example: that they are to study the Bible, to make it their rule of conduct for themselves and their students; their need not only to study it, but prayerfully to reflect on it and to pray for the grace to see their communication of it as part of their own ministry within the Church.

### St Catherine of Alexandria

There appear to be few reliably documented facts about the life of Catherine of Alexandria (died c. 310), one contemporary of De La Salle’s remarking that it was a waste of time ‘to look for any true acts of this illustrious saint’ of whose existence the oldest witness is a manuscript dating from the eighth or ninth century. De La Salle reports the details from a source he frequently used, the martyrology of the Abbé

<sup>29</sup> *operations*. This term is from Mons/Huré; Amelote has *vertus d’agir*.

<sup>30</sup> *ceux qui ont le don d’assister les frères* (Mons and Huré) is an amplification of the terse ἀντιλήμψεις of the original, *les frères* being fortuitously appropriate for the readership. Amelote paraphrases very differently with ‘zeal for the afflicted’.

<sup>31</sup> *l’Oraison*.

François Paris (d. 1718), published in 1691.<sup>32</sup> Catherine has been venerated in the East since the ninth century.<sup>33</sup> The doubtful historicity of the saint does not, of course, detract from De La Salle's observations about the Bible, many of which are in any case derived from the Scriptures themselves.

## **For the Feast of Saint Catherine, virgin and martyr, MF 192**

### **192.1.1**

29. Saint Catherine, having been converted to the faith from her tender youth, found a solid means of preserving the faith in the reading of the Holy Books, and she devoted herself to it in such a way that she mastered them perfectly, with the effect that, when certain persons wanted to turn her away from the practice of the religion she had embraced, no one could ever shake her.
30. She was even strong enough that at a time when she was taken by order of the Emperor, since he saw that she was speaking with so much energy on the subject of her religion, having gathered some philosophers and the cleverest of Alexandria to convince her, all they had to report regarding the dispute they had with her was the embarrassment of being bested by a girl.

### **192.1.2**

31. See how important it is for you to know the Holy Scripture well, since Saint Paul assures us that whoever *does not know*<sup>34</sup> *it, will himself be unknown* [1 Cor 14.38]<sup>35</sup> and that it is [the Scripture]<sup>36</sup> which strengthens us in the faith and in the practice of good; for, as the same Saint Paul says, it is it [the Scripture] which *instructs for the salvation by the faith which is in Jesus Christ* [2 Tim 3.15b],<sup>37</sup> and which, being *inspired by God, is useful for instructing, for reproof, for correcting, and for guiding towards piety, and towards justice, so that the person [who is] of God may be perfect and well prepared*<sup>38</sup> for all sorts of good works [2 Tim 3.16].
32. That is the benefit that Saint Catherine drew from the reading of the Holy Scripture, and which it is important that you draw from, you who are directed by God to 'instruct, to reprove, to correct, and to guide towards piety' the children who are entrusted to you;

---

<sup>32</sup> Jean-Guy Rodrigue, *Contribution*, 519, 41.

<sup>33</sup> McBrien, *Encyclopedia*, 238.

<sup>34</sup> *ignore*, 'is ignorant of', not the English 'ignore'.

<sup>35</sup> Huré: 'If anyone wishes not to know [recognize?] *it*' namely, that 'the things that [Paul] is writing to you are the commands of the Lord' v. 37, (which itself is cited in the Meditation on St Catherine, below), he will himself be unknown/unrecognized'. Paul refers to the Law in v. 34. Mons is similar; Amelote has a quite different rendering.

<sup>36</sup> *elle*.

<sup>37</sup> The three French versions are the same.

<sup>38</sup> *bien disposé*. Mons has *parfaitement disposé*; Amelote has *préparé* [*sic*].

33. therefore read it frequently, and may this holy reading so fill you with the Spirit of God that it may enable you to do all these things with ease.

### 192.2.1

34. Saint Catherine, being very full of the spirit of Christianity, and being well grounded in the faith, withdrew completely from the world so as to devote herself in a very particular way to prayer, in which she spent much time, to apply her mind and her heart to meditation on the holy truths which she had learned in the divine books, and to determine how to practise them, looking upon the poor, whom she often served, as Jesus Christ himself.

### 192.2.2

35. What an admirable thing it is, and of what great value for those who wish to live in piety and in the exercise of virtue, to meditate often on the holy and exalted maxims that are contained in holy Scripture, and which are far above anything of which the human mind can conceive by itself.
36. It enlightens the mind by means of this divine light, which, as Saint John says, *enlightens all those who come*<sup>39</sup> *into this world* [Jn 1.9] and because what it encompasses, says Saint Paul, are *the directives of the Lord* [1 Cor 13.37],<sup>40</sup> the meditation that we make on them stimulates us to practise them.
37. Through Saint Catherine's example, make use of this means of sanctifying yourself; meditate often on the words of holy Scripture, so as to encourage yourselves to do good, and to conduct yourselves in accordance with the spirit of your state; *for the word of God* which is contained in it has that effect, according to Saint Paul, because *it is living and effective, and it pierces more than a two-edged sword; it even enters*, continues this holy Apostle, *and penetrates the most hidden recesses*<sup>41</sup> *of the soul and of the spirit* [Heb 4.12].<sup>42</sup> Make use of it, then, for this purpose, since it brings about such great benefits.

### 192.3.1

38. This saint had been accused of being a Christian before the Emperor Maximian who was at that time in Alexandria, and because the Emperor saw that he was unable with his reasons to convince her to change her religion and take up again the cult of the false gods, he wanted to try the way of gentleness and promises to win her over, and make her do what he wanted. But seeing that all the means he used were useless, and were not capable of moving the

---

<sup>39</sup> Perhaps De La Salle is quoting from memory: the three French versions mirror the singular of the original ('was coming') and the Vulgate (*venientem*).

<sup>40</sup> *les ordonnances du Seigneur* (Mons and Huré; Amelote has *des ordres inspirez de Dieu*, which would have enhanced the argument had it been used).

<sup>41</sup> *replies*, 'folds'.

<sup>42</sup> Huré. MonsE is almost identical, except for the spelling *trenchans* ['edges'] for Huré and De La Salle's *tranchans*. *Trencher* ('to cut') appears in Jean Nicot's *Le Thresor de la langue francoyse* (1606); cf. English 'trenchant'. Dict. 1694 spells the word *trancher*.

heart of this saint, whose constancy was unshakeable, he had her cruelly flogged, and then left her in prison for twelve days, while given almost nothing to eat.

39. He then had her put in the wheels, which would reduce her whole body to pieces; but since by the help of grace she sustained no harm from all these tortures, the Emperor had her head cut off.

### **192.3.2**

40. Seclusion, prayer, and reading the holy Scripture, usually serve as they did for Saint Catherine, to prepare a soul to suffer with courage all that God wills that it suffer; and when one is prepared by these three means, it often happens that one is rendered as if insensible to sufferings, because one receives them as coming from God, and as a means of uniting oneself closely to him, and to possess him.
41. You will be like this saint, content and consoled by God in your sufferings, if you prepare yourselves for them as she did.

### **Summary**

The meditation on Catherine reiterates many of the themes evident in that on Jerome. There is the emphasis on the teachers' need to know the Bible and to read it frequently. De La Salle again insists that as well as knowledge, they must meditate and pray with biblical texts. Even further, they must put them into practice. The reference to Heb 4.12 shows De La Salle's faith-filled awareness that the Bible has its own claims to make as the vehicle for God's effective and powerful word. In Chapter 3 I shall discuss these and other dimensions of his biblical perspective in relation to the history of effects hermeneutic.

### **Characteristic aspects of De La Salle's biblical references**

Before moving to a consideration of the nine principles that may be derived from these two meditations, I note that they also reflect two general aspects of De La Salle's references to the Bible. The first is that, just in these two meditations, there are several of them. They are set out *en bloc* below, together with the 'line' numbers of the meditations in brackets.

Col 2.3 (5)

Ezek 2.8; 3.3 (6)

1 Cor 8.1, 2-3 (17)

1 Cor 12.4b, 11, 4a, 6, 8, 10, 28, 28e, 28d (26)

1 Cor 14.38; 2 Tim 3.15b, 16 (31)

Jn 19; 1 Cor 13.37 (36)  
Heb 4.12 (37)

Even from these two meditations one can anticipate De La Salle's preference for Pauline works.<sup>43</sup> Moreover, the incorporation of verses and part-verses, in order and out of order, from 1 Cor 12 (line 26) illustrates the way in which De La Salle can present the Scriptures so as most effectively to inspire his seventeenth-eighteenth century hearers/readers to take certain actions and to adopt certain attitudes, as he does in line 27. Line 31 is a good example of the way in which he intertwines biblical texts within his own exhortations to those same contemporary hearers and readers:

See how important it is for you to know the Holy Scripture well, since Saint Paul assures us that whoever *does not know it, will himself be unknown* [1 Cor 14.38] and that it is [the Scripture] which strengthens us in the faith and in the practice of good; for, as the same Saint Paul says, it is it [the Scripture] which *instructs for the salvation by the faith which is in Jesus Christ* [2 Tim 3.15b], and which, being *inspired by God, is useful for instructing, for reproof, for correcting, and for guiding towards piety, and towards justice, so that the person [who is] of God may be perfect and well prepared* for all sorts of good works [2 Tim 3.16].

To indicate that the number of identified quotations in these two meditations is not atypical, I observe that, to take a more or less random sample, for the first ten of the *Meditations for the Principal Feasts of the Year*, there are 78 editorial, footnoted biblical references in *Œuvres complètes*. Another indication is that in his comments on De La Salle's meditation 'for the Wednesday within the octave of the Most Holy Sacrament' Alain Houry, the editor of De La Salle's complete works, can find it unusual enough to remark that 'this Meditation does not quote Scripture'.<sup>44</sup>

The second aspect of De La Salle's way of referring to biblical texts, which I shall take up in more detail below, is also illustrated in these meditations. Rather than quoting a text and providing a normally formulated biblical reference, which we know from elsewhere that he is able to do, it is as though he engages the author in a conversation between himself and the reader. It is not 'as we read in 1 Cor 8.1', but 'Saint Paul says...' with Paul's words presented, but not referenced. The same method is used for non-biblical texts. So just in these two meditations I note:

---

<sup>43</sup> De La Salle's drawing upon the Pauline corpus has been explored in the pioneering works of Michel Sauvage, *Citations*, and Miguel Campos, *Itinéraire*.

<sup>44</sup> Houry, *Écrits*, MD 53.



- Line 6: 'according to the expression of the Prophet [Ezekiel]'
- Line 17: 'Saint Paul says'
- Line 18: 'says the author of the *Imitation* [of Christ]'
- Line 26: 'says Saint Paul'
- Line 31: 'Saint Paul assures us', 'Saint Paul says'
- Line 36: 'Saint John says'; 'Saint Paul says'
- Line 37: 'according to Saint Paul'

This manner of referring to a biblical passage has the effect of its being spoken to the audience in the present, rather than being an ancient written text to which they might refer if interested. Moreover, the fact of its being *heard* in the present already encourages its being *heeded* in the present: that the word is intended to move its hearers to action within their own context.

### 3. DE LA SALLE'S APPRECIATION OF THE BIBLE: NINE PRINCIPLES

It is possible to infer from these two meditations, on Jerome and Catherine, nine principles which inform De La Salle's appreciation of and engagement with the Bible. I hope to show that these principles can be confirmed from his other writings, and in particular in his appropriation of passages from Mt 4.23-10.8. Although for the sake of clarity they are itemized here as discrete, it is obvious in the flow of the two meditations that De La Salle would see them as being essentially interrelated. (The numbers in square brackets refer to the lines of the two meditations as numbered above.)

#### 1. *Scripture is not an end in itself, but a means towards communion with God*

Jerome is presented as wanting to develop 'a taste for God', which he finds in studying the Scriptures [2]. In the same Point (170.1.2) De La Salle commends the study of Scripture to his Brother-teachers if they wish to be 'filled with the mind ('Spirit'?) of God' and given the capacity to be good teachers [11].<sup>45</sup>

Similarly, in view of the benefits Catherine drew from reading the Bible, the

---

<sup>45</sup> *esprit* can mean either 'spirit' or 'mind'; in the original edition it is not capitalized in either meditation: CL 12, 162, 214.

Brothers are again urged to read it frequently to as to be filled with the mind/Spirit of God and enabled to ‘reprove, correct, and guide towards piety’, citing 2 Tim 3.16 [33]. Just as Catherine found ‘a solid means of preserving the faith’ in reading the Bible [29], so it is important that the Brothers know it well, because it ‘strengthens us in the faith’ [31]. As a result of his study of the Bible, Jerome’s vigour and zeal as a minister of God was deepened [22, 23], and Catherine’s constancy as a Christian became unshakeable [38]. She was prepared in her sufferings to unite herself closely to God [40]. Meditating on the Scriptures, after the example of Catherine, is a means of sanctification [37].

What is also evident in these examples, and those that follow, is the characteristic movement of De La Salle between a focus on the life and work of two people, a man from the fourth-fifth century and a woman from, at least putatively, the third-fourth century, and on that of his community teachers in 17<sup>th</sup>-18<sup>th</sup> century France. The vital connection is the Bible as a pathway towards an encounter with God.

*2. Scripture is not just to be known conceptually, but is to be internalized in order to be communicated to others*

De La Salle quotes Ezekiel in saying that the genuine servants of God must ‘eat’ the ‘divine books’, and be filled with them [6]. While knowing them is important, ‘knowing’ is not so much a matter of memorizing Bible passages, but of reflective and prayerful meditation on them so as to be able to teach what they are about [20]. In fact, bookish knowledge can merely bolster one’s self importance, whereas a deeper appreciation of the Bible points towards love in action, and a sense of being loved by God [17].

De La Salle’s introduction to the Jerome meditation does not resile from the need for ‘pains, labour, and effort’ in the pursuit of biblical studies, even for a person as evidently intelligent as Jerome [1-3]. So there is no hint here of anti-intellectualism, which would be scarcely credible in someone with De La Salle’s own educational experience. But he believes that, once understood, the Scriptures need to be allowed to have their effect.

*3. An understanding of Scripture involves action*

In Athens, De La Salle reports, Jerome met Gregory Nazianzen, who taught him that to learn ‘the holy Scripture’ one has to begin by putting it into practice.<sup>46</sup> Jerome followed this advice, and looked on Gregory as his teacher [14-15]. As well as to prayer and meditation on the Bible, Jerome applies himself to ‘the practice of all that it teaches’ [16]. De La Salle has already made the point that the Bible serves as a rule of *conduct*, both for the Brothers and their students [12], and in the meditation on Catherine he invokes Heb 4.12 in exhorting the teachers to meditate on the Scriptures ‘so as to encourage yourselves to do good, and to conduct yourselves in accordance with the spirit of your state’ [37]. The Scriptures strengthen us ‘in the practice of good’ [31], as exemplified in Catherine’s learning the ‘holy truths’ from them, and determining how to practise them, particularly in serving the poor [34].

#### *4. The appropriation and interpretation of Scripture involve faith, prayer, and reflection*

Catherine is said to have meditated on ‘the holy truths which she had learned in the divine books’ and to have determined ‘how to practise them’. Hence, De La Salle says, how admirable it is for those who wish to live ‘in the exercise of virtue’ to meditate often ‘on the holy and exalted maxims that are contained in holy Scriptures’ [34-35]. Scripture, he says, enlightens the mind (citing Jn 1.9) and because it reveals God’s directives (citing 1 Cor 13.37), meditation on them ‘stimulates us to practise them’. De La Salle’s readers are urged to ‘meditate often on the words of holy Scripture, so as to encourage yourselves to do good’ [35-37].

A prayerful and practical approach to the Bible is summed up in Jerome’s applying himself ‘to prayer, to meditation on Holy Scripture, and to the practice of all that it teaches’. His ‘natural incisiveness’ in combination with penance and prayer enabled him to do what he did [16, 24].

---

<sup>46</sup> De La Salle is here quoting from one of his regular sources, the *Martyrologe* of Abbé François Paris (†1718); see Rodrigue, *Contribution*, 428.

*5. A prayerful and reflective approach to the Scriptures requires focused attention*

Jerome, who ‘had an excellent mind and an extraordinary knowledge’ [1] put considerable effort into being instructed about the Scriptures [3]. For the Brothers, being ‘filled with the mind of God’ and rendered effective in their work requires particular attention to the study of the Bible [11]. Jerome adopted an undistracted lifestyle, where he engaged in prayer, meditation on the Bible, and the practice of its teachings [10, 16]. Catherine also ‘withdrew from the world’ so as ‘to apply her mind and heart to meditation on biblical truths’ [34]. Therefore De La Salle advises his teachers similarly to ‘love seclusion and interior prayer’ [28].

*6. The study and interpretation of the Scriptures have a community dimension*

Jerome’s efforts show that an informed understanding of the complexities of the Bible is enriched by engaging with the wisdom and insights of experienced and knowledgeable teachers [3, 13, 15]. He was then, in turn, able to share his knowledge with others, and so enrich the Christian community [8, 9]. The Brothers are urged to pray for some of the gifts accorded Jerome, so that they might be of service to the Church in their ministry of educating young people [11, 12, 26, 27, 28].

*7. The Scriptures themselves include expressions of their nature, significance and purpose*

De La Salle quotes from Col 2.3, ‘I want their [the people from Colossae and Laodicea] hearts to be encouraged and united in love, so that they may have all the riches of assured understanding and have the knowledge of God’s mystery, that is, Christ himself, in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge’. His contention is that ‘all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge’ in Christ are ‘outpoured’ in the Scriptures. While this is not in fact stated by the author of Colossians, De La Salle is effectively offering it as an extension into the New Testament of the references to Ezek 2.8-3.4 which immediately follow [5, 6]. Here the prophet is commanded to devour the words of God, written on a scroll, and to be filled with them, so that he can speak God’s words to the house of Israel. The contention finds more explicitly

biblical foundation in the reference to 2 Tim 3.15-16, which De La Salle then typically proposes as also relating to the Brothers' own work of 'reproving, correcting and guiding' [31, 32].

Similarly, De La Salle cites Heb 4.12, whose author is in his own way actualizing texts from the Old Testament, in testifying that the words of Scripture are effective – and will continue to be effective in their own lives and work [37].

#### *8. The Scriptures are necessary for, and enable, the Church ministry of Christian education*

De La Salle makes much of the fact that Jerome was too humble to exercise his priestly ministry in the usual way [21]. He implies, however, that he was indeed 'a minister of God' in 'enlightening' and protecting the Church by drawing on his knowledge of the Bible [9, 22]. The combination of penance, prayer, and incisiveness enabled him to exercise his ministry [25]. Any 'servant of God' (i.e. minister, including lay ministers, as De La Salle designated teachers)<sup>47</sup> needs to be filled with 'the divine books' in order to be able to communicate and explicate them as part of religious instruction [6,-7], which is something that God wants to be done [10]. That, of course, requires knowledge on the part of the teacher [20]. The sort of prayerful reflection on the Bible exemplified by Jerome and enjoined by De La Salle enables a minister to carry out his (and her) work [11, 26, 27, 33], which is of service to the Church [9, 26, 27, 28].

#### *9. The Scriptures, written and read in one historical context, can be read as applying in another context*

This principle is implicit enough throughout both meditations, but is particularly evident in the continued reality of the Spirit's gifting initially the first century community in Corinth. It then has an effect on Jerome as one who

---

<sup>47</sup> See, for example, MR 193.3.2, where teachers are encouraged to see themselves as 'ministers', in a reference to 1 Cor 4.1, *ministres de Jesus-Christ*. The first extant edition of these 'Meditations for the Time of Retreat', thought to be from 1730, has the subtitle, 'For the use of all persons who are employed in the education of youth; and particularly for the Retreat which the Brothers of the Christian Schools make during the holidays', CL 13, 1.

studied, meditated on, and taught the Scriptures in the fourth-fifth centuries, and then the Brother-teachers in France many centuries later, in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries [26-27]. It becomes quite explicit in De La Salle's application of the very words of 2 Tim 3.16 ('reproving, correcting, guiding') to the Brothers' work in the classroom [31]. De La Salle's exhortation to 'make use of' Scripture is no doubt founded in his conviction that the 'word' continues to have its 'effect' [37].

#### 4. DE LA SALLE'S PRINCIPLES REFLECT THOSE OF AUGUSTINE

Given his frequent references to the works of Augustine, and Trent's pronouncement that interpretation by church fathers was the biblical touchstone, it is quite likely that De La Salle was aware of and guided by Augustine's work on the interpretation of the Bible, *De Doctrina Christiana*. As will be seen below, a common feature in the approaches of the two is the reference to 1 Cor 8.1b, 'Knowledge puffs up, but love builds up', which, as previously noted, De La Salle cites in reference to the greater importance of love over knowledge in the interpretation of Scripture.

Other convictions expressed by Augustine are echoed in what we have seen of De La Salle's meditations on Jerome and Catherine. While Augustine is writing of biblical interpretation by a homilist reading from a prepared script, the principles are equally applicable to De La Salle's meditations, written to be read aloud and reflected on by his community of Brother-teachers.<sup>48</sup>

As with De La Salle's observations on the lengths to which Jerome went in order to be able to read and understand the Bible, Augustine wrote of the 'great and arduous work' of both determining its meaning and the most appropriate way of communicating it.<sup>49</sup> He refers to the third step in interpretation (following 'fear' and 'piety') as 'knowledge' [*scientia*] 'at which [step] every student of the divine Scriptures exerts himself'.<sup>50</sup> A knowledge of languages is essential: people who know

---

<sup>48</sup> That the meditations were composed for public reading is noted by the editors of the English translation: Loes and Huether, eds., *Meditations by John Baptist de La Salle* (Landover, MD: Christian Brothers Conference, 1994), xv.

<sup>49</sup> Augustine, *De Doctrina Christiana Libri Quattuor*. Liber 1.1, 'Sant' Agostino', [http://www.augustinus.it/latino/dottrina\\_cristiana/index2.htm](http://www.augustinus.it/latino/dottrina_cristiana/index2.htm), accessed 22 Feb 2015.

<sup>50</sup> Augustine, *Doctrina*, Liber 2.7. The original (*studiosus*) is masculine.

Latin need two other languages, Hebrew and Greek, ‘so that recourse may be had to the original texts [*exemplaria praecedentia*] if the infinite variety of Latin interpreters drives them into doubt’.<sup>51</sup> And ‘whatever history indicates about the sequence of times past helps us very much in understanding the holy Books.’<sup>52</sup>

Notwithstanding the academic rigour required, as a Christian teacher Augustine sees the purpose of interpretation as going beyond the understanding of an ancient text. Translated into various languages, the Bible ‘was made known to the nations for salvation’, with a view to knowing ‘the will of God’.<sup>53</sup> A genuine understanding of the Scriptures can only lead to building up the twofold love: of God and one’s neighbour.<sup>54</sup> Indeed it would be presumptuous to engage in the challenging work of interpretation, Augustine says, without the conviction that it is in him [God] that one’s hope of carrying through this work resides’.<sup>55</sup> Moreover, it is essential that ‘the student of the divine Scriptures’, appropriately instructed, ‘does not cease to reflect on “the apostolic dictum” [*apostolicum* – i.e. of Paul the Apostle], “knowledge inflates, love builds” [*scientia inflat, caritas aedificat*]’.<sup>56</sup> As indicated above, De La Salle observes that it was when Jerome, after all his necessary study and global consultation, had heeded the advice of Gregory Nazianzen and devoted himself to prayer and meditation on the Bible, that he came to understand the meaning of this verse of Paul’s.<sup>57</sup>

It may be no accident that De La Salle’s onetime spiritual director, the Minim Nicolas Barré (1621-1686),<sup>58</sup> himself a redoubtable scholar, also wrote that

knowledge is a great obstacle to holiness. It is useful in that it can enlighten consciences, but it can also puff people up, feeding self-love and pride...<sup>59</sup>

---

<sup>51</sup> Augustine, *Doctrina*, Liber 2.11.

<sup>52</sup> Augustine, *Doctrina*, Liber 2.28.

<sup>53</sup> Augustine, *Doctrina*, Liber 2.5.

<sup>54</sup> Augustine, *Doctrina*, Liber 1.36.

<sup>55</sup> Augustine, *Doctrina*, Liber 1.1.

<sup>56</sup> Augustine, *Doctrina*, Liber 2.41. Cf. Vg 1 Cor 8.1b: *Scientia inflat, caritas vero aedificat*.

<sup>57</sup> MF 170.2.2.

<sup>58</sup> The Minims (Latin, *minimus*, ‘least’) are a religious order founded by Francis of Paola in 1435. Their orientation is Franciscan, with an emphasis on humility. See McBrien, *Encyclopedia*, 864.

<sup>59</sup> Brigitte Flourez, *Better than Light: Nicolas Barré* (Singapore: Angsana Books, 1994), 47-48.

Augustine sees prayer as an essential component of interpretation. If an interpreting speaker is able to say things that are ‘just, holy and good’, he will succeed ‘more by the piety of [his] prayers than by his capacity for oratory’. Before he speaks, he should ‘lift up his thirsting soul, so that he might pour out [*eructet* ‘spit out’] what he has drunk, be filled with what he is to give forth’.<sup>60</sup> This conviction, supported with a reference to Mt 10.19-20 (‘... do not worry about how you are to speak or what you are to say... for it is not you who speak, but the Spirit of your Father speaking through you’) is clearly consistent with De La Salle’s insistence on interiorization and prayer as essential parts of understanding and teaching the Scriptures.

Finally, De La Salle’s emphasis on *practising* the truths of the Gospel is evident in Augustine. He writes: ‘When what is being taught is to be acted upon, and is being taught so that it may be acted upon, it is useless that the way in which it is said is pleasing, if it is not learned so as to be acted upon.’ Moreover, example is the best teacher. Even if someone can speak with neither eloquence nor wisdom, let him so live as not only to win a reward for himself, but to show example to others, and may his way of living be, as it were, an abundance of speaking’.<sup>61</sup>

I conclude that the principles I have derived from De La Salle’s meditations on Jerome and Catherine are consistent with much of what, in *De Doctrina Christiana*, Augustine expects of a homilist expounding the Scriptures.

## **5. THE BIBLE IN OTHER WRITINGS OF DE LA SALLE**

As I have indicated above, the separate delineation of the ‘principles’ I have derived from De La Salle’s meditations on Jerome and Catherine is for the sake of analytical clarity. More often they form an integrated approach to interpretation, though it is perhaps predictable that different categories of his works reflect different emphases. In this chapter I cite those in which he speaks of Scripture and the Gospel in general; the main body of the thesis will concentrate on his references to the Gospel of Matthew in particular, in which consideration will be given to particular instances of these principles. I propose in Chapter 3 to relate the approach typified by these principles to the major hermeneutical methodology adopted by Ulrich Luz in his

---

<sup>60</sup> Augustine, *Doctrina*, Liber 4.15.

<sup>61</sup> Augustine, *Doctrina*, Liber 4.29.



commentary on the Gospel of Matthew, influenced as it is by the work of Hans-Georg Gadamer.

### **The Bible in De La Salle's catechetical writings**

The main emphasis in the catechetical works is on principle (6), above, the community dimension of the study and interpretation of the Bible. In accordance with the Council of Trent, especially, *Duties of a Christian I* points to the role of the Church even in determining the precise extent of the books to be acknowledged as biblical. De La Salle writes:

The teaching which Jesus Christ has left to his Church is the same as he taught, from which the Apostles instructed the faithful of their time, and which they left to the pastors who succeeded them, whether in writing or by the spoken word.

The Church cannot change or add anything new to this teaching; and the right she has regarding doctrine and matters of faith is to explain the mysteries and the words of holy Scripture, and to propose which are the books which we must believe to be holy Scripture and to have been written by the movement of the Spirit of God. That is what made Saint Augustine declare that he would not have believed the Gospel if he had not been committed to it by the authority of the Church.

The Church received this authority from Jesus Christ, when he himself said, 'Whoever listens to you, listens to me'. And 'if anyone does not listen to the Church, regard him as a pagan and a publican' (Lk 10.40; Mt 18.17).<sup>62</sup>

As well as the affirmation of the Church's authority, which is both confined and warranted by Scripture, we can observe here De La Salle's belief in the Holy Spirit's impulse in the writing of biblical books, and an instance of his characteristic reference to one of the Church Fathers (Augustine). The opening sentence reflects his consciousness of the 'handing-on' of Christian teaching: from Jesus to the Apostles to their disciples and to subsequent church leaders.

The same sense of an historical tradition which includes the Bible, is reflected in De La Salle's orthodox Catholic attestation of Holy Orders<sup>63</sup> as one of the seven sacraments:

---

<sup>62</sup> DA 105.3.5-6. The economy of words in the Matthew quotation suggests De La Salle's own translation of the Vulgate (*qui vos audit, me audit*) rather than one of the French versions. The quotation from Luke is that of Amelote.

... the Council of Trent says that, it being clear and manifest by the witness of Scripture, by the tradition of the Apostles and by the unanimous consent of the Fathers that, by holy ordination which is accomplished by words and external signs, grace is conferred, no one can doubt that Orders is truly and properly one of the seven sacraments of the Church.<sup>64</sup>

In tracing the celebration of the Eucharist De La Salle remarks on the place of the reading and explanation of the Bible with the community of the early Church:

In these assemblies of the faithful in the first centuries of the Church, they were read the holy Scripture and had them explained. The Apostles, and after them the bishops and priests, consecrated the body and blood of Jesus Christ...<sup>65</sup>

The instructional purpose of the Bible is noted in his mention of the other ‘public prayer’, the Divine Office:

In fact, the Church has so arranged each of the hours of the Office, that she wished to give an opportunity to those who would chant it of doing these three things [to adore and praise God, to be instructed by God’s word, and to pray to God].<sup>66</sup> This is why in each Hour of the Office, she has placed psalms, hymns and sometimes canticles, to be used to praise God; readings drawn from holy Scripture and from the holy Fathers, to instruct the faithful in the word of God; and collects, which are prayers which conclude each hours of the Office...<sup>67</sup>

The same point is made in the question-and-answer catechism, with an even more explicit acknowledgment of the standing of the Church Fathers:

Q. How are we instructed about the word of God in the Divine Office?  
A. It is through the readings we recite, drawn from holy Scripture or the holy Fathers.<sup>68</sup>

In the same catechism is to be found a picture of the place of the Bible in the manner in which the early Church kept Sunday holy – in the context of the need for De La Salle’s contemporaries to do the same:

---

<sup>63</sup> In the Roman Catholic tradition, ‘Holy Orders is the sacrament by which one is received into the ministry of the diaconate, priesthood, or episcopacy’. See McBrien, *Encyclopedia*, 620.

<sup>64</sup> DA 309.1.5.

<sup>65</sup> DA 405.2.2.

<sup>66</sup> Cf. DA 405.2.6,

<sup>67</sup> DA 405.2.7.

<sup>68</sup> DC 10.3.2.

Q. Must Christians have a great respect for holy Sunday?

A. Yes, because it is a day which God has reserved and which he has ordered to be dedicated entirely to him.

Q. How did the first Christians spend holy Sunday?

A. They assembled in one place and there spent almost the whole day in the following practices:

1. praying to God for the different needs of the Church.
2. reading the holy Scriptures of the Old and the New Testament.
3. listening to the instructions of pastors.
4. chanting psalms and holy songs.
5. attending the Sacrifice of the holy Mass at which they received communion.<sup>69</sup>

The role of the Holy Spirit in helping people to understand the Bible is dealt with in a question regarding the equality of the Persons of the Trinity:

Q. Is the Holy Spirit inferior to the Father and the Son, because they are the ones who sent him?

A. No, but we say that he is sent by the Father and the Son, because he proceeds from the one and the other.

Q. What effects did the Holy Spirit produce in the Apostles?

A. The following three:

1. He enabled them to speak all sorts of languages.
2. He gave them understanding of the holy Scripture.
3. He confirmed them in habitual grace and in the grace of their apostolic vocation.<sup>70</sup>

In De La Salle's catechetical writings for both the Brothers and their students, there is evidence of his awareness of the place of the Bible – and its interpretation - in the life and worship of the early Church community, its function as a means of prayer and instruction, and the role of the Holy Spirit in making it understood.

### **The Bible in the De La Salle's Meditations**

The point in the last excerpt from *Duties of a Christian III* is underlined in the Meditation for the day of Pentecost, with the further point that what they had been enable to understand, they were enabled to explain to others, a process illustrated from the experience of St Jerome (lines 7-8 of the meditation, above), and to be repeated by the Brothers (lines 11-12):

---

<sup>69</sup> DC 41.1.3.

<sup>70</sup> DC 42.11.9. The expression 'apostolic vocation' – 'vocation as Apostles' – would not have been lost on the Brother-teachers, whom De La Salle encouraged highly to esteem their work 'which is apostolic' (MF 167.2.2).

What a surprising thing! Those who beforehand had been so ignorant that they were unable to understand the holy truths which Jesus propounded to them, were suddenly so enlightened [by the Holy Spirit] that they were explaining clearly and with all imaginable correctness, the words of holy Scripture.<sup>71</sup>

This comment is preceded by a relevant quotation from Acts 2.3-4,<sup>72</sup> to set the scene of the Spirit's appearance, and is followed by further references to Acts 2 regarding the reaction of the crowd and Peter's observations about the influence of the Holy Spirit.

The patristic connection is evident in De La Salle's meditation 'On the life of Saint John Chrysostom', presented as similar in some respects to that of Saint Jerome:

Saint John Chrysostom, predisposed by grace, left the world at a time when he could have lived there in greater fame because of the eloquence that made him admired by everyone. He withdrew into solitude, where he applied himself to the study of holy Scripture which gave him great insights and a strong religious foundation.<sup>73</sup>

You have the happiness and benefit of being disengaged from the world, of often reading holy Scripture and hearing it read. You must consequently learn the knowledge of salvation from it, and the holy maxims which your profession requires you to practise, and to teach others. Meditate on them from time to time and ensure that they are also the normal subject of your conversation.<sup>74</sup>

There is the flight from fame, the withdrawal into solitude for the purpose of biblical study, and the encouragement of the Brothers to do the same. They are urged to read the Bible, listen to it read, practise what it teaches, and teach it to young people. Not only must they study the Bible, but meditate on it, and talk about it among themselves.

In a meditation on another Church Father, Cyprian of Carthage (d. 258), the subject is described as initially a pagan, and 'very learned' (*fort savant*). Through his affectionate relationship with a priest, Cecilius, he was converted to Christianity. But, De La Salle remarks, even before receiving Baptism 'he studied the holy Scripture and, full of the maxims that he had learned, and of the catholic spirit, he was admitted

---

<sup>71</sup> MD 43.3.1.

<sup>72</sup> Amelote's version.

<sup>73</sup> *un fond de religion*; MF 100.1.1.

<sup>74</sup> MF 100.1.2.

to it. ‘Full’ and ‘spirit’ suggest the sort of internalization of what he had absorbed through study.

De La Salle then makes the point that ‘as soon as he was baptised, he sold all his goods and distributed the proceeds to the poor’, an allusion to Mt 19.21. De La Salle makes no mention, of course, of his own distribution of his inheritance to the poor in the famine of, probably 1684-85,<sup>75</sup> though his readers would have been well aware of the fact. As a result of his internalizing of the Scriptures, Cyprian’s heart is described, in imagery similar to that from the meditation on Jerome (genuine servants must ‘fill themselves’ with the ‘divine books’), as being ‘full of the spirit of Jesus Christ’, so that he could do nothing but ‘practise great virtues’, and of producing ‘great fruits in the Church’. Here we see De La Salle’s habitual emphasis on biblical reflection leading to practice.<sup>76</sup>

De La Salle is invariably insistent on the practical dimension of the Christian life, which was certainly evident in his own life in establishing a community of teachers and a network of schools. In his *Meditations for the Time of Retreat*, for example, he acknowledges the need for students to know certain truths, but asks of what use it will be to *know* them, ‘if one does not go to the trouble of *practising* the good which is necessary’, an admonition supported by reference to Jas 2.17 and 1 Cor 13.2. For that reason, the teachers are told, if they are to lead the children they are instructing ‘to take on the spirit of Christianity’ that they must

teach them the practical truths of the faith of Jesus Christ and the maxims of the holy Gospel, with at least as much care as the purely speculative truths.<sup>77</sup>

The good to be practised is biblically-based, as he makes clear in *Duties of a Christian II*:

- Q. What are the practical truths which the Church proposes and prescribes for us to believe?
- A. They are the ones that Jesus Christ our Lord taught in his holy Gospel, and all those which are proposed for us in holy Scripture.<sup>78</sup>

---

<sup>75</sup> Cf. Henri Bédel, *Initiation à l’histoire de l’Institut des Frères des Écoles Chrétiennes: Origines 1651-1726* (Rome: Maison Saint Jean-Baptiste de La Salle, 1994), 55.

<sup>76</sup> MF 166.1.1.

<sup>77</sup> MR 194.3.1.

In this short survey of mentions of the Scriptures in De La Salle's meditations, there is an evident consistency of perspective with what has been seen in the nine principles derived from just two of them. There is also a degree of similarity of approach with what has been seen of his references to the Scriptures in his catechetical works, though with a more spiritual quality as befits the meditations as a basis for prayer. In the meditations he writes of the role the Holy Spirit in understanding and communicating the biblical message. This is clearly something of which a community of religious teachers needs to become convinced, especially when they come together for meditation and prayer.

His meditation on John Chrysostom reflects his own knowledge of the Church Fathers, and his desire that the Brother-teachers be aware of and influenced by their insights. The same meditation affirms their need for 'seclusion' in the midst of an active ministry, for the sake of being able to study the Bible, meditate on it, talk about it, teach it, and practise what it teaches.

The power of the biblical word is attested within the twofold dynamic of another Church Father, Cyprian's conversion: an affectionate relationship with a mentor, and an intensive study of 'the holy Scripture'. It then influences his lifestyle, in that he is moved to sell his possessions and give them to the poor.

A reference to one of the Meditations for the Time of Retreat exemplifies De La Salle's insistence on a knowledge of 'the practical truths of the faith' as proposed in the gospel, but also on the principle that knowledge without practice is of no value.

### **The Bible in *Explanation of the Method of Interior Prayer***

It is in this work, his last, that we find De La Salle demonstrating most extensively his conviction that interior prayer emerges out of reflection and meditation on the Bible.<sup>79</sup> It is illustrative to consider the extent and scope of the biblical references in this relatively short work (some 75 pages in *Œuvres complètes*).

---

<sup>78</sup> DB 1.2.2.

<sup>79</sup> Cf. Donald Mouton, *Explanation of the Method of Interior Prayer by John Baptist de La Salle* (Landover, MD: Christian Brothers Conference, 1995), 1.

The Index of Biblical References prepared by Jean-Guy Rodrigue for an English edition of and commentary on this work lists 387 references to separate biblical texts, some of which are indicated as appearing many times throughout the work; there are, for example, fourteen separate references to Ps 16.8 and eleven to Mt 16.26.<sup>80</sup> The following table gives an idea of the spread of references, though in some cases it is acknowledged that more than one biblical attribution is possible, and a number of them are indicated.<sup>81</sup>

*Biblical references in Explanation of the Method of Interior Prayer*

<b>OT</b>	<b>number</b>	<b>NT</b>	<b>number</b>
Gen	4	Mt	27
Ex	2	Mk	3
Lev	1	Lk	47
Num	1	Jn	62
Deut	2	Acts	16
1 Sam	2	Rom	20
2 Sam	2	1 Cor	12
2 Kings	1	2 Cor	7
2 Chr	3	Gal	8
Job	3	Eph	13
Ps	59	Phil	4
Prov	1	Col	9
Eccl	1	1 Tim	1
Wis	6	Heb	31
Sir	1	Jas	1
Isa	14	1 Pet	2
Jer	4	1 Jn	8
Ezek	1	Rev	2
Dan	1		

<sup>80</sup> Miguel Campos and Michel Sauvage, *Encountering God in the Depths of the Mind and Heart: A Commentary on John Baptist de La Salle's Explanation of the Method of Mental Prayer* (Rome: Brothers of the Christian Schools, 1995), 488-494.

<sup>81</sup> Miguel Campos et Michel Sauvage, *Explication de la méthode d'oraison (de saint Jean-Baptiste de La Salle): Présentation du texte de 1739; Instrument de travail* (CL 50; Rome: Maison Saint Jean-Baptiste de La Salle, 1989), xii.

Hos	1
Joel	2
Mal	2

The very notion of ‘interior’ prayer reflects De La Salle’s insistence that the Bible not simply be known, but internalized. In his introductory remarks, De La Salle observes that this form of prayer is called ‘interior’

because it is not simply an occupation of the mind, but it is [an occupation] of all the powers of the soul, and, so as to be most pure and real,<sup>82</sup> it must be practised in the depths of the soul, that is to say, in the most intimate part of the soul.<sup>83</sup>

The second section makes clear the fundamental role of the Bible in interior prayer. It begins as follows:

The first thing, then, that one must do in interior prayer is to be interiorly penetrated with the presence of God, which must always be done through a sentiment<sup>84</sup> of faith based on a passage drawn from holy Scripture.<sup>85</sup>

When he comes to discussing ‘reflections that can be made on the presence of God’, De La Salle observes that

some passages of holy Scripture are often very useful in helping the soul to make these sorts of reflection using few words, all the more because, being words of God, as faith makes us realize, they are themselves a divine anointing [cf. 1 Jn 2.27],<sup>86</sup> of themselves they lead us to God, they make us taste God, and they help us to have a sight of God and to preserve within ourselves the taste of God.<sup>87</sup>

There is a clear echo here of the meditation for the feast of St Jerome, who not finding that the human sciences gave him ‘a taste for God’, turned to the study of the Bible.<sup>88</sup>

---

<sup>82</sup> *bien pure et bien solide*. The latter word, according to Dict. 1694, can carry such figurative meanings as ‘real’, ‘effective’, and ‘durable’.

<sup>83</sup> EM 1.3.

<sup>84</sup> Dict. 1694 includes the connotation ‘movement of the soul’.

<sup>85</sup> EM 2.14.

<sup>86</sup> Dict. 1694 indicates regarding *onction* that there are ‘things which touch the heart and lead to devotion’.

<sup>87</sup> EM 4.143.

<sup>88</sup> MF 170.1.1.



Throughout this work De La Salle frequently reminds the Brother-teacher of the centrality of the Bible in his prayer, and the importance of reflection on what it means:

These ways [of interior prayer], proposed above, of reflecting on a mystery by discourse and multiple reflections can be useful; it will not be less advantageous to maintain yourself in that by short and prolonged reflections on a passage of holy Scripture which relates to the mystery on which you wish to dwell.<sup>89</sup>

We can observe in the following excerpt not only the depth of biblically-inspired interior prayer to which De La Salle invites his community, but its active outcome – the practice of virtue:

This short reflection, adorned with faith, supported by a passage drawn from holy Scripture, gives a soul some facility in applying itself to the mystery in an interior manner, and to explore its depths,<sup>90</sup> in such a way that it is impressed on mind and heart, which are as it were filled with it and which accept its impressions, so participating in the spirit and the grace of the mystery; and being, by this means, agreeably and gently disposed and inclined to the practice of the virtues that one perceives in the mystery – which is the point to which one must always tend and which is the one which Our Lord espoused in the accomplishment of his mysteries.<sup>91</sup>

The same interaction between reflection and practice is evident in a later section of the work:

The second way of persuading yourself of the necessity of a particular virtue is by some reflection on the virtue which convinces your mind of the need to practise it. The reflection must be drawn from what is said about it in holy Scripture, and especially from the New Testament.<sup>92</sup>

Towards the end of *Explanation of the Method of Interior Prayer*, there is a section on ‘Considering a Maxim’. ‘Maxims’, De La Salle explains,

are what we call sentences or passages from holy Scripture containing truths necessary for salvation, ‘interior words’ which help us know what we must do

---

<sup>89</sup> EM 8.204.

<sup>90</sup> *pénétrer* according to Dict. 1694, is used ‘in speaking of the profound knowledge of things’.

<sup>91</sup> EM 8.207.

<sup>92</sup> EM 11.252.

or not do, what we should value or despise, what we should search for or flee from, love or hate, etc. The New Testament is full of them.<sup>93</sup>

When considering a maxim

one must begin firstly by being deeply aware<sup>94</sup> of the necessity or the benefit of the maxim about which one wishes to make interior prayer, through a sentiment of faith, by calling to mind the passage of holy Scripture where it finds expression.<sup>95</sup>

The interrelationship between interiority and action is apparent in some of the comments and illustrative prayers De La Salle has provided to conclude the final section on maxims:

One makes an act of union with Our Lord by uniting oneself to his Spirit and to the interior dispositions with which he has taught this maxim, asking him some part in this Spirit and these dispositions, praying insistently that he give us the grace to enter into the spirit and practice of this maxim.<sup>96</sup>

How obliged I am, my Lord Jesus Christ, for the goodness you have had in coming from heaven to earth (cf. Jn 3.13; 6.38), to teach me a truth so important for my soul. I acknowledge the great need I have of filling my mind and heart with this divine maxim, all the more because if I neglect to enter into its practice, I will be lost...<sup>97</sup>

This discussion of De La Salle's incorporation of passages from the Bible into the work he wrote to help people to pray has shown, first of all, a great number of them – over 370 in a work of some 75 pages. The Bible is clearly regarded as the 'platform' for the sort of interior prayer that is 'practised in the depths of the soul', not by a community of pure contemplatives, but by teachers working daily with poor young people in need of an education in faith and in the basic knowledge and skills that will enable them to find employment. It is passages of the Bible that 'lead us to God', echoing the first principle derived from the meditations on Jerome and Catherine, that the Bible is not an end in itself, but a means of attaining communion with God.

The practical dimension of biblical prayer is evidenced in De La Salle's focus on its leading to the 'practice of the virtue that one perceives in the mystery', the

---

<sup>93</sup> EM 15.293.

<sup>94</sup> *on se pénètre intérieurement.*

<sup>95</sup> EM 15.296.

<sup>96</sup> EM 18.319.

<sup>97</sup> EM 17.317.2.

Incarnation, for example, which is the subject of prayerful reflection. As in the meditations, the *Explanation of the Method of Interior Prayer* develops the essential relationship between interiority and action.

### **The Bible in the *Rule* of 1718**

These excerpts from De La Salle's own writings reflect his own profound appreciation of the Bible. Its standing within the community of teaching Brothers he led, and the practices they adopted in its regard, are most clearly revealed in their Rule. It is important to note that this Rule was not merely a collection of rules devised by De La Salle and imposed on his community. It was a document born of their collective experience over several years, and in which the Brothers themselves expressed their sense of identity and purpose, as well as the practical ways in which they wished to live them out. Understandably De La Salle's influence was crucial but the significance of the place of the Bible in the early Rule might be better understood in the light of a brief outline of the process whereby it came to be formulated.

As noted in the brief outline of De La Salle's life in the introductory chapter, it was in 1679 that he first became involved with the group of schoolteachers gathered together in Reims by Adrien Nyel. Gradually, and much outside the trajectory that his life to that point might have suggested, he found himself becoming increasingly responsible for them. Luke Salm relates that he recognized that they lacked three important qualities for the success of their work of educating children of artisans and working people: 'discipline, professional training, and above all, a spiritual vision'.<sup>98</sup> Unwilling to accede to De La Salle's requirements, the first group left him, to be replaced by others who were better qualified, and better disposed towards life in a fledgling and as yet unauthorized religious community.

Perhaps as early as 1682, as Salm observes, a daily schedule was agreed upon, and over the years the group learned from experience how best to regulate their lives in accordance with the nature of their educational mission. By 1694, De La Salle considered it timely to draw on that experience, and consulted the Brothers regarding the formulation of a Rule of life, of which there survives a manuscript copy dating

---

<sup>98</sup> Luke Salm, 'Introduction', in Loes and Isetti, *Rule and Foundational*, 4.

from 1705. To understand its nature as something more than a collection of rules, but rather a document which reflects an integrating dynamism, I cite Luke Salm's description:

This Rule presents the life of the Brother as a seamless reality into which are woven his daily routine at prayer, in community, and in the school; his sense of vocation and the spirit that gives it life; his lifestyle, characterized by poverty, chastity, obedience, and silence; his relationships with his Brothers, the superiors, and outsiders. Notable for its originality and its rootedness in the living experience of the Brothers, this Rule admirably provides charismatic vision to animate the institutional structures, and these in turn are designed to guarantee the survival and the transmission of the charism itself.<sup>99</sup>

In 1717, De La Salle's long-standing wish that one of the Brothers themselves should be Superior came to fruition in the election of Brother Barthélemy. At the same time, we are told that there was discussion and consultation about the Rule, from which De La Salle abstained, but on the basis of which he was asked to revise the earlier version as he saw fit.<sup>100</sup> The result was *Common Rules of the Brothers of the Christian Schools*, 1718 – the year before De La Salle's death. In 2014 its most recent revision was approved by a General Chapter.

The first chapter of the 1718 Rule comprises clear statements of the Institute's nature, purpose, solely lay membership, and social necessity, its opening sentences indicating both its mission to educate boys without charge, and the quality of relationships among its members:

The Institute of the Brothers of the Christian Schools is a Society in which profession is made to conduct schools gratuitously. Those of this Institute will call one another by the name 'brothers' and they will never allow themselves to be called otherwise, and when they name one of their brothers they will always say 'Our Dear Brother N.'<sup>101</sup>

It is in the second chapter, 'On the Spirit of this Institute', that the centrality of the Bible in the life of these teachers is stated. The context is important. In the 1705 manuscript the chapter opens with a statement that logically begins expanding on its title: 'The spirit of this Institute is firstly a spirit of faith...', which is repeated verbatim in the 1718 edition. However, one of the more significant ways in which De

---

<sup>99</sup> Salm, 'Introduction', 6.

<sup>100</sup> Salm, 'Introduction', 6. See also Hermans, *L'Institut*, 79.

<sup>101</sup> RC 1.1.

La Salle modified this edition was to insert a paragraph at the head of the chapter. As Maurice-Auguste Hermans observes, such texts ‘delivered the essence of his thought on his work as founder of a new community’.<sup>102</sup> Luke Salm notes that, at the end of his life, De La Salle ‘was profoundly aware of the primacy of the spirit over everything else in the life of the Brothers and wanted the Brothers to share in this awareness’.<sup>103</sup> I cite this article of the Rule which prefaces the community’s acceptance of the Bible as the first means of ‘*living* the spirit of faith’ as further testimony of De La Salle’s insistence on the fundamental importance of genuine interiorization as the wellspring of action.

There is a dynamic, enlivening relationship between the two faces of what is called ‘the spirit of the Institute’, faith and zeal. The opening paragraph of the second chapter of the *Rule* of 1718 was added to the 1705 version:

What is most important and of which one must have most consideration in a community is that all those who compose it have the spirit which is proper to it, that the novices apply themselves to acquiring it and that those who are committed there make it their first care to preserve and increase it in themselves, for *it is this spirit which must inspire all their actions and be the motivation for*<sup>104</sup> *all their conduct*, and those who do not have it and who have lost it should be regarded, and should regard themselves, as dead members because they are deprived of the life and the grace of their state and should also persuade themselves that it will be very difficult for them to preserve themselves in the grace of God.<sup>105</sup>

The spirit of the Institute is, then *firstly*

a spirit of faith which must commit those who form it not to look upon anything but with the eyes of faith, not to do anything but in view of God,<sup>106</sup> to attribute everything to God, entering always into these sentiments of Job: ‘The Lord had given me everything, the Lord has taken everything from me’ [cf. Job 1.21], nothing has happened to me but what has pleased him, and with other similar [sentiments] so often expressed in holy Scripture and in the mouth of the Patriarchs of old.<sup>107</sup>

---

<sup>102</sup> Hermans, *L’Institut*, 81.

<sup>103</sup> Salm, ‘Introduction’, 16, n. 4.

<sup>104</sup> *donner le mouvement à*.

<sup>105</sup> RC 2.1, emphasis added.

<sup>106</sup> It is possible that *dans la vue de Dieu* also has the nuance of ‘in the sight of God’.

<sup>107</sup> RC 2.2.

So as not to lose sight of the full picture of this spirit of the Institute, it is well immediately to jump forward several paragraphs to: ‘*Secondly* the spirit of their Institute

consists in an ardent zeal for instructing children and to educate<sup>108</sup> them in respect<sup>109</sup> for God, to lead them to preserve their innocence if they have not lost it and as much as possible to distance them from, and to have a great horror for sin and for anything that could make them lose their purity.<sup>110</sup>

The one ‘spirit of the Institute’ is therefore twofold: faith and zeal, both a consciousness of the presence and providence of God, and a passion for the Christian education of young people. Even in the articulation of the spirit of faith itself it is clear that faith is not simply a way of ‘seeing’, but the impulse for positive action. Zeal is the obverse and outcome of faith

As regards the Bible, there is already the quotation from Job, and an unspecified allusion to ‘the Patriarchs’, but in the following article is stated the place of the Bible itself, and the New Testament in particular, in acquiring and living in the spirit of faith:

To enter into and to live in this spirit, firstly the Brothers of this Society will have a very profound respect for holy Scripture and to signalize this they will always carry the New Testament on themselves, and will not pass any day without reading some of it through a sentiment of faith out of respect and veneration for the divine words which are contained there, regarding it as their first and principal rule.<sup>111</sup>

The additions De La Salle made to this article in the 1718 edition are twofold: the words ‘to enter into’, indicating that the Bible is necessary not only for living in the spirit of faith, but for acquiring it in the first place; and the highly significant ‘regarding it as their first and principal rule’. Whatever is contained in the Rule itself and however important it might be as an expression of the Brother’s identity and

---

<sup>108</sup> *élever*, literally, ‘to raise up’. The *Dictionnaire* indicates one meaning as ‘to instruct, give an education’.

<sup>109</sup> As in English, the French *crainte* (‘fear’) had both negative and positive denotations. The Dict. 1694 includes *crainte respectueuse* (‘respectful fear’) as well as *crainte servile*, the fear deriving from the apprehension of punishment.

<sup>110</sup> RC 2.9.

<sup>111</sup> RC 2.3.

mission as they saw it in the France of 1718, their rule of life is essentially the New Testament.

The New Testament (not to exclude the Bible as a whole) is not only the Brothers' rule of life. The concluding article of this chapter on the spirit of the Institute brings together their prayer and their work for the young people entrusted to them, whom they are 'to bring up' – 'to educate' – 'in a true Christian spirit'. The biblical essence of the latter is spelt out in the chapter's final words:

To enter into this spirit, the Brothers of the Society will exert themselves through prayer, through instructions and by their vigilance and the good conduct in school, to bring about the salvation of the children who are entrusted to them, by educating them in piety and in a true Christian spirit, that is according to the rules and the maxims of the Gospel.

The Rules will be read on Sundays and Feasts, a chapter right through during dinner, except on Feasts of the Mysteries, when it will be read in the evening.<sup>112</sup>

The 'maxims of the Gospel' are next mentioned in chapter 7, 'On the way in which the Brothers should conduct themselves in school with regard to their students'.

Following another statement on the gratuitous nature of the schools, and practical observations about the teaching of reading, spelling and arithmetic in accordance with the system presented in *The Conduct of Schools*, is the injunction that

[t]hey will make it their first and principal care to teach their students morning and evening prayers, the *Pater*, the *Ave*, the *Credo*, and the *Confiteor*, and these same prayers in French; the commandments of God and of the Church, the responses at holy Mass, the catechism, the duties of a Christian, and the maxims and practices which Our Lord has left us in the holy Gospel.<sup>113</sup>

The following chapter of the *Rule* concerns the Brothers' approach to correcting their students, greatly revised in the 1718 edition on the basis of their ongoing experience in schools. In the main, the substantial additions indicate what the teachers are *not* to do when correcting children, the positive tone being set in the opening article.

The Brothers will exercise all possible care and vigilance over themselves so as to punish their students only rarely, convinced as they should be that it is

---

<sup>112</sup> RC 2.10.

<sup>113</sup> RC 7.5.

one of the principal means of the orderly regulation<sup>114</sup> of their school and of establishing very good order.<sup>115</sup>

When punishment is really necessary the Rule calls for ‘great moderation’ and conformity with the prescriptions of the *Conduct of Schools*. Teachers are not to punish students impulsively, or ‘when they feel agitated’, angry or impatient.<sup>116</sup> If these precautions are not taken, ‘the students will not profit from their correction’, which is its sole purpose, ‘and God will not give it his blessing’.<sup>117</sup>

There is no appeal to the Bible, certainly not to Proverbs 13.24. The spirit is one of self-restraint and gentleness, evoking De La Salle’s frequent citation of Mt 11.29: ‘Ah! how great is the benefit of learning well, and practising well, this lesson of Our Lord’s: “Learn from me”, he says, “that I am gentle and humble of heart.”’<sup>118</sup>

There are numerous references to the New Testament in the subsequent chapters of the 1718 Rule. It is among the few items the Brothers were allowed for their personal use, together with the *Imitation of Christ*, a rosary, a crucifix, and a small pocketbook [*portefeuille*] to hold papers. Teachers of writing were also allowed a writing case with a penknife and pens.<sup>119</sup>

In the 1718 edition, the chapter on ‘Travel’, specified as ordinarily ‘on foot’, Brothers are required to read ‘every day a page of the New Testament and a page of the *Imitation of Christ*.<sup>120</sup> This stipulation is the same as for a normal school day, when, having risen at 4:30 am and prayed together at 5:00, they make their personal interior prayer and do spiritual reading until 6:00, the latter either from the New Testament or the *Imitation*.<sup>121</sup> Among the readings at dinner, first place is given to the New

---

<sup>114</sup> *bien régler*.

<sup>115</sup> RC 8.1.

<sup>116</sup> RC 8.2, 3.

<sup>117</sup> RC 8.3.

<sup>118</sup> MD 65.2.2. ‘Gentleness’ is by far the longest chapter (52 pages) in a work written in 1785 by Brother Agathon (1731-1798), fifth Superior General of the Institute, on ‘the twelve virtues of a good teacher’ which were simply listed in *The Conduct of the Christian Schools*, CL 24, 118. See Frère Agathon, *Les Douze Vertus d’un Bon Maître, proposées par le Vén. J.-B. de La Salle, Instituteur des Frères des Ecoles chrétiennes* (Versailles: Imprimerie de Beau Jeune, 1856), 67-119.

<sup>119</sup> RC 17.3, 4.

<sup>120</sup> RC 24.6.

<sup>121</sup> RC 27.8.



Testament: the Gospels and the Acts of the Apostles.<sup>122</sup> After school, having returned to the house, made an examination of their faults, and studied catechism, they prepare for interior prayer by reading half a page of the New Testament on their knees.<sup>123</sup> During supper, first place is given, again, to a reading from the New Testament, ‘from the epistles of the holy Apostles and from the Apocalypse [Revelation]’, the second possibility being a chapter of Bible history.<sup>124</sup>

‘A chapter from the history of the holy Bible’ ( ... *un chapitre de l’histoire de la Ste Bible*, CL 25: 102) is intriguing. The absence of any particular identification of the book in question may suggest that it was well-known, and the possibility exists that it was *L’histoire de la sainte Bible, avec des explications édifiantes tirées des Saint Pères pour régler les mœurs dans toute sorte de conditions* (‘The history of the holy Bible, with edifying explanations drawn from the Holy Fathers to regulate morals in every sort of condition. The author was *le Sieur de Royaumont, Prieur de Sombreval*, Isaac Lemaitre de Sacy, who was responsible for the Mons translation of the New Testament, one of the versions used by De La Salle. No date is shown on the title page, though the ‘approbation’ of the Doctors of the Sorbonne is dated 1669. The work begins, as would be expected, with a commentary on Genesis 1, ‘The creation of the world’, and ends with three pages on Rev 21, ‘The new Jerusalem’. The Preface (*Avertissement*) begins in a way consistent with De La Salle’s own views, and his frequent reference to the Church Fathers’ devotion to the Bible.

There is nothing more established by the agreement of all the Holy Fathers, than the respect which Christians must have for the word of God, and the care with which they should search there for the rules of salvation.<sup>125</sup>

The schedule for Sundays and feast days is different, though no less rigorous. After interior prayer and attending Mass, on their return from the church they are to read a chapter of the New Testament, with an explanation of the same chapter, and engage in a discussion about it until 8:00 am.<sup>126</sup>

---

<sup>122</sup> RC 27.20.

<sup>123</sup> RC 27.29.

<sup>124</sup> RC 27.34.

<sup>125</sup> Le Sieur de Royaumont, Prieur de Sombreval, *L’histoire de la Sainte Bible avec des explications édifiantes tirées des Saints Peres pour régler les mœurs dans toute sorte de conditions* (Brussels: Pierre de Dobbeleer [c. 1669]), 2.

<sup>126</sup> RC 28.1.

Chapter 30 details particular practices for certain days of the year. These include, on the feast of St Joseph, ‘patron and protector of the Community’, a public reading from the New Testament, followed by recitation and explanation until 7:30 am.<sup>127</sup> After recreation until 3:00 pm (and before that various other spiritual exercises, and dinner) they say the Litany of St Joseph, the rosary, and then each reads the New Testament until 4:00 pm.<sup>128</sup> For the special days of Holy Week, school having closed on the Wednesday, there are many practices specified, including on Holy Thursday ‘a public reading of the New Testament, then recital and explanation’. At table on Holy Wednesday and Holy Thursday the only readings are the accounts of the Passion ‘according to the four Evangelists’, followed by Bible history beginning with the Last Supper.<sup>129</sup> On Thursday, during dinner, is read

the Passion of Our Lord Jesus Christ according to Saint Matthew which is reported in the twenty-sixth and twenty-seventh chapters, and it will be commenced by saying: The Passion of Our Lord Jesus Christ according to Saint Matthew, and the same will be done at the other meals without naming the chapters.<sup>130</sup>

Immediately after dinner, there is a public reading of chapters 13-17 of the Gospel of Saint John. The following day, Good Friday, as well as the other required exercises and depending on the local time for church services, there is a public reading of the Passion according to Saint John.<sup>131</sup> If there is any time between one exercise and the next on Friday afternoon, ‘each will read for himself from the New Testament’.<sup>132</sup> On Holy Saturday at 7:00 am there is a public reading of the New Testament, then recitation and explanation.<sup>133</sup>

Chapter 31 of the Rule sets out the regulations for the time of vacation, both for the three days in the week that are ‘holidays’ and those that are not! On the non-holiday vacation days, the Brothers attend Mass at 6:00 am, ‘then each on his own will read

---

<sup>127</sup> RC 30.19.10.

<sup>128</sup> RC 30.19.15.

<sup>129</sup> RC 30.20.13.

<sup>130</sup> RC 30.20.14.

<sup>131</sup> RC 30.20.28.

<sup>132</sup> RC 30.20.31.

<sup>133</sup> RC 30.29.39.

the New Testament'.<sup>134</sup> During the vacation the Brothers also have their retreat, the schedule again beginning with Mass at 6:00 am, and after a discussion or a public reading 'in some good book', breakfast at 7:15 and the recitation of the Litany of the Holy Infant Jesus, there is at 8:00 'a reading from a chapter of the Gospel, of which one chapter will be read each day, and those read will be chapters five, six, and seven of Saint Matthew [the Sermon on the Mount] and chapters 13, 14, 15, 16 and 17 of Saint John [the account of the Last Supper]'.<sup>135</sup>

## CONCLUSION

Over six hundred generic references to the Bible ('Bible', 'Scripture', 'Old Testament', 'New Testament', 'Gospel') are an indication of its importance for De La Salle in works that relate both to the religious and community life of his Brother teachers, and to their work with young people. His real recourse to the Bible becomes much more concrete when we consider the number of actual quotations from biblical works: more than twelve hundred, for example, in just three of his twenty-five listed works. With reference to this thesis, there are more than six hundred references to the Gospel of Matthew in the complete works, and one hundred and sixty-two from the section of that Gospel I am considering.

Two of De La Salle's meditations in particular provide an inkling of his appreciation of the Bible, and from these I have identified nine discrete 'principles' for the sake of further discussion. In summary, these principles indicate that De La Salle sees God as the ultimate point of reading the Bible, and as essentially involved in its absorption and interpretation. These require collaborative study and focused, reflective, prayerful attention. For De La Salle, a real interiorization of biblical meanings gives rise to action in the reader's own context, such that its meanings can be actualized – in the case of the Brothers, within an educational mission within the Church in 17<sup>th</sup> century France.

Going beyond these two meditations, I have identified in the catechetical writings a belief that the Church is both limited in its teachings by what would now be regarded as 'sacred tradition and Sacred Scripture [forming] one sacred deposit of the word of

---

<sup>134</sup> RC 31.2.

<sup>135</sup> RC 32.11-13.

God',<sup>136</sup> and responsible for its explanation. In these works we also see De La Salle's regard for the special role of the Church Fathers in the interpretation of the Bible. His meditations testify to the inspiration of the Holy Spirit in the explanation of the Scriptures, and provide further evidence of his contention that the biblical message demands study, internalization, and action. In *Explanation of the Method of Interior Prayer* there is an extensive range of quotations from both Testaments. In the same work De La Salle also emphasized the fundamental requirement that placing oneself in the presence of God is on the basis of a passage of Scripture. Thus we find there a holistic approach to the Bible, engaging mind, heart and soul, as well as the characteristic emphasis on the *practice* of biblically inspired virtue.

The *Rule* of 1718, emerging from the experience of the community and edited by De La Salle the year before he died, indicates that the Bible is at the very heart of the Brothers' integrated spirituality. It is the basis of the 'spirit of the Institute': faith and zeal. That twofold spirit itself succinctly expresses the inseparable elements of a relationship with God and an effective commitment to human and Christian education.<sup>137</sup>

In the next chapter I shall outline a hermeneutical framework which I believe provides an appreciative perspective on De La Salle's interpretation of the Bible. This will involve a discussion, based on the work of Ulrich Luz, of the relative merits of historical-critical exegesis and a 'history of influence' hermeneutic – and the value of a fruitful relationship between them. I shall indicate an affinity between this hermeneutic, and De La Salle's own interpretative approach as he seeks to relate the 'living and effective word' to the life and educational work of his community of Brothers in seventeenth century France.

---

<sup>136</sup> Second Vatican Council, *Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation: Dei Verbum*, (1965), no. 10, in Murphy, *Church and Bible*, 342. Cf. Benedict XVI's Post-synodal Apostolic Exhortation *Verbum Domini*. 'Benedict XVI, Apostolic Exhortations,' w2.vatican.va, accessed May 11, 2015. [http://w2.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/apost\\_exhortations/documents/hf\\_ben-xvi\\_exh\\_20100930\\_verbum-domini.html](http://w2.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/apost_exhortations/documents/hf_ben-xvi_exh_20100930_verbum-domini.html).

<sup>137</sup> In an unpublished paper Gerard Rummery has elaborated this relationship most incisively in terms of a Lasallian 'double contemplation', which for De La Salle meant a profound awareness of and response to God's love for poor children.

## CHAPTER 2: A HERMENEUTICAL FRAMEWORK

### INTRODUCTION

In this chapter I wish to explore certain affinities which I see between a ‘history of influence’ approach to biblical interpretation and that of John Baptist de La Salle.<sup>1</sup> I use the word ‘affinities’ to suggest that this hermeneutic is a helpful lens through which to appreciate De La Salle’s engagement with the Bible and his interpretation of it for his Brothers. I do not suggest that De La Salle, writing for his community of relatively uneducated men in seventeenth century France, was consciously employing a modern-day hermeneutic. Rather, De La Salle’s writing exemplifies a history of influence and a deep concern to have the Bible read as a living word spoken in the here and now.

My original concern in wishing to consider De La Salle’s interpretation of the Bible was that it would not be seen as open to academic scrutiny in terms of modern biblical scholarship. Since he wrote from a position of faith, the likelihood might be that his interpretations would be merely devotional and subjective; and since he interpreted texts as having a meaning directly relevant to his seventeenth-eighteenth century French audience, he seemed to take for granted that a text could be invested with a meaning other than its original sense. A perspective shaped largely by historical-critical exegesis seemed unlikely to find either tendency acceptable.

It was enlightening to find that an authoritative modern commentator, Ulrich Luz (b. 1938), had long been concerned that the outcomes of the historical-critical method did not seem to be meeting pastoral needs, but that he still believed it had a valuable role to play. Furthermore, his embracing of the ‘history of influence’ (*Wirkungsgeschichte*) approach to biblical interpretation opened the possibility of appreciating De La Salle’s interpretation of the Bible, and particularly of the Gospel

---

<sup>1</sup> I take considerable comfort from the fact that, at the beginning of his detailed exploration of the issues of history, hermeneutics, faith, and the history of influence approach, James D.G. Dunn, *Jesus Remembered* (Grand Rapids, MI / Cambridge, UK: William B. Eerdmans, 2003), 100, admits to having ‘little expertise in the philosophical technicalities involved’.

of Matthew, from a critically respectable point of view, since that approach is, in fact, one of Luz' principal methodologies in his major commentary on Matthew.<sup>2</sup>

It would seem that meeting pastoral needs in regard to biblical interpretation is most reliably achieved by allowing for an interplay between a method which uncovers the original meaning of a text and one which allows for that text to have a developed meaning in another context. A significant factor seems to be that the new meaning is not purely subjective or arbitrary, but, to use one of many images in the literature, 'grows out of' the original meaning.<sup>3</sup>

Historical-critical exegesis is the established means of uncovering what a text most probably meant to its original readership. Those who engage the Bible from a perspective of *Wirkungsgeschichte* have a not uncritical respect for the ways in which that meaning has been reshaped by different interpreters, in different contexts, over time, and it encourages later interpreters to continue that process in meeting the needs of their own time and place.

My task in this chapter is to outline similarities between certain elements of the *Wirkungsgeschichte* method particularly as espoused as a major methodology by Ulrich Luz, and some of the characteristics of De La Salle's approach to biblical interpretation which can be seen in its light.

I intend to do this by considering what Luz, especially, regards as being both the strengths and the deficiencies of historical-critical exegesis in regard to biblical interpretation, particularly in a pastoral context, and then the ways in which a *Wirkungsgeschichte* methodology can complement historical-critical exegesis.

## **1. HISTORICAL-CRITICAL EXEGESIS: PASTORALLY DEFICIENT IN ISOLATION**

It should be noted that, even while critiquing the historical-critical method, Luz is writing as an exponent: '...it is an open question whether we historical-critical

---

<sup>2</sup> Luz, *Matthew 1-7*, 60-61.

<sup>3</sup> Luz, *Matthew 1-7*, 65, also writes of 'a tree that repeatedly puts out new sprouts' and 'soil in which new flowers repeatedly grow'.

exegetes, whose task is to promote the *explanation* of the text, are really able to promote an *understanding* of the text through our explanations'.<sup>4</sup>

The distinction arising from Luz' open question about his own exegetical work is itself helpful: a text can be *explained* by historical-critical exegesis, but that does not, in Luz' view, guarantee that it is *understood*. Luz also adopts from Paul Ricoeur a related, and I believe similarly helpful distinction between 'meaning' and 'significance':

I understand 'meaning' (French *sens*) and 'significance' in the way P. Ricoeur understood those terms: To understand the 'meaning' of a text is to understand its own intentions; to understand its 'significance' is to actualize its meaning in one's own existence.<sup>5</sup>

Luz discusses this distinction at greater length in connection with the hermeneutical significance of the Church Fathers, whose importance for his approach (and De La Salle's) will be discussed in Chapter 3.<sup>6</sup>

Distinguishing between how a text is to be understood and how it may be expounded is not without historical precedent. Hans-Georg Gadamer notes a similar distinction in the early hermeneutical tradition, between *subtilitas intelligendi* (understanding) and *subtilitas explicandi* (interpretation), with a third added by pietism: *subtilitas applicandi* (application), to be discussed later in this chapter.<sup>7</sup>

The problem as Luz perceives it is not with historical-critical exegesis in itself. It is that such an approach does not provide any immediate answer to the question, 'What *significance*, if any, does this text have for me or for us, in the here and now?' As a pastor and teacher as well as an exegete, Luz regards this question as crucial. In an article first published in 1982, he reflects on a period in which the value of exegesis itself was being called into question, by his students and even by his colleagues:

---

<sup>4</sup> Ulrich Luz, *Matthew in History: Interpretations, Influence, and Effects* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1994), 15-16; italics original.

<sup>5</sup> Luz, *History*, 17, n. 28, citing Paul Ricoeur, 'Preface to Bultmann', *Essays on Biblical Interpretation* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1980), 67f.

<sup>6</sup> Ulrich Luz, *Studies in Matthew* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2005), 298-299.

<sup>7</sup> Hans-Georg, Gadamer *Truth and Method*. trans. Joel Weinsheimer and Donald G. Marshall (London/New York: Bloomsbury, 2004), 317. Kindle eBook.

The basic problem seems to me to lie in the experience of many theologians that their intense preoccupation with the original sense of a text, deriving from historical-critical interpretation, actually makes it difficult or even impossible to answer the question of its present-day meaning.<sup>8</sup>

An exclusive focus on the text's meaning in its original context, therefore, will leave the question of its current relevance aside. This results in a rift between, for example, exegesis and homiletics. Marie Isaacs points out that an understanding of the biblical text and the proclamation of the gospel have gone hand in hand since the inception of the church. However, she maintains, their relationship 'has always been a contentious question'.<sup>9</sup>

More recently, introducing a special edition of *Journal for the Study of the New Testament* which aims 'to open out the character of *Wirkungsgeschichte* / reception history to a wider biblical studies audience', Jonathan Roberts and Christopher Rowland advert to 'a particular form of the historical method' which, they remark, has become 'a hegemonic mode of biblical interpretation in the academy'. They call attention to a view that in post-Enlightenment hermeneutics a tradition of Christian interpretation of the Bible *through time* has been replaced with one which 'either sat loose to its predecessor or rejected it completely'. This has resulted in a disregard for Jewish and Christian traditions of interpretation, and 'the way the text impacts on modern readers'.<sup>10</sup> Moreover, they observe, biblical studies can seem arcane and 'too often caught up in its own parochial disputes to seem of much relevance'.<sup>11</sup>

*Wirkungsgeschichte*, on the other hand, 'is an attempt to be truly diachronic and to appreciate the history of texts through time as a key to their interpretation'. As well as acknowledging literature, art and music as important modes of exegesis, it affords the same significance to 'actualizations of the text'.<sup>12</sup>

The disjunction between a text's original sense and its present-day meaning is elaborated in various ways. Luz notes, for example, the distinction made by Hans-

---

<sup>8</sup> Luz, *Studies*, 266.

<sup>9</sup> Marie E. Isaacs, 'Exegesis and Homiletics', *The Way Supplement* 72 (1991), 32.

<sup>10</sup> Jonathan Roberts and Christopher Rowland, 'Introduction', *JSNT* 33 (2010), 131-132.

<sup>11</sup> Roberts and Rowland, 'Introduction', 136.

<sup>12</sup> Roberts and Rowland, 'Introduction', 132.



Georg Gadamer (1900-2002) between the historical understanding of a text, and recognition of its ‘truth’. It is worth considering the full passage from Gadamer’s work, *Truth and Method*, from which Luz quotes a few lines:

The text that is understood historically is forced to abandon its claim to be saying something true. We think we understand when we see the past from a historical standpoint – i.e., transpose ourselves into the historical situation and try to reconstruct the historical horizon. In fact, however, we have given up the claim to find in the past any truth that is valid and intelligible for ourselves. Acknowledging the otherness of the other in this way, making him the object of objective knowledge, involves the fundamental suspension of his claim to truth.<sup>13</sup>

As an historical-critical exegete, Luz himself does not seem to go to the extent of abandoning *any* recourse to the ancient text as an ‘object of objective knowledge’, but he would agree with Gadamer that such an exercise does not in itself uncover its ‘truth’ for a modern reader.<sup>14</sup>

One of Luz’ related concerns about historical-critical exegesis as a sole hermeneutical method is expressed in terms of the ‘power’ of a text, whose potential for *creating* history, ‘is limitless’. Historical-critical exegesis, he writes, ‘cannot fully understand such texts because it cuts the texts off from their power’.<sup>15</sup> While this potential can be ascribed to any classical text, Luz also sees it from a theological point of view, in terms of the Bible’s own claim for itself:

... biblical texts do not have a simple fixed meaning, which would be identical with their original meaning; they have *power* (cf. Rom 1.16; 1 Cor 1.18) to create new meanings for and with new people in new situations.<sup>16</sup>

Here we have a confident assertion of a potential for *new* meanings, and for their impact, as against the inclination of historical-critical exegesis

to define as precisely as possible, *the* – one and definable – original meaning of a text in its original communication situation. Historical-critical

---

<sup>13</sup> Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, 314.

<sup>14</sup> In discussing Gadamer’s hermeneutic, Francis Watson, ‘Philosophy’, in *A Dictionary of Biblical Interpretation*, ed. R.J. Coggins and J.L.Houlden (London: SCM Press, 1990), 549, contrasts the ‘conversation’ it promotes with classic texts over against the ‘alienation produced by *purely* historical interpretation’ (emphasis added).

<sup>15</sup> Luz, *History*, 20.

<sup>16</sup> Luz, *History*, 19.

interpretation seems to presuppose that each text has *one* meaning, which can be detected through critical analysis and must be described as precisely as possible through scholarly discussion.<sup>17</sup>

The issue of there being only one meaning for a biblical text is also addressed in the 1993 document of the Roman Catholic Pontifical Biblical Commission, *The Interpretation of the Bible in the Church*.<sup>18</sup> Noting that historical-critical exegesis adopted the thesis that ‘a text cannot have at the same time more than one meaning’, it acknowledges that such a thesis ‘has run aground on the conclusions of theories of language and of philosophical hermeneutics, both of which affirm that written texts are open to a plurality of meaning’.<sup>19</sup>

In the face of such a plurality of meanings, Luz favours an interpretative approach which he describes in terms of the interaction between a ‘kernel of meaning’ and a ‘directional meaning’ which ‘gives a present direction’ to the reader. This model, he says, implies an element of openness in the meaning of a text, leaving room for changing interpretations.<sup>20</sup>

Luz repeats his concerns about the historical-critical method in the introduction to the 2007 edition of his volume on Mt 1-7, as part of his exposition of the ‘history of influence’ approach which constitutes an important part of his methodology:

If I see the situation correctly, a major problem of historical-critical exegesis is that it isolates a text in its own time and its own original situation and this keeps it from saying something to the present.

He goes on to indicate that the solution is not ‘a retreat from history into the narrated or structured world of the text’, nor through fundamentalist approach which ‘hypostasizes the text as a word of God beyond history’.<sup>21</sup> As Luz observes in his

---

<sup>17</sup> Luz, *History*, 21 (emphasis original).

<sup>18</sup> In terms of Vatican structures, the Commission is described as ‘a consultative body placed at the service of the Magisterium [the teaching office and authority of the Church] and connected to the Congregation of the Doctrine of the Faith, whose Prefect is also the President of the Commission’. See ‘Pontificia Commissione Biblica,’ vatican.va.

[http://www.vatican.va/roman\\_curia/congregations/cfaith/pcb\\_documents/rc\\_con\\_cfait\\_h\\_pro\\_14071997\\_pcbible\\_it.html](http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/cfaith/pcb_documents/rc_con_cfait_h_pro_14071997_pcbible_it.html).

<sup>19</sup> Fitzmyer, *Interpretation*, 117-118.

<sup>20</sup> Luz, *History*, 20-21.

<sup>21</sup> Luz, *Matthew 1-7*, 63.

earlier work, ‘synchronic and structuralist interpretations, insofar as they exclude history, cannot finally understand’ biblical texts,<sup>22</sup> and thus remain hermeneutically incomplete.

Perhaps Luz’ concern is, for my purposes, best expressed in pastoral terms. His description of the late twentieth century Europe in which he was writing as ‘characterized by pessimism, distrust of reason, new age visions, withdrawal from the political to the individual world, a longing for lasting values and authority, and susceptibility to various kinds of religions and superstitions’ is still applicable, if somewhat bleak itself. He goes on to situate his professional anxiety within that context:

We are in a situation in which many people *want* someone or something, a God or a divine word, to touch them and give them authority or clear direction in life and to provide them with a hope that transcends this hopeless world. In this situation the historical-critical interpretation of the Bible, which is inherently incapable of making contact with the eternal, because it leads only to temporal and historical interpretations of it, has become rather meaningless. Here I find the deepest reason for the hermeneutical crisis that we observe today.<sup>23</sup>

This reflection further highlights the unhappy effect of concentrating solely on the past meaning of a biblical text. Not only does it leave the *present* stranded, but, says Luz, it leaves us disconnected from ‘the eternal’.

De La Salle’s approach to biblical interpretation encourages his Brother-teachers to see a contemporary meaning in texts, reflected upon in conscious awareness of the presence of God. Luz’ critique of historical-critical exegesis for its disregarding of both the present and ‘the eternal’ shows that a twenty-first century scholar also considers both communion with God, and an actualization of meaning, to be matters of pastoral necessity.

Luz’ insight that ‘many people want someone or something, a God or a divine word, to *touch* them and give them authority or clear direction and to provide them with hope...’ (emphasis mine) is also reminiscent, in its use of ‘touch’, of an expression used frequently by De La Salle, ‘to touch hearts’.

---

<sup>22</sup> Luz, *History*, 20.

<sup>23</sup> Luz, *History*, 12.

## 2. DE LA SALLE AND THE GOD WHO ‘TOUCHES HEARTS’ THROUGH THE BIBLE

‘Touching hearts’ is language which, when uncritically appropriated and dissociated from its own context, runs the risk of being sentimentalized and thereby distorted when tossed about in our own time and culture. It is not a phrase De La Salle invented. Indeed it appears, for example, in a chapter of the decree ‘On Justification’ from the Council of Trent (13 January, 1547). The decree concerns the necessity, in adults, of preparation for justification, and speaks of God’s prevenient grace in disposing people to conversion,

so that by freely assenting to and cooperating with that same grace, with God touching a person’s heart [*tangente Deo cor hominis*] through the illumination of the Holy Spirit, the person himself/herself does not do absolutely nothing...<sup>24</sup>

It is beyond the scope of this thesis to show that De La Salle’s use of the term ‘touching hearts’ is much closer to Trent’s discussion of radical conversion than to some of the more emotive connotations with which it sometimes embroidered. It is certainly the case that he describes educators as ‘touching the hearts of their students’,<sup>25</sup> but it is clear from his writings that it is ultimately God who ‘touches hearts’. Moreover, Michel Sauvage and Miguel Campos point out that ‘heart’ is understood in this context in its biblical sense as the ‘core’ of a person: ‘emotion, volition, understanding’,<sup>26</sup> so that ‘to illuminate the heart’, for example, goes beyond a notional knowledge, to transformation and conversion.<sup>27</sup>

---

<sup>24</sup> Council of Trent, ‘Sessio VI-Decretum de Justificatione,’  
documentacatholicaomnia.eu.

[http://www.documentacatholicaomnia.eu/04z/z\\_15451563\\_\\_Concilium\\_Tridentinum\\_\\_Sessio\\_VI-Decretum\\_de\\_Justificatione\\_\\_LT.doc.html](http://www.documentacatholicaomnia.eu/04z/z_15451563__Concilium_Tridentinum__Sessio_VI-Decretum_de_Justificatione__LT.doc.html).

<sup>25</sup> E.g. MD 43.3.2, where he reminds his readers that they cannot do it ‘except through the Spirit of God’; MF 79.2.2, in a context explicitly concerning ‘conversion’; MF 86.3.2, through religious instruction.

<sup>26</sup> See, for example, Mark Allan Powell, ed., *HarperCollins Bible Dictionary* (New York: HarperOne, 2011), 368.

<sup>27</sup> Michel Sauvage and Miguel Campos, *Jean-Baptiste de La Salle: Expérience et enseignement spirituels. Annoncer l’Évangile aux pauvres* (Paris; Beauchesne, 1977), 77.

What is of particular relevance here is not only that De La Salle attributes the ‘touching of hearts’ to God,<sup>28</sup> but that the biblical text is one of the means by which he maintains that God does so. It is confirming that Michael Trainor uses the same expression in regard to the first ‘auditors’ of a gospel. Indicating that the original setting in which the gospels were heard as primarily liturgical, Trainor describes their proclamation in terms of ‘performance’,

not in the manner of a histrionic rendition by a Greek actor, but a style of presentation that enabled the narrative performed in an oral-aural context to *touch the hearts and lives* of gospel auditors.<sup>29</sup>

When making interior prayer by reflecting on a passage of the Bible, for example, De La Salle advises, there may come a time when a particular reflection is no longer of value. In such a situation his advice is that

it is appropriate to bring to mind another reflection, which, being new and capable of touching the heart, ensures that the truth which one had intended to penetrate one’s mind and heart, does so as like a new impression.<sup>30</sup>

‘Penetrating the heart’, an image which recurs in both the following examples, and which seems to be a simile for ‘touching the heart’, appears to be drawn from Heb 4.12, a passage which is cited explicitly in the first of them, the meditation on Hilarion.

De La Salle’s meditation ‘for the feast of Saint Hilarion’ is relevant here. Hilarion (c. 291-371) was an early Christian monastic figure, born in Palestine and converted to Christianity in Alexandria. He was profoundly influenced by the Desert Father Anthony of Egypt (c. 251-356) about whom De La Salle has also written a meditation,<sup>31</sup> and who in the meditation on St Luke, below, is also said to have been profoundly affected by the Gospel. I will make further reference to the meditation on Hilarion later in this chapter, but for the present purpose I note that a major influence in committing him ‘to give himself completely to God’

---

<sup>28</sup> E.g. MF 159.2.1; LI 61.4; DA 104.4.5 (Jesus); DB 2.15.7 (Holy Spirit).

<sup>29</sup> Michael Trainor, *The Body of Jesus and Sexual Abuse: How the Gospel Passion Narratives Inform a Pastoral Response* (Northcote, VIC: Morning Star Publishing, 2014), 51 (emphasis added).

<sup>30</sup> EM 3.92.

<sup>31</sup> MF 97.

is that he imprinted so profoundly in his mind this word of Our Lord in the holy Gospel: ‘The one who does not renounce all he possesses cannot be my disciple’,<sup>32</sup> that, his parents having died when he was not yet fifteen, he stripped himself of everything, and withdrew into solitude.<sup>33</sup>

De La Salle then immediately generalizes the Lucan reference to include all of Scripture, with reference to Heb 4.12:

Ah! how powerful the word of God is *to touch hearts*! It is, says Saint Paul, alive and efficacious: it pierces a heart more than a double-edged sword; it enters and penetrates as far as the hidden places<sup>34</sup> of the soul.

The conclusion of the meditation draws out its relevance for educators, with an echo of the power of the Gospel and the touching of hearts:

You can perform several miracles, both in regard to yourself and in your work: in regard to yourself, by a complete fidelity to grace, letting none of its impulses pass by without responding to it; and in your work by *touching the hearts* of the wayward children who are confided to your care, making them receptive and faithful to the maxims of the holy Gospel, and to their practice...<sup>35</sup>

The same powerful effect of the biblical word is affirmed in De La Salle’s meditation for the feast of the Apostle Bartholomew, who, as tradition had it, was assigned to ‘announce the holy Gospel in Armenia and in the Indies’, where he was reputed to have committed the king, the queen and the entire royal family to make a public profession of the faith and the law of Jesus Christ. His work of conversion among the people

he did effectively through the preaching of the word of God, and by the frequent and diligent prayer [*oraison*] he would engage in so as to rouse God to touch their hearts.<sup>36</sup>

Relating this to the work of the Brother-teachers with an echo of the imagery of affecting the ‘hearts’ of children, De La Salle characteristically describes their work,

---

<sup>32</sup> *à tout ce qu’il possède* (Lk 14.33) is the terminology of Huré and Amelote rather than Mons.

<sup>33</sup> MF 180.2.1.

<sup>34</sup> *replis*, lit. ‘folds’, which Dict. 1694 indicates is used figuratively to mean ‘what is most secret, most hidden in the heart’.

<sup>35</sup> MF 180.3.2.

<sup>36</sup> MF 159.2.1.

not as being in some way similar to Bartholomew's, but as 'participating in the functions of the Apostles'<sup>37</sup>

by, every day, teaching religion [*le catéchisme*] to the children of whom you have the guidance, and by instructing them in the maxims of the holy Gospel; but you will not bear a great deal of fruit in their regard if you do not fully possess the spirit of prayer [*oraison*] which gives holy anointing to your words [*paroles*], and which makes them effective [*efficaces*] in penetrating [*pénétrant*] the depths of their hearts [*cœurs*].<sup>38</sup>

It seems highly unlikely that in this exhortation for the Brothers to pray about their work, De La Salle's use of the language of Heb 4.12, specifically that of Amelote's translation,<sup>39</sup> is coincidental. It constitutes the extraordinary claim that a group of lay schoolteachers are responsible, in their day to day work with a particular group of children, for speaking God's transforming word in terms which the author of Hebrews originally attributed to an ancient psalm urging the Hebrew people to listen to God's voice (Ps 95.7, 11). The 'history of influence' continues through the ages.

This history of influence is expressed, in his own terms, by De La Salle in his meditation for the feast of St Luke, Evangelist, whom he describes as 'one of the historians of the establishment of the true religion, in writing the Book of Acts'.<sup>40</sup> De La Salle comments that Luke may not have often proclaimed the Gospel aloud, 'but how many people did he not cause to embrace religion by his writings?'. As an instance, he cites St Anthony, who needed only to hear 'the words in Luke, "Sell all you have and give it to the poor" [cf. Lk 18.22] to leave the world and all his goods, and to withdraw into the desert for the rest of his life'.<sup>41</sup>

De La Salle then reflects on the effect of written words of the Bible:

Spoken words,<sup>42</sup> being transitory, touch hearts only once, and in the instant; but the good which writings do, which last for ever – such as those which Saint Luke composed – are always bearing fruit, and are capable of converting in every age, and until the end of the world, a great number of souls, provided that they are well disposed to listen to the word of God which is expressed in them.

---

<sup>37</sup> *participer aux fonctions apostoliques.*

<sup>38</sup> MF 159.2.2.

<sup>39</sup> *\parole...efficace...penetre...cœur*

<sup>40</sup> MF 178.3.1.

<sup>41</sup> MF 178.3.1.

<sup>42</sup> *paroles.* Dict 1694 gives as its first definition *mot prononcé*, 'a word pronounced'.

Listen to it receptively,<sup>43</sup> read it every day with application, and Saint Luke will be for you an apostle of Jesus Christ and a preacher of the holy Gospel.<sup>44</sup>

Perhaps it is not going too far to see in the last sentence an encouragement, in Gadamer's terms, to allow the listener's 'horizon' to be 'fused' with that of Luke, so that Luke's good news can be heard afresh as affecting the listener's own context.<sup>45</sup>

The community's practical manual concerning the running of a good school, *The Conduct of the Christian Schools*, includes a substantial section on teaching young people how to write. Having dealt with basics such as paper, pens and penknives, and ink, it goes on to describe the two sorts of examples of writing provided for the children to copy: alphabets of two types, and sentences of five or six lines.

All the lined examples will be sentences from holy Scripture, or Christian maxims drawn from the holy Fathers [i.e. Church Fathers], or books of devotion. In each house [in which the school is situated] there will be two sets, one of sentences from holy Scripture, both the Old and the New Testament, and the other of pious maxims taken from several good books.

Teachers will not give any example to the students which is not taken from one of these two sets. There will be special care to take them from holy Scripture, which must make a stronger impression and more powerfully *touch their hearts*, being the word of God.<sup>46</sup>

It is noticeable that in each of these disparate works De La Salle refers to the *power* of the biblical text, an aspect to which Luz drew attention, above, in reference to Rom 1.16 and 1 Cor 1.18.

In the work he wrote to help beginners, especially, to learn to pray interiorly – *Explanation of the Method of Interior Prayer* – De La Salle has a chapter on 'different ways of being attentive to<sup>47</sup> the presence of God'. Among these, he particularly (and typically) recommends recalling 'a passage of holy Scripture which reminds one of

---

<sup>43</sup> *avec docilité*.

<sup>44</sup> MF 178.3.2.

<sup>45</sup> See Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, 316-317.

<sup>46</sup> CE 4.2.21-26.

<sup>47</sup> *s'entretenir sur*.



the presence of God, such as this one, for example, taken from Ps. 15, v. 8:<sup>48</sup> “I told myself always to have God in front of me”<sup>49</sup>. De La Salle then discusses an example of how to reflect on this passage, and provides advice about not letting the mind become tired. In that case, he recommends focusing on another reflection on the same passage, ‘which, being new and capable of *touching the heart*’ will ensure that the truth under consideration will penetrate the mind and heart.<sup>50</sup>

### 3. HISTORICAL-CRITICAL EXEGESIS: ‘DISTANCE’ BUT NOT ‘SIGNIFICANCE’

As a prelude to his discussion of the ‘history of influence’ approach, Luz also describes the downside of the historical-critical approach in more theoretical terms. He describes it as, ideally, having a twofold function: first, to distance the text from the interpreter ‘and make it alien by putting it back into its own period’; and second, to make interpreters ‘aware of their own preunderstanding in the confrontation with the foreign texts and teach them something about themselves’. His judgment is that historical-critical exegesis tends only to achieve the first: to distance the interpreter from the ancient text, without facilitating any confrontation from within an increased awareness of the interpreter’s own context.

The term ‘preunderstanding’ (*Vorverständnis* – ‘preconception’ is one dictionary’s translation<sup>51</sup>) is reported in *The Interpretation of the Bible in the Church* as being used by Bultmann, though its hermeneutical usage may be earlier. In his commentary on that document, Joseph Fitzmyer paraphrases the term as ‘presupposition’.<sup>52</sup> Gadamer’s translators use ‘fore-meanings’, and Gadamer’s discussion of the role of ‘fore-meanings’ in interpretation is helpful. An interpreter can neither ignore nor be blinded by her ‘preunderstandings’, and Gadamer remarks that a person trying to understand a text is prepared for it to tell her something, and ‘a hermeneutically trained consciousness must be, from the start, sensitive to the text’s alterity’. It is not a question of being neutral regarding the content of the text, nor of ‘the extinction of

---

<sup>48</sup> NRSV Ps 16.8. Note the reference to chapter and verse (as shown in the 1739 original published edition, CL 14, 28), rarely given in works other than this, and no doubt here so that it can be noted for use on other occasions.

<sup>49</sup> EM 3.88.

<sup>50</sup> EM 3.92.

<sup>51</sup> *The Collins German Dictionary* (Glasgow: HarperCollins, 1991).

<sup>52</sup> See Joseph Fitzmyer, *Interpretation*, 111, 133.

one's self', but 'the foregrounding and appropriation of one's own fore-meanings and prejudices'.

The important thing is to be aware of one's own bias, so that the text can present itself in all its otherness and thus assert its own truth against one's own fore-meanings'.<sup>53</sup>

Interpretation is therefore not simply a matter of coming to an awareness of one's 'biases' in an attempt objectively to assess the original meaning of a text. It is also a matter of allowing those biases to be challenged and, if necessary, corrected.

The question arises as to whether De La Salle was able to appreciate biblical texts as 'alien' in the sense of being distanced from his own time and circumstances, and at the same time sufficiently aware of the latter to allow a fruitful confrontation between the text's original meaning and his 'fore-meanings' in seeing their 'significance' for himself and his Brothers.

He did not engage in historical-critical exegesis, though he had a scholar's knowledge of both the Bible and of the Latin and Greek classics, and the antiquity of both. To anticipate something of the 'history of influence' approach, I suggest that De La Salle's awareness of the 'distance' can only have been enhanced by the awareness of the passage of time that must be inevitable for someone who included among his writings so many references to, and reflections on, a succession of persons over several centuries, including Church Fathers and saints since the time of Jesus. At the other end of the interpretative 'gap', De La Salle was acutely aware of the circumstances of his writing, so different from the comfortable upper-bourgeois life he had abandoned in his thirties, and definitively in his forties,<sup>54</sup> and that he and his Brothers were embarking on a very new approach to the education of the poor.

De La Salle was thus ideally placed to reflect<sup>55</sup> on the literal meaning of a biblical text, to acknowledge its distance from his own situation and that of his Brothers, and to

---

<sup>53</sup> Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, 281-282.

<sup>54</sup> His contemporary biographer reports him as saying that for two years while he was working with the teachers in his own home, he experienced 'a great discomfort' (*une grande peine*). See Blain, *Vie*, 169.

<sup>55</sup> Varela's (*Sacred Scripture*, 124) careful scrutiny of each of De La Salle's meditations in all three collections leads him to conclude that 'we can testify with total certainty that the literal sense predominates in Lasallian exegesis'.

actualize it for them in a new context. That certainly included, as will be seen in his appropriation of texts from the Gospel of Matthew, the sort of reflection on biblical passages that challenged contemporary attitudes and behaviour.

#### 4. POSITIVE ASPECTS OF HISTORICAL-CRITICAL EXEGESIS

As foreshadowed above, to criticize historical exegesis for what it does *not* do from a pastoral or theoretical-hermeneutical point of view is not to deny its positive contribution to interpretation. Mention has already been made of Luz' rejection of any 'flight from history', and he in fact relates historical-critical exegesis with 'a history of *effects*' approach in his statement that

historical-critical interpretation means to reconstruct the way the texts came to be, what they wanted to *effect*, and what they did *effect*. Historical-critical interpretation means to retell the story of the origin, the genesis, the intention, and, if possible, the immediate *effects* of the texts. In this story, both the author and the readers are implied. In other words, historical-critical interpretation explains the texts by giving them back to the life they had in their original setting.<sup>56</sup>

In this sense, it seems that historical-critical exegesis, or at least its outcome, is an essential beginning in the process of discerning an actualized significance for a text, if that discernment is not to be so undisciplined as to yield an infinite number of divergent and even contradictory meanings. Luz comments on Karl Barth's description of understanding the subject matter of a text as 'driving on "till I have almost forgotten that I am not its author; till I know the author so well that I allow him to speak in my name and am even able to speak in his name myself"' – a description that seems very close to what Gadamer<sup>57</sup> describes as a 'fusion of horizons' of author and interpreter. With regard to Barth's description Luz remarks that

the statement of the text blends with the statement of the interpreters or their church community. In this process of blending, the distancing explanation of historical criticism can be a helpful *controlling element*, but not when it completely prevents the blending.<sup>58</sup>

---

<sup>56</sup> Luz, *History*, 24, emphasis added.

<sup>57</sup> E.g. Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, 317.

<sup>58</sup> Luz, *Matthew 1-7*, 64, n. 323 (emphasis added).

So historical-critical exegesis has value as a *control* in the discernment of new meanings, such that a newly discerned ‘significance’ in a text must in some degree be related to and consistent with its original ‘meaning’, its ‘literal sense’. I understand that this is what Luz means by the ‘trajectory’ of a text, when he observes that sometimes ‘the church’s reception has almost completely silenced the trajectory of the texts as a glance at certain interpretations of the Sermon on the Mount or the disciples discourse (Matthew 10) can show’.<sup>59</sup> In such instances, the potential rift between the ‘meaning’ of the text and its current ‘significance’ has been brought about by a *failure* to establish what it meant in its original context. This is the converse of the exegete’s disregard of a text’s present significance.

As noted earlier, Varela has concluded that De La Salle’s predominant approach to biblical texts was to take them in their literal sense. De La Salle thus began from what, in later centuries, would be determined by historical-critical exegesis, and was as close as he could have been at the time to ensuring a valid ‘trajectory’ between the literal sense of the texts he was interpreting for his Brother-teachers and his actualization of those texts as having significance for their lives and ministry.

## 5. DE LA SALLE AND THE ‘BLENDING’ OF TEXTS

Luz’ comments on Karl Barth’s knowing the author ‘so well that I allow him to speak in my name and am even able to speak in his name myself’ seem to me to provide a helpful frame of reference for the appreciation of De La Salle’s weaving of biblical texts into his own writing. That ‘the statement of the text blends with the statement of the interpreters or their church community’ seems to describe well De La Salle’s literal ‘blending’ of texts into his own work in a way that, as William C. Creasy says of Thomas à Kempis, ‘it is difficult to tell where Thomas starts and Scripture stops’.<sup>60</sup>

I anticipate that this will be corroborated in the more detailed discussion of De La Salle’s recourse to Mt 4.23-10.8, in later chapters. However, an example may be given here, chosen more or less at random: the seventh of De La Salle’s sixteen *Meditations for the Time of Retreat*. Here we find, as part of his own continuous prose over scarcely more than two pages in *Œuvres complètes*, words and phrases from no

---

<sup>59</sup> Luz, *Matthew 1-7*, 65.

<sup>60</sup> Thomas à Kempis, *Imitation*, 159.

fewer than sixteen acknowledged biblical references from, in order: Galatians, 1 Corinthians (x3), Ephesians (x3), Hebrews, Luke (x2), Matthew, Acts (x2), 2 Corinthians (x2), Romans.<sup>61</sup>

On the basis of his doctoral work on ‘the gospel itinerary of Saint John Baptist de La Salle and the recourse to Scripture in his *Meditations for the Time of Retreat*’<sup>62</sup> Miguel Campos makes a significant observation about De La Salle’s approach to Scripture. Commenting on De La Salle’s threefold manner of citing biblical texts in this set of meditations, he writes that it warns against an expression such as ‘De La Salle *uses* Scripture’:

He does not use it for a rhetorical purpose or to apply some definitions to the obligations of the Brothers, nor even to prove the value of their state, or the meaning of the purpose of their Institute. In one sense Scripture does not come to him from outside, but the words which he cites come from a ‘gut level’ – from the lived reality of the life he has lived and which he has contemplated in the light of faith.<sup>63</sup>

This, I believe, constitutes a ‘blending’ of the biblical word with De La Salle’s own words precisely because he has made them his own: they have ‘touched his heart’ to such a degree that they are part of what he wants to say.

## 6. ULRICH LUZ AND THE ‘HISTORY OF INFLUENCE’ APPROACH

### Definitions and overview

At the beginning of this chapter I alluded to the question of interpreting the Bible from the standpoint of faith: does faith preclude an intelligent assessment of what the text means? One of the benefits of a ‘history of influence’ hermeneutic as a framework for appreciating De La Salle’s approach to interpretation is that it accepts that faith can be a significant *dimension* of a history of influence. James Dunn remarks, in fact, that Gadamer has proved to be ‘an ally to those who want to maintain that faith is not in principle at odds with the hermeneutical process’.<sup>64</sup>

---

<sup>61</sup> MR 199.

<sup>62</sup> Campos, *Itinéraire*.

<sup>63</sup> Miguel Campos, ‘Introduction’, in *John Baptist de La Salle: Meditations for the Time of Retreat*, trans. Augustine Loes (Winona, MN: The Christian Brothers Conference, 1975), 32.

<sup>64</sup> Dunn, *Jesus*, 123.

Working on the basis of Gadamer's *Wirkungsgeschichte* methodology,<sup>65</sup> Luz provides some definitions in the introduction to his commentary on Matthew. Having defined 'history of interpretation' (*Auslegungsgeschichte*) as (the history of) 'the interpretations of a text particularly in commentaries', he defines 'the history of the influence of the text' (*Wirkungsgeschichte*) in both its narrower and its broader sense. Through the former he wants to understand 'how the text is received and actualized in media other than commentaries', including sermons, canonical documents, literature, art, and music, 'and all the church's activity and suffering, that is, in church history'. In its broader sense he includes both interpretation in commentaries, and interpretation in the wider range of genres, acknowledging that the distinction is not always clear.

It seems appropriate to classify those works of De La Salle in which he incorporates and often actualizes biblical texts as falling within the ambit of 'media other than commentaries'.

It is significant that Luz chose not to use the term 'reception history' (*Rezeptionsgeschichte*), which he says may have been more appropriate, because it

connotes for me primarily the people who receive the text, while *Wirkungsgeschichte* suggests for me the effective power of the texts themselves. For me that is what is basic.<sup>66</sup>

As noted above, for Luz the potential/power of the text is both hermeneutically and theologically of primary importance: hermeneutically, because as well as the 'original sense' of any text, there is the multiplicity of latent meanings yet to discovered; theologically, because the biblical text, for all its human and historical matrix, is the word of God. That, of course, is clearly a faith stance, respecting the claim made by biblical texts to reflect and encourage faith. As the author of the Fourth Gospel says to the reader, 'these [signs/words] are written so that you may come to believe...' (Jn 20.31).

---

<sup>65</sup> It is acknowledged that *Wirkungsgeschichte* represents a means of analyzing hermeneutics rather than being a hermeneutic in itself.

<sup>66</sup> Luz, *Matthew 1-7*, 61.

For Luz, Gadamer's *Wirkungsgeschichte* is important because he is convinced that 'past history, especially biblical history, is for us modern people a supporting and forming horizon into which we enter and not simply another subject about which we are concerned'.<sup>67</sup>

In *Matthew in History*, Luz illustrates this phenomenological<sup>68</sup> perspective with the image of a river, in a passage describing his indebtedness to Gadamer. The latter, he says, points out that history 'is not something distant that we simply analyze but an essential component of life to which we owe our language, our way of thinking, our questions, our answers, the whole of our life', so that biblical texts 'are not just an object to analyse neutrally', but marked our life and culture long before our analysis of them. For that reason, 'historical objectivism ... conceals the involvement of the historical consciousness itself in effective history', to which we are indebted 'even when we have to protest against it and fight against its burden'. The image is close to being metaphorical for a history of influence approach which can uncover positive as well as harmful interpretations of biblical texts during the course of history:

History is like a river, and we are in a boat carried by that river. Naturally, we can analyze the water of this river chemically in different places along the river during our journey in the boat. We can examine its composition, its minerals, its pollution, and so on. But in the meantime we are carried and driven forward by the river, now to this side, now to the other.<sup>69</sup>

Luz insists that anything we say about biblical texts 'presupposes that we already have a relationship with them – directly, because we already know, love, or hate them; or indirectly, because we take part in a culture dominated by Christianity, and speak a language formed by the Bible'. Hence, he concludes, 'We too are a product of the effective history of the Bible'. De La Salle's was conscious both of the Christian

---

<sup>67</sup> Luz, *Matthew 1-7*, 62-63.

<sup>68</sup> Anthony Thistleton, 'Biblical Studies and Theoretical Hermeneutics', in *The Cambridge Companion to Biblical Interpretation*, ed. John Barton (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 100, notes that Gadamer was a pupil of Heidegger. He also comments that Gadamer 'has received wide recognition as perhaps the most influential hermeneutical theorist of the twentieth century'. In Thistleton's major work, *New Horizons in Hermeneutics: The Theory and Practice of Transforming Biblical Reading* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1992), 344, he links Gadamer and Paul Ricoeur as probably standing alone in the extent of their influence on and importance for late twentieth-century hermeneutical theory.

<sup>69</sup> Luz, *History*, 25.

tradition to which he belonged, and of the effects of the Bible on the lives of Church Fathers, saints, and others who had carried that tradition forward. He would certainly have recognized himself as ‘a product of the effective history of the Bible’.

The history of effects approach, therefore, says Luz, ‘brings together the texts and us, their interpreters; or better: the history of effects shows us that we are already together and that it is an illusion to treat the texts in a position of distance and in a merely “objective” way’.<sup>70</sup>

Even our ‘pre-understandings’, it would seem, have been to some extent affected – even effected – by the text and its ongoing history of interpretation, for better or worse. Gadamer would say, as I understand it, that when we are conscious that these are indeed pre-understandings, and in need of possible correction in confrontation with the text that stands at the beginning of that history,<sup>71</sup> our ‘horizon’ merges with that of the original text and we understand the truth of that text as it speaks within our own context.

### **Critiques of Ulrich Luz’ approach**

As might be expected, Luz is not without his critics. In an article that focuses specifically on his commentary on Matthew, Mark W. Elliott applauds Luz for the ‘Herculean task’ of producing a scholarly commentary on Matthew and ‘for his bold and learned attempt not only to summon up the wisdom of the church from the past, but also to use today’s and tomorrow’s hermeneutics to lend that wisdom advocacy’. Elliott is of the view, however, that Luz’ reading of the history of interpretation ‘can be quirky’, and points out the risk of assembling ‘a range of “ecclesial messages”’ rather than a sharpening of the doctrinal meaning of particular texts.<sup>72</sup>

Mark Knight discusses the approaches of Anthony Thistleton and Ulrich Luz, and criticizes both for making ‘a relatively conservative foray into reception history rather than a more radical engagement with the “history of influence”’. In particular, he

---

<sup>70</sup> Luz, *History*, 25.

<sup>71</sup> Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, 306, writes that ‘productive’ prejudices’ (or ‘fore-meanings’) that enable understanding must be separated from those that hinder it ‘in the process of understanding itself’.

<sup>72</sup> Mark W. Elliott, ‘Effective-History and the Hermeneutics of Ulrich Luz’, *JSNT* 33 (2010), 171.



appears to critique Luz' commentary on Matthew, for giving attention, in discrete sections, to both historical exegesis and the 'history of influence', despite its claim to give 'great weight' to the latter.<sup>73</sup> While Knight is correct in articulating the fact that the weighting between historical exegesis and 'history of influence' gives greater prominence to the former, Luz's commentaries on Matthew are themselves historical artefacts, and when placed in their historical context, the relative weighting is accurately described. I have suggested above that attending to both approaches is in fact a benefit, in that historical-critical exegesis is best at uncovering the likely original meaning of a text, which serves as touchstone for the validation of subsequent interpretations throughout the history of its influence.

### **De La Salle's France: a Christian and biblical culture**

In regard to John Baptist de La Salle I note, first, that his was indeed a culture 'dominated by Christianity' – much more so than our own, and secondly, that it was precisely in the France of his time that his biblical and patristic education, as well as his deep reflection on biblical texts and their significance for him and his Brothers, enabled him 'to speak a language formed by the Bible'.

France was indeed 'dominated' during most of De La Salle's life by Louis XIV (1638-1715; king from 1643). From 1685, when he signed the Edict of Fontainebleau, revoking the Edict of Nantes (1598) which had granted Huguenots the right to practise their religion, the kingdom was effectively dominated by Catholicism. The Edict 'forbade any exercise in public of *la Religion Prétendue Reformée*', so that 'to be a practising Huguenot was henceforth to be outside the law',<sup>74</sup> although even before that time the Edict had been illiberally interpreted.<sup>75</sup> Bergin reports that following the revocation, even the parish priest's 'say-so could condemn "new" Catholics [i.e. more or less forcibly converted Protestants] to incarceration or punishment if he judged them obdurate and recalcitrant'.<sup>76</sup>

---

<sup>73</sup> Mark Knight, 'Wirkungsgeschichte, Reception History, Reception Theory', *JSNT* (2010), 142.

<sup>74</sup> Ian Dunlop, *Louis XIV* (London: Pimlico, 2001), 265.

<sup>75</sup> See Louis Cognet, 'Christian Thought in Seventeenth Century France' in *History of the Church*, ed. Hubert Jedin (London: Burns & Oates, 1981), 6: 73.

<sup>76</sup> Bergin, *Church*, 221.

De La Salle's attitude towards the role of the Brothers in the school in Alès, established in 1707, was moderate in comparison. Élie Maillefer (1684-1761), an early biographer of De La Salle, wrote that it was Louis XIV himself who had detached the town of Alès, in a still strongly Protestant area of southern France, from the bishopric of Nîmes, naming François Maurice Chevalier de Saulx as its bishop. François Maurice was in charge of the Royal Missions, which the King had founded 'to work for the conversion of the Calvinists of Bas-Languedoc'.<sup>77</sup> Yves Poutet, however, remarks that, in the *Meditations for the Time of Retreat*, De La Salle's richest set of reflections on the Brothers' educational ministry, the terms 'heresy', 'heretic', 'Huguenot', 'Protestant', and 'Catholic' do not appear. Donald Mouton comments that in Alès, whatever the motives of the bishop, 'De La Salle did not envisage a missionary school in the strict sense of the term of bringing people from one religion to another'.<sup>78</sup> 'Conversion', as Yves Poutet observes, was something De La Salle recommended not with 'heretics' in mind, but for 'Catholics and the Brother of the Christian Schools himself':

These, rather, are the souls and hearts which must all and always be converted: the need is to make each person constant in following his or her conscience illuminated by faith.<sup>79</sup>

In France, the Bible played a significant part in this process of conversion. Joseph Bergin points out that post-Reformation attempts by the Catholic church to restrict access to the Bible, reinforced by the Council of Trent, were far less successful in France than elsewhere 'since the continuing presence of Protestantism there created a space, however uncertain, for continuing familiarity with the Bible, which was available in French translations'.<sup>80</sup> Of the latter, we know that De La Salle frequently availed himself of at least three, two of which (Mons and Huré) emerged from what Bergin describes as 'the desire of the [Catholic] Jansenist-Augustinians to put the

---

<sup>77</sup> François-Élie Maillefer, *La vie de M. Jean-Baptiste de La Salle, prêtre, docteur en théologie, ancien chanoine de l'église cathédrale de Reims, et instituteur des Frères des Écoles chrétiennes* (CL 6; Rome : Maison Saint Jean-Baptiste de La Salle, 1966), 181.

<sup>78</sup> Paul Grass, ed., *John Baptist de La Salle: Two Early Biographies* (Landover, MD: Lasallian Publications, 1996), 243, n. 249.

<sup>79</sup> Poutet, *Le XVII<sup>e</sup> siècle*, 2: 203.

<sup>80</sup> Bergin, *Church*, 313.

Bible in the vernacular at the disposal of laypeople, and to encourage its use for meditative purposes'.<sup>81</sup>

Bergin notes in particular the 'most famous and controversial translations', namely the 'New Testament of Mons' (1667) and the Old Testament (1672-95), 'both the work of Isaac Lemaitre de Sacy, the *solitaire* of Port-Royal', the Cistercian abbey in Paris which became a centre of Jansenist piety and education. Bergin also observes that these translations included French and Latin texts, 'with explanations based on Augustine's advice on how to read the Bible'.<sup>82</sup> At least one of the 1673 editions of the Mons New Testament, quite likely available to De La Salle, also includes a Greek text. Its foreword notes that 'generally all versions are a type of commentary' given that words can be ambiguous 'and capable of different meanings', and that by comparing the Vulgate's Latin text with the Greek, the reader can see why the translator has chosen particular French renderings.<sup>83</sup>

De La Salle's use of the Mons version, from which, for example, he appears to have taken the wording of the Lord's Prayer to be used in the schools (see below, on Mt 6.9-13) – and which became the standard form of the prayer in France until last century – was thus an example of a French *biblical* culture, both Protestant and Catholic, that was exceptional at the time. That Augustine's advice on bible reading was also disseminated illustrates the 'history of effects' in regard to biblical interpretation as exemplified in the influence of the Church Fathers. I turn now to this dimension of Luz' 'history of influence approach'.

### **The Church Fathers within a 'history of influence'**

In a paper, 'The Significance of the Church Fathers for Biblical Interpretation in Western Protestant Perspective', presented in 1998, Luz acknowledges that, for himself as a Protestant exegete, his concern to emphasize the church fathers

---

<sup>81</sup> While remaining on good terms with Louis-Antoine de Noailles, a former fellow student, and later Archbishop of Paris, De La Salle formally rejected his Jansenist tendencies. See Aroz, *Documents*, II: 505. This was in spite of the fact that, as Calcutt, *De La Salle*, 534-535, notes, Reims (De La Salle's home city) was 'the most organized Jansenist centre outside Paris', and that seven of his relatives, including his brother Jean-Louis, appealed against the papal Bull condemning Jansenism.

<sup>82</sup> Bergin, *Church*, 414-415.

<sup>83</sup> *Le Nouveau Testament de Notre Seigneur Jesus Christ, traduit en françois avec le Grec, & le Latin de la Vulgate ajoûtez à côté* (Mons: Gaspard Migeot, 1673), iii.

hermeneutical significance makes him ‘exceptional’.<sup>84</sup> Following his assertion, in the preface to the first edition of the commentary (reprinted in the Hermeneia edition), that ‘the history of the text’s influence can make a significant contribution’ to drawing interpretative lines into the present, he observes that ‘after the text itself, I am probably most indebted to the church fathers and to the Protestant and Catholic exegesis of the sixteenth through the eighteenth centuries’.<sup>85</sup> In the introduction he outlines the criteria for his selection of sources to illustrate the history of influence, which include ‘interpretations that influenced the Catholic and Protestant churches as confessions’, and especially ‘the earliest’ and ‘those that were potentially the most influential’.<sup>86</sup> The indexes of ‘Early Christian Literature and the Ancient Church’ in the commentary’s three volumes run to some nineteen pages, with often multiple references to Fathers from Athanasius, Augustine, Basil, Clement of Alexandria, and Cyril of Alexandria to Origen and Tertullian.

In brief, the significance that Luz accords the church fathers is both exegetical and hermeneutical. He cites, for example, exegetical discoveries by John Chrysostom, Augustine and Severus of Antioch.<sup>87</sup> More important, he believes, is their significance for hermeneutics: ‘their methods of interpretation allow for some unexpected connections with more recent methods which now supplement historical-critical interpretation’.<sup>88</sup> The hermeneutics of the fathers, Luz declares, ‘is, in many respects, closer to the New Testament texts than that of modern historical-critical interpretation’. In his discussion of Origen and allegorical interpretation he upholds the intention of the latter, without suggesting that it has validity in a modern setting.<sup>89</sup> What Luz sees of value is the christological and pneumatic focus of the church fathers (i.e. their belief in the activity of Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit in interpretation) –

---

<sup>84</sup> Luz, *Studies*, 291. Thomas C. Oden, ‘General Introduction’, in Simonetti, (ed.), *Matthew 1-13*, xi, remarks that the twenty-eight volume *Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture* is ‘a long-delayed assignment in biblical and historical scholarship’.

<sup>85</sup> Luz, *Matthew 1-7*, xv. In *History*, 34 Luz indicates examples such as Origen, Hilary and Jerome, Albert the Great, Thomas Aquinas, John Calvin and Abraham Calov.

<sup>86</sup> Luz, *Matthew 1-7*, 62.

<sup>87</sup> Luz, *Studies*, 296-297.

<sup>88</sup> Luz, *Studies*, 298.

<sup>89</sup> In both *History* (34-35) and *Matthew 1-7* (64, n. 32) Luz quotes Georg Picht as suggesting that both the NT writers themselves, and the church fathers, ‘engaged in exegesis that would make the hair of every philologist stand on end’.

again, from a standpoint of faith – and their concern to interpret the Bible as speaking to their own audiences, and thus doing what he believes modern interpreters *ought* to be doing.

In Chapter 3 I shall show that De La Salle had no hesitation in urging his Brother-teachers to hear the biblical words of Jesus as being addressed directly to themselves. This clearly reveals faith in the risen Jesus, present to him and to them, wishing to communicate with them that they were, for example, to ‘seek the kingdom of God’ or to ‘bear much fruit’.

Regarding the activity of the risen Christ from the point of view of the church fathers, Luz comments:

When all the biblical texts are expressions of a present reality, the living Christ, then every interpretation is guided by our experience and understanding of this living Christ. There is an element of personal identity and personal faith that belongs to all interpretations of biblical texts. They are not ‘alien’ to the interpreter.

Furthermore,

when the biblical texts become expressions of the living Christ, the barrier between past and present that we experience is eliminated. Christ, about whom the texts speak, never is a merely past. There is no possibility of a ‘mere’ past that has nothing to do with us.

And thirdly,

when the biblical texts become expressions of the living Christ, they speak with one voice, the voice of the living Christ of faith... There is no possibility of dissolving the unity of the biblical message into various different, unconnected testimonies of different people in different situations, which makes the integrity of the Bible so difficult for us.<sup>90</sup>

I consider that De La Salle’s concern to share with his Brothers a faith in the biblical word as carrying a communication from the risen and present Jesus is very consistent with the christological insights of the Church Fathers, as presented by Luz.

### **De La Salle: the Church Fathers**

---

<sup>90</sup> Luz, *History*, 36-37.

I have already outlined De La Salle's education in patristic exegesis and his exposure to the interpretations of individual church fathers. He would certainly concur with the christological dimension of patristic interpretation that Luz outlines above. His conviction from that perspective, that the text is 'never a merely past reality' is cogently exemplified in some of the excerpts from De La Salle's meditations noted earlier.

It is particularly to you that Jesus Christ is addressing these words of the Gospel of today: 'Seek firstly the Kingdom of God' [Mt 6.33].<sup>91</sup>

'It will be my Father's glory that you bear much fruit and that you become my disciples.' What Jesus Christ says to his holy Apostles, he also says to you yourselves ...<sup>92</sup>

In Gadamer's terms of the 'fusion of horizons' it is difficult to think of a more complete merging of the horizon of the original text and that of the interpreter than having, in the case of a Gospel text, the living subject of that text is also present in faith to the contemporary reader searching for its actualized significance. That was certainly the belief of John Baptist de La Salle in his biblical ministry to his Brothers.

In section 2 of the present chapter, in connection with Luz' expression of people's need to be 'touched' by a divine word, I discussed De La Salle's conviction that the Bible is a privileged way through which God 'touches the hearts' of people with an excerpt from the meditation on Hilarion. In the following section I shall situate this meditation within what might be called a history of influence 'writ small'.

### **A history of influence 'writ small'**

The meditation on Hilarion provides an excellent specific example of 'the history of influence' within De La Salle's own consciousness of some of the people who 'filled the gap' between the historical Jesus, the gospels, and his own era. The line of influence evident in De La Salle's relevant meditations is: Anthony of Egypt (c. 251-356) – Hilarion (c. 291-371) – Jerome's biography (c. 390) of Hilarion and Jerome himself (c. 340-420) – De La Salle (1651-1719) – his Brothers – and, for those who

---

<sup>91</sup> MD 67.1.1.

<sup>92</sup> MR 195.3.1.

have seen and still see themselves as part of the continuing line of influence, De La Salle's followers and their students or clients, and their families, in the centuries since.

De La Salle's meditation on Anthony of Egypt begins with the account of Anthony hearing a biblical text read:

Saint Anthony, having heard read, in the church, these words of the Gospel: 'If you wish to be perfect, sell all that you have, and give it to the poor' [Mt 19.21], went at that very moment to effect<sup>93</sup> them, as if they had been spoken to him, himself,<sup>94</sup> convinced that it was this that God was asking of him.<sup>95</sup>

Thus Anthony hears the Gospel text, understands it as spoken to him personally, and puts it into immediate practice.

The meditation on Hilarion describes the influence of Anthony's gospel-based example on Hilarion, whose fame induced Hilarion to go and find him, and observe his way of life, his application to prayer, his humility, his manner of leading his desert brothers. Hilarion was in turn moved 'to apply himself with all imaginable fervour to practise all these virtues which he had observed in Saint Anthony'.<sup>96</sup> Anthony influenced Hilarion by example, and Hilarion put into practice what he had observed.

De La Salle's comment is 'Ah! What force and efficacy example has to convert souls and to advance them in virtue!'

As noted previously, the meditation goes on to extol something else that committed Hilarion to 'give himself completely to God': his deep acceptance of the significance for himself of 'this word of our Lord in the holy Gospel: 'The one who does not renounce all that he possesses, cannot be my disciple' [Lk 14.33].<sup>97</sup> So, orphaned and aged only fifteen, Hilarion put the text into effect and gave everything away.

De La Salle's comment is parallel with the first: 'Ah! How powerful the word of God is to touch hearts!'

---

<sup>93</sup> *exécuter*.

<sup>94</sup> The French is emphatic by repetition: *si elles lui eussent été dites à lui-même*.

<sup>95</sup> MF 97.1.1.

<sup>96</sup> MF 180.1.1.

<sup>97</sup> MF 180.2.1.

Jean-Guy Rodrigue's research shows that, for the meditation on Hilarion, De La Salle drew, probably exclusively, on the *Vita Sancti Hilarionis* ('Life of Saint Hilarion') by Jerome, the relevant parts of which Latin text Rodrigue reproduces beside the text of De La Salle's meditation.<sup>98</sup> These include the reference to Lk 14.33, perhaps in Jerome's original translation.<sup>99</sup> So Jerome, in the late fourth century has passed on to his readers an account of the Bible's influence on Hilarion, including the fact (not included in De La Salle's meditation) that he had memorized the holy Scriptures 'which he would recite, after prayers and psalms, as if in the presence of God'.<sup>100</sup>

Several centuries later, De La Salle, in France, is sufficiently moved by this account to use it as the substantial basis for a meditation on Hilarion, including reference to a particular gospel passage, to be read by his Brothers at the time, and which continues to be read in contemporary Lasallian circles today. Moreover, as shown in Chapter 1, De La Salle also writes a meditation of Jerome himself, which reflects to a considerable extent De La Salle's own appreciation of the Bible.

### **Intelligence and education in the service of the word**

It is also notable that, just as at the beginning of his meditation on Jerome, De La Salle remarks on Jerome's intelligence and his study of 'the human sciences' [*les sciences humaines*],<sup>101</sup> he also introduces the meditation on Hilarion with the observation that Hilarion had made himself competent in, literally, 'human letters' [*les lettres humaines*], by the keenness of his mind'.<sup>102</sup> *Les lettres humaines* are described by the *Dictionnaire* (1694) as relating to 'Grammar, Poetry Rhetoric, History, antiquity, and the ancient authors who treat of it'.

---

<sup>98</sup> Rodrigue, *Contribution*, 476-480.

<sup>99</sup> The tense of *renuntiare* is different (future perfect, as against the Vulgate's present), as is the main verb (*habere*, rather than Vg *possedere*).

<sup>100</sup> *Scripturas quoque sanctas memoriter tenens, post orationes et psalmos quasi Deo praesente recitabat*. See Jerome, 'Vita Sancti Hilarionis'. 'Excerpta ex Migne Patrologia Latina,' [documentaomniacatholica.eu](http://www.documentacatholicaomnia.eu).

[http://www.documentacatholicaomnia.eu/02m/0347-0420,\\_Hieronymus,\\_Vita\\_Sancti\\_Hilarionis,\\_MLT.pdf](http://www.documentacatholicaomnia.eu/02m/0347-0420,_Hieronymus,_Vita_Sancti_Hilarionis,_MLT.pdf).

<sup>101</sup> MF 170.1.1.

<sup>102</sup> MF 180.1.1.



Augustine, too, is described as acquiring his reputation because of both his virtues and ‘his great insight and the soundness of his mind’. It was ‘grace’ in combination with ‘his natural intelligence and profound erudition’ that silenced his opponents.<sup>103</sup>

Although, in his meditation on ‘Saint Denis’, De La Salle insists that ‘the principal conversion is that of the heart, and that, without it, [conversion] of the mind is quite sterile’,<sup>104</sup> he remarks earlier in the same meditation that ‘God, as he did in Saint Denis and in others, makes use of their natural intelligence and their insights from the human sciences, to lead people to himself’.<sup>105</sup>

The appreciation of the human mind, in concert with heart and soul, is evident also in De La Salle’s reflection on Mt 22.37 (cf. Dt 6.5), a verse from the Gospel reading on the seventeenth Sunday after Pentecost: ‘You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your mind [*esprit*] and with all your strength’.<sup>106</sup> The focus of the first Point of the meditation is on loving God ‘with all our heart’, and the second Point considers ‘with all our soul’. Accordingly, the third Point begins, appropriately interlaced with a biblical quotation,

God, having placed us in this world only for himself, according to the expression of the Sage, who says that ‘God has made all things’<sup>107</sup> for himself, also thinks continually of us; and, have gives us a mind only to think of him, it is with this object [*sujet*] that Jesus Christ says, in this Gospel [of today], that ‘we must love God with all our mind’. It is by occupying ourselves always with him that we fulfil this commandment, and by referring to him, in such a way, all our thoughts concerning creatures, that we do not think of anything relating to them which does not bring us to loving him, or which does not keep us in his holy love; for there is nothing which makes it more evident that one person loves another than when she/he cannot help thinking of him/her.<sup>108</sup>

Though it is love demonstrated in action that is the most important outcome of biblical reflection and prayer, De La Salle draws on the educational experience of some of the Church Fathers to remind his Brothers that study and intelligent insight have an important part to play.

---

<sup>103</sup> MF 161.2.1.

<sup>104</sup> MF 175.2.2.

<sup>105</sup> MF 175.1.2.

<sup>106</sup> MD 70.1.1.

<sup>107</sup> Vg Sir 43.37; NRSV Sir 43.33.

<sup>108</sup> MD 70.3.1.

## The word expressed in deed

It is, however, the *practice* of the biblical word that is of crucial importance for De La Salle. In the meditation on Anthony of Egypt, whose renunciation, help of the poor, and withdrawal ‘from the world’ De La Salle holds up as virtues, the concluding paragraph reminds the Brother-teachers that they should love the seclusion that allows for self-knowledge<sup>109</sup> and intimacy with God, ‘but you must leave it when God requires of you that you work for the salvation of souls [i.e., the children] who are entrusted to you’.<sup>110</sup> Solitude and activity constitute the rhythm of the Brothers’ lives.

The meditation on Hilarion reminds them of the ‘power and efficacy’ of example. All those who live together in community should encourage one another ‘to *practise* whatever is most perfect and most holy in the maxims of the holy Gospel’.

‘According to axiom of the philosophers, the *practice* as well as the love of goodness is easily communicated to those who have a little willingness to carry it out’.<sup>111</sup>

The first application of the reflection on Jerome’s scholarship and his biblical expertise is that De La Salle’s listeners should study the Bible, and to do so in order to make them capable of their work, and to make it a ‘rule of *conduct* both for themselves and their students’.<sup>112</sup>

This emphasis on both faith and practice is characteristic of De La Salle’s spirituality. Fundamentally, according to the *Rule* which he and the Brothers developed, the ‘spirit of the Institute’ is ‘faith and zeal’, in short, faith in a God who guides, and zeal for the education of young people. Both, as would be expected, are persistent threads in the sixteen *Meditations for the Time of Retreat*, in which there are some twenty-nine instances of the word ‘faith’, and over thirty instances of ‘practice’ and ‘practise’, typically in drawing attention to the fact that it is what the teacher ‘practises’ that will encourage young people in good practices. An example from the second meditation to be read on the very first day of the annual retreat gives the flavour:

To lead the children whom you instruct to take on the spirit of Christianity, you must teach them the *practical* truths of the faith of Jesus Christ, and the

---

<sup>109</sup> MF 97.2.2.

<sup>110</sup> MF 97.3.2.

<sup>111</sup> MF 180.1.2, emphasis added.

<sup>112</sup> MF 170.1.2, emphasis added.

maxims of the holy Gospel, with at least as much care as the truths of pure speculation [i.e. more abstract theological reflection]. It is true that there are some of the latter that it is absolutely necessary to know in order to be saved; but what will be the use of knowing them, if one does not apply oneself to the good which one must *practise*?<sup>113</sup>

Is your principal care to instruct your disciples about the maxims of the holy Gospel, and the *practice* of the Christian virtues? ... Do you regard the good that you are trying to do for them as the foundation of all the good that they will *practise* for the rest of their life?

If you want the instructions to be profitable that you provide to those you are obliged to instruct, to draw them to the *practice* of good, you have to *practise* them yourselves ...<sup>114</sup>

For De La Salle, then, a way of life based on the ‘maxims of the Gospel’ involves mind and heart, solitude and community, prayer and practice, faith and zeal. It is an integrated spirituality. I believe this is very much accords with what Luz and others see as a holistic approach to biblical interpretation.

## 7. A HOLISTIC APPROACH TO INTERPRETATION

Ulrich Luz compares the written biblical text to frozen food, or to a photograph, in which ‘the human figures no longer move or laugh’. Understanding the texts means ‘to restore them back to life’. Historical-critical interpretation, he implies, describes the life situations to which the texts originally belonged; but that is not to *understand* them in the present. Just as a photograph ‘becomes meaningful only when it is combined with our memory and when, through it the persons represented in it come alive again in our hearts’, biblical texts become meaningful only when they become part of our life.

In other words, to understand a New Testament text does not mean to understand the words of the text only, but to understand the living Christ to whom it testifies and the life situation that was shaped by him, and to understand both as a gift, a question, and a challenge for our own lives. Understanding such texts is not an intellectual knowledge that can be separated from other dimensions of life; rather this understanding is possible only when it encompasses human life in its totality – intellectual insights, feelings, actions, and suffering.<sup>115</sup>

---

<sup>113</sup> MR 194.3.1, emphasis added.

<sup>114</sup> MR 194.3.2, emphasis added.

<sup>115</sup> Luz, *History*, 13-14.

In terms of Luz' acceptance of Ricoeur's distinction (above) between 'meaning' and 'significance' as relating respectively to the original and the new context, 'significance' becomes much more comprehensive than arriving at a conceptual understanding of how an original audience or readership probably understood the words. The text now becomes a 'significant' part of a person's life; it has an impact.

Even more helpful, perhaps, is Gadamer's adverting to the distinction in the early hermeneutical tradition between 'understanding' and 'interpretation', together with pietism's 'application' – all of them, as he says, called *subtilitas* 'i.e., they are considered less as methods that we have at our disposal than as talents requiring particular *finesse*<sup>116</sup> of mind'. Gadamer's reflections lead him to the conviction that these, while distinct, are inseparable. He sees 'interpretation' not as 'an occasional, post facto supplement to understanding; rather understanding is always interpretation, and hence interpretation is the explicit form of understanding'. With regard to the third element, application, he laments that in later hermeneutical approaches which excluded it, 'the edifying application of Scripture in Christian preaching, for example, now seemed very different from the historical and theological understanding of it'.

Gadamer summarizes this position as follows:

In the course of our reflections we have come to see that understanding always involves something like applying the text to be understood to the interpreter's present situation. Thus we are forced to go one step beyond romantic hermeneutics, as it were, by regarding not only understanding and interpretation, but also application as comprising one unified process. This is not to return to the pietist tradition of the three separate 'subtleties', for, on the contrary, we consider application to be just as integral a part of the hermeneutical process as are understanding and interpretation.<sup>117</sup>

In other words, *actualization* and the challenge to *action* are not to be seen as discretionary adjuncts to the interpretative process: they are an essential part of it. To anticipate the discussion in later chapters, De La Salle would agree: the 'word' has not been fully understood until it becomes 'deed'.

---

<sup>116</sup> *Subtilitas* denotes 'keenness, acuteness, penetration, definiteness, exactness, subtlety', from *subtilis*, 'fine, nice, delicate'.

<sup>117</sup> Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, 318-319.

Hence it is particularly relevant to this thesis that among the ways in which Luz exemplifies the essential role of *application* in holistic interpretation is Matthew's parable of 'the four soils' (Mt 13.3.23). The tension is between 'hearing' and 'understanding' the word: 'When anyone hears the word of the kingdom and does not understand it, the evil one comes and snatches away what is sown in the heart; this is what was sown on the path' (Mt 13.19). The person represented by 'what was sown on rocky ground' 'hears the word', receives it with joy, but 'falls away' (v. 20). The one represented by 'what was sown among thorns' 'hears the word', but it is choked by the cares of the world and the lure of wealth 'and it yields nothing'. The climax of Matthew's explanation of the parable, as Luz points out, involves both hearing and understanding – the latter validated by the person's 'bearing fruit: 'But as for what was sown on good soil, this is the one who *hears* the word *and understands it*, who indeed bears fruit and yields, in one case a hundredfold, in another sixty, and in another thirty' (Mt 13.23, emphasis added).

From similar biblical and other reflections including those of Gadamer, Luz notes the place of 'application' in, for example, liberation theology, in which

theory and praxis, dogmatics and ethics, understanding and application cannot be separated. This basic hermeneutical insight of liberation theology seems very close to the Bible.<sup>118</sup>

The consequences, he observes, are that

there is no 'meaning' of biblical texts that exists for itself, detachable from life and history. Hermeneutically this means that application is not something additional, which can be added afterward to understanding, but, as Gadamer says, is an 'integral element of all understanding'.<sup>119</sup>

The hermeneutical prominence given to 'application' calls to mind J.H. Newman's (1801-1890) distinction between 'notional' and 'real' assent. The first of his examples of 'the change of Notional Assent into Real' seems apposite. It concerns boys at school pursuing the same studies, some with greater success than others,

but it will sometimes happen, that those who acquitted themselves but poorly in class, when they come into the action of life, and engage in some particular

---

<sup>118</sup> Luz, *History*, 16.

<sup>119</sup> Luz, *History*, 16, citing Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, 275 (p. 319 in the 2004 English translation previously cited).

work, which they have already been learning in its theory and with little promise of proficiency, are suddenly found to have what is called an eye for that work – an eye for trade matters, or for engineering, or a special taste for literature – which no one expected from them at school, while they were engaged on notions. Minds of this stamp not only know the received rules of their profession, but enter into them, and even anticipate them, or dispense with them, or substitute other rules instead.<sup>120</sup>

‘Coming into the action of life’ and ‘engaging in some particular work’ was certainly the lot of John Baptist de La Salle in his radical abandonment of what would have been a distinguished ecclesiastical career, as he was led into a different world in which he found himself forming a new community of lay educators of poor children. His own example of the practice of biblical truth within a project which he frequently reminded himself was ‘God’s work’, in a phrase from Habakkuk,<sup>121</sup> and his insistence that biblical texts be not only understood but practised, place him well within the framework espoused by Gadamer and Luz.

## CONCLUSION

At the beginning of this chapter I indicated the misgivings I had in trying to locate De La Salle’s approach to biblical interpretation within a hermeneutical framework which took a largely ‘objective’ approach, and focused, quite properly, on the text’s original meaning. In particular, such a framework did not seem hospitable to De La Salle’s faith perspective, and his tendency to reinterpret biblical texts so that they had a clear significance for the life and work of his community of Brother-teachers in seventeenth-eighteenth century France.

I believe that the ‘history of influence’ (*Wirkungsgeschichte*) hermeneutic provides a much more accommodating framework, being inclusive of faith, intelligence, prayer, action, and the community of the church (both present and historical), and insisting that the real significance of a biblical text is the one discerned by a reader who is conscious of the transformation of its original meaning throughout the community’s history, and who recognizes her place within that transformative history as she allows herself to be confronted, in her own context, by the ancient word.

---

<sup>120</sup> John Henry Newman, *An Essay in Aid of a Grammar of Assent* (London: Burns, Oates, & Co., 1874), 75-76.

<sup>121</sup> ‘Lord, it is your work’ (*Domine, opus tuum*), Vg Hab 3.2, in ‘Rules I have imposed on myself’, EP 3.0.8.

It seems just as infelicitous to try and distil this hermeneutic into a series of points as it was to extract the nine ‘principles’ from just two of De La Salle’s meditations – a very small sampling from an extensive and diverse collection of writings. However, for the sake of showing that that the two are in some degree compatible, I propose that the following six interrelated characteristics reflect something of Ulrich Luz’ elaboration of a holistic ‘history of influence’ hermeneutic:

1. A care to discern the unfolding ‘significance’ (Ricoeur) of a biblical text in new contexts;
2. A consciousness on the part of the interpreter that her own interpretations have been influenced by her participation in a history of interpretative influence;
3. A belief in the transformative power of the biblical word;
4. An understanding of biblical passages as living communications rather than as doctrinal or moral proof-texts from the past;
5. An approach to interpretation which includes faith in God, and in the Bible as the living word of God;
6. A belief that practical application, going beyond notional understanding, is a key element of biblical interpretation.

While juxtaposing De La Salle’s ‘principles’ and these summary characteristics for the sake of comparison, below, I think it would be trying to prove too much to multiply direct correlations in order to demonstrate that De La Salle was an exponent of *Wirkungsgeschichte* in advance of his time. With that in mind, I have not attempted to put similar items side by side. Nonetheless I believe that an overall comparison reflects a clear affinity, which I hope has been demonstrated in the course of this chapter, and will be corroborated in a more detailed study of De La Salle’s references to texts from the Gospel of Matthew in later chapters.

Principles derived from De La Salle’s meditations on Jerome and Catherine	Summary characteristics of a ‘history of influence’ approach to interpretation
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Scripture is not an end in itself, but a means towards communion with God.</li> <li>• Scripture is not just to be known conceptually, but is to be internalized in order to be communicated to</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A care to discern the unfolding ‘significance’ (Ricoeur) of a biblical text in new contexts.</li> <li>• A consciousness on the part of the interpreter that her pre-understandings</li> </ul>

<p>others.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• An understanding of Scripture involves action.</li> <li>• The appropriation and interpretation of Scripture involve faith, prayer, and reflection.</li> <li>• A prayerful and reflective approach to the Scriptures requires focused attention.</li> <li>• The study and interpretation of the Scriptures have a community dimension.</li> <li>• The Scriptures themselves include expressions of their nature, significance and purpose.</li> <li>• The Scriptures, written and read in one historical context, can be read as applying in another context.</li> <li>• The Scriptures are necessary for, and enable, the Church ministry of Christian education.</li> </ul>	<p>and her own interpretations have been influenced by her participation in a history of interpretative influence.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A belief in the transformative power of the biblical word.</li> <li>• An understanding of biblical passages as living communications rather than as doctrinal or moral proof-texts from the past.</li> <li>• An approach to interpretation which includes faith in God, and in the Bible as the living word of God.</li> <li>• A belief that practical application, going beyond notional understanding, is a key element of biblical interpretation.</li> </ul>
--	--

On the assumption that the ‘summary characteristics’ are at least consistent with De La Salle’s ‘principles’, and in some cases closely akin to them, and because they are more comprehensive than a distillation from just two meditations could be, I shall use the ‘summary characteristics’ as touchstones in the consideration, in later chapters, of De La Salle’s references to Mt 4.23-10.8, with a view to showing that they, too, can be appreciated when seen through the lens of the ‘history of influence’ approach to biblical interpretation.

In the next chapter I shall develop a particular aspect of De La Salle’s approach to the interpretation of the Bible that is consistent with a ‘history of influence’ approach, namely that he sees the Brother-teachers’ educational ministry as a continuation of the work begun in Jesus and which has continued in various time-bound expressions ever since. Similarly, he sees his own interpretative, encouraging work on the Brothers’ behalf as occupying a place within a living tradition of facilitating the communication of God’s word.



## CHAPTER 3: DE LA SALLE'S CONSCIOUSNESS OF A VITAL HERITAGE

### INTRODUCTION

In Chapter 1 it was established that the Bible is foundational for De La Salle's integrated spirituality of 'faith and zeal' as reflected in his writings, and hence for the life and work of the community of his Brother-teachers. Nine principles were derived from two of his meditations, where he especially reveals his perspective on the Bible as a means of communion with God and a powerful 'word' to be internalized, acted upon, and communicated. He conveys to his audience that this requires study, reflection, meditation, and prayer, and demonstrates how this enables the Bible to be 'actualized' in their own context. In anticipation of further discussion in this chapter, it was shown that, for De La Salle, the Church Fathers are in the forefront of biblical interpreters within a history going back to the early church.

Chapter 2 described the 'history of influence' hermeneutic espoused by Ulrich Luz and developed some points of comparison with the interpretative approach of De La Salle,

In this chapter I wish to extend that comparison by exploring some further aspects of De La Salle's Bible-interwoven writing. It bespeaks a strong sense of connection with a living heritage that has its source in the Triune God,<sup>1</sup> and especially in the person and work of Jesus Christ as testified to in the New Testament.

De La Salle believed himself and his Brother-teachers to be living and working in the presence of the Trinity,<sup>2</sup> and that in their reading of and reflection on the Scriptures they were daily encountering God's word for their own context. He also believed that he and they were participating in an educational ministry that began definitively in the

---

<sup>1</sup> From the very beginning, in the vow De La Salle made in private with just two of his companions in November 1691, and in the later vow with a larger group in 1694, the opening invocation of the formula of vows has been 'Most Holy Trinity, Father, Son and Holy Spirit...', EP 1.0.1; 2.0.1.

<sup>2</sup> In the first of the three meditations reviewing the year (December 29-31), for example, De La Salle asks the Brothers 'Have you recalled that God was with you everywhere...?' (MF 90.1.2).

words and work of Jesus, and that it remained ‘God’s work’.<sup>3</sup> He believed that Jesus’ work had been continued by Christian women and men in an unbroken line from the time of Jesus until his own, in seventeenth century France. He saw that heritage as a source of inspiration for their educational work on behalf of the children of artisans and the poor.

Hence I shall discuss one of De La Salle’s characteristic ways of referring to biblical citations: as words being spoken by a person rather than as a text to be read. This conforms to his consciousness of being part of a living tradition, with the Church Fathers as an authoritative stream within that tradition. I shall discuss the extent to which he is conscious of Jesus not just as the first in a line of educators, but as one who relates to contemporary educators through the biblical word. De La Salle is concerned to elevate his teachers’ estimation of their work by assuring them that they are participating in what was and remains Jesus’ work – indeed, that Jesus is at work in them - and that they can learn from the same conviction of other educators across some seventeen centuries.

### **1. A ‘SPOKEN WORD’ RATHER THAN A TEXTUAL REFERENCE**

As foreshadowed in connection with the meditations for St Jerome and St Catherine of Alexandria in Chapter 1, it is characteristic of De La Salle’s meditations that, while he constantly weaves biblical quotations and allusions into his own writing, his direct reference is only rarely to a written *work* as such, but rather to its *author* as speaker. For example, when incorporating a passage from what he understood as being the Pauline corpus (so including Ephesians and Hebrews),<sup>4</sup> he does not write ‘as we see in St Paul’s letter to the Ephesians’ but rather ‘as Saint Paul says’ or simply ‘Saint Paul says’, with no reference to the actual source.<sup>5</sup> Less frequently, but with even greater significance, it is Jesus who ‘says’.<sup>6</sup>

---

<sup>3</sup> ‘I shall often say to him [God] these words of the prophet Habakkuk, “Domine, opus tuum (“Lord, (it is) your work”)’’, EP 3.0.8.

<sup>4</sup> See DA 101.3.12 for De La Salle’s listing of the ‘fourteen’ letters of St Paul.

<sup>5</sup> In the *77 Meditations for Sundays*, for example, there are more than 50 references to ‘Saint Paul says’ or variants on that most frequent expression, with one or more quotations from his letters or those attributed to him at the time.

<sup>6</sup> E.g. MD 1.2.2; 42.1.2; 49.3.1; 56.1.2.

This is equally true of other sources, biblical and otherwise. References to Sirach or Proverbs, for example, are introduced with ‘as the Sage says’. Quotations from the Psalms are as said by ‘the Prophet-King’. In the *Meditations for Sundays*, for example, St James and St Peter are quoted with similar introductions, and there are also references to the work of people such as St Jerome, St Doritheus, St Bonaventure, St Teresa of Ávila, St Augustine, St Bernard, St John Chrysostom, Tertullian – all in terms of what each of them ‘says’. There are, of course, many more biblical texts, paraphrases, re-workings, and allusions to texts that are incorporated into De La Salle’s writings without reference to author or location.

There is some evidence that this is not just an alternative way of referring to a biblical text, in that the same expression ‘as Saint Paul says’ is used in regard to words of Paul not from one of his letters but as reported in Acts (actually the words of Paul and Barnabas together, Acts 14.22) and cited in Meditation 73.<sup>7</sup>

Although this form of the verb *dire*, ‘to say’, could be *passé simple* (‘said’ rather than ‘says’), it is also in this meditation that it is unmistakably present, as it is invariably translated in the published English versions:

‘It is necessary,’ says Saint Paul, ‘that we enter the kingdom of God through many tribulations’. When he *says* ‘it is necessary’ he *makes* us very much aware that it would be to ask for a miracle from God to claim that he would make us enter heaven without taking the road by which it is necessary to arrive there.

The verbs ‘it is necessary’ [*il faut*] and ‘makes us aware’ [*fait...connaître*] are present tense. A past tense – ‘he said’ – would be dissonant.

It is perhaps the exception that proves the rule that in *The Explanation for the Method of Interior Prayer*, De La Salle sometimes quotes a biblical work by author and chapter. This practice may be a function of the work’s late composition, or, less likely, an editorial addition, but it seems better explained by the fact that it is precisely the biblical *texts* that De La Salle wishes the Brothers to use as a basis for their prayer. As he notes early in the work, itself characteristically a tapestry of his own reflections and exemplary prayers, with a weft of biblical quotations and allusions, the first thing

---

<sup>7</sup> MD 73.3.2. De La Salle is aware that Acts was by the same author as the Gospel of Luke; cf. MD 69.1.1.

to be done in interior prayer is become attentive to the presence of God, ‘which must always be done through a sentiment of faith based on a passage drawn from holy Scripture’.<sup>8</sup> When it comes to the second phase of interior prayer, ‘one can apply to oneself’... a maxim [‘sentence or passage’] of the holy Gospel and make it the subject of one’s interior prayer’. Among his examples are Mt 19.21 and Mt 5.29, where the text is given, followed by, respectively, ‘Math. 19’ and ‘in s. Math. 5’.<sup>10</sup>

The habit of quoting people, especially biblical authors and Jesus himself, as ‘saying’ things, in the present tense, creates a strong impression of ‘a cloud of witnesses’, of people on whom God has had an impact, and who continue to encourage those who hear them ‘speaking’ to allow themselves to be similarly affected. It is as though they are part of a reflective conversation concerning, not their own earlier context, but that of a community of seventeenth century French teachers. In this way, and especially because his meditations would have been heard read in a prayerful setting, De La Salle’s style of presenting biblical authors would have made it similar to the experience of the original ‘auditors’ of the gospels, in which, as Michael Trainor observes,

the proclaimer, the ‘minister of the word’, engaged in what I consider an ‘inter-textual’ act. In this act, the minister enabled the biblical text to interact with and address the reality of auditors’ lives.<sup>11</sup>

Moreover, over eighty meditations on saints of the day, in a different series from the *Meditations for Sundays*, ensured that the Brother-teachers were connected with the stories of Christians who had gone before them, and over twenty classroom lessons on individual ‘feasts to honour the saints’ kept both teacher and students aware of their significance within the tradition.<sup>12</sup>

## 2. CONSCIOUSNESS OF A LIVING TRADITION

---

<sup>8</sup> EM 2.14.

<sup>9</sup> *s’appliquer*, in the sense of *prendre pour soy* (Dict. 1694).

<sup>10</sup> CL 14, p. 110; EM 14.294-295.

<sup>11</sup> Michael Trainor, *The Body of Jesus and Sexual Abuse: How the Gospel Passion Narratives inform a Pastoral Response* (Northcote, VIC: Morning Star Publishing, 2014), 51. Trainor envisages two ‘texts’, the biblical text, and the world of the auditors.

<sup>12</sup> DC 44.

De La Salle's frequent citing of the Church Fathers says something of his own theological and biblical formation, his adherence to the injunction of the Council of Trent 'to let no one dare interpret Scripture in a way contrary to the general agreement of the Fathers',<sup>13</sup> and this same strong sense of a living tradition. To take as an indication the number of times various Fathers are named in just four works: *Meditations for Sundays, Meditations for Feasts, Meditations for the Time of Retreat, and Duties of a Christian towards God (I)* it is clear that Augustine (354-430) is by far the most often referred to: (66 times in these four works), followed by John Chrysostom (32), Ambrose (27), Jerome (23), Tertullian (18), Cyprian (12), Gregory the Great (11), Cyril and John Damascene (5 each), Athanasius, Basil and Gregory Nazianzen (4 each), Theodoret (2), Gregory of Nyssa, Hilary of Poitiers and Ignatius of Antioch (1 each).

That De La Salle's references to the Church Fathers is more than a reliance on secondary sources is evident, for example, in his use of the meditations and other works of François Giry (1635-1688). 'Giry,' Varela notes, 'hardly ever quotes from the Church Fathers'.<sup>14</sup>

Parenthetically, it is a little perplexing that De La Salle makes no mention of Irenaeus of Lyons, despite his works being available at least since the previous century,<sup>15</sup> and in particular in the library of the Chapter of Reims to which De La Salle as a Canon had access.<sup>16</sup>

De La Salle's references to the place of the Bible in the Church from the earliest times confirm his awareness of a living heritage of reading and interpretation:

In the assemblies of the faithful of the first centuries of the Church, the holy Scripture was read to them and explained to them.<sup>17</sup>

... in each Hour of the Office [the Church] has placed psalms, hymns and sometimes canticles, for praising God; *readings drawn from holy Scripture*

---

<sup>13</sup> Murphy, *Church and Bible*, 32.

<sup>14</sup> Varela, *Sacred Scripture*, 153; cf. Rodrigue, *Contribution*, 177, 259, 295.

<sup>15</sup> Krumenacker, *L'école française*, 119.

<sup>16</sup> Poutet, *Le XVII<sup>e</sup> siècle*, 360-361.

<sup>17</sup> DA 405.2.2.

*and from the holy Fathers, for instructing the faithful in the Word of God; and collects, which are prayers that conclude each Hour of the Office...*<sup>18</sup>

De La Salle is thus aware of a 'history of influence' not only of the Bible, but of the commentaries of Church Fathers who in their own times endeavoured to relate the biblical word to the lives of their own audiences.

### **3. JESUS' BIBLICAL WORD ADDRESSED DIRECTLY TO THE CONTEMPORARY READER**

The impression is reinforced when the hearer/reader is told that the words of Scripture are to be heard as being addressed directly to 'him',<sup>19</sup> as exemplified in the following extracts:

Jesus Christ says today in the Gospel [Mt 5.20-24] to his holy Apostles that if their virtue does not surpass that of the Pharisees, they will not enter the Kingdom of the heavens. Apply these words to yourselves, and persuade yourselves that *Jesus Christ is addressing them to you yourselves*: that if you do not have more virtue than people of the age, you will be more subject to condemnation than they on the day of judgment.<sup>20</sup>

When a steward had been accused before his master of having wasted away his wealth, he made him come and he said to him: 'What am I hearing about you? Give me an account of your administration' [Lk 16.1-2]. You who are in a holy work where God has placed you, you must persuade yourself *that these words are addressed to you ...*<sup>21</sup>

It should be noted that in both these meditations, 'persuade yourselves' (*persuadez-vous; vous devez vous persuader*) constitutes a strong exhortation to the Brothers to adopt De La Salle's own hermeneutic: that Jesus' words as recorded in the Bible are being spoken to them in the here-and-now of their own seventeenth/eighteenth century context.

*It is particularly to you that Jesus Christ is addressing these words of the Gospel of today: 'Seek firstly the Kingdom of God' [Mt 6.33].*<sup>22</sup>

---

<sup>18</sup> DA 405.2.7.

<sup>19</sup> The first hearers of the meditations were men; happily, the situation is different today.

<sup>20</sup> MD 58.1.1.

<sup>21</sup> MD 61.1.1.

<sup>22</sup> MD 67.1.1.

‘It will be my Father’s glory that you bear much fruit and that you become my disciples.’ *What Jesus Christ says to his holy Apostles, he also says to you yourselves* ...<sup>23</sup>

A similarly direct communication is evoked with other expressions:

Who would believe that faith would have such an effect, to have us receive unflinching everything we ask of God, if the Son of God, who is the truth himself [Jn 14.6] did not assure us of it? *Not only does he have you know it through these words, but he has given you an example in the Canaanite woman*...<sup>24</sup>

*Jesus Christ points out for us, in today’s Gospel three dispositions for receiving the Holy Spirit, expressed in these words: ‘If you love me, keep my commandments, and I will ask my Father, and he will give you another Consoler to live with you for ever’ [Jn 14.15-16].*<sup>25</sup>

The same can be said of St Paul addressing the reader:

It is in the same spirit and in this sentiment that the same Saint Paul ‘*implore[s] you*’, in another place, ‘*through the mercy of God, to offer him your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and agreeable in his eyes*’ [Rom 12.1].<sup>26</sup>

In the last example, De La Salle has simply taken the word ‘you’, originally designating Paul’s original readers, to mean De La Salle’s own audience.

The teacher’s intermediary role in the relationship and communication between Jesus and the teacher’s students is graphically stated in one of De La Salle’s later writings:

Since you are ‘the ambassadors’ and the ministers<sup>27</sup> ‘of Jesus Christ’ [Amelote 2 Cor 5.20a] in the work that you carry out, you must do it as representing Jesus Christ himself. It is he who wants your disciples *to envisage*<sup>28</sup> *you as himself*, to receive *your instructions ‘as if it were’ he who were giving them to them*’ [cf. 2 Cor 5.20b]...<sup>29</sup>

---

<sup>23</sup> MR 195.3.1.

<sup>24</sup> MD 38.2.1.

<sup>25</sup> MD 42.1.1.

<sup>26</sup> MD 62.2.1. Except for the change of person (‘I implore’ to ‘he implores’) the emphasized words are verbatim from Huré Rom 12.1.

<sup>27</sup> *ministre* carried the same overtone of political service as in current English, as well as a sense of religious service. In adding it, De La Salle seems to be capitalizing on the ambiguity: teachers are envoys with a religious ministry.

<sup>28</sup> The primary meaning of *envisager* as ‘to look someone in the face’ makes this all the more graphic.

<sup>29</sup> MR 195.2.1.

The ‘as if it were’ [*comme si*] in 2 Cor 5.20b refers to ‘God himself exhorting you [the readers] through us [Paul]’: *comme si Dieu mesme vous exhortoit par nous*.<sup>30</sup> De La Salle is boldly actualizing this as ‘Jesus himself exhorting your students through you’.

Miguel Campos’ discussion of this passage is illuminating, especially in regard to the word ‘representing’. He remarks that we should not be thinking here of an ‘extrinsic representation’.<sup>31</sup> ‘What is in question is rather the actuality of the action and word of Jesus Christ here and now, and the text affirms it explicitly.’<sup>32</sup> The latter text that Campos refers to is the continuation of the sentence of the meditation cited above:

... [your disciples] becoming convinced that it is the truth of Jesus Christ who is speaking through your mouth, that it is only in his name that you are teaching them, and that it is he who is giving you authority over them, and that they themselves are the letter which he has dictated to you and that you are writing every day in their hearts, not with ink, but with the Spirit of the living God who is acting in you and through you, by the power of Jesus Christ, who makes you triumph over all the obstacles which stand in way of the salvation of these children, illuminating them in the person of Jesus Christ so as to make them avoid all that could displease him.<sup>33</sup>

This is an extraordinary claim for the teaching profession, particularly when it is remembered that De La Salle’s relatively early recollection (perhaps written in 1693) of those who were recruited to the schools was so negative. In his 1733 biography Blain records De La Salle’s disarmingly honest words, evidently from a manuscript no longer extant. De La Salle is pointing out that several people had tried unsuccessfully beforehand to interest him in the schools.

If indeed I had thought that the care I was taking of the schoolmasters, out of pure charity, would ever have obliged me to reside with them, I would have abandoned it: for since at the natural level<sup>34</sup> I put below my valet those whom I was obliged, especially at the beginning, to employ in the schools, the very thought that it would have been necessary to live with them would have been intolerable.<sup>35</sup>

---

<sup>30</sup> Amelote 2 Cor 5.20b. I recognize that De La Salle used an edition of 1707 or later, but the 1781 edition, for example, is here the same as the 1688, orthography aside.

<sup>31</sup> *représentation extrinsèque*.

<sup>32</sup> Campos, *Itinéraire*, 95.

<sup>33</sup> MR 195.2.1.

<sup>34</sup> *naturellement*.

<sup>35</sup> Blain, *Vie*, 1: 169.



De La Salle's later reflections of the work of teaching, enriched by years of experience and of working with the members of his community of Brothers at precisely *their* social level, were clearly much more profound, and all the more so for being biblically inspired.

#### 4. A WORK CONTINUOUS WITH THAT OF PAUL, AND AS BEGUN BY JESUS AND HIS FIRST DISCIPLES

In the fourth of his *Meditations for the Time of Retreat*, De La Salle draws the teachers' attention to the image of Jesus as the good shepherd of Lk 15.4-5, 'who looks for the lost sheep, puts it on his shoulders and returns it so as to put it back in the flock and, *as you take his place, look upon yourselves as obliged to do the same...*'<sup>36</sup>

In the seventh meditation of the same series, De La Salle first draws a connection between the ministry of St Paul and that of the Brother-teachers. He begins by quoting Paul's own account of his calling (Gal 1.15-16), together with references to his being given 'knowledge of the mysteries of Jesus Christ' (Eph 3.4), of being given the grace of being 'a good architect who laid a foundation' (1 Cor 3.10), someone who was first to proclaim the Gospel in a particular place (2 Cor 10.14). 'That is why,' continues De La Salle, 'he says quite correctly that those to whom he announced the Gospel are his work and that he 'fathered them' (1 Cor 4.14). De La Salle goes on to make the bold statement,

You can say, without comparing yourself to this great saint, that (taking account of the due proportion between your work and his), *you are doing the same thing* and that *you exercise the same ministry in your profession*.

No comparison can be made between the Brothers and Paul himself, nor with the momentousness of his ministry, but theirs is still *the same ministry* as his, and they can equally make the daunting claim that those to whom they announce the Gospel are their work and that they are 'fathering' them in Jesus Christ.<sup>37</sup>

De La Salle takes this to its ultimate in the second part of this meditation. Continuing the theme of the great necessity of providing religious instruction to young people, he

---

<sup>36</sup> MR 196.1.2.

<sup>37</sup> MR 199.1.1.

points out that it was the first thing that St Peter did after the descent of the Holy Spirit, and it was the special work of St Paul. But the trump card is that

Jesus Christ did not content himself with confiding to his Apostles the work of teaching catechism; he also did it himself, and he taught the principal truths of our religion as is reported in a great number of places in his Gospel, where he says to his Apostles: ‘It is necessary that I announce the Gospel of the Kingdom of God, for it is that for which I was sent’ (Lk 2.43).<sup>38</sup>

Then comes the bold assertion:

*Say the same*: that it is for that that Jesus Christ has sent you and for which the Church whose ministers you are employs you. So pay all necessary attention so as to acquit yourself of this responsibility with as much zeal and success as was exercised by the saints.<sup>39</sup>

It is instructive to follow De La Salle’s presentation, in this meditation, of various figures who engaged in the ministry of Christian education, ‘one of the most necessary works in the Church’ as its heading declares.<sup>40</sup>

As we have seen, the first exemplar is St Paul, whose calling and empowering is from God himself, as recalled from Paul’s own works, Gal 1.15 and 1 Cor 3.9-10.<sup>41</sup>

The point is then made that, saving due proportion, the readers’ work is the *same* as Paul’s, entrusted to them ‘by pastors, fathers and mothers’ – by the church,<sup>42</sup> and that knowledge of and instruction in the faith are of critical importance because ‘without faith it is impossible to please God’ and be saved, citing, as it was thought, Paul’s letter to the Hebrews (Heb 11.6). They are urged to pray that God would make them worthy of exercising such a ministry in a manner worth of God.

The second Point of De La Salle’s meditation reminds the readers that the ‘holy bishops of the early church’ regarded religious instruction as their principal duty. He cites the catechisms of Cyril of Jerusalem and Augustine, used by them and by their assisting priests. He observes that the very learned Jerome ‘attests in his letter to

---

<sup>38</sup> MR 199.2.2. With the omission of ‘other towns’, this is the same as the Huré text of Luke.

<sup>39</sup> MR 199.2.2.

<sup>40</sup> CL 13, p. 32.

<sup>41</sup> MR 199.1.1.

<sup>42</sup> MR 199.1, 2.

Laeta that he would do himself a greater honour to give religious instruction [catéchiser] to a young child than to be tutor [précepteur] to a great emperor’.

Jerome’s relatively short letter to Laeta, who had suggested that he take responsibility for the education of her daughter, Paula, is full of biblical references – including 1 Corinthians, Luke, Daniel, Exodus, Matthew, 1 Samuel, 1 Timothy, Jonah, Genesis, Ezekiel, John, Deuteronomy, Psalms, Song of Solomon, Ephesians, and Ecclesiastes. In that respect it was no doubt one of the models for De La Salle’s incorporation of biblical texts within his own writing. That there are also many references to secular history and classical authors corroborates De La Salle’s assertion that Jerome’s learning ‘was profound’.<sup>43</sup> Even the remark to which De La Salle refers and which concludes the letter, has both a biblical and a classical tone:

Do you wonder at the happiness of this holy woman [Hanna, mother of Samuel]? If you send Paula, I myself, an old man, will form her stammering words, [and so be] more glorious than the worldly philosopher [Aristotle]: I will be instructing not the Macedonian king [Alexander] who was to die from Babylonian poison, but the handmaiden and spouse of Christ who is to be offered in the heavenly realms.<sup>44</sup>

Jean de Gerson (1363-1429), Chancellor of the University of Paris, is De La Salle’s next example. Also a great scholar, theologian and a conciliarist during the Western Schism, Gerson is said in his later years to have taught children in Lyons. He was an early proponent of the conviction, shared by De La Salle, that being a true Christian required a genuine *knowledge* of their religion. Joseph Bergin notes that this view was ‘canonised’ by Luther, Calvin and their contemporaries, who insisted on some explicit knowledge of revealed truths.<sup>45</sup> In the present context it is a little ironic that Gerson also proposed a ban on Bible translations.<sup>46</sup>

---

<sup>43</sup> MR 199.2.1; MF 170.1.1.

<sup>44</sup> *Miraris felicitatem sanctae mulieris? Imitare fidem. Ipse, si Paulam miseris, balbutientia senex verba formabo multo gloriosior mundi philosopho, qui non regem Macedonum Babylonio periturum veneno, sed ancillam et sponsam Christi erudiam regnis caelestibus offerendam.* ‘Jerome, Saint, Epistulae. Selections,’ [www.perseus.tufts.edu](http://www.perseus.tufts.edu).

<http://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/text?doc=Perseus%3Atext%3A2008.01.0566%3Aletter%3D107%3Asection%3D13>.

<sup>45</sup> Bergin, *Church*, 277-278.

<sup>46</sup> Diarmud MacCulloch, *A History of Christianity: the First Three Thousand Years* (London: Penguin Books, 2010), 569.

De La Salle then states the reason for ‘these great saints’ having espoused the work of religious education: it was the first line of work [*fonction*] which Jesus assigned to his holy apostles. The importance Jesus’ attached to this commission is that ‘as soon as he had chosen them, he sent them to proclaim the kingdom of God’.<sup>47</sup> De La Salle is rather stretching the point here. In Luke’s account, a good deal has happened between the ‘choosing’ of the apostles in chapter 6 (Lk 6.13) and the ‘sending’ in chapter 9. Perhaps intentionally De La Salle has conflated the ‘chose’ [*choisit*]<sup>48</sup> of Lk 6.13 and the ‘having assembled’ [*ayant assemblé*] of Lk 9.1 in order to underline the importance of the mission, just as in *Duties of a Christian I* he rather telescopes the time between Jesus’ emergence from the desert (Mt 4.12?; Lk 4.13) and the choosing of the apostles (incomplete until at least Mt 9.9 with the call of Matthew; Lk 6.13) in stressing the importance to Jesus of gathering twelve to proclaim his Gospel with him.<sup>49</sup>

The argument continues with the examples of Peter’s preaching (Acts 2) and Paul’s discourses in the Areopagus (Acts 17.22-31) and to Felix (Acts 24.10-21) and Festus (Acts 25.8-11), as well as his concern to be useful to the Corinthians. But its climax comes with the observation that ‘the work of religious instruction<sup>50</sup> was carried out by Jesus himself, as ‘he says to his apostles, “It is necessary that I announce the Gospel of the kingdom of God, for it is for that that I was sent.”’ (Lk 4.43).<sup>51</sup>

Jesus’ being sent to announce the kingdom echoes his own sending of the apostles, above (*envoyer* in both cases). The apostles’ mission is that of Jesus himself. The same verb is used in the next sentence:

Say the same, that it is that for which Jesus Christ has *sent* you, and for which the Church, whose ministers you are, employs you.<sup>52</sup>

The Brother-teachers’ mission is that of Jesus himself: De La Salle is identifying the Brothers’ educational ministry with the proclamation of the kingdom of God.

---

<sup>47</sup> MR 199.2.1. The text is that of Mons/Huré Lk 9.2.

<sup>48</sup> Huré.

<sup>49</sup> DA 104.3. Even in Mark, a Gospel to which De La Salle refers only rarely, the twelve are not chosen until 3.14.

<sup>50</sup> *faire le catéchisme*. The primary meaning of *catéchisme* according to the Dict. 1694 is ‘instruction in the principles of the faith and the Christian religion’.

<sup>51</sup> MR 199.2.2. The text is that of Huré (with the omission of ‘other towns’).

<sup>52</sup> MR 199.2.2.

The point is put in a nutshell in the conclusion of the meditation:

Thank God for the grace he has given<sup>53</sup> you in your work, of participating in the ministry of the holy apostles, and the principal bishops and pastors of the Church, and ‘honour your ministry’,<sup>54</sup> making yourselves – as Saint Paul says – ‘worthy ministers of the New Testament’.<sup>55</sup>

It should be noted that the expression is ‘participating in’ [*participer au*]. It is not a matter of doing something similar, or replicating a previous ministry. It is the *same* ministry. And they are to read themselves into Paul’s text and Paul’s place: to be ‘worthy ministers’. To recall the discussion in Chapter 2 of Ulrich Luz’ employment of the ‘history of influence’ hermeneutic of Hans-Georg Gadamer, this seems consistent with a ‘fusion of horizons’ of the original author (Paul) and the interpreter/reader (De La Salle/his readers).

I propose that the key to understanding De La Salle’s line of thinking is his assertion that

[t]he reason for which these great saints engaged in such work<sup>56</sup> is because it is the first work which Jesus assigned to his holy apostles, of which Saint Luke reports that, as soon as he had chosen them, he sent them to proclaim the kingdom of God. It is also the one he required<sup>57</sup> of them most expressly, immediately before departing from them, by saying ‘Go, teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit [Mt 28.19]’<sup>58</sup>

The fundamental motivation for engaging in religious education is that it was a work to which, according to the Scriptures as De La Salle interprets them, Jesus himself commissioned his apostles, both at the beginning (Lk 9.1-2) and at the end (Mt 28.19) of his time with them, and De La Salle has made clear his conviction that subsequent

---

<sup>53</sup> Literally, ‘has done for you’.

<sup>54</sup> Huré Rom 11.13b: ‘Insofar as I shall be the Apostle of the Gentiles, I shall attempt to do honour [*faire honneur*] to my ministry’.

<sup>55</sup> This is perhaps De La Salle’s own paraphrased translation of the Vulgate, 2 Cor 3.6, where the key adjective he renders as ‘worthy’ [*digne*] is *idoneus* ‘fit, meet, proper, becoming, suitable, apt, capable’, and his *testament* is *testamentum*. Huré translates as ‘capable’ and ‘alliance/covenant’ respectively. Amelote uses *propre* and *alliance*.

<sup>56</sup> *en usaient ainsi*, ‘acted in this way’.

<sup>57</sup> Between the 1694 and 1762 editions of the *Dictionnaire de l’Académie*, there is an evident intensification of meaning for *recommander*, from ‘request’ to ‘order’. The latter seems more appropriate in the context.

<sup>58</sup> MR 199.2.1.

educators, up to and including his own community, stand under that same commission. In his meditation for the feast of Saint Matthew, having exhorted his teaching community not to attach themselves to any ‘but Jesus Christ’, he encourages them very much to ‘value [their] work, which is *apostolic*’.<sup>59</sup> The exaltation of their profession is all the greater for the fact that, as De La Salle points out, Jesus himself engaged in teaching ‘the principle truths of our religion’.<sup>60</sup> Moreover, he goes so far as to suggest that there is a divine dimension to education:

As your profession<sup>61</sup> has the purpose of securing the salvation of souls, the first concern you must have is to secure it to the extent that it is possible for you; and in that you must as it were ‘imitate God’, for he so cherished<sup>62</sup> the souls he created that, seeing them involved in sin and without the capacity of delivering themselves from it, the zeal and affection that he had for their salvation committed him to sending his own Son so as to extricate them from that miserable situation.<sup>63</sup> That is what caused Jesus Christ to say that ‘God loved the world so much that he gave his only Son, so that who ever believes in him will not perish, but will have eternal life’ [Amelote Jn 3.16].<sup>64</sup>

De La Salle is keenly aware not only of being affected by the biblical word, but that he and his Brother-teachers are part of its ongoing story: they are ‘participating in the ministry of the holy apostles, and the principal bishops and pastors of the Church’, as he asserts in the meditation they would have heard each year in the middle of their annual retreat.<sup>65</sup> They are to see themselves as working within a history of influence which has affected them, and in which they are to affect others – in particular, the young people in their care.

---

<sup>59</sup> MR 167.2.2 (emphasis added). *Dictionnaire de l’Académie* (1694/1762) indicates that *apostolique* has a much closer historical connection to the original Apostles than in contemporary usage.

<sup>60</sup> MR 199.2.2.

<sup>61</sup> *emploi*.

<sup>62</sup> Dict. 1694 gives *chérir* as meaning ‘to love tenderly’. The language is suggestive of Amelote Eph 5.1-2: ‘So *imitate God*, as his very dear [*tres-chers*] children, and walk in love, just as Jesus Christ has also loved us, and offered himself to God for us in most pleasantly fragrant sacrifice’.

<sup>63</sup> De La Salle has already used the word *fâcheux* in the second of this set of sixteen meditations (MR 194.1.1), to describe the effects on the children of unemployed parents being unable to care for them, or send them to school during the day. The echo would no doubt be heard in this meditation, heard a few more days into their retreat.

<sup>64</sup> MR 201.3.1.

<sup>65</sup> MR 199, the seventh meditation, to be heard on the fourth morning.

## 5. A SPIRITUAL LINEAGE

The whole historical line of persons – Jesus’ apostles, ‘the holy bishops of the early church’, Church Fathers (Cyril, Augustine, Jerome), and Jean de Gerson as (for De La Salle’s time) a more recent and French representative in the cavalcade of religious educators – traces its commitment to religious education back to Jesus’ commissioning of his disciples both at the beginning (Lk 9.1-2) and end (Mt 28.19) of their time with him. The commissioning is, as it were, anchored in Scripture. The work is not only something Jesus required of his disciples; it was his own mission, which he entrusted to them. And De La Salle’s disciples are urged to read themselves into the same text of Luke, ‘I must announce the gospel of the kingdom of God, for it is for that that I have been sent’, to ‘say the same thing’, to sense that Jesus Christ has sent them, that they are ministers within the church community, and that they ought to emulate the zeal of those who have previously been commissioned to engage in the same work.

That De La Salle is quite conscious of this vital lineage is clear from a passage in his meditation for the feast of St Thomas, apostle.

It is in vain that you believe what Jesus Christ has proposed to you in the holy Gospel, if your actions do not give assurances of it; your faith is in vain.<sup>66</sup> Make it also evident by these actions that you conduct yourselves as the children of those who were instructed in the truths of the faith by the holy Apostles.<sup>67</sup>

A similar sentiment is expressed in the meditation for the feast of St Mark, whom De La Salle assumes to have been a disciple of St Peter, and therefore ‘instructed by such a capable teacher’. He also assumes that Peter was the author of I and II Peter.<sup>68</sup>

You can have the same benefit of being instructed by the same teacher as Saint Mark if you often read the epistles of Saint Peter and if you have the

---

<sup>66</sup> Cf. Jas 2.20. Both Huré and Amelote apostrophize a ‘vain man’ [*ô homme vain*] who needs to know that faith without works is dead.

<sup>67</sup> MF 84.3.2. In the meditation for the feast of St Matthias, Judas’ replacement, De La Salle is at pains to point out that he was nominated on two accounts, the first of which is that he had been with Jesus throughout, ‘so that he was perfectly instructed in the teaching of Jesus Christ’ and able to proclaim it (MF 107.3.1).

<sup>68</sup> See David A. deSilva, *An Introduction to the New Testament: Contexts, Methods and Ministry Formation* (Dowers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2004), 844-847, 876-881 for a discussion of contemporary opinions.

fidelity to put into practice the holy maxims which pervade it, and which are so consoling and instructive.<sup>69</sup>

I draw attention again to De La Salle's characteristic inclusion of putting the Scriptures into practice as being a condition of the benefit to be had from reading them.

The line of historical influence in Meditation 199, above, is only representative (except, of course, in regard to Jesus and his disciples). Elsewhere De La Salle draws his Brothers' attention to many other exemplary people who are presented as having 'instructed' others. these include Francis Xavier (1506-1552),<sup>70</sup> Ignatius of Antioch (c. 35-107),<sup>71</sup> the 'evangelical workers' sent out by Gregory the Great (c. 540-604),<sup>72</sup> Benedict (c. 480-547),<sup>73</sup> the uncle of Germain, bishop of Paris (c. 496-576),<sup>74</sup> Germain himself,<sup>75</sup> Margaret, Queen of Scotland (c. 1053-1093),<sup>76</sup> the grandfather of Basil (c. 330-379),<sup>77</sup> Dominic (c. 1170-1221),<sup>78</sup> Cassian (c. 365-435),<sup>79</sup> Louis IX King of France (1214-1270),<sup>80</sup> Ambrose (c. 339-397),<sup>81</sup> Cyprian (d. 258),<sup>82</sup> Francis (1181-1226),<sup>83</sup> Denis, Bishop of Paris (c. 250),<sup>84</sup>

These persons are among the seventy-nine saints, including twelve women, for whose feast days De La Salle wrote meditations. Of these, 24 are associated with New Testament times. The lives of the others span every century from the first to the sixteenth, except the seventh, eighth and ninth centuries.

---

<sup>69</sup> MF 116.1.2.

<sup>70</sup> MF 79.3.2.

<sup>71</sup> MF 102.2.1.

<sup>72</sup> MF 109.3.1.

<sup>73</sup> MF 111.3.1.

<sup>74</sup> MF 131.1.1.

<sup>75</sup> MF 131.3.1.

<sup>76</sup> MF 133.1.1

<sup>77</sup> MF 136.1.1.

<sup>78</sup> MF 150.2.1.

<sup>79</sup> MF 155.1.1.

<sup>80</sup> MF 160.3.1.

<sup>81</sup> MF 161.1.1.

<sup>82</sup> MF 166.2.1.

<sup>83</sup> MF 173.1.1.

<sup>84</sup> MF 175.2.1.



It is indicative of the relationship between the exemplary lives of these 79 saints and the Bible that the word ‘gospel’ appears in 36 of the meditations concerning them. In terms of gospel *references*, however, Alan Houry has identified 222 in the full set of *Meditations for Feasts*. Of these, 82 are from Matthew, 71 from Luke, 14 from Mark, and 55 from John.<sup>85</sup>

*Meditations for Feasts* includes 98 references to St Paul as a person, and Houry has identified some 183 quotations from the Pauline corpus as it was envisaged by De La Salle,

## CONCLUSION

I conclude that in his references to biblical texts De La Salle creates a sense of dialogue between Jesus, and New Testament and later authors, on the one hand, and himself and his Brother-teachers on the other. As well as assuring his teachers that not only do they continue the honourable work of education in continuity with a centuries-long heritage that was initiated in the earthly, divinely-ordained ministry of Jesus, but that Jesus remains effectively present in the educative relationships they have with their students. Out of that conviction he invites his Brothers, and through them, their students, into that continuing, challenging dialogue between life and Gospel which elevates their profession to that of a participation in Jesus’ own ministry – in God’s own work of salvation.

I submit that De La Salle’s consciousness of a ministry initiated by the historical Jesus and continued over the centuries as an ongoing response to the Gospel is, again, consistent with the ‘history of effects’ approach to biblical interpretation discussed in Chapter 2.

In the next chapter I shall outline my reasons for selecting a particular section of the Gospel of Matthew (Mt 4.23-10.8) and discuss some of the themes foreshadowed in Mt 4.23-25 as reflected in Jesus’ words and deeds (Mt 5-7, and 8-9, respectively), particularly as they relate to the concerns of John Baptist de La Salle. It is from this section of the Gospel of Matthew in particular that I shall further illustrate the

---

<sup>85</sup> Houry, *Écrits*.

characteristics of De La Salle's approach to biblical interpretation which are consistent with a *Wirkungsgeschichte* hermeneutic.

## CHAPTER 4: THE TEXTUAL FOCUS – MATTHEW 4.23-10.8

### INTRODUCTION

In the Introduction to the thesis I indicated my general interest in the Gospel of Matthew as relating to his overarching theme of the presence of God in Jesus, which accords with a fundamental Lasallian consciousness of the presence of God. I also suggested that the chosen section of Matthew, 4-23-10.8 has the potential to affirm the work of contemporary educators. From both perspectives, that section is therefore at least an *appropriate* sample of a gospel text for the purpose of demonstrating the thesis.

From De La Salle's point of view, the section could be regarded as a useful but *random* sample. I shall show that his reflections on individual passages within the section are consistent with key aspects of a 'history of influence' hermeneutic. They reflect the influence of Church Fathers and other historical persons; they encourage an active response to hearing and reflecting on God's word; they reflect De La Salle's inclination to actualize biblical passages as relevant for his historical followers. But, understandably in his time, he shows no indication of seeing any *structural* significance in this section of Matthew's Gospel.

However, from the point of view of modern exegesis Mt 4.23-10.8 is no random sample. When conjoined with De La Salle's insight that the ministry of his Brother-teachers (and therefore of his contemporary followers) is in empowered continuity with the ministry of Jesus himself, it is the whole section that may be actualized. As I shall discuss below, Mt 4.23-10.8 represents Matthew's presentation of Jesus as proclaiming the kingdom of God in word and deed, and of Jesus commissioning his disciples to continue that ministry. What De La Salle sees as individual mosaics, in his actualization of particular passages, can be seen as a unified and inspiring depiction of an educational ministry when viewed through the twin lenses of contemporary scholarship and his own profound understanding of the teacher's mission.

What I wish to consider in this chapter, therefore, is the content and structure of Mt 4.23-10.8 as a series of texts on which De La Salle has written reflections consistent

with a ‘history of influence’ approach to interpretation. In the concluding Chapter I also wish to see this section as a unit on which his twenty-first century followers might continue that approach even more fruitfully. Hence, as well as outlining the scope of this section of Matthew, I want to indicate something of the ways in which De La Salle’s insights into its content might be broadened by a more expansive actualization of Matthew’s own evident purpose in writing it in the way he did, for his own audience.

In discussing this section of the Gospel of Matthew, 4.23-10.8, I shall consider its structure, the function of Mt 4.23-25 as the first bracket of a significant *inclusion* within the section, and four interrelated themes: teaching, healing, presence and salvation. I see these themes as directly related to Matthew’s understanding of kingdom, and also as key themes in the continued actualization of this gospel unit.

### **1. THE STRUCTURE OF MT 4.23-10.8**

Ulrich Luz has revealed the hazards of attempting to perceive particular structures in Matthew’s Gospel, the history of research in that area offering ‘a rather chaotic picture’.<sup>1</sup> His survey of Matthew’s own observable structuring methods leads him to conclude that the Gospel is ‘above all formed intensively in smaller units’, that its *Sitz im Leben* is the reading and especially the hearing of the text as it is read aloud and repeatedly in longer sections, and that it shares many compositional devices with Old Testament and rabbinic literature.<sup>2</sup>

Luz remarks that determining an *overall* structure is more difficult,<sup>3</sup> and that even looking for a ‘plot’ may be an anachronism, given the probability that few of those for whom it was intended would have been able to read it as a whole, and the likelihood that it would not have been read to them in a single sitting.<sup>4</sup> Nonetheless, in employing the word ‘auditors’ for those who first engaged the gospel narratives, Michael Trainor stresses that their ability ‘to attend closely to a gospel proclamation

---

<sup>1</sup> Luz, *Matthew 1-7*, 3.

<sup>2</sup> Luz, *Matthew 1-7*, 8-9.

<sup>3</sup> Luz, *Matthew 1-7*, 9.

<sup>4</sup> Luz, *Matthew 1-7*, 12.

or performance, memorise it and integrate its meaning for living’ attests to a ‘literacy’ quite different from that defined by our own western criteria.<sup>5</sup>

The section of Matthew on which I have chosen to focus, Mt 4.23-10.8, falls within chapters 1-11, before the Gospel begins to follow the sequence of Mark 2.23-4.34; 6.1-16.8. On the question of the structure of Mt 1-11, Luz makes the following comment very relevant to my choice:

The observation that 4.23 and 9.35 surround the Sermon on the Mount and the two miracle chapters 8 and 9 like a ring is decisive. To this inclusion corresponds an inner ring-shaped composition. Thus there is a unity in the portrayal of the Messiah of word (chaps. 5-7) and deed (chaps. 8-9). The sending discourse of chap. 10, where the disciples take over Jesus’ healing activity and Jesus’ preaching mission also belongs here.<sup>6</sup>

Luz notes Matthew’s liking for *inclusions*, one of which is ‘impressive’ in that it spans the whole Gospel. The naming of Jesus as ‘Emmanuel ... God with us’ (Mt 1.23) is recalled in the final verse of the Gospel in his promise of being ‘with you always, to the end of the age’ (Mt 28.20).<sup>7</sup>

Mt 4.23-10.8 therefore encompasses the *inclusion* (Mt 4.23-25 with 9.35) surrounding the Sermon on the Mount (chapters 5-7) – Jesus’ *words*, and the two chapters (8-9) which relate his *deeds*, as well as the opening verses of chapter 10, in which this words-and-deeds mission is handed over to the disciples.

The following table indicates the section of the Gospel chosen for consideration, according to Luz’ structuring of his commentary. It can be seen that my focus is on the first part (Mt 4.23-10.8) of the second major section of the Gospel (4.23-11.30).

<b>MATTHEW 1.1; 1.2-4.22</b>	<b>MATTHEW 4.23-11.30</b> (Sections A-C. Section D includes 11.2-30)
<i>Heading (1.1)   Prelude (1.2-4.22)</i>	<i>Jesus’ activity in Israel in word and deed</i>
A. Infancy narratives (1.2-2.23) B. Beginning of Jesus’ activity (3.1-4.22)	Introductory Overview (4.23) A. Sermon on the Mount (5.1-7.29)

<sup>5</sup> Trainor, *The Body of Jesus*, 50.

<sup>6</sup> Luz, *Matthew 1-7*, 10.

<sup>7</sup> Luz, *Matthew 1-7*, 7.

	B. Jesus Miracles in Israel (8.1-9.35) Concluding Summary Report (9.35) C. The Disciples Discourse (9.36-11.1) The People's Suffering (9.36-38) The Commissioned (10.1-5a) The Mission (10.5b-15) Persecution of the Disciples (10.16-23) As the Master, so the Disciples (10.24-25) Proclamation without Fear (10.26-33) Division of families and Cross (10.34-39) Hospitality for the Disciples (10.40-42) Conclusion of the Disciples Discourse (11.1)
--	--

**2. MT 4.23-25 AS ENCAPSULATING THE MINISTRY OF JESUS-EMMANUEL**

4<sup>23</sup> Jesus went throughout Galilee, teaching in their synagogues and proclaiming the good news of the kingdom and curing every disease and every sickness among the people.<sup>24</sup> So his fame spread throughout all Syria, and they brought to him all the sick, those who were afflicted with various diseases and pains, demoniacs, epileptics, and paralytics, and he cured them.<sup>25</sup> And great crowds followed him from Galilee, the Decapolis, Jerusalem, Judea, and from beyond the Jordan.

The major theme in this pericope is Jesus' proclamation of the 'good news of the kingdom', with the associated activities 'teaching' and 'healing' whose import Matthew will develop in chapters 5-7 and 8-9 respectively. I shall endeavour below to show that 'kingdom', 'teaching', 'healing', 'presence', and 'salvation' are interrelated themes in the Gospel of Matthew. In the concluding Chapter I shall also suggest that they are fundamental to a contemporary appreciation of the Lasallian ministry of education, particularly when De La Salle's understanding of 'kingdom' and 'salvation' is complemented by the more holistic perspective of modern exegesis and theological reflection. While De La Salle interprets and actualizes these themes from his own perspective, later scholarship enables us to enrich his perceptions of their significance.

**3. INTERRELATED THEMES: KINGDOM, TEACHING, HEALING, PRESENCE, SALVATION**

In this section I shall demonstrate that Matthew's concept of the kingdom is best understood when its interrelationship with other key Matthean concepts is recognized: 'teaching', 'healing', 'presence', and 'salvation'.

### **Kingdom, teaching and healing in the Gospel of Matthew**

'Kingdom' (βασιλεία) is a key term in the Gospel of Matthew, most often appearing as 'the kingdom/reign of the heavens' (ἡ βασιλεία τῶν οὐρανῶν). In his excursus on the kingdom of heaven in Matthew, Eugene Boring observes that it is Matthew's most encompassing theological image, uniting the messages of the Baptist (3.2), Jesus (4.17) and the disciples whom Jesus, within the section I wish to consider, instructs to 'go, proclaim the good news, "The kingdom of heaven has come near"' (10.7).<sup>8</sup>

In Mt 4.17 Jesus is depicted as proclaiming that 'the kingdom of heaven has come near'. In Mt 4.23 Matthew presents this proclamation as his central message, and that the kingdom is 'good news'. As Margaret Hannan comments, it is the good news of God's sovereign power being manifested in Jesus' mission of teaching and healing.<sup>9</sup>

Matthew informs his audience that the *proclamation* of the kingdom as good news is being effected by two complementary means: teaching and healing, word and deed. Both are necessary – the deeds are a palpable demonstration of the coming of God's reign, while the words affirm that what Jesus is doing is indeed the work of God.

Donald Senior's comments are pertinent. Of the overall section of Matthew, 4.12-10.42, within which my focus lies, he remarks that it contains 'the heart of Matthew's portrayal of Jesus and his vision of the community's mission'.<sup>10</sup>

In his commentary on Matthew, Senior discusses the relationship among the Evangelist's terms 'teaching', 'proclaiming', and 'healing'. Of 'proclaiming' and 'teaching' he suggests that it is difficult to know whether Matthew intended a distinction, though the former seems to indicate the initial announcement, while

---

<sup>8</sup> M. Eugene Boring, 'The Gospel of Matthew: Introduction, Commentary and Reflections', in *The New Interpreter's Bible* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1995), 8: 289.

<sup>9</sup> Margaret Hannan, *The Nature and Demands of the Sovereign Rule of God in the Gospel of Matthew* (London: T&T Clark International, 2006), 43.

<sup>10</sup> Donald Senior, *The Gospel of Matthew* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1997), 97.

‘teaching’ connotes explanation. Senior’s statement of the fundamental interrelationship between teaching, healing and the proclamation of the good news is incisive. As a phrase, ‘the good news of the kingdom’, unique to Matthew, ‘captures the full scope of Jesus’ message’ as one which ‘both announces and embodies’ the reality of God’s reign in word and in action.<sup>11</sup> ‘Proclaim’, in this view, subsumes both ‘teach’ and ‘heal’.

I have attempted in Chapter 1 to show that, for De La Salle, an important aspect of biblical interpretation is the *practice* of the word, which was also discussed in Chapter 2 as a dimension of ‘holistic interpretation’ in a ‘history of influence’ approach. Senior identifies practice as a key dimension of Matthew’s message, even when he is dealing primarily with ‘teaching’. In terms of the scope of this thesis, he also links Mt 4.23-25 with the apostles’ commission in Mt 10.1-8. In 4.23-25, as well as mention of Jesus’ preaching and teaching, there is a ‘strong emphasis’ on his healing ministry, to be described in more detail in Matthew chapters 8-9. The same emphasis on healing is echoed in the mission instruction to the Twelve to cast out unclean spirits and to cure the sick (Mt 10.1, 8).<sup>12</sup>

### **Kingdom and presence**

The motif of God’s presence in the Gospel of Matthew has been closely examined by David Kupp against the background of the many direct and indirect assurances in the Hebrew Scriptures and, not always identically, the Septuagint, that God is present to people in being ‘with’ them. His opening paragraph would have appealed to De La Salle, given his concern that his teachers and their students be continually reminded of the presence of God, as will be discussed later in this chapter.

On a personal level, true religion can be defined as *the encounter between oneself and one’s God*, and on the corporate level as *one’s community practising the presence of God*. This study is concerned with the understanding of God’s presence with his people which appears in the Gospel of Matthew.<sup>13</sup>

---

<sup>11</sup> Donald Senior, *Matthew* (Abingdon New Testament Commentaries; Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1998), 65.

<sup>12</sup> Senior, *Gospel*, 101.

<sup>13</sup> David D. Kupp, *Matthew’s Emmanuel: Divine presence and God’s people in the First Gospel* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 1.



Kupp remarks that Matthew ‘was one of Christianity’s earliest and most distinctive students of divine presence’:

Matthew exhibits a deliberate interest in this question, particularly as captured by the evangelist’s unique Christological use of Isaiah’s Emmanuel prophecy and pointed emphasis on the special character of the presence of Jesus. Jesus comes as the Emmanuel Messiah. – ‘God with us’ (1.23); his presence is the focus of his people’s gatherings (18.20); he dies, reappears and commissions them to a powerful, authoritative mission undergirded by his presence (28.16ff.). He never leaves, but in fact promises to stay with his followers ‘to the end of the age’ (28.20). He breathes no spirit on them, does not ascend and promises no παράκλητος [*paraklētos*].<sup>14</sup>

Presence ‘with’ people has different overtones from the quality of presence nuanced in other ways, such as presence ‘over’ or ‘before’ or ‘behind’ or ‘in’ them. ‘With’ bespeaks accompaniment and solidarity. It is incarnational, in that it calls to mind a God who has chosen to identify with humanity, to journey with people. ‘With’ is a particularly appropriate term for ‘Brothers’ who have chosen that name as evidence of a certain quality of relationship with their colleagues and their students.

In relation to the section of Matthew’s Gospel under consideration, this means that Matthew’s audience are encouraged to understand God being present ‘with’ them in Jesus as he proclaims the ‘good news’ of a God whose coming reign is already bringing them healing and wholeness.

A close connection can be seen between ‘presence’ and ‘kingdom’ in the Gospel of Matthew.

Warren Carter closely associates divine presence with kingdom, or as Carter is inclined to name it, ‘empire’, in contrasting it with the political dominance of Rome, under which Jesus lived and was killed, and the Gospel was later written.<sup>15</sup> With regard to Mt 3.2, the first occurrence of Βασιλεία in the Baptist’s call to repentance, Carter comments that in the context of chapters 1-2, ‘the imminent empire of the heavens relates to the revelation of God’s saving presence, which God commissions Jesus to carry out (1.21, 23).’<sup>16</sup>

---

<sup>14</sup> Kupp, *Matthew’s Emmanuel*, 3.

<sup>15</sup> Warren Carter, *Matthew and the Margins: A Sociopolitical and Religious Reading* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2000), 571-2, n. 8.

<sup>16</sup> Carter, *Margins*, 93.

The close association of ‘kingdom’ and ‘presence’ becomes more explicit in Carter’s comment on the relationship between Jesus’ divine commission to save from sins (1.21) and to manifest God’s presence (1.23), on the one hand, and ‘God’s empire/reign’ on the other. Carter maintains that Jesus’ announcement of the empire refers to this commission: ‘the empire of the heavens is God’s saving presence’, and is displayed in the ministry of Jesus ‘with continuing but not yet completed impact’.<sup>17</sup>

Similarly, with respect to Mt 4.23, Carter writes of the ‘transforming impact of God’s empire’ in the teaching and healing work of Jesus, in which he ‘makes known God’s empire (3.2; 4/17) or *saving presence*’.<sup>18</sup>

Carter makes the same identification in his commentary on the second petition of the Lord’s Prayer, ‘Your kingdom come’ (Mt 6.10). Looking back to Mt 4.17-25 which includes the pericope now under consideration, and to Mt 5.43-48, Carter comments that they have established God’s empire as life-giving, and that the petition is motivated by a widespread refusal to recognize God’s sovereignty. With regard to presence, Carter continues: ‘God’s empire or *saving presence* (1.21, 23) is now being demonstrated in the merciful and transformative ministry of Jesus especially among the poor and desperate... and is continued through disciples (see 5.3-16)’.<sup>19</sup>

It could be said, then, to co-opt an English idiom, that the reign of God may be expressed as ‘God making God’s presence felt’ in Jesus’ ministry of teaching and healing, which he commissions his disciples to continue. In Chapter 3 I discussed De La Salle’s firm conviction that his Brother-teachers *were* those disciples in their seventeenth-eighteenth century French schools.

### **Presence and salvation**

The twofold naming of Jesus in Mt 1.21-25 links the themes of presence and salvation. Joseph is to name the child ‘Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins’, and he obeys the divine injunction in 1.25 that “they shall name him Emmanuel” which means, “God is with us” (1.23): Jesus is the presence of God to save. As Warren

---

<sup>17</sup> Carter, *Margins*, 119-120.

<sup>18</sup> Carter, *Margins*, 123, emphasis added.

<sup>19</sup> Carter, *Margins*, 165, emphasis added.

Carter comments in regard to Mt 1.21, the Gospel's audience will recall the initial explanation of Jesus' name, and will evaluate his actions and words in relation to it.<sup>20</sup>

Kupp also emphasizes the connection made between presence and salvation, observing that the twofold naming of Jesus constitutes the narrator's programmatic statements about Jesus, asserting 'nothing less than that divine salvation and presence are the focal point and *raison d'être*' for Jesus' existence.<sup>21</sup>

Davies and Allison similarly connect presence, salvation, and (among other themes) healing in commenting on Mt 1.21, while also suggesting that Matthew may have envisaged a variety of ways in which Jesus would save people from their sins, which he demonstrates in the ensuing narrative.<sup>22</sup>

### **Salvation and healing**

The observation by Davies and Allison on the variety of ways in which Matthew may have envisaged Jesus' saving work reflects the variety of ways in which the verb 'to save' (σώζειν) is used in Matthew's gospel: to indicate salvation from sins (1.21), from drowning (at least on a *prima facie* reading of 8.25 and 14.30), from haemorrhage (9.21-22), from eschatological perishing (10.22; 16.25; 9.25; 24.13, 22), and in the case of Jesus, from the cross, while recalling the 'saving' of others during his ministry (27.40, 42, 49).

Carter's comment on the significance of σώζειν in Mt 9.21-22, the healing of the woman with a haemorrhage, helpfully links the existential and eschatological senses of the word in terms of the reign of God. In detailing Jesus' manifestation of God's power to save her from her sickness, Matthew's use of the perfect tense (σέσωκεν), Carter notes, 'indicates continuing consequences of wholeness and a different way of life'. The importance of 'saved/made well' is underlined by its threefold repetition within two verses (21-22), and the woman's healing 'anticipates the wholeness which

---

<sup>20</sup> Carter, *Margins*, 69.

<sup>21</sup> Kupp, *Matthew's Emmanuel*, 56-57.

<sup>22</sup> William David Davies and Dale C. Allison, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Gospel according to Saint Matthew* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1988), 1: 210.

will mark the future fullness of God's empire'.<sup>23</sup> Carter refers to 2 Bar 73.1-2, of which v. 2 prophesies that 'health will descend in dew, and illness will vanish'.<sup>24</sup>

Luz makes a similar point in regard to the summary of Jesus' ministry in Mt 4.23-25, commenting that because Matthew is primarily concerned with Jesus' *teaching*, the Evangelist puts chapters 5-7, the Sermon on the Mount, before chapters 8-9. But Jesus the teacher is also the Jesus who accompanies people, including the church, with his helping (healing) power. Verses 23-24, says Luz, 'speak of a dimension of the "indicative" of salvation that is so often missed in Matthew'.<sup>25</sup>

There is thus a close relationship between the 'indicative' of healing and wholeness in this life, as conferred on individuals during Jesus time-bound ministry of announcing the beginning of God's reign, and the transformation to be expected at its consummation.

In regard to the 'indicative', Denis Edwards reflects most helpfully on the stories of Jesus' healings as an essential dimension of Jesus' proclamation of the kingdom:

These stories of healing and exorcisms function as gospel, revealing God's will to save enfleshed in Jesus' compassionate words and deeds. The miracles express the healing and the *shalom* associated with the coming of God's reign. The healings are both a sign that God's reign is already present in Jesus' ministry and a promise of its fullness. They liberate the afflicted, not only from a medical condition (disease) but also from a situation of alienation (illness). In these actions, salvation from God is revealed as far more than a religious matter in the narrow sense. It embraces the body, health, sanity, relationships, community, and wholeness.<sup>26</sup>

Jesus' historical healings, Edwards observes, which anticipated the fullness of salvation yet to come, were in themselves limited and finite.

Reflection on this suggests that our own practices of healing and liberation, incomplete and limited as they are, may be seen as a participation in and an anticipation of God's coming reign.<sup>27</sup>

---

<sup>23</sup> Carter, *Matthew and Margins*, 226

<sup>24</sup> *The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha*, ed. James H. Charlesworth (London: Darton, Longman and Todd, 1983), I: 645.

<sup>25</sup> Luz, *Matthew 1-7*, 166.

<sup>26</sup> Denis Edwards, *How God Acts: Creation, Redemption, and Special Divine Action* (Hindmarsh, South Australia: ATF Press, 2010), 18-19.

<sup>27</sup> Edwards, *How God Acts*, 19-20.

#### 4. DE LA SALLE'S UNDERSTANDING OF 'KINGDOM' AND RELATED CONCEPTS

##### Kingdom

De La Salle uses *régner/règne* ('reign' as verb and noun respectively) 81 times, and *royaume* ('kingdom') 71 times, each of them in many of the same 11 works.

It is notable that he refers a number of times to Lk 17.21.<sup>28</sup> In the NRSV, following v. 20 in which Jesus remarks that 'the kingdom of God is not coming with things that can be observed', v. 21 is translated 'nor will they say, "Look, here it is!" or "There it is!" For, in fact, the kingdom of God is *among* you.'

De La Salle, however, following the translation of Amelote, takes the verse as meaning 'for know that the kingdom of God is *within* you [*au dedans de vous*]', a reading which John Nolland describes as representing 'the view with the longest pedigree' and conforming to the most common meaning of ἐντός.<sup>29</sup> It is the sense reflected in the Vulgate's *Ecce enim regnum Dei intra vos est*, which was quoted verbatim in, for example, the 15<sup>th</sup> century *Imitatio Christi*,<sup>30</sup> a work to which De La Salle makes several references,<sup>31</sup> including that in his meditation on Jerome's dedication to the study of the Bible (MF 170.2.2).

However, as Nolland comments, the more modern reading is that of the NRSV, taking account of the word's more likely meaning in its context.<sup>32</sup> It is interesting from the point of view of 18<sup>th</sup> century scholarship that this is also the reading of Huré (*au milieu de vous*, 'in the midst of you'), whereas the Mons translation is the same as Amelote. In Luke Timothy Johnson's terms, the 'within' reading suggests that the rule of God is 'a spiritual awareness' rather than, as Nolland puts it, 'the kingdom of God as present in the person and ministry of Jesus'.

---

<sup>28</sup> E.g. DA 403.1.1; EM 2.51; MD 22.1.1-2; R 7.0.6.

<sup>29</sup> John Nolland, *Luke 9.21-18.34* (WBC 35b; Dallas: Word Books, 1993), 853.

<sup>30</sup> Thomas à Kempis, *Imitatio Christi*, Book 2, chapter 1, paragraph 1. See 'Thomas à Kempis *De Imitatione Christi* Liber Secundus,' [thelatinlibrary.com](http://www.thelatinlibrary.com/kempis/kempis2.shtml).  
<http://www.thelatinlibrary.com/kempis/kempis2.shtml>.

<sup>31</sup> *Vocabulaire lasallien* lists twenty-three references, in seven different works.

<sup>32</sup> Cf. Luke Timothy Johnson, *The Gospel of Luke* (Sacra Pagina 3; Collegeville, MN: 1991), 263.

Without homogenizing De La Salle's varied use of the concept of the kingdom/reign of God, it can be said that his understanding of it is largely 'spiritual'. Two examples will have to suffice here, meditations in which there is a significant reflection on 'kingdom'. Meditation 22 is a reflection on Jesus 'the king' riding towards Jerusalem on the donkey and the colt (Mt 21.1-9), and the 'kingdom' aspect is that Jesus wishes 'to establish his reign in souls'.<sup>33</sup> Meditation 67 is a reflection on Mt 6.24-33, especially v. 33, 'strive first for the kingdom of God'. The exhortation is that 'you should seek only to establish in your soul this reign of God both for this life and for the other'.<sup>34</sup> However salutary these injunctions may be, they stem from an interpretation of the kingdom of God as being an essentially interior reality, consistent with a 'within' reading of Lk 17.21.

Hence, De La Salle's understanding of the Kingdom of God/heaven,<sup>35</sup> that dynamic metaphor for a reality regarding which John Meier says that, for Matthew, its coming is a 'process event'<sup>36</sup> is one area of his thought where contemporary exegesis and theology may enrich, correct, or at least complement this aspect of his rich spirituality for educators.

### **The Presence of God**

As remarked above, awareness of the presence of God is a fundamental dimension of De La Salle's spirituality, and one which continues to be a practical reality in the Lasallian world today. It was characteristic of the French, or Bérullian, school of spirituality, of which De La Salle has been described as a significant heir.<sup>37</sup> As Yves Krumenacker remarks, De La Salle may well have met the Carmelite champion of the presence of God, Brother Lawrence of the Resurrection, a former soldier turned monastic sandal-maker and cellarmaster, in the convent on the rue de Vaugirard in

---

<sup>33</sup> MD 22.1.1, where Lk 17.21 is cited.

<sup>34</sup> MD 67.1.1.

<sup>35</sup> The equivalence of 'Kingdom of God' and 'Kingdom of heaven' has been disputed. See e.g. Davies and Allison, *Matthew*, I: 390-391; these authors are not persuaded that a distinction is valid.

<sup>36</sup> John P. Meier, *Matthew* (Dublin: Veritas Publications, 1980), 23.

<sup>37</sup> Raymond Deville, *L'École française de spiritualité* (Paris: Desclée de Brouwer, 2008), 191. Cardinal Pierre de Bérulle (1575-1629) is regarded as the founder of the French 'school' of spirituality.

Paris.<sup>38</sup> Among Lawrence's sayings is that 'the holiest, most ordinary, and most necessary practice of the spiritual life is that of the presence of God'.<sup>39</sup>

The importance of the practice is established early in the *Rule* of 1718:

They will pay as much attention as possible to the holy presence of God, and will have care to renew it from time to time, being quite convinced that they must think only of him and of what he commands, that is to say, of what concerns their duty and their work.<sup>40</sup>

It is reaffirmed later in the same work as one of the four 'interior supports' of the Institute: 'interior prayer, the presence of God, the spirit of faith, interior recollection'.<sup>41</sup>

The Brothers are frequently reminded of its importance, for example in this meditation which, appropriately in this context, has as its theme the seeking of kingdom of God (Mt 6.33). Having encouraged them not to concentrate on anything other than to have God 'reign in your heart by grace and by the fullness of his love', he advises them:

It is essential that you nourish yourself on him, by occupying yourself as much as possible with his holy presence. What made the life of saints was their constant attention to God; that must also be [the life] of souls consecrated to God and who seek only to do his holy will, to love him and to make him loved by others. That is what should be your whole preoccupation on earth; it is what must give purpose to all your work.<sup>42</sup>

In his *Explanation of the Method of Interior Prayer*, De La Salle treats extensively of the various ways of placing oneself in the presence of God as the precondition for interior prayer: 'in the place where one is, in oneself, and in the church'.<sup>43</sup> As noted previously, he affirms that the person praying must first become 'interiorly imbued

---

<sup>38</sup> Krumenacker, *L'école française*, 528.

<sup>39</sup> Brother Lawrence of the Resurrection, *Writings and Conversations on the Practice of the Presence of God*, critical edition, ed. Conrad de Meester (Washington: ICS Publications, 1994), 36.

<sup>40</sup> RC 2.7.

<sup>41</sup> RC 16.8.

<sup>42</sup> MD 67.1.1.

<sup>43</sup> EM 2.14-15.

with the presence of God, which must always be done through a sentiment of faith based on a passage taken from holy Scripture'.<sup>44</sup>

De La Salle, and those who collaborated over a long period of time in the writing of the *Conduct of the Christian Schools*, were equally concerned to cultivate that awareness in their students, who from the beginning of the school day were to be 'inspired to enter their classrooms with a profound respect in view of the presence of God'.<sup>45</sup> Moreover, throughout the day,

at each hour of the day, some short prayers will be said that will serve, for the teacher[s], to renew their awareness of themselves and of the presence of God, and, for the students, to accustom them to think of God from time to time during the day, and to dispose them to offer [God] all their actions, so as to draw down [God's] blessing on [their actions].<sup>46</sup>

The conviction that God is present to teacher and students in the classroom is given particular gravity in the light of De La Salle's reminder to his Brother-teachers, noted in Chapter 2, above. They are to carry out their work 'as representing Jesus Christ himself'. This has all the more significance in view of Miguel Campos' assertion that 'represent' here refers to 'the actuality of the action and word of Jesus Christ here and now'.<sup>47</sup> From that perspective, the teacher is invited to see herself as the agent of the saving and transforming presence of God. It is an exalted, biblical view of the teaching profession.

The same is true even in so practical a work as *the Rules of Christian Decorum and Civility*, an advanced students' reader which was also a manual of early 18<sup>th</sup> century French etiquette (and thus a considerable help in gaining employment in a very stratified society). The emphasis in regard to the complex rules of politeness is on complying with them in an awareness of God's presence. In De La Salle's introduction to this work, he writes, from a characteristically biblical standpoint:

In presenting [children] with the rules of decorum, they [parents and teachers] should never forget to teach them that they should practise these rules only for purely Christian motives, those that look to the glory of God and to salvation. Far from telling the children under their guidance that if they do not do a

---

<sup>44</sup> EM 2.14.

<sup>45</sup> CE 1.1.9.

<sup>46</sup> CE 7.1.4.

<sup>47</sup> Campos, *Itinéraire*, 95.



certain thing they will be blamed, that they will not be respected, that they will be held up to ridicule – all of which are ways which simply inspire them with the spirit of the world and distance them from that of the Gospel – rather, when they want to train them in practices which concern bodily care and simple modesty, they should be careful to motivate them with the presence of God, as St Paul did when counselling the faithful of his time that their modesty should be evident to everyone because the Lord was near to them [cf. Phil 4.5], that is, out of respect for the presence of God...<sup>48</sup>

For all his concern that the young people in the schools find employment, and therefore that they can conduct themselves in accordance with the social graces expected by their potential employers, De La Salle insists that their basic motivation be God-focused.

### **Salvation**

Salvation is another conspicuous theme in the writings of De La Salle. The *Rule* of 1718, for example, connects salvation, schooling, and the Gospel:

To enter into this spirit [i.e. ‘faith and zeal’, the ‘spirit of the Institute’], the Brothers of the Society will exert themselves by prayer, by their [religious] instruction and by their vigilance and their good conduct in the school to secure the salvation of the children who are confided to them, bringing them up in piety and in a true Christian spirit, that is to say, according to the rules and maxims of the Gospel.<sup>49</sup>

The connection between salvation and religious instruction, characteristic of the time,<sup>50</sup> is explicit in *Duties I*:

If one does not believe distinctly and clearly all these mysteries [i.e. one God in three Persons; the incarnation and salvific death of Jesus; heaven and hell], one cannot be saved, because the truths that they contain are the first principles and foundations of our religion.<sup>51</sup>

The *Conduct of the Christian School* reflects both a realism regarding the indifference of the poor towards religion and ‘salvation’, and at least an association between the

---

<sup>48</sup> RB 0.0.5-6.

<sup>49</sup> RC 2.10.

<sup>50</sup> Bergin, *Church*, 277, writes of the ‘conviction that to be a true Christian required individuals to have a knowledge of their religion’ and the Reformers’ insistence on the requirement of ‘some explicit knowledge of revealed truths’, rather than merely implicit faith.

<sup>51</sup> DA 101.1.5.

harm done to children by a lack of education generally and that resulting from a lack of religious instruction.

The means of remedying the negligence of parents, especially of the poor, will be to speak to the parents and to make them understand the obligation they are under to have their children instructed, and the wrong they do them in not having them learn to read and write; how much that can impair them; that they will almost never be capable of anything for any job, without knowing how to read and write, and one must try to make them understand the harm that can be done to their children by a lack of instruction in the matters of their salvation, with which the poor are normally little concerned, not having any religion themselves.<sup>52</sup>

It is in the *Meditations for the Time of Retreat*, composed late in De La Salle's life, that he shows his profound concern for the 'salvation' of both teacher and students. The noun [*salut*] is used 48 times in the sixteen meditations; the verb [*sauver*] a further sixteen times. The opening sentence of the first meditation sets the tone in a typically biblical way, quoting 1 Tim 2.4.

1 Tim 2.3-4 reads 'This [the making of intercessions] is right and is acceptable in the sight of God our Saviour, who desires everyone to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth'. De La Salle's meditation begins:

God is so good that, having created people, 'he wishes that they all come to the knowledge of the truth'. This truth is God himself and what he has very much wished to reveal to us, whether through Jesus Christ, or through his holy Apostles, or through his Church. That is why God wants all people to be instructed so that their minds may be illuminated by the lights of faith, and since no one can be instructed in the mysteries of our holy religion unless he has had the good fortune of hearing them...<sup>53</sup>

It can be seen that this quotation from 1 Tim 2.4 goes straight to the second part of the verse, relating to 'knowledge'. De La Salle cites the first part, 'to be saved', at the beginning of the third Point of the same meditation, reversing the author's order so as to stress, for teachers, the importance of 'instruction'.

Not only does God 'wish that all people come to the knowledge of the truth, but he wishes that all be saved' - and he cannot truly wish that without giving

---

<sup>52</sup> CE 16.2.18.

<sup>53</sup> MR 193.1.1. The quotation from 1 Tim is from Amelote; this is followed by a paraphrase of Rm 10.14-17.

them the means and, by consequence, without giving children teachers who help in the accomplishment of this plan in their regard.<sup>54</sup>

Teachers, therefore, ‘help in the accomplishment’ both of the children’s instruction and of their salvation.

While it is reasonable to conclude that De La Salle uses the terms ‘salvation’ and ‘save’ in the conventionally religious, even eschatological sense, it should be clear that in practice his concern for the education of young people related very much to their competence in this world, and their capacity to emerge from the hopeless poverty in which many of their families lived. In the light of the biblically-based reflections of Denis Edwards, above, his concern for the ‘salvation’ of young people can therefore be seen as more holistic than his traditional use of the term might suggest.

## CONCLUSION

In this chapter I have discussed the section of Matthew’s Gospel chosen to exemplify De La Salle’s approach to interpretation. I have suggested that in De La Salle’s various writings, texts from this section of Matthew are simply individual texts to which he refers when, on different occasions, he considers them appropriate. From the point of view of contemporary scholarship, however, the section is structured in such a way as to emphasize Jesus’ ministry of teaching and healing as a proclamation of the kingdom of God. It also includes, in the early verses of Mt 10, Jesus’ commissioning of his disciples to continue precisely that ministry. That is a fundamental belief on De La Salle’s part in respect of his own community of Brothers, but not one necessarily drawn from reflection on this section of Matthew as a whole. De La Salle’s manner of working on different topics, at different times, and in different written works did not facilitate his consideration of Mt 4.23-8.10 as a significant unit. Nor, perhaps, was that a feature of biblical interpretation at the time.

Nonetheless, in the following chapters I shall show that De La Salle has interpreted and actualized passages from this section in a way that can be appreciated from the perspective of a ‘history of influence’ hermeneutic. What I have done in this chapter

---

<sup>54</sup> MR 193.3.1.

is to indicate the scope of the section of Matthew from which those interpretative examples will be drawn. But I wanted also to indicate the richness of its interrelated themes as highly relevant to De La Salle's own concerns, and central to any continued actualization using a 'history of influence' hermeneutic. For a Lasallian reader of the Gospel, that influence includes De La Salle's own insights, enhanced and even corrected by more recent scholarship –direction for further study to which I shall refer in the Conclusion to the thesis.

In Chapters 5-8, then, I shall discuss De La Salle's engagement with texts from this section of the Gospel from the point of view of a 'history of influence' hermeneutic, but keeping in mind the potential of its interrelated themes for an enriched actualization in the present.

## **CHAPTER 5: DE LA SALLE'S REFERENCES TO MATTHEW 4.23-5.12**

### **INTRODUCTION**

As a prelude to the exploration of De La Salle's appropriation of passages from Matthew 4.23-10.8, I shall summarize what has been established up to this point.

In the Introduction I outlined aspects of the life and education of John Baptist de La Salle, particularly as they relate to his references to the Bible and to the influence of the Church Fathers on his approach to interpretation.

In Chapter 1, I discussed the extent of De La Salle's mentions of and recourse to the Bible, and to the Gospel of Matthew in particular. From two significant meditations I derived a set of nine 'principles' that reflect his understanding of the Bible's significance. These principles align well with those of Saint Augustine, to whom De La Salle most frequently refers among the Church Fathers. In this chapter there was also discussion of De La Salle's references to the Bible in a range of his works;

Chapter 2 developed the view that De La Salle was very conscious of being part of a living heritage. I instanced the sense communicated in some of his writings of listening to biblical authors 'speak', rather than adverting to their written texts, as well as hearing the biblical word as immediately relevant to the listener's own context. His awareness of being part of a living tradition of 'saints' is evident in his many meditations on the ways in which women and men throughout the centuries have lived out the gospel. He includes frequent references to and quotations from Church Fathers and their actualizations of the Bible for their own audiences. He insists that the educational ministry of his readers is in direct continuity with that of the Jesus of the gospels, of his immediate disciples, and of many 'educators' over the intervening centuries. Without using the term, De La Salle was conscious of living and writing within a 'history of influence'.

In Chapter 3 I outlined the 'history of influence' hermeneutic, particularly as a methodology in Ulrich Luz' major commentary on the Gospel of Matthew. I proposed that there are affinities between that hermeneutic and the approach to the Bible taken by John Baptist de La Salle, and that it therefore provides a suitable framework for an appreciation of John Baptist de La Salle's approach to biblical interpretation.

Chapter 4 offered an explanation for the choice of Mt 4.23-10.8 as a particular textual focus for considering De La Salle's recourse to the Bible, with reference to a number of themes evident in the Gospel of Matthew that are relevant to a biblical theology and spirituality of education in the Lasallian tradition. As such, they deserve to be a part of the ongoing actualization both of Matthew's texts, and De La Salle's interpretations.

In this and subsequent chapters I shall consider De La Salle's incorporation, in his various works, of particular verses within the range Mt 4.23-10.8. The aim is to determine the extent to which De La Salle's interpretation of these texts sustains the thesis *that a 'history of influence' (Wirkungsgeschichte) hermeneutic provides a critical framework within which to appreciate John Baptist de La Salle's (1651-1719) recourse to the Bible, and in particular to passages from the Gospel of Matthew, chapters 4-10.*

It is important to be aware that the allusions De La Salle makes to passages from the Gospel of Matthew are sometimes incidental to the main focus of his writing, which may be, for example, a passage from elsewhere in the Bible. Nonetheless, it is his interpretation of the *Matthean* text which I shall consider.

It is not my intention to show that De La Salle was a prescient exponent of a twenty-first century hermeneutic, but rather that his approach to the incorporation of biblical texts within his works reflects many of the characteristics of a modern 'history of influence' approach to interpretation and can be appreciated from that perspective. If that is the case, twenty-first century Lasallian interpreters who adopt the same hermeneutic will be enabled to see De La Salle's work as part of a critically legitimate, living heritage of biblical interpretation, and one therefore deserving of actualization in their own context.

While earlier chapters have already indicated some general points of comparison between a *Wirkungsgeschichte* hermeneutic and De La Salle's interpretative approach, the following characteristics identified in the previous chapter will serve as more specific criteria in examining De La Salle's understanding of verses from the chosen section of the Gospel of Matthew.

As I understand it, a ‘history of influence’ hermeneutic, particularly as expounded by Ulrich Luz, includes the following interrelated characteristics:

7. A care to discern the unfolding ‘significance’ (Ricoeur) of a biblical text in new contexts;
8. A consciousness on the part of the interpreter that her pre-understandings and her own interpretations have been influenced by her participation in a history of interpretative influence;
9. A belief in the transformative power of the biblical word;
10. An understanding of biblical passages as living communications rather than as doctrinal or moral proof-texts from the past;
11. An approach to interpretation which includes faith in God, and in the Bible as the living word of God;
12. A belief that practical application, going beyond notional understanding, is a key element of biblical interpretation.

## **1. MATTHEW 4.23-25: PROCLAMATION BY TEACHING AND HEALING**

### **Introduction**

As noted in Chapter 4, **Mt 4.23-25** is recognised as the opening bracket of an *inclusion* encompassing Matthew chapters 5-9, that is, the Sermon on the Mount in chapters 5-7 and the healing stories of chapters 8-9. Mt 4.23-25 anticipates the elaboration of Jesus’ ‘teaching’ and ‘curing’ as part of the proclamation of the good news of God’s reign. The closing bracket is Mt 9.35, which repeats the substance of Mt 4.23-25.

De La Salle refers to these verses in the first ‘Treatise’ of *The Duties of a Christian to God*.<sup>1</sup> The book itself (*Duties I*) is a work in continuous prose, as distinct from the question-and-answer form of the catechism to which it is related (*Duties II*). serving as a theological reference work especially for teachers, but also for students able to read at the appropriate level.<sup>2</sup>

---

<sup>1</sup> *Les devoirs d’un chrétien envers Dieu, et les moyens de pouvoir bien s’en acquiter* (Paris: Antoine Chrétien, 1703); CL 20 provides a facsimile of this *editio princeps*.

<sup>2</sup> See Houry, *Écrits*, ‘DA-Présentation’.

4<sup>23</sup> [Jesus] went throughout Galilee, teaching in their synagogues and proclaiming the good news of the kingdom and curing every disease and every sickness among the people. <sup>24</sup> So his fame spread throughout all Syria, and they brought to him all the sick, those who were afflicted with various diseases and pains, demoniacs, epileptics, and paralytics, and he cured them. <sup>25</sup> And great crowds followed him from Galilee, the Decapolis, Jerusalem, Judea, and from beyond the Jordan.

The reference to **Mt 4.23-25** comes within the fourth chapter of the first Treatise, ‘On the redemption of persons’, following chapters on faith, God and the three divine persons, and the creation of the world. The chapter on redemption comprises ten sections outlining the life and work of Jesus Christ, of which it is the third in which Jesus’ ministry is summarised by reference to this passage from Matthew. It is important, however, to see this in the broader context of what De La Salle understands by ‘the duties of a Christian’, and how these relate to the Gospel.

Briefly, his introduction *The Duties of a Christian* defines the Christian religion as ‘a state or a society of a great number of persons of different nations, who are committed to fulfilling their duties to God, both in public and in private, in the manner which Jesus Christ has taught’.<sup>3</sup> The name ‘Christian’ ‘signifies disciple and imitator of Jesus Christ’.<sup>4</sup> Even here, the double emphasis is clear: Christians both *learn* from Jesus, and they *do* what he did. De La Salle’s characteristic emphasis on action (‘zeal’) in response to faith is evident.

The ‘duties’ are presented as fourfold: to know, adore, love, and obey God.<sup>5</sup> To be ‘a good Christian’, as well as being baptised, and publicly professing one’s faith, ‘it is necessary, moreover, to be enlivened by the Spirit of Our Lord Jesus Christ, and to lead a life which conforms with his, and with his maxims, which are expressed in the holy Gospel, and in the whole of the New Testament’.<sup>6</sup>

The life of Jesus, and his teachings as found in the Bible, are therefore of paramount importance in living life as ‘a good Christian’.

---

<sup>3</sup> CL 20, ii-iii; DA 0.0.2.

<sup>4</sup> DA 0.0.5.

<sup>5</sup> DA 0.0.4.

<sup>6</sup> DA 0.0.6.



Jesus' public ministry is the subject of Section 3 of the chapter on 'The Redemption of Humanity'. The previous section concludes with his baptism in the Jordan and his threefold temptation, itself an instruction for us 'not to fear temptations, but to resist them'. Its final sentence reads:

It was through this withdrawal into the desert that Jesus Christ prepared himself to proclaim the Gospel, which he announced in all the districts of Judea for three years, from his baptism until his death.<sup>7</sup>

The title of Section 3 reflects a significant change of focus. Where one might expect, following on from the end of the previous section, a headline foreshadowing an account of Jesus' proclamation of the Gospel, what we read instead is 'On the vocation and mission of the apostles, the preaching, the miracles, and the life of poverty of Jesus Christ'.<sup>8</sup> Prominence is given to the calling of the apostles and the fact that they accompanied Jesus in his ministry.

The significance of the disciples' involvement in that ministry is more evident in the original than in the published English version, which understandably breaks up a typically long French sentence in the interests of readability. More literally, however, the French can be translated:

Jesus Christ, having come to bring people a New Law, and having prepared himself for thirty years to announce it to them, began *as soon as he had left the desert* by choosing twelve disciples, whom he named Apostles, which is to say, Envoys, because he was appointing<sup>9</sup> them *to preach his Gospel with him*, which is this New Law, which he came to announce to all people.<sup>10</sup>

---

<sup>7</sup> DA 104.2.8.

<sup>8</sup> DA 104.3.

<sup>9</sup> *Destinait*. According to Jean Dubois, René Lagane and Alain Lerond, *Dictionnaire du français classique* (Paris: Larousse, 2001), 147, the verb is equivalent to *designer* in modern French, and so carries such denotations as marking out, appointing to a particular role. In both English and French 'destine'/*destiner* can have connotations of something being intended without necessarily coming to fruition. In the present context, the apostles' appointment seems to be regarded as immediate. De La Salle uses the verb elsewhere in the sense of appointment to a ministry, e.g. MD 39.1.1 (Jesus' disciples), MR 199.1.1 (St Paul).

<sup>10</sup> CL 20, p. 31; DA 104.3.1; Cf. Alexis James Doval, ed., *The Duties of a Christian to God: John Baptist de La Salle* (Landover, MD: Lasallian Publications, 2002), 35. Emphasis added.

De La Salle indicates that the choice and preparation of the Apostles was so integral to his ministry that it was the first action he took after a long preparation.<sup>11</sup> This is a significant claim, the only, even partial, basis for which could have come from the Gospel of Mark, De La Salle's least-preferred gospel in terms of traceable references. In Mark, the brief account of Jesus' experience in the wilderness (Mk 1.13) is followed by his arrival in Galilee and his announcement of the approach of the kingdom with the call to repentance (Mk 1.14-15), then the calling of his first four followers (Mk 1.16-20). Levi is not summoned to follow until Mk 2.14, and the 'twelve' are not appointed until Mk 3.14. In the other synoptics, the time-lag between Jesus leaving the desert and appointing the twelve is even greater (Mt 4.12-Mt 9.9 [call of Matthew] and Lk 4.13-Lk 6.13).

Hence, even on the basis of the shortest account, from a Gospel to which he rarely refers, De La Salle appears to be overstating the immediacy of the calling of the Twelve for the sake of stressing its importance.

I sense here that beneath a straightforward account of Jesus' early ministry, De La Salle is drawing attention to another layer of meaning: that right from the start, the ministry of Jesus was collaborative. For a religious community of teachers encouraged, as we have seen, to see themselves as continuing the ministry of Jesus in educating young people – indeed, as participating in that ministry with him - that layer would have held considerable significance.

Following an account of the calling of various disciples, including a more detailed focus on that of 'Matthew' (so named only in the Gospel of Matthew, and there not until 9.9), De La Salle remarks that 'next he sent them from town to town, and from village to village, to preach there, *and he also went there himself*'.<sup>12</sup> Again, there is an emphasis on the disciples' ministry and Jesus accompanying them. The disciples' involvement with him is also evident in the next sentence:

---

<sup>11</sup> De La Salle's NT source for the list of apostles is discussed below, in connection with Mt 9.9.

<sup>12</sup> CL 20, p. 32; DA 104.3.3. Emphasis added.

He travelled all over Judea for three years, to instruct the people [cf. **Mt 4.23**], *having with him (besides the Apostles) seventy-two disciples* [cf. Lk 10.1],<sup>13</sup> whom he sent two by two into the towns where he had to go, to prepare the people to profit from his preaching...<sup>14</sup>

The ensuing narrative relates Jesus' healing miracles in general, and the raising of three individuals to life: the widow's son at Nain (Lk 7.11), the synagogue chief's daughter at Capernaum (Mt 9.25; Mk 5.42; Lk 8.55), and Lazarus (Jn 11.44). 'In all these miracles,' De La Salle observes, 'he had no purpose but the conversion of souls, of whom at the same time as he healed their bodies he pardoned their sins, and urged them no to commit them again.' (It can be observed that, since the 'souls' had 'bodies', the former term is here being used to mean the whole person.)

There follows a paragraph based quite closely on **Mt 4.24-25**:

People brought to him, from every place in Judea, and also from Syria, all those who were suffering from different illnesses and cruel afflictions, the possessed, lunatics and paralytics, and he healed them all. It was this great number of miracles which soon had him followed by an enormous crowd of people from Galilee, Decapolis, Jerusalem and beyond the Jordan.<sup>15</sup>

Reflecting Matthew's Gospel itself, where Mt 4.25 immediately precedes the Sermon on the Mount, the following paragraph reminds the reader of what has already been said, that Jesus 'traversed the whole of Judea for three years, to instruct the people':

He applied himself to instructing all these people, and to teaching them his new doctrine, making them aware through a long discourse [Mt 5-7] which he gave them, how much more this new law was more excellent and more perfect than the former law... These people were so surprised and touched<sup>16</sup> by his

---

<sup>13</sup> All three French versions follow the Vulgate's *septuaginta duos*; cf. the variant Greek reading ἑβδομήκοντα δύο.

<sup>14</sup> CL 20, p. 32; DA 104.3.4. Emphasis added.

<sup>15</sup> CL 20, p. 33; DA 104.3.5. The vocabulary is closest to that of Amelote: *amenoit, la Syrie, travaillez de diverses maladies et de cruelles douleurs, la Decapolis*.

<sup>16</sup> *Toucher* in Dict. 1694 has a wide range of meanings. The sense intended here is indicated as *esmouvoir (émouvoir – 'to move, stir, rouse')*, and the illustrative examples begin with '*Dieu luy a touché le coeur, il s'est converty. rien ne touche si efficacement que la parole de Dieu*'. Both this meaning and the examples provided shed light on an expression often used by De La Salle: 'to touch the hearts' of young people. Teachers are urged, for example, to share in the apostolic zeal of St Ambrose when they strive, through their work, 'for the salvation of souls'; they must frequently ask God for the grace 'to touch the hearts' of those they instruct (MF 81.2.2). The sense of being 'moved, stirred, roused', under God's influence, in a context of religious instruction, implies a process much deeper than rote or even intelligent

doctrine that five thousand persons, not including the women and children, followed him and stayed with him for three whole days without eating and without being troubled by it...<sup>17</sup>

In De La Salle's account of Jesus' ministry, the presence of Jesus' apostles and disciples is frequently alluded to. In what amounts to a brief excursus on the poverty of Jesus, the point is made that he had 'twelve apostles with him', and that almost all of them were of 'lowly birth'.<sup>18</sup> Jesus' transfiguration takes place before three apostles, 'so that they could give witness to the mystery' which presaged his resurrection.<sup>19</sup> The following section, on 'the principal persons whom Jesus Christ converted' begins with the observation that 'Jesus, by his preaching and by the example of his holy life, attracted to himself a great number of disciples'.<sup>20</sup>

The 'excursus' on poverty is another indication that in this section of *Duties of a Christian* De La Salle is interpreting the Scriptures with his readers very much in mind. The quotation above continues:

This [i.e. the fact that the crowd had not eaten] obliged Jesus to perform a miracle so as to feed them, by multiplying five loaves, with which they were all satisfied; but, since he lived frugally [*pauvrement*], he also fed them frugally, giving them only barley bread with a little fish.

Although Jesus would have been able to lack nothing, and to have everything that he could have wanted, he nonetheless lived always in a way so poor [*pauvre*] that he had nothing with which to feed himself, nor a house in which to live, nor any place (as he himself says) where he could rest his head, and having with him twelve apostles, who were almost all of low birth, far from lifting them above their condition, he allowed them to experience so great a poverty that on one occasion they were obliged to press ears of corn in their hands to pull out the grain and eat it.<sup>21</sup>

The writing continues in this vein, noting the occasions when Jesus indicated that he thought little of riches, and showed his love for the poor. But the comments above on the frugality of the meal of bread and fish can hardly be considered as anything but a

---

learning, and cannot be reduced to the purely emotional: there is an intention to move a young person towards positive transformation, which De La Salle would readily recognize as being, ultimately, 'God's work'.

<sup>17</sup> DA 104.3.6.

<sup>18</sup> DA 104.3.7.

<sup>19</sup> DA 104.3.10.

<sup>20</sup> DA 104.4.1.

<sup>21</sup> DA 104.3-6-7.

gloss for the sake of a community who were obliged by the circumstances of providing a gratuitous education for poor boys to live very frugally themselves. It is clearly the interpretation of a detail in the text so as to reveal a new meaning in a new situation.

### **Reading the text in another context**

Such references to Jesus' having his apostles and disciples with him in his ministry are consistent not only with the general purpose of the work – to outline what should be known of God, and how God is to be loved – but with a less obvious subtext that would have been evident to the Brother-teachers for whom it was primarily written, a subtext thrown into some relief by an unusual focus on the somewhat sparing nature of Jesus' generosity.

In the meditations he wrote for them 'for the time of retreat', written some time after 1707,<sup>22</sup> we find connections being made between the early 18<sup>th</sup> century teachers and Jesus' apostles and disciples:

'This is the glory of my Father, that you bear much fruit and that you become my disciples'.<sup>23</sup> What Jesus Christ says to his holy apostles, *he says to you yourselves as well...*<sup>24</sup>

Jesus Christ, speaking to his apostles, said to them that he had given them the example, so that they would do as he himself had done;<sup>25</sup> he wanted his disciples to accompany him in all the conversions he made, so that having seen the way in which he had conducted himself in doing so, they could, in all that they had to do to win souls for God, model and form themselves on his conduct. *That is also what you must do, you whom Jesus Christ has chosen from among so many others to be his co-workers*<sup>26</sup> in the salvation of souls.<sup>27</sup>

In view of the close connection drawn here between the disciples' relationship with Jesus, and their mission to follow his example,<sup>28</sup> is not difficult to see De La Salle, in

---

<sup>22</sup> Sauvage, *Citations*, xiv, concludes from a comparison among several versions and editions that, for this work, De La Salle made extensive use of the Amelote translation in an edition of 1707 or later.

<sup>23</sup> Amelote Jn 15.8.

<sup>24</sup> MR 195.3.1 (emphasis added).

<sup>25</sup> Jn 13.15.

<sup>26</sup> Cf. 1 Cor 3.9.

<sup>27</sup> MR 196.2.1 (emphasis added).

<sup>28</sup> In the Meditation for the Sixth Sunday after Pentecost (MD 59.1.1), De La Salle points to the fact that more than four thousand people followed Jesus into the desert

this section of *Duties of a Christian*, exemplifying from the New Testament (the community's 'first and principal rule',<sup>29</sup> the very 'spirit of the Institute', expounded in their Rule as 'firstly, a spirit of faith',<sup>30</sup> and 'secondly... an ardent zeal for instructing children',<sup>31</sup> according to which 'they will animate all their *actions* with sentiments of *faith*'.<sup>32</sup> Thus faith and zeal are not *two* 'spirits of the Institute'; they are the obverse and reverse of the one coin, the interacting elements of the one spirit.<sup>33</sup>

### **Reflections from contemporary exegesis**

De La Salle's juxtaposition of Jesus' instruction of the people (DA 104.3.4) and his healing ministry (DA 104.3.5) is consistent, as observed in Chapter 4, above, with what contemporary scholars see as the essential components of **Mt 4.23-25**: Jesus' teaching and healing, in a pericope which with Mt 9.35 forms an inclusion of chapters 5-9 and anticipates their structure.<sup>34</sup>

The import for contemporary Lasallian schools of the themes of kingdom, proclamation, teaching and healing, presence, and salvation as reflected in Mt 5-9 and anticipated in these verses has also been noted in Chapter 4 of the thesis.

### **Conclusion: De La Salle and Mt 4.23-25**

First, De La Salle's presentation of the story of Jesus' early ministry in such a way as to highlight the importance Jesus attached to having a group of apostles accompany him and be accompanied by him is not only informative, but formative: it constitutes not only a reading of the biblical story, but an encouraging reading of the story of the life and work of the community for which it was written.

---

[Mk 8.4, 9], 'drawn by the example of his holy life, and by the *zeal* that he demonstrated for the conversion of souls in his fervent preaching'.

<sup>29</sup> RC 2.3. This line in the *Rule* of 1718 was added to that of 1705.

<sup>30</sup> RC 2.2.

<sup>31</sup> RC 2.9.

<sup>32</sup> RC 2.4 (emphasis added).

<sup>33</sup> The revised *Rule* of the Brothers (2014, 1.7) has it that 'the spirit of faith inspires the Brothers with an ardent zeal...'

<sup>34</sup> See Luz, *Matthew 1-7*, 165.

Secondly, the presentation of Jesus' as preparing for a ministry of both instructing and healing by 'withdrawing into the desert' is reminiscent of the same priority given to undistracted and prayerful reflection on Scripture that is accentuated in the meditation on St Jerome (Chapter 1, above), and was to be applied in the Brothers' lives.

Thirdly, there is the reinforcement of the interactive combination of word and deed in the proclamation of the Gospel.

Fourthly, as outlined in the previous chapter, a contemporary exegesis of **Mt 4.23-25** in association with a modern theology of salvation fosters an understanding that helpful interactions in an educational setting (among many others) can be seen as salvific. This can only enhance De La Salle's perception of the teacher as cooperating with Jesus in the salvation of young people, and give point to what is stated in the Brothers' current *Rule* that 'John Baptist de La Salle gave a new meaning to the school by making it accessible to the poor and offering it to all as a sign of the Kingdom and as a means of salvation'.

## **2. MATTHEW 5.3-12: THE BEATITUDES**

De La Salle comments on the Beatitudes as a whole in *The Duties of a Christian to God*, under the heading 'The Evangelical Counsels':

The beatitudes are actions and practices of most excellent and most perfect virtues, which lead souls to the holiness and perfection of the Christian life. It is Jesus Christ who has proposed them in his Gospel. They are called beatitudes because Jesus Christ, in expounding them, has promised to those who practise them a happiness that begins in this life and that they are like a pledge and an assurance of the consummate happiness that is enjoyed in heaven.<sup>35</sup>

He then provides a brief comment on each of the Beatitudes in turn. It can be remarked again, in terms of the spirit of the Institute being described as 'faith and zeal', that De La Salle does not regard the Beatitudes as mere aphorisms; they are 'actions and practices'.

### **Matthew 5.3**

---

<sup>35</sup> DA 216.2.6.

5<sup>3</sup> ‘Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.’

It can be seen that this is a verse which De La Salle quotes frequently. It may be surmised that its frequency relates to a ministry of education accessible by and useful for ‘the poor’, by a community of teachers who – without originally taking the traditional vow of poverty – nonetheless lived in that state, sometimes quite precariously.<sup>36</sup> Though unlikely to mention it, De La Salle would also have been conscious of his own early decision to distribute his own wealth to ‘the poor’, and to embrace the poverty of those whom he led.<sup>37</sup> For De La Salle, however, there is also a spiritual dimension to poverty.

The first beatitude, he notes, is

‘Blessed are the poor in spirit,’ that is, in heart and in affection, ‘because the kingdom of God is theirs.’<sup>38</sup> The poor in spirit are the humble, who are diffident to themselves, detach their heart from affection for earthly goods, and attach it solely to God; the kingdom of heaven is theirs because we are certain that if they die in this state, they will possess it.<sup>39</sup>

De La Salle refers to this first Beatitude in no fewer than seven of his meditations, as well as in the *Collection of Various Short Treatises*.

### **Mt 5.3** | MD 5

The next instance of **Mt 5.3** appears in Meditation 5, for Sunday in the Octave of Christmas, which is a reflection on the gospel of the day, Lk 2.33-40, and in particular on v. 34, that Jesus is to be ‘a sign that will be opposed’ (*en butte à la contradiction*

<sup>36</sup> Cf. e.g, Maillefer, *Vie*, 110-113.

<sup>37</sup> Blain, *Vie*, 214-222; Maillefer, *Vie*, 66-69.

<sup>38</sup> *Bienheureux sont les pauvres d’esprit [...] parce que le Roïaume du Ciel est à eux* (CL 20, 190, which presents a facsimile of the 1703 edition). In the interests of identifying particular versions of the New Testament which De La Salle may have used at various times, I note the following: Mons Mt 5.3: *Bienheureux les pauvres d’esprit; parce que le royaume du ciel est à eux*; Amelote: *Bien-heureux sont les pauvres d’esprit: car le Roiaume du Ciel est à eux*; Huré: *Heureux ceux qui sont pauvres d’esprit ; parce que le royaume des cieus leur appartient*. De La Salle’s text is closest to that of Amelote.

<sup>39</sup> DA 216.2.7.



*des hommes*).<sup>40</sup> The verb *contredire* is then employed seven times in the meditation, and appears in the topic sentence of its two subsequent ‘Points’.<sup>41</sup> Its significance is reflected in the theme heading: ‘We must contradict neither the truths, nor the precepts, nor the counsels of the Gospel’.

**Mt 5.3** is cited in the third point, whose theme is ‘an even more perfect, more excellent way’ (cf. 1 Cor 12.31), that is, to avoid ‘contradicting’ not only Jesus’ teachings and maxims in matters of doctrine (1<sup>st</sup> Point), nor in his ‘moral teachings’ (2<sup>nd</sup> Point), but even in the maxims that call us ‘to live according to the perfection of the Gospel’ (MD 5.3.2). This is clearly consistent with the general observation of *Duties 1*, noted above, that the beatitudes ‘lead souls to holiness and to the perfection of the Christian life’. They are ‘counsels of the Gospel’. In this part of the meditation, ‘Blessed are the poor in spirit’ is linked with a reference to Mt 19.23-24 which reverses the comparison in the original to emphasize the difficulty of the counsel: ‘it is harder for a rich man to enter heaven than for a camel to pass through a needle’s eye’. De La Salle asks the teacher: ‘To how many do not these words of Jesus Christ seem harsh?’

The application in the 1<sup>st</sup> Point is that teachers should teach ‘only the common doctrine of Jesus Christ and ... abide in all things by what the Church teaches to the faithful in the catechisms approved by her’. In the 2<sup>nd</sup> Point it is not to regard moral teachings merely as counsels of perfection. The 3<sup>rd</sup> Point concludes with an exhortation to take even the latter seriously, ‘for we are people God has called to live according to the perfection of the Gospel’.

### **Mt 5.3 | MD 44**

Meditation 44, for Monday in the Octave of Pentecost, has as its theme: ‘The first effect produced by the Holy Spirit in a soul is to make it consider things with the eyes of faith’. From the gospel for the day, Jn 3.16-21,<sup>42</sup> De La Salle reflects particularly on v. 19, ‘And this is the judgment, that the light has come into the world, and people

---

<sup>40</sup> MD 5.1.1.

<sup>41</sup> As previously noted, De La Salle’s meditations are typically divided into three ‘points’, each with discernible subdivisions. References to such points will be capitalized: ‘Point’.

<sup>42</sup> A table of epistles and gospels is appended to, for example, the Mons New Testament.

loved darkness rather than light because their deeds were evil'. He establishes in the 1<sup>st</sup> Point that the descent of the Holy Spirit provides the light which enables a person 'to see spiritual things altogether differently from those who live according to the spirit of the times', and, on the basis of Jn 16.13, that the Holy Spirit makes things known 'not only as they appear outwardly', but 'as we can know them when we understand them truly with the eyes of faith'.<sup>43</sup> The question is then posed, 'Do you make use of this light to judge all visible things...?'. And the first application is made to the life of the teacher: 'If you act as a disciple of Jesus Christ enlightened by God's Spirit, this is the only light that should guide you'.<sup>44</sup>

Here, the reference to **Mt 5.3** comes in the second Point, as one of a number of examples of 'maxims of the Gospel' that can be understood correctly, and practised, only with the inspiration of the Holy Spirit:

Can we, indeed, realize that 'blessed are the poor', that we should love those who hate us [Mt 5.44], and rejoice when we are calumniated and when people say all sorts of evil against us [Mt 5.11], that we should return good for evil [Mt 5.44],<sup>45</sup> and a number of other truths entirely contrary to what nature suggests to us, unless the Spirit of God himself teaches them to us?<sup>46</sup>

The application made to the teachers' lives is that they are obliged to teach 'these holy maxims' to the children they are charged to instruct.<sup>47</sup> They themselves must first be thoroughly convinced of them. De La Salle concludes the 2<sup>nd</sup> Point: 'Make yourself

---

<sup>43</sup> MD 44.1.1.

<sup>44</sup> The *Rule* (1705) articulates 'the spirit of this Institute' as being 'first, a spirit of faith, which ought to induce those who compose it not to look upon anything but with the eyes of faith' (RC 2.2). The first means of living in this spirit is that 'the Brothers of this Society will have a most profound respect for Holy Scripture' (RC 2.3).

<sup>45</sup> The reference given in *Œuvres complètes* and Loes and Huether, *Meditations* is Lk 6.27, understandably in view of modern versions. However, particularly within the string of Matthean references, it is more likely to be a second, allusive reference to Mt 5.44. The Vulgate (with some Greek versions) reads *Ego autem dico vobis: Diligite inimicos vestros, benefacite his, qui oderunt vos, et orate pro persequentibus, et calumniantibus vos*. Bruce M. Metzger, *A Textual Commentary on the Greek New Testament* (Stuttgart: United Bible Societies, 1975), 14, notes that 'later witnesses enrich the text by incorporating clauses from the parallel account in Lk 6.27-28'. *Faites du bien à ceux qui vous haïssent* is to be found in the versions of Mt 5.44 by both Amelote, and Huré.

<sup>46</sup> MD 44.2.1.

<sup>47</sup> De La Salle pairs Mt 5.3 and Mt 5.44 a number of times: MD 5, MD 44, MF 84, MR 202.

docile, therefore, to the Holy Spirit, who can in a short time procure for you a perfect understanding of these truths.’

### **Mt 5.3** | MF 84

De La Salle begins his meditation for the Feast of Saint Thomas, Apostle (December 21) with a reflection on his ‘zeal’ (Jn 11.16),<sup>48</sup> but more particularly on his ‘incredulity’ (Jn 20.25).<sup>49</sup> This, however, paves the way for a provocative assertion: ‘Still, the majority of Christians are even more unbelieving than Saint Thomas, because they do not believe in Jesus Christ’.<sup>50</sup> The assertion is supported with reference to three texts, the first pair being, again, **Mt 5.3** and Mt 5.44. The third is Lk 9.23, though it could also be a recollection of Mt 16.24.<sup>51</sup> The point is that people do not believe such difficult ‘maxims’: the poor are considered unfortunate; revenge is paramount, and suffering is something to be escaped. Again, the upshot is that the teachers, who ‘have the advantage of reading the Gospel and meditating on the truths found in it every day’, have the responsibility of both teaching and modelling ‘these holy maxims’. They must show that they believe them by putting them into practice.

### **Mt 5.3** | MF 142

The first virtue emphasised by De La Salle in his meditation on Saint Bonaventure<sup>52</sup> is poverty, about which that saint wrote his *Apologia of the Poor*. In this work, says De La Salle, Bonaventure ‘demonstrates that voluntary poverty is the foundation of Gospel perfection’, declaring that ‘when Jesus Christ wished to lead his disciples to perfection, he began by making them understand the happiness which the truly poor in spirit enjoyed’ (**Mt 5.3**).<sup>53</sup> Regarding the *practice* of the virtue, exemplified in Bonaventure’s choosing to enter ‘the poorest order in the Church’, De La Salle recalls Jesus’ injunction to ‘sell all that they had and give it to the poor’ (Mt 19.21).<sup>54</sup> Those

---

<sup>48</sup> ‘Zeal’ is the obverse of ‘faith’ according to the *Rule*: ‘The spirit of this Institute is firstly a spirit of faith...’. ‘Secondly, the spirit of their Institute consists in an ardent zeal for instructing children...’ (RC 2.2; 2.9).

<sup>49</sup> The Gospel of the day was Jn 20.24-29.

<sup>50</sup> MF 84.1.1.

<sup>51</sup> Only Luke speaks of taking up the cross *daily*.

<sup>52</sup> MF 142 (July 14).

<sup>53</sup> Luz, *Matthew 1-7*, 191, discusses the difficulties associated with interpreting ‘poor in spirit’ as ‘voluntary poverty’.

<sup>54</sup> This reference to Mt 19.21 recurs at least eight times in De La Salle’s writings.

listening to the meditation are urged to ‘enter into the sentiments of this holy doctor and imitate his example’.<sup>55</sup>

### **Mt 5.3** | MF 166

The same two references, **Mt 5.3** and Mt 19.21 appear in the 1<sup>st</sup> Point of the meditation for the Feast of Saint Cyprian (September 16),<sup>56</sup> who studied Holy Scripture ‘even before receiving baptism’, after which ‘he sold all his possessions, distributed the proceeds to the poor [Mt 19.21] and resolved to practice celibate chastity’. The conclusion to this Point challenges the readers to go beyond mere deprivation (which was often their actual situation) with a reference to Mt 5.3:

It does not suffice to be deprived of them [‘the goods and comforts of life] unless it is willingly<sup>57</sup> and with sincerity.<sup>58</sup> That is why Jesus Christ does not say only ‘Blessed are the poor,’ but ‘the poor in spirit’. This spirit of poverty is often no less rare in [religious] communities than it is in the world.<sup>59</sup>

In the second Point, De La Salle remarks on St Cyprian’s special care for the poor, noting that ‘when one makes oneself voluntarily poor to imitate Jesus Christ, one also loves, as he did, those whom God has made poor’.<sup>60</sup> Drawing out the application to his teachers’ lives, De La Salle then reminds them that every day they have poor children to instruct, that they are to love them tenderly as Cyprian did. He alludes to Mt 11.5: ‘the poor have good news brought to them’:

Prefer them to those who are not poor, for Jesus Christ does not say: the Gospel is preached<sup>61</sup> to the rich, but to the poor; these are also the ones God has entrusted to you, and to whom you are obliged to announce the truths of the holy Gospel.<sup>62</sup>

---

<sup>55</sup> MF 142.1.2.

<sup>56</sup> MF 166.

<sup>57</sup> *volontiers*. Luz, *Matthew 1-7*, 191-192, notes that the interpretation of ‘in spirit’ as voluntary poverty was prevalent in the early church, but that it is a problematic interpretation of the Greek.

<sup>58</sup> As well as its modern meaning, *affection* denoted ‘ardour’, ‘zeal’, ‘sincerity’. See Dubois, *Dictionnaire* and Dict. 1694. De La Salle uses the same term in reference to Mt 5.3 in DA 216.2.7, cited above, where he expands on the significance of ‘in spirit’.

<sup>59</sup> MF 166.1.21.

<sup>60</sup> MF 166.2.1.

<sup>61</sup> *prêcher* suggests Amelote; Mons and Huré use *annoncer*.

<sup>62</sup> MF 166.2.2.

**Mt 5.3** | MR 196

**Mt 5.3** appears in two of the *Meditations for the Time of Retreat*,<sup>63</sup> nos. 4 and 10.<sup>64</sup>

The first of these, entitled ‘What must be done to be true cooperators with Jesus Christ for the salvation of children’, develops its theme on the principal basis of 1 Cor 3.9, ‘For we are God’s servants, working together; you are God’s field, God’s building’. Amelote here reads: *Nous aidons Dieu dans son ouvrage...*, whence De La Salle’s ‘he [Jesus Christ] has chosen you to do his work’ (*pour faire son ouvrage*). De La Salle simply places the work of his Christian educators in early eighteenth century France in continuity with the ministry of St Paul.<sup>65</sup> The conclusion of the first Point is the consequent need for prayer: ‘you must constantly represent the needs of your disciples to Jesus Christ’.<sup>66</sup>

The second Point is that, just as Jesus taught his apostles by example, and had them accompany him in his ministry so that they could ‘be guided and formed by his conduct’, the teachers are ‘in reading the Gospel, to study the manner and the means that he used to lead his disciples to the practice of the truths of the Gospel’.<sup>67</sup>

There are then listed various ‘truths’, and virtues to be practised. The first group is presented in this way:

Sometimes he [Jesus] proposed as a happiness everything that the world holds in horror, like poverty, injuries, insults, calumnies, and all kinds of persecutions for justice, even telling them that they should be overjoyed<sup>68</sup> when they happen to them.<sup>69</sup>

---

<sup>63</sup> Michel Sauvage (CL 1, xxxiii) has identified the principal (French) New Testament text used in this set of sixteen meditations as that of Amelote 1707; they are considered therefore to have been composed sometime after that date, that is, towards the end of De La Salle’s life (he died in 1719). The introduction to the first published edition (1730) refers to ‘his long experience’ (CL 13, 5).

<sup>64</sup> MR 196 and MR 202.

<sup>65</sup> In a later meditation in this same series, De La Salle tells the teachers quite explicitly: ‘Without comparing yourself to this great saint [Paul] (and keeping in mind the due proportion between your work and his), you can say that you are doing the same thing, and that you are fulfilling the same ministry in your profession’ (MR 199.1.1).

<sup>66</sup> ‘Disciples’ is a characteristic and significant term for ‘students’ in this set of meditations.

<sup>67</sup> MR 196.2.1.

<sup>68</sup> *ravis de joie* is from Amelote Mt 5.12.

<sup>69</sup> MR 196.2.1.

Here we have allusions to, and some direct quotations from, **Mt 5.3** ('happiness', 'poverty'); 5.10 ('persecution for the sake of justice'); 5.11 ('insults'), 5.44 ('calumnies [*calomnies*]);<sup>70</sup> 5.12 ('overjoyed'). The following paragraph refers to virtues Jesus proposed, 'such as gentleness, humility' (cf. Mt 11.29). The next contains a clear reference to Mt 5.20: Jesus made his disciples understand 'that unless their justice was not more abundant than that of the scribes and Pharisees (who bothered themselves only about the external), they would not enter the kingdom of the heavens'. The 2<sup>nd</sup> Point concludes with the admonition that 'it is according to these practices and all the others of Jesus Christ that you must teach the Christian youth who [are] entrusted to you'.<sup>71</sup>

### **Mt 5.3 | MR 202**

The tenth meditation 'for the time of retreat' has as its theme-heading 'How a Brother of the Christian Schools ought to show zeal in his work'.<sup>72</sup> Regarding this work of instructing children, the 1<sup>st</sup> Point concerns zeal in preventing and remedying sinful behaviours, such as 'impurity, lack of reverence in church and at prayer, stealing, lying, disobedience, lack of respect for their parents, and ... other faults in regard to their companions'.<sup>73</sup> The Brother-teachers are to inspire them with a horror for such behaviour, 'making them understand that those who fall into these kinds of sins will not possess the kingdom of heaven'.<sup>74</sup>

---

<sup>70</sup> This likely reference to Mt 5.44 is not attributed by e.g. Varela, *Sacred Scripture*, nor the editors of either *Œuvres complètes* or Loes and Huether *Meditations*, no doubt because modern translations of Mt 5.44 do not incorporate those parts of Lk 6.27-28 accommodated by the Vulgate and contemporary French versions as noted above. The latter include 'et qui vous *calomnient*'.

<sup>71</sup> MR 196.2.2

<sup>72</sup> MR 202.

<sup>73</sup> MR 202.1.2. Léon Lauraire, *La Conduite, Approche contextuelle* (CL 61; Rome: Maison Saint Jean-Baptiste de La Salle, 2001), 109, has written of the context in and for which the *Conduct of the Christian Schools* was progressively developed by De La Salle and the first Brothers. In a chapter entitled 'Avoiding the dangers of the street' he describes French urban life at this time, particularly as regards young people, and writes of a reality that was 'complex, unsettled, boisterous and dangerous'. It is unlikely that in this meditation and elsewhere De La Salle is referring merely to the occasional peccadilloes of generally well-behaved little boys.

<sup>74</sup> MR 202.1.2. While the editorial attributions are to Gal 5.21 ('... those who do such things will not inherit the kingdom of God'), the substitution of 'kingdom of heaven'

The 2<sup>nd</sup> Point reminds the readers that they are not to be content with keeping the children confided to their care ‘from doing evil’: ‘It is also necessary that you engage them in doing the good and the good actions of which they are capable’.<sup>75</sup> He goes on immediately to tell teachers to see to it that children always speak the truth, but without having to ‘swear great oaths’, citing Mt 5.37 in his caution that ‘they limit themselves to saying that it is or is not so’.<sup>76</sup> This is followed by a reference to (Amelote) Mt 5.44, in that young people are to practise ‘what Our Lord says when he commands us to love our enemies, to do good to those who do evil to us, who persecute us and calumniate us’. There is also an allusion to Mt 5.38-40 in ‘Help them completely avoid rendering evil for evil, injury for injury, and avenging oneself’.

There follows advice citing Mt 6.1, 5 and 6, not to content themselves with doing good works, but to avoid doing them ‘before others, to be esteemed and honoured, because those who act in this way have already received their reward’. So the children should be taught to pray ‘as Our Lord taught those who followed him, and to pray with much piety, and in secret’.

Finally in this Point, with another quotation of **Mt 5.3**, the teachers are enjoined to recognise the situation of the young people in their care (which was often little different from their own):

And since the majority are born poor, you must encourage them to despise riches and to love poverty, because Our Lord was born poor and loved the poor, and was happy to be with them, and even said that the poor are blessed because the kingdom of heaven is theirs.<sup>77</sup>

### ‘To love poverty’?

---

suggests that De La Salle may, also or instead, have had a Matthean text in mind, e.g. Mt 19.14.

<sup>75</sup> MR 202.2.1.

<sup>76</sup> Amelote, Mt 5.37 reads: *Contentez-vous donc de dire Cela est ou cela n’est pas*. De La Salle: *ils se contentent de dire cela est ou cela n’est pas*.

<sup>77</sup> MR 202.2.2. De La Salle is surely here encouraging young people to be ‘poor in spirit’, rather than passively to accept their socio-economic poverty. As, for example, the second Meditation in this series affirms, his project was not just to educate children in faith, however strongly that may have been the priority. He (though in his own terms, ‘God’) established the Christian schools with the complementary purpose that ‘when their parents want them to go to work, they are prepared for employment’ (MR 194.1.2).

That De La Salle would advocate encouraging children, especially poor children, to ‘love poverty’ is confronting. It is inconceivable that he favoured the idea of urging the poor to be happy with their lot, because the whole purpose of founding the gratuitous ‘Christian Schools’ was not only to teach children their religion, but to read and write so that, as it was expressed in *The Conduct of the Christian Schools*, they would be ‘capable of everything’.<sup>78</sup> The second meditation in this series of sixteen, which has teachers reflect during their annual retreat on the whole purpose of their work, begins:

Reflect on the fact that it is all too normal among manual workers and the poor to let their children live as they wish, like vagabonds who wander here and there, as long as they are as yet unable to have them employed in some trade, having no concern to send them to the schools, as much because of their poverty, which does not allow them to pay teachers, as because, being obliged to seek work away from home, they must of necessity abandon them.<sup>79</sup>

The same Point of this meditation goes on to praise as God’s initiative the resolution of this distressing situation by establishing the Christian schools,

where [we] teach gratuitously and only for the glory of God, and where the children, being kept there during the day, and learning to read, to write, and their religion, and thus being always occupied, will be in a position to be employed at work when their parents want them to be.<sup>80</sup>

‘Loving poverty’, therefore, cannot mean rejoicing in the sort of deprivation which it was the purpose of the schools to alleviate. It can only mean the sort of freedom from greed and excessive dependence on wealth which encourages a sense of a deeper need for God. The fact that **Mt 5.3** is among those ‘Gospel maxims’ whose meaning can only be fathomed under the influence of the Holy Spirit (see on Mt 5.11 | MD 44.2.1, below) shows that ‘poverty’ is not to be understood in any facile way.

The conclusion of this 2<sup>nd</sup> Point echoes De La Salle’s understanding of this beatitude as a counsel of perfection, though one which is clearly to be proposed to young people; it is not reserved only for ‘consecrated religious’. With a reference to the opening theme of ‘zeal’, De La Salle insists that inspiring ‘these maxims and

---

<sup>78</sup> *capable de tout*, CE 16.2.21.

<sup>79</sup> MR 194.1.1.

<sup>80</sup> MR 194.1.2.



practices' in their disciples will be the way in which teachers show themselves 'zealous for the glory of God, since these maxims can come only from God (being contrary to human inclination)'.<sup>81</sup>

### **Mt 5.3 / R 11**

The final reference to **Mt 5.3** is to be found in De La Salle's *Collection of Short Treatises*,<sup>82</sup> a type of anthology of religious texts compiled or written by De La Salle, and first published probably in 1705. It was intended as a companion to the *Rule*, to which it contributed, and parts of which it elaborates and explains.<sup>83</sup> The relevant passage is to be found in the section entitled 'Explanation of the Chapter [of the Rule] on the Spirit of our Institute', which chapter was referred to above. The section is in question and answer form:

*What is meant by looking upon something with the eyes of faith?*

It is to look upon it only according to what faith teaches about it. It is thus that Saint Paul to the Philippians, chapter 3, verse 19, makes us look at those given to excessive eating as being similar to idolaters, who make a god of their belly and who glory in what should cover them with shame.<sup>84</sup> That is how we are to regard poverty as a benefit, because Our Lord says in the Gospel 'blessed are the poor.'<sup>85</sup>

It is noteworthy that, while the reference to Philippians includes chapter and verse the reference to **Mt 5.3** does not. Perhaps a significant knowledge of the gospels is presupposed. In any case, De La Salle's insistence on the importance of the Scriptures is evident in this discussion of 'the spirit of faith'. To the question concerning 'the first means given to us to help us have the spirit of faith and to conduct ourselves by this spirit', the answer is 'to have a profound respect for holy Scripture'. The 'signs which show that a person has a profound respect for holy Scripture' is 'when one always carries it on his person' and reads it every day.<sup>86</sup>

### **Summary: De La Salle and Matthew 5.3**

---

<sup>81</sup> MR 202.2.2.

<sup>82</sup> *Recueil de Différents Petits Traités* (edition said to be 1711), CL 15.

<sup>83</sup> Daniel Burke, ed., *John Baptist de La Salle: Collection of Various Short Treatises* (Landover, MD: Lasallian Publications, 1993), vii.

<sup>84</sup> *confondre*.

<sup>85</sup> R 11.2.9.

<sup>86</sup> R 11.2.18-19.

At this point it may be useful to suggest ways in which De La Salle's multiple references to this first beatitude can be seen as confirming a number of the 'principles' proposed in Chapter 1 as underlying De La Salle's appreciation of the Bible.

The first principle, for example, that Scripture is not an end in itself, but a means towards knowing God, is reflected in the proposal that Mt 5.3 encourages us to 'attach the heart solely to God'. Inspiring Gospel maxims and practices in the Brothers' 'disciples', as they are frequently called in the *Meditations for the Time of Retreat*, is the way in which teachers show themselves 'zealous for the glory of God'. The thought that 'we are people God has called to live according to the perfection of the Gospel' indicates that the Bible is a means towards 'perfection' as calling from God.

The third principle identified in Chapter 1 is that an understanding of Scripture involves action. This is evident in frequent references to *practising* virtues, and the maxims and truths of the Gospel (e.g. MD 44; MF 84 and 142; MR 196). Jesus himself is said to have taught *by example*, and we are urged to '*practise* what our Lord says' (MR 202).

That 'the appropriation and interpretation of Scripture involve faith, prayer, and reflection' (principle 4) is exemplified in the indication that 'we cannot accept certain Gospel sayings unless the Spirit of God himself teaches them to us'.

Apart from the various ways in which the beatitude of Mt 5.3 is applied to the lives of teachers and students, there is the actualization of 1 Cor 3.9, 'For we are God's servants, working together' as referring to the community of 18<sup>th</sup> century teachers in France (Principle 8)

And in regard to a more contemporary understanding of 'kingdom' and 'salvation', De La Salle's contention that 'God established the Christian schools' (MR 202), with their function of addressing both religious ignorance and systemic poverty – while knowing full well that they had been established by the hard work of himself and his community, might well be understood in our time as an expression of their cooperation in God's establishment of his saving reign.

### **Matthew 5.4-12**

**Mt 5.4** [Vg Mt 5.5]<sup>87</sup> | DA 216.2.9

De La Salle's only reference to the second beatitude is in the section of *Duties I* which lists and comments briefly on all the beatitudes under the heading 'On the evangelical counsels'. The expression 'weeping for [*pleurer*] their sins' occurs in MD 2.3.1 in connection with the preaching of John the Baptist, and in MF 148.1.1, Ignatius of Loyola is described as continually weeping [*pleurer*] over his sins.

5<sup>4</sup> 'Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted'.

De La Salle writes:

The third [beatitude] is 'Blessed are those who weep, for they will be consoled.'<sup>88</sup>

These are they who do penance for their sins, who weep for the sins of others, who wail to see themselves in a foreign land and distanced from God. They will be consoled because they will rejoice in heaven with a joy which cannot be conceived, with no mingling of sadness.<sup>89</sup>

There are two references to Mt 5.5., one in that same section of *Duties I*, and another in a Sunday meditation.

**Mt 5.5** [Vg Mt 5.4] | DA 216.2.8; MD 65.2.1

5<sup>5</sup> 'Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth.'

**Mt 5.5** | DA 216.2.8

Following the Vulgate's ordering as reproduced in his sources, De La Salle describes as 'the *second* beatitude'

---

<sup>87</sup> In the Vulgate and in those French versions dependent on it, the verse is numbered 5.5.

<sup>88</sup> This corresponds to the texts of Mons and Amelote; Huré differs only in *heureux* for *bienheureux*.

<sup>89</sup> DA 216.2.9.

‘Blessed are those who are gentle [‘sweet’], for they will possess the earth’.<sup>90</sup>

These ‘sweet’ persons are those who possess themselves to such an extent<sup>91</sup> that far from becoming embittered when they are hurt, they do not show even the least resentment. They will possess the earth because by this conduct they will easily make themselves masters of everyone.<sup>92</sup>

### **Mt 5.5** | MD 65.2.1

The other reference to **Mt 5.5** is in Meditation 65, for the Twelfth Sunday after Pentecost, the gospel of the day being Lk 10.23-37, the parable of the Good Samaritan. The theme is ‘On the union that should exist among the Brothers’. The argument is that ‘in today’s Gospel Jesus Christ proposes to us an example of charity’, and ‘gives us a clear picture of the kind of charity we should have for our Brothers and how closely we should be united with one another’.<sup>93</sup> De La Salle then immediately alludes to St Paul’s exposition of charity in 1 Cor 13, which becomes the real organising reference for the meditation:<sup>94</sup> ‘This is one of the things we should take most to heart because, as Saint Paul says, if you do not have charity, whatever good you may do will profit you nothing’.

**Mt 5.5** forms part of the argument of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Point, whose theme is provided by 1 Cor 13.4: ‘Love is gentle’.<sup>95</sup> De La Salle also quotes Prov 15.1, referencing it not as such

---

<sup>90</sup> *Bienheureux sont ceux qui sont doux, car ils posséderont la Terre* (CL 20, 190). Cf. Mt 5.4, Amelote: ‘Bien-heureux sont ceux qui ont l’esprit doux : car ils auront la terre pour heritage’; Mons: ‘Bienheureux ce qui sont doux ; parce qu’ils posséderont la terre’; Huré: ‘Heureux ce qui sont doux ; parce qu’ils posséderont la terre’. Here De La Salle’s text is closest to the Mons version.

<sup>91</sup> *Ces doux sont ceux qui se possèdent tellement eux-mêmes...* (‘These “meek” are those who possess themselves to such an extent...’). The original makes the play on ‘possess’ more obvious. Dict. 1694 defines *doux* in this sense as *Humain, traitable, affable, benin, clement, & est opposé à rude, farouche, fascheux, severe, & violent*. De La Salle also plays on the more literal ‘sweet’ in using the verb *s’aigrir*, ‘to turn sour, to become embittered’.

<sup>92</sup> DA 216.2.8.

<sup>93</sup> MD 65.1.1.

<sup>94</sup> 1 Cor 13.3, 4 and 7 are cited in the 1<sup>st</sup> Point, vs. 4 in the 2<sup>nd</sup> Point, and vs. 5 in the 3<sup>rd</sup> Point. Verses from this chapter are cited in a number of other meditations: MD 3 (twice), MD 12, MD 74 (twice), MR 194.

<sup>95</sup> *La charité est douce*, cf. Huré, and Amelote: *La charité est patiente, elle est douce....*

but with the typical ‘says the Sage’: ‘the gentle word [*la parole douce*] breaks the course of anger’.<sup>96</sup> Then comes support from the gospel:

This is why Our Lord in the sermon on the mountain says to his apostles: Blessed are those who have gentleness [‘sweetness’] to share [*qui ont la douceur en partage*], for they shall possess the earth. That is to say, everyone, because those possess everyone, who possess the hearts of all people, which is what persons of a kind and moderate temperament [*d’un nature doux et modéré*] easily achieve.<sup>97</sup>

The extended exposition of **Mt 5.5** is followed by a quotation from another favourite passage of De La Salle’s, Mt 11.29:

Ah! What a great advantage it is to learn well and to practise well this lesson from Our Lord: ‘Learn from me,’ he says, ‘for I am gentle [*doux*] and humble of heart.’<sup>98</sup>

The 2<sup>nd</sup> Point concludes: ‘Never speak to them [one’s Brothers] except with gentleness [*douceur*], and keep quiet if you are afraid of speaking otherwise.’<sup>99</sup>

‘Gentleness’ [*douceur*] is of fundamental importance to De La Salle, for whom it especially characterizes his God. When writing of his early and rather distressing experiences with the schoolmasters, some of whom became the first of his Brother-teachers, he reflects that his involvement was providentially gradual:

God who guides everything with wisdom and with gentleness [*douceur*], and whose practice is never to force people’s inclinations, wishing to involve me in taking complete responsibility for the Schools, did so in a most unobtrusive

---

<sup>96</sup> Whether De La Salle’s own translation or not, the rendering is close to that of the Vulgate: *Responsio mollis frangit iram: sermo durus suscitatur furorem*.

<sup>97</sup> MD 65.2.1.

<sup>98</sup> MD 65.2.2. Cf. Amelote, ... *que je suis doux & humble de cœur*. I note that the same adjective, πραΰς, is used in both texts of Matthew (and in only two other NT instances: Mt 21.5, citing Zech 9.9, and 1 Peter 3.4). Mt 11.29 is cited in three other meditations (MF 79, MR 196, MR 200), and is the text for ‘an act of faith on the virtue of humility’ in EM 259, cf. EM 261.1-2; 262.1-2. Jesus’ *douceur* is recalled in DB 2.16.12, as the opposite of anger.

<sup>99</sup> *Douceur* is also to be characteristic of the teacher’s manner of dealing with young people, particularly according to the chapter on ‘Corrections’ in *The Conduct of the Christian Schools*, where, for example, the principle is enunciated of ‘joining gentleness [*douceur*] to firmness in the guidance of children’. While the *Conduct* is the fruit of actual classroom experience, this principle is said also to derive from ‘experience founded on the unvarying teachings of the saints’ (CE 15.00.02-03). It contrasts considerably with the harshness often evident in schools of the time.

way, and over a long time, in such a way that one commitment led me into another, without my having foreseen it at the start.<sup>100</sup>

As one of the ‘twelve virtues/characteristics of a good teacher’, listed at the end of *The Conduct of the Christian Schools*,<sup>101</sup> where it is mentioned a number of times in connection with ‘correction’, *gentleness* receives by far the most attention (41 of 168 pages) in the elaboration of those virtues by Brother Agathon (1731-1798), Superior General of the Institute from 1777 until his death. The chapter concludes with the quotation of Mt 11.29 and 5.5 [Vg 5.4], in the Mons translation.<sup>102</sup>

### **Mt 5.6 | DA 216.2.10**

5<sup>6</sup> ‘Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled.’

This beatitude is referred to only in the overall discussion of the beatitudes in *Duties of a Christian*:

The fourth [beatitude] is: Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for justice, for they will be satisfied. These are they who, seeing themselves very far from the perfection God asks of them, always encourage themselves with the desire and the affection they have for arriving there. These people will be satisfied because they will fully possess in heaven what they so much desired on earth.<sup>103</sup>

In the context of a discussion of ‘maxims’ of Jesus Christ ‘calling all Christians to a high degree of perfection’,<sup>104</sup> De La Salle may have Mt 5.48 in mind here: ‘Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect’. This is a text he cites in the *Collection of Various Treatises*, in a section dealing with ‘Reflections that the Brothers may make on the means of becoming interior’. The second such reflection is that ‘it must never happen that we wilfully do the least thing displeasing to God’, and the fourth of its five short points is:

---

<sup>100</sup> Blain, *Vie*, 169.

<sup>101</sup> See Houry, *Écrits*, CE, 129.

<sup>102</sup> Frère Agathon, *Les douze vertus*, 67-119.

<sup>103</sup> DA 216.2.10. The text is the same as that of Amelote.

<sup>104</sup> DA 216.2.15: *à une haute perfection*.

The concern of our Lord in his sufferings and death was not only to draw away from sin, but to distance from all imperfections, those souls who want to be all for him: he says, ‘Be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect’.<sup>105</sup>

While the heading of the section indicates that the words are addressed to ‘the Brothers’,<sup>106</sup> the fifth point confirms that the principle applies to all Christians:

Jesus Christ was concerned, says Saint Paul,<sup>107</sup> to bring harmony and glory to his Church, and thus to the faithful soul, by rendering it free of blemish and wrinkle. By wrinkles we are to understand imperfections.<sup>108</sup>

Ulrich Luz has a helpful comment in regard to Matthew’s notion of ‘perfection’ which, he remarks, is to be understood against its Jewish background, not in terms of the Greek doctrine of virtues. Interpreted in context, being perfect as the Father is perfect, refers specifically to loving one’s enemies (cf. Mt 5.44-45), which is the ‘apex of all the commandments that lead to perfection’. Perfection, therefore, ‘is not a special status of a few “exceptional” Christians’.<sup>109</sup> This is consistent with De La Salle’s view that the ‘counsels of perfection’ apply to all Christians, including – as observed above – the young people in the Brothers’ classes.

This was the understanding in the ancient Church. Luz cites *2 Clement* (second century), that ‘whoever does not love the one who hates him is not a Christian’. Ambrose (fourth century), however, assigns the counsel to love one’s enemies to the ‘perfect duties’, as distinct from the ‘middle duties’, so that a two-tier ethic was already in train.<sup>110</sup> The distinction that Hilary (c. 315-367) makes in regard to Mt 5.48 is not between levels of virtue but between law and faith:

The law used to demand that your neighbour be loved and allowed hatred against an enemy. Faith, rather, requires that enemies be cherished.<sup>111</sup>

**Mt 5.7** | DA 216.2.11

---

<sup>105</sup> R 13.6.4.

<sup>106</sup> R 13.

<sup>107</sup> Cf. Eph 5.27.

<sup>108</sup> R 13.6.5.

<sup>109</sup> Luz, *Matthew 1-7*, 290.

<sup>110</sup> Luz, *Matthew 1-7*, 290-291.

<sup>111</sup> Manlio Simonetti, ed., *Matthew 1-13* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2001), 122.

5<sup>7</sup> ‘Blessed are the merciful, for they will receive mercy.’

De La Salle writes:

The fifth [beatitude] is: ‘Blessed are the merciful [*miséricordieux*], because they will have mercy shown them.’

These are they who have much tenderness and compassion [*de tendresse et de compassion*] for their neighbour, and who make an effort to soothe him/her in his/her misery [*misère*]. They will be shown mercy, because God will easily and completely pardon all their faults.

It is instructive to compare the language of this generalized statement about ‘tenderness and compassion’, as well as the second beatitude, ‘Blessed are the gentle’ [*doux*] with the words which characterize the approach to correction in the schools, which the Brothers developed over many years of dealing with young people, specifically, in the case of the evolution of *The Conduct of the Christian Schools*, more than fourteen years: 1706-1720. In an introduction to, for the times, an extraordinarily mild and positive approach to correction and punishment as developed in that book, we find teachers telling themselves:

It is necessary to have great perseverance, without however allowing the children to expect impunity and that they can do what they like, etc., for gentleness [*douceur*] must not be a part of that; but one has to know that it consists in this, that in the reproofs that one makes, there is no hint of harshness, nor anything that savours of anger or passion, but that what is displayed is the gravity of a father, a compassion full of tenderness and a certain gentleness [*une compassion pleine de tendresse et une certaine douceur*] which is nonetheless lively and effective, and that it is obvious in the teacher who is reproofing or punishing that it is a matter of necessity and concern for the common good that he is doing so.<sup>112</sup>

It is not difficult to see here a practical application of these two beatitudes, integrating ‘gospel maxims’ and life experience.

**Mt 5.8** | DA 216.2.12

5<sup>8</sup> ‘Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God.’

---

<sup>112</sup> CE 150.0.23.



Again, De La Salle's only evident reference to this verse is in his discussion of the beatitudes in general in *Duties of A Christian*:

The sixth [beatitude] is 'Blessed are those who have a pure heart, for they will see God.'

These are they who, having a heart free from all vice and all affection for the least sin, are attached to God alone. They will see God because there is no darkness in their soul that may hinder them from seeing the eternal truths, and being pure and detached from all things, they will see God in heaven with clear and penetrating vision.<sup>113</sup>

This sentiment is similar to that, for example, in the model prayer, in *Explanation of the Method of Interior Prayer*, relating to reflecting on God's presence in a church (one of several ways of considering the presence of God). De La Salle prays for 'that holiness ... which is the surest mark of my *attachment* to you and to your service', and asks God to make his soul worthy of the graces poured out on 'one who appears before you in a church with a *pure heart*, and completely *detached* from the least of sins'.<sup>114</sup>

#### **Mt 5.9 | DA 216**

5<sup>9</sup> 'Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God.'

Again, the only reference appears to be in this same section of *Duties of a Christian*:

The seventh [beatitude] is: 'Blessed are the peaceful,<sup>115</sup> for they will be called children of God'.<sup>116</sup> These are the ones who strive to conquer their passions to have and preserve peace with God, with their neighbour, and with themselves. They will be called children of God through the likeness that they have with him and with Jesus Christ, who always possessed much peace, which he came to bring on earth.<sup>117</sup>

---

<sup>113</sup> DA 216.2.12.

<sup>114</sup> EM 2.73.3.

<sup>115</sup> *pacifique*. Dict. 1694 includes this only as an adjective, though a footnote in Mons explains that it means 'those who love and procure peace'.

<sup>116</sup> The original is the same as in Mons.

<sup>117</sup> DA 216.2.13. If De La Salle is quoting directly here, the most likely version is Mons. Jesus' coming to bring peace is perhaps a reference to Col 1.20 (*la paix fût fait entre ce qui est dans le ciel, et ce qui est sur la terre*, Amelote), which is quoted in MF 112.3.1 (See Rodrigue, *Contribution*, 174). The only other use of the term *pacifique* in De La Salle's writings is later in the same work, where it is used to

**Mt 5.10** | DA 216.2.13; MR 196.2.1

5<sup>10</sup> ‘Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness’ sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

**Mt 5.10** | DA 216.2.14

In *Duties of a Christian* De La Salle presents the eighth beatitude in a similar way:

The eighth [beatitude] is ‘Blessed are those who suffer persecution for justice, because the kingdom of Heaven is theirs’.<sup>118</sup>

These are they who are persecuted for the faith or for religion by infidels and also to those who, leading a holy life, suffer railleries, contempt, and ill-treatment<sup>119</sup> from people who live disorderly lives.<sup>120</sup> The kingdom of Heaven is theirs because nothing provides greater assurance of eternal happiness than that one suffers in God’s interests.

**Mt 5.10** | DA 196.2.1

As noted above in connection with Mt 5.3, this beatitude is also referred to in Meditation 196, the fourth of the *Meditations for the Time of Retreat*, where it is one of the illustrations of Jesus’ sometimes proposing ‘as a happiness<sup>121</sup> everything that the world holds in horror’. This includes ‘every kind of persecution for the sake of justice’.<sup>122</sup> De La Salle then adds, citing Mt 5.12, ‘even telling his disciples that they ought to be glad and rejoice when such things happen to them’.<sup>123</sup>

**Mt 5.11-12** | MD 5.3.2; 44.2.1; MF 95.3.1; 167.3.2; 176.3.2;<sup>124</sup> MR 196.2.1

---

describe, evidently in the terms of the Council of Trent, the category of old-law sacrifices called ‘eucharistic’ – also called ‘peace offerings’ (DA 305.3.3).

<sup>118</sup> DA 216.2.14. Again, the Mons version is the more likely source.

<sup>119</sup> *des railleries, des mépris, et des mauvais traitements*. The plurals would seem to indicate being repeatedly mocked, scorned and ill-treated.

<sup>120</sup> *qui vivent dans le dérèglement*; as well as denoting moral disorder, there is the connotation that such people have no ‘rule’ of life.

<sup>121</sup> *un bonheur*, cf. *bienheureux* in the Beatitudes.

<sup>122</sup> *toutes sortes de persécutions pour la justice*, cf. Mons and Amelote *ceux qui souffrent persécution pour la justice*.

<sup>123</sup> MR 196.2.1. De La Salle’s text reads: *qu’ils devaient être ravis de joie*, the expression used in both Mons and Amelote. Cf. Huré, *tressaillez de joie*.

<sup>124</sup> There is a reference to Mt 5.11-12 in MA 168.3.2 ‘For the feast of Saint Yon’, one of six meditations which appear at the end of the original edition (see CL 12, 258-

5<sup>11</sup> ‘Blessed are you when people revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account. <sup>12</sup> Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven, for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you.’

**Mt 5.11** has been alluded to in this same list, in the citing of ‘injuries’ (*injures*), ‘insults’ (*affronts*) and ‘slander’ (*calomnies*).<sup>125</sup> De La Salle does not include it in the section of *Duties of a Christian* dealing with ‘evangelical counsels’, confining himself to a list of eight. However, he makes numerous references to Mt 5.11 elsewhere.

#### **Mt 5.11** | MD 5.3.2

In MD 5.3.2, the reference to **Mt 5.11** appears in the same part of the meditation as Mt 5.3, discussed above. The context, we recall, is a warning against ‘contradicting’ even those maxims of Jesus which reflect ‘the perfect way’.<sup>126</sup> Hence, he invites the readers to ‘probe the depths of our heart. Is it truly penetrated with what Jesus Christ said: You will be blessed, when people say falsely every sort of evil of you?’<sup>127</sup>

#### **Mt 5.11** | MD 44.2.1

In terms of the nine principles stated in Chapter 1 of this thesis, this meditation, for the Monday in the Octave of Pentecost (MD 44), is very relevant. The Gospel of the

---

261). Rodrigue, *Contribution*, 539-540, has outlined the reasons for their not being attributable to De La Salle. In the case of MA 168, these include an anachronistic reference to the ‘kings’ of third century France.

<sup>125</sup> Mons Mt 5.11 has *d’injures & de reproches*; Amelote 1688 has *des affronts*. Perhaps here De La Salle is and relying on his memory of at least two different versions. Neither text uses the word *calomnies*, but rather *diront faussement toute sorte de mal contre vous* and *on aura dit faussement toute sorte de mal contre vous*, respectively. *Calomnies* is likely to be a reference to the versions of Mt 5.44 which include the Lukan *et qui vous calomnient*, as noted previously.

<sup>126</sup> De La Salle refers explicitly in this 3<sup>rd</sup> Point to the ‘person consecrated to God’, as distinct from ‘a secular person’ (*un séculier*). When the latter is used as a noun rather than an adjective, according to Dict. 1694, it refers to lay people as distinct from either ecclesiastics or vowed religious. In the final admonition De La Salle observes that ‘we are people God has called to live according to the perfection of the Gospel’. However, as discussed in the conclusion below, De La Salle does not limit the pursuit of ‘perfection’ to ecclesiastics or religious.

<sup>127</sup> The form of the quotation is almost identical to that of Mons. The future tenses no doubt reflect the future perfect of the Vulgate.

day is Jn 3.16-21,<sup>128</sup> and the theme heading announces ‘the first effect that the Holy Spirit produces in a soul’ as ‘enabling it to envisage things with the eyes of faith’, an expression to be found in the *Rule* (both the 1705 and 1718 editions) in the chapter on ‘the Spirit of this Institute’: ‘The spirit of this Institute is firstly a spirit of faith which should commit those who comprise it not to envisage anything except through the eyes of faith.’<sup>129</sup>

De La Salle asserts in the first Point that it is by the Holy Spirit’s descent that the true light has come into the world, and its first effect (the second is discussed in the following meditation) is to make the person fortunate enough to receive it able to see the things of Heaven with ‘a quite different eye’, which those who live according to the spirit of the age cannot.

The second Point relates directly to De La Salle’s approach to the Bible as outlined in Chapter 1, and includes the references to Mt 5.3, 11 and 44. For those reasons I quote it in full:

The truths which the Holy Spirit teaches those who have received him are the maxims which pervade<sup>130</sup> the holy Gospel, which he enables<sup>131</sup> them to understand, and which he enables them to taste, and according to which he enables them to live and to act;<sup>132</sup> for it is only the Spirit of God who can provide understanding of them and can bring a person effectively to practise them, because they are beyond the capacity of the human spirit.

In reality, can we acknowledge that the poor are blessed [Mt 5.3]; that we must love those who hate us [Vg Mt 5.44]; that we should rejoice when we are calumniated and every sort of evil is said against us, and a number of other truths completely contrary to what nature suggests, unless the Spirit of God himself teaches them to us?

You are obliged to teach these holy maxims to the children you are charged with instructing; you must be deeply convinced of them, so as to impress the strongly on their hearts. So make yourselves open to being taught<sup>133</sup> by this

---

<sup>128</sup> See the table of epistles and gospels provided in Huré, according to which the gospel reading for this day is greater in length within the diocese of Paris: Jn 3.5-21.

<sup>129</sup> RC 2.2.

<sup>130</sup> *répandues dans*.

<sup>131</sup> This sense of *faire* is difficult to translate, given that in English to ‘make’ someone do something suggests force.

<sup>132</sup> *vivre et agir* represent the theme of the meditation for the following day (MD 45), on ‘the second effect’.

<sup>133</sup> *docile*, in its literal sense.

Holy Spirit, who can in a short time provide you with a perfect understanding of them.<sup>134</sup>

In summary, De La Salle is indicating that what the Holy Spirit teaches is what is contained in the Gospel, and the Spirit teaches them in a way which enables people to understand, interiorize, savour, and put them into practice, a lot of the point of which is so that they can then teach them to young people in a way which *they* can understand, interiorize, and practise.

#### **Mt 5.11** | MF 95.3.1

The meditation for the Feast of Saint Genevieve, a patron of Paris, focuses first on the Saint's devoting herself to prayer, as well as to 'works of piety'.<sup>135</sup> The 2<sup>nd</sup> Point urges the readers to learn from the example of Genevieve in taking the means 'to be masters of your senses'. The 3<sup>rd</sup> Point begins:

The reward Saint Genevieve received in this life for all her great deeds and her exercises of piety was long and frequent illnesses, considerable suffering, and persecution throughout her whole life which were much increased by some quite extraordinary calumnies, for which she did not avenge herself, after the example of Saint Paul, who by through actions and graces, and through prayers to God for those who had persecuted and slandered him [cf. 1 Cor 4.12-13].<sup>136</sup>

She prayed for those who persecuted and calumniated her 'because she knew that this is the reward God gives to his saints in this life, as Jesus Christ testifies in the holy Gospel; saying that this should make them happier than the possession of all imaginable treasures'. 'Make them happier' in the company of 'persecute' seems to be a clear allusion to **Mt 5.11-12**. Mention of 'treasures' could be an echo of such passages as Mt 6.19-21. The meditation concludes on the realistic note that 'to be treated in this way is all we should expect in this world after spending our life for God', though 'this is what will help us find and possess God and his holy peace within us'. The Brothers are urged to show by their silence and patience that they are content and that they accept all willingly for the love of God'.<sup>137</sup>

#### **Mt 5.11** | MF 176.3.2

---

<sup>134</sup> MD 44.2.1-2.

<sup>135</sup> MF 95.1.1.

<sup>136</sup> MF 95.3.1.

<sup>137</sup> MF 95.3.2.

De La Salle's reflections on the life of the Jesuit and former Duke of Gandia, St Francis Borgia, begin with his humility, and then, in the 2<sup>nd</sup> Point, focus on the poverty he assumed as member of the 'Company of Jesus'.<sup>138</sup> The readers are exhorted to imitate the saint in both virtues. While there is a reference in the 1<sup>st</sup> Point to Jesus and Judas at the Last Supper, there do not appear to be any biblical references in these sections of the meditation, even in regard to poverty.<sup>139</sup> The 3<sup>rd</sup> Point, however, upholds Francis' spirit of mortification, evident in his practices and his attitude of liking 'everything that made him uncomfortable'. He had no greater gratitude for anyone than for 'those who persecuted him; because he considered himself very blessed [*heureux*] in persecutions, according the spirit of the Gospel'.<sup>140</sup> This would appear to be an allusion to **Mt 5.11**.

#### **Mt 5.11** | MR 196.2.1

The same verse is alluded to in the fourth meditation for the time of retreat, as mentioned in the discussion of Mt 5.3, above. The list of what Jesus sometimes proposed as 'a happiness', comprising the beatitudes relating to poverty, insults, slander and every kind of persecution for the sake of justice, includes 'injuries' (*injures*),<sup>141</sup> a term used in the Mons 1672 translation of **Mt 5.11**.

De La Salle tells the Brother-teachers,

you whom Jesus Christ has chosen among so many others to be his co-workers [cf. Amelote 1 Cor 3.9: 'We help God in his work'] in the salvation of souls. In reading the Gospel you must study the manner, and the means which he used to lead his disciples to the practice of the truths of the Gospel; as much presenting to them as a happiness [*bonheur*] all that the world holds in horror, such as poverty, injuries, insults, calumnies and all kinds of persecution for

---

<sup>138</sup> MF 176.1, 2.

<sup>139</sup> However, the reference in MF 176.2.2 to 'the sure and unfailing foundation' on which the community is to be built, that on which 'the holy apostles began to build the edifice of the Church' may be an allusion to Eph 5.20. The Amelote rendering of this verse contains *édifice, fondé, Apostres, and Jésus-Christ*; Huré includes *édifiés, fondement, Apôtres, and Jésus-Christ*. De La Salle's text: ... *sur ce fondement ; c'est celui que Jésus-Christ a trouvé le plus solide, et sur lequel les saints Apôtres ont commencé a bâtir l'édifice de l'Église.*

<sup>140</sup> ...*il s'estimait très heureux, selon l'esprit de l'Évangile, dans les persécutions*, MF 176.3.2.

<sup>141</sup> MR 196.2.1. Mons reads *Vous serez bienheureux lorsque les hommes vous chargeront d'injures & de reproches....* Amelote has *affronts*; Huré, *malédiction*s.

justice, telling them even that they should be filled with joy when these things happen to them, as giving them a horror of the sins into which people are accustomed to fall, at other times proposing to them virtues to be practised such as gentleness [*douceur*], humility [cf. Mt 11.29] and others; at other times helping them understand that if their justice is not more abundant than that of the scribes and Pharisees, they will not enter the kingdom of Heaven [Mt 5.20]...<sup>142</sup>

Here we can see many of De La Salle's customary preoccupations: that educators cooperate with Jesus in bringing about God's salvation of people; that the Gospel is to be studied, particularly with a view to emulating the way in which Jesus taught his disciples (recalling that in this work, *Meditations for the Time of Retreat*, young people are frequently referred to as the 'disciples' of their teachers); that Gospel truths and virtues are not only to be taught and learned but to be *practised*. There is also the assumption that what is read in the Scriptures about Jesus working with his followers can be actualized in the work of Jesus, through teachers, in 18<sup>th</sup> century France.

**Mt 5.12** | MF 87.3.1; MF 167.3.2

**Mt 5.12** | MF 87.3.1

De La Salle announces the theme of his meditation for the Feast of St Stephen (December 26) in the opening sentences, and couches it in the language of his community, 'the spirit of faith', though its substance is drawn from several passages in Acts 6-7:

It is said of Saint Stephen, in the Acts of the Apostles, that he was filled with faith [Acts 6.5]. He also demonstrated this well, having always conducted himself and always acted by the spirit of faith.<sup>143</sup>

'Conducted himself ... and acted' expresses the complementary dimensions of 'the spirit of the Institute' ('zeal'), which De La Salle makes explicit in the application to be drawn from the 1<sup>st</sup> Point: like St Stephen, the Brothers are to demonstrate that they are true disciples of Jesus,

having nothing in view but God in your actions, and proclaiming with as much boldness and intrepidity as he the maxims of the holy Gospel. And what must fortify your zeal, as much as your faith, is that you are proclaiming them as ministers of God [cf. Rom 15.16; Amelote 1 Cor 4.1 (*ministers*)].

---

<sup>142</sup> MR 196.2.1-2.

<sup>143</sup> MF 87.1.1.

The 2<sup>nd</sup> Point develops the latter requirement: St Stephen was not satisfied with being ‘filled with faith’. He wanted ‘to share his fullness with those of his nation by preaching to them the new religion which had just been established, and by making known to them, with the testimony of Holy Scripture, Jesus Christ, whom they did not know, and who had come to give them the means of salvation and to die for them’.<sup>144</sup>

He tells his teachers, ‘You have been chosen by God to make Jesus Christ known and to proclaim him’, and they are to teach their students ‘the rules of the Christian life and the means they must use to be saved’.<sup>145</sup>

This consideration leads into the 3<sup>rd</sup> Point: ‘After teaching the faith, Saint Stephen also died for the faith’. Returning to the story in Acts 7, De La Salle notes the hearers’ reaction to Stephen’s sermon, their stoning him as a blasphemer, and adds the comment from **Mt 5.12**: ‘That is how they treated all the prophets’.<sup>146</sup> Saint Stephen, he says, considered himself blessed [*heureux* – cf. the *bienheureux* of the beatitudes] to have been treated like those who had preceded him, and ‘says Saint Augustine’ he received ‘with thanksgiving this shower of stones that fell on him’.

The conclusion for the teachers is that they should ‘enter into these dispositions from today on’:

In imitation of Saint Stephen, faith must make you consider all you suffer from your neighbour as gifts and benefits from God. It is only pure faith which can inspire such sentiments.<sup>147</sup>

The characteristic emphasis on faith-and-zeal is obvious here, in the particular requirement that faith having been received is to be passed on to the teachers’ students for their salvation. The reference to St Augustine ‘saying’ is a typical invocation of De La Salle’s most quoted witness from the heritage of those who have previously reflected on and interpreted the Gospel.

---

<sup>144</sup> MF 87.2.1.

<sup>145</sup> MF 87.2.2.

<sup>146</sup> C’est ainsi qu’ils ont traité tous les prophètes. The plural subject makes this paraphrased citation (*traité* for *persécuté*; *persécuté* is used a few lines below) closer to Mons 1672 than to Huré or Amelote.

<sup>147</sup> MF 87.3.2. De La Salle several times refers to the ‘persecutions’ associated with the Brothers’ way of life and their work, and encourages them to embrace such difficulties not only as inevitable, but as actually enhancing their ministry, e.g. MF 78.3.2; 79.2.2; 100.3.2; 126.2.2; 162.3.2; 166.3.2.



**Mt 5.11-12** | MF 167.3.2

The final reference to **Mt 5.11-12** is to be found in De La Salle's meditation on St Matthew (MF 167, September 21, 'For the feast of Saint Matthew, apostle and evangelist'). This begins with an emphasis on the immediacy of Matthew's response to Jesus' call, the aspect of his life that is 'most admirable'. The account draws indirectly on Mt 9.9 and, for the account of Matthew/Levi's inviting Jesus to a great banquet, Lk 5.29. De La Salle refers to Jerome's observation that the 'several publicans and sinners' present 'were converted by Our Lord'.<sup>148</sup>

Matthew's 'extraordinary' response is said to demonstrate the power of grace through 'the word':

It is true that the word of Jesus Christ is efficacious [cf. Heb 4.12] in the calling of his apostles; but, since the majority were poor fishermen, it is not as surprising that they had followed Jesus Christ straight away, as it is in Saint Matthew's regard, who had wealth and who was living comfortably.

The citing of Augustine is in relation to the lesson to be drawn from Matthew's promptness. De La Salle asks his Brothers,

How many time, perhaps, has Jesus Christ called you? Have you not often said, like Saint Augustine, 'Tomorrow, tomorrow I shall be converted?' Don't you still say that every day?<sup>149</sup>

The 2<sup>nd</sup> Point again cites Jerome, who observes that Matthew remained attached to Jesus until the end of his life. That is why Jesus chose him to be an apostle, 'and to preach his Gospel with him and after him, and to write the first [Gospel], in the same language in which Jesus Christ had preached it, that is, in Syriac, which was a corrupt Hebrew'.<sup>150</sup> The lesson for the Brothers is:

---

<sup>148</sup> MF 167.1.1. Jean-Guy Rodrigue, *Contribution*, 418-422, has shown that part of De La Salle's text, here and elsewhere in the meditations on the saints, derives from the *Martyrology* of Abbé François Paris, published in 1691. De la Salle also refers to Jerome's *In Mattheum*, in a reading from the Roman Breviary, and to the *Confessions* of Augustine.

<sup>149</sup> MF 167.1.2.

<sup>150</sup> The relevant passage from F. Paris has it that 'after the descent of the Holy Spirit, he [Matthew] had the privilege of writing the first Gospel in the same language in which Jesus Christ preached it, that is in Hebrew [*hébreu*]' (Rodrigue, *Contribution*, 420). De La Salle's observations about Syriac must derive from another source.

Do not be attached except to Jesus Christ, to his teaching, and his holy maxims, since he has done you the honour of choosing you<sup>151</sup> in preference to a great number of others in order to announce these maxims to the children who are his well-beloved.<sup>152</sup>

This Point concludes with this encouraging and challenging injunction to teachers:

Hold your work in high esteem – it is apostolic, and study attentively<sup>153</sup> the Gospel of Saint Matthew, in which are proposed the holiest maxims of Jesus Christ and the principal foundations of Christian piety.

The 3<sup>rd</sup> Point relates Matthew's preaching assignment in 'Ethiopia', where he converted the king and his entire family.<sup>154</sup> However, according to the story on which De La Salle is drawing, the king's successor had Matthew put to death because he would not persuade Iphigenia, the former king's daughter, to marry the new king against her vow of chastity. This provides an example to teachers, supported by citing

**Mt 5.12:**

When anyone wants to engage your disciples in doing evil, strengthen them in doing good, and do not expect any other rewards when you have discharged your duty well than to suffer persecution, injuries, outrages, and curses, and have people falsely say every sort of evil against you, as Saint Matthew wrote, and as he himself practised. 'So rejoice,' adds the same saint, 'and jump for joy because a great reward is reserved for you in heaven; for it was in this way that they persecuted the prophets who were before you.' Be convinced that such persecutions will draw down on you the graces of God in abundance, and his blessings on your work.<sup>155</sup>

---

<sup>151</sup> De La Salle is here emphasizing that the Brothers are personally called to the vocation of educating young people.

<sup>152</sup> ...aux enfants, qui sont ses bien-aimés, MF 167.2.2. The word is the same as in e.g. Mt 3.17 (Mons): *C'est mon Fils bienaimé*. It also reflects the language of the Song of Solomon, to which (Song 2.16) De La Salle alludes in one of his Prayers after Communion, written 'to meet the needs of the Brothers, their students, the parents and others': 'Just as I am your beloved [*bien-aimé*], I want you to be mine' (I 6.25.2). See the Introduction in Eugene Lappin, ed., *Religious Instructions and Exercises of Piety for the Christian Schools: John Baptist de La Salle* (Landover, MD: Lasallian Publications, 2002), 2.

<sup>153</sup> avec application.

<sup>154</sup> As before, this colourful tradition is drawn from F. Paris, though De La Salle omits details such as Matthew's gift for languages and his 'prodigies and miracles'. See Rodrigue, *Contribution*, 421.

<sup>155</sup> MF 167.3.2. Rodrigue suggests the Mons 1688 version of Mt 5.11-12 as the likely source, and it is clearly very close to De La Salle's text except for the latter's *qu'on a persécuté* in place of the Mons' *qu'ils ont persécuté*. Huré has *qu'on a persécuté* (but *les cieux* rather than the singular). De La Salle may have been working from a recollection of more than one version.

It is important to place ‘engaging your disciples in doing evil’ in its historical and social context. Charles Démia, a priest whose *Remonstrances* (1666, 1668) concerning the need for the education of the poor in Lyons, revealed the effects of poor parents being understandably preoccupied with survival, and often neglecting their children’s upbringing. His concerns are echoed in De La Salle’s own writing, specifically in the second of the *Meditations for the Time of Retreat* (MR 194). Démia’s influence on De La Salle came through Nicolas Roland, De La Salle’s spiritual director and a fellow canon in Reims. Démia very colourfully describes the effects of idleness on the children of the poor:

... the poor, not having the means of raising their children in this way, leave them in ignorance of their obligations: the concern they have for living makes them forget that of enabling them to learn how to live well ...

Young people who are badly brought up ordinarily fall into idleness, from which it follows that they do nothing but hit the streets<sup>156</sup> and are seen in packs at the crossroads where more often than not they engage in dissolute chatter, becoming unruly, debauched, gamblers, blasphemers, scrappers, addicted to drunkenness, impurity, thieving, and brigandage, so that they finally become the most depraved and seditious people in the State.<sup>157</sup>

A description such as this gives point to De La Salle’s preoccupation with the ‘salvation’ of children, whether as reflecting his contemporary theological understanding of the term, or the actual personal and social effects of the education to which he and his community gave them free access.

Several characteristics of De La Salle’s appreciation of the Bible are evident in this meditation: the efficacy of the word of God (an allusion to Heb 4.12); his incorporation of the work of Church Fathers, Jerome and Augustine; the encouragement not simply to know of biblical texts, but to be ‘attached’ to Jesus and to the maxims of his Gospel; the need to teach these maxims to young people; the associated need attentively to study the Gospel of Matthew; that Matthew himself not only reported maxims such as Mt 5.11-12, but *practised* them.

---

<sup>156</sup> *battre le pave*.

<sup>157</sup> Cited in Jean Pungier, *Jean-Baptiste de La Salle: le message de son catéchisme* (Roma: Casa Generalizia Fratelli Scuole Cristiane, 1984), 23-24. See also Calcutt, *De La Salle*, 78, 104.

## Conclusion: De La Salle and Matthew 5.3-12

De La Salle's discussion of the Beatitudes (at least the first eight) under the heading 'The Evangelical Counsels' in *The Duties of a Christian* raises the question of how he understood them in terms of living a Christian life, and particularly for *whom* they were intended as 'counsels'. A modern work of reference describes evangelical counsels as 'ideals, known as poverty, chastity, and obedience, given by Jesus to those who would live perfect Christian lives'. The early churches, it is said, 'tended to equate the minimal moral demands of the Christian life, which were seen as absolutely necessary for salvation, with the basic requirements of natural law', equated with the ten commandments. In this context, 'Jesus' more austere demands could be interpreted as ideals rather than as absolute commands'. Over time, structures of organised religious life developed, within which certain people could live out the evangelical counsels, 'seen as Jesus' invitations to a more perfect imitation of him rather than as commands placed on all Christians'.<sup>158</sup>

In his discussion of the history of interpretation of the Sermon on the Mount, Graham Stanton indicates that it was Thomas Aquinas, in interpreting the Sermon, who introduced the distinction, influential in Catholic thought, between the *commandments* of the new law, and the *counsels*. The former are necessary for salvation. The counsels, in Thomas' words, 'render the gaining of eternal bliss more assured and expeditious', and are intended for those who strive for perfection.' Based on poverty, chastity and obedience, they are primarily for those who join religious life.<sup>159</sup>

Luke Salm observes that the theology of vows in the 17<sup>th</sup> century derives from Aquinas' extensive treatment of the subject, and that part of the reason for vows being 'high on the list of targets for the Protestant reformers of the 16<sup>th</sup> century' was that the scriptural basis for the 'structure' of religious life was seen to be weak.<sup>160</sup> The fundamental issue here seems to be not so much the structure of consecrated life, but, as Salm notes, the fact that

---

<sup>158</sup> McBrien, *Encyclopedia*, 372-373.

<sup>159</sup> Graham N. Stanton, *A Gospel for a New People: Studies in Matthew* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1992), 290-291.

<sup>160</sup> Luke Salm, 'Vows', in *Lasallian Themes*, ed. Léon Lauraire (Rome: Brothers of the Christian Schools, 1995), 2: 261.

recent biblical and theological scholarship has shown that there is little basis in the New Testament for two classes of Christians, ordinary Christians who observe only the commandments, and “perfect” Christians who practice the counsels. It is stressed today that the so-called hard sayings of Jesus are addressed as challenges to anyone who would be a Christian.<sup>161</sup>

Salm also points out that nowhere in his writings does De La Salle discuss the vows of religion (poverty, chastity, obedience) as such, and that in his lifetime the Brothers did not take vows of poverty and chastity, though from the beginning ‘they were expected and by Rule to share everything in common and to lead a chaste and celibate life’. Religious consecration was taken to be a reality from the moment of their entering the Society, in which not all took vows. The latter, it could be said, ‘add the note of specificity and obligation’ to consecration, which is fundamental, and which in its first historical expression (perhaps in 1686) was in terms only of a vow of obedience for the sake of the stability of their community.<sup>162</sup> In 1691, with two Brothers, and in 1694, with twelve, De La Salle consecrated himself to the ‘most holy Trinity’ through ‘a vow of association and union to bring about and maintain the said establishment [of the Society of the Christian Schools]’ (1691), and ‘vows of association and stability in the said society, and of obedience’ (1694).<sup>163</sup>

It is against this historical background, and with attention to his various reflections on the Beatitudes, that De La Salle’s own stance regarding ‘perfection’ must be understood. On the one hand, he appears to accept the distinction between ‘obligatory’ and ‘advisory’. At the beginning of the section in which he deals with the beatitudes, he writes:

We should not content ourselves, if we wish to live as true Christians, with practising the virtues which are obligatory [*d’obligation*], and which are opposed to the vices that we are obliged to avoid; we should also apply ourselves to several which are only advisory [*de conseil*], whose practice will serve to keep us away from sin, and dispose us not to fall into it.<sup>164</sup>

---

<sup>161</sup> Salm, ‘Vows’, 260.

<sup>162</sup> See Calcutt, *De La Salle*, 193.

<sup>163</sup> Bédel, *Origines*, 82, 92. In recent years, the vow of association for the educational service of the poor has been restored to the formula of vows taken by the Brothers. See General Council, *Circular 455: The Documents of the 44<sup>th</sup> General Chapter* (Rome: Brothers of the Christian Schools, 2007), 25. ‘Association’ is also a way of describing and encouraging different forms of ‘belonging’ to the Institute on the part of women and men in the global educational mission.

<sup>164</sup> DA 216.2.1.

These ‘counsels’ are to be found ‘throughout the holy Gospel and the New Testament’, and can in the main be reduced to three kinds: the works of mercy, the eight beatitudes and ‘a number of maxims that Jesus Christ has taught us, personally or through his Apostles, to be practised by those who wish to serve him with fidelity’.<sup>165</sup>

But, on the other hand, it is to be noted that ‘we’ appears to comprise ‘the faithful’,<sup>166</sup> not just a sub-set of Christians, and there is no mention of the ‘vows of religion’ amongst the evangelical counsels.<sup>167</sup>

De La Salle’s inclusive understanding is quite explicit in the final paragraph of this treatment of the counsels, immediately following his discussion of the eighth of Matthew’s beatitudes:

There are still more Christian maxims that it has not been thought necessary to mention here because they will easily be found in many places in the New Testament. Jesus Christ, calling Christians to a high [degree of] perfection, has revealed these principles to them either himself, or through his holy Apostles, and has left them in writing. It is up to [Christians] to read them often, and to meditate on them, so as to be disposed to practise them, and by this means to become perfect Christians.<sup>168</sup>

De La Salle’s location of the counsels firmly within the New Testament has evidently aligned his understanding of them with that of the Reformers more so than with any two-tiered view of the Christian life, though Michel Sauvage places him in the mainstream of the Catholic ‘Counter-Reformation’, and observes that ‘like most of the spiritual authors of the time, he sees in Sacred Scripture the foundation of the spiritual life of the Christian’.<sup>169</sup> As noted above in considering De La Salle’s

---

<sup>165</sup> DA 216.2.2.

<sup>166</sup> *fidèles*, DA 216.1.1.

<sup>167</sup> De La Salle points to the connection between the Gospel and the Brothers’ Rule (not the vows) in MD 58.2.2, where he also distinguishes Jesus’ ‘commandments’ and ‘the counsels of the Gospel’, exemplified here in Mt 5.23, 44. The Brothers are to be faithful not only to the commandments, but to the counsels ‘and consequently to the observance of your *Rule*’.

<sup>168</sup> DA 216.2.15.

<sup>169</sup> Michel Sauvage, ‘L’itinéraire évangélique de Saint Jean-Baptiste de La Salle’ in *Jean-Baptiste de La Salle et la Fondation de son Institut: ‘Frères consacrés en Église pour le Monde*’, ed. Alain Houry, (CL 55; Rome: Maison Saint Jean-Baptiste de La Salle, 2001), 106.

reference to Mt 5.3 in his tenth meditation for the time of retreat (MR 202.2), these evangelical counsels are to be reflected on and practised not only by teachers, but taught to and modelled for their ‘disciples’ – the young people in their schools – so that they, too, might become ‘perfect Christians’.

This *practice* of the evangelical counsels underlines a further emphasis we have noted in De La Salle’s writings: the repeated insistence not only on faith and understanding, but also on action. ‘We’ are called ‘to live the perfection of the Gospel’;<sup>170</sup> teachers are to show that they believe the maxims of the Gospel by the way their actions conform to them;<sup>171</sup> in reading the Gospel they must study the manner and the means that Jesus used ‘to lead his disciples to practise the truths of the Gospel’;<sup>172</sup> to revisit just a sample of the meditations which refer to the Beatitudes, which themselves are described as ‘actions and practices of virtues’.<sup>173</sup> As previously observed, the ‘spirit of the Institute’ is unitary but twofold: faith-and-zeal, faith expressed in action.

Faith is not only a belief in maxims, but firstly a belief in Jesus. This is clear, for example, in the meditation for the Feast of St Thomas, where the difficulty of believing in, and practising, ‘maxims’ such as Mt 5.3 and Mt 5.44 is discussed. But the fundamental incredulity is that people ‘do not believe in Jesus Christ’.<sup>174</sup> The same meditation insists that ‘it is in vain that you believe what Jesus Christ *proposed to you* in the holy Gospel if your actions do not give proof of your belief’.<sup>175</sup> There seems to be an unelaborated assumption that the words of the Gospel have been directed by Jesus to the reader. Moreover, language such as that in the fourth Meditation for the Time of Retreat: ‘he [Jesus Christ] has chosen you to do his work’<sup>176</sup> makes it clear that not only understanding, but action, is a function of a living relationship with Jesus.

---

<sup>170</sup> MD 5.3.2.

<sup>171</sup> MF 84.1.2.

<sup>172</sup> MR 196.2.1.

<sup>173</sup> *des actions et pratiques de vertus*, DA 216.2.6.

<sup>174</sup> MF 84.1.1.

<sup>175</sup> MF 84.3.1.

<sup>176</sup> MR 196.1.1.

De La Salle's spirituality has been characterised as 'mystical realism'<sup>177</sup>. In taking up this expression, Jean-Guy Rodrigue writes:

This Lasallian community [of 1694] does not exist without tension between its transcendent and its this-world dynamics, a sort of mystical realism. 'It is born, becomes an organism, and establishes its identity and purpose in a movement coming from God that takes hold of each Brother to commit him to the service of the poor for the glory of God'.<sup>178</sup>

Finally, I note the comparative frequency with which De La Salle refers to the nine beatitudes.

1. 'Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven' (Mt 5.3) is referred to nine times, in nine separate works.
2. 'Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted' (Mt 5.4; Vg Mt 5.5) is referred to once, within the overall discussion of the 'eight' beatitudes.
3. 'Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth' (Mt 5.5; Vg Mt 5.4) is referred to twice.
4. 'Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled' (Mt 5.6) is referred to once.
5. 'Blessed are the merciful, for they will receive mercy' (Mt 5.7) is referred to once.
6. 'Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God' (Mt 5.8) is referred to once.
7. 'Blessed are the peacemakers, for their will be called children of God' (Mt 5.9) is referred to once.
8. 'Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven' (Mt 5.10) is referred to twice.
9. 'Blessed are you when people revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account. Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven, for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you' (Mt 5.11-12) is referred to seven times, whether citing one or both verses. It is not included in the 'eight' beatitudes discussed in *The Duties of a Christian*.

---

<sup>177</sup> Sauvage, 'Itinéraire', 107.

<sup>178</sup> Jean-Guy Rodrigue, 'Religious Life in France During the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries', in *Spirituality in the Time of John Baptist de La Salle*, ed. Robert C. Berger (Landover, MD: Lasallian Publications, 1999), 76, and citing Sauvage and Campos, *Expérience et enseignement*, 359.



It is difficult not to see the comparatively strong emphasis on two of the beatitudes, 'Blessed are the poor in spirit', and 'Blessed are you when people revile and persecute you' as reflecting something of the life of De La Salle and of those of (at least) the early Brothers. He sees them as 'beatitudes' which cannot be understood unless lived out. As a well-to-do canon of the cathedral of Reims who, in the process of forming his community, distributed his wealth to feed the poor and spent the rest of his life establishing schools for the education of their children, De La Salle had a first-hand experience of poverty, which he understood as both an economic injustice and a spiritual virtue. The early communities struggled financially, and in some situations did not have enough to eat. Moreover, their schools attracted the ire of, especially, the Writing Masters, who saw De La Salle's refusal to exclude the non-certified poor from his schools as a threat to their own institutions. This, and other issues, left De La Salle and the Brothers the object of lawsuits. As a virtually unprecedented community of lay religious men, they were also from time to time under threat from church leaders who wanted to have control of them.

In the next chapter I shall consider De La Salle's references to the remainder of Mt 5.

## CHAPTER 6 – DE LA SALLE’S REFERENCES TO MATTHEW 5.17-48

### INTRODUCTION

This chapter continues the discussion of De La Salle’s references to Matthew 5, following his reflections on the Beatitudes, Mt 5.3-12 as considered in the previous chapter.

### MATTHEW 5.17-48: THE TEACHING CONTINUES

#### Mt 5.17 | MF 93.1.1

5<sup>17</sup> ‘Do not think that I have come to abolish the law or the prophets; I have come not to abolish but to fulfil.’

Meditation 93, ‘for the Feast of the Circumcision of Our Lord Jesus Christ’ (January 1) begins with the observation that

Jesus Christ in his circumcision submitted himself to the law, which ordered that all male children be circumcised on the eighth day after their birth [Lev 12.3],<sup>1</sup> although he was exempt from and above all law, being himself the sovereign legislator.<sup>2</sup>

This law, the meditation notes, applied only to sinners. It therefore praises the ‘admirable humility of Jesus Christ’ who makes himself resemble sinners and ‘in coming into the world takes upon himself the burden of our sins for he came only to make satisfaction for them’ (cf. Heb 10.5-7).

The readers are then exhorted to ‘admire today the obedience and the humility of the Saviour in this mystery’, who ‘came into this world as he himself says, not to destroy the Law, but to accomplish it’ (Mt 5.17).<sup>3</sup> De La Salle’s interpretation of Jesus’ submission to the Law in being circumcised, and in his evident upholding of the Law rather than superseding it, is that Jesus therein exemplifies obedience and humility. On that basis he proceeds to tell his Brothers that they should learn from Jesus

---

<sup>1</sup> The reference to the Law in Luke comes in the verses immediately following the mention of Jesus’ circumcision (Lk 2.21-24).

<sup>2</sup> MF 93.1.1.

<sup>3</sup> De La Salle’s citing of Mt 5.17 refers only to the Law, omitting reference to ‘the prophets’. The vocabulary reflects that of Mons and Amelote, rather than Huré.

to submit to those whom God has given you as your superiors, to humble yourself on the occasions that will arise, and to circumcise yourself with a true circumcision not made by human hands, as Saint Paul says,<sup>4</sup> but which, he says, consists of stripping off the fleshly body, that is, our sins, our passions and our own inclinations; for as the same Apostle says elsewhere, true circumcision is not that which is done in the flesh, and which is only exterior, but that of the heart, which is done by the Spirit.<sup>5</sup>

The citing of **Mt 5.17**, then, provides an articulation by the adult Jesus of his (Matthean) stance on the Law, and presents him as a model of obedience and humility. De La Salle's application for the listener is to obey God-given superiors, but the shift to a metaphorical understanding of circumcision deepens the context to one of thoroughgoing conversion amid overtones of Jesus' own redemptive obedience to the will of the Father.<sup>6</sup>

De La Salle's typical insistence on interiorization is evident: he endorses the Pauline notion that it is the Holy Spirit's 'circumcision' of the heart which is required. I note also the characteristic 'as Saint Paul *says*'.

#### **Mt 5.19** | R 16.1.3

5<sup>19</sup> 'Therefore, whoever breaks one of the least of these commandments, and teaches others to do the same, will be called least in the kingdom of heaven; but whoever does them and teaches them will be called great in the kingdom of heaven.'

Alain Houry indicates an allusion to **Mt 5.19** in the section of the *Collection of Various Short Treatises* entitled 'Reflections on their state and employment that the Brothers should make from time to time, especially during retreat':

Be convinced that it is very important for your salvation to be faithful in your state, and that this fidelity consists in not failing in anything of what God requires of you, as if having to give an account to God for even the least little details.<sup>7</sup>

---

<sup>4</sup> Col 2.11. The table of Epistles and Gospels provided at the end of Huré's volume indicates that the normal Epistle for this feast was Titus 2.11-15, but that in the Diocese of Paris it was Col 2.6-11. As well as this reference to Col 2.11, De La Salle alludes to vv. 13-14 at the end of the 1<sup>st</sup> Point.

<sup>5</sup> MF 93.1.2. The reference to external and internal circumcision is from Rom 2.28-29.

<sup>6</sup> See the reference to Heb 10.5-7, with its own appropriation of Ps 40.7-8.

<sup>7</sup> R 16.1.3,

While the spirit of this admonition reflects that of Mt 5.17-19, there seems little on which to base an argument for a closer textual relationship. Nonetheless, it has been observed that the section is closely modelled on the 1685 edition of a summary of a work by the Jesuit Julien Hayneufve, originally published in 1643.<sup>8</sup> A comparison of the texts of Hayneufve and De La Salle exposes an alteration by the latter which may indeed indicate that he had the text of Matthew in mind:

Hayneufve <sup>9</sup>	De La Salle
... et comme ayant à lui en rendre compte, jusques aux plus petites particularités et circonstances.	... comme ayant à en rendre compte à Dieu jusqu'aux <i>moindres</i> petites circonstances.

*Moindres* ['least'] is the qualifier for *commandemens* in the versions of Mt 5.19 of Mons, Amelote and Huré, and suggests its Matthean resonances.

**Mt 5.20** | MD 58.1.1; MR 196

5<sup>20</sup> 'For I tell you, unless your righteousness exceeds that of the scribes and Pharisees, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven.'

Meditation 58 is for the 5<sup>th</sup> Sunday after Pentecost, for which the Gospel reading was Mt 5.20-24. The heading is 'That religious persons must have much more virtue than secular people'.<sup>10</sup> The first reference to **Mt 5.20** comes in the opening sentence:

Jesus Christ says today in the Gospel to his holy apostles that if their virtue [*vertu*] does not surpass that of the Pharisees, they will not enter the kingdom of heaven.<sup>11</sup>

<sup>8</sup> Daniel Burke, *Collection 77*.

<sup>9</sup> Arturo Gareis, 'Un texte redevable aux *Méditations* du P. J. Hayneufve: *les Considérations que les Frères doivent faire de temps en temps, et surtout pendant leur retraite*,' in *Contribution à l'étude des sources du Recueil de différents petits traités*, ed. Maurice-Auguste Hermans and Arturo Gareis (CL 16; Rome: Maison Saint Jean-Baptiste de La Salle, 1964), 58.

<sup>10</sup> ...*que les personnes du siècle*, MD 58.1.

<sup>11</sup> The reference appears to be a paraphrase. The French versions use the term *justice*, not *vertu*. However, only Huré has *royaume des cieux* (plural).

I note first of all the way in which the text is quoted: ‘Jesus Christ says today in the Gospel ...’ (*Jésus-Christ dit aujourd’hui dans l’Évangile...*). It is not ‘in today’s Gospel we read that...’, but ‘Jesus Christ says today in the Gospel’.<sup>12</sup> This is consistent with the perspective outlined in Chapter 3, that De La Salle often presents Jesus’ biblical word as addressed directly to the contemporary reader.

The sense of a direct address is made explicit in the following sentence:

Apply these words to yourselves, and convince yourselves that Jesus-Christ is addressing them to you yourselves,<sup>13</sup> that if you do not have more virtue than secular people, you will be more subject to condemnation than they on the day of judgement.

The Pharisees<sup>14</sup> are actualized as ‘people of the age’ [*du siècle*] in eighteenth century France, content to observe the external and outward aspects of religion. Perhaps surprisingly from a modern perspective, ‘the people of the age’ are described as actually practising their religion: ‘They are present at holy Mass, listen to the sermons, they sometimes attend the Divine Office; but they do all these things and several others without any interior spirit’. De La Salle’s insistence on an internalized spirituality is again obvious.

The point to be drawn is that ‘you who have given yourselves to God, and consequently should consecrate to him every moment of your life, should also do everything in a *spirit* of religion’, and not be content with ‘only what is exterior in the duties of your state’. The final sentence of the 1<sup>st</sup> Point alludes to Rom 8.27: ‘For if people are satisfied with what is external in actions, God who sounds hearts will not put any value on them.’<sup>15</sup> The inadequacy of the merely exterior could not be more explicit. What has been said previously regarding De La Salle’s emphasis on practice as well doctrine and maxims, then, must be seen as complementary to an insistence on a fundamental interior disposition.

---

<sup>12</sup> Loes and Huether, *Meditations*, 129, translates this as ‘In today’s Gospel Jesus Christ tells his holy apostles...’.

<sup>13</sup> The French is emphatic: *...que Jésus-Christ vous les adresse à vous-mêmes....*

<sup>14</sup> However unjust to the historical reality, Luz, *Matthew 1-7*, 137, points out in connection with Mt 3.7 that the Pharisees were ‘Matthew’s most important opponents of Jesus’.

<sup>15</sup> The rendering *qui sonde les cœurs* is as in Amelote; Huré has *penetre le fond du cœur*.

In regard to ‘the duties of your state’, De La Salle refers frequently in the meditations to ‘your state’.<sup>16</sup> A related term is ‘your employment’.<sup>17</sup> Saturnino Gallego has summarised the difference and the relationship between these terms, which are significant in view of their relative frequency. In the language of De La Salle, he writes,

‘state’ is the stable form of life; and it is almost always applied to the religious and sacerdotal life. It implies the whole life of the Brother: his spiritual exercises, regularity, obedience, ‘flight’ from the world, fraternal charity, vows, and the school apostolate.

‘Employment’, on the other hand,

signifies exclusively the employment of Christian education. It never signifies the profession of the religious as one consecrated, but rather the profession as teacher. For the religious, its reality is encapsulated in the word ‘state’, but not vice versa. However, the frequent expression ‘state and employment’ does not oppose the terms. Nor is the twinned phrasing tautological since ‘state’ includes ‘employment’ as a part of it.<sup>18</sup>

There is a second reference to **Mt 5.20** in the 2<sup>nd</sup> Point, which invokes as ‘counsels of the Gospel’ Mt 5.23 and Mt 5.44 in its Vulgate rendering:

What God requires of you, and in which he wishes that your justice surpass that of people of the world, is that you not only keep his commandments exactly, but even that you make yourselves faithful to the practice of the counsels of his Gospel and, consequently, to the observance of your Rules. Have you nothing about which to reproach yourself in all that?<sup>19</sup>

It is significant that De La Salle connects ‘the counsels of the Gospel’ with the *Rule*, illustrating the principle enunciated in the 1718 *Rule* itself that the New Testament is to be looked upon as the Brothers’ ‘first and principal rule’ (RC 2.3). Moreover, the *practice* of the counsels is paramount.

**Mt 5.20** | MR 196.2.2

---

<sup>16</sup> *Votre état*; 14 times in MD; 45 in MF; 2 in MR.

<sup>17</sup> *Votre emploi*; 9 in MD; 46 in MF; 21 in MR.

<sup>18</sup> Saturnino Gallego, *An Introduction to the Writings of John Baptist de La Salle*, trans. Arthur Bertling (Rome: Brothers of the Christian Schools, 1993), 16.

<sup>19</sup> MD 58.2.2.

The reference to **Mt 5.20** in the fourth of the *Meditations for the Time of Retreat* (MR 196.2.2) is to be found, as noted previously, in the company of references to Mt 5.3, 10-12; and 11.29.

The context in this second Point is the *example* Jesus provided for his apostles, specifically by reference to Jn 13.15, ‘that he had given them the example, so that they might do as he himself had done’, and generally by the observation that Jesus ‘wanted his disciples to accompany him in all the conversions he brought about’, so that having seen the way in which he conducted himself, they would be able in all that they had to do to win souls for God, model and educate<sup>20</sup> themselves on the basis of his conduct.

De La Salle then makes a typical connection between the Jesus of the Gospel story and the Jesus present in the Brother-teachers’ world:

That is also what you should do, you whom Jesus Christ has chosen among so many others to be his co-operators in the salvation of souls. You must when reading the Gospel study the manner and the means which he used to bring his disciples to the practice of the truths of the Gospel...

Such ‘truths’, as noted above in connection with Mt 5.11, include those which identify poverty, slander and persecution as reasons for rejoicing. De La Salle goes on to encourage not only inculcating young people with a ‘horror for sins’, but the practice of virtues, and helping them to realize, citing **Mt 5.20**, that ‘if their justice is not more abundant than that of the scribes and Pharisees (who trouble themselves only about externals), they will not enter the kingdom of Heaven [Mt 5.20]...’<sup>21</sup>

The emphasis is on learning from Jesus, not just out of the Gospel as an ancient text, but from the continuation of the story into the readers’ own time, when Jesus calls *them* as disciples. Moreover, the language of the *Meditations for the Time of Retreat*

---

<sup>20</sup> *se régler et se former*. For *se régler*, Dict. 1694 indicates ‘to model oneself on’, and among the meanings of *former* is ‘to instruct’.

<sup>21</sup> MR 196.2.2. De La Salle’s vocabulary is closest to that of Huré (which is similar to Amelote’s), though his *plus abondante* appears to be a paraphrase, or perhaps De La Salle’s own conscious or unconscious recollection of the Vulgate’s *nisi abundaverit justitia vestra*. The observation in parenthesis, so printed in the *editio princeps* of c. 1730 (CL 13), may be an allusion to Mt 23.25.

has it that the teachers' pupils are also 'disciples', to be formed as Jesus formed his own disciples, and therefore to be encouraged, in turn, to practise 'Gospel truths'.

This is consonant with the tenor of the 1<sup>st</sup> Point, in which De La Salle makes the telling point that the teacher is taking the place of the Good Shepherd (cf. Lk 15.4-5), and therefore needs to 'ask him for the graces necessary to bring about the conversion of their hearts'. He continues:

You must, then, devote yourself very much to prayer in order to succeed in your ministry, ceaselessly representing the needs of your disciples to Jesus Christ, explaining to him the difficulties you have found in guiding them; Jesus Christ, seeing that you regard him in your work as the one who can do everything, and yourself as an instrument that ought to be moved only by him, will not fail to grant you what you ask of him.<sup>22</sup>

Prayer is therefore essential to the teaching and practice of Gospel truths, not just in the abstract, but as a dialogue with Jesus about the individual students the teacher is working with each day, especially those who may be challenging.

**Mt 5.22** | RB 207.1.510

5<sup>22</sup> 'But I say to you that if you are angry with a brother or sister, you will be liable to judgement; and if you insult a brother or sister, you will be liable to the council; and if you say, "You fool", you will be liable to the hell of fire.'

De La Salle's *The Rules of Christian Decorum and Civility*<sup>23</sup> was written between 1694 and 1702 as both a presentation of what was regarded as polite behaviour in French society, and as a classroom reader for advanced pupils. As noted in Chapter 4, however, it is not just a manual of conventional etiquette, useful as it would have been for young people aspiring to employment in social circles above their own. In its preface, De La Salle is at pains to point out that when teaching young people how to conduct themselves appropriately, parents and teachers should be careful 'to motivate them with the presence of God, as St Paul did when counselling the faithful of his

---

<sup>22</sup> MR 196.1.2.

<sup>23</sup> *Les règles de la bienséance et de la civilité*. A facsimile of the first (1703) edition is published as *Cahiers lasalliens*, 19.



time that their modesty should be evident to everyone because the Lord was near to them [cf. Phil 4.5], that is, out of respect for the presence of God'.<sup>24</sup>

So it is that, when writing of 'decorum' under the heading of 'Meetings and Conversations',<sup>25</sup> De La Salle's introduction to the topic refers to the Epistle of James,<sup>26</sup> and to Sirach. The third section under this heading is 'The faults that one can commit against decorum in speaking contrary to the charity one owes to one's neighbour'. It, too, refers to James and Sirach, warning against slander, before moving on to discuss pitfalls in conversation that might arise through insensitive comparison or indiscreet reminiscence.

It is with regard to 'insults' that the Gospel is then invoked:

One of the things which most offend propriety as well as charity is the insult.<sup>27</sup> It is also something that Our Lord condemns quite expressly in the Gospel: insults should never be found on the lips<sup>28</sup> of a Christian, since they are even most improper in a person of negligible education. One should never humiliate anyone at all, and it is not permitted to do anything, nor to say anything which might give rise to it.<sup>29</sup>

The condemnation seems to be that found in **Mt 5.22**, perhaps referring both to calling one's brother *raca*,<sup>30</sup> and 'you fool'. The former expression is translated in both RSV and NRSV simply as 'insult(s)'.

**Mt 5.23 (-24)** | MD 058.2.1; DC 20.07.3; RB 206.1.420;

**Mt 5.23-24** 'So when you are offering your gift at the altar, if you remember that your brother or sister has something against you,<sup>24</sup> leave your gift there before the altar and go; first be reconciled to your brother or sister, and then come and offer your gift.'

---

<sup>24</sup> RB 0.0.5-6.

<sup>25</sup> This is the seventh topic in Part Two, others having addressed themes as basic as 'Food' and 'Clothing', as well as 'Amusements' and 'Visits'.

<sup>26</sup> The explicit reference is to Jas 3.2.

<sup>27</sup> *les injures*,

<sup>28</sup> 'in the mouth'.

<sup>29</sup> RB 207.1.510.

<sup>30</sup> Seventeenth century biblical scholarship is evidenced by the fact that Amelote has a footnote regarding '*racha*' as deriving from ריק *ric* meaning empty, with reference to the brain, which accords with Luz' suggested possibility (*Matthew 1-7*, 235) of 'feather brain'. The Mons footnote is that it is a word of contempt (*mépris*).

**Mt 5.23** | MD 058.2.1

As noted above **Mt 5.23** is among the texts referred to in the Meditation for the 5<sup>th</sup> Sunday after Pentecost in support of the theme that ‘religious should have much more virtue than secular persons [“people of the age”]’ (cf. Mt 5.20). The latter, ‘those in the world who have a certain piety’, ‘think that they have satisfied their obligations as long as they do not display any significant vices, and that their external conduct is not at all reprehensible.’ Jesus Christ, however

condemns these sentiments in those who are striving to serve him with fidelity, and does not want anyone to approach him in prayer, or in participation in the Eucharist, while having the least coldness towards his brother. What he wants is that, far from hating one’s enemies, one loves them, one does good to them, one prays for them.<sup>31</sup>

The approaching in *prayer* reflects what may be a parallel passage in Mark: ‘Whenever you stand praying, forgive...’ (Mk 11.25).<sup>32</sup> The ‘Eucharist/brother’ reference appears to be based on **Mt 5.23**. It is likely that Jesus’ requirement of love for enemies alludes not to Lk 6.27-28, as the editorial references would have it, but to the Vulgate version of Mt 5.44: ‘But I say to you, Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, and pray for those who persecute and calumniate you’.

As do the Beatitudes, such passages as **Mt 5.23** represent what De La Salle means by ‘the counsels of the Gospel’.

**Mt 5.23** | DC 20.07.3

In the third part of ‘the Catechism of the Brothers of the Christian Schools by questions and answers’,<sup>33</sup> Treatise 2 is entitled ‘Ceremonies performed during the public rites of the Christian Religion’. These ‘ceremonies’ are described as ‘the second means the Church uses to encourage Christians to offer God exterior and

---

<sup>31</sup> MD 58.2.1.

<sup>32</sup> See Davies and Allison, *Matthew*, 1: 516, for a discussion of the relationship between Mt 5.23 and Mk 11.25, including Bultmann’s suggestion that the Matthean version is more original.

<sup>33</sup> See Houry, *Écrits*, ‘Présentation du livre Du Culte extérieur et public (DC)’.

public worship’,<sup>34</sup> the ‘first means’ being the public religious rites themselves: the parish Mass, the Divine Office, then ‘processions confraternities and pilgrimages’, as well as ‘extraordinary public rites’ performed in the face of heresy, weather unfavourable to the crops, war, and ‘some contagious or public malady’.<sup>35</sup>

There are seven ‘ceremonies’ discussed that take place before and during the parish Mass:

- 1) the blessing of the water, 2) the procession, 3) the sermon, 4) the Offertory,
- 5) the blessed bread, 6) the kiss of peace, and 7) the incensing.<sup>36</sup>

It is with regard to the ‘kiss of peace’ that an allusion is made to **Mt 5.23-24**. As with the ‘blessed bread’, this was a liturgical adaptation of primitive practice different from that current in the Roman Catholic liturgy.<sup>37</sup> It was given ‘to all in the congregation during the parish High Mass so that we can kiss it’:

It is to show that the faithful should have perfect charity among themselves, and that those who have ceased to have it be reconciled with one another and return together into close union.<sup>38</sup>

The theme of union and reconciliation is emphasised throughout the short article. The origin of the ceremony is given as the kisses exchanged in the early Church before receiving Communion. The reason for the custom of exchanging kisses is related explicitly to **Mt 5.23-24**:

This was to have them carry out what Our Lord says in the holy Gospel: When you wish to present something at the altar, if you know that your brother has

---

<sup>34</sup> DC 20.0.1.

<sup>35</sup> DC 10.1.1-3.

<sup>36</sup> DC 20.0.2. It should be noted that ‘the blessed bread’ is distinct from the eucharistic bread itself. It was evidently distributed in lieu of sacramental communion as a symbolic revival of the early Christian *agape* meal, and began ‘when the faithful stopped going to Communion at all Masses after the priest, according to ancient custom’ (DC 20.6.4).

<sup>37</sup> The 1913 edition of the *Catholic Encyclopedia* indicates that this was ‘the *instrumentum pacis*, or *osculatorium*, known in English as the “pax-board” or “pax-brede”, gradually introduced ‘in the 12<sup>th</sup> or 13<sup>th</sup> century’. ‘This was a little plaque of metal, ivory, or wood, generally decorated with some pious carving and provided with a handle, which was first brought to the altar for the celebrant to kiss at the proper place in the Mass and then brought to each of the congregation in turn at the altar rails’. See ‘Pax,’ newadvent.org. <http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/11594b.htm>.

<sup>38</sup> DC 20.7.1.

something against you, go beforehand to be reconciled with him, and then you can come to offer your present to God before the altar.<sup>39</sup>

The significance is then explained in terms of the faithful being ‘not worthy to be present and participate in the sacrifice of the holy Mass unless they are fully united with one another; if they have a difficulty [*peine*] with someone or know that someone has a difficulty with them, they must, before going to holy Mass, be reconciled with him/her’.<sup>40</sup>

Finally, De La Salle outlines the ‘spirit’ in which those present at the parish mass should kiss the instrument of peace:

They should kiss it while entering into the intention of the Church, and thus with the three following dispositions: 1) to have peace and union with the faithful; 2) to be reconciled in the depths of their heart with those with whom they are not fully united; 3) to be resolved to be actively and effectively reconciled, and in fact as soon as they have left the church, if they have not already done so.<sup>41</sup>

It can be seen that, even when providing the basis for teachers to instruct young people about ‘exterior and public worship’,<sup>42</sup> De La Salle invokes the Gospel, and is therefore at pains to emphasise the necessary *interior* dispositions.

### **Mt 5.23** | RB 206.1.420

The section of *The Rules of Christian Decorum and Civility* which deals with ‘visits’ begins with the observation that ‘living in the world, one cannot be dispensed from sometimes making and receiving visits; it is an obligation which ‘propriety (*la bienséance*) imposes on all seculars (*les séculiers*).<sup>43</sup> De La Salle points out that even the Blessed Virgin, although ‘retired’ (*retiree* – no doubt in the sense of withdrawn from social interaction during her pregnancy) paid a visit to her cousin Elizabeth, and

---

<sup>39</sup> DC 20.7.3. While some of the terminology (*votre présent* for *don* or *offrande*) is different from that of the available French texts the expression *allez auparavant vous réconcilier avec lui, et puis vous viendrez...* suggests that De La Salle may have had the Huré text in mind: *et allez vous réconcilier auparavant avec votre frère, & puis vous viendrez faire votre offrande.*

<sup>40</sup> DC 20.7.4.

<sup>41</sup> DC 20.7.5.

<sup>42</sup> DC 20.0.1.

<sup>43</sup> RB 206.1.418. Dict.1694 indicates that as an adjective, *seculier* applies to both ecclesiastics and lay persons as distinct from those who take vows and live in community; as a noun it refers to lay persons.

that ‘it seems that the Gospel only reports it at such length so that it can serve as a model for our own [visits].<sup>44</sup> Jesus himself also ‘paid visits several times out of simple charity having no obligation other than that’.

‘Justice and charity’ are indeed the criteria according to which Christian decorum obliges us to make visits: ‘to show someone signs of respect, or to maintain union and charity’.<sup>45</sup>

Propriety based on justice would dictate visiting, for example, a father who has a sick child,<sup>46</sup> or a child a sick parent. The allusion to **Mt 5.23-24** appears also to fall under this heading:

When someone feels hatred and aversion towards another person, both are obliged, according to the rules of the Gospel, to visit one another so as to be reconciled together, and to live entirely at peace.<sup>47</sup>

**Mt 5.24 (23-24?)** | I 1.6.51

---

<sup>44</sup> If this seems a somewhat superficial reading of the Lucan passage (in a work, however, addressed primarily to young people), it should be noted that in his meditation for the feast of the Visitation, De La Salle begins by reflecting on ‘the promptness with which the Most Blessed Virgin went to visit her cousin Saint Elizabeth as soon as she learned the will of God’. It was her promptness in spite of the journey’s difficulties which ‘drew down God’s blessings on her visit and was a cause of the great things which God performed through her’ (MF 141.1.1).

<sup>45</sup> RB 206.1.419. ‘Union’ is a key theme in De La Salle’s writings; see Gilles Beaudet, ‘Union among the Brothers’, in *Lasallian Themes*, ed. Alain Houry (Rome: Brothers of the Christian Schools, 1997), 3: 305-310. The ‘heroic vow’ of 1691 which De La Salle made together with two of his closest companions in order to ‘bring about and maintain’ the Society of the Christian Schools’ was one of ‘association and union’. The 1694 vow with twelve Brothers was ‘to unite myself and live in society with’ them (see Bédel, *Origines*, 92). De La Salle’s last will and testament includes the recommendation that the Brothers ‘maintain close union among themselves’ (EP 4.0.1). The emphasis (four instances) on ‘union’ in this section on ‘visits’, as well as its mention in the preface to this work (RB 0.0.9, where Christian decorum itself is defined as arising from ‘a sentiment of modesty, or respect, or of union and charity towards one’s neighbour’) and in reference to placing one’s hand in that of another (RB 112.1,114) indicate that it is a Christian virtue, not just one to be cultivated ‘among the Brothers’.

<sup>46</sup> Jesus’ visiting the head of the synagogue (Mt 9.18-19) is adduced as one of several Gospel examples a little later in this section (RB 206.1.422).

<sup>47</sup> RB 206.1.420. The obligation to visit with a view to reconciliation is also taken up in *The Duties of a Christian* (DA 207.0.5, 7; see below in regard to Mt 5.44).

De La Salle's *Instructions and Prayers for Holy Mass, Confession, and Communion, with Methodical Instruction by Questions and Answers on How to Confess Well* combines four shorter works reflected in its title, and is a catechetical work whose section on the Mass dates from at least 1698.<sup>48</sup> In the words of its Preface, the *Instruction and Prayers* were composed

to teach the faithful everything that concerns this holy Sacrifice and to give them a means of occupying themselves during it in a useful and holy manner.<sup>49</sup>

Predictably, the reference to Mt 5.23-24 is to be found in the two instructions respectively concerning the parts of the Eucharist immediately preceding Communion: 'Agnus Dei [Lamb of God] and *Domine Jesus Christe* [Lord Jesus Christ]' and 'Kiss of Peace'. In the former, De La Salle observes that the people join with the priest in asking Jesus Christ for peace 'to make known to God their desire of obtaining and preserving peace'. While *Agnus Dei* is being sung, the priest says another prayer for peace, 'pleading with Jesus Christ not to consider his sins a motive for refusing peace but to grant it in view of the fidelity of the church'. De La Salle explains why 'priest and people ask God for peace with such insistence before Holy Communion':

because peace is one of the main effects<sup>50</sup> of this sacrament, which is a sacrament of union and charity, and to accomplish this word of Jesus Christ, who ordered a person to be reconciled with his brother before offering his gift at the altar.<sup>51</sup>

---

<sup>48</sup> Lappin, *Instructions*, 1, 19. The 1734 edition is reproduced in CL 17.

<sup>49</sup> I 1.1.1. Luke Salm, 'Mass', in *Lasallian Themes*, ed. Alain Houry, (Rome: Brothers of the Christian Schools, 1997), 186, 190, notes that it was part of the routine in parish schools in the France of De La Salle's time to have all the children attend daily Mass: 'Since everything, except the sermon, was in Latin, and since vernacular translations of the Mass texts were forbidden, the people in the congregation were more or less left to their own private prayer and devotions.' Hence, following the instructional section, De La Salle provides two sets of prayers for the use of the faithful, including students in his schools, 'one based on the Ordinary of the Mass, the other on the sacred actions performed by the celebrant during Mass' (I 1.1.3).

<sup>50</sup> *dispositions*. See Dict. 1694 for this meaning.

<sup>51</sup> I 1.6.51. We note again inclusion of 'union and charity'. It is perhaps on this basis that Houry sees an allusion to Mt 5.23-24 in the 1718 Rule's chapter on 'regularity' (the observance of the Rule), probably written by De La Salle on his own initiative, at the end of his life. 'Most of the rules,' says the Founder, 'are practices pertaining to the commandments'. So he relates silence and circumspection to the Letter of St James regarding faults involving the tongue, and he notes in passing that 'union with

The sentiment is repeated in the following section, ‘Kiss of peace’ (which again explains the origin of the ‘instrument of peace’ kissed by the priest, the deacon, and all present):

By these two ceremonies the church wishes to teach us that to be at peace with God we must be at peace with people, and that anyone who harbours in his heart any hatred for his brother is unworthy not only to receive communion, but even to be present at Holy Mass.<sup>52</sup>

**Mt 5.26** | MD 1.3.1

5<sup>26</sup> ‘Truly I tell you, you will never get out until you have paid the last penny.’

De La Salle’s only apparent citation of **Mt 5.26** is in connection with a reference to St Jerome in the first of the Sunday meditations, for the First Sunday of Advent (MD 1). The theme of the meditation, deriving from the Gospel of the day (Lk 21.25-33) is stated simply as being ‘On the General Judgment’. The overall thrust is to inspire a salutary fear of the Judgment, which should move us constantly to ‘strive to free ourselves of our defects, for we cannot know either the day or the hour when we shall die’.<sup>53</sup> The 2<sup>nd</sup> Point begins with the observation that it is not only the wicked who need to fear the judgment, a notion supported first by appeal to Augustine, then to Jerome, who asserts that ‘there will be few, in fact there will be none, in that general gathering who do not deserve to be reproved with severity and anger by the judge’.<sup>54</sup>

Jerome is invoked again in the 3<sup>rd</sup> Point, in the company of Job (Jb 9.28; 31.14, 23), Hilarion, and Ephrem (c. 306-373), to make the point that if the greatest saints ‘despite their eminent holiness, did not fail to dread’ God’s judgments, how could we not fear them.

Saint Jerome, who had grown pale in solitude and in all sorts of penitential exercises, declares that he had enclosed himself in this way, condemning himself to a sort of prison out of fear of the Last Judgment. He also says elsewhere that being, as he was, completely soiled with sins, he would hide

---

their Brothers’ is ‘of obligation and precept’ (see Loes and Isetti, *Rule and Foundational*, 68; RC 16.1).

<sup>52</sup> I 1.6.53.

<sup>53</sup> MD 1.1.2, citing Mt 25.13.

<sup>54</sup> MD 1.2.1.

himself day and night, in the fear that someone would say to, ‘Jerome, come out!’ and that he would then be obliged to pay right up to the last penny (Mt 5.26).<sup>55</sup>

De La Salle seems content here to accept Jerome’s accommodation to the Last Judgment of a text which appears in context to refer to an earthly ‘accuser’. However, this interpretation is not without support among modern commentators. Luz, for example, remarks that ‘beneath the surface of the common-sense advice the perspective of the last judgment becomes visible’ and is signalled by the Amen ‘which almost always introduces an eschatological, last-judgement statement’.<sup>56</sup>

In regard to De La Salle’s consciousness of being part of a vital heritage of biblical interpretation, as proposed in Chapter 3 of the thesis, it should be observed that the meditation includes four references to Jerome, two to Augustine, and one each to Ephrem the Syrian and Hilarion. His frequent recourse to the Bible itself is evidenced by six references to the Old Testament and five to the New Testament, as well as the reference to **Mt 5.26**.

**Mt 5.28** | DA 211.0.5

5<sup>28</sup> ‘But I say to you that everyone who looks at a woman with lust has already committed adultery with her in his heart.’

Chapters 2-11 of *The Duties of a Christian to God* deal with the commandments of God, ‘the Ninth and Tenth Commandments of God’ being discussed in Chapter 11, where it may be recognised that there is an allusion to **Mt 5.28**.

This part of the catechism is in Treatise 2, ‘The Second Duty of a Christian, Which is to Love God’ (the first having been described as ‘To Know God’). The second section of Chapter 1 (‘Charity, Which Makes us Love God’) concerns the principle that ‘we must not be satisfied with loving God; we must also love our neighbour’.

---

<sup>55</sup> *payer jusqu’au dernier denier*, MD 1.3.1. ‘Elsewhere’ is evidently St Jerome’s *Commentary on Matthew*, 1.5.25: for an excerpt regarding ‘the last farthing’ see Simonetti, *Matthew 1-13*, 107. The quotation of Mt 5.26 may have come from an existing translation of St Jerome’s work, or it may be De La Salle’s own. Mons renders it *payé jusqu’à la dernière obole*; Huré is the same; Amelote uses *denier*, but a different verb: *que vous n’aiez rendu jusqu’à un denier*.

<sup>56</sup> Luz, *Matthew 1-7*, 241.



This is the second commandment of the New Law that our Lord proposes to us, and which he says is similar to the first,<sup>57</sup> because it includes it; for whoever, says Saint John, does not love his neighbour, and who says that he loves God is a liar: indeed can anyone who does not love his brother whom he sees, love God whom he does not see [1 Jn 4.20]?<sup>58</sup>

The typical use of someone speaking the biblical text in the present tense is evident here: ‘Our Lord proposes’; ‘he says’; ‘says Saint John’: the readers are not directed to a text so much as encouraged to hear the message in the present moment.

Following this, Chapter 2, on ‘The Commandments of God in General’, states at the outset that ‘the main proof we can give that we love God and our neighbour is when we keep faithfully and exactly the holy commandments of God’.<sup>59</sup> The ten commandments are listed in an abbreviated rendering of Ex 20.2-17, mentioned explicitly (‘the 20<sup>th</sup> chapter of Exodus’) as their source.<sup>60</sup> However, De La Salle makes it clear that are to be considered in the light of the ‘the law of grace’:

Jesus Christ in the law of grace published and announced them anew to his Church in the person of his apostles and his disciples, and taught them the way in which they should fulfil them, through grace and under the impetus of charity, which can only tend to make them to love God and their neighbour in a holy way.<sup>61</sup>

It is in that New Testament key that overtones of **Mt 5.28** may be heard in De La Salle’s discussion of the ninth and tenth commandments, which he treats together: ‘You shall not desire the wife of your neighbour. You shall not desire his house, etc.’<sup>62</sup>

By the ninth commandment, he says, God ‘forbids all thoughts and speech contrary to purity, and by the tenth commandment he forbids wrongful desires for another’s property’.

---

<sup>57</sup> Cf. Mt 22.39.

<sup>58</sup> DA 201.3.1.

<sup>59</sup> DA 202.0.1.

<sup>60</sup> DA 202.0.6.

<sup>61</sup> DA 202.0.6.

<sup>62</sup> DA 211.0.1. In DA 202.0.4 the commandment is cited more fully: ‘... his house, nor his male servant, nor his female servant, nor his ox, nor anything that belongs to him’.

True to his emphasis on interiority, De La Salle goes on to observe that the reason for which God forbids these thoughts and bad desires, in two particular commandments,

is to indicate to us that the law which God has given us, being spiritual, was not established only to govern our external actions, but that it is moreover to govern the affections of our heart, and that our religion is so holy, that it cannot endure or permit any evil, even though it is not apparent...'.<sup>63</sup>

It is in the summary paragraph following such explanations that Houry sees an allusion to **Mt 5.28**, no doubt because De La Salle extrapolates from the commandment's 'wife of one's neighbour' to 'any woman' [*fille*]:

It is therefore to sin against the ninth commandment of God, and to sin mortally, to dwell voluntarily and willingly on thoughts of impurity, even when one would not do the evil of which one is thinking - to desire immodest pleasures, to have the wish to abuse the wife of one's neighbour, or any woman.<sup>64</sup>

He goes on to write of 'impure thoughts', with a rider that reflects a balanced understanding of human nature perhaps not characteristic of the rigorism of his time:<sup>65</sup>

Bad thoughts and bad desires are not always sinful; for they can arise in the mind or in the sensory appetite without the will having any part. Neither the one nor the other is a sin unless we consent to them, and our heart is touched by them and takes part in them.<sup>66</sup>

The heart being 'touched' by bad thoughts or desires is the only instance of De La Salle's use of the expression in a negative sense, but as such it points up the real significance of the expression 'to touch hearts': it is a matter of having a profound effect, for better or for worse.

**Mt 5.29** | EM 15.295

<sup>529</sup> 'If your right eye causes you to sin, tear it out and throw it away; it is better for you to lose one of your members than for your whole body to be thrown into hell.'

---

<sup>63</sup> DA 211.0.2.

<sup>64</sup> *fille*, which according to Dict. 1694 can refer to a woman who is not married.

<sup>65</sup> See Pungier, *Catéchisme*, 118-130.

<sup>66</sup> DA 211.0.5-6.

This verse, ordering the right eye to be torn out if it is a cause of sin, appears in the section of *Explanation of the Method of Interior Prayer* entitled ‘Considering a Maxim’. Here De La Salle is explaining the use of a ‘maxim of the holy Gospel’ as the subject of prayer. ‘Maxims’ he defines as

sentences or passages of holy Scripture, containing some truths necessary for salvation, spiritual sentiments<sup>67</sup> which make us understand what we should do or not do, what we should esteem or despise, what we should seek or flee from, love or hate, etc. The New Testament is full of them.<sup>68</sup>

He goes on to distinguish ‘maxims of precept’, which impose an obligation, ‘because our Lord positively commands us to practise them under pain of damnation’, and maxims which are ‘counsels’: one is not absolutely obliged to practise them, but they are proposed as the necessary means for acquiring greater perfection.<sup>69</sup>

The first example of a ‘maxim of counsel’ is Mt 19.21, and is explicitly attributed.<sup>70</sup> De La Salle then points out that some such counsels are ‘clear and intelligible, easy to understand’, such as Mt 5.44, also explicitly attributed.<sup>71</sup> There are others which are ‘obscure and difficult to understand’. The two examples are **Mt 5.29** and Lk 14.26 (both attributed in the text). De La Salle concludes this brief introduction with the observation that there are ‘several others which are similar, and which must not be taken literally’.<sup>72</sup>

### **Mt 5.32/19.9** | DA 310.2.2

---

<sup>67</sup> *paroles intérieures*.

<sup>68</sup> EM 15.293.

<sup>69</sup> This distinction uses the same language as that in *Duties 1*, regarding the evangelical counsels, as we considered above in connection with De La Salle’s discussion of the beatitudes. There are virtues which are obligatory [*d’obligation*] and those that are advisory [*de conseil*] (DA 216.2.1). Indeed, De La Salle concludes that section with the observation that there are many more ‘maxims’ [besides the beatitudes] to be found in many passages of the New Testament, expounded by Jesus Christ in ‘calling all Christians to a high degree of perfection’ (DA 216.2.15).

<sup>70</sup> *en Saint Matthieu*, 19, EM 15.294.

<sup>71</sup> Notwithstanding the attribution in the text, the editorial references in *Œuvres complètes* and in Mouton, *Explanation*, 135, are to Lk 6.27-28. De La Salle’s text is almost identical to those of Amelote, Mons, and Huré, which derive from the Vulgate, itself following a variant reading.

<sup>72</sup> *à la lettre*, EM 15.295. De La Salle was no doubt aware of various patristic interpretations of Mt 5.29, perhaps including that of Apollinaris of Laodicea (c. 310-390), who described it as hyperbole, and indicated that ‘one should not *literally* cut off one’s members’, but rather mortify them (see Simonetti, *Matthew 1-13*, 110).

5<sup>32</sup> ‘But I say to you that anyone who divorces his wife, except on the ground of unchastity, causes her to commit adultery; and whoever marries a divorced woman commits adultery.’

In De La Salle’s exposition of the sacraments in *The Duties of a Christian*, there is in the section ‘The ends of marriage and the graces that one receives in this sacrament’ a statement of the three ends of marriage ‘according to the institution of Jesus Christ’,<sup>73</sup> who ‘had the intention that married persons would be sanctified in the marriage, and would contribute to one another’s sanctification’. Here De La Salle cites Augustine’s observation that in the marriage of ‘the faithful’, the holiness of the sacrament is of more worth and ‘virtue’ than fertility [*fécondité*]. In that light, he remarks that

[Jesus] wanted it to be a sacrament so that it would not be broken, which caused him to say, ‘Whoever shall leave his wife and shall marry another’s [*épousera une autre*] commits adultery’.<sup>74</sup>

The quotation of Jesus’ words appears to be an abbreviated paraphrase of either **Mt 5.32** or Mt 19.9, though the latter text may be indicated by the word ‘another’ [*une autre*]. However, the use of the future tense in the French text, not evident in the available translations, may indicate that it is a translation of the Vulgate, in which the tenses are future-perfect in both potential references.

**Mt 5.(34-)37** | DA 204.0.4-5; MR 202.2.1; RB 207.1.497

5<sup>34</sup> ‘But I say to you, Do not swear at all, either by heaven, for it is the throne of God,<sup>35</sup> or by the earth, for it is his footstool, or by Jerusalem, for it is the city of the great King.<sup>36</sup> And do not swear by your head, for you cannot make one hair white or black.<sup>37</sup> Let your word be “Yes, Yes”, or “No, No”; anything more than this comes from the evil one.’

<sup>73</sup> DA 310.2.2. De La Salle begins the section by outlining the three ends ‘which are natural and common to all marriages, according to the intention of God’. The first is to unite husband and wife intimately [*étroitement*]; the second is to have them live together so as to help one another in all their needs; the third is to give them the means of having children legitimately. It is interesting that the first end of the sacrament of marriage (distinguished from its ‘bond’) is the couple’s mutual sanctification. The procreation of children does not appear to have priority over the relationship of wife and husband.

<sup>74</sup> DA 310.2.2.

In his discussion of the Second Commandment De La Salle explains firstly what is meant by ‘the name of God’, and by ‘swear’: ‘to take God as a witness that the thing one is saying is true’.<sup>75</sup> He indicates the situations and conditions when it is permissible to swear.<sup>76</sup> Then comes a reference to **Mt 5.34-37**, including a more or less explicit citation:

One must never swear by whatever creature. Jesus Christ forbids us to do it in the holy Gospel, because that would be to render to a creature the honour that is due to God alone.

The safe rule so as never to swear when it is not necessary is not to do so except when obliged, either by a judge or by someone who has the authority or has the right to demand it of us. Beyond these occasions, one should be content, as Our Lord commanded, to say: that is [the case], or that is not [the case],<sup>77</sup> because he assures us that whatever we say more than that is evil, and is not permitted.<sup>78</sup>

#### **Mt 5.(34-)37 | MR 202.2.1**

The Tenth Meditation for the Time of Retreat (MR 202) has as its stated theme ‘How a Brother of the Christian Schools ought to show zeal in his work’.<sup>79</sup> In the *Rule* of 1705, repeated verbatim in that of 1718, ‘zeal’ is described in these terms:

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 have not lost it and inspiring them with a great aversion and a very great horror for sin and for all that could cause them to lose purity.<sup>80</sup>

Accordingly, the 1<sup>st</sup> Point of the meditation concentrates on the teacher’s need to urge their ‘disciples’ to avoid sin ‘with as much speed as they would flee the presence of a snake’. There is a positive motivation for this. Referring to Elijah’s zeal as the

---

<sup>75</sup> DA 204.0.2.

<sup>76</sup> To be admitted as a student in the faculty of theology in the University of Reims, De La Salle himself was required take an oath on the book of the Gospels that, among other things, he would respect ‘the rights, freedoms, privileges and statutes’ of the university (see Aroz, *Documents*, 205).

<sup>77</sup> *cela est, ou cela n’est pas*, the expression used in all three of the available versions of Mt 5.37.

<sup>78</sup> DA 204.0.4.

<sup>79</sup> It will be recalled that ‘zeal’ is the obverse of ‘faith’ in the ‘spirit of this Institute’ (RC 2.2, 2.9).

<sup>80</sup> RC 2.9.

prophet says of it on his own account in 1 Kgs 19.14, De La Salle enjoins teachers to say to their disciples:

I am so zealous for the glory of my God that I cannot see you renounce the covenant you made with him in baptism, nor the dignity<sup>81</sup> of children of God which you received in that sacrament.

The 2<sup>nd</sup> Point begins with the observation that teachers cannot be content with keeping the children in their care from doing wrong: ‘It is also necessary to influence them to do what is right, and the good actions of which they are capable’. There is an allusion to **Mt 5.37** in the sentence that follows:

Be careful about this, then, and also that they always tell the truth, and that when they want to affirm something, they content themselves with saying, ‘That is so’, or ‘That is not so’. Make them realize that by saying just these few words, people will believe them more than if they swear great oaths, because they will judge that it is out of a Christian spirit that they say nothing more.<sup>82</sup>

**Mt 5.(34-)37** | RB 207.1.497

This injunction is repeated in *The Rules of Christian Decorum and Civility*, chapter 7 of whose second part relates to ‘Meetings and Conversations’. In the first article under this heading, ‘Qualities which decorum dictates should accompany your speech’, the second section is entitled ‘Faults which can be committed against decorum by speaking contrary to the law of God’.<sup>83</sup>

Having written of such matters as the impropriety of ‘mocking and making fun of sacred things [including Scripture] and religious practices’, and observed (with supportive references to Sirach) that ‘in polite society a person who swears is considered lower than a cart driver’, De La Salle cautions the readers not to use the names of Jesus or Mary, nor to say ‘Oh, my God’, in ordinary talk, or even to use meaningless exclamations such as ‘Pardi’.<sup>84</sup>

---

<sup>81</sup> *qualité*, which had among its meanings ‘nobility’ in Dict. 1694.

<sup>82</sup> MR 202.2.1. As we will see (or in the case of Mt 5.3, as has already been noted) this reference to Matthew is followed by two others from Mt 5 and two from Mt 6.

<sup>83</sup> RB 207.1.493.

<sup>84</sup> ‘By God’ (*par Dieu*): an informal expression which did not find its way into the *Dictionnaire* until the eighth edition (1932-35).

Before moving on to the avoidance of indecent language, he again recommends restraint in making affirmations by reference to **Mt 5.37**:

One should be content, following the advice of Jesus Christ in the Gospel, to say, ‘That is so’, or ‘That is not so’; and when one wishes to affirm something, it is sufficient to make use of this way of speaking: ‘Assuredly, Sir, that is so,’ without saying anything further.<sup>85</sup>

**Mt 5.38** | DB 2.07.9; MR 202.2.1

5<sup>38</sup> ‘You have heard that it was said, “An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth”’.

Of the two possible allusions, that in the tenth Meditation for the Time of Retreat is the more readily recognised. It sits in company with a number of other Matthean references, one of which, Mt 5.37, we have noted above. Immediately after recommending that young people make their avowals without ‘great oaths’, De La Salle moves on to another area in which they can be led ‘to practise well all the good of which they are capable’, namely, to love their enemies (Mt 5.44, see below). This is reinforced by what may be seen as an implicit allusion to **Mt 5.39**, the graphic language of Lev 24.20 (‘fracture for fracture, eye for eye, tooth for tooth’) being avoided perhaps because it was precisely the guiding principle among street-fighters.

Lead them to practise what Our Lord said when he commanded us to love our enemies, and to do good to those who do us harm, who persecute us and calumniate us [Vg Mt 5.44],<sup>86</sup> [which is] far from rendering evil for evil, insult for insult, and taking revenge.<sup>87</sup>

The other possible allusion to **Mt 5.38** is in the response to the catechism question posed in *Duties of a Christian*, volume 2, regarding the ‘the fifth commandment of God “You shall not kill”’. The first question and answer set the tone for the Lesson, indicating that by this commandment God ‘forbids us to do harm to our neighbour,

---

<sup>85</sup> RB 207.1.497.

<sup>86</sup> It is noteworthy that in both *Œuvres complètes* and Loes and Huether, *Meditations*, the editorial references are indeed to Mt 5.44, despite the absence of ‘calumniate’ in modern translations.

<sup>87</sup> MR 202.2.1. In the French text this suggested reference to Mt 5.38 is part of the same sentence as that referring to Mt 5.44 (cf. CL 13, 50). Loes and Huether, *Meditations*, has simplified the structure by making it a separate sentence.

whether to his body or his soul'.<sup>88</sup> The two final questions and answers, certainly in the spirit of both Vg Mt 5.44<sup>89</sup> and **Mt 5.38** are:

Q. When someone does harm to us, what must we do?

A. We must pardon him and do for him all the good we can.

Q. Is it not sufficient not to wish any harm to someone who has done us harm?

A. No, that is not sufficient; one must wish and do him all the good one can.<sup>90</sup>

**Mt 5.39** | RB 105.1.54

5<sup>39</sup> 'But I say to you, Do not resist an evildoer. But if anyone strikes you on the right cheek, turn the other also.'

In his introduction to De La Salle's *The Rules of Christian Decorum and Civility*, Gregory Wright notes that, 'during the sunset of the Splendid Century in France, the end of the 72-year reign of Louis XIV', De La Salle 'sought to revive the concept and reality of the gentleman' in this book addressed at first to 'the working class and the poor'. 'Decorum' [*bienséance*] Wright defines as 'a self-controlled modesty and propriety even when alone'; 'civility' [*civilité*] is 'an evangelical courtesy practiced in the presence of others'.<sup>91</sup>

De La Salle's chapter on 'The Forehead, Eyebrows, and Cheeks'<sup>92</sup> in *Rules of Christian Decorum* illustrates both the historical and cultural particularity, and the timelessly 'evangelical' dimension of the work. It opens with the observation that

It is very indecorous to have one's forehead wrinkled; this is ordinarily the sign of an anxious and melancholy mind, and one should take care not to let

<sup>88</sup> DB 2.07.1.

<sup>89</sup> *benefacite his, qui oderunt vos.*

<sup>90</sup> DB 2.07.9.

<sup>91</sup> Gregory Wright, ed., *John Baptist de La Salle: The Rules of Christian Decorum and Civility* (Romeoville, IL: Lasallian Publications, 1990), xi-xii. Whether De La Salle wanted simply to 'revive' something is questionable; in his own introduction to the work, De La Salle advises that in exercising practices of decorum and civility, one has to have regard for the times, 'because there are several which have been in use in previous centuries, or even several years ago, which are no longer current'. He also notes that such practices vary from country to country (RB 0.0.10).

<sup>92</sup> This follows 'The Face' and precedes 'The Eyes and Glances' in the first part of the book, dealing with 'the modesty on should show in one's deportment and in the care of different parts of the body'.



anything harsh be seen there, but let it have an air of wisdom, kindness, and being well-disposed.<sup>93</sup>

There are warnings against such solecisms as tapping with a bent knuckle on someone's forehead, knitting one's eyebrows, puffing out one's cheeks, touching one's own or another's cheeks. De La Salle then concludes the chapter:

To give a slap on the cheek is to give a person a grave insult; in the world this is considered an intolerable affront. The Gospel counsels putting up with it, and wants Christians who try to imitate Jesus Christ in his patience to be inclined, and even quite ready, after receiving a slap, to present the other cheek to receive yet a second one, but it forbids giving one, and it can only be great rage, or a urge to vengeance which would make one do so.

A wise person should never raise a hand to hit someone on the cheek; decorum and decency do not allow it, not even towards a servant.<sup>94</sup>

**Mt 5.44(-46) (?)** | DA 101.2.3; 201.2.7; 207.0.5; 207.0.6; DB 1.03.06; 2.01.04; 4.9.3; EM 15.295; MD 5.2.2; 44.2.1; 58.2.1; MF 84.1.1; MR 202.2.1; RB 203.5.195; 207.5.576; DA 403.2.9.

5<sup>44</sup> 'But I say to you, Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, 4<sup>5</sup> so that you may be children of your Father in heaven; for he makes his sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the righteous and on the unrighteous. 4<sup>6</sup> For if you love those who love you, what reward do you have? Do not even the tax collectors do the same?

The frequency with which De La Salle refers to this challenging text in a number of different works, whether it is from Matthew or from Luke (6.27-28), invites some explanation. It would be inappropriate to arrive at any conclusion without considering the citations in context, but I note as possible factors both the place of suffering in De La Salle's spirituality, and the real opposition he and his companions faced in establishing free schools for the poor which were open also to those who were better off, and for whom the tuition was also free.<sup>95</sup>

---

<sup>93</sup> RB 105.1.49.

<sup>94</sup> RB 105.1.54. The language reflects that of Mons and Amelote (*soufflet*) rather than Huré (*frapper*). It is also that of Matthew rather than the parallel Lk 6.29, where Amelote uses *frapper*.

<sup>95</sup> Both aspects are discussed in Sauvage and Campos, *Expérience et enseignement* e.g. 141-147; 257-261.

A potential complication regarding these citations, already noted in passing, is that editors of De La Salle's works have in some cases attributed them, understandably, to Luke. This is because modern versions of Matthew's text omit certain clauses included in the Vulgate, and in the French versions deriving from it which De La Salle may have used. These clauses, which sometimes feature in De La Salle's citations, appear in both the contemporary and the modern readings of Lk 6.27-28.

To clarify this source of confusion, the texts of both Evangelists, and the relevant versions (where available) are set out below:

<b>Version</b>	<b>Matthew 5.44</b>	<b>Luke 6.27-28</b>
Vulgate	Ego autem dico vobis : Diligite inimicos vestros, Benefacite his, qui oderunt vos, Et orate pro persequentibus, et calumniantibus vos.	Sed vobis dico, qui auditis : Diligite inimicos vestros, Benefacite his, qui oderunt vos. <sup>28</sup> Benedicite maledicentibus vobis, et orate pro calumniantibus vos.
<i>Translation of Vulgate</i>	But I say to you : Love your enemies, Do good to those who hate <sup>96</sup> you And pray for those who persecute you, and calumniate you.	But I say to you who are listening : Love your enemies, Do good to those who hate you. <sup>28</sup> Bless those who curse you and pray for those who calumniate you.
Mons	Et moy je vous dis : Aimez vos ennemis ; [ <i>Marginal note</i> : benissez ceux qui vous maudissent ;] faites du bien à ceux qui vous haïssent, & priez pour ceux qui vous persecutent, & qui vous calomnient ;	Mais pour vous qui m'écoutez, je vous dis : Aimez vos ennemis :  Faites du bien à ceux qui vous haïssent: <sup>28</sup> Benissez ceux qui font des imprecations contre vous : & priez pour ceux qui vous calomnient.
Amelote	Mais moi je vous dis : Aimez vos ennemis, Faites du bien à ceux qui vous haïssent. Et priez pour ceux qui vous persecutent, & qui vous calomnient.	Mais je vous dis à vous qui m'écoutez : Aimez vos ennemis, faites du bien à ceux qui vous haïssent. <sup>28</sup> Benissez ceux qui vous maudissent, & priez pour ceux qui vous calomnient.
Huré	Mais moi je vous dis : aimez vos ennemis,	Mais je vous dis à vous qui m'écoutez :

<sup>96</sup> The perfect form is used for the present in this defective verb.

	Faites du bien à ceux qui vous haïssent : & priez pour ceux qui vous persecutent, & vous calomnient.	Aimez vos ennemis ; faites du bien à ceux qui vous haïssent :  <sup>28</sup> Benissez ceux qui font des imprécations contre vous : priez pour ceux qui vous calomnient.
NRSV	But I say to you, Love your enemies  And pray for those who persecute you, <sup>97</sup>	But I say to you that listen, Love your enemies, Do good to those that hate you, <sup>28</sup> bless those who curse you, pray for those who abuse you.

The question as to whether a given instance is in fact from Matthew or Luke will be addressed in regard to each instance. However I note at this stage that De La Salle in fact makes few references to Luke chapter 6, but, as already observed, many references to Matthew chapter 5.<sup>98</sup>

#### **Mt 5.44(-46) (?) | DA 101.2.3**

Following De La Salle's introduction to *Duties of A Christian to God*, its first 'treatise' concerns the first 'duty', which is to know God. Chapter 1, therefore, is entitled 'Faith, which enables us to know God is this world'. Its first section addresses the topic 'What faith is'; the second is 'The obligation to makes acts of faith'. De La Salle gives examples of acts of faith, whether 'in general', or 'on a particular mystery of our religion', such as the Trinity. He then goes on to add that

<sup>97</sup> Metzger, *Textual Commentary*, 14, opts for the shorter text, on the grounds that 'later witnesses enrich the text by incorporating clauses from the parallel account in Lk 6.27-26'. If the clauses were originally in Matthew, their omission in early representatives of the Alexandrian, and several other witnesses 'would be entirely unaccountable'.

<sup>98</sup> Varela, *Biblia*, 342, notes four references to Lk 6 in the Meditations, one of them from an 'additional' meditation probably not De La Salle's, and another which could well be from Matthew (in MD 58.2, see below). He notes twenty-nine references to Mt 5. A search of Houry, *Écrits* indicates that De La Salle refers to Luke's 'Sermon on the Plain' as a whole only once (I 1.7.23-26), and makes a single reference, in a letter (LI 53.7), to Lk 6.20, which is Luke's version of the 'poor' beatitude cited much more frequently from Matthew (Mt 5.3).

one must not be content with making only acts of speculative faith,<sup>99</sup> that is, on the truths that one simply believes; one must often make acts of practical faith, that is, in the truths that one must practise.<sup>100</sup> One must make these sorts of acts of practical faith, particularly when tempted to offend God, or to contravene one of the practical truths, or when one has difficulty or trouble in practising them, as for example, one has trouble pardoning one's enemies, it is good to say, 'My Saviour Jesus Christ, I firmly believe that it is not only necessary to pardon one's enemies, but also to love them, pray to God for them, and to do good to them, because it is you who have said it, and because you have taught it in the holy Gospel...'<sup>101</sup>

#### **Mt 5.44 (?) | DA 201.2.7**

The second 'treatise' in *Duties of a Christian* concerns the 'duty' of loving God. The second section of Chapter 1 deals with 'the way in which one should love God, and the signs that can indicate that one has love for him'.<sup>102</sup> Despite any possibility of certainty in this life of our truly loving God, there are several signs [*marques*] that can help us judge whether that is the case. De La Salle lists five: that we have an ardent desire to do God's will in everything; that we fulfil with fidelity what we know God is asking of us; that we often think of God, and willingly converse with him; and, before the fifth indication, which is that we have a great contempt for the world and of all earthly things,

when we do good to everyone, even to those who hate us, and do us or have done us harm.<sup>103</sup>

Again, this is a clear if inexact reference to either Vg Mt 5.44 or Lk 6.27; there does not appear to be any contextual indication of its precise source.

---

<sup>99</sup> *actes de foi spéculative*, DA 101.2.3.

<sup>100</sup> *actes de foi pratique*.

<sup>101</sup> Houry, *Écrits*, provides a single reference here, to Lk 6.35. While this could certainly be the source for the teaching on loving enemies and doing them good, as would Lk 6.27, it does not include, as do Lk 6.28 and Vg Mt 5.44, the teaching on *praying* (for 'those who calumniate you'). However, neither Matthew nor Luke has a clear reference to *pardoning* [*pardonner*] one's enemies in these verses. On the other hand, *pardonner* is the verb used six times in the Mons version (only, amongst the available translations) of the Lord's prayer and Jesus' subsequent emphasising of the relationship between our being forgiven and our forgiving (Mt 6.12, 14, 15). It is used in Luke's version (but not Matthew's) of the same clause (Lk 11.4) according to Amelote's translation, but not that of Huré. It seems possible that De La Salle is here summarising a Gospel teaching which draws on more than one specific reference.

<sup>102</sup> DA 201.2.

<sup>103</sup> DA 201.2.7.

**Mt 5.44 (?) | DA 207.0.5-6**

Chapter 7 of this same treatise on our duty to love God deals with the Fifth Commandment, ‘You shall not kill’. The final paragraph presents an extensive list of actions or omissions which infringe this commandment, some of them reflecting the era, some timeless. These include hatred; desiring or arranging someone’s death; striking someone or challenging him to a duel; despising or mocking someone; procuring or advising an abortion; smothering a child who sleeps in the same bed; failing to give alms when the situation is urgent. The concluding clause, which in the original simply continues this list, returns to the more mundane circumstances in which teachers and young people may find themselves:

... those who refuse to forgive their enemies, or see them, or greet them, or visit them, as they used to do before the hostility<sup>104</sup> came about, who put themselves in danger of offending God, or who contribute to the sin of their neighbour in any of the ways in that can be done.<sup>105</sup>

The mention of *visiting* enemies recalls the similar injunction in *The Rules of Christian Decorum and Civility*, in the pursuit of reconciliation ‘according to the rules of the Gospel’.<sup>106</sup> This, as noted above, may be an allusion to Mt 5.23-24. The likely allusion to **Mt 5.44**, however, comes within the body of the discussion of the 5<sup>th</sup> Commandment:

When there is someone who hates us, or who causes us distress, we must not only readily forgive him and in no way speak badly of him, but also love him, do good to him, greet him, and speak to him with affection, even visit him if there is need, to gain his friendship, and pray to God for him.

It is an indispensable obligation for us to forgive our enemies and those who hate us, because Jesus Christ demanded it of us, and because he requires that we do not ask him forgiveness for our sins, unless we show him that we also forgive our neighbour the wrong he has done us, and the hurts we have received from him; he even wanted to give us a significant example of this by forgiving those who brought about his death, and, before he breathed his last by asking the eternal Father to forgive them.<sup>107</sup>

There are a number of gospel allusions here: to the Lord’s prayer (Mt 6.12 or Lk 11.4, ‘ask him forgiveness...forgive our neighbour’); to Jesus forgiving his executioners

---

<sup>104</sup> *avant leurs inimitiés.*

<sup>105</sup> DA 207.0.7.

<sup>106</sup> RB 206.1.420.

<sup>107</sup> DA 207.5, 6.

(Vg Lk 23.34, ‘forgiving those who brought about his death’); to visiting people when there is need (perhaps an echo of Mt 25.36, with overtones of ‘going to be reconciled’ from Mt 5.24 as discussed above). But the combination of ‘hates us’, ‘love him’, and ‘do good to him’ is clearly an allusion to **Mt 5.44** or Lk 6.27-28. In this context, there is no conclusive basis for determining which gospel is the actual source, if De La Salle had one or the other particularly in mind.

#### **Mt 5.44** | DB 1.03.6

In the question-and-answer version of the catechism, the section within the treatise on ‘knowing God’ which concerns the topic ‘regarding the means of preserving and increasing faith within ourselves, and the obligation of making acts of faith’ contains the exchange:

Q. How does one make an act of faith on a practical truth?

A. It is thus that one makes an act of faith on a practical truth: ‘My God, I firmly believe that one must forgive ones enemies and do good to them, and that if one does not do that, one cannot be saved, because Jesus Christ has said so in the Gospel.’<sup>108</sup>

This is plainly the message of the more discursive part of *Duties of a Christian*, in an abbreviated form.<sup>109</sup> While the added apodosis of not being saved is perhaps reminiscent of the conclusion to the forgiveness parable in Mt 18.23-35, the allusions are again to the Lord’s Prayer and to **Mt 5.44** / Lk 6.27-28.

#### **Mt 5.44** | DB 2.1.4

Similarly, the question-and-answer version of loving God (and one’s neighbour) reflects the discussion in DA 201.2.7, above:

Q. Are we able to demonstrate some sign [*marque*] that we love God?

A. Yes, we can show one 1) when we often think of God, and when we freely converse with him; 2) when we accomplish faithfully what we know God asks of us; 3) when we do good towards everyone even those who hate us and who do wrong towards us; 4) when we often make acts of love towards God.<sup>110</sup>

#### **Mt 5.44** | DB 4.9.3

---

<sup>108</sup> DB 1.3.6.

<sup>109</sup> See regarding Mt 5.44 (?) in DA 101.2.3, above.

<sup>110</sup> DB 2.1.4.

The connection between these sentiments and the Lord's Prayer is made directly in the catechism<sup>111</sup> treatment of 'the three final requests of the prayer of Our Lord'.<sup>112</sup> The catechism poses questions as to what the fifth request is: 'pardon our offences, as we forgive those who have offended us';<sup>113</sup> and what one is asking through these words: 'to forgive us our sins, as we forgive our enemies. It inquires why we ask in this way: 'because we cannot expect God to show us mercy if we do not show it to others, and to strengthen our trust in God who promised that he will treat us as we treat those who have offended us', and asks what it is to forgive the offences of those who have offended us: 'not to wish any revenge, and to be disposed to render good for bad'.<sup>114</sup>

Then come these questions and responses:

Q. Is forgiving that one does not wish to see, nor to put up with those who have offended us, saying only that one does not wish them any harm?

A. No, that is not forgiving: one must, Jesus Christ says, love them, wish and do good towards them.

Q. What must one do to show that one wishes well those by whom one has been offended, and that one loves them?

A. One must do six things: 1) readily forgive them for the love of God; 2) speak no wrong of them; 3) be reconciled with them; 4) willingly see them; 5) greet them; 6) pray to God for them.<sup>115</sup>

---

<sup>111</sup> Pungier, *Catéchisme*, 140, argues that the questions and answers as presented in the book 'are not, necessarily, the questions and answers to be offered to the students. The teacher has the responsibility of working them over so that they become better adapted to his audience'.

<sup>112</sup> DB 4.9. In view of the invocation of the Trinity in the Brothers' formulas of vows from 1691 to the present, it is of consequence to note the answer to the question 'Who is the one whom we call our Father at the beginning of the Prayer of Our Lord?' The answer is 'It is God the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit' (DB 4.7.4). Pungier, *Catéchisme*, 86-90, provides the textual evidence that this reproduces verbatim the answer provided in the *Catechism of Chartres* (c. 1699) written by Godet de Marais, Bishop of Chartres, after the model provided by the *Catechism of the Council of Trent*. Godet de Marais had been a fellow student of De La Salle's at Saint-Sulpice, and was a loyal friend.

<sup>113</sup> DB 4.9.1: *Pardonnez-nous nos offenses, comme nous pardonnons à ceux qui nous ont offensés*. The text of the Lord's Prayer as presented in stages in this section. With very few variations, it is clearly that of Mt 6.9-13 in the Mons version. Presumably it was the form of the prayer in common use in De La Salle's time. It is even possible that its use in Brothers' schools (from Calais to Marseille by the time of De La Salle's death) contributed to its popularity. It was the standard 'Catholic' version in France until the Second Vatican Council, when an ecumenical version was adopted.

<sup>114</sup> DB 4.9.1-2.

<sup>115</sup> DB 4.9.3.

It can be seen that here again are echoes of and allusions to a number of Matthean texts already mentioned, including **Mt 5.44** or Lk 6.27-28.

**Mt 5.44** | EM 15.295

I have already noted the discussion of ‘maxims’ in De La Salle’s *Introduction to the Method of Interior Prayer*, in relation to Mt 5.29, an example of a maxim which is ‘obscure and difficult to understand’. This follows immediately on an example of those which are ‘clear and intelligible, easy to understand:

‘Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, pray to God for those who persecute you and calumniate you’, in Saint Matthew, 5.<sup>116</sup>

This is a full<sup>117</sup> quotation of **Mt 5.44**, corresponding more or less exactly to the three available contemporary French versions. Moreover, there is no inclusion of Luke’s ‘bless those who curse you’. It seems quite clear therefore that this is a quotation from the Gospel of Matthew, as De La Salle has indicated.

**Mt 5.44** | MD 44.2.1

The 1<sup>st</sup> Point of this meditation, for Monday in the Octave of Pentecost, takes as its starting point Jn 3.19, from the Gospel of the day,<sup>118</sup> ‘the light has come into the world, but people preferred the darkness to the light’. The first effect, says De La Salle, ‘in a soul which has the happiness of receiving it is to make [the person] see the things of heaven in an altogether different light from those who live according to the spirit of the age’. This leads to a reflection on Jn 16.13, concerning the Spirit’s

---

<sup>116</sup> *en S. Math.*, 5 in the 1739 edition (CL 14, 110). *Œuvres complètes* modernises the reference as ‘en saint Matthieu, 5’. The attribution is omitted from Mouton, *Explanation*, 135. It is included in the text and commentary of Miguel Campos and Michel Sauvage, both in the French edition and its published English and Spanish translations but in each case there is a marginal reference to Lk 6.27-28, repeated in the commentary. The assumption seems to have been that De La Salle’s attribution was mistaken (CL 50, 501-502; Campos and Sauvage, *Encountering*, 333-334.)

<sup>117</sup> Indeed an *overfull* quotation: the available versions and translations do not have pray to God [‘priez Dieu’]. The addition may simply be a gloss on De La Salle’s part, or perhaps a recollection of Chrysostom’s commentary on the verse, which includes the expression ‘to entreat God himself on our enemy’s behalf’, according to Simonetti, *Matthew 1-13*, 120.

<sup>118</sup> Jn 3.16-21, according to the table in Huré.



teaching ‘all truth’, interpreted in a Lasallian way as coming to a deep understanding of things ‘through the eyes of faith’.<sup>119</sup>

The 2<sup>nd</sup> Point asserts that the truths which the Holy Spirit teaches those who have received him are ‘the maxims to be found throughout [*répandues*] the holy Gospel’ ‘which he causes them to comprehend, and which he causes them to savour, and according to which he causes them to live and act’.<sup>120</sup> De La Salle then gives some examples of gospel maxims which the Spirit can help us properly understand and practise. The first of these [‘Blessed are the poor’, Mt 5.3] we have already considered above. In the same sentence come others:

... that we should love those who hate us, that we should rejoice when people calumniate us and when they utter every sort of evil against us; that we should render good for evil, and a great many other truths...

This appears to be amalgam of elements of **Mt 5.44** (or Lk 6.27-28), Mt 5.11 (‘rejoice’; ‘utter every sort of evil’), and perhaps an epitome of Mt 5.38-41 (‘render good for evil’).<sup>121</sup>

#### **Mt 5.44** | MD 58.2.1

I have already noted regarding this meditation De La Salle’s reference to Mt 5.23. The thought continues:<sup>122</sup> ‘he [Jesus Christ] wishes that, far from hating one’s enemies, one would love them, one would do good towards them, one would pray for them’. While it is hardly a convincing argument for a Matthean provenance that the two quotations would then come from the same chapter of the same gospel, it does seem to make it more probable that De La Salle is thinking of Vg **Mt 5.44** than of Lk 6.27-28, particularly since the Gospel of day is from Matthew 5.

#### **Mt 5.44** | MF 84.1.1

A similar case could be made in regard to this meditation, for the feast of St Thomas, where in the 1<sup>st</sup> Point De La Salle observes that ‘the majority of Christians are more

---

<sup>119</sup> MD 44.1.1.

<sup>120</sup> MD 44.2.1.

<sup>121</sup> De La Salle may also be thinking of such references as Rom 12.7; 1 Thess 5.15; 1 Pet 3.9.

<sup>122</sup> While in *Œuvres complètes* this begins a new sentence, the first edition [1730?] reproduced in CL 12, 163, has the two quotations separated by a colon.

incredulous than St Thomas, adducing, as we have seen above, that they consider the poor to be unfortunate, when Jesus has said ‘Blessed are the poor’.<sup>123</sup> Moreover,

Jesus Christ says that one must do good towards one’s enemies, and pray to God for them, and they think only of avenging the outrages they persuade themselves have been done to them.<sup>124</sup>

**Mt 5.44** | MR 202.2.1

I have already considered the reference to Mt 5.37 in this meditation ‘for the time of retreat’, in its context of the need to encourage young people to practise all the good actions of which they are capable, rather than merely dissuading them from doing wrong. Immediately following the injunction to speak the simple truth rather than ‘make great oaths’ De La Salle writes:

Help them practise what our Lord says, when he commands us to love our enemies, and to do good towards those who do wrong towards us, who persecute us and calumniate us, rather than rendering bad for good, insults for insults, and taking revenge.<sup>125</sup>

**Mt 5.44** | RB 203.5.195

In the chapter of *The Rules of Christian Decorum and Civility* on ‘Clothing’, there is an article entitled ‘The sword, stick, cane and staff’. De La Salle remarks early in the article that one should not keep one’s hand on the pommel of one’s sword when speaking to someone, because it is neither gentlemanly nor Christian to look as though one is ready to draw one’s sword at any moment. There may be an allusion to **Mt 5.44** as well as the clear reference to Jn 18.10<sup>126</sup> in the sentences that follow:

---

<sup>123</sup> MF 84.1.1.

<sup>124</sup> The case for Matthew is perhaps weakened by the fact that the following reference regarding carrying one’s cross is from Lk 9.23 rather than Mt 16.24, if the word ‘daily’ (*porte sa croix tous les jours*) – the expression used in Huré) represents a conscious quotation rather than an undifferentiated recollection. Nonetheless, and surprisingly in view of some of the other editorial attributions, *Œuvres complètes*, Loes and Huether, *Meditations*, and Varela, *Biblia* all cite the reference as being Mt 5.44.

<sup>125</sup> MR 202.2.1. The same three authorities also attribute this to Mt 5.44.

<sup>126</sup> The editorial reference in the English translation is to Mt 26.52; however, the mention of Peter indicates the Fourth Gospel.

It is therefore against decorum to be so ready to defend oneself against some insult or some outrage; and the rules of the Gospel require that one should suffer insults patiently.<sup>127</sup>

**Mt 5.44** | RB 207.5.576

The chapter of the *Christian Decorum* on ‘Meetings and conversations’ includes an article entitled ‘What decorum permits or does not permit in regard to debating, interrupting and replying’, which begins with the observation that St Paul warned his disciple Timothy not to dally over disputes about words (cf. 2 Tim 2.14).<sup>128</sup> The final paragraph reads as follows:

If it happens that one is insulted by someone, it is a wise man who takes no offence; far from wishing to defend oneself, one should not respond at all. It is the mark of a low and cowardly character not to be able to suffer an insult. It is obligatory for a Christian person to demonstrate no resentment for it, and in fact not to have any. This is the opinion which the Wise Man [*le Sage*] gives us: to forget all the insults what we receive from our neighbour.<sup>129</sup> And Jesus Christ wishes not only that one forgive one’s enemies whatever wrong or displeasure might have been received, but moreover that one should do good towards them. If someone wants to go to our defence, one must show him that one is in no way at all offended.<sup>130</sup>

The manner of referring to the Sirach text as something which ‘the Wise Man gives us’ is another example of De La Salle’s inclination to see the biblical text as addressed to readers in the present.

In the 1703 edition the marginal reference for Jesus’ admonitions is to **Mt 5.44**.

**Mt 5.44** | DA 403.2.9

Within the long ‘treatise’ on prayer in *Duties of a Christian*, a section dealing with ‘those for whom we can and must pray’ presents a comprehensive range of people who, in ‘Christian charity, the most beautiful ornament of our religion’,<sup>131</sup> should be part of our prayer. With references to Paul, Jerome, Ambrose,<sup>132</sup> John Chrysostom,

---

<sup>127</sup> RB 203.5.195. It will be recalled that *injures* (insults) is part of the language of Mt 5.11 in the Mons version.

<sup>128</sup> The marginal reference in CL 19, p. 219 (the 1703 edition) appears to be to Timothy ‘2. v. 14’.

<sup>129</sup> The 1703 reference is to Sir 10.6.

<sup>130</sup> RB 207.5.576. The marginal reference is to Mt 5.44.

<sup>131</sup> DA 403.2.2.

<sup>132</sup> Misread as ‘Augustine’ in Doval, *Duties*, 218; cf. CL 20, 452.

Tertullian, and in particular, Augustine, the list includes all Christians, schismatics, heretics, the Jews ('even though they have incurred God's curse'<sup>133</sup>), those weak in virtue, people in both spiritual and temporal authority, preachers of the Gospel, our fathers and mothers, friends and benefactors.

Before he moves on to speak of praying for the dead, and of not praying for 'demons, nor the damned', nor for the saints, De La Salle declares that

it would be of little value to pray for our friends, if we did not pray for our enemies; that is what Jesus Christ himself ordered and recommended us to do in the holy Gospel, telling us to commit ourselves to doing this; that if we only show affection towards those who love us, what will our reward be, since in doing so we are doing no more than the pagans, and judging well that this would be a difficult thing to put into practice, he wanted to give us an example in praying publicly for those who were crucifying him.<sup>134</sup>

Although the notion of praying for enemies could be a reference to either **Mt 5.44** or Lk 6.27, and the reference to Jesus' prayer for his executioners is to Vg Lk 23.34, the question 'what will our *reward* [*récompense*] be' indicates that this is a reference to **Mt 5.46**, not to Lk 6.32.<sup>135</sup> It is more likely, then, that the whole reference to praying for enemies and the inadequacy of loving only one's friends is an allusion to (Vg) **Mt 5.44, 46**.

#### **Mt 5.44** | MD 5.2.2

I observed when considering De La Salle's use of Mt 5.3 in this meditation for Sunday in the Octave of Christmas that its theme, relating especially to Lk 2.34 (Jesus

---

<sup>133</sup> *Malédiction*. De La Salle is quoting Augustine. In DA 104.5.4, in a section called 'Concerning the hatred of the Pharisees towards Jesus-Christ, and the aversion Jesus had for the Pharisees', De La Salle describes how Jesus gave the Pharisees visible signs of his 'indignation' 'in the curses [*malédiction*s] he thundered forth at them, particularly in the 11<sup>th</sup> chapter of Saint Luke, and in the 23<sup>rd</sup> chapter of Saint Matthew'.

<sup>134</sup> DA 403.2.9. It would be comforting to think that De La Salle was aware that 'the Jews' (or at least 'the Pharisees' as portrayed in the gospels, including Matthew) were among the 'enemies' to be prayed for.

<sup>135</sup> Luke uses χάρις, Matthew μισθός: NRSV 'credit' and 'reward', respectively. The difference is reflected in the Vulgate's *gratia* (Lk) and *merces* (Mt). All three French versions translate Luke's term as *gré*, and Matthew's as *récompense*, the word used by De La Salle.

Christ ‘would be exposed to the contradiction of men’<sup>136</sup>) that the theme of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Point is that the *moral* teachings of Jesus are not to be ‘contradicted’. Jesus, De La Salle remarks, did not come to us so much to announce the holy truths of Christian morality, but to commit us to practising them. Nonetheless it is quite common, he says, to see Christians – even in religious communities – having little taste for practical truths.

He provides some examples of truths which ‘they contradict in their heart and often in their exterior conduct’: having to account for a careless word (cf. Mt 12.36); to pray without ceasing (cf. Lk 18.1); to enter heaven by the narrow gate (cf. Mt 7.13/Lk 13.24);<sup>137</sup> to do penance or to perish (cf. Lk 13.5).

The final ‘practical truth’ is expressed as follows:

...that there is a commandment for them to love their enemies, to good to those who hate them, to pray to God for those who persecute and who calumniate them, so that they may be children of their Father who is in Heaven who makes his sun rise on the good and on the bad...<sup>138</sup>

The inclusion of Mt 5.45, which has no parallel in Luke, confirms Matthew as the source of his quotation.

To conclude this discussion of De La Salle’s use of Matthew chapter 5, and particularly of his frequent use of what appears to be most often Mt 5.44 rather than Lk 6.27-28, we note some of the observations made in the official biography commissioned after the General Chapter of 1724 and published in 1733. The task was given to John Baptist Blain, a canon of the cathedral of Rouen, and includes, as well as the historical biography, ‘Book IV’ entitled ‘His [De La Salle’s] spirit, his sentiments, and his virtues’. Extensive and obviously hagiographic, as was often the

---

<sup>136</sup> *serait en butte à la contradiction des hommes*. The 1730 edition reproduced in CL 12, 20 has the spelling *bute*, which corresponds exactly to the expression in Huré.

<sup>137</sup> Since the Vulgate uses the same word [*porta*] for Matthew’s *πύλη* and Luke’s *θύρα*, both Huré and Amelote use *porte*; it is therefore not possible to attribute the allusion to one or the other evangelist. The fact that the following reference is from Lk 13 may favour Luke as the more probable source.

<sup>138</sup> MD 5.2.2. Allowing for De La Salle’s turning part of the verse into indirect speech, the text reproduces that of Mons.

tone of such works, its purpose included the newly approved Institute's objective of its Founder's beatification and eventual canonisation.<sup>139</sup>

There is a section within Book IV which begins, in Edwin Bannon's translation:

The real triumph of charity is love for our enemies; this is charity's noblest achievement, the proof that it has been stamped with the seal of Jesus Christ. This is charity of a heroic kind, which does honour to the Gospel.<sup>140</sup>

The editorial reference is to **Mt 5.44**. Blain describes, over some ten pages in the English translation, the various situations in which De La Salle demonstrated his virtue. The account is liberally sprinkled with words like 'opponents', 'persecutors', 'slandorous', 'endless vexations'. Then, in turning to De La Salle's own behaviour under trying circumstances, Blain has this to say:

To love our enemies, to speak well of them, to do good to them, and to pray for them – such are four precepts of charity laid down by Jesus Christ and exemplified in his own conduct: *diligite, benefacite, benedicite, orate*. They are of strict obligation, but they imply a high degree of perfection, and we must admit that to practise them literally, we have to be dead to our natural feelings!<sup>141</sup>

Bannon points out in a footnote that the four verbs are from the Vulgate version of Lk 6.27-28 (Mt 5.44 does not include *benedicite*). It would seem that Blain, unlike the subject of his eulogising, has chosen Luke over Matthew, the most probable source of De La Salle's own recommendations of 'heroic charity' to his community and their students.

Lest it be thought that Blain is exaggerating the extent of various sorts of hostility towards De La Salle, to scan just the table of contents of a later work on De La Salle is to see such headings as 'Persecutions instigated by the teachers' organizations'; 'Second attack of the salaried teachers'; 'The torment of 1704-1706' (the confiscation

---

<sup>139</sup> See Edwin Bannon, 'Introduction', in Augustine Loes, ed., *The Mind and Heart of John Baptist de La Salle: Jean-Baptiste Blain* (Landover, MD: Lasallian Publications, 2002), 1-6.

<sup>140</sup> Augustine Loes, ed., *The Mind and Heart of John Baptist de La Salle: Jean-Baptiste Blain* (Landover, MD: Lasallian Publications, 2002), 342.

<sup>141</sup> Loes, *Mind and Heart*, 345.

of school furniture and being forbidden to maintain schools); ‘The sad Clément affair’ (a legal suit wrongly awarded against De La Salle).<sup>142</sup>

Towards the end of Blain’s own biography he relates the final insult received by De La Salle, on his death-bed: with the connivance of the vicar general he was falsely accused of having lied to the Archbishop. His priestly faculties were suspended. Blain himself refused to convey the message, which was carried by someone else, but observes that ‘God permitted this trial so that his servant might die, like Jesus Christ, in disgrace’. The vicar general is reported to have exclaimed, nonetheless, on hearing of De La Salle’s death: ‘He is a saint! The saint is dead!’<sup>143</sup>

**Mt 5.48 | R 13.6.4**

5<sup>48</sup> ‘Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect.’

Matthew’s understanding of ‘perfect’ in this verse was considered above in connection with Mt 5.6, with reference to the comments of Ulrich Luz. De La Salle cites (or includes)<sup>144</sup> the verse itself in *The Collection of Various Short Treatises*, in a section entitled ‘The least thing which displeases God must not be done even if somewhat involuntarily’. The fourth of the five points reads:

The concern of our Lord through his sufferings and through his death was not only to withdraw from sin but to distance from all imperfections the souls which he wants to be all for him: ‘Be perfect,’ he says, ‘as your heavenly Father is perfect’.<sup>145</sup>

In this context, the text is cited as part of a series of briefly-stated reasons for avoiding even ‘imperfections’. Among the others, there are references to the Song of Solomon (perhaps Song 4.9) and Eph 5.27. The Biblical word is an essential aspect of this whole section dealing with ways of ‘becoming interior’.

---

<sup>142</sup> Yves Poutet, *Saint Jean-Baptiste de La Salle: un saint du xvii<sup>e</sup> siècle* (Paris: Beauchesne, 1992), 81-182.

<sup>143</sup> Blain, *Vie*, 167-169.

<sup>144</sup> It is possible that some material in this work was gathered from other sources.

<sup>145</sup> R 13.6.4. The text is most likely that of Amelote. While Mons and Huré otherwise have the same wording, their sentences begin ‘You *others*, be perfect...’.

## CONCLUSION: DE LA SALLE AND MT 5.17-48

De La Salle's recourse to verses from the second part of Mt 5, following the Beatitudes can be seen to reflect the criteria outlined as consistent with a 'history of influence' approach to interpretation:

- that the Gospel is to be internalized, so that it does in fact exert an *influence*, even on behaviour that would normally be considered as required by conventional etiquette;
- that the truths of the Gospel are to be *practised*;
- that the biblical word, including the words of Jesus, is to be heard as addressed to the listener in his or her *present context*;
- that the interpretation of the Bible is seen as part of a *living tradition* involving, especially, the Church Fathers
- that *prayer* is a part of biblical interpretation

In the following chapter I shall discuss De La Salle's references to the remainder of the Sermon on the Mount, Mt 6-7.



## CHAPTER 7 – DE LA SALLE’S REFERENCES TO MATTHEW 6-7

### INTRODUCTION

This chapter continues the discussion of De La Salle’s references to the Sermon on the Mount, Mt 6-7, including his extended treatment of the Lord’s Prayer, Mt 6.9-13.

### 1. MATTHEW 6.1-6

**Mt 6.1-6** | MR 202.2.2; MR 203.1.1

6<sup>1</sup> ‘Beware of practising your piety before others in order to be seen by them; for then you have no reward from your Father in heaven. 2 So whenever you give alms, do not sound a trumpet before you, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and in the streets, so that they may be praised by others. Truly I tell you, they have received their reward. 3 But when you give alms, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing, 4 so that your alms may be done in secret; and your Father who sees in secret will reward you. 5 And whenever you pray, do not be like the hypocrites; for they love to stand and pray in the synagogues and at the street corners, so that they may be seen by others. Truly I tell you, they have received their reward. 6 But whenever you pray, go into your room and shut the door and pray to your Father who is in secret; and your Father who sees in secret will reward you.’

The tenth of the *Meditations for the Time of Retreat* is paired with the ninth, both being concerned with the ‘zeal’<sup>1</sup> of those who instruct youth.<sup>2</sup>

The first Point enjoins on teachers the sort of zeal that would urge their ‘disciples to avoid sin as promptly as they would flee the presence of a snake’. The examples of sin which De La Salle gives are no doubt illustrative of the situation of the young people in the schools: impurity, irreverence in church and at prayer, stealing, lying, disobedience and disrespect towards their parents, and other faults to do with their companions.<sup>3</sup> Léon Lauraire has researched the dangers, both physical and moral, of the situation in which the Brothers’ pupils lived, whether in their lodgings or on the

---

<sup>1</sup> In Lasallian terms, ‘zeal’ is the obverse of ‘faith’ and together they constitute the ‘spirit of the Institute’. See the Rule of 1705/1718, RC 2.2; 2.9.

<sup>2</sup> That these meditations were to be read two per day in an eight-day retreat is indicated by the foreword to the original edition (c. 1730), probably written by Brother Timothée, Superior General from 1720 to 1751. See Loes and Huether, *Meditations*, 476-477.

<sup>3</sup> MR 202.1.2.

street. He quotes Arlette Farge as noting that houses were such that ‘Everything is public, obscenity as much as indecency’,<sup>4</sup> and points out that the Brothers had to take account of the fact that their pupils made the journey through the streets at least four times a day, where there was considerable risk of ‘accidents, but also of the bad examples which they saw there’.<sup>5</sup> Of Paris during the reign of Louis XIV, Andrew Hussey remarks that ‘everyday life in the city was filthy and dangerous’.<sup>6</sup>

In the second Point, the teachers are told not to be content with dissuading the children from doing the wrong thing; they are to persuade them to do all the good of which they are capable.<sup>7</sup> But, ‘according to the teaching of Jesus Christ’, they are not to do their good works ‘in the sight of other people [*devant hommes*] so as to be looked at and honoured, because those who behave in that way have already received their reward’.<sup>8</sup> De La Salle goes on to stress the importance of teaching them to pray to God, ‘as Our Lord taught those who were following him, and pray to [God] with much piety and “in secret”, that is, with much recollection’.<sup>9</sup>

It may be that there is here also an echo of Luke’s prelude to the Lord’s Prayer, where one of Jesus’ disciples asks him to ‘teach us to pray, as John taught his disciples’. The vocabulary and syntax of *apprenez-nous à prier, comme Jean l’a appris à ses disciples*<sup>10</sup> is very similar to that of De La Salle’s *que vous leur appreniez à prier Dieu, comme Notre Seigneur l’a appris à ceux qui le suivaient*.<sup>11</sup> We note again that in the *Meditations for the Time of Retreat*, pupils are frequently called ‘disciples’, as they are a few lines below in this Point. The relationship between Jesus and his disciples is to be mirrored in that between teacher and pupils – ‘the children in your care’.<sup>12</sup>

---

<sup>4</sup> Arlette Farge, *Vivre dans la rue au XVIII<sup>e</sup> siècle* (Paris: Gallimard/Julliard, 1979), 32-33, cited in Lauraire, *Approche contextuelle*, 119.

<sup>5</sup> Lauraire, *Approche contextuelle*, 122.

<sup>6</sup> Andrew Hussey, *Paris: The Secret History* (London: Penguin Books, 2007), 157.

<sup>7</sup> MR 202.2.1.

<sup>8</sup> The vocabulary: *regardés, bonnes œuvres* (Amelote ‘vos œuvres de justice’, cf. Vg Mt 6.1 *justitiam*), *devant les hommes, récompense*, etc., is that of the French versions of Mt 6.1-5.

<sup>9</sup> MR 202.2.2. Only Huré Mt 6.6 has De La Salle’s *en secret*; Amelote and Mons have *dans le secret*.

<sup>10</sup> Huré Lk 11.1.

<sup>11</sup> MR 202.2.2.

<sup>12</sup> MR 202.2.1.

The issue of authentic piety is taken up again in the following meditation – most likely the meditation of the following morning, whose subject is the obligation of teachers to reprove and correct the faults that those they are charged with instructing commit'.<sup>13</sup> De La Salle provides a series of examples: Jesus' 'zeal concerning the Jews' is shown in his chasing the buyers and sellers out of the temple. And he publicly rebuked and reproached the Pharisees for their 'hypocrisy, false piety', and their pride in praising their own actions while criticising and blaming those of others. While there is no mention of Pharisees in Mt 6, 'hypocrites' appears in vv. 2, 5 and 16, and the Pharisees are called hypocrites in Mt 23.13, 23, 25, 27, 29, which may also be in view here.

**Mt 6.5, 7 | DA 402.1.1**

6<sup>5</sup> And whenever you pray, do not be like the hypocrites; for they love to stand and pray in the synagogues and at the street corners, so that they may be seen by others. Truly I tell you, they have received their reward. 6<sup>6</sup> But whenever you pray, go into your room and shut the door and pray to your Father who is in secret; and your Father who sees in secret will reward you. 7<sup>7</sup> When you are praying, do not heap up empty phrases as the Gentiles do; for they think that they will be heard because of their many words.'

The allusion to the overuse of words in prayer occurs in De La Salle's extensive treatise on prayer in *The Duties of a Christian to God*. Before considering that allusion, it is relevant to point out that within the five-chapter treatise there are 27 explicit references to Augustine, 22 to John Chrysostom, ten to Tertullian, and five to Ambrose. The same chapters include 20 references to the Gospel of Matthew, 14 of which fall within the thesis scope of Mt 4.23-10.8. As examples of patristic influence on biblical interpretation I note De La Salle's reference to Augustine's comments on Mt 6.11 ('Give us this day our daily bread'),<sup>14</sup> Chrysostom's comments on Eph 3.17 ('and that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith...'),<sup>15</sup> Tertullian's on the Lord's Prayer in Matthew, and Ambrose's on Mt 6.6 ('But whenever you pray, go into your room...').<sup>16</sup>

---

<sup>13</sup> MR 203.

<sup>14</sup> DA 403.1.9.

<sup>15</sup> DA 401.3.5.

<sup>16</sup> DA 402.2.1.

The second chapter of De La Salle's treatise concerns 'the circumstances that should accompany prayer'; its first section has the heading 'the conditions that prayer should have',<sup>17</sup> and begins:

It is not sufficient to pronounce words [*paroles*], or to appear to pray on the outside, to do so effectively, and to render one's prayer acceptable to God, useful to oneself, and to one's neighbour...<sup>18</sup>

The references to 'words', 'the outside', and 'useful' suggest that this can be seen as an allusion to Mt 6.5, in which the disciples are urged not to pray, as the 'hypocrites' do, 'so that they may be seen by others', and to Mt 6.7: '... do not heap up empty phrases as the Gentiles do; for they think that they will be heard because of their many words'.<sup>19</sup>

De La Salle foreshadows the subsequent discussion by listing the eight 'principal conditions' which prayer should have: 'purity of heart, attention, devotion, fervour, humility, resignation, confidence, and perseverance'.<sup>20</sup> The reference to 'heart' here is reminiscent both of the treatment of vocal prayer for the pupils, in the more extensive of the two 'summaries' of *Duties of Christian*, and in De La Salle's reference to 'a prayer of the heart', in his *Explanation of the Method of Interior Prayer*. To the question 'What is vocal or spoken prayer?' in the former, the answer is given: 'Vocal prayer is that in which the heart and the mouth speak to give God our homage, and to ask him for our needs'.<sup>21</sup> In the latter, concerning the Brother-teachers learning interior prayer according to De La Salle's method, he advises:

It is not intended that they make a habit of using these [acts] provided here, lest their prayer be not simply a prayer of the heart, but would degenerate into vocal prayer, which would not have for them the same benefit it would if it were produced in them by the Holy Spirit, (who must inspire them in making interior prayer) and from the depths of their hearts.<sup>22</sup>

---

<sup>17</sup> DA 402; 402.1.

<sup>18</sup> DA 402.1.1.

<sup>19</sup> Amelote Mt 6.7 uses *paroles* twice; our other two versions once each. Mons Mt 6.7 paraphrases 'will be heard' as 'they will obtain what they are asking for': *ils obtiendront ce qu'ils demandent*. There is no parallel to these strictures in Mark or Luke.

<sup>20</sup> DA 402.1.1.

<sup>21</sup> GA 29.2.

<sup>22</sup> EM 6.174.

Clearly, the children's prayer is also to be, in a way suitable to their stage of development, 'a prayer of the heart'.

**Mt 6.6** | DA 402.2.1; R 12.5

The second section of the same chapter, dealing with 'the places, times, and posture' of prayer begins with an explicit reference to Mt 6.6: 'When you wish to pray, go into your room',<sup>23</sup> cited with the support of St Ambrose. De La Salle goes on to appeal to 1 Tim 2.8, in which St Paul 'prescribes that people pray in all places'.<sup>24</sup> Since Ambrose's commentary on this verse also refers to Mt 6.6, it is very likely that De La Salle is drawing on that Father's *In Epistolam Beati Pauli ad Timotheum Primam* as his starting point.<sup>25</sup>

Two points can be made here. Firstly, both Ambrose and De La Salle take 'room' literally, as a physical place. It is not spiritualized as in, for example, Hilary's 'the bedroom of our hearts', or Augustine's 'the inmost heart'.<sup>26</sup> Secondly, Ambrose reflects on the verse in terms of St Paul warning lest people think that they can pray only in church.<sup>27</sup> De La Salle wants to make this clear at the start, as he does at considerable length in *Explanation of the Method of Interior Prayer*.<sup>28</sup> However, his main concern in this section of *Duties of a Christian* is to emphasise the value of praying in church:<sup>29</sup>

But the place where we ought to pray to God preferably to all others is the church, because of all places it is the one which is particularly consecrated to prayer: it is on that account that it is called by Jesus Christ the house of God and the house of prayer.<sup>30</sup>

---

<sup>23</sup> The vocabulary is that of Huré and Mons: ... *lorsque vous voudrez prier, entrez dans votre chambre*. Amelote has ... *quand vous voudrez prier, entrez dans votre cabinet*.

<sup>24</sup> *en tous lieux*. Amelote and Huré have *en tout lieu*, cf. Vulgate *in omni loco*.

<sup>25</sup> 'Migne Patrologia Latina,' documentacatholicaomnia.eu.

<http://www.documentacatholicaomnia.eu/02m/0339->

0397,\_Ambrosius,\_In\_Epistolam\_Beati\_Pauli\_Ad\_Timotheum\_Primam,\_MLT.pdf.

<sup>26</sup> See Simonetti, *Matthew 1-13*, 127-128.

<sup>27</sup> *ne in sola Ecclesia putarent orandum*.

<sup>28</sup> The 'first way of placing oneself in the holy presence of God' is by 'considering God present everywhere', EM 2.17.

<sup>29</sup> Cf. EM 2.64-2.74.

<sup>30</sup> DA 402.2.2. This point is developed in EM 2.64-2.65.

The point is made succinctly in the question-and-answer version:

Q. In what place should one pray to God?

A. One should pray to God in all places, but particularly in churches, which are made and intended for this exercise.<sup>31</sup>

Again, we see the consistency between what the teacher is encouraged to internalise, and what the teacher has then to encourage the students to begin to understand and practise.

On the other hand, there are times when the places and styles of prayer are considered separately. Significantly, though, their distinctiveness is treated under the unifying banner of the spirit of the Institute, ‘the spirit of faith’, in *Collection of Various Short Treatises*. At the end of the section of the *Collection* devoted to this theme, there is provided a list of biblical passages ‘which can help the Brothers to do their actions through the spirit of faith’.<sup>32</sup>

These are arranged in groups of up to four short passages, under more than thirty headings relating to a broad range of both daily activities and a few ‘less ordinary’ actions, such as ‘When one receives absolution’. The daily activities include ‘When one washes’, ‘When one has lunch or dinner’, ‘When at school’, ‘When one corrects someone’, as well as those to do with community life and prayer. There are three, early in the section, relating to prayer and to the above discussion: ‘When one makes vocal prayer’, ‘When one makes interior prayer’, and ‘When one enters a church or oratory’.

For ‘vocal prayer’ the two biblical passages (combined) are ‘This people honours me with the lips, and their heart is distant from me.’<sup>33</sup> I will bless the Lord at all times, and his praise will always be in my mouth’. For ‘When one makes interior prayer’ the recommended verses are ‘God is spirit and wishes that those who adore him adore

---

<sup>31</sup> DB 4.4.1.

<sup>32</sup> R 12.

<sup>33</sup> This seems to be the version of LXX Isa 29.13 adapted and cited in Mt 15.8. The French version is closest to those of Mons and Huré, both of which (with Amelote and consistently with the original) have ‘*but* their heart...’. The edition of 1711 includes no biblical reference at this point, though it does for the immediately following quotation from Ps 33 [34]. See CL 15, 51.

him in spirit and in truth.<sup>34</sup> When you wish to pray, go into your room, pray to your heavenly Father in secret.<sup>35</sup> The latter verse, clearly based on Mt 6.6, is not referenced in the 1711 edition. The passages relating to entering a church or oratory are noted in the 1711 edition as Lk 19.46, ‘My house is a house of prayer’,<sup>36</sup> and simply ‘Gen.’: ‘This place is awesome [*terrible*], it is the house of God and the gate of heaven’ (Gen 28.17).

### Mt 6.8 | DB 4.1.3

6<sup>8</sup> ‘Do not be like them, for your Father knows what you need before you ask him.’

Mt 6.8 is noted in a question regarding prayer in the second volume of *Duties of a Christian*:

Q. Is it necessary for people to ask God for what they need, since God knows beforehand what they are asking for?

A. Yes, it is necessary.

Q. Why does God want people to ask him for what they need, since he knows beforehand that they are asking him for it?

A. It is to make them realise that everything they have, and can have, can only come from him.<sup>37</sup>

## 2. MATTHEW 6.9-13 – THE LORD’S PRAYER

DA 403.1.2; DB 4.7; 4.8; 4.9

6<sup>9</sup> ‘Pray then in this way: Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name. <sup>10</sup> Your kingdom come. Your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. <sup>11</sup> Give us this day our daily bread. <sup>12</sup> And forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors. <sup>13</sup> And do not bring us to the time of trial, but rescue us from the evil one.

<sup>34</sup> This is acknowledged in the 1711 text as ‘S. Jean Chap. 4. v. 24’. However, in its cited form it omits the obligation stated in the original, ‘... *must* worship...’, present in Mons and Huré (... *il faut que*...) and Amelote (...*doivent*...).

<sup>35</sup> The vocabulary (*quand, cabinet*) is that of Amelote; Mons and Huré have *lorsque* and *chambre*. ‘Heavenly’ (*céleste*) is perhaps borrowed from Mt 6.14.

<sup>36</sup> The indefinite article is used in Mons and Huré; Amelote has *la*. However, all three versions use *prière* (Amelote in the plural), whereas the *Collection* text has *oraison*, the subject of the previous paragraph, *oraison mentale*.

<sup>37</sup> DB 4.1.3. The vocabulary and syntax (*connaître* and *besoins*, rather than *savoir* and *dequoi [sic] vous avez besoin* as in Mons and Huré) are again that of Amelote.

The text of the prayer is based on the Mons text of Mt 6.9-13. Whether this form of the Lord's Prayer was already to some extent current at least in some areas of France, or whether its currency was in fact encouraged by its standardization in the Brothers' schools is a question that merits further study.

De La Salle comments at length on the Lord's Prayer in the chapter of *Duties of a Christian (Duties I)* entitled 'For what and for whom one should and can pray to God',<sup>38</sup> within the first section, dealing with 'Regarding what one must and can ask God for in prayer'. In *Duties II*, in question and answer format, there is a lesson on the Lord's Prayer in general, followed by one on the first four petitions, and another on the last three.<sup>39</sup> There are also a number of incidental references to verses 9, 11, and 12 in these and other works, whose import I shall consider below, in regard to their respective 'petitions'.

That the Lord's Prayer was of deep personal significance for De La Salle is evident in the last of the rules he imposed on himself:

Every day I shall recite once the *Our Father* with as much devotion, attention, and faith as possible, out of respect for Our Lord who has taught it to us and commands us to recite it.<sup>40</sup>

In the *Collection of Various Short Treatises*, he begins a section 'Regarding the Office and vocal prayers' with a paragraph in high praise of the Lord's Prayer. It is part of a longer chapter entitled 'Reflections that the Brothers should make from time to time, and especially during their retreat, on their state and their work'.<sup>41</sup>

Reflect on the fact<sup>42</sup> that God has promised to grant us the fruit of our prayers if they are well made: that there is no doubt at all that we should not obtain all that is contained in the Lord's Prayer, if we do not place any obstacle in the way; because it is the most noble, the most excellent, the easiest and the most efficacious of all prayers.<sup>43</sup>

---

<sup>38</sup> DA 403.1.

<sup>39</sup> DB 4.7, 4.8, 4.9.

<sup>40</sup> EP 3.0.20.

<sup>41</sup> R 16.1.

<sup>42</sup> *Considérez*. Dict. 1694 gives one meaning as 'examine with reflection', which suggests something stronger than simply 'remember' or 'bear in mind'.

<sup>43</sup> R 16.4.1.



In the introductory discussion of the Lord's Prayer in *Duties I*, the first point is that we cannot ask God for everything that comes to mind. De La Salle cites St Paul (cf. Rom 8.26) in stating that we do not know what to ask of God, so that it is necessary that the Holy Spirit pray to God in us. He then draws on Tertullian, to support an emphasis on asking God more particularly for 'the things that lead [us] to heaven', and also to highlight Jesus' 'new way of praying'. Hence, Tertullian is noted as saying,

that it was for this reason that in the prayer which [Jesus] himself composed, which is called the dominical or Lord's prayer, he taught them a new way of praying, which is so excellent that even Tertullian had no difficulty in saying that the whole Gospel is encompassed within it, and that it is like a summary of the Gospel.<sup>44</sup>

De La Salle adverts to the custom in the early church of praying the Lord's Prayer 'three times each day'<sup>45</sup>, an injunction found in the *Didache*,<sup>46</sup> and throughout this section he refers to both Tertullian and Augustine. From the latter, for example, he takes the assertion that 'there is nothing to be found in all other prayers which is not contained in this one, and that, although we are free to make use of other words when we pray, we are not free to ask God for other things which are not included in it'.<sup>47</sup>

*Duties II* includes three lessons on the Lord's Prayer, as part of the thirteen-lesson Treatise 2, on 'Prayer'.<sup>48</sup> One of the questions in the introductory lesson on the Lord's Prayer makes it clear that the children are to be able to say the prayer both in

---

<sup>44</sup> DA 403.1.2. De La Salle is drawing on Tertullian's *De Oratione*, 1, which itself refers to Mt 6.6 (*imprimis de praecepto secreta adorandi*) and Mt 6.7 (*non agmine verborum adeundum putemus ad dominum*). Tertullian gives great emphasis to the newness of Jesus' prayer by constant repetition of *novus* ['new']: *novis discipulis novi testamenti novam orationis formam determinavit, novum vinum novis utribus recondi et novam plagulam novo adsui vestimento*. 'Tertullian; De Oratione,' Tertullian.org. [http://www.tertullian.org/articles/evans\\_orat/evans\\_orat\\_03latin.htm](http://www.tertullian.org/articles/evans_orat/evans_orat_03latin.htm).

<sup>45</sup> DA 403.1.3.

<sup>46</sup> *Didache*, 8.3: τρις τῆς ἡμέρας οὕτω προσεύχεσθε. 'The Apostolic Fathers,' ccel.org. <http://www.ccel.org/l/lake/fathers/didache.htm>.

<sup>47</sup> Cf. Augustine, *Epistola CXXX*, 12: *Et si per omnia precationum sanctarum verba discurras, quantum existimo, nihil invenies quo in ista dominica non contineatur et concludatur oratione. Unde liberum est aliis atque aliis verbis, eadem tamen in orando dicere; sed non debet esse liberum alia dicere*. (In *Opera Omnia*, Patrologia cursus completus, series Latina, vol. 33, edited by J.-P. Migne (Paris: Migne, 1861), 503.

<sup>48</sup> DB 4.

Latin and in French.<sup>49</sup> *The Conduct of the Christian Schools* stipulates, for example, that ‘on Wednesdays... those [pupils] who read Latin will recite the responses of Holy Mass during breakfast’ (which was brought to school by those able to do so, and shared with those who were in need).<sup>50</sup>

The point of having the pupils say the prayer in Latin at this time was no doubt to help them recognise something of the Latin in which Mass was celebrated, given that going to Mass at about 10:30 am was part of the normal school day.<sup>51</sup> The related prayers include one ‘before going to holy Mass’ and another ‘on returning from holy Mass’.<sup>52</sup> Moreover, the ‘I confess’ (*Confiteor*) as recited at this time includes the otherwise irrelevant words ‘and (to) you, Father’,<sup>53</sup> as if they were being said by the server at Mass.

I shall consider De La Salle’s treatment of the seven petitions in turn.

**Mt 6.9** | DA 403.1.6; 404.1.2; 405.1.8; DB 4.7.4; 4.8.1-3

6<sup>9</sup> ‘Pray then in this way: Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name.’

### ‘Our Father’ (Mt 6.9b)

While in *Duties I* the discussion of the first petition relates only to ‘hallowed be thy name’ (*la sanctification du saint nom de Dieu*), *Duties II* takes up the opening address, ‘Our Father’:

Q. Who is the one we call our Father at the beginning of our Lord’s prayer?

<sup>49</sup> DB 4.7.5. Contrary to the prevailing educational practice, the Latin language as such was not taught in the first ‘Christian Schools’; see Everett, ‘Introduction’, 24. The *Rule* of 1718 prescribed that pupils would be taught to *read*, firstly, French, secondly, Latin, thirdly, letters written by hand, and to write (RC 7.4). It forbade the teaching of the Latin language to anyone, whether in the house or outside it (RC 26.1). Houry, *Écrits*, RC, indicates that the article RC 7.4 is not included in the 1705 edition of the *Rule*. The presentation in *Cahiers lasalliens* of the editions of 1705, 1718 and 1726 indicates that all but the words *et à écrire* [‘and to write’] were included in the 1705 edition; see CL 25, 34. The English version reflects this; see Loes and Isetti, *Rule and Foundational*, 36.

<sup>50</sup> CE 2.2.4. See CL 24, 7.

<sup>51</sup> CE 8.0.2.

<sup>52</sup> E 2.20-21.

<sup>53</sup> *et tibi pater ... et te pater*, E 2.14.00.

The response is intriguing:

A. It is God the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.<sup>54</sup>

It is likely that in this De La Salle is following one of his sources, the *Catechism of Chartres*, by Bishop Godet des Marais (1647-1709).<sup>55</sup> But since he has made use of a number of different sources for his own version, we must ask why he chose to include this interpretation of ‘Father’.<sup>56</sup>

As Luz observes, a trinitarian view of the Lord’s Prayer itself is not unknown, and has been commented on by August Tholuck.<sup>57</sup> Tholuck perceived in the Prayer ‘a logical inner structure’ (*ein logischer Schematismus*) within the seven petitions, according to which the recognition of God’s holiness relates chiefly to the Father, his rule in humankind is mediated through the Son, and finds its fulfilment in the Spirit. He sees a similarly trinitarian pattern in the Father’s conservation of physical existence, the Son’s removal of the guilt of sin, and the Spirit’s protection from the power of temptation and final subjective redemption from Evil/the Evil One (*vom Bösen*).<sup>58</sup> In his later commentary on the Sermon on the Mount, Tholuck reiterates his conviction that ‘the careful reader’ will see a reference to the Trinity in the scheme of the prayer, in that the petitions of the first and second parts relate to God as Creator and Maintainer (*Erhalter*), both second petitions to God as Redeemer, and the third in each part to God the Holy Spirit.<sup>59</sup> Luz comments that such interpretations (including Tholuck’s) ‘made the Lord’s Prayer a stranger to itself by treating and interpreting it as a compendium of Christian doctrine’ and ‘a dogmatic basic text’.<sup>60</sup>

---

<sup>54</sup> DB 4.7.4.

<sup>55</sup> See Pungier, *Catéchisme*, 98.

<sup>56</sup> The Trinitarian view does not seem to derive from the *Catechism of the Council of Trent*, the primary source of Godet des Marais’ work. See *Le catéchisme du concile de Trente, Latin-François. Tome second.* (Mons: Gaspard Migeot, 1685), 447-464, for the elaboration of ‘Father’.

<sup>57</sup> Luz, *Matthew 1-7*, 325.

<sup>58</sup> August Tholuck, *Philologisch-theologische Auslegung der Bergpredigt Christi nach Matthäus, zugleich ein Beitrag zur Begründung einer rein-biblischen Glaubens und Sittenlehre* (Hamburg: Friedrich Verthes, 1833), 389-391.

<sup>59</sup> August Tholuck, *Der Bergpredigt* (Gotha: Friedrich Andreas Verthes, 1856), 359.

<sup>60</sup> Luz, *Matthew 1-7*, 325.

To understand ‘the Father’ as signifying the Trinity is not an interpretation explained in *Duties I*. Here in *Duties II* it is perhaps an opportune means of calling the children’s attention to the doctrine and presence of the Triune God. Unlike Tholuck, De La Salle does not do this by differentiating roles within the Godhead by means of structural analysis. It seems more likely, on the contrary, that he is conforming to the classical Trinitarian axiom, ‘*opera trinitatis ad extra indivisa sunt*’.<sup>61</sup> Given his references to Tertullian in this context, it may be seen as extension of the comment by Tertullian, quoting Jn 10.30, that ‘likewise, in “Father”, the Son is invoked: for he says I and the Father are one’ (*item in patre filius invocatur: Ego, enim inquit, et pater unum sumus*).<sup>62</sup> Moreover, since De La Salle quotes Gregory of Nyssa elsewhere in *Duties I*,<sup>63</sup> it is not impossible that he is thinking explicitly of Gregory’s teaching that

in the case of the Divine nature we do not ... learn that the Father does anything by Himself in which the Son does not work conjointly, or again that the Son has any special operation apart from the Holy Spirit; but every operation which extends from God to the Creation, and is named according to our variable conceptions of it, has its origin from the Father, and proceeds through the Son, and is perfected in the Holy Spirit.<sup>64</sup>

That De La Salle believed in the fundamental importance of the mystery of the Triune God is well-attested. It was to the ‘Most Holy Trinity’ that the Brothers consecrated themselves by vow, renewed each year on the Feast of the Trinity.<sup>65</sup> In explaining the form of Baptism, De La Salle explains that the Trinity is invoked ‘because this mystery is the principal object and foundation of faith’.<sup>66</sup> It is the first of ‘the mysteries which we must necessarily believe and know in particular in order to be saved’.<sup>67</sup> And his concern to educate young people about the unity in action of the tripersonal God is clear in the understanding they are to have of the incarnation:

---

<sup>61</sup> See Anne Hunt, *Trinity: Nexus of the Mysteries of Christian Faith* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2005), 111.

<sup>62</sup> Tertullian, *De Oratione*, 2.11-12

<sup>63</sup> DA 304.1.7.

<sup>64</sup> Gregory of Nyssa, ‘On Not Three Gods’, New Advent, [newadvent.org](http://www.newadvent.org/fathers/2905.htm).  
<http://www.newadvent.org/fathers/2905.htm>.

<sup>65</sup> *Rule* (both 1705 and 1718, and thereafter), RC 33.1; RC 30.21.8.

<sup>66</sup> DA 302.1.9.

<sup>67</sup> DB 1.2.4.

Q. Did not all three persons of the most holy Trinity form the body and create the soul of Jesus Christ?

A. Yes, it was all three persons together.<sup>68</sup>

### **‘Hallowed be thy name.’ (Mt 6.9c)**

In *Duties I* De La Salle here draws on Tertullian, and also on Augustine’s commentary on the Sermon on the Mount, for example in observing that what we are asking in praying ‘hallowed be your name’ is

that the name of God be so sanctified and recognised as holy by people that they are persuaded that there can be nothing more holy, and that this conviction would make them be afraid to offend him, and would commit them to having nothing but the glory of God in all their actions.<sup>69</sup>

These sentiments are summarised in *Duties II*: to sanctify the ‘name’ of God is to have a profound respect for the holiness of the person of God, and a great fear of offending God. Those who thus sanctify God’s name, are those who obey him.<sup>70</sup>

### **Mt 6.10**

<sup>610</sup> ‘Your kingdom come. Your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.’

### **Mt 6.10a ‘Your kingdom come’ | DA 403.1.7; DB 4.8.4-5**

Commenting on the second petition, ‘that the kingdom of God may come’ (*que le règne de Dieu arrive*<sup>71</sup>) De La Salle again draws on Augustine, though, it seems, from a work other than the commentary on the Sermon on the Mount. The kingdom is envisaged both as something to desire, and something present. Regarding the latter, as noted in Chapter 4 of the thesis, De La Salle refers to Lk 17.21, translated as ‘the kingdom of God is within you’ (*le règne de Dieu est au-dedans de vous*).<sup>72</sup>

<sup>68</sup> DB 1.8.6.

<sup>69</sup> DA 403.1.6. See Augustine, *De Sermone Domini in Monte secundum Matthaum*, II, 5, 19; PL 34, 1277-1278: *Quod non sic petitur, quasi non sit sanctum nomen Dei, sed ut sanctum habeatur ab hominibus: id est, ita illis innotescat Deus, ut non existiment aliquid sanctius, quod magis offendere timeant*. There is a further reference to this work of Augustine’s (from chapter 6), in DA 403.1.8.

<sup>70</sup> DB 4.8.2.

<sup>71</sup> DA 403.1.7.

<sup>72</sup> *Au dedans de vous* is read by Mons Lk 17.21 and by Amelote Lk 17.21. Huré Lk 17.21, on the other hand, reads *au milieu de vous*. According to John Nolland, *Luke*

In *Duties II*, there are five questions and answers regarding this petition.<sup>73</sup> There is the same combination of asking that God ‘will reign more and more in this world by his grace’, and that he will bring about the day when ‘he must reign over all people, over the saints, and over the damned’. The latter consummation will occur ‘at the end of the world, after the universal judgment’; for the saints it will consist in having them rejoice in eternal glory, and for the damned, for all eternity ‘a most rigorous justice in hell’ (*une justice très rigoureuse dans les enfers*).

### **A more recent perspective on ‘Thy kingdom come’**

I suggested in Chapter 4 that modern scholarship might expand or even in some degree correct De La Salle’s understanding of the nuances of Matthew’s expression ‘the kingdom/reign of the Heavens’, particularly in view of the kingdom being understood by De La Salle as ‘within’ rather than ‘among’. While a full exegetical analysis of ‘thy kingdom come’ is beyond the scope of the thesis, I believe that De La Salle would be in accord with insights deriving from the fact that in verse 10a the verb ‘come’ is one of three third person aorist imperatives in the first section of the prayer (**Mt 6.9-10**). For English speakers, such a verbal form is something of a conundrum, because there is no English equivalent: our imperatives are straightforward second-person commands. As a grammarian puts it,

Since English has only second person command[s], English has no real slot for translating Greek third person commands.<sup>74</sup>

Vicky Balabanski has drawn out a meaning for these imperatives in the context of an eco-justice perspective on the Lord’s Prayer.<sup>75</sup> I believe that her insights are equally valuable from a Lasallian perspective. Balabanski points out that

---

9.21-18.34 (Dallas: Word Books, 1993), 853, the former translation of ἐντος ὑμῶν ἐστιν as ‘is within you’ has ‘the longest pedigree’, while the latter, ‘is among/in the midst of you’, despite being problematic, is preferred by most modern translators.

<sup>73</sup> DB 4.8.4-5.

<sup>74</sup> Gerald L. Stevens, *New Testament Greek Primer: From Morphology to Grammar* (Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2010), 333.

<sup>75</sup> Vicky Balabanski, ‘An Earth Bible Reading of the Lord’s Prayer: Matthew 6.9-13,’ in *Readings from the Perspective of Earth*, ed. Norman C. Habel (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2000), 151-161.

the third person aorist imperatives in the prayer are intriguing, as they exhort God to effect these actions, but leave open who is the third party who will carry out the actions. In addition, the first [‘hallowed be thy name’] and the third of the imperatives [‘thy will be done on earth’] are passive, which encourages us to think of the divine passive, and therefore of God effecting the actions.<sup>76</sup>

The person praying is addressing God, and God as ‘*our* Father’, and so is implicated in the action of the kingdom’s ‘coming’. God is not being directly requested to *make* the kingdom come, because it is not a second-person imperative. Yet the fact that God is being addressed in prayer, and because the two passive verbs suggest that the kingdom is God’s to effect, God is also implicated in the action.

I reproduce in full Balabanski’s conclusion from an ecojustice perspective, because I believe that, *mutatis mutandis*, it reflects one which De La Salle would endorse in regard to the educational mission of his community.

In terms of our ecological perspective, these imperatives do not allow us to assume that it is either God or humanity who will effect these actions alone, but rather that the creator and the created are working together in a further creative act – namely in breaking down the distinction between heaven and earth. The earth and its communities are not the passive objects of creation, but are co-creators with God in the overall goal that is envisaged in this prayer – namely the recognition of God’s name, reign and will throughout all creation.<sup>77</sup>

It is just such a perspective that makes sense of De La Salle’s twofold conviction as to *who* was effecting the educational project that became his unanticipated responsibility. On the one hand, he was convinced that the establishment and maintenance of his educational community was ‘God’s work’ – ‘Lord, the work is yours,’ as he expressed it, quoting the Vulgate of the Prophet Habakkuk<sup>78</sup>. It was ‘God who had the goodness to remedy’ the distressing situation of the illiterate poor ‘by the establishment of the Christian Schools’.<sup>79</sup> On the other hand his own forty-year involvement, together with that of his Brother-teachers, in establishing and maintaining those schools can hardly be described as passive. Nor can the ongoing work of educators today.

---

<sup>76</sup> Balabanski, ‘Earth Bible Reading’, 136.

<sup>77</sup> Balabanski, ‘Earth Bible Reading’, 136.

<sup>78</sup> (*Domine, opus tuum*), Vg Hab 3.2, in ‘Rules I have imposed on myself’, EP 3.0.8.

<sup>79</sup> MR 194.1.2.

De La Salle's conviction that 'the creator and the created are working together in a further creative act', to borrow Balabanski's expression, is in terms of 1 Cor 3.9. He addresses his Brothers as 'you whom Jesus Christ has chosen among so many others to be his co-workers (*coopérateurs*). But Balabanski's reflections on the tensive ambiguity of the third-person aorist imperative in 'Thy kingdom come' shine a direct light on the significance of the statements in the recently revised *Rule* of the Brothers, that De La Salle and the early Brothers

reformed the kind of schooling available at the time to make it accessible to the poor, and to offer it to all as a sign of the Kingdom and as a means of salvation.<sup>80</sup>

The school, at its best, is a sign that God's salvific work among young people – and on the Earth – is being effected through an infinitely unequal partnership.

Balabanski's reflections also explicate the connection between 'Kingdom' and 'co-workers' in the same *Rule's* encouragement that

by faith, as 'cooperators with Jesus Christ', the Brothers dedicate their whole life to the building up of the Kingdom of God through the service of education.<sup>81</sup>

The same applies, of course, to all educators, even if 'their whole life' also embraces partners, family and friends, and a wide range of other activities.

**Mt 6.10b 'Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven.'** | DA 403.1.8; DB 4.8.6-7

Both Tertullian and Augustine are cited in the *Duties I* comment on this petition, Tertullian in his observation that the 'whole of [God's] will is the salvation of those he has adopted' (*quia summus est voluntatis ejus, salvus eorum, quos adoptavit*),<sup>82</sup> and Augustine in the plea that the obedience of the saints on earth might mirror that of the angels who happily do God's will in heaven.<sup>83</sup> De La Salle can therefore comment that in this petition we are asking God for 'the means of saving ourselves, because therein lies the fulfilment and the end of God's will', and we are asking that we

---

<sup>80</sup> *Rule*, revised text (2015), 1.1.

<sup>81</sup> *Rule*, revised text (2015), 1.6.

<sup>82</sup> Tertullian, *De Oratone*, PL 1.1157.

<sup>83</sup> Augustine, *De Sermones Domini*, Book 2, PL 34.1278.



observe God's commandments 'with as much fidelity and exactness' as that with which the angels execute God's orders. De La Salle adds, again summarizing Augustine,<sup>84</sup> that we are praying to be able to subject the flesh to the spirit.

While reflecting what is written in *Duties I*, the students' catechism is more particular: doing God's will involves two things: observing God's holy commandments and those of his church, and accepting submissively all the difficulties that God sends us. We need God's grace to obey his will, and we pray that all people 'do his will with submission, with affection, and with love' for God, as the blessed do in heaven.<sup>85</sup>

**Mt 6.11** | DA 403.1.9-12; DB 4.8.8-11

6<sup>11</sup> 'Give us this day our daily bread.'

The first direct citation from the Lord's Prayer in *Duties I* is the 'fourth petition', expressed here as 'Give us today our daily bread' (*Donnez-nous aujourd'hui notre pain quotidien*)<sup>86</sup>, the wording used in many contemporary French versions, including that of a 1688 Breviary which could well have been known to De La Salle,<sup>87</sup> though in thinking of this petition he may be recalling the liturgical version: *Panem nostrum cotidianum da nobis hodie*, which is closest to that of Vg Lk 11.3.<sup>88</sup> The Eucharist is mentioned in this discussion, as being one interpretation of 'daily bread'.<sup>89</sup>

---

<sup>84</sup> Augustine, *De Sermones Domini*, Book 2, PL 34.1279.

<sup>85</sup> DB 4.8.7.

<sup>86</sup> *Donnez-nous aujourd'hui notre pain quotidien*, DA 403.1.9. This is identical with Amelote Lk 11.3. Both Mons and Huré read *notre pain de chaque jour*, which is also the wording of the prayer's common recitation (I 1.7.52). For Mt 6.11 Amelote has *Donnez-nous aujourd'hui notre pain qui surpasse toute substance*; Mons has the same rendering as Lk 11.3: *Donnez-nous aujourd'hui notre pain de chaque jour*. Huré has ... *qui est au dessus de toute substance*.

<sup>87</sup> *Le Breviaire Romain, en Latin et en François. Suivant la reformation du S. Concile de Trente. Imprimé par le commandement du Pape Pie V. revû, & premierement corrigé par Clement VII. & depuis par Urbain VIII. Divisé en quatre parties. Partie d'esté* (Paris: Denus Thierry, 1688). The full text of the Lord's Prayer is printed on page 1, as part of the prayers to be said before each of the hours.

<sup>88</sup> Vg Mt 6.11 has *supersubstantialem*; Vg Lk 11.3 *quotidianum*.

<sup>89</sup> DA 403.1.12.

In *Duties II*, which reflects the version recited in school, the alternative *de chaque jour* is added: *Donnez-nous aujourd'hui notre pain quotidien, ou de chaque jour* (literally, 'Give us today our daily bread, or [our bread] of each day'). The version provided in De La Salle's works published subsequently has only *de chaque jour*, the translation given in the original and later editions of Mons Mt 6.11.<sup>90</sup>

The reason for this twofold expression of the petition in this section of the catechism is undoubtedly to outline a usefully twofold interpretation of 'bread', stemming from the various ways in which its original adjective (ἐπιούσιος, used by both Matthew and Luke) has been understood.<sup>91</sup>

Augustine's commentary on this petition, which De La Salle again has in mind, includes three possible interpretations of 'our daily bread': it may refer quite concretely to our physical needs, including food; it may refer to the bread of the Eucharist; or it may refer more broadly to spiritual food, namely 'divine precepts on which we should meditate and act daily' (*praecepta scilicet divina, quae quotidie oportet meditari et operari*).<sup>92</sup> While Augustine accepts all three possibilities, he explains his reservations about the first two, and clearly prefers the last.

De La Salle includes all of these, evidently with equal emphasis. *Duties II* asks, 'What is the daily bread, or [bread] of each day that we ask of God in the Lord's Prayer?' The answer: 'It is the bread of the soul, and the bread of the body.' The 'bread of the soul' is stated in the next response as being 'the grace of God, his holy word, the holy Eucharist and all that is necessary for the salvation [*salut*] of our soul,'<sup>93</sup> while 'the

---

<sup>90</sup> DA 403.1.9. Doval, *Duties*, 216, omits part of the original sentence, which includes an allusion to Mt 6.34. The part of the sentence concerned reads: *mais elle* [i.e. *la nourriture corporelle*] *conforme à ce qui est commandé dans le saint Évangile de ne point penser au lendemain, et...*

<sup>91</sup> Davies and Allison, *Matthew*, 607 comment that the derivation and meaning of this word has been described as 'one of the great unresolved puzzles of NT lexicography'. Its interpretation among the Fathers, with at least some of whom De La Salle was familiar, ranged from the exclusively spiritual (Origen), through 'both spiritually and simply' (Cyprian) and as 'bread for tomorrow' (Jerome), to 'enough [ordinary bread] for one day' (Chrysostom). See Simonetti, *Matthew 1-13*, 135.

<sup>92</sup> Augustine, *De Sermonibus Domini*, Book 2, PL 34.1279.

<sup>93</sup> DB 4.8.9.

bread of the body' is 'all that is necessary for life and for maintaining [*conservation*] the health of our bodies'.<sup>94</sup>

Further questions regarding this petition include three which echo preoccupations of De La Salle and the mission of the early teachers: a trust in divine providence,<sup>95</sup> and the society within which they conducted their mission of educating the poor. The first reminds us as well of the high rate of infant and childhood mortality.<sup>96</sup>

To the question,

Why do we ask God for the bread which is for today, that is, for this day?

is given the reply:

It is because we must entrust ourselves to the providence of God for the following day, which perhaps we shall not see.<sup>97</sup>

There is a similar social relevance in the following question, which would otherwise seem unnecessarily speculative:

Q: Must the rich ask God for their daily bread, as well as the poor?

A: Yes, they must ask for it for two reasons: 1) because they have need of God's grace; 2) because it is God who gives them the goods they possess, and who can take them away when it pleases him.<sup>98</sup>

The matter of both rich and poor being obliged to ask God for their daily bread is similarly treated in *Duties I*, which further distinguishes a particular group whose children attended the schools: 'those who earn [wages] by the work of their hands in order to have the necessities of life'.<sup>99</sup> These correspond to the *salariés*, manual workers whose meagre income made their situation tenuous, whom Léon Lauraire situates among the working classes and poor whose children attended the schools.<sup>100</sup>

---

<sup>94</sup> DB 4.8.9. Dubois, *Dictionnaire* indicates a contemporary meaning for *conservation* as *maintien de la santé, de la vie*.

<sup>95</sup> The word appears at least thirty times in De La Salle's writings.

<sup>96</sup> Bergin, *Church*, 254, refers, for example, to 'rampant infant mortality' in the seventeenth century. De La Salle himself was aware of the death of four of his ten siblings in their infancy or early childhood; see Grass, *Early Biographies*, 204 n. 26.

<sup>97</sup> DB 4.8.10.

<sup>98</sup> DB 4.8.11.

<sup>99</sup> DA 403.1.11.

<sup>100</sup> Lauraire, *Approche contextuelle*, 27.

There is a particular poignancy in the likelihood that, as noted above, those who could read Latin would have sometimes been reciting the Lord's Prayer at the moment when the better off were sharing their bread, at breakfast time in school, with those who had none.<sup>101</sup>

In *Duties II*, the lesson ends with a sobering question as to what we are to do when God 'refuses the temporal goods we ask of him'. The answer could be construed as pious cant if we were not aware of De La Salle's dispossessing himself of his personal wealth to feed the poor, his personal response to actual hardship, and his acute awareness of the precarious situation of families whose children he was committed to educating.<sup>102</sup>

A: We must adore [God's] divine providence, and be persuaded that it is out of his goodness [*bonté*] that he refuses them.<sup>103</sup>

**Mt 6.12** | DA 403.1.13-14; DA 207.0.6; DB 4.9

6<sup>12</sup> 'And forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors.'

In *Duties I* De La Salle begins the discussion of the fifth petition with a seemingly unnecessary reference to Augustine in explaining that we are asking God's pardon for the sins we have committed – unnecessary because while Augustine is arguing at length that the Vulgate's *debita* ('debts') is to be taken as meaning *peccata* ('sins'),

---

<sup>101</sup> CE 2.2.4. See CL 24, 7.

<sup>102</sup> The early biographers relate De La Salle's distribution of his wealth to the poor: Maillefer (CL 6, 66-67, identifying the year as 1684); Bernard (CL 4, 58); Blain (CL 7, 219f.). Poutet, *Le XVIIIe siècle*, 722, notes that in the winter of 1684-85, commodities became scarce, so that prices rose steeply. Christophe Mory, *Jean-Baptiste de La Salle: Rêver l'éducation* (Paris: Pygmalion, 2010), 85, points out that conditions were such that *les artisans*, whose children were among those attending the schools, were unable to work. Poutet, *Saint Jean-Baptiste*, 41, calculates that De La Salle distributed some 9,000 *livres* ('pounds'), retaining on the canonical advice of his spiritual director, 4,000 *livres* as a capital sum which would earn him an essential 200 *livres* per year, De La Salle's own reliance on Providence had been previously and successfully challenged by his followers. See e.g. Maillefer, CL 6, 56-57. In the famine of 1693, De La Salle's own community was reduced to 'extreme poverty'; see Maillefer, CL 6, 111.

<sup>103</sup> DB 4.8.11.

De La Salle's translation (his own?) is the unusual *pechez* (= *péchés*, 'sins').<sup>104</sup> Perhaps the appeal to Augustine is to justify that rendering, one which De La Salle does not use elsewhere.<sup>105</sup> In the corresponding section of *Duties II*, he refers to the customary translation of the Lord's Prayer, where at this point the key word is *offenses*, for which the children in class would need no extended explanation.<sup>106</sup>

The questions and answers in *Duties II* focus on the reasons for, and the practical details of forgiving others, the latter making it clear that someone who is offended must, far from desiring revenge, be willing to return good for evil. It is not sufficient to avoid contact with those who have offended us, and merely to say that we wish them no harm: 'One must, says Jesus Christ, love them, wish them well and do good to them.'<sup>107</sup>

The language here indicates a clear allusion to Mt 5.44 in its Vulgate-influenced French version, to which reference was made in the discussion of that verse, above in the previous chapter.

The 'doing good' and 'loving' are spelled out as six specific indications: pardoning them from the heart; not speaking ill of them; being reconciled with them; seeing them willingly; and praying to God for them. Not wanting to forgive those who have offended us, or wishing neither to see nor to greet them, but still praying the Lord's Prayer means that we are condemning ourselves and in effect asking God not to see us, help us, or forgive us – until we have pardoned those who have offended us.<sup>108</sup> We see here an example of De La Salle's insistence that prayers, like catechism answers, must be understood, internalised, and acted upon – not simply parroted.

I note that De La Salle also emphasises the need for forgiveness of those who have offended us in dealing with the fifth commandment, 'You shall not kill'. There is another allusion to Mt 5.44 ('those who hate us'), to Mt 6.12 ('that we also pardon our

---

<sup>104</sup> Cf. Amelote Lk 11.4: *pardonnez-nous nos pechez*.

<sup>105</sup> DA 403.1.13; Augustine, *De Sermone Domini*, II, PL 34: 8.

<sup>106</sup> DB 4.9.1.

<sup>107</sup> DB 4.9.3.

<sup>108</sup> DB 4.9.4.

neighbour the wrong he has done to us'), and to Lk 23.34 (Jesus' forgiveness of those who were putting him to death).<sup>109</sup>

### Mt 6.13

6<sup>13</sup> 'And do not bring us to the time of trial, but rescue us from the evil one.'

**Mt 6.13a** | DA 403.1.15-16; DB 4.9.5-11

I note first that in these two discussions of the sixth petition of the Lord's Prayer, De La Salle uses two different translations of the verse:

*et ne nous induisez point en tentation* [*Duties I*; DA 403.1.15]<sup>110</sup>  
*Ne nous laissez point succomber à la tentation* [*Duties II*; DB 4.9.5]<sup>111</sup>

The former translation, no doubt deriving from the Vulgate [*et ne nos inducas in tentationem*], is also noted in Mons 1667 (and other editions) as the literal rendering, except that it there uses *pas* rather than *point*. The latter translation is that of the Mons text itself, and of the version of the prayer used in the schools.

On the more literal version in *Duties I*, De La Salle comments only briefly:

Saint Augustine says that, by the sixth petition, 'and do not lead us into temptation' we are asking God that he not permit that we be tempted beyond our strength, and that he not abandon us to temptation to such an extent that we would allow ourselves to be seduced, so that we would succumb [*succombions*] to it, but that he would give us the grace to resist it and to draw advantage from the temptation. We must often make this prayer to God, because during this life we are always subject to being tempted, without being able to avoid it on many occasions.<sup>112</sup>

The thrust of this comment appears to derive from a section of Augustine's commentary on Mt 6.13, in which he discusses, among other things, the notion that 'temptations' are the common lot of humanity, that there is a positive sense in which

---

<sup>109</sup> DA 207.0.6.

<sup>110</sup> CL 20, 448.

<sup>111</sup> CL 21, 285.

<sup>112</sup> DA 403.1.15-16.

people are tempted, in the sense of ‘tested’ or ‘proven’, and that a faithful God will not allow people to be tempted beyond their strength, citing 1 Cor 10.13.<sup>113</sup>

Regarding the version prayed by the students there are eighteen separate questions and answers. The first asks, according to the established pattern, ‘What is the sixth petition of Our Lord’s prayer?’ The answer, however, departs from the pattern. Whereas for all but the fourth petition the answer which quotes the petition is introduced simply by ‘It is this:’ (*C’est celle-ci:*) or ‘Here it is:’ (*La voici:*),<sup>114</sup> De La Salle seems to be aware that the customary version is a paraphrase when it comes to Mt 6.13, and the introduction is ‘It is *expressed* by these words: “Do not let us succumb to temptation”.’<sup>115</sup> He emphasises the element of ‘succumbing’ by using the word several times, as indicated below.

1. What is asked of God in praying this petition?
2. What is a temptation?
3. What is ‘a temptation or a test for our benefit’?
4. What is a temptation to do evil?
5. Is the temptation to do evil a sin?
6. Is God sometimes the instigator of the temptation?
7. How does God put our resolve [*vertu*] to the test?
8. Why does God permit that we be drawn [*portés*] to do evil?
9. Why does God permit that we succumb [*succombions*] to temptation?
10. What are the causes of temptations that push us to do evil?
11. What do we have to do so as not to be tempted often?
12. Can we of ourselves resist temptation?
13. What must we do not to succumb [*succomber*] to temptation?
14. What are the temptations against which we should be particularly on guard?
15. What must we do to overcome temptations against faith?
16. What must we do to overcome temptations against chastity?
17. What must we do when one has succumbed [*succombé*] to temptation?

---

<sup>113</sup> *De Sermone Domini in Monte*, Lib. II, cap. IX (PL 34, col. 1284).

<sup>114</sup> The fourth petition (‘Give us today our daily bread, or [our bread] of each day’) is said to be ‘contained in these words’. DB 4.8.8.

<sup>115</sup> DB 4.9.5.

The disturbing notion that God would *lead* people into temptation, an interpretation left open by the literal translation used in *Duties I*, is firstly avoided by the paraphrase itself. It is further obviated by distinguishing between two sorts of temptation, in the answer to question 2, above (‘What is a temptation?’): either a ‘proving’ [*épreuve*] for our benefit, or a ‘soliciting’ [*sollicitation*] to do evil. The answer to question 6 involves a further distinction: God can never be responsible for a temptation to do evil, ‘though he often permits it’. God is sometimes the instigator of a temptation for our benefit, by putting our resolve to the test.<sup>116</sup> God permits us to be drawn to do evil so as to give us opportunities for further reward (Question 8). God permits that we succumb to temptation for three reasons: to make us more careful; to give us a humbling experience and to renew our fervour in God’s service; to encourage us to have compassion in regard to the sins of other people.<sup>117</sup>

I note that there is no suggestion that God is punishing, much less damning people by allowing them to fail: even succumbing to temptation can have positive outcomes. In regard to the last of them – the development of compassion – it is instructive to recall the last of six examples, in *The Conduct of the Christian Schools*, of the sort of teacher-behaviour which can be ‘unbearable’ [*insupportable*] for students:

Sixthly and finally, when, taking no consciousness of himself, he cannot sympathise with the weaknesses of children, and grossly exaggerates their faults. When he reprovcs or punishes them it is as if he is dealing with an insensible instrument rather than a creature capable of reason.<sup>118</sup>

If God can allow even sin to be educative, the Christian teacher who is aware of his own weaknesses will look compassionately on the faults of those in his care.

**Mt 6.13b** | DA 403.1.16-20; DB 4.9.12

I note here that the NRSV has opted for what in the RSV was an alternative translation of ἀπὸ τοῦ πονηροῦ, ‘from the evil one’, rather than ‘from evil’, opting in other words for the masculine rather than the neuter.<sup>119</sup> The word *mal* does not

---

<sup>116</sup> DB 4.9.6.

<sup>117</sup> DB 4.9.7.

<sup>118</sup> CE 15.0.14.

<sup>119</sup> See, for example, Davies & Allison, *Matthew*, 614-615. However Luz, *Matthew 1-7*, 369, 385, favours ‘preserve us from evil’.



appear to have carried a ‘personal’ meaning. Rather, the circumlocution for the demon or devil was *le malin* (or *malin esprit*).<sup>120</sup>

De La Salle, therefore, in both *Duties I* and *Duties II*, is interpreting ‘evil’ (*mal*) in its general sense. However, before referring once again to Augustine, he makes an observation which appears to be his own, that we are asking God to deliver us from all the punishments which are due to sins, from the evils of the next life (hell and purgatory), and from those of this life – either that God would help us to bear those trials patiently – ‘or rather, that he would deliver us from every physical and spiritual affliction’ which might prevent us from achieving our salvation.<sup>121</sup> Augustine’s cited view that, in regard to the trials of the present life, we do not know what to ask of God, since they can be useful as well as harmful, does not seem to be from his commentary on the Sermon on the Mount.<sup>122</sup>

The answer to the question in *Duties II* regarding the thrust of this petition simply summarises what is in *Duties I*.<sup>123</sup> However, De La Salle then adds a further question relating to the whole prayer:

In all the petitions of this prayer that he gave us, why did our Lord want us to say ‘we’ and ‘our’, in the plural, and not ‘my’ and ‘mine’, in the singular?

The answer is that the Lord wants us to know that his intention is that we say this prayer not just for ourselves, but also for all Christians who have a place in our prayers, because of the union we have with them.<sup>124</sup>

He concludes the questions about the Lord’s Prayer with an explanation of the ‘Amen’, which is of course part of its normal recitation, is included in the Vulgate of

---

<sup>120</sup> Dubois, *Dictionnaire*, 316.

<sup>121</sup> DA 403.1.16.

<sup>122</sup> It is possible that De La Salle had access to a contemporary translated anthology of Augustine’s comments on the Lord’s Prayer, *Explication de l’oraison dominicale, composées des pensées et des paroles mêmes de S. Augustin, qu’on a extraites avec une très exacte fidélité* (Paris: Guillaume Desprez, 1688). This work makes use of the Mons-based version of the Lord’s Prayer.

<sup>123</sup> DB 4.9.12.

<sup>124</sup> DB 4.9.13.

Mt 6.13, and at the end of some of the doxological ascriptions included in some NT texts.<sup>125</sup> De La Salle puts the answer itself in the form of a prayer:

Grant us if you will, my God, all that we have been asking of you in this prayer.

The final comment is that ‘Amen’ signalises ‘the trust that we should have, having prayed, of obtaining from God what we have asked of him’.<sup>126</sup>

### 3. MATTHEW 6.14-34

**Mt 6.14** | MD 74.3.2

6<sup>14</sup> ‘For if you forgive others their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you.’

Houry has identified this Sunday meditation (for the 21<sup>st</sup> Sunday after Pentecost) as among a group evidently addressed to ‘those who live in community’.<sup>127</sup> Its theme, whether or not original, is stated as ‘On the obligation which Persons in community have of putting up with [*supporter*] the faults of their Brothers’,<sup>128</sup> and the gospel, that set down for the day is Mt 18.23-35, the kingdom parable of the king, his slaves, and their debts.

The meditation begins with a short summary of the parable itself, concluding immediately with the admonition: ‘God has forgiven you [the reader] a great debt, and certainly expects that you would also forgive anything of those of your Brothers who are indebted to you.’<sup>129</sup> The second half of the 1<sup>st</sup> Point is a realistic declaration of the impossibility of people who live together not being a source of mutual irritation,

---

<sup>125</sup> See Metzger, *Textual Commentary*, 16-17. ‘Amen’ is included in the Sixto-Clementine version of the Vulgate which De La Salle used. It is omitted in the *Nova Vulgata* edition. See

[http://www.vatican.va/archive/bible/nova\\_vulgata/documents/nova-vulgata\\_nt\\_evang-matthaeum\\_lt.html#6](http://www.vatican.va/archive/bible/nova_vulgata/documents/nova-vulgata_nt_evang-matthaeum_lt.html#6).

<sup>126</sup> DB 4.9.14.

<sup>127</sup> Houry, *Écrits*, ‘MD-MF présentation’, 5.

<sup>128</sup> CL 12, 210. Both *Personnes* and *Frères* are capitalized.

<sup>129</sup> MD 74.1.1.

the necessity of grace [*grâce*], and the need to put up charitably with the defects of others: to be ‘disposed to display graciousness [*grâce*] towards others’.<sup>130</sup>

The biblical text appealed to in the 2<sup>nd</sup> Point is 1 Cor 13.7: that ‘charity endures [*souffre*]<sup>131</sup> everything’, providing De La Salle with a basis for stressing ‘everything’ – one cannot pick and choose the defects one is prepared to put up with. The Point again concludes with the assertion that it is mistaken to come to the community if one is not prepared to put up with others’ faults.

The 3<sup>rd</sup> Point takes this a little further: putting up with others’ defects is in fact a divinely imposed obligation. Here De La Salle invokes Gal 6.2, ‘Bear one another’s burdens, and in this way you will fulfil the law of Christ’. The ‘burden’ [*fardeau*]<sup>132</sup> De La Salle says, is the failings [*défauts*] of others, and the exemplar is God, ‘who has put up with so much from you’.<sup>133</sup> God offers pardon, but the condition is that ‘you pardon your Brother for everything’. The introduction of the word ‘pardon’<sup>134</sup> paves the way for the allusion to **Mt 6.14**, and its application to one’s Brother in community.

De La Salle’s actualization of the biblical text in regard to the lives of people living in community is evident.

**Mt 6.15** | DA 403.1.13; DB 1.03.6

6<sup>15</sup> ‘but if you do not forgive others, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses.’

This negative corollary of the previous verse, and of the petition in the Lord’s Prayer (Mt 6.12), is no doubt the basis for De La Salle’s use of the rather formidable language in his commentary on that petition, that ‘those who are not in this disposition [of pardoning others’ sins and hurtfulness] while reciting this prayer draw upon themselves both their condemnation, and God’s curse [*malediction*].<sup>135</sup>

---

<sup>130</sup> MD 74.1.2.

<sup>131</sup> The verb is that of Mons and Huré . Amelote has *supporte*.

<sup>132</sup> The noun in all three of our versions.

<sup>133</sup> MD 74.3.2.

<sup>134</sup> The French word is used in all three of our versions of Mt 6.14.

<sup>135</sup> DA 403.1.13.

In the first part of *Duties II*, within the ‘treatise’ on the first duty of a Christian, ‘to know God’, there is a lesson (Lesson 3) entitled ‘On the means of preserving and increasing faith within ourselves, and on the obligation of making acts of faith’.<sup>136</sup> It is in answer to the question ‘How can one make an act of faith on a practical truth [as distinct from a speculative truth, such as the mystery of the Trinity]? The answer alludes to Mt 6.15:

One can make an act of faith on a practical truth in this way: ‘My God, I firmly believe that it is necessary to pardon one’s enemies and to do good to them, and that if one does not do so, one cannot be saved, because Jesus Christ said this in his holy Gospel.’<sup>137</sup>

While in ‘enemies’ and ‘doing good’ there are echoes here of the version available to De La Salle of Mt 5.44, the negative corollary suggests Mt 6.15.

**Mt 6.19-23** | DA 216.2.12; I 6.23.1; MD 57.1.2

6<sup>19</sup> ‘Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust consume and where thieves break in and steal, <sup>20</sup> but store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust consumes and where thieves do not break in and steal. <sup>21</sup> For where your treasures is, there your heart will be also. <sup>22</sup> The eye is the lamp of the body. So, if your eye is healthy, your whole body will be full of light; <sup>23</sup> but if your eye is unhealthy, your whole body will be full of darkness. If then the light in you is darkness, how great is the darkness!’

An allusion to Mt 6.22-23 is made in the course of De La Salle’s comment on the sixth beatitude, ‘Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God’ (Mt 5.8), to which reference was made in the discussion of Matthew 5. These ‘blessed ones’, De La Salle says,

are those who, having a heart free from all vice and all inclination [*affection*]<sup>138</sup> to the least sin, attach themselves only to God. They will see God, because there is in their soul no darkness whatever which hinders them from seeing the eternal truths, and being pure and disengaged from all things, they will see God in heaven, with a very clear and penetrating vision.<sup>139</sup>

---

<sup>136</sup> DB 1.3.

<sup>137</sup> DB 1.3.6.

<sup>138</sup> As well as having its modern positive connotations, the word could be used neutrally or negatively.

<sup>139</sup> DA 216.2.12.

The references to ‘darkness’ [*ténèbres*] to vision/sight [*vue*], and to ‘heart’ [*cœur*] as well as the overtones of the previous verse (‘do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth... for where your treasure is, there your *heart* will be also’, Mt 6.19-21) indicate that De La Salle has these verses in mind in his commentary on the beatitude.

Similar language appears in one of the prayers after communion, where the communicant speaks of his mind and heart in these terms:

I have the happiness of possessing you, loveable Jesus, and you possess me too; but what do you possess in me: a body subject to all sorts of miseries, a mind [*esprit*] full of darkness, and a heart [*cœur*] which naturally feels affection only for the things of earth...<sup>140</sup>

In his meditation on the Gospel of the 4<sup>th</sup> Sunday after Pentecost, Lk 5.1-11, De La Salle again takes up the theme of darkness, brought to mind by Peter’s response to Jesus’ instruction to let down the nets: ‘Master, we have worked all night...’. The gospel story provides De La Salle with the opportunity to point out the folly of acting solely on our own initiative, according to no other rule or guide ‘than our own mind [*esprit*] can suggest’.<sup>141</sup> In such a circumstance, he maintains, we are ‘truly working in the darkness [*obscurité*] of night’,

because our mind often serves only to lead us astray, the light which is in it being, most times, nothing but darkness [*ténèbres*].

The expression ‘nothing but darkness’ [*n’est que ténèbres*] is the same in each of our versions of **Mt 6.23**.

De La Salle goes on to indicate that the solution to this difficulty is to follow ‘a more certain guide’, the theme of the meditation being obedience.

**Mt 6.24** | MF 174.3.1

6<sup>24</sup> ‘No one can serve two masters; for a slave will either hate the one and love the other, or be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and wealth.’

---

<sup>140</sup> I 6.23.1.

<sup>141</sup> MD 57.1.1.

Notes in the English and the French editions of De La Salle's works recognize the import of this saying in his meditation on St Bruno, founder of the Grande Chartreuse which De La Salle visited during his stay in Grenoble, at a particularly troubling time of his life.<sup>142</sup>

Having reminded the reader that St Bruno and his associates in their secluded place [*désert*] had embraced three sure ways of 'going to God': seclusion [*retraite*] for the rest of their days, virtually continuous prayer, and mortification in all things, De La Salle continues:

What usually gets religious people lost is their frequenting the world, because it draws them away from the communication they should have with God. God and the world, the Spirit of God and the spirit of the world cannot persist together, says Jesus Christ in the holy Gospel; that is why, he adds, as soon as you have one of them, you cease to have the other.<sup>143</sup>

Whether or not this meditation was written before or after his visit to Grenoble and the Grande Chartreuse, the parallels between its language and the typically rather overblown description by De La Salle's biographer are worthy of reflection.

Could he [De La Salle] have failed to be devoted to St Bruno, whom he had imitated so closely in renouncing, like him, a canonry of Reims,<sup>144</sup> and everything that could make the world pleasant for him, to embrace a lifestyle as austere as it was humbling? Having arrived in this frightful, secluded place [*désert*], he felt himself uplifted [*ravi*] in God at the sight of the places which the restorer of the solitary life in the West has sanctified by his tears and by the rigours of his penance. He looked with admiration at those steep rocks which endure an almost perpetual winter, hiding themselves most often under snow and ice, and where those who inhabit them seem to be buried alive. Edified by the silence and recollection which reign among these solitaries, his inclination for seclusion [*retraite*] was kindled, and he wanted to end his days amongst them.<sup>145</sup>

**Mt 6.25** | MD 50.2.1

6 <sup>25</sup> 'Therefore I tell you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat or what you
--

<sup>142</sup> Blain, *Vie*, CL 8, 100.

<sup>143</sup> MF 174.3.1.

<sup>144</sup> After much soul-searching, and in the face of much criticism, De La Salle succeeded in renouncing his canonry in 1683, shortly after his decision to join in community the group of teachers he had been supervising. See Calcutt, *De La Salle*, 165-167.

<sup>145</sup> Blain, *Vie*, CL 8, 100.

will drink, or about your body, what you will wear. Is not life more than food, and the body more than clothing?’

In his meditation for the Second Sunday after Pentecost, ‘in the octave of [the feast of] the holy Sacrament’, De La Salle uses this reference in support of his encouragement of frequent reception of ‘Jesus Christ in the Eucharist’,<sup>146</sup> a stance not universally supported at the time.<sup>147</sup>

The biblical text is used here in an *a fortiori* argument, following the assertion that it is inconceivable that ‘people who are born for heaven’ and in Baptism are engaged to lead a holy life,<sup>148</sup> would neglect the principal means God gives them for sanctifying themselves, ‘communion with the body of Jesus Christ’.

If the body, says our Lord, is more than clothing, what is the body in comparison with the soul?<sup>149</sup>

### **Mt 6.26-33**

MD 67 (Mt 6.26-33, *passim*); MF 153.3.1 (Mt 6.31, 33); DA 402.1.15 (Mt 6.32-33); DA 402.1.17; DB 4.3.16; EM 18.322.3 (Mt 6.33)

---

<sup>146</sup> MD 50.1.1.

<sup>147</sup> See Bergin, *Church*, 265-268, who notes that even the interpretation of ‘frequent’ could be minimal; and Ronnie Po-chia Hsia, *The World of Catholic Renewal 1540-1770* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 199-200. In *Duties I* De La Salle cites a number of sources, both biblical and historical, in upholding the value of even daily communion, insisting, however, on the need for a proper disposition and the advice of ‘a wise confessor’, an injunction repeated in *Duties, II* (DA 304.3.7; DB 3.18.5). Francis de Sales’ position was similar; he cites Augustine as recommending weekly communion, notes that the early Christians ‘communicated every day’ (*communioient tous les jours*), but leaves the actual frequency to the discretion of ‘Philothea’ and the advice of a spiritual director. See Sebastien Cramoisy, ed., *Introduction à la vie devote du bien-heureux François de Sales evesque de Genève* (Paris: de l’Imprimerie royale, 1651), 194-202; Francis de Sales, *Introduction to the Devout Life*, trans. John K. Ryan (New York: Image Books, 2003), 104-107.

<sup>148</sup> We note that the reference here is to (all) Christians, not just to those who would be called today ‘consecrated religious’.

<sup>149</sup> MD 50.2.1. The biblical reference indicated in the English edition is to Lk 12.23; there is none in *Œuvres complètes*, though the citation is in italics. The citation itself is [*est*] *plus que le vêtement*, which in Mons or Huré could be from either Matthew or Luke. Amelote Lk 12.23, however, has *vestemens*, plural, while his translation of Mt 5.25 has the singular. Houry, *Écrits*, ‘MD-MF présentation’, 1, notes that Meditations MD 13-63 tend to use Mons rather than Amelote. In MD he indicates the present reference as Mt 6.25.

6<sup>26</sup> ‘Look at the birds of the air; they neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not of more value than they? <sup>27</sup> And can any of you by worrying add a single hour to your span of life? <sup>28</sup> And why do you worry about clothing? Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow; they neither toil nor spin, <sup>29</sup> yet I tell you, even Solomon in all his glory was not clothed like one of these. <sup>30</sup> But if God so clothes the grass of the field, which is alive today and tomorrow is thrown into the oven, will he not much more clothe you—you of little faith? <sup>31</sup> Therefore do not worry, saying, “What will we eat?” or “What will we drink?” or “What will we wear?” <sup>32</sup> For it is the Gentiles who strive for all these things; and indeed your heaven Father knows that you need all these things. <sup>33</sup> But strive first for the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well.’

The gospel for the 14<sup>th</sup> Sunday after Pentecost is Mt 6.24-33, on which De La Salle reflects in a meditation whose theme is stated as ‘On abandonment to Providence’.<sup>150</sup>

The opening sentence is an excellent illustration of De La Salle’s view of the Scriptures as ‘living and active’ (Heb 4.12), an expression he cites elsewhere in encouraging the teachers to ‘meditate often on the words of holy Scripture’.<sup>151</sup> He has no hesitation in asserting that, in the case of this text, ‘the words’ are spoken directly by Jesus himself to the listener who reflects on them:

It is particularly to you that Jesus Christ addresses these words of the Gospel of today: ‘Seek first the kingdom of God.’<sup>152</sup>

I note De La Salle’s use of two words in this meditation: *royaume* and *règne/régner*. The former, ‘kingdom’ has a largely spatial sense in both classical and modern French, as in English, whereas the latter, ‘reign’ is more active. But at least by the time of the publication of the 4<sup>th</sup> edition of the *Dictionnaire de l’Académie française* (1762) the active sense of *royaume* was acknowledged precisely in terms of its biblical usage: ‘Jesus Christ says in Scripture, “My kingdom is not of this world”’. And in this phrase,

---

<sup>150</sup> MD 67. Mons (only) has *le royaume et la justice de Dieu*. The others put *la justice* after *Dieu*.

<sup>151</sup> MF 192.2.2.

<sup>152</sup> Mt 6.33; MD 67.1.1.



“kingdom” means “reign, power”.<sup>153</sup> De La Salle uses *royaume* when citing or referring directly to the gospel text (three times); but in his reflection on that text he uses *règne* or *régner* (seven times).

The teacher is reminded that he came ‘to this house’ to seek the reign of God ‘firstly, for yourself; secondly, for those with whose instruction God has charged you’. The reign of God is to be sought in his soul both for this life and for the next, through grace ‘and through the fullness of God’s love in your heart’. Such is to be his entire occupation on earth, to give purpose to all his work.<sup>154</sup> I observed in Chapter 4 that De La Salle’s understanding of ‘kingdom’ was somewhat spiritualized by what is now regarded as a less likely translation of Lk 17.21. The notion of the kingdom being ‘within’ is evident here, in that the reign of God is to be sought in a person’s soul.

It is characteristic of De La Salle’s spirituality that the Brother’s preoccupation with the presence of God is inseparable from his occupation as a teacher. This is articulated clearly in, for example, *Rules I Have Imposed on Myself*, all but two of whose statements refer specifically to himself. The third and the fourteenth are generalized, each beginning with *Bonne règle...*:

[3] A good rule of conduct [is] not to make any distinction between the matters proper to one’s state, and the matter of one’s salvation and perfection, and to be assured that one will never work better towards [*faire*] one’s salvation, and will never acquire greater perfection than in carrying out the responsibilities of one’s employment [*les devoirs de sa charge*], provided one accomplishes them in view of God’s command. One must always try to have that in view.<sup>155</sup>

[14] A good rule is not so much to trouble oneself with knowing what ought to be done, than to do perfectly what one [already] knows [must be done].<sup>156</sup>

The integration of personal calling and the work of teaching young people is emphasised in the conclusion to the 1<sup>st</sup> Point of the meditation:

Often call to mind what the purpose of your calling is, and may it make you contribute to establishing and maintaining the reign [*règne*] of God in the

---

<sup>153</sup> *Jésus-Christ dit dans l'Écriture, Mon royaume n'est pas de ce monde. Et dans cette phrase, Royaume signifie, Règne, pouvoir*’.

<sup>154</sup> MD 67.1.1.

<sup>155</sup> EP 3.0.3.

<sup>156</sup> EP 3.0.14.

hearts of your pupils. Reflect that one of your best means of procuring such a benefit is firstly to have God reign to such an extent within your pupils, that they no longer have either act or inclination except by him.<sup>157</sup>

The 2<sup>nd</sup> Point of this meditation relates the twofold task of having God reign in oneself and in one's pupils to the avoidance of a preoccupation with food and clothing, referring especially to Mt 6.31-32.<sup>158</sup> 'This is why,' he says, 'Jesus Christ recommends, in the same Gospel, to his holy apostles whom he charged with care for the salvation of souls and to establish his kingdom [*royaume*] on earth, not to worry at all and say:

'What shall we eat? Or what shall we drink? Or with what shall we clothe ourselves?' For that only pertains to pagans, says Our Lord, for inasmuch as they are troubled in that way they show that they have no faith at all. And to give them a convincing proof, he says, 'Look at the birds in the sky: they neither sow nor reap, and they gather nothing into barns. Consider also the lilies of the fields: they neither work nor spin, but nonetheless Solomon, in all his glory, was never so well clothed as they.'<sup>159</sup>

The biblical text here is in some degree rearranged, truncated and paraphrased, but it is recognizably based on one or other of the published versions, with some characteristics being closer to Huré than to Mons or Amelote.<sup>160</sup>

On the other hand, the final phrase of Mt 6.33, which De La Salle uses, again paraphrasing a little so as to weave it into the meditation, is much closer to Amelote's version.<sup>161</sup> This mixture of sources may suggest that De La Salle is quoting from memory, recalling phrases and words from different versions. His familiarity with this section of the Sermon on the Mount is perhaps founded on a particular incident in his life.

Each of De La Salle's 18<sup>th</sup> century biographers relates that some of his early followers were concerned about their future in such a tenuous enterprise as the gratuitous education of the poor, and that De La Salle attempted to reassure them that God

---

<sup>157</sup> MD 67.1.2.

<sup>158</sup> The text as cited is closest to the version in Huré, which differs in several respects from both Amelote and Mons.

<sup>159</sup> MD 67.2.2.

<sup>160</sup> The key expressions in Huré are *néanmoins* ('nonetheless') and *n'a jamais été si bien vêtu* ('was never so well clothed') in Mt 6.29.

<sup>161</sup> Amelote, and De La Salle: *vous seront données par surcroist*. Huré: *vous seront données par dessus*; Mons: *vous seront données comme par surcroist*.

would provide for their needs. The teachers' rejoinder was that, as Bernard puts it, it was all very well for him to talk that way.<sup>162</sup> He had his canonry and his inheritance on which to rely if the schools failed. Bernard points to the 'lack of virtue and confidence in God' reflected in such a response, but remarks that De La Salle, at first astonished at their reaction, came to consider that there was some truth in what they said, a realisation that God permitted so as to lead him 'to evangelical perfection'.

In Paris, De La Salle sought the advice of a Franciscan Minim, Nicolas Barré, and after much prayer decided to exemplify abandonment to God's providence by resigning his canonry,<sup>163</sup> which, a modern scholar notes, meant forfeiting an annual prebend of one thousand pounds (*livres*).<sup>164</sup> It is not surprising that Barré's own community of lay religious women, wanting applicants to be completely aware of their dependence on divine providence, required them to sign a declaration which included a paragraph referring to Barré and assuring intending members that 'if their services for God and their beloved neighbour were given freely and out of pure love' they would be worthy to receive 'the great and admirable rewards which God has promised in this life and in the next to those who seek only His Kingdom'.<sup>165</sup>

In recounting the exchange between De La Salle and the teachers, Maillefer has De La Salle appeal to Jesus' sayings about the lilies of the field and the birds, as related in Mt 6.25-32.<sup>166</sup>

Maillefer reports a similar response on the part of the teachers, despite De La Salle's discourse being supported 'by the authority of God himself', but less judgmentally he attributes its inadequate impression on them to 'a preoccupied mind' (*l'esprit préoccupé*). He gives the teachers themselves more credit for De La Salle's subsequent decision to dispose of his wealth:

M. De La Salle felt the force of this response profoundly. He acknowledged that the Brothers were rather correct in expressing such reproaches, and he

---

<sup>162</sup> ...*qu'il en parlait bien à son aise*, CL 4, 47.

<sup>163</sup> CL 4, 48.

<sup>164</sup> Poutet, *Le XVII<sup>e</sup> siècle*, I: 720.

<sup>165</sup> Flourez, *Better than Light*, 106.

<sup>166</sup> Maillefer, *Vie*, 55-57. Maillefer's reference to Mt 6.25-32 is largely allusive, though the expression *ne vous inquiétez* ('do not worry') is Huré's rather than that of Amelote or Mons.

considered from that time that the best way to convince them of his detachment [*désintéressement*] was to divest himself of everything so as to make himself like them.<sup>167</sup>

It is Blain, De La Salle's more fulsome biographer, who dramatizes the occasion, also recreating the Founder's homily as a reflection on Mt 6.26-33.<sup>168</sup> He is nonetheless quite candid in sheeting home to De La Salle the ineffectiveness of his homily.

Words so truthful would have had their effect if the one pronouncing them with such vigour had been as poor as he was virtuous. But it was a rich Canon speaking, one who, in a good prebend and inheritance had an income insuring him against indigence, and so did not have the grace to persuade others to forget all about their own interests. It was easy for him to talk about perfect abandonment to divine Providence, while he had nothing to fear and while Providence had provided him with such an abundance of what was necessary and even superfluous. Before he could use the language of perfection persuasively, he had to place himself in the position of those with whom he was using it. When he divested himself of everything, without prebend, without inheritance, he would give the best possible example of abandonment to Providence, his word would be listened to; it would be effective, because it would be supported by his example. The word can be resisted. With captious reasoning the truth can be contradicted. Even miracles can be doubted, or at least contested. But example has to be ceded to. It is a reality which provides its own evidence and which admits of no objection.<sup>169</sup>

Implicit in Blain's comments can be seen a criterion for the valid actualization of biblical texts: to be effective, it must take account of the real circumstances of those to whom it is addressed. Perhaps Blain, consciously or not, is echoing the terms of Heb 4.12: 'the word', 'effective'.<sup>170</sup>

From De La Salle's own point of view, the response of his followers – or rather, his acceptance that their response had point – *was* effective. In due course and not without resistance from the authorities, he relinquished his canonry and distributed his share of the family inheritance to the poor of Reims.<sup>171</sup>

---

<sup>167</sup> CL 6, 56.

<sup>168</sup> While De La Salle's language appears to be closest to that of Huré, Blain's is mostly paraphrase.

<sup>169</sup> Blain, *Vie*, CL 7, 187-188.

<sup>170</sup> *la parole; efficace*. See for example, Huré Heb 4.12: *Car la parole de Dieu est vivante & efficace*.

<sup>171</sup> See Calcutt, *De La Salle*, 158; 165-167; 171-174.

Michel Sauvage and Miguel Campos comment on this incident in terms of the interaction between Gospel and life:

Challenged by the simple and unvarnished objection of the teachers, De La Salle becomes aware that his verbal gospel reference remains void, because it falls on his disciples from on high and from outside, as it were: the word which he has proposed to them comes back to him, given life by their rejoinder. He understands that he has to be in a position to offer it from within their very situation which he is claiming to challenge.

To make reference to the gospel has meaning only to the extent that it constitutes the ultimate norm of a concrete itinerary in search of God, with the brothers, in the world.<sup>172</sup>

### **Mt 6.31, 33 | MF 153.3.1**

There may also be a biographical dimension to the meditation on Saint Cajetan (Gaetano Thiene, 1480-1547), inasmuch as he was canonized in 1671,<sup>173</sup> while De La Salle was studying at the Sorbonne and the seminary in the parish of Saint Sulpice. Cajetan had been an active proponent of the reform of the clergy in Rome, while Saint Sulpice was described by its founder, Jean-Jacques Olier, as dedicated to the renewal in the Church of ‘the love of Jesus Christ and of piety [*religion*] towards his Father, especially in the clergy as the source of the holiness which must thenceforth be spread by them throughout the people in general’.<sup>174</sup>

The meditation begins by extolling in Cajetan’s life the relationship between his days spent in ‘administering the sacraments, visiting and exhorting the sick and in other pious actions’ – such was his ardent zeal (the obverse of faith as ‘the spirit of the Institute’<sup>175</sup>) – and his nights of penitential acts, study and interior prayer [*faire oraison*].<sup>176</sup>

---

<sup>172</sup> Sauvage and Campos, *Expérience et enseignement*, 55.

<sup>173</sup> The note in Loes and Huether, *Meditations*, 284, that Cajetan was canonized in 1691 by Pope Innocent XII appears to be incorrect. He was canonized in 1671 by Clement X; see Hsia, Ronnie, *Catholic Renewal*, 122. In any case, Innocent XII was not elected pope until July 1691. The implication, therefore, that De La Salle drew inspiration from Cajetan may well be true, but not necessarily when the former was 40 years old ‘and passing through a most critical period in his work to found the Institute’.

<sup>174</sup> *Divers écrits*, 1:71, cited in Deville, *École française*, 103.

<sup>175</sup> *un zèle ardent*, RC 2.9.

<sup>176</sup> MF 153.1.1.

The second Point refers to Cajetan's awareness that 'one of the most common and compelling [*sensible*] criticisms of the church' on the part of 'the heresiarch Luther' (!) was 'the unruly life of ecclesiastics', a sentiment echoed in France in the following century by Vincent de Paul, who is reported to have observed that 'the Church has no enemies so dangerous as the priests', and that 'it is due to the priests that the heretics have flourished, that vice has gained its mastery, and that ignorance is so prevalent among the people'.<sup>177</sup>

De La Salle remarks that Cajetan's solution was to found an Order of Clerks Regular, who would be an example to other clergy of conduct that was regulated and disinterested, a way of behaving which De La Salle enjoined on his own followers.<sup>178</sup>

The 3<sup>rd</sup> Point continues the theme of disinterestedness, noting Cajetan's forbidding not only rent and revenue, but the soliciting of alms, so that the Clerks would abandon themselves to God's providence in order to live and be clothed, and for all their bodily needs,

based on these words of Jesus Christ, in the Gospel, that one should not worry [*s'inquiéter*] about drinking or eating, and about all the needs of life, because, seeking firstly, and even only, the reign of God, these things will be given as well [*par surcroît*].<sup>179</sup>

On that basis De La Salle asserts that his readers cannot carry 'disinterestedness' too far in their own work, because it is the poor that they have to teach and they must instruct them by example. They have committed themselves to maintain schools gratuitously,<sup>180</sup> and to live on bread alone,<sup>181</sup> if necessary, rather than receive anything from parents or students.

---

<sup>177</sup> Cited in Ella Katherine Sanders, *Vincent de Paul: Priest and Philanthropist 1576-1660* (New York: Longmans, Green, and Co., 1915), 51-52.

<sup>178</sup> MF 153.2.1-2.

<sup>179</sup> Again, the references to Mt 6.31 and 33 are possibly from memory: among the versions available to us, *s'inquiéter* is from Huré, while *par surcroît* is from Amelote.

<sup>180</sup> The expression is straight from the opening sentence of the 1705/1718 *Rule*, RC 1.1.

<sup>181</sup> 'To live on bread alone' (*vivre de pain seulement*) is word for word from the 'heroic vow' De La Salle made privately in 1691 with two of his trusted companions, Gabriel Drolin and Nicolas Vuyart. It was repeated in the formula used by a larger group in 1694; see EP 1.0.2 and EP 2.0.3.

**Mt 6.32-33** | DA 402.1.15

Within the second of five chapters in *Duties I* on prayer, as the ‘second means of obtaining the grace necessary to properly discharge ones duties towards God’ De La Salle discusses ‘the conditions required for prayer’. These include ‘purity of heart’, ‘being attentive’, ‘devotion’, and ‘fervour’.<sup>182</sup> When it comes to ‘temporal goods’, however, we cannot be too eager in prayer or want them for their own sake.

The main condition required is humility. De La Salle recalls Abraham’s humility in asking God not to destroy Sodom and Gomorrah, quoting Gen 18.27 (‘I who am but dust an ashes’); Judith’s in praying for victory (perhaps an allusion to Judith’s ashes and sackcloth, Jud 9.1), and Sir 35.21 (‘the prayer of the one who humbles himself penetrates the Heavens’).<sup>183</sup>

This humility in prayer, says De La Salle, will lead to complete resignation to God’s will. In that connection there is an allusion to **Mt 6.32** (cf. Mt 6.8):

What must especially commit us to having this resignation is the conviction we have that God knows much better than ourselves what we need, and what is appropriate for us, and which he is always disposed to giving us, and hence to granting it when we ask him for it.<sup>184</sup>

When it comes to matters that affect our sanctification (referring to 1 Thess 4.3: ‘For this is the will of God, your sanctification...’) our prayer should be insistent.<sup>185</sup>

At this point De La Salle takes up again the question of praying for ‘temporal goods’, which can damage our salvation as much as they can be of use. We can only pray for such things ‘with complete indifference, convinced that God will be good enough to give us as much as we need for his service, which is what we should make our first and principal care, as Jesus tells us in the holy Gospel’.<sup>186</sup> ‘Our first and principal care’ (*notre premier et principal soin*) may be seen as a reference to **Mt 6.33**: ‘Seek firstly the kingdom of God...’ (*Cherchez...donc premièrement le royaume de Dieu...*).

---

<sup>182</sup> DA 402.1.2-11.

<sup>183</sup> The footnote reference to Sir 3.18 in Doval, *Duties*, 208, is appropriate but incorrect.

<sup>184</sup> DA 402.1.15.

<sup>185</sup> DA 402.1.16.

<sup>186</sup> DA 402.1.17; an allusion to Mt 6.33.

**Mt 6.33** | DB 4.3.16

That the latter allusive reference is to Mt 6.33 receives some corroboration in the parallel treatment of ‘the eight conditions that prayer must have’ in the question-and-answer catechism. ‘Resignation to God’s will’ is the seventh:

Q. What is the basis for the resignation to God’s will that we must have with regard to temporal goods when we pray?

A. It is based on what the Gospel teaches us: to seek first the Kingdom of God and his justice, assuring us that the rest will be given us as well.<sup>187</sup>

**Mt 6.33** | EM 18.322.3

Towards the end of *Explanation of the Method of Interior Prayer*, in the section concerned with praying ‘on a maxim’ – that is, a sentence or passage from Scripture – De La Salle writes about a number of ‘acts’ (e.g. faith, adoration, thanksgiving), of which the last three are ‘the act of union with Our Lord’, ‘the act of petition’, and ‘the act of invocation of the saints’.<sup>188</sup> The reference to **Mt 6.33** appears in the ‘example of an act of petition’ in regard to the maxim ‘What does it serve a person to gain the whole world and to lose his soul?’ (Mt 16.26).<sup>189</sup>

I beg you, inscribe this divine maxim with your divine finger<sup>190</sup> (which is the Holy Spirit) in my innermost heart: ‘What does it serve a person to gain the whole world and to lose his soul’, so that I seek and desire only the kingdom of God and his justice by the practice of virtues; and [I beg you] to grant me this grace in union with Our Lord and through Our Lord, in whom alone and by whose spirit I dare to ask it of you, with the hope of obtaining it from your goodness.<sup>191</sup>

As well as the ‘maxim’ (Mt 16.26), we see here a combined reference to the parallel passages in Lk 11.20 and Mt 12.28, in which the demons are cast out by ‘the finger of

---

<sup>187</sup> DB 4.3.16. The French text is closest to that of Amelote Mt 6.33.

<sup>188</sup> EM 18.

<sup>189</sup> De La Salle’s quotation is closest to Huré’s version: *sert*, rather than Amelote’s *serviroit*. Mons has ‘himself’ (*soi-même*) rather than ‘his soul’.

<sup>190</sup> A hymn in the collection edited by De La Salle reproduces this image in a French rendition of the ancient Latin hymn, *Veni Creator Spiritus: digitus paternae dexteræ* is paraphrased as *Vous êtes le doigt du très-haut* [‘you are the finger of the Most High’ (CA 3.16.3).

<sup>191</sup> EM 18.322.3.



God’, and ‘the Spirit of God’, respectively. The image of inscribing ‘a divine maxim’ in the innermost heart recalls the ‘cutting’ of the covenant in the hearts of the people (Jer 31.33, cf. 17.1).

What is evident here in De La Salle’s ‘use’ of Scripture is that, far from being a mere illustration, much less employed as a proof text, it is woven into the substance of a prayer that a passage of Scripture itself would be so deeply internalised that the one praying would be in intimate and *fruitful* union (‘the *practice* of virtue’) with the God of the Kingdom.

**Mt 6.34** | DA 403.1.09

6<sup>34</sup> ‘So do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will bring worries of its own. Today’s trouble is enough for today.’

The reference to this verse occurs in De La Salle’s discussion of the Lord’s Prayer in *Duties I*, and is made in connection with the fourth petition, ‘Gives us today our daily bread’, which I have discussed above.

By the fourth petition, ‘Give us today our daily bread’, St Augustine says that one can ask for bodily or spiritual food. If it is bodily food that one is asking for, says this saint, this petition does not go very far; but it conforms to what is commanded in the holy Gospel not to think about tomorrow,<sup>192</sup> and to that of which the apostle St Paul warns us, that we must be satisfied, provided that we have enough to live on, and to clothe ourselves.<sup>193</sup>

De La Salle’s ‘*think about tomorrow*’ does not reflect the French versions: ‘do not worry’ (Amelote and Huré), ‘[*literally*] do not put yourself in pain’ (Mons), nor the Vulgate ‘do not be anxious [*soliciti*]’. It is likely that it comes from his reading of Augustine on ‘seeking first the kingdom and justice of God’, where Augustine quotes Vg Mt 6.34b verbatim, but quotes Mt 6.34a as ‘Do not think about tomorrow...’.<sup>194</sup>

#### 4. MATTHEW 7.2-19

---

<sup>192</sup> This part of the sentence has been omitted from Doval, *Duties*, 216.

<sup>193</sup> DA 403.1.09.

<sup>194</sup> *Nolite cogitare de crastino... Crastinus enim dies...solicitus erit sibi ipsi (De Sermone Domini, Liber duo, XVII, 56: 2). Cf. Vg Mt 6.34: Nolite ergo solliciti esse in crastinum. Crastinus enim dies sollicitus erit sibi ipsi. Sufficit diei malitia sua.*

7<sup>1</sup> ‘Do not judge, so that you may not be judged. 2 For with the judgment you make you will be judged, and the measure you give will be the measure you get.’

Mt 7.2b is cited in this meditation for the 21<sup>st</sup> Sunday after Pentecost, the gospel reading prescribed being Mt 18.23-35, the parable of the unforgiving slave. The parable is Jesus’ response to Peter’s question as to how often he should forgive ‘a brother’ (Mt 18.21). Appropriately, the title of the meditation is ‘On the obligation persons in community have of putting up with the failings [*défauts*] of their Brothers’.<sup>195</sup>

The meditation begins with a summary of the parable, followed by some very realistic observations about the inevitability, when people live together, of having to put up with one another. This is applied directly to the Brother-teachers:

It is rare that all these sorts of temperaments [*humeurs*], these different mindsets [*esprits*] do not cause difficulties among the Brothers, and, if grace does not come to the rescue, it is almost impossible that they will make allowances for [*s’accommodent*] one another, and charity not suffer extremely.<sup>196</sup>

That such difficulties were familiar to De La Salle is evident, for example, in his letters to individual Brothers:

It is true that Brother Alphonse is difficult sometimes, but you have to do something to make him more docile. Let me know his faults in more detail, and I will make him do his duty. (To Brother Hubert, January 30, 1708)<sup>197</sup>

You must be more exact in reproving the Brothers for their faults. (To Brother Hubert, April 18, 1708)<sup>198</sup>

I am angry that Brother Thomas treats you as you tell me. I will see to it that he changes his behaviour in that regard. (To Brother Denis, 8 July [1708?])<sup>199</sup>

---

<sup>195</sup> MD 74.

<sup>196</sup> MD 74.1.2.

<sup>197</sup> LA 35.3

<sup>198</sup> LA 36.14.

<sup>199</sup> LA 11.4.

The second Point ends with the warning that if a Brother thinks that he has joined a community ‘without being obliged to put up with the faults of your Brothers, you are mistaken, and you were mistaken in coming here’.<sup>200</sup>

The third Point concerns the fact that it is a divinely imposed obligation to put up with the defects of one’s Brothers. Here De La Salle cites Gal 6.2: ‘Bear one another’s burdens, and in this way you will fulfil the law of Christ’; Mt 6.14: ‘For if you forgive others their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you’. The citation of **Mt 7.2** concludes the meditation:

So if you do not wish to put up with anything from your Brothers, God will not put up with anything from you, and will punish you severely for what you have done against him. If, on the contrary, you put up with everything from your Brothers, God will pardon you everything you have done against him: ‘You will be measured he says elsewhere, ‘with the same measure by which you measure others’.<sup>201</sup>

The same verse, in the same translation, is to be found in the section of the *Collection of Various Short Treatises* entitled ‘Passages drawn from Holy Scripture, which can help the Brothers to carry out their actions by the spirit of faith’. Here one or more of a total of 74 biblical passages (both Old and New Testament) are provided under such headings as ‘When one enters the church or oratory’, ‘When one dines’, ‘When one is teaching school’. Following the last-mentioned comes ‘When one corrects someone’, and the three passages (unreferenced in the original) are:

The one who loves his son applies himself to correcting him [Sir 30.1]; beat him with rods and you will deliver his soul from hell [Prov 23.14];<sup>202</sup> you will be measured with the same measure with which you have measured others [**Mt 7.2**].<sup>203</sup>

---

<sup>200</sup> MD 74.2.2.

<sup>201</sup> *Vous serez mesurés...de la même mesure dont vous aurez mesuré les autres* (MD 74.3.2). De La Salle’s text is the same as that of Amelote, except for Amelote’s *à la même mesure*. Unlike the Greek and Latin, the French translations seem to regard the verb as meaning ‘measure’ in the sense of ‘assess’, with ‘you’ and ‘others’ as direct objects (consistently with ‘judge’ in 7.1), rather than ‘measure out’ with ‘you’ and ‘others’ being recipients of something being given them.

<sup>202</sup> While the *Conduct of the Christian Schools* provides for the use of ‘the rod’ [*les verges*] for certain misdemeanors, it was to be used ‘with great moderation and presence of mind’, and with a normal maximum of three strokes (CE 15.1.18-19).

<sup>203</sup> R 12.18.

Mt 7.2 verse is clearly intended as a cautionary counterbalance to the verses from Sirach and Proverbs.

As to the significance of this citation of **Mt 7.2**, we note its appearance within a section that reflects, in its title, the fundamental importance of the Bible for De La Salle and the early Brothers. The first means mentioned in the Rule of 1705/1718 for living in the ‘spirit of faith’, pronounced as ‘the spirit of this Institute’, is that ‘the Brothers will have a most profound respect for Holy Scripture’.<sup>204</sup>

**Mt 7.7** | CA 2.19.11

7<sup>7</sup> ‘Ask, and it will be given you; search, and you will find; knock, and the door will be opened for you.’

The collection of songs and hymns which De La Salle edited for use in school includes twelve references to the Gospel of Matthew, only one of which falls within our scope, Mt 4.23-10.8. Hymn 19 is entitled ‘On the benefit there is in doing penance in this life’, and its eleven verses traverse the sins and repentance of Adam, David, John the Baptist, Jesus (exceptionally, the ‘perfect penitent’), Mary Magdalene (!), and the Apostle Peter, with a further reference to Lazarus-buried within a simile about a person ‘grown old in sin’.

The final two verses are:

Christians, how happy we will be  
if we do penance like them,  
Our Lord can in a moment  
make this change in the hardest heart.

Since grace has this power,  
teach us how we can have it.  
Ask, you will be given it,  
Knock, says the Lord, and it will be opened to you.<sup>205</sup>

I draw attention to the thoroughly biblical scope of this song for the children of the Christian schools, with its references to both Old and New Testament figures, as well as its theology of grace.

---

<sup>204</sup> RC 2.3.

<sup>205</sup> CA 2.19.10-11.

**Mt 7.12** | MD 74.1.2

7<sup>12</sup> ‘In everything do to others as you would have them do to you; for this is the law and the prophets.’

There is an echo, though scarcely a direct citation, of this verse in the meditation considered above in regard to Mt 7.2, more obvious in Huré’s version than the others:

... the means of maintaining union in a community, despite all these different types of people [*caractères*], is charitably to put up with the failings of each: it is to be disposed to be gracious [*faire grâce*] to others, as we wish that they would be to us...<sup>206</sup>

The construction in Huré **Mt 7.12** is similar:

MD 74.1.2	Huré Mt 7.12
c’est être dispose à <i>faire</i> grâce <i>aux</i> autres, comme nous <i>voulons</i> qu’ <i>on nous</i> le <i>fasse</i>	<i>faites</i> -donc <i>aux</i> hommes tout ce que vous <i>voulez</i> qu’ils vous <i>fassent</i>

Amelote and Mons have fewer similarities:

Amelote Mt 7.12	Mons Mt 7.12
conduisez-vous donc en toutes choses envers les hommes, comme vous voudriez qu’ils se conduisissent envers vous	agissez doc vousmêmes envers les hommes, comme vous voudriez qu’ils agissent envers vous

What is evident here is De La Salle’s concern to make a direct connection between the biblical text and the actual community situation in which his readers live.

**Mt 7.13 / Lk 13.24** | MD 5.2.1

7<sup>13</sup> ‘Enter through the narrow gate; for the gate is wide and the road is easy that leads to destruction, and there are many who take it.’

Luke 13<sup>24</sup> ‘And he said to them, <sup>24</sup> Strive to enter by the narrow door; for many, I tell you, will try to enter and will not be able.’

<sup>206</sup> MD 74.1.2.

In the meditation for the Sunday in the Octave of Christmas (Gospel: Lk 2.33-40 – Simeon and Anna in the Temple), this verse is part of a short list of Gospel sayings exemplifying ‘practical truths’ taught by Jesus for which Christians, ‘including those in religious communities’, have little liking, contradict them in their heart, and sometimes even in their behaviour. The other passages, quoted but not referenced, are Mt 12.36, Lk 18.1, and Lk 13.5, none of which has a parallel in another gospel. The excerpt from the verse under consideration, however, is too short to identify as either Matthew or Luke, since the same language is used in both gospels, and in all three versions of both gospels, despite the Greek and the English translations differentiating between Matthew’s πύλη and Luke’s θύρα.

Nonetheless, to be noted is De La Salle’s customary insistence<sup>207</sup> on the *practice* of Gospel maxims: ‘Jesus did not come so much to announce the holy truths of Christian morality as to engage us in practising them well’. The ‘practical truths’ to be enacted include those we are inclined to dislike, inwardly reject, and consequently fail to practise.<sup>208</sup>

### **Mt 7.15-19 | MD 60**

7<sup>15</sup> ‘Beware of false prophets, who come to you in sheep’s clothing, but inwardly are ravenous wolves. <sup>16</sup> You will know them by their fruits. Are grapes gathered from thorns, or figs from thistles? <sup>17</sup> In the same way, every good tree bears good fruit, but the bad tree bears bad fruit. <sup>18</sup> A good tree cannot bear bad fruit, nor can a bad tree bear good fruit. <sup>19</sup> Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire.

A similarly practical theme is announced in the title of the meditation for the Seventh Sunday after Pentecost, the Gospel of the day (Mt 7.15-21) being the source of the quotations. The theme is ‘That holiness does not consist in the habit, but in actions’, where ‘habit’ [*habit*] means the religious habit worn by members of religious communities, including De La Salle’s new community of Brother-teachers.<sup>209</sup>

<sup>207</sup> See, for example, MR 194.3.1; 195.3.2; 196.2.1; 196.3.1; 197.2.1.

<sup>208</sup> MD 5.2.1.

<sup>209</sup> De La Salle wrote a ‘mémoire’, perhaps best understood as a position paper, on the habit chosen for the Brothers of the Christian Schools, in the face of an attempt by

The opening sentences comes straight to the point:

Jesus Christ says, in the Gospel of this day, that many have the coat [*peau*] of sheep, and ravenous wolves hide under this coat.<sup>210</sup> This is what happens sometimes in the holiest communities, and it is this that made the Council of Trent say that it is not the habit which makes the religious.<sup>211</sup>

The quotation from the Council of Trent is, more precisely:

... although the habit does not make the monk, it is however necessary that clerics always wear clothes appropriate to their particular order; so that by the propriety of their external dress they might show the internal probity of their morals.<sup>212</sup>

There is a little irony here. Despite the fact that the Brothers' robe was to distinguish them as a community from both clerics and secular persons, De La Salle is citing a pronouncement about monks in a setting relating to clerics. As Ronald Isetti observes, 'the vocation of a lay teaching Brother was then something entirely new in the church',<sup>213</sup> since their *Rule* (1705/1718) precluded their being priests.<sup>214</sup> It is likely that De La Salle has deliberately modified the quotation, changing 'monk' [*moine*] to 'religious' [*religieux*] since the reference to *habit* in the Dictionary of the French Academy (1694) notes that it was in fact a proverb, used well beyond religious contexts. *L'habit ne fait pas le moine* was used to affirm that 'one should not always judge persons by appearances, by externals'.

---

one or more members of the clergy to modify it, and in doing so to attenuate the autonomy of the Society. He describes the habit in some detail, noting that it is called a 'robe' [*une robe*] 'so as not to give it the name of an ecclesiastical habit, from which it also differs somewhat in shape'. See the transcription by Maurice Hermans in Michel Sauvage, *Frère Maurice Hermans (1911-1987) et les origines de l'Institut des Frères des Écoles chrétiennes* (CL 5; Rome: Maison Saint Jean-Baptiste de La Salle, 1991), 257; cf. Hermans, *L'Institut*, 350.

<sup>210</sup> This reference to Mt 7.15 appears to be a paraphrase, possible because the likely NT reference is from Amelote who, unlike Mons and Huré uses the expression '...false prophets who come to you under the habit [*habit*] of sheep', and De La Salle does not seem to wish to exploit the play on words.

<sup>211</sup> MD 60.1.1.

<sup>212</sup> ... *etsi habitus non facit Monachum, oportet tamen Clericos vestes proprio congruentes ordini semper deferre; ut per decentiam habitus extrinseci, morum honestatem intrinsecam ostendant*; see *Sacrosancti et œcumenici concilii Tridentini Paulo III, Julio III et Pio IV, pontificibus maximis, celebrati canones et decreta* (Paris/Besançon: Gauthier Frères, 1823), 131.

<sup>213</sup> Loes and Isetti, *Rule and Foundational*, 167.

<sup>214</sup> RC 1.2.

Echoing the line from Trent, De La Salle goes on to say that this habit, ‘simple and coarse [*grossier*]’ is a holy habit because ‘it gives an external sign of the commitment which those who are clothed in it have contracted to lead a holy life’. The external sign, however, is no guarantee of inner holiness: ‘... it is not the habit which sanctifies them, and it happens all too often that it serves to cover great defects [*défauts*]’.<sup>215</sup>

The second Point picks up the thrust of the stated theme (holiness is in actions, not the religious habit) by citing the ‘fruit’ imagery of Mt 7.15-19, with a fleeting reference to Mt 6.25 and 31 (‘...do not worry about...what you will wear’):

The Gospel adds that one should not be preoccupied with [*s’arrêter*] the habit one wears, but with the fruits one produces: ‘You will know them,’ it says, ‘by their fruits’.<sup>216</sup>

The ‘fruits’, De La Salle insists, are twofold: ‘fruits of grace in your own regard, which consist in the sanctity of your actions’,<sup>217</sup> and ‘other fruits which you must produce in regard to the children whose instruction you are obliged to attend to’.<sup>218</sup>

The former concern ‘everything about you, whether external or internal’, and include being edifying, recollected, modest, and reserved, so that it is evident that ‘God is in you and that you have only God in view in your behaviour’. The latter concern firstly the teacher’s attention to teaching children their religion: knowing it himself, and teaching it carefully.

Here we have an explicit reference to the prevailing view of the critical importance of good religious instruction. The teacher is charged with ensuring that his pupils ‘know God’,<sup>219</sup> and must not ‘leave them in an ignorance capable of damning them through your negligence’.<sup>220</sup> As Jean Pungier observes,

---

<sup>215</sup> MD 60.1.1.

<sup>216</sup> The text is that of Amelote: *Vous les connoistrez par leurs fruits*. Huré has *à leurs fruits*; Mons has *reconnoîtrez*.

<sup>217</sup> MD 60.2.1.

<sup>218</sup> MD 60.3.1.

<sup>219</sup> Cf. the beginning of the first of the *Meditations for the Time of Retreat*, where De La Salle makes it clear when citing 1 Tim 2.4 – God’s wishing people to arrive at ‘the knowledge of the truth’ – that ‘this truth is God himself’, before going on to speak of what God has wanted to reveal to us (MR 193.1.1).

<sup>220</sup> MD 60.3.1.



Religious ignorance – ‘the evil of the century’, as it was then called – the moral and spiritual poverty of the little people of the towns and countryside, was what triggered and maintained the great apostolic movement of the Church in France in the 17<sup>th</sup> century.

The dramatization of this religious situation, given rise by a long-standing awareness, since it was already given forceful expression at the Council of Trent, was all the more alive and profound because the religious circles of the time – catholic and protestant – were convinced that a person was damned by doctrinal ignorance.<sup>221</sup>

The point was also made by Vincent de Paul, in a letter (August 1631) to François du Coudray:

You must make it understood that the poor are being damned for want of knowing the things necessary for salvation, and for want of going to confession.<sup>222</sup>

The possibility of a teacher’s being a ‘false prophet’ (Mt 7.15), producing only ‘bad fruit’ (Mt 7.18) is discussed in terms of a lack of concern if his pupils associate with bad company, if they give way to gambling [*au jeu*], and if they spend most of the day in degenerate amusements [*la dissipation et le libertinage*].<sup>223</sup>

The final part of the meditation suggests both the ‘good fruits’ of the teacher’s attentions – developing in their students’ piety and a love of prayer, and careful attention in church and at exercises of devotion – and the fact that, if people see the opposite in the students, the teachers themselves are lacking in piety, such that ‘not bearing good fruit’,<sup>224</sup> one cannot bring others to bear it.<sup>225</sup>

---

<sup>221</sup> Pungier, *Catéchisme*, 20.

<sup>222</sup> *Vous devez faire entendre que le pauvre peuple se damne, faute de savoir les choses nécessaires à salut, et faute de se confesser. Un Prêtre de la Congrégation de la Mission, Lettres de S. Vincent de Paul, fondateur des Prêtres de la Mission et des Filles de la Charité, Tome premier: 1607-1652 (Paris: Librairie de D. Dumoulin et C<sup>ie</sup>, 1882), 27.*

<sup>223</sup> *Jeu* has the broad range of meanings of the English ‘game’, but here probably refers to gambling, as it apparently does in De La Salle’s *Rules of Christian Decorum and Civility* (RB 205.3.377). Francis de Sale’s *Introduction to the Devout Life*, which, Alain Houry notes, influenced De La Salle’s views here, lists gambling among ‘forbidden games’ (forbidden by both Church and State) because any gain depends on chance rather than skill. See De Sales, François, *Vie Dévote*, 438.

<sup>224</sup> *ne portant pas de bons fruits; Amelote (and Huré) Mt 7.19: Tout arbre qui ne porte pas de bon fruit...* The language in Mons is quite different.

<sup>225</sup> MD 60.3.2.

Once again to be observed is De La Salle's consistent emphasis on the practical dimension of the Christian life. For all its symbolic importance, the religious habit worn by the Brothers is mere camouflage unless it bespeaks an authentic holiness that finds its expression in an active concern for young people and their growth to moral maturity.

## **5. CONCLUSION: DE LA SALLE AND MATTHEW 6.1-7.19**

I note some of the salient points of De La Salle's recourse to this final section of the Sermon on the Mount:

- the Bible, and specifically Matthew's version of the Lord's Prayer (Mt 8.13-19), as a significant basis for teaching young people about authentic prayer;
- the extent to which De La Salle brings Church Fathers such as Augustine, Chrysostom, Tertullian and Ambrose – and their biblical commentaries – to bear on his own discussion;
- the emphasis on the teacher's internalizing of this teaching in order to communicate it and to encourage appropriate practice (with regard, for example, to Mt 6.6);
- a more recent perspective on the significance of verbal forms in Mt 6.9-10 as a corrective to De La Salle's interiorization of 'kingdom';
- a very full commentary on the Lord's Prayer, in Matthew's version, tailored to the needs both of teachers, and of the children whom they are encouraging to pray;
- an application of texts such as Mt 6.14 to the realities of community living;
- echoes in De La Salle's comments of his own life experience, such as his visit to the Grand Chartreuse;
- the typical emphasis on the need to *practise* Gospel maxims (in regard to Mt 7.13/Lk 13.24);
- the urgency, characteristic of the age, of ensuring that young people know their religion.

## **CONCLUSION: DE LA SALLE AND THE SERMON ON THE MOUNT (MATTHEW 5-7)**

When the above summary points are noted in connection with those relating to De La Salle's earlier recourse to Mt 4.23-25, to the Beatitudes, and to the rest of Mt 5 – especially his references to the religious life of his community, his evident rejection of a two-tiered vision of the Christian life, his constant insistence on *practising* the Beatitudes and other 'Gospel maxims', the primacy of faith as inspiring such practice, the high frequency of references to being poor in spirit (Mt 5.3), and to adopting a positive attitude towards opposition (Mt 5.10, 44), no doubt deriving from his and the early Brothers' life experience – I propose that it is valid to conclude that De La

Salle's recourse to this section of the Gospel of Matthew can helpfully be viewed from the perspective of a *Wirkungsgeschichte* hermeneutic. I propose that De La Salle's recourse to texts from Mt 4.23-7.19 can be seen as closely aligned with the characteristics of that approach as I attempted to summarize them in Chapter 5:

13. A care to discern the unfolding 'significance' (Ricoeur) of a biblical text in new contexts;
14. A consciousness on the part of the interpreter that her own interpretations have been influenced by her participation in a history of interpretative influence;
15. A belief in the transformative power of the biblical word;
16. An understanding of biblical passages as living communications rather than as doctrinal or moral proof-texts from the past;
17. An approach to interpretation which includes faith in God, and in the Bible as the living word of God;
18. A belief that practical application, going beyond notional understanding, is a key element of biblical interpretation.

The following chapter will consider De La Salle's recourse to Matthew 8 and 9, as well as the opening verses of Matthew 10, with a view to confirming this alignment in his discussion of some of the healings which exemplify Jesus' proclamation of the kingdom by deed.

## CHAPTER 8: DE LA SALLE'S REFERENCES TO MATTHEW 8-10

### INTRODUCTION: DE LA SALLE AND MATTHEW 8.1-10.7

The previous three chapters have discussed De La Salle's references to texts from the Sermon on the Mount, and its prelude in Mt 4.23-25. It will be recalled from Chapter 4 that I am guided by the perception of Ulrich Luz that, for Matthew, 'there is a unity in the portrayal of the Messiah of word [Mt 5-7] and deed [Mt 8-9]', and that the sending discourse in Mt 10, enjoins the disciples to take over Jesus' healing activity and Jesus' preaching mission.<sup>1</sup> In this chapter I turn to De La Salle's reflections on that healing activity, and on the commissioning of Jesus' disciples

### 1. MATTHEW 8.1-4: JESUS HEALS A MAN WITH LEPROSY

#### Matthew 8.2 | DA 401.3.12

8<sup>1</sup> When Jesus had come down from the mountain, great crowds followed him; <sup>2</sup> and there was a leper who came to him and knelt before him, saying, 'Lord, if you choose, you can make me clean.'

The second section of the first chapter of De La Salle's 'treatise' on prayer in *Duties of a Christian* has for its subject 'The advantages of prayer'. He begins with a summary of 'St John Chrysostom's' 'two works' composed 'to make known the excellence, the necessity, and the value of prayer'.<sup>2</sup> Further on there are references to the change brought about by prayer in Nineveh (Jon 3.6-10), and New Testament references which include the woman caught in adultery (Vg Jn 8.3-11). However, the benefits of prayer, it is said, are not limited to its spiritual effects. 'It delivers those who apply themselves to it from all sorts of perils, whether spiritual or temporal.'<sup>3</sup> Still drawing on the work attributed to John Chrysostom, De La Salle cites his examples of temporal advantage from Moses and David, whose victories came through prayer rather than their own military prowess. St Peter was delivered from prison 'only through the prayer of the Church'. Furthermore,

---

<sup>1</sup> Luz, *Matthew 1-7*, 10.

<sup>2</sup> DA 401.3.1. The two works are *De Precatione I* and *II*, which appear in Migne among the *Dubia* of St John's Chrysostom's works (PG 50: 775-786).

<sup>3</sup> DA 401.3.8.

[prayer] often helps to heal bodily illnesses, as happened to the leper, who as soon as he threw himself at Jesus' feet was healed there and then, which makes Saint Chrysostom say that if God so promptly cured a body corrupted by a debilitating illness, with how much more readily will he heal our souls, infected with the illness and leprosy of sin.<sup>4</sup>

The source here is *De Precatione I*.<sup>5</sup> The Latin translation in Migne includes the reference 'Matth. 8.2'. The Greek text has no biblical reference, and appears to be a paraphrase of one or more of the Gospel parallels: Mt 8.2-3; Mk 1.40-42; Lk 5.12-13. Amongst the key terms in the patristic text, *λεπρός* is not used here by Luke,<sup>6</sup> and the verb underlying 'threw himself at Jesus feet' (*προσπίπτω*) is not used here by any of the Evangelists.<sup>7</sup> The final phrase, denoting the actual healing, is, in the patristic text, *καὶ καθαρθεὶς εὐθέως*. Both Matthew and Luke appear to edit Mark's longer text; only Matthew ends up with the simple expression *καὶ εὐθέως ἐκαθαρίσθη*. On that basis, Mt 8.2 does seem to be the most likely source.

I note that De La Salle here invokes the Gospel text, with the patristic comment, to recommend the healing power of prayer in regard to both body and soul.

## 2. MATTHEW 8.5-13: JESUS HEALS A CENTURION'S SERVANT

**Matthew 8.5** | RB 206.3.436

<sup>8</sup> When he entered Capernaum, a centurion came to him, appealing to him <sup>6</sup> and saying, 'Lord, my servant is lying at home paralyzed, in terrible distress.'

One of the sections on 'Visits' in *The Rules of Christian Decorum and Civility* deals with the way in which to greet people one is visiting (Article 3). It begins with the need to greet and 'make the reverence' to the person being visited as soon as one enters the room. Before detailing some of the intricate requirements of 18<sup>th</sup> century French etiquette, De La Salle points out that such a greeting was the first thing done by the Virgin Mary when she visited Elizabeth (Lk 1.39), an event recalled a few lines below to show that it is called for even when visiting someone 'inferior in rank'.<sup>8</sup>

<sup>4</sup> DA 401.3.12. The reference is to *De Precatione I* (PG 50: 778).

<sup>5</sup> PG 50: 778.

<sup>6</sup> It appears only in a variant reading evidently deriving from a parallel.

<sup>7</sup> Again, Luke's 'falling on his face' seems to rule that Gospel out as a direct source.

<sup>8</sup> RB 206.3.433, 6.

There are also certain conventions associated with *receiving* visitors, some of which require that the host simply step forward, some that the visitor be met at the door, some outside the door. The gospel illustrations here concern Martha and Mary Magdalen (*sic*) greeting Jesus before the raising of Lazarus, and ‘the honour shown [Jesus] by the centurion, when he went to go<sup>9</sup> to his house to heal his servant, who was ill’.<sup>10</sup> That this is essentially a reference to Matthew’s account of the story (**Mt 8.5-13**) is confirmed by the centurion’s own approach to Jesus (**Mt 8.5**), rather than Luke’s ‘Jewish elders’ appealing on his behalf (Lk 7.3-4). Indeed, it is the approach itself, and well away from the centurion’s home, which appears to be the point of the reference: the ‘honour’ shown by the centurion was in going out to meet the one he wanted to receive. According to the custom De La Salle is impressing on his readers, that is the requirement for a most honoured guest.

In providing such illustrations from the gospels, De La Salle is here going beyond mere etiquette. As remarked before, mention of the honour accorded to the presence of Jesus is wholly consistent with De La Salle’s perspective on polite behaviour as he sets it out in the introduction to this work: children should be motivated to practice ‘decorum’ and ‘civility’ by being conscious of the presence of God, including God’s presence in others as ‘members of Jesus Christ and living temples, enlivened by the Holy Spirit’.<sup>11</sup>

#### **Matthew 8.7** | DA 104.3.8

8<sup>7</sup> And he [Jesus] said to him, ‘I will come and cure him.’

De La Salle makes use of the story of the centurion’s servant being healed in *Duties of Christian*, when stressing Jesus’ preference for the poor. In a section dealing with ‘the vocation and mission of the apostles, the preaching, the miracles, and Jesus

---

<sup>9</sup> The French verb here is *alla*, perhaps suggesting that Jesus in fact *went* to (or at least towards) the centurion’s house. It may be that De La Salle is, in that respect, thinking of Luke’s account (Lk 7.6).

<sup>10</sup> RB 206.3.436. There is little to indicate De La Salle’s French NT source, except perhaps that Amelote uses *chez moi* in v. 6 (cf. *chez lui* in De La Salle’s text), as against *dans ma maison* in both Mons and Huré.

<sup>11</sup> RB 0.0.6.

Christ's life of poverty', De La Salle has already made reference to Jesus' healing ministry.<sup>12</sup> The point of the servant's healing is made by contrasting that story with the parallel in Jn 4.46b-54, in which Jesus rejects the official's [*un homme de la cour*] plea to go to his house (but heals the man's son at a distance). There are too few details in these few lines to determine that Matthew rather than Luke is the source for the centurion story, though De La Salle's expression 'he [Jesus] was prepared<sup>13</sup> to go to cure a centurion's servant' sits more easily with Matthew's account, where the offer to go to the house is Jesus' immediate response to the centurion's description of his son's distress (**Mt 8.7**); in Luke Jesus is, rather, prevailed upon by the elders.<sup>14</sup>

**Matthew 8.8** | EM 2.80; I 1.6.54; I 6.15.1; MD 9.2.1

8<sup>8</sup> The centurion answered, 'Lord, I am not worthy to have you come under my roof; but only speak the word, and my servant will be healed.'

**Matthew 8.8** | EM 2.80

Both the editors of *Œuvres Complètes* and of the English translation of *Explanation of the Method of Interior Prayer* see an allusion to **Mt 8.8** in the section of that text which discusses placing ourselves in the presence of God 'by considering Our Lord in the Most Blessed Sacrament of the Altar'.<sup>15</sup> The relevant passage concerns situations in which we can profitably 'address ourselves to Our Lord dwelling in the church in the most Blessed Sacrament of the altar, because Jesus-Christ, in the Eucharist, is a doctor who heals all our ills...'.<sup>16</sup> Certainly the operative verb, *guérir*, is that used in the Mons, Huré and Amelote versions of the centurion story. But this can only be the most general allusion. The editorial references also indicate Lk 4.23 ('Doctor, heal yourself'), and Lk 5.31 ('Those who are well have no need of a physician'), but not its parallels (Mk 2.17; Mt 9.12). Another allusion may well be to Ps 103.3: 'Bless the Lord...who heals all your diseases' (Vg. *qui sanat omnes infirmitates tuas*).

---

<sup>12</sup> DA 103.3.4.

<sup>13</sup> *se mit en devoir*, see Dict. 1694.

<sup>14</sup> In both classical and modern French the expression 'se metre en devoir de faire...' appears to connote not so much a matter of duty or obligation, but rather of showing a clear sign that one is going to do something (cf. Dict. 1694). In either case, the expression is perhaps more consistent with Matthew's version.

<sup>15</sup> EM 2.75.

<sup>16</sup> EM 2.80.

Notwithstanding the unspecified biblical reference, the image of healing is again noteworthy.

**Mt 8.8:** I 1.6.54

This reference, in *Instructions and Prayers*, requires little comment, being simply a description of the celebrant's traditional prayer before taking communion, 'Domine non sum dignus', deriving from Vg Mt 8.8.

**Mt 8.8:** I 6.15.1

Further on in the same work De La Salle incorporates a developed paraphrase of that prayer into one of several composed prayers to be said before communion. The only words not paraphrased are those that begin it: *Seigneur, je ne suis pas digne...* ('Lord, I am not worthy...').

**Mt 8.8:** MD 9.2.1

The gospel reading set down for 'the third Sunday after the feast of the Kings' is Mt 8.1-13, as confirmed by the lectionary table in Huré. However De La Salle has confined himself to the story of the healing of the centurion's servant/son, Mt 8.5-13.<sup>17</sup> His recounting of the story reflects a conflation, conscious or not, with Luke's account, in that the centurion is described as begging Jesus 'to come and cure [the servant]'.<sup>18</sup> In Matthew, it is indeed the centurion himself who approaches Jesus, but he simply 'appeals to him',<sup>19</sup> without making any overt request; in Luke the centurion sends Jewish elders (because, considering himself unworthy, he did not presume to approach Jesus, vv. 6-7) 'to come and heal his slave' (Lk 7.3). It is no doubt Luke's account which then provides a basis for De La Salle's observation that the centurion subsequently reflected that there was no point in putting Jesus to the trouble of

---

<sup>17</sup> The ambiguity of Matthew's παῖς is discussed in, e.g., Luz, *Matthew 8-20*, 10, and Davies and Allison, *Matthew*, 2: 20f. De La Salle understands it as meaning servant (*serviteur*, MD 9.1.1). Some of the Church Fathers understood the word in that sense, rather than as 'son': Theodore of Mopsuestia, for example, invokes Luke's use of δούλος to elucidate Matthew's meaning (see Simonetti, *Matthew 1-13*, 161).

<sup>18</sup> Loes and Huether, *Meditations*, 53, though not *Œuvres complètes*, here provides an editorial reference to Lk 7.2-3. Its other three references are to Mt 8.

<sup>19</sup> προσῆλθεν... παρακαλῶν (Mt 8.5).



actually coming to his house.<sup>20</sup> He sent friends to Jesus to tell him that only a word from him was necessary, an assertion that in Matthew, as in De La Salle's retelling, is made by the centurion himself.

The lesson which De La Salle wants his Brothers to draw from this story is that the centurion makes us realise 'the excellence of obedience animated and sustained by faith'.<sup>21</sup> The centurion saw in Jesus Christ 'only the externals of an ordinary man', but he was nonetheless deeply convinced that he had the authority of God, and 'consequently that he was God'.<sup>22</sup> It should be that same faith-inspired obedience which enables De La Salle's community to obey their superior with the view that they are obeying God himself, 'veiled under the form of a weak and mortal man, but endowed with divine authority'.

It is possible, of course, that De La Salle's apparent blending of the two versions of this story is due simply to the fact that he is working from memory (though this would mean that he did not actually consult the text of the day's Gospel reading). On the other hand, it seems essential for his point that the centurion actually *sees* Jesus, which happens only in Matthew's account. Luke's version, on the other hand, provides an element of development in the centurion's belief in Jesus' authority, in that he initially asks that Jesus come and heal the slave, and only later comes to the point of recognising that, even from a distance, just a word from Jesus would suffice. Like the centurion, the Brothers need to *consider*<sup>23</sup> the implications of an authority which their spirit of faith should tell them is expression of God's own will for them.

In a chapter entitled 'The Establishment and Guidance of the Community as God's Work' (the 'work' understood as embracing the mission of the Community: the Christian education of poor youth), Michel Sauvage and Miguel Campos underline the perception of the fundamental role of obedience at the time of De La Salle. The second section of the chapter is headed 'A Community Founded on Adherence to

---

<sup>20</sup> MD 9.1.1. '...to go to all this trouble' – ...*se donnât cette peine* may also have been suggested by Lk 7.6: *donner...peine* is the expression used by Huré, Mons and Amelote.

<sup>21</sup> This is one in a series of nine consecutive meditations (MD 7-15), from the Sunday after the Feast of Kings until the Sunday before Ash Wednesday, on the theme of obedience.

<sup>22</sup> MD 9.1.1, 2.

<sup>23</sup> *penser*, MD 9.1.1.

God's Will', with an initial discussion, 'Obedience and Regularity, Foundations of the Community'.<sup>24</sup>

**Mt 8.10:** DA 402.1.19; MF 96.1.1

8<sup>9</sup> 'For I also am a man under authority, with soldiers under me; and I say to one, "Go," and he goes, and to another, "Come", and he comes, and to my slave, "Do this," and the slave does it.' <sup>10</sup> When Jesus heard him, he was amazed and said to those who followed him, 'Truly I tell you, in no one in Israel have I found such faith.'

Chapter 2 of De La Salle's long 'treatise' on prayer, in *Duties of a Christian* begins with a section concerning 'the conditions required for prayer'. The principal conditions, which he subsequently discusses, are 'purity of heart, attention, devotion, fervour, humility, resignation, confidence [*la confiance*] and perseverance.<sup>25</sup> It is in respect of 'confidence' that De La Salle refers to the story of the 'the centurion in the Gospel'. While abandonment to God's will ('resignation') is important,

it should not prevent us from [praying] with all possible confidence, because God is more disposed to give us what we are asking of him, than we are inclined to ask him for it. Is it not he, in fact, who tells us in the holy Gospel: 'Ask and you will receive: why have you not asked for anything in my name?' Is it not he who urges us to pray without ceasing, and who assures us that he will grant us all that we ask of him?<sup>26</sup>

The mention of God's greater inclination to give recalls Mt 6.8, '... your Father knows what you need before you ask him' (for which there is no synoptic parallel), and Mt 7.11, '... how much more will your Father in heaven give good things to those who ask him!' (cf. Lk 11.13). The first part of the apparently direct quotation which

---

<sup>24</sup> See Michel Sauvage and Miguel Campos, *Annoncer l'Évangile aux pauvres* (Paris: Beanchesne, 1977), 381-396. An illustration of the estimation of the virtue of obedience is that the work of the discaled Carmelite, Modeste de Saint-Amable (died 1684), *Le Parfait Inférieur, ou l'Art d'Obéir* (Paris: Librairie Victor Lefoffre, 1893), originally published in 1671, went through six editions into the 19<sup>th</sup> century. The spiritual director of the seminary of Saint Sulpice during De La Salle's residence there, Louis Tronson (1622-1700), wrote a posthumously-published *Traité de l'Obéissance* (Paris: Librairie ecclésiastique, 1822). Tronson's conferences would no doubt have been one of the sources of De La Salle's understanding of, and insistence upon, religious obedience.

<sup>25</sup> DA 402.1.1.

<sup>26</sup> DA 402.1.18.

follows, however, is from Jn 16.24.<sup>27</sup> The second part is an interrogative form of the beginning of that same verse, perhaps to conform to the questions which frame the quotation. The injunction to ‘pray without ceasing’ is verbally (*prier sans cesse*) closest to Huré’s rendering of 1 Thess 5.17 (*priez sans cesse*); Jesus’ own similar exhortation is reported in Lk 18.1: ‘their need to pray always and not to lose heart’.

De La Salle goes on to say that it was this confidence (*confiance*)

which encouraged<sup>28</sup> the prayer of the Canaanite woman, and of the centurion in the Gospel, which was so great and so unexpected, that it drew the admiration of Jesus himself, and was the reason for his granting them what they were asking for there and then.<sup>29</sup>

Is there anything here to suggest that De La Salle had Matthew’s centurion story, and specifically **Mt 8.10**, in mind, rather than Luke’s? I note firstly that it is linked with that of the Canaanite woman (Mt 15.22-28),<sup>30</sup> which Luke does not include. Secondly, the emphasis on the ‘prayer’ of each supplicant suggests Matthew rather than Luke, in that in Luke’s version it is the elders who make the actual plea, on the centurion’s behalf. Thirdly, it may have been apparent to De La Salle that Jesus’ commendation of the centurion’s faith is couched in slightly different terms in the two evangelists’ accounts. Whereas in Lk 7.9 Jesus highlights the fact that he has not found such faith ‘even in Israel’, in Mt 8.10, the Greek word order gives greater emphasis to ‘such faith’, which Jesus has not found in *anyone* in Israel.<sup>31</sup>

#### **Mt 8.10:** MF 96.1.1

De La Salle’s meditation ‘for the day of the feast of the adoration of the kings’ (6 January) begins with the sentence,

---

<sup>27</sup> Mons, Amelote and Huré all read, as does De La Salle’s text, *Demandez & vous recevez*; the punctuation (no comma) in CL 20, 432 is as in Amelote. The footnote reference in *Œuvres complètes* is to Mt 7.7, whose only similarity to De La Salle’s text is the first verb, *demandez*.

<sup>28</sup> *anima*, cf. Dict. 1694.

<sup>29</sup> DA 402.1.19.

<sup>30</sup> De La Salle also refers to this story in MD 38.2.1. Again, the Founder tells his Brothers to ‘be persuaded that God is disposed to refuse you nothing of what you ask him with faith and with confidence [*confiance*] in his goodness’ (MD 28.2.2). Davies and Allison, 2: 25, point out that these two narratives are the only two where Jesus grants a Gentile’s request, and that in each case it is because of his or her faith.

<sup>31</sup> Metzger, *Textual Commentary*, 21, comments that the alternative, ‘clearer and easier’ reading, identical to Luke’s, is doubtless an assimilation to it.

We cannot cease being astonished<sup>32</sup> at the faith of the holy magi, because *a like faith was never found in Israel*, says Saint Bernard, regarding [the faith] of these worthy Gentiles.<sup>33</sup>

Houry rightly attributes this allusion to Mt 8.10.<sup>34</sup> The quotation is from St Bernard's third Sermon for the Epiphany, on the text of Mt 2.1-11.<sup>35</sup> Preceded by a direct quotation from Vg Mt 2.11, the sentence reads:

From where does this come to you, you foreigners? *We have not found such faith in Israel*. The cheap dwelling of a pot-house does not offend you? nor the poor cradle of a manger? The presence of a poor Mother, the unspeaking child at the breast does not scandalize you?<sup>36</sup>

Vg Mt 8.10b reads: *Amen dico vobis, non inveni tantam fidem in Israel*. Except for the change to a plural subject, the Latin of St Bernard's sentence coincides closely with the second clause.<sup>37</sup>

This is an interesting use of one biblical text to illuminate another, in this case spelling out 'the faith of the holy magi'. The question De La Salle asks in the 1<sup>st</sup> Point is 'Do we make ourselves attentive to the inspirations we receive from God, and are we prompt to follow them, as the holy magi were to allow themselves to be led by the star which served as their guide?' He concludes the point with a reference to St Paul, who 'deserved to be entirely converted, because he was from the first faithful to the voice of Jesus Christ, who was calling him' (cf. Acts 9.4-5). De La Salle has already in this Point alluded to 2 Cor 5.7 ('for we walk by faith, not by sight').

The meditation continues to dwell on the theme of its opening sentence,<sup>38</sup> and in its conclusion draws the readers' attention to the poor children in their care, the *raison d'être* of their community:

---

<sup>32</sup> *Admirer*, cf. *Dictionnaire 1694*.

<sup>33</sup> MF 96.1.1, emphasis added.

<sup>34</sup> Houry, *Écrits*.

<sup>35</sup> *In Epiphania Domini*, Sermo III; PL 183, cols. 149-152.

<sup>36</sup> *Unde vobis hoc, o alienae? Neque enim tantam invenimus fidem in Israel. Sic, vos non offendit vilis habitatio stabuli, non pauperes cunae praesepii? non vos pauperis matris praesentia, non lactentis infantia scandalizat?* (PL 183: 151), emphasis added.

<sup>37</sup> Vg Lk 7.9b, on the other hand, reads: *Amen dico vobis, nec in Israel tantam fidem inveni*.

<sup>38</sup> It will be recalled that De La Salle and the first Brothers determined that faith (with its concomitant 'zeal') was to be designated as 'the spirit of the Institute'.

Recognize Jesus under the poor rags of the children you have to instruct; adore him in them; love poverty, and honour the poor, after the example of the magi, for poverty must be agreeable to you who are charged with the instruction of the poor. May faith make you do it with affection and zeal, because they are members of Jesus Christ [cf. 1 Cor 12.27]. It is by this means that this divine Saviour will be pleased with you, and that you will find him, because he always loved the poor and poverty.<sup>39</sup>

It is clear that De La Salle has used the reference to St Bernard and his transposed citation of Mt 8.10 to enable him to reflect on the otherwise only implicit faith of the magi, and to encourage his Brothers to practise that virtue, most especially in the way in which they ‘see’ their pupils.

**Mt 8.13** MD 9.3.1

8<sup>13</sup> And to the centurion Jesus said, ‘Go; let it be done for you according to your faith.’ And the servant was healed in that hour.

I noted above that this meditation relates to the gospel of the day, Mt 8.1-13. With regard to Mt 8.8 it was seen that in the 1<sup>st</sup> Point De La Salle’s emphasis was on obedience to a superior, reflecting the stated theme: ‘On the faith that should be shown in obedience’. In the 3<sup>rd</sup> Point he stresses that *faith* is indeed the motivation for obeying superiors.

The centurion was indeed right; for as soon as he believed that Jesus could heal his servant with a single word, his servant was really healed [Mt 8.13]<sup>40</sup> and this grace was granted in view of the excellence and liveliness of his faith.<sup>41</sup>

He concludes with the admonition:

Reflect on this, that it is not through reason that one obeys, but through grace and through a simple faith-view, and that the person who listens to reason, acts

---

<sup>39</sup> MF 96.3.2.

<sup>40</sup> ...*son serviteur fut effectivement guéri*.... With the omission of the adverb (and the accent on *guéri*, cf. CL 12, 37), this accords exactly with the Mons, Huré, and Amelote versions of Mt 8.13.

<sup>41</sup> MD 9.3.1.

[only] as a human being and not as a disciple [who is] responsive<sup>42</sup> to the voice of Jesus Christ, [and] who<sup>43</sup> should always be led by a spirit of faith.

### 3. MATTHEW 8.18-22: THE DEMANDS OF DISCIPLESHIP

Mt 8.22 DC 44.12.8

8<sup>21</sup> Another of his disciples said to him [Jesus], ‘Lord, first let me go and bury my father.’<sup>22</sup> But Jesus said to him, ‘Follow me, and let the dead bury their own dead.’

The reference to Jesus’ seemingly harsh response to a potential disciple’s request: ‘Follow me, and let the dead bury their own dead’ (Mt 8.22) appears in the ‘question-and-answer’ version of *Duties of a Christian*, in connection with St Philip the Apostle.<sup>44</sup>

To the question ‘What are the virtues that most stood out in Saint Philip?’, the answer is threefold: confidence [*confiance*] in God; respectful submission to Our Lord; detachment from [his] relatives/parents.<sup>45</sup>

St Philip’s confidence in God is said to derive from Jesus’ questioning him as to where bread could be bought to feed the crowd that was following him (Jn 6.5-7).

---

<sup>42</sup> *docile*.

<sup>43</sup> The original edition reproduced in CL 12, 37, reads ...*la voix de Jesus-Christ qui doit le conduire toujours [sic] par esprit de foi.* *Œuvres complètes* has *la voix de Jésus-Christ, qui doit se conduire toujours par esprit de foi*. Loes and Huether, *Meditations*, translates as ‘... not as a disciple faithful to the voice of Jesus Christ, which should always guide *us* by the spirit of faith’. William John Battersby, ed., *De La Salle: Meditations* (London: Longmans, Green and Co., 1953), 72, renders it as ‘... not as a disciple docile to the voice of Christ, who should always be guided by faith’, evidently reading *se* rather than *le*, and taking *disciple*, not *voix*, as the antecedent of *qui*. If *Œuvres complètes* has rightly corrected the 1731 text to *se*, this reading seems preferable to one suggesting that ‘the voice of Jesus Christ’ is obliged to do something. The Spanish translation in José Maria Vallodolid, ed., *Obras Completas de San Juan Bautista de la Salle* (Madrid: Ediciones San Pio X, 2001) evidently reads *le*: ...*que debe conducirlo siempre por espíritu de fe*.

<sup>44</sup> ‘Lesson 12’ concerns ‘the feast of Saint James and Saint Philip, apostles’ (DC 44.12). It is noteworthy that in the meditation for the same feast, De La Salle uses the same incident to exemplify Philip’s special grace of ‘tenderness and appeal in procuring [peoples’] knowledge and love of Jesus Christ’ (MF 119.3.1).

<sup>45</sup> *Parents*; cf. Dict. 1694. In the context of the reference to Mt 8.22, perhaps the narrower meaning, ‘parents’, is more appropriate. Doval, *Duties*, 481, opts for ‘relatives’.

Having first replied that two hundred denarii would not suffice to give each a small piece, Philip ‘remained tranquil’<sup>46</sup> in expectation of what Our Lord would do to provide’.<sup>47</sup> The Saint’s ‘respectful submission towards Our Lord’ is displayed in his making no response to Jesus’ affirmation, ‘Philip, the one who sees me, also sees my Father’ (cf. Jn 14.8-11). De La Salle interprets Philip’s silence as indicating that he was content ‘to believe with submission what Our Lord was saying’.<sup>48</sup>

The third virtue, ‘detachment from parents’ (as well as the second, ‘respectful submission towards Our Lord’) is said to be shown in the conversation in **Mt 8.22**: ‘Another of his disciples said to [Jesus], “Lord, first let me go and bury my father”. But Jesus said to him, “Follow me, and let the dead bury their own dead”.’ Philip, according to De La Salle, ‘made no objection’.<sup>49</sup> De La Salle, however, omits ‘Follow me’, which makes it difficult to determine whether he has in mind **Mt 8.22** or Lk 9.60 (or both), since the dictum concerning the dead is the same in both.

Nonetheless there are two pointers to Matthew as being the source. Firstly, the context in *Duties of a Christian* is to do with apostles (James and Philip), and it is only in Matthew that it is a *disciple* who asks to bury his father (**Mt 8.21**); in Luke 9.57-62 there appears to be a distinction drawn between Jesus’ three interlocutors and the ‘disciples’ of Lk 9.54. The first is described as ‘someone’ (v. 57), each of the second two as ‘another’ (vv. 59, 61). Secondly, De La Salle’s provisional identification of the disciple as ‘Philip’, of which there is no indication in the gospel text,<sup>50</sup> may be attributed to Clement of Alexandria,<sup>51</sup> whose text in this anti-Marcionite chapter is clearly a rearrangement of Mt 8.22b. Matthew reads:

ἀκολουθεῖ μοι καὶ ἄφες τοὺς νεκροὺς θάψαι τοὺς ἑαυτῶν νεκρούς.

Clement:

”Αφες τοὺς νεκροὺς θάψαι τοὺς ἑαυτῶν νεκρούς· σὺ δε ἀκολουθεῖ μοι.

<sup>46</sup> *Demeura en repos.*

<sup>47</sup> DC 44.12.7.

<sup>48</sup> DC 44.12.7.

<sup>49</sup> *Il ne fit aucune instance*, DC 44.12.8.

<sup>50</sup> De La Salle uses the expression *à ce qu’on dit*, translated by Doval, *Duties*, 481, as ‘it is commonly believed that...’.

<sup>51</sup> See Davies and Allison, *Matthew*, 2: 54; the reference is to *Stromata*, 3.4.

In Luke Jesus does not speak of the person following him; rather the order is to ‘go and proclaim the kingdom of God’ (Lk 9.60b).

In connection with this discussion, there are only two references to the Brothers’ parents in their first *Rule* (1705/1718). The first appears in the chapter on ‘Silence’, in the context of maintaining strict silence in community outside the time of recreation, and of the various matters about which the Brother ought not to speak, including the affairs of another house, the conduct of the Brother Director, any of the Brothers, eating and drinking. The list includes ‘himself, his relatives, his native place, or what he has done’, though he may disclose such information to an enquirer such as a bishop. The reason is that the Brother does not wish to be known, ‘except insofar as necessary to God alone and to his Superiors’.<sup>52</sup>

The second reference, added in the 1718 edition to the chapter on ‘Prayers to be said for Deceased Brothers’, concerns the funeral of parents:

The Brothers may go to the funeral of their father or mother at the church only when they are living in the place where [the parent] died, which is a situation that ought to be prevented.<sup>53</sup>

This may not be as harsh as it sounds, given the difficulties of communication and the time and expense involved in travelling any distance. According to the official record, De La Salle’s own mother, Nicole, died in Reims on 19 July 1671 and was buried on the same day.<sup>54</sup> Calcutt notes that De La Salle, at the seminary in Paris (some 145 km away), received news of her death three days later.<sup>55</sup>

#### **4. MATTHEW 8.23-27: JESUS CALMS THE STORM**

**Mt 8.23-27** | MD 10.1.1

---

<sup>52</sup> RC 20.9.5.

<sup>53</sup> RC 23.18. De La Salle’s letter to Brother Paulin (c. 1705) indicates that the latter’s request to be assigned to Brother Barnabé’s community because he knew him was, deplorably, ‘entirely natural’ (LA 52.9). No doubt an assignment to one’s home town would have been considered equally inappropriate, perhaps distracting. In similar vein, De La Salle tells Brother Mathias that he should well understand that ‘amongst us, one has to accommodate oneself wherever one is sent by the Superiors, since obedience must be the principal rule and the greatest joy of the Brothers’ (LA 42.7).

<sup>54</sup> See Léon de Marie Aroz, *Les actes d’état civil de la famille de saint Jean-Baptiste de La Salle* (CL 26 ; Rome: Maison Saint Jean-Baptiste de La Salle, 1966), 222-223.

<sup>55</sup> Calcutt, *De La Salle*, 71.



8<sup>23</sup> And when he [Jesus] got into the boat, his disciples followed him. <sup>24</sup> A windstorm arose on the sea, so great that the boat was being swamped by the waves; but he was asleep. <sup>25</sup> And they went and woke him up, saying, ‘Lord, save us! We are perishing!’ <sup>26</sup> And he said to them, ‘Why are you afraid, you of little faith?’ Then he got up and rebuked the winds and the sea; and there was a dead calm. <sup>27</sup> They were amazed, saying, ‘What sort of man is this, that even the winds and the sea obey him?’

The Gospel set down for the Fourth Sunday after the Feast of the Kings was **Mt 8.23-27**.<sup>56</sup> The heading for De La Salle’s meditation for this day is ‘On the fidelity one should have to obedience, notwithstanding the most violent temptations’. He begins with a brief summary of the gospel story:

While Jesus was in a boat, there arose on the sea such a great storm that the boat was covered with waves. When his disciples drew his attention to it, he rose, and commanded the winds and the sea to be still, and there ensued a great calm, which so much astounded those who were present that they said, ‘What<sup>57</sup> is this man whom the winds and the sea obey?’<sup>58</sup>

Although this is a summary which omits many details, it is, in its vocabulary and in some whole phrases, identical with the text of Mons and Huré,<sup>59</sup> though somewhat different from Amelote. It is clearly less close to the Gospel text included in the original edition of the meditations themselves.<sup>60</sup>

This is the starting point for De La Salle’s stark observation that

to be in a community of Religious is to be in the boat with Jesus and his disciples,<sup>61</sup> because those who live there, having left the world so as to follow Jesus, have thus placed themselves under his guidance [*conduite*] and amongst the number of his disciples, and there they are sheltered from the waves of the stormy sea of this world, that is to say from a great number of situations in which they might offend God.

---

<sup>56</sup> See Huré, which includes a ‘table of Epistles and Gospels to be read in the Church during the whole year’.

<sup>57</sup> *Quel* – perhaps more appropriately ‘what’ rather than ‘who’; cf. Vg *qualis*, and the Greek original.

<sup>58</sup> MD 10.1.1.

<sup>59</sup> Huré especially. Unlike the other versions, and with a closer approximation to the original, the final question in Mons reads: *Quel est celui-cy à qui les vents & la mer obeïssent?* The others have simply *Quel est cet homme[-ci] ....*

<sup>60</sup> Cf. CL 12, 38.

<sup>61</sup> *une communauté régulière*, that is, a community living according to a Rule.

He goes on to comment that the shelter is not absolute: ‘There, however, one is not exempt from difficulties and temptations.’ Of these, ‘the most dangerous and the most harmful are those which lead to not obeying, or to not obeying in the way in which it ought to be done’. An insight into the perception of the significance of obedience comes from the next statement: ‘... because, since a person<sup>62</sup> should not have entered a community except to obey, as soon as he distances oneself from obedience, he deprives himself of the graces he needs to maintain himself in his state’.<sup>63</sup>

There is no further mention of the gospel text, the subsequent biblical references being to Leviticus, Romans, 1 Corinthians, Philippians and Ephesians. It could be concluded that the opening image of community life being ‘in the boat with Jesus’ has been abandoned. However, the notion of obedience being presented here is, precisely, one of obedience to God, an understanding patently expressed, for example in De La Salle’s insistence (bolstered by reference to Lev 11.44 and Rom 13.1) that a person in community cannot fail in obedience towards his Superiors without making himself culpable in regard to obedience towards God. To be a disciple ‘in the boat’ with Jesus, and under his guidance (*conduite*), is a commitment to, and safeguard for, obedience to God.

De La Salle’s interpretation of this story could be seen as simply metaphorical: the boat is a metaphor for a religious community. Ulrich Luz comments on the history of interpretation of the story, however, suggest that De La Salle is quite properly actualizing a story which requires an interpretation such as De La Salle’s in order to be really understood:

We can, indeed we must, put our own *experiences* in our story and be understood anew ‘in’ it. Only those who themselves are ‘in the ship’ can understand it correctly.<sup>64</sup>

As well as offering three examples of interpretation, including the Church Father, Peter Chrysologus (c. 406-450), Luz enunciates a principle for actualization implicit in my outline of the relationship between a *Wirkungsgeschichte* hermeneutic and a historical-critical approach, in Chapter 3.

---

<sup>62</sup> *On*; I resort to the masculine pronoun to avoid excessive use of ‘one’.

<sup>63</sup> MD 10.1.2.

<sup>64</sup> Luz, *Matthew 8-20*, 22.

The question is: Is our text open to *every* experience, and does it permit *every* interpretation, or does it also place limits on such interpretations and on putting oneself in the story?<sup>65</sup>

Luz sets forth three limits based on Matthew's text. The first centres on faith in the risen Jesus, so that 'there is no place in our text for experiences other than those in which faith has been changed by encountering the living Lord'. The second is related to the group of disciples, 'that is, an experience in a community'. The third, which recalls Balabanski's commentary on the verbal forms in the first part of the Lord's Prayer (Chapter 8), is that

God's help and human struggle are intertwined. There is nothing passive about discipleship. Matthew has prefaced the experience of the stilling of the storm with a powerful statement about what is required from those who follow Jesus.<sup>66</sup>

I suggest that De La Salle's interpretation of this story for his Brother-teachers falls well within those limits, and thus exemplifies a valid actualization of this story.

## 5. MATTHEW 9.2-8: JESUS HEALS A PARALYZED MAN

**Mt 9.2, 6** | MD 71.1

9<sup>2</sup> And just then some people were carrying a paralyzed man lying on a bed. When Jesus saw their faith, he said to the paralytic, 'Take heart, son; your sins are forgiven.'<sup>3</sup> Then some of the scribes said to themselves, 'This man is blaspheming.'<sup>4</sup> But Jesus, perceiving their thoughts, said, 'Why do you think evil in your hearts?'<sup>5</sup> For which is easier, to say, 'Your sins are forgiven,' or to say, 'Stand up and walk'?<sup>6</sup> But so that you may know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins' – he then said to the paralytic – 'Stand up, take your bed and go to your home.'

In his meditation for the 18<sup>th</sup> Sunday after Pentecost De La Salle refers to **Mt 9.1-8**, the forgiving and healing of the paralytic, as 'this Gospel',<sup>67</sup> making the connection between the meditation and the gospel of the day quite explicit.

---

<sup>65</sup> Luz, *Matthew 8-20*, 22.

<sup>66</sup> Luz, *Matthew 8-20*, 22.

<sup>67</sup> *cet Évangile*, MD 71.1.1.

The heading is ‘On the means by which spiritual infirmities can be healed, whether they be voluntary or involuntary’. It might be assumed, therefore, that De La Salle is attending only to the forgiveness of the paralytic’s sins (**Mt 9.2**), rather than to the cure of his paralysis. However, there is no reference in the meditation to the man’s sins, or to Jesus’ forgiveness. The action of Jesus is referred to in terms of ‘strengthening’ [*fortifier*],<sup>68</sup> ‘bringing a remedy’, ‘healing’, ‘giving back the movement it [‘our soul’] has lost’. Indeed, at the beginning of the 3<sup>rd</sup> Point he refers to Jesus’ ‘bringing about the healing of our spiritual paralysis’.<sup>69</sup>

The expression he uses at the beginning of the meditation is that ‘servants of God’ sometimes ‘find themselves in a kind of powerlessness [*impuissance*] to do good’, because of scarcely resistible temptations, interior difficulties, or the strength of their passions’. It is only ‘sometimes’ that such dispositions arise from sins one has committed.<sup>70</sup> Sometimes ‘we are not culpable in any way’.<sup>71</sup>

While it is evident that De La Salle is not discussing straight wrong-doing and the need for forgiveness, it does not seem adequate to say that he has ‘spiritualised’ the story of the person’s paralysis and cure. Perhaps from a modern perspective we might say that he is discussing problems regarding which it is difficult – perhaps unwise – to distinguish too precisely between ‘spiritual’ and ‘psychological’. In any case, the operative terms are ‘healing’ and ‘being healed’,<sup>72</sup> with no indication that they are being used in a purely figurative sense.

Jesus’ healing of bodily ills, De La Salle says, requires no more than a word from Jesus, or just that he wills it. But to be healed of those of the soul, *we* have to want it, because, however much God may exhort us, he will not force our will. It is up to us ‘to receive his grace, to put it into action, and to assist his good will for the healing of our spiritual weaknesses’.<sup>73</sup>

---

<sup>68</sup> De La Salle’s expression ‘...it [a ‘soul’] can do everything when he strengthens it’ (*elle peut tout lorsqu’il la fortifie*) appears to be a close allusion to Phil 4.13, e.g. Huré: *Je puis tout en celui qui me fortifie*.

<sup>69</sup> MD 71.1.3.

<sup>70</sup> MD 71.2.2

<sup>71</sup> MD 71.3.1.

<sup>72</sup> *guérison, guérir*, MD 71.3.1.

<sup>73</sup> MD 73.1.3.

De La Salle cites the words of Jesus in the 2<sup>nd</sup> and the 3<sup>rd</sup> Points, but in reference to ‘us’; and here they are of course used in regard to these ‘spiritual weaknesses’, not to physical paralysis. Even despite an absence of ‘feeling of God’ or ‘movement towards God’,<sup>74</sup> we should rely on the firmness of our faith, which will be pleasing to Jesus (‘in front of’ whom we find ourselves – whether due to ‘a passing light’ or to the guidance of others).<sup>75</sup> Then, ‘after he has helped us and encouraged our confidence’, he will say to us ‘Get up’ (**Mt 9.6**),<sup>76</sup> which is to say, ‘rise up to God’. And he will say ‘Walk!’ – ‘which is to say, take up again the practices of virtue with which you have had difficulty’.<sup>77</sup> All our strength having been restored to us, we will do so easily. The same verse of Matthew is cited some lines further on: ‘Jesus will say to us, “Go [home]! (**Mt 9.6**)’<sup>78</sup> It is cited again in the 3<sup>rd</sup> Point, where the sending-home is explicit: ‘Go straight home’.<sup>79</sup> ‘Home’ is here interpreted as living community life to the full: ‘in withdrawal, recollection and silence’, applying oneself to prayer and to the exact observance of the community’s Rules. ‘These are the sure means of restoring in your soul the good movements which had been interrupted’.<sup>80</sup>

The passing allusion to ‘those who guide [*conduisent*] us’<sup>81</sup> as one means of finding ourselves ‘before Jesus’ should not be overlooked. The lack of ‘light’ or ‘the lack of help on the part of those who guide [*conduisent*] them’ are cited as causes of ‘spiritual paralysis’ early in the meditation.<sup>82</sup> The reference is no doubt to the Brother Director, as the conclusion of the meditation makes explicit. Being faithful to ‘exposing the depths of your heart to your Directors’ would ‘ordinarily’ prevent a Brother from ‘succumbing to these sorts of weaknesses’.<sup>83</sup> This brings to mind a more recent

---

<sup>74</sup> *sentiment de Dieu, mouvement vers Dieu*, MD 71.2.1.

<sup>75</sup> MD 71.2.1.

<sup>76</sup> *Levez-vous*, the expression used in all three French versions, Mt 9.6.

<sup>77</sup> *Marchez* comes not from Mt 9.6 but from the earlier question to the scribes regarding which is easier to say – that sins are forgiven, or ‘Stand up and walk’ (Mt 9.5); *levez-vous et marchez* is the expression in each of the French versions.

<sup>78</sup> *Allez-vous-en*. The French versions read *vous en allez dans/en votre maison*.

<sup>79</sup> *allez droit à votre maison*; *droit* appears to be an interpolation.

<sup>80</sup> MD 71.3.2.

<sup>81</sup> MD 71.2.1.

<sup>82</sup> MD 71.1.1.

<sup>83</sup> MD 71.3.2. The role of the Brother Director in what amounted to spiritual direction and even what might be seen as a form of ‘confession’ is spelt out in the *Rule* of 1705/1718. The Brothers ‘will have a humble and entire confidence in him, and will disclose to him all their weaknesses, whether of body or spirit, their problems, their

emphasis on the value of spiritual direction and accompaniment, and professional supervision.

## 6. MATTHEW 9.9-13: THE CALL OF MATTHEW

**Mt 9.9** | DA 104.3.3; DC 44.14.1; MF 167.1

9<sup>9</sup> As Jesus was walking along, he saw a man called Matthew sitting at the tax booth; and he said to him, ‘Follow me.’ And he got up and followed him. <sup>10</sup> And as he sat at dinner in the house, many tax collectors and sinners came and were sitting with him and his disciples. <sup>11</sup> When the Pharisees saw this, they said to his disciples, ‘Why does your teacher eat with tax collectors and sinners?’ <sup>12</sup> But when he heard this, he said, ‘Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick. <sup>13</sup> Go and learn what this means, “I desire mercy, not sacrifice.” For I have come to call not the righteous but sinners.’

Immediately following the section in *Duties of a Christian* which briefly outlines what is given in the gospels regarding Jesus’ life from his birth to the temptations in the desert, there follows a slightly longer section on ‘The vocation and mission of the apostles, the preaching, the miracles, and the life of poverty of Jesus Christ’.<sup>84</sup> As noted previously, De La Salle seems anxious (in an overall chapter headed ‘On the redemption of humanity’) to arrive at the point of Jesus’ teaching and healing, and in that context to draw attention to the role of the apostles and disciples.

So it is in this section, mostly to do with ‘the preaching, the miracles and the life of poverty of Jesus Christ’, that there are two or three paragraphs concerning ‘the vocation and mission of the apostles’, including the account of Jesus calling Matthew to follow him, and the subsequent feast (**Mt 9.9-13**).

Having noted the early callings of Simon, Andrew, James and John ‘children of Zebedee’, and Philip ‘the next day’ (cf. Jn 1.43), De La Salle relates the call of Matthew:

---

temptations, the inclination or ease and difficulty that they find in the practice of virtue’ (RC 12.8). Loes and Huether, *Meditations*, 70, note that references to giving an account of conscience to the Superior, in Meditation 19, were modified to read ‘confessor’ rather than ‘superior’ in later editions, following the Holy See’s Decree *Quemadmodum* of December 15, 1890.

<sup>84</sup> DA 104.3. ‘Life of poverty’ renders *la vie pauvre*.

Some time afterwards, passing by the tax office he called Matthew, who was a publican, that is to say a receiver of taxes, and he told him to follow him, which he did at once, leaving his office. Afterwards he gave a great feast for Jesus and his disciples, and he invited several publicans, whom Jesus very much wanted to be included in his company, because he had come (as he himself said) to convert sinners, and to bring them to do penance: it was thus that he called the other apostles. He then sent them from town to town, and from village to village, to preach there, and he himself went there as well.<sup>85</sup>

The comment ‘to bring them to do penance’ may be a recollection of Lk 5.32, though Mons Mt 9.13 includes a square-bracketed *à la penitence*, translating the *textus receptus* reading, εἰς μετάνοιαν.

In what is really a summary reference to the apostles and disciples within a chapter which largely concerns Jesus himself, these several lines devoted only to Matthew suggest a particular interest on De La Salle’s part. The story is related only a little more briefly in the catechism lesson on ‘Saint Matthew, Apostle and Evangelist’ (DC 44.14.1), and its point is indicated in De La Salle’s customary final question in each section concerning an Apostle: ‘What should we do to honour [this Apostle] and to celebrate his feast properly?’ Concerning Matthew, the answer is that ‘we should do five things’:

1. Read his Gospel often, and particularly the sermon of Jesus Christ on the mountain, which contains the principal maxims of the Christian life, and at the same time make acts of faith on the principal truths that are contained there.
2. Thank God for having given us in this Saint a great example of renouncing all things, and of rising above human respect.
3. Hope in the mercy of God, who in a moment made an apostle – and a great saint - out of a sinner.
4. Through his intercession, ask God for chastity.<sup>86</sup>

---

<sup>85</sup> DA 104.3.3.

<sup>86</sup> One of the ‘biographical’ details provided in this Lesson is that, as well as converting the king of Ethiopia and his kingdom, and raising the king’s daughter from dead, Matthew is believed to have ‘instituted the consecration of virgins, and of the veil they are given’ (DC 44.14.2). The *Catholic Encyclopedia* (1913) observed that almost all ancient writers connect Matthew with Ethiopia, though referring to the country ‘to the south of the Caspian Sea’, not the one in Africa. See ‘Catholic Encyclopedia (1913)/St Matthew,’ [en.wikisource.org](http://en.wikisource.org/wiki/Catholic_Encyclopedia_(1913)/St._Matthew).  
[http://en.wikisource.org/wiki/Catholic\\_Encyclopedia\\_\(1913\)/St.\\_Matthew](http://en.wikisource.org/wiki/Catholic_Encyclopedia_(1913)/St._Matthew).

5. Imitate his virtues, particularly his abstinence,<sup>87</sup> his great courage, and his detachment from riches, and from all worldly things.<sup>88</sup>

Notwithstanding the doubtful historical basis for some of these injunctions, not least of which is the identification of the evangelist with the apostle, they indicate the esteem in which De La Salle held ‘Matthew’, and the priority he attached to the Gospel which bears his name.<sup>89</sup> Both are evident in his meditation for the feast of St Matthew (21 September), which begins by drawing attention to Matthew’s ‘admirable faithfulness in following Jesus as soon as he was called from his position as ‘receiver of the Emperor’s taxes’.<sup>90</sup>

De La Salle’s recollection of Matthew’s call is a little more expansive than the Gospel account. Matthew reads: ‘As Jesus was walking along, he saw a man called Matthew sitting at the tax booth, and he said to him, “Follow me.” And he got up and followed him’ (Mt 9.9). De La Salle’s account provides some details:

He (Matthew) was in Capernaum, a town in Galilee, a receiver of the emperor’s taxes. Jesus Christ, who was there preaching his Gospel, passed one day in front of the gate where Saint Matthew stayed, and this man immediately left his office [*bureau*] and all that he had and followed Jesus Christ.<sup>91</sup>

It is likely that the addition ‘all that he had’ derives from Luke’s account of the call of Levi: ‘He got up, left everything, and followed him’ (Lk 5.27).<sup>92</sup> This provides a basis for De La Salle’s assessment, substantiated or not, of what Matthew left behind in

---

<sup>87</sup> The two particular virtues attributed to Matthew in this Lesson are humility, in view of his naming himself in the Gospel as a sinner, and abstinence, because he ate only herbs and grains (DC 44.14.3).

<sup>88</sup> DC 44.14.6.

<sup>89</sup> As may be expected, the priority of Matthew is understood even in chronological terms. In the Lesson on ‘The Holy Evangelists’, ‘the first of the evangelists’ is Matthew, who wrote his gospel ‘in Judea’, ‘shortly after the death of Our Lord Jesus Christ, and before the apostles separated to go and preach to all the world’ (DC 44.7.2). The second is Mark, who wrote ‘in Rome’, ‘about ten years’ after the death of Jesus (DC 44.7.3). Luke wrote, location unspecified, ‘twenty-three years, or thereabouts’ after Jesus’ death, and is also credited with the Acts of the Apostles (DC 44.7.4). The location is also unspecified for the Gospel of John, which he wrote ‘in the sixty-fifth year after the death of Jesus-Christ’. ‘He also wrote the Apocalypse, on the island of Patmos (DC 44.7.6)’.

<sup>90</sup> MF 167.1.1.

<sup>91</sup> MF 167.1.1.

<sup>92</sup> The vocabulary, *quitter* and *tout*, is that of Luke in all three French versions.



comparison with the first apostles, and for the question asked of the teaching Brothers,<sup>93</sup> ‘Have you left everything [*tout quitté*] from the bottom of your heart’:

The conversion of Saint Matthew is indeed extraordinary, and it is a mark of the power of grace, and of the effects which it produces in a soul. It is true that the word of Jesus Christ is efficacious in the call of his apostles; but, since most of them were poor fishermen, it is less surprising that they had at once followed Jesus Christ, than it is for Saint Matthew, who had property and lived in comfort.<sup>94</sup>

The observation that ‘the word [*parole*] of Jesus Christ is efficacious [*efficace*]’ would appear to be a variation on Heb 4.12, the Mons version of which, for example, uses both French words.

On the basis of Matthew’s life and work, the reader is encouraged to demonstrate a similar, prompt fidelity to being called, and to attach himself

only to Jesus, to his doctrine and to his holy maxims, since he has done you the honour of choosing you, in preference to a great number of others, to announce them to children, who are his most-beloved.<sup>95</sup>

De La Salle concludes this Point of the meditation by making a strong connection between Matthew’s Gospel and the contemporary work of the Christian educator, which he sees in a very positive light:

Highly esteem your work, which is apostolic,<sup>96</sup> and study with application<sup>97</sup> the Gospel of Saint Matthew, in which are proposed the most holy maxims of Jesus Christ, and the chief principles of Christian piety. The more you apply

---

<sup>93</sup> MF 167.1.2.

<sup>94</sup> MF 167.1.1.

<sup>95</sup> MF 167.2.2.

<sup>96</sup> This term would seem to be rather more literal than the somewhat diffuse sense it has in modern times; the work is ‘apostolic’ because it is the same work as the apostles’, including Matthew’s own work of evangelisation as a (supposed) apostle and evangelist.

<sup>97</sup> The French phrase is *avec application*. Loes and Huether, *Meditations*, translates it as ‘carefully’; the earlier rendition of William John Battersby, ed., *De La Salle: Meditations* (London: Longmans, Green and Co., 1953) is ‘make a special study of...’. However *application* in Dubois, *Dictionnaire* is defined first as *zèle, dévouement*, and secondly as *attention, intérêt, soin portés à quelque chose*. Since De La Salle’s approach to the Gospels, especially in the meditations, is, precisely, not only to study them, but prayerfully to apply them in the contemporary situation, the nuance of ‘zeal and devotion’ should not be overlooked.

yourselves to it, the more expert you will become in the science of the saints, and the more you will be in a position to instruct others.<sup>98</sup>

He makes this claim in respect of no other Gospel, though of course he values and quotes from them all, indeed from all but three of the books of the New Testament. As noted in Chapter 1, Varela has shown that, in the Meditations, Matthew's is the Gospel most often quoted.<sup>99</sup> By way of comparison, of the 216 gospel readings included in Huré's 'Table of the Epistles and Gospels that are read during the year', 79 are from Matthew, 67 from Luke, 62 from John, and 8 from Mark. The proportions are very close to those of De La Salle, and perhaps give some statistical weight to such observations as Luz', that Matthew 'is the chief Gospel of the church'.<sup>100</sup>

### **Mt 9.11** | MR 203.1.1

The eleventh and twelfth Meditations for the Time of Retreat concern the correction of students: the obligation to do so, and the manner of doing so, respectively.<sup>101</sup> The obligation arises from 'the zeal that one has for the well-being and salvation of souls', the theme of the previous two meditations. The first exemplar of zealous correction is Jesus himself, 'who often displayed his zeal in regard to the Jews in the Temple of Jerusalem, when, on entering there, he made the people leave who were buying and selling the things needed for sacrifices: he made a whip out of cords, to use it to chase them out'.<sup>102</sup>

Jesus is said to have acted in the same way towards the Pharisees, 'whose hypocrisy and false piety he could not tolerate, nor indeed their pride which caused them to esteem and praise their own actions, and to censure and even condemn those of others'. The last of these tendencies is an allusion to **Mt 9.11**, the Pharisees' implied criticism of Jesus for eating with tax collectors and sinners. The following sentence alludes similarly to Mt 23.3: 'In a word, he condemned all their conduct because they

---

<sup>98</sup> MF 167.2.2.

<sup>99</sup> Varela, *Sacred Scripture*, 58.

<sup>100</sup> Luz, *Matthew 1-7*, 95.

<sup>101</sup> MR 203, 204.

<sup>102</sup> The reference to the whip comes from Jn 2.15. Mention of 'those who sold and those who bought', however, is to be found only in Mk 11.15 / Mt 21.12. The modern editorial references attribute the latter to Lk 19.45, whose rendering in the Vulgate and the three French versions evidently derives from a variant Greek reading which adds 'those who bought'.

were content to teach others, but not put themselves to the trouble of practising what they taught them'.<sup>103</sup>

To allay any impression that 'correction' of students is simply a euphemism for punishment, it is useful to note the positive use of the term in the *Conduct of the Christian Schools*, where there is a lengthy chapter concerning, especially, the disposition of the teacher and the faults to be avoided in various approaches to correction.<sup>104</sup> Moreover, enshrined in the Brothers' Rule (1718), as mentioned previously, is a chapter on the subject of correction, which begins,

The Brothers will pay all possible attention to and vigilance over themselves so as not to punish their pupils except rarely, convinced as they must be that this is one of the principal ways of managing their school well and of establishing very good order there.<sup>105</sup>

### **Mt 9.13 | I 3.35.2**

Among the 'prayers after confession' in *Instructions and Prayers for Holy Mass, Confession and Communion* De La Salle provides a prayer headed 'Act of gratitude to the Son of God, for having applied to us the fruit and the merit of his passion and his death'.<sup>106</sup> Addressing Jesus as 'my Saviour', the penitent offers all possible thanks for indeed being his saviour 'today'. The prayer concludes with the conviction that 'you have indeed made me see that you had come for sinners [Mt 9.13], and not for the just,<sup>107</sup> because you were so strongly concerned<sup>105</sup> to restore me to grace, and to the freedom of the children of God'.

## **7. MATTHEW 9.18-25: JESUS HEALS A WOMAN AND A YOUNG GIRL**

### **Mt 9.18 / 9.25 / 8.8 | I 6.14.1**

---

<sup>103</sup> Perhaps it is significant, in view of his audience, that in this paraphrase De La Salle twice uses the verb *enseigner* 'to teach' (as does, for example, NRSV Mt 23.3), when the original, the Vulgate, and our French versions all refer simply to *saying* and *doing*.

<sup>104</sup> CE 15.

<sup>105</sup> RC 8.1.

<sup>106</sup> I 3.35.

<sup>107</sup> *Pécheurs* and *justes* are the terms used in the French versions of Mt 9.13. (Huré 1709 has an evident typographical error: 'les justes, mais les pecheur [*sic*]').

9<sup>18</sup> While he was saying these things to them, suddenly a leader of the synagogue came in and knelt before him, saying, ‘My daughter has just died; but come and lay your hand on her, and she will live.’<sup>19</sup> And Jesus got up and followed him, with his disciples.<sup>20</sup> Then suddenly a woman who had been suffering from haemorrhages for twelve years came up behind him and touched the fringe of his cloak,<sup>21</sup> for she said to herself, ‘If I only touch his cloak, I will be made well.’<sup>22</sup> Jesus turned, and seeing her he said, ‘Take heart, daughter; your faith has made you well.’ And instantly the woman was made well.<sup>23</sup> When Jesus came to the leader’s house and saw the flute-players and the crowd making a commotion,<sup>24</sup> he said, ‘Go away; for the girl is not dead but sleeping.’ And they laughed at him.<sup>25</sup> But when the crowd had been put outside, he went in and took her by the hand, and the girl got up.

In the same work, *Instructions and Prayers for Holy Mass, Confession and Communion*, the section ‘Prayers before communion’ includes an ‘Act of desire, expressing a great eagerness to receive Jesus Christ, in which one asks him for some particular graces’. Its third sentence reads: ‘Do not reproach my little faith, if I beg you as the Lord of the gospel to enter promptly into my home,<sup>108</sup> because you yourself are more eager than I am to grant me this favour, and you desire nothing more than to fill my soul by your coming with all sorts of benefits’.<sup>109</sup>

The English edition of this work suggests an allusion here to ‘Jairus: Matt. 9:18; Mark 5.23; Luke 8:41’.<sup>110</sup> The text itself alludes to ‘the Gospel’, and there are obvious echoes of either the story of the centurion’s servant/son (Mt 8.5-13; Lk 7.1-10; Jn 4.46-54), or (as the editor suggests) Mt 9.18 and parallels.<sup>111</sup> But there is also an echo, in ‘do not reproach my little faith’, of Matthew’s characteristic reproaching of the disciples as ‘you of little faith’.<sup>112</sup> As regards ‘enter promptly into my home’, *entrer* is used, for example, in Amelote Mt 8.8: *que vous entriez dans ma maison*, but also in Amelote Mt 9.25. However, ‘promptly’ could also be a reminiscence of Jn 4.49, in a parallel version of the ‘centurion’ story: ‘Sir/Lord, come down before my little boy dies’.

<sup>108</sup> *d’entrer promptement chez moi.*

<sup>109</sup> I 6.14.1.

<sup>110</sup> Lappin, *Instructions*, 165, n. 46.

<sup>111</sup> The leader’s name, ‘Jairus’, is mentioned only by Mark and Luke. There is no suggested reference in *Œuvres complètes*.

<sup>112</sup> Mt 6.30; 8.26; 14.31; 16.8; 17.20; cf. Lk 12.28.

I can conclude only that De La Salle may be adverting to various Gospel passages, no doubt by way of encouraging reflection on the gospel-based liturgical prayer before communion: ‘Lord, I am not worthy...but only say the word...’

**Mt 9.18-25** | RB 206.1.422; DA 104.3.4

I have already referred to the chapter on ‘Visits’, in *The Rules of Christian Decorum and Civility*, in connection with Mt 5.23-25. In the same article of this chapter, dealing with ‘the obligation of making visits which decorum imposes, and the dispositions which one should bring to it’,<sup>113</sup> there is a listing of ‘visits’ which Jesus made to various persons, beginning with Zacchaeus, followed by those whom Jesus visited ‘so as to revive the dead’. Among these are visits to ‘the home of the leader of the synagogue’. Since in Mk 5.23 the leader’s daughter is described only as being ‘at the point of death’,<sup>114</sup> while in Lk 8.42 she ‘was dying’,<sup>115</sup> this can be seen as a more likely reference to the visit recounted in **Mt 9.18-25**.<sup>116</sup>

The same can be said for the similar list of miracles in DA 104.3.4,<sup>117</sup> in which Jesus is also said to have ‘revived three dead persons’, namely, ‘the son of a widow of Nain [Lk 7.11-15], the daughter of the leader of the synagogue of Capernaum, and Lazarus the brother of Mary Magdalen and Martha [Jn 11.43-44]’. Again, the observation regarding ‘dead persons’ strongly suggests **Mt 9.18**. The reference to Capernaum may be a recollection of Mk 1.21, ‘And they went into Capernaum; and immediately on the Sabbath he entered the synagogue and taught’.

**Mt 9.24** | MD 76.1.1

Mt 9.18-26 was the Gospel appointed to be read on the 23<sup>rd</sup> Sunday after Pentecost.<sup>118</sup>

It is notable that De La Salle’s meditation for this day begins with an explicit reference to the fact that Jesus ‘entered the house of a leader of the synagogue to

---

<sup>113</sup> RB 206.1.418.

<sup>114</sup> ἐσχάτως ἔχει.

<sup>115</sup> ἀπέθνησκεν – imperfect.

<sup>116</sup> Although neither the Greek text nor RSV Mt 9.18 includes any reference to ‘the synagogue’, each of our French texts interpolates it (Mons and Huré in italics), as does NRSV. Amelote includes in his heading to Mt 9 the fact that Jesus *ressuscite une fille*, the verb De La Salle uses in RB 206.1.422.

<sup>117</sup> Noted above in the discussion of Mt 9.9.

<sup>118</sup> See Huré’s table of readings.

restore his daughter to life’, made the crowd withdraw, said that she was not dead but sleeping (Mt 9.24).<sup>119</sup> But there is no further reference to the story. The child’s sleeping, and death itself, are used as images in an extended reflection on the theme, as the meditation’s published heading has it: ‘That there are several in the communities who, even though they have left the world, have not left its spirit.’ Just as the girl was not dead but asleep,

it can be said of several who have left the world and who have entered community, that they are not dead, but only that they are sleeping, because in fact they have left the world, but they have not at all renounced it, which demonstrate well enough by their behaviour.<sup>120</sup>

The expression is used a number of times. De La Salle says of people who ordinarily appear to be ‘mortified as regards eating’, but when travelling they eat all the best food available, and when ill they are very hard to please.

These peoples’ senses are not dead, they are only drowsing; that is why they wake up so easily.<sup>121</sup>

The same image is used in the second Point, in regard to ‘their passions’, which include being inconsistently upset at being humiliated, unwillingness to put up with any inconvenience, being roused when spoken to harshly (unless by a superior!), becoming angry and even hitting students when teaching, ‘which often has unfortunate consequences that are difficult to remedy’.

The passions of these types of people are not dead, but they are asleep only for a time, after which they awaken, in some with much vigour, in others a little more moderately; in some more often, in others more rarely. However, you should not have left the world except to make them die altogether, without which you will never have real strength of character,<sup>122</sup> Apply yourselves seriously to this, and with all the care of which you are capable.<sup>123</sup>

The third Point concludes similarly. The behaviour and attitudes singled out include relishing the company of ‘people of the world’, being obsessed by the sort of clothing

---

<sup>119</sup> The vocabulary, though here in reported speech, is closer to that of Amelote.

<sup>120</sup> 76.1.1.

<sup>121</sup> MD 76.1.2.

<sup>122</sup> *une véritable vertu*.

<sup>123</sup> MD 76.2.2.

normally worn by ‘people of the world’, reading books which, though not bad, are read merely out of curiosity.<sup>124</sup>

Two observations can be made about this appeal to a gospel story in regard to the life of a Brother-teacher. Firstly, while there is almost no reflection on the story itself, but rather a concern to address some evidently pressing issues, there is no attempt to allegorise the story, but rather to make use of a striking image: ‘not dead, but asleep’. Secondly, while most of the issues themselves are to do with people who have ‘left the world’ to live a form of religious community life, there is no distinction made between inappropriate anger in community and inappropriate anger in class: the Brother is a Brother in both situations. This is consistent with De La Salle’s dictum that the Brothers should make no distinction

between the matters proper to your state<sup>125</sup> and the matter of your salvation and perfection. Be assured that you will never better accomplish your salvation and you will never attain perfection except by acquitting yourself well of the duties of your state, provided that you do them in view of God’s command.<sup>126</sup>

Thirdly, this meditation is among the comparatively few which draw so little on the Bible, or indeed which make little reference to God. The only other biblical reference is to Numbers 11.5,<sup>127</sup> exhorting the readers not to act like the Israelites who ‘having left Egypt through a singular favour of God, no longer considered the trouble they had had but yearned for the onions of Egypt’.<sup>128</sup> Apart from the initial reference to Jesus in the gospel story, God is mentioned in connection with the Numbers citation, and in the all-important observation that the practices to which De La Salle is drawing the Brothers’ attention

---

<sup>124</sup> *curieuses*. Loes and Huether, *Meditations*, translates it as ‘trivial’; Battersby, *Meditations*, as ‘which satisfy mere curiosity’. The admonition is consistent with that made about spiritual reading in the *Collection of Various Short Treatises*: ‘Never read out of curiosity...’ (14.7.1).

<sup>125</sup> Gallego, *Introduction*, 16, notes that ‘state’ (*état*) ‘implies the whole life of the Brother: his spiritual exercises, regularity, obedience, “flight” from the world, fraternal charity, vows, and the *school apostolate*’.

<sup>126</sup> R 16.1.4.

<sup>127</sup> Varela lists this as Num 9.5. The only other reference to the Book of Numbers is in MF 164.1.1, citing St Bernard’s image that the Virgin Mary is ‘the star arisen from Jacob’ (cf. Num 24.17).

<sup>128</sup> MD 76.1.2.

in no way become persons who have been consecrated to God, separating themselves from all dealings with the world, and taking on a state which obliges them to lead a regular life in a community.<sup>129</sup>

## 8. MATTHEW 9.37-38: THE LORD OF THE HARVEST

Mt 9.37-38 | MD 67.3.1

9<sup>37</sup> ‘The harvest is plentiful, but the labourers are few;’<sup>38</sup> therefore ask the Lord of the harvest to send out labourers into his harvest.’

The meditation for the Fourteenth Sunday after Pentecost refers mostly to the Gospel of the day, Mt 6.24-33, as we have seen above in connection with De La Salle’s drawing on that chapter. The heading-theme of the meditation is ‘On abandonment to Providence’. The reference to ‘the harvest of souls’ is made towards the end, the point being that

if you go to the trouble of working for the harvest of souls, how can you be afraid that the One who employs you, and whose workers [*ouvriers*] you are, would refuse you the food which is necessary for you to do his work?

The English edition<sup>130</sup> translates *ouvriers* as ‘coworkers’, rather than ‘workers’, perhaps to reflect an echo of *συνεργοί* in 1 Cor 3.9, which they and the editors of *Œuvres complètes* both cite. While that overtone may well be sounding, the word, together with *moisson* (‘harvest’), is used in both verses of **Mt 9.37-38**,<sup>131</sup> which is perhaps better regarded as its primary referent.

Two points can be made here. The first is that there is no attempt to spiritualize ‘food’: De La Salle speaks explicitly of ‘temporal needs’ (*du temporel*), ‘your food and your livelihood’.<sup>132</sup> Secondly, the ‘work’ of the harvest is *teaching*. There are references throughout the meditation to ‘those whom you teach [*enseigner*]’, ‘to make God reign in yourself and in the souls of those whom you instruct [*instruire*]’, ‘acquitting yourself of your duty, and applying yourself only to making God reign in your hearts and in the hearts of others’. The fact that both verbs, *enseigner* and

---

<sup>129</sup> MD 76.3.2.

<sup>130</sup> Loes and Huether, *Meditations*.

<sup>131</sup> All three French versions use both terms.

<sup>132</sup> *vosre nourriture et vosre entretien*, 67.3.1.



*instruire*, are used in this context suggests that, given a particular concern for young people's religious formation, it is the overall work of teaching, with its implied relationships, which De La Salle considers to be 'the harvest of souls'.

## 9. MATTHEW 10.1-8: JESUS COMMISSIONS HIS DISCIPLES TO HEAL AND PROCLAIM

Mt 10.1-4 | DA 104.3.2; DC 44.6.1-2

10<sup>1</sup> Then Jesus summoned his twelve disciples and gave them authority over unclean spirits, to cast them out, and to cure every disease and every sickness.<sup>2</sup> These are the names of the twelve apostles: first, Simon, also known as Peter, and his brother Andrew; James son of Zebedee, and his brother John;<sup>3</sup> Philip and Bartholomew; Thomas and Matthew the tax-collector; James son of Alphaeus, and Thaddaeus;<sup>4</sup> Simon the Cananaean, and Judas Iscariot, the one who betrayed him.

In *Duties of a Christian I* De La Salle lists the Apostles as

Simon named Peter, and Andrew his brother, James and John sons of Zebedee, Philip and Bartholomew, Matthew and Thomas, James son of Alphaeus, Jude or Thaddeus his brother, Simon the Cananaean, and Judas Iscariot, who was the one who betrayed Jesus'.<sup>133</sup>

This listing appears to be from a combination of sources. Only the evangelists Matthew and Mark refer to James and John as the sons of Zebedee (Mk 3.17; Mt 10.2). Only Luke (6.16, cf. Acts 1.13) includes 'Jude', though modern translations represent him as the son of James, rather than his brother.<sup>134</sup> Luke refers to the second Simon as 'the Zealot, whereas Matthew calls him the Cananaean. The order Matthew-Thomas is that of Mark and Luke; Matthew reverses this order, and identifies Matthew as 'the tax collector'.

---

<sup>133</sup> DA 104.3.2.

<sup>134</sup> 'Ιουδαν' Ιακώβου. F. Wilbur Gingrich and Frederick W. Danker, eds., *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature* (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1979), 380, notes that 'linguistically speaking, ἀδελφός might also be supplied'. Of the French versions, Amelote has *Jude, frere de Jacques*; Huré has *Jude frere de Jacque*; and Mons has *Judas frere de Jacques*. In Simonetti, *Matthew 1-13*, 192, the translation of Chrysostom's 'Ιουδας ὁ' Ιακώβου (PG 57: 380) is 'Judas the brother of James', though the Latin has simply *Judas Jacobi*, similarly to Vg Lk 6.16. Elsewhere in *Duties of Christian*, De La Salle relates that Saint Jude 'also called Thaddeus, was a Hebrew of the tribe of Judah, brother of Saint James the Less, and close relative of Jesus Christ' (DC 44.15.1).

In *Duties of a Christian III* (entitled ‘On the exterior and public worship [*culte*] which Christians are obliged to render God, and the means of rendering it to him’) the names of the Apostles are listed in Lesson 6, ‘The Holy Apostles’, within a Section entitled ‘Feasts instituted in honour of the saints’:

Q. Who are the holy apostles?

A. These are the principal disciples of Jesus Christ, whom he chose himself and whom he called first, to accompany him during his mortal life, to be witnesses of his holy life, his wise leadership,<sup>135</sup> his teaching, and his miracles, and to proclaim his Gospel throughout the earth after his death.

Q. How many apostles are there?

A. There are twelve; they are Saint Peter, Saint Andrew his brother, Saint James and Saint John his brother, Saint Philip, Saint Bartholomew, Saint Matthew, Saint Thomas, Saint James son of Alphaeus, Saint Simon called the Zealot, Saint Jude brother of Saint James the Less, and Saint Mathias who was chosen by the apostles, and put in place of Judas Iscariot who after betraying Our Lord hanged himself in despair.<sup>136</sup>

Here the order of the first nine is the same as in *Duties I*, above: Peter, Andrew, James, John, Philip, Bartholomew, Matthew, Thomas, James. Then comes Simon (here called the Zealot, as in Luke rather than Matthew’s ‘Cananean’) before Jude (without the alternative ‘Thaddeus’, but designated as the brother of James the Less), then Mathias, the replacement for Judas Iscariot.

It is a somewhat simpler listing, as befits an answer to be understood by children. But we note in the introductory answer the elements of accompaniment of Jesus, and his commissioning of the apostles to continue his preaching mission ‘throughout the world’ after his death. The latter is expressed in language reflecting that of Mt 24.14, ‘And this good news of the kingdom will be proclaimed throughout the world...’<sup>137</sup>

So we can observe here (and throughout this Lesson 6, with its concentration on the apostles’ preaching) a focus on the continuation of Jesus’ mission by his followers

---

<sup>135</sup> *Conduite*. While the published English version translates the word as ‘conduct’, the adjective suggests that ‘leadership’ (following the main sense of the verb, *conduire*) may be more appropriate.

<sup>136</sup> DC 44.6.1-2.

<sup>137</sup> The terminology in the three French versions of Mt 24.24 is similar to De La Salle’s; e.g. Amelote: *Cet Evangile du Roiaume sera presché dans toute la terre*; De La Salle [CL 22, 229]: *pour prêcher par toute la terre son Evangile*.

that was noted in regard to the context in which we discussed De La Salle's reference to Mt 4.23-25.

**Mt 10.7** | MD 39.1.1

10<sup>5</sup> These twelve Jesus sent out with the following instructions: 'Go nowhere among the Gentiles, and enter no town of the Samaritans, <sup>6</sup> but go rather to the lost sheep of the house of Israel. <sup>7</sup> As you go, proclaim the good news, "The kingdom of heaven has come near." <sup>8</sup> Cure the sick, raise the dead, cleanse the lepers, cast out demons. You received without payment; give without payment.'

In a meditation 'for the eve of the Ascension of Our Lord Jesus Christ', in which the principal gospel reference is Jn 17, the gospel of the day, De La Salle draws on Jesus' prayer to address the theme, 'On what one should ask of God in prayer'. He identifies three themes in particular, which become the subjects of the three Points of the meditation: firstly, 'distancing [*éloignement*] from sin', on the basis of Jn 17.15: '... I ask you to protect them from [the] evil [one]';<sup>138</sup> secondly, that the Father would 'sanctify them in the truth' (Jn 17.17);<sup>139</sup> thirdly, 'a great union amongst them, to be so intimate and so stable, that he wishes that it resemble that of the three divine persons'. This derives from Jn 17.22-23.<sup>140</sup>

Within the first Point of the meditation De La Salle makes the observation that Jesus appointed his disciples 'to preach his Gospel':

He [Jesus] does not ask for them [his disciples] human and temporal things; because he had not come into this world to procure them for people, and because, recognizing that it is the eternal Father who gave him his disciples, and that they belong to him, and also that he appointed them *to preach his Gospel* and to work for the salvation of souls, he ought not to ask his Father to give them anything other than what could contribute to the purpose for which he calls them.<sup>141</sup>

---

<sup>138</sup> MD 39.1.1. De La Salle phrases this as an imperative: *Gardez-les du mal*. The verb is that of Mons and Huré, rather than Amelote's *preserver*.

<sup>139</sup> MD 39.2.1. The terminology is the same in all three French versions.

<sup>140</sup> De La Salle uses similar language regarding the Brothers' unity of spirit in his last Testament (3 April 1719): '... to have among themselves an intimate union...'; see the critical edition in CL 26, 287.

<sup>141</sup> MD 39.1.1.

The marginal references to ‘preach his gospel’ [*prêcher son évangile*], in Houry, *Œuvres complètes*, and the published English translation are given as Jn 17.18, with the last two adding Mt 28.19. There is some warrant for both, in that Jn 17.18 includes Jesus ‘sending them into the world’, and Mt 28.19 refers to his commissioning the eleven to go and make disciples, ‘teaching them to obey everything that I have commanded you’. But in neither text is ‘preach’ or ‘gospel’ included. It is equally possible that De La Salle has in mind a text such as Mt **10.7**, where that is precisely the instruction:

‘As you go, proclaim, saying ‘The kingdom of the heavens has come near’.<sup>142</sup>

In all three French versions, the verb is *prêcher*, as in De La Salle’s own text.

I note that the same expression was used in the context of the first text within the scope of the thesis, Mt 4.23-25, where De La Salle observes that Jesus appointed the apostles ‘to preach his gospel with him’ [*prêcher avec lui son évangile*].

Also noteworthy, in this Meditation 39, is the reason that De La Salle is urging the Brother-teachers to make Jesus’ prayer their own: it is in view of their teaching ministry:

So pray God insistently that nothing make you displeasing in his sight, as you are obliged gently to introduce [*insinuer*] his love into the heart of those whom you instruct. Is that what you do? Is that what you ask of God in the prayers you make to him?<sup>143</sup>

Similarly, the reason for praying to be made holy, in the 2<sup>nd</sup> Point, is that the Brother-teachers are ‘called ... to bring about the sanctification of [their] pupils’.<sup>144</sup>

And finally, I note De La Salle’s characteristic emphasis on the essential interplay between words and deeds:

... you are the ones who must communicate holiness to them, as much by your good example as by the words about salvation which you must announce to them every day.<sup>145</sup>

---

<sup>142</sup> A more literal translation than NRSV, which reads ‘As you go, proclaim the good news, “The kingdom of heaven has come near.” ‘The good news’ has been inserted.

<sup>143</sup> MD 39.1.2.

<sup>144</sup> MD 39.2.2.

<sup>145</sup> MD 39.2.2.

## **CONCLUSION: DE LA SALLE AND MATTHEW 8.1-10.7**

De La Salle's knowledge of and references to the Church Fathers have been evident in his treatment of this section of the Gospel: John Chrysostom (c.349-407), Clement of Alexandria (c. 150-215) and Peter Chrysologus (c. 406-450). His quoting of St Bernard (1090-1153) further exemplifies his awareness of belonging to a long history of influence. I note that his biblical allusions are not confined to the New Testament, but include Moses, David and Jonah.

Biblical texts are connected with everyday behaviour in a France where social conventions were detailed and complex; they are not used, however, simply to bolster the conventions, such as those to do with paying visits, but to ensure that they were carried out in a Gospel spirit. Texts from the Bible are also shown to be part of the liturgy of the Eucharist, which was part of the normal school day for both teachers and their students. The story of the Magi highlights the relationship between teacher and student, in that – precisely as poor – they are to be honoured as giving sanctuary to the presence of Jesus himself.

Other biblical stories, such as the healing of the centurion's servant are applied to the need within the Brothers' community for 'obedience animated and sustained by faith', and for confidence in prayer. The story of the calming of the storm is applied to life in community, and in a way consistent with both the potential for, and within the limits to actualized interpretation as suggested by Ulrich Luz. The healing of a paralyzed man testifies to Jesus' power to heal spiritual/psychological distress.

A focus on the call of 'Matthew', and his Gospel provides the opportunity for De La Salle to encourage a frequent reading of that Gospel, holding up the apostle/evangelist as an example of renunciation, and of hope in the mercy of God, as well as someone affected by the power of Jesus word (in an allusion to Heb 4.12). The call of Matthew is a call to fidelity in one's own vocation to the work of teaching, which is to be 'highly esteemed' precisely because it is 'apostolic'. 'Harvest' in Mt 9.32 describes the whole work of education, both secular and religious.

Finally, there are De La Salle's reflections on the important role of disciples in both accompanying Jesus in his mission, and of being commissioned to continue it. If my

attribution of ‘to preach his gospel’ to Matthew 10.7 is correct, De La Salle is urging his Brother-teachers to pray to the Father, ‘who had appointed *them* to preach his gospel’, for the qualities they need in order to ‘inculcate [*insinuer*] his love in the hearts of those whom they instruct’ both by their ‘good example’, and by ‘the words of salvation’ which they speak to the children ‘every day’.

It seems valid to conclude that De La Salle’s reflections on the texts from Mt 8-10 are consistent with the characteristics of a history of influence hermeneutic as previously outlined:

1. A care to discern the unfolding ‘significance’ (Ricoeur) of a biblical text in new contexts;
2. A consciousness on the part of the interpreter that her own interpretations have been influenced by her participation in a history of interpretative influence;
3. A belief in the transformative power of the biblical word;
4. An understanding of biblical passages as living communications rather than as doctrinal or moral proof-texts from the past;
5. An approach to interpretation which includes faith in God, and in the Bible as the living word of God;
6. A belief that practical application, going beyond notional understanding, is a key element of biblical interpretation.

In the following, final chapter I shall summarize the findings of this and previous chapters with a view to showing that De La Salle’s approach to the interpretation of the Bible can be well appreciated from the perspective of a ‘history of influence’ hermeneutic.

## CONCLUSION

In this thesis I have endeavoured to demonstrate *that a 'history of influence' (Wirkungsgeschichte) hermeneutic provides a critical framework within which to appreciate John Baptist de La Salle's (1651-1719) recourse to the Bible, and in particular to passages from the Gospel of Matthew, chapters 4-10.*

De La Salle's classical school education and his subsequent theological studies and seminary training prepared him for an intelligent, reflective and prayerful approach to the Bible, considerably influenced by constant study of and reflection on interpretations by a wide range of Church Fathers. His sense of being part of, and affected by, a long biblical faith tradition is further evidenced not only by his engagement with the Bible itself, and the efforts of Church Fathers to relate it to their own pastoral concerns, but by his series of meditations for his Brothers, and reflections for the students, on women and men through the ages whose lives testify to the impact of God's 'effective word'.

The frequency with which the Bible, both Old and New Testaments, is mentioned in his significant body of written works is itself an indication of its centrality in his thinking. His weaving of biblical texts into his own writing, his manner of referring not to biblical texts and authors as such, but to 'speakers' of a living and challenging word, his conviction that the educational community he set in train was in direct continuity with God's salvific 'teaching' work in Jesus – these all underlie his concern to actualize the plain meaning of biblical texts so that they speak to the needs of a community of seventeenth and eighteenth century French educators (Introduction, Chapters 1 and 3).

Given De La Salle's concern to connect biblical texts with the lives and work of his community of Brother-teachers, I believe that the Gospel of Matthew can speak to fundamental dimensions of a Lasallian spirituality for educators today, especially in its overarching preoccupation with the presence of God in Jesus (Mt 1.23; 18.20; 28.20). In the section of Matthew (4.23-10.8) from which I have chosen to consider De La Salle's references, there is a systematic focus on Jesus' teaching (Mt 5.7) and on his works of healing (Mt 8-9) as a word-and-deed proclamation of 'the good news of the kingdom' (Mt 4.23; 9.35). The metaphor of 'kingdom' represents an

encouraging paradigm for the understanding and appreciation of a well-rounded, twenty-first century education, especially in schools and other educational agencies which are Christian at heart. This is especially so when De La Salle's insights are complemented by those of contemporary biblical and theological scholarship. (Chapter 4, and see below).

De La Salle's references from Mt 4.23-10.8 exemplify a concern to relate them to the personal, communal, and professional needs of his community of Brother-teachers. They reflect his own awareness of and dependence on a living tradition of interpretation and biblically-inspired discipleship. His belief in the Bible, not as an end in itself, but as a living and transformative invitation to communion with God is evident especially in his frequent references and allusions to Heb 4.12, the word of God, 'living and active'. His sustained emphasis on good example and on the *practice* of gospel 'maxims' testifies to his belief that the Bible is not understood until its ever unfolding 'word' is lived out (Chapters 5-8).

These characteristics of De La Salle's recourse to the Bible are consistent with those of a 'history of influence' (*Wirkungsgeschichte*) hermeneutic, especially as expounded by Ulrich Luz, and utilized in his commentary on the Gospel of Matthew. As specified in Chapter 2, these are:

19. A care to discern the unfolding 'significance' (Ricoeur) of a biblical text in new contexts;
20. A consciousness on the part of the interpreter that her own interpretations have been influenced by her participation in a history of interpretative influence;
21. A belief in the transformative power of the biblical word;
22. An understanding of biblical passages as living communications rather than as doctrinal or moral proof-texts from the past;
23. An approach to interpretation which includes faith in God, and in the Bible as the living word of God;
24. A belief that practical application, going beyond notional understanding, is a key element of biblical interpretation.

My approach has sought to avoid the implication that a seventeenth-century French priest anticipated a twenty-first century approach to biblical interpretation. Rather, I



have shown that in the light of such an approach, valuable aspects of De La Salle's recourse to the Bible become more pronounced, and better appreciated.

If De La Salle's own place within a history of influence is recognized, his Christian, Muslim, Buddhist, and Hindu followers within a global network of educational establishments, as well as many others of different faiths and none, will be well placed to continue to actualize both the biblical texts themselves, and his biblically- animated insights, within their own diverse educational and community contexts. In the following section I suggest one direction in which further study might profitably continue that process.

**A DIRECTION FOR FURTHER STUDY: KINGDOM, SALVATION AND EDUCATION:**

In his recent monograph, Michael Trainor has developed a timely pastoral hermeneutic for addressing the issue of sexual abuse through a fresh listening to the gospel passion narratives.<sup>1</sup> This is not the place to attempt to do justice to Trainor's biblical perspective on the issue of sexual abuse. However, his insights on biblical interpretation in relation to a matter of contemporary significance, as initially observed in Chapter 2, could be fruitfully brought to bear on other issues. In particular, I suggest that it would enrich our understanding of a 'kingdom' perspective on what it means to provide 'young people, especially the poor, with a human and Christian education', as the Lasallian mission is described in the revised version of the Brothers' *Rule* (2014).<sup>2</sup> It would, in other words, contribute significantly to the ongoing actualization of Mt 4.23-8.10 initiated for his time by John Baptist de La Salle.

There is no doubt that children have been subjected to sexual abuse in educational institutions, among others, causing long-lasting hurt of which, sadly, too many people have been oblivious. Recent experience indicates that there is also another set of victims: those who are obliged to suffer the humiliation and unjust consequences of being falsely accused of perpetrating sexual abuse, in their accusers' hope of financial gain.

---

<sup>1</sup> Trainor, *Body of Jesus*, 8.

<sup>2</sup> 'Règle des Frères des Écoles Chrésiennes: Texte révisé par la Commission désigné par le Frère Supérieur Général' (unpublished draft, 2014) 1.3.

Without side-stepping Trainor's deep concern for the pain of victims of sexual abuse and for the embracing of a gospel response, I wish to draw on Trainor's manner of reflection on the passion narratives to sketch a possible gospel perspective on the *best* aspects of education, and especially Lasallian education, as we approach the third centenary of De La Salle's death in 1719.

### **Michael Trainor: the gospel stories as both window and mirror**

Consistently with an actualization hermeneutic, Trainor reminds us that the gospel stories are not only 'a window for looking into the world of their original audiences', but also 'a mirror for reflecting on our world and the present sexual abuse scandal'.<sup>3</sup> In particular he writes of the passion stories as 'providing a context for interpreting our experience', and as allowing

the faith insights of the first generation of Jesus followers to expand our horizons and to engage us with their insights into Jesus and his disciples and their response to suffering and death.<sup>4</sup>

Trainor's reflection on the passion narratives as 'word of God' further reminds us that 'word' here, and in the Bible generally, is not to be understood literally, but metaphorically, affirming our conviction that God desires to communicate with us, and that

this divine self-communication, spoken of in theological terms as revelation, allows us to encounter God and to know, at the core of our being, of God's desire for intimacy and communion with us.<sup>5</sup>

This communion extends in a particular way to victims of abuse, as Trainor observes in his study's concluding sentence regarding the gospel passion stories. He writes that they

do not encourage or promote discipleship modelled on a form of passive suffering servant; rather they help us to see in the abused Jesus God's communion with humanity and solidarity with those who have been abused.<sup>6</sup>

---

<sup>3</sup> Trainor, *Body of Jesus*, 48.

<sup>4</sup> Trainor, *Body of Jesus*, 47.

<sup>5</sup> Trainor, *Body of Jesus*, 47.

<sup>6</sup> Trainor, *Body of Jesus*, 285.

Trainor's concluding reflection on the teaching in 1 Pet 3.9 speaks to the response to abuse encouraged on the part of both the victim and a supportive community. The Christ-like response of 'repaying with a blessing' (1 Pet 3.9), reminiscent of De La Salle's suggestively frequent citing of Mt 5.44, 'pray for those who persecute you', is not, says Trainor, 'a pious sentiment that speaks to the abuser with words of gratitude for what has happened'.

The 'blessing' spoken is rather encouragement to perceive and interpret the experience in the context of the presence of God. It is not an attempt to soften the experience, deny it, or to allow the perpetrator to act with impunity.

It does not exclude rage, or voicing the pain, 'nor the need of the Christian community to listen to the rage and hurt'.<sup>7</sup>

Biblical interpretation such as this, stemming from a conviction that we can fruitfully engage with the insights and responses of the first generation of Jesus followers, and that in doing so we are in communion with a God who desires intimacy, can only enrich our understanding and inspire educational 'best practice'. This is especially so when we recognize De La Salle's understanding of a God who is present to the relationship between educator and young person, and who wants to listen to the concerns an educator may have about any one of her students or clients.<sup>8</sup>

### **Education: 'a sign of the Kingdom and a means of salvation'**

One of the dimensions of the gospel story which I believe Michael Trainor's hermeneutical approach would illuminate for educators is 'the Kingdom'.

The Kingdom of God (more often in Matthew, 'the Kingdom of the heavens') and the themes associated with it as discussed in Chapter 4, are of ongoing significance for the educational mission of the Lasallian educational family in the present century. By way of example, I adduce the several references to the 'Kingdom of God' in the *Rule* of the Brothers, as recently revised in view of the global context in which that mission is carried on by people who are, in the main, not formal members of the Institute. The text of the revised *Rule* text has now been approved by the Vatican authorities.

---

<sup>7</sup> Trainor, *Body of Jesus*, 283-284.

<sup>8</sup> De La Salle encourages the teachers 'constantly to represent the needs' of their students to Jesus Christ, and 'to make him aware of the difficulties' they have with their students' behaviour (MR 196.1.2; see also MF 186.3.2).

As does the previous edition of the *Rule*, it includes several references to ‘the kingdom’, the first of which appears in the opening article:

Deeply moved by the human and spiritual distress ‘of the children of artisans and of the poor’, and in response to the call of God, John Baptist de La Salle and his first Brothers made a lifelong commitment to [God] to provide these children with a human and Christian education, and so extend the glory of God on earth. They reformed the kind of schooling available at the time to make it accessible to the poor, and to offer it to all *as a sign of the Kingdom and as a means of salvation*.<sup>9</sup>

It is a significant claim to make that a school is a sign of the Kingdom of God and a means of salvation. It is one which cannot be directly ascribed to John Baptist de La Salle, though its thrust may be perceived in his work and his writings.

Subsequent references in the *Rule* to ‘kingdom’ and ‘reign’ encourage the Brothers ‘by faith’ to ‘dedicate their whole life to the building up of the Kingdom of God through the service of education’,<sup>10</sup> to be aware that ‘the Institute establishes, renews and diversifies its works according to the needs of the Kingdom of God’;<sup>11</sup> that the witness of their consecrated life lived in community ‘demonstrates that love is a saving reality and that, by being brothers among themselves and with others, they make the Reign [*règne*] of God visible’;<sup>12</sup> that ‘by faith, they praise God at seeing his Reign [*Royaume*] extended’;<sup>13</sup> that their consecration is ‘an expression of the love of God for humanity, and a prophetic sign which establishes the values of the Kingdom as criteria for discerning human realities’;<sup>14</sup> that ‘through love of the Gospel, and as signs of the hope to which the Kingdom of God invites them, the Brothers make themselves poor and commit themselves resolutely to love the poor and to fight against poverty’.<sup>15</sup>

The Kingdom of God is thus an important point of reference for the identity and work of the Brother, and increasingly (as this version of Rule reflects) for the women and

---

<sup>9</sup> ‘Règle’, 1 (emphasis added).

<sup>10</sup> ‘Règle’ 2014, 6.

<sup>11</sup> ‘Règle’ 2014, 13.

<sup>12</sup> ‘Règle’ 2014, 15.

<sup>13</sup> ‘Règle’ 2014, 20. Neither the definitive French nor the English version is consistent in the use of ‘kingdom’ and ‘reign’.

<sup>14</sup> ‘Règle’ 2014, 24.

<sup>15</sup> ‘Règle’ 2014, 40.3.

men who are their majority partners in working in the educational service of young people.

This 'kingdom' perspective on human and Christian education is elaborated by Michel Sauvage. While drawing upon such writings of De La Salle as his *Rules of Christian Decorum and Civility* and *The Conduct of the Christian Schools* to acknowledge a notional distinction between 'secular' subjects as preparing for 'the earthly city' and religious education as relating especially to 'the kingdom of God', Sauvage does not accept the premise that 'the secular is simply a means in the service of the religious'. He stresses De La Salle's insistence that secular subjects be as well taught as are religious lessons. He cites, for example, the meditation urging the Brothers to reflect on their comportment throughout the year towards their Superiors, their Brothers, and their students. Regarding their students, De La Salle reminds them:

The first thing you owe your students is edification and good example. Have you applied yourself to virtue, with the intention of edifying your disciples? Have you considered that you ought to be their model for the virtues which you want to have them practise? Have you behaved this year as good teachers should? You ought to have taught them their religion; have you applied yourself to it during this year? Have you regarded this task as your principal duty in their regard? [...] Have you taught those under your guidance the other things that are part of your duty, such as reading, writing, and all the rest with all possible application?<sup>16</sup>

Sauvage concludes his discussion of this theme with the observation that 'for Saint John Baptist de La Salle, it is through the work of the school in its entirety that the Brothers work at the building up of the kingdom of God... It is an apostolic purpose that in the final analysis he assigns to all their activity'.<sup>17</sup>

In a later work co-authored by Sauvage and Miguel Campos there is the similar view expressed that 'the spiritual preoccupation with promoting the Kingdom of God led La Salle to be concerned about the good progress of the schools, with transforming their pedagogy in putting them to the service of the children who attended them, with devoting himself as a priority to the training of the teachers'.<sup>18</sup>

---

<sup>16</sup> MF 91.3.1-2.

<sup>17</sup> Sauvage, *Catéchèse*, 668-683.

<sup>18</sup> Sauvage and Campos, *Expérience et enseignement*, 270.

De La Salle's explicit references to the Kingdom of God as an essentially interior reality do not provide much direct support for the perception of the school (or other educational agency) as 'a sign of the Kingdom and a means of salvation'. Among all 152 instances of De La Salle's use of reign/kingdom, the only approximation to this view as expressed in the Brothers' current *Rule* – no doubt deriving at least in part from Sauvage's reflections – is to be found in the meditation on Saint Alexis (17 July):

You have a profession [*emploi*] which is honourable only before God, because it serves to extend [*étendre*] his kingdom. Do you accept people's contempt with joy? For the kingdom of God which you serve and in which you hope, is not of this world [Jn 18.36].<sup>19</sup>

The same expression, 'extend the kingdom', appears in the second-last meditation for the time of retreat:

God is so good that he does not leave without reward the good that one does for him and the service that one renders him, especially in regard to the salvation of souls. If it is true that God rewards so well, starting in this world, those who have left everything for him, that they receive a hundredfold starting in this life, with how much more reason will he reward, even at the present time, those who will apply themselves with zeal to extend his Kingdom!<sup>20</sup>

But even here there is no reason to think that 'extending' God's kingdom refers to anything other than the laudable objective of encouraging both teachers and students to let God 'reign in their hearts'.

My reflection on De La Salle's spiritualized understanding of 'the kingdom of God' is that a contemporary interpretation of this elusive metaphor could invest it with a more holistic dimension, one more directly related to the day to day work of educators, as suggested in the Brothers' *Rule*, and to what De La Salle achieved in practice by addressing both the spiritual and the temporal needs of the marginalized young people of his time.

Further reflection on 'the good news of the kingdom' which Jesus proclaimed in both word and healing (Mt 4.23-25; 9.35), in dialogue with De La Salle's exalted view of

---

<sup>19</sup> MF 143.3.2, emphasis added.

<sup>20</sup> MR 207.1.1.

the educator's ministry within the church, would further enrich our appreciation of the fact that schooling, accessible to the most vulnerable and open to all, is offered to them 'as a sign of the Kingdom and as a means of salvation'.

This appreciation would only be enhanced by considering Denis Edwards' perspective on 'salvation' as outlined in Chapter 4. The understanding that 'our own practices of healing and liberation ... may be seen as a participation in and an anticipation of God's coming reign' provides a counterbalance for De La Salle's somewhat spiritualized view of salvation, and allows the totality of his integrated approach to education to be viewed in a richer biblical and theological light.

Not to exclude families and other persons and groups who have a positive impact on youth, I believe that much of what is achieved on behalf of young women and young men in schools and other educational agencies can be understood in these terms. An effective education, characterized by positive relationships between adults and young people, among young people themselves, and among adults, can be a sphere of 'salvation'. This is particularly so when (where feasible) it is complemented by an approach to religious education which attempts to make unitive and positive sense of the sometimes very different worlds of young people, their families, their teachers, and their church – if they have one.

## BIBLIOGRAPHY

In accordance with the most recent edition of the SBL Handbook of Style, dates of accessing web pages have not been included.

*A New and General Biographical Dictionary; Containing An Historical and Critical Account of the Lives and Writings of the Most Eminent Persons in every Nation; Particularly the British and Irish; From the Earliest Accounts of Time to the present Period.* London: T. Osborne, J. Whiston and B. White, 1761.

Aroz, Léon-de-Marie. *Jean-Baptiste de La Salle: Documents bio-bibliographiques.* CL 41. Rome: Maison Saint Jean-Baptiste de La Salle, 1979.

\_\_\_\_\_. *Les actes d'état civil de la famille de saint Jean-Baptiste de La Salle.* CL 26. Rome: Maison Saint Jean-Baptiste de La Salle, 1966.

Augustine of Hippo. 'De Doctrina Christiana Libri Quattuor'. Sant' Agostino.  
[http://www.augustinus.it/latino/dottrina\\_cristiana/index2.htm](http://www.augustinus.it/latino/dottrina_cristiana/index2.htm).

\_\_\_\_\_. 'De Sermone Domini in monte'. In *Opera Omnia*. Patrologia cursus completus, series Latina, vol. 34. Edited by J.-P. Migne. Paris: Migne, 1861.

\_\_\_\_\_. 'Epistola CXXX', 12. In *Opera Omnia*. Patrologia cursus completus, series Latina, vol. 33. Edited by J.-P. Migne. Paris: Migne, 1861.

Balabanski, Vicky. 'An Earth Bible Reading of the Lord's Prayer: Matthew 6.9-13.' In *Readings from the Perspective of Earth*, edited by Norman C. Habel. Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2000.

Bannon, Edwin. 'Introduction.' In *The Mind and Heart of John Baptist de La Salle: Jean-Baptiste Blain*, edited by Augustine Loes, 1-22. Landover, MD: Lasallian Publications, 2002.

Battersby, William John, ed. *De La Salle: Meditations*. London: Longmans, Green and Co., 1953.

Beudet, Gilles. 'Union among the Brothers'. In *Lasallian Themes*, edited by Alain Houry. Rome: Brothers of the Christian Schools, 1997.

Bédel, Henri. *An Introduction to the History of the Institute of the Brothers of the Christian Schools: The Origins 1651-1726*. Translated by Allen Geppert. Rome: Brothers of the Christian Schools, 1996.

\_\_\_\_\_. *Initiation à l'histoire de l'Institut des Frères des Écoles Chrésiennes: Origines 1651-1726*. Rome: Maison Saint Jean-Baptiste de La Salle, 1994.



- Benedict XVI. Post-synodal Apostolic Exhortation *Verbum Domini*. ‘Benedict XVI, Apostolic Exhortations,’ w2.vatican.va. [http://w2.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/apost\\_exhortations/documents/hf\\_ben-xvi\\_exh\\_20100930\\_verbum-domini.html](http://w2.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/apost_exhortations/documents/hf_ben-xvi_exh_20100930_verbum-domini.html).
- Bergin, Joseph. *Church, Society and Religious Change in France 1580-1730*. New Haven / London: Yale University Press, 2009.
- Bernard of Clairvaux. ‘In Epiphania Domini’, Sermo III. PL 183, cols. 149-152.
- Blain, Jean-Baptiste. *La Vie de Monsieur Jean-Baptiste de La Salle, Instituteur des Frères de Écoles chrétiennes*. CL 7 and 8. Rome: Maison Saint Jean-Baptiste de La Salle, 1961 [1733].
- Boring, M. Eugene. ‘The Gospel of Matthew: Introduction, Commentary and Reflections.’ In *The New Interpreter’s Bible*. 8: 87-505. Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1995.
- Breviarum Romanum ex Decreto Sacrosancti Concilii Trid. restitutum, Pii V. Pontificis Max. jussu editum, et Clementis VIII. primùm, nunc denuò Urbani PP. VIII. auctoritate recognitum. Pars autumnalis*. Antwerp: Ex Typographia Plantiniana apud Viduam Baltharis Moreti, 1698.
- Brother Lawrence of the Resurrection. *Writings and Conversations on the Practice of the Presence of God*, edited by Conrad de Meester. Washington: ICS Publications, 1994.
- Bureau du Personnel. ‘Statistics 2014’. Rome: Casa Generalizia, 2015.
- Burke, Daniel, ed. *John Baptist de La Salle: Collection of Various Short Treatises*. Landover, MD: Lasallian Publications, 1993.
- Calcutt, Alfred. *De La Salle: A city saint and the liberation of the poor through education*. Oxford: De La Salle Publications, 1993.
- Campos, Miguel. ‘Introduction.’ In *John Baptist de La Salle: Meditations for the Time of Retreat*. Translated by Augustine Loes. Winona, MN: The Christian Brothers Conference, 1975.
- . *L’Itinéraire évangélique de saint Jean-Baptiste de La Salle et le recours à l’Écriture dans ses Méditations pour le Temps de la Retraite: Contribution à l’étude sur les fondements évangéliques de la vie religieuse*. CL 45-46. Rome: Maison Saint Jean-Baptiste de La Salle, 1974.

- \_\_\_\_\_ and Michel Sauvage. *Encountering God in the Depths of the Mind and Heart: A Commentary on John Baptist de La Salle's Explanation of the Method of Mental Prayer*. Rome: Brothers of the Christian Schools, 1995.
- . *Explication de la méthode d'oraison (de saint Jean-Baptiste de La Salle): Présentation du texte de 1739. Instrument de travail*. CL 50. Rome: Maison Saint Jean-Baptiste de La Salle, 1989.
- Carter, Warren. *Matthew and the Margins: A Sociopolitical and Religious Reading*. Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2000.
- Catholic Encyclopedia. 'Pax,' newadvent.org.  
<http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/11594b.htm>.
- Cavadini, John. 'Fathers of the Church', in *HarperCollins Encyclopedia of Catholicism*, edited by Richard P. McBrien, 520. New York: HarperCollins, 1995.
- Charlesworth, James H., ed. *The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha*. London: Darton, Longman and Todd, 1983.
- Cognet, Louis. 'Christian Thought in Seventeenth Century France.' In *History of the Church*, edited by Hubert Jedin, 6: 93-106. London: Burns & Oates, 1981.
- Council of Trent. 'Sessio VI-Decretum de Justificatione,'  
 documentacatholicaomnia.eu.  
[http://www.documentacatholicaomnia.eu/04z/z\\_15451563\\_\\_Concilium\\_Tridentinum\\_\\_Sessio\\_VI-Decretum\\_de\\_Justificatione\\_\\_LT.doc.html](http://www.documentacatholicaomnia.eu/04z/z_15451563__Concilium_Tridentinum__Sessio_VI-Decretum_de_Justificatione__LT.doc.html).
- Cramoisy, Sebastien, ed. *Introduction à la vie devote du bien-heureux François de Sales evesque de Genève*. Paris: de l'Imprimerie royale, 1651.
- Davies, Wiliam David, and Dale C. Allison. *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Gospel according to Saint Matthew*. Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1988.
- De La Salle, John Baptist. *Collection of Various Short Treatises*, edited by Daniel Burke. Landover, MD: Lasallian Publications, 1993.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *Œuvres complètes*. Rome: Maison Saint-Jean-Baptiste-de-La-Salle, 1993.
- De Sales, Francis. *Introduction to the Devout Life*. Translated by John K. Ryan. New York: Doubleday, 1989.
- . *Introduction à la Vie Dévote*. Paris: L'Imprimerie Royale, 1651.
- deSilva, David A. *An Introduction to the New Testament: Contexts, Methods and Ministry Formation*. Dowers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2004.

- Deville, Raymond. *L'École française de spiritualité*. Paris: Desclée de Brouwer, 2008.
- Didache*. 'The Apostolic Fathers,' ccel.org.  
<http://www.ccel.org/l/lake/fathers/didache.htm>.
- Doval, Alexis James, ed. *The Duties of a Christian to God: John Baptist de La Salle*. Landover, MD: Lasallian Publications, 2002.
- Dubois, Jean, René Lagane and Alain Lerond. *Dictionnaire du français classique*. Paris: Larousse, 2001.
- Dunlop, Ian. *Louis XIV*. London: Pimlico, 2001.
- Dunn, James D.G. *Jesus Remembered*. Grand Rapids, MI /Cambridge, UK: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2003.
- Edwards, Denis. *How God Acts: Creation, Redemption, and Special Divine Action*. Hindmarsh, South Australia: ATF Press, 2010.
- Elliott, Mark W. 'Effective-History and the Hermeneutics of Ulrich Luz.' *JSNT* 33 (2010): 161-171.
- Everett, Edward. 'Introduction,' in *The Conduct of the Christian Schools by John Baptist de La Salle*, edited by William Mann, 20-42. Landover, MD: Lasallian Publications, 1996.
- Explication de l'oraison dominicale, composées des pensées et des paroles mêmes de S. Augustin, qu'on a extraites avec une très exacte fidélité*. Paris: Guillaume Desprez, 1688.
- Fitzmyer, Joseph A. *The Biblical Commission's Document "The Interpretation of the Bible in the Church": Text and Commentary*. Roma: Editrice Pontificale Istituto Biblico, 1995.
- Flourez, Brigitte. *Better than Light: Nicolas Barré*. Singapore: Angsana Books, 1994.
- Frère Agathon. *Les Douze Vertus d'un Bon Maître, proposées par le Vén. J.-B. de La Salle, Instituteur des Frères des Ecoles chrétiennes*. Versailles: Imprimerie de Beau Jeune, 1856.
- Gadamer, Hans-Georg. *Truth and Method*. Translation revised by Joel Weinsheimer and Donald G. Marshall. London/New York: Bloomsbury, 2004. Kindle eBook.
- Gallego, Saturnino. *An Introduction to the Writings of John Baptist de La Salle*, Translated by Arthur Bertling. Rome: Brothers of the Christian Schools, 1993.

- . *Vida y Pensamiento de San Juan Bautista de La Salle*. Madrid: Biblioteca de Autores Cristianos, 1986.
- Gareis, Arturo. ‘Un texte redevable aux *Méditations* du P. J. Hayneufve: les *Considérations que les Frères doivent faire de temps en temps, et surtout pendant leur retraite*’. In *Contribution à l’étude des sources du Recueil de différents petits traités*, edited by Maurice-Auguste Hermans and Arturo Gareis, 51-99. CL 16. Rome: Maison Saint Jean-Baptiste de La Salle, 1964.
- General Council. *Circular 455: The Documents of the 44<sup>th</sup> General Chapter*. Rome: Brothers of the Christian Schools, 2007.
- Gingrich, F. Wilbur and Frederick W. Danker, eds. *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*. Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1979.
- Grass, Paul. *John Baptist de La Salle: Two Early Biographies*, edited by Paul Grass. Landover, MD: Lasallian Publications, 1996.
- Gregory of Nyssa. *On Not Three Gods*. New Advent, newadvent.org.  
<http://www.newadvent.org/fathers/2905.htm>.
- Hannan, Margaret. *The Nature and Demands of the Sovereign Rule of God in the Gospel of Matthew*. London: T&T Clark International, 2006.
- Hauser, Alan J. and Duane F Watson, eds. *A History of Biblical Interpretation*. Grand Rapids, MI / Cambridge, UK: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2009.
- Hermans, Maurice-Auguste, ed. *Vocabulaire lasallien*. Paris: Frères des Écoles Chrétiennes, 1984.
- . *L’Institut des Frères des Écoles chrétiennes à la recherche de son statut canonique: des origines (1679) à la bulle de Benoît XIII (1725)*. CL 11. Rome: Maison Saint-Jean-Baptiste de La Salle, 1962.
- Houlden, James Leslie. *A Commentary on the Johannine Epistles*. London: Adam and Charles Black, 1973.
- Houry, Alain. ‘Écrits du Fondateur’, LaSalle.org.  
<http://www.lasalle.org/fr/ressources/publications/ecrits-du-fondateur/>
- Hoverlant, Adrien. *Essai chronologique pour servir à l’histoire de Tournay*. Courtray: Hoverlant, 1808.
- Hsia, Ronnie Po-chia. *The World of Catholic Renewal 1540-1770*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998.

- Hunt, Anne. *Trinity: Nexus of the Mysteries of Christian Faith*. Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2005.
- Isaacs, Marie E. 'Exegesis and Homiletics.' *The Way Supplement* 72 (1991): 32-47.
- Jerome. 'Letter to Laeta.' 'Jerome, Saint, Epistulae. Selections,'  
[www.perseus.tufts.edu](http://www.perseus.tufts.edu).  
<http://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/text?doc=Perseus%3Atext%3A2008.01.0566%3Aletter%3D107%3Asection%3D13>.
- Jerome. 'Life of Saint Hilarion'. 'Excerpta ex Migne Patrologia Latina,'  
[documentaomniacatholica.eu](http://www.documentacatholicaomnia.eu).  
[http://www.documentacatholicaomnia.eu/02m/0347-0420,\\_Hieronymus,\\_Vita\\_Sancti\\_Hilarionis,\\_MLT.pdf](http://www.documentacatholicaomnia.eu/02m/0347-0420,_Hieronymus,_Vita_Sancti_Hilarionis,_MLT.pdf).
- Hussey, Andrew. *Paris: The Secret History*. London: Penguin Books, 2007.
- Johnson, Luke Timothy. *The Gospel of Luke*. Collegeville, MN: 1991.
- Knight, Mark. 'Wirkungsgeschichte, Reception History, Reception Theory.' *JSNT* (2010): 138-146.
- Krumenacker, Yves. *L'école française de spiritualité: Des mystiques, des fondateurs, des courants et leurs interprètes*. Paris: Les Éditions du Cerf, 1999.
- Kupp, David D. *Matthew's Emmanuel: Divine presence and God's people in the First Gospel*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996.
- La Chalotais, Louis-René de Caradeuc de. *Essai d'éducation nationale ou plan d'études pour la jeunesse*. [No place or publisher indicated]. 1763.
- Lappin, Eugene. ed. *Religious Instructions and Exercises of Piety for the Christian Schools: John Baptist de La Salle*. Landover, MD: Lasallian Publications, 2002.
- Lauraire, Léon. *La Conduite, Approche contextuelle*. Rome: Maison Saint Jean-Baptiste de La Salle, 2001.
- Le Breviaire Romain, en Latin et en François. Suivant la reformation du S. Concile de Trente. Imprimé par le commandement du Pape Pie V. revû, & premierement corrigé par Clement VII. & depuis par Urbain VIII. Divisé en quatre parties. Partie d'esté*. Paris: Denus Thierry, 1688.
- Le catéchisme du concile de Trente, Latin-François. Tome second*. Mons: Gaspard Migeot, 1685.
- Le Sieur de Royaumont, Prieur de Sombreval. *L'histoire de la Sainte Bible avec des explications édifiantes tirées des Saints Peres pour regler les mœurs dans toute sorte de conditions*. Brussels: Pierre de Dobbeleer [c. 1669].

- Loes, Augustine and Francis Huether, eds. *Meditations by John Baptist de La Salle*. Landover, MD: Christian Brothers Conference, 1994.
- Loes, Augustine and Ronald Isetti, eds. *Rule and Foundational Documents: John Baptist de La Salle*. Landover, MD: Christian Brothers Conference, 2002.
- Loes, Augustine, ed. *The Mind and Heart of John Baptist de La Salle: Jean-Baptiste Blain*. Landover, MD: Lasallian Publications, 2002.
- Luz, Ulrich. *Das Evangelium nach Matthäus*. Zürich, Einsiedeln, Köln: Benziger Verlag, 1985.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *Matthew 1-7: A Commentary*. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2007.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *Matthew 8-20: A Commentary*. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2001.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *Matthew in History: Interpretation, Influence, and Effects*. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1994.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *Studies in Matthew*. Grand Rapids, MI / Cambridge, U.K.: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2005.
- MacCulloch, Diarmud. *A History of Christianity: the First Three Thousand Years*. London: Penguin Books, 2010.
- Maillefer, François-Élie. *La vie de M. Jean-Baptiste de La Salle, prêtre, docteur en théologie, ancien chanoine de la cathédrale de Reims, et instituteur des Frères des Ecoles chrétiennes [1723/1740]*, edited by Maurice-Auguste Hermans. CL 6; Rome: Maison Saint Jean-Baptiste de La Salle, 1966.
- McBrien, Richard P., ed. *The HarperCollins Encyclopedia of Catholicism*. New York: HarperCollins, 1995.
- Meier, John P. *Matthew*. Dublin: Veritas Publications, 1980.
- Metzger, Bruce M. *A Textual Commentary on the Greek New Testament*. Stuttgart: United Bible Societies, 1975.
- Migne Patrologia Latina. documentacatholicaomnia.eu.  
[http://www.documentacatholicaomnia.eu/02m\\_0339-0397,\\_Ambrosius,\\_In\\_Epistolam\\_Beati\\_Pauli\\_Ad\\_Timotheum\\_Primam,\\_MLT.pdf](http://www.documentacatholicaomnia.eu/02m_0339-0397,_Ambrosius,_In_Epistolam_Beati_Pauli_Ad_Timotheum_Primam,_MLT.pdf).
- Modeste de Saint-Amable. *Le Parfait Inférieur, ou l'Art d'Obéir*. Paris: Librairie Victor Lefoffre, 1893.
- Moréri, Louis. *Le grand dictionnaire historique, ou le mélange curieux de l'histoire sacrée et profane*. Paris: Les Libraires associés, 1759.

- Mory, Christophe. *Jean-Baptiste de La Salle: Rêver l'éducation*. Paris: Pygmalion, 2010.
- Mouton, Donald. *Explanation of the Method of Interior Prayer by John Baptist de La Salle*. Landover, MD: Christian Brothers Conference, 1995.
- Murphy, Dennis, ed. *The Church and the Bible: Official Documents of the Catholic Church*. New York: St Pauls, 2007.
- Newman, John Henry. *An Essay in Aid of a Grammar of Assent*. London: Burns, Oates, & Co., 1874.
- Nolland, John. *Luke 9.21-18.34*. Dallas: Word Books, 1993.
- Oden, Thomas C. 'General Introduction'. In *Matthew 1-13*, edited by Manlio Simonetti, xi-xxxii. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2001.
- 'Pontificia Commissione Biblica,' vatican.va.  
[http://www.vatican.va/roman\\_curia/congregations/cfaith/pcb\\_documents/rc\\_con\\_cfaith\\_pro\\_14071997\\_pcbible\\_it.html](http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/cfaith/pcb_documents/rc_con_cfaith_pro_14071997_pcbible_it.html).
- Poutet, Yves. *Le XVII<sup>e</sup> siècle et les origines lasalliennes: Recherches sur la genèse de l'œuvre scolaire*. Rennes: Imprimeries Réunies, 1970.
- . *Saint Jean-Baptiste de La Salle: un saint du xvii<sup>e</sup> siècle*. Paris: Beauchesne, 1992.
- Powell, Mark Allan, ed. *HarperCollins Bible Dictionary*. New York: HarperOne, 2011.
- Prêtre de la Congrégation de la Mission. *Lettres de S. Vincent de Paul, fondateur des Prêtres de la Mission et des Filles de la Charité*, Tome premier: 1607-1652. Paris: Librairie de D. Dumoulin et C<sup>ie</sup>, 1882.
- Pungier, Jean. *Jean-Baptiste de La Salle: le message de son catéchisme*. Roma: Casa Generalizia Fratelli Scuole Cristiane, 1984.
- 'Règle des Frères des Écoles Chrétiennes: Texte révisé par la Commission désignée par le Frère Supérieur général'. (Unpublished). Rome: 2014.
- Roberts, Jonathan and Christopher Rowland. 'Introduction'. *JSNT* 33 (2010): 131-136.
- Rodrigue, Jean-Guy. 'Religious Life in France During the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries'. In *Spirituality in the Time of John Baptist de La Salle*, edited by Robert C. Berger, 3-79. Landover, MD: Lasallian Publications, 1999.
- . *Contribution à l'étude des sources des Méditations sur les principales festes de l'année*. CL 47. Rome: Maison Saint Jean-Baptiste-de-La-Salle.

- Sacrosancti et œcumenici concilii Tridentini Paulo III, Julio III et Pio IV, pontificibus maximis, celebrati canones et decreta.* Paris/Besançon: Gauthier Frères, 1823.
- Salm, Luke. 'Introduction.' in *Rule and Foundational Documents: John Baptist de La Salle* edited by Augustine Loes and Ronald Isetti, 3-11. Landover, MD: Lasallian Publications, 2002.
- . 'Mass', in *Lasallian Themes*, edited by Alain Houry, 3: 185-192. Rome: Brothers of the Christian Schools, 1997.
- . 'Vows.' In *Lasallian Themes*, edited by Léon Lauraire, 2: 260-265. Rome: Brothers of the Christian Schools 1995.
- . *John Baptist de La Salle: the Formative Years.* Romeoville, IL: Lasallian Publications, 1989.
- . *The Work is Yours: The Life of Saint John Baptist de La Salle.* Washington, DC: Christian Brothers Publications, 2nd ed. 1996.
- Sanders, Ella Katherine. *Vincent de Paul: Priest and Philanthropist 1576-1660.* New York: Longmans, Green, and Co., 1915.
- Sauvage, Michel. *Frère Maurice Hermans (1911-1987) et les origines de l'Institut des Frères des Écoles chrétiennes.* CL 5. Rome: Maison Saint Jean-Baptiste de La Salle, 1991.
- . 'L'itinéraire évangélique de Saint Jean-Baptiste de La Salle' in *Jean-Baptiste de La Salle et la Fondation de son Institut: 'Frères consacrés en Église pour le Monde'* edited by Alain Houry, 104-125. CL 55. Rome: Maison Saint Jean-Baptiste de La Salle, 2001.
- . *Catéchèse et laïcité: Participation des laïcs au ministère de la Parole et mission du Frère-enseignant dans l'Église.* Paris: Liget, 1962.
- . *Les citations néotestamentaires dans les Méditations pour le Temps de la Retraite.* CL 1. Rome: Maison Saint Jean-Baptiste de La Salle, 1959.
- and Miguel Campos. *Jean-Baptiste de La Salle: Expérience et enseignement spirituels. Annoncer l'Évangile aux pauvres.* Paris; Beauchesne, 1977.
- . *Annoncer l'Évangile aux pauvres.* Paris: Beachesne, 1977.
- Sayce, Richard Anthony. 'Continental Versions from c. 1600 to the Present Day: French'. In *The Cambridge History of the Bible: The West from the Reformation to the Present Day* edited by Stanley L. Greenslade, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1963.



- Second Vatican Council. 'Divine Revelation'. In *The Church and the Bible*, edited by Dennis J. Murphy, 336-352. New York: St Pauls/Alba House, 2007.
- Senior, Donald. *Matthew*. Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1998.
- . *The Gospel of Matthew*. Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1997.
- Simonetti, Manlio, ed. *Matthew 1-13*. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2001.
- Stanton, Graham N. *A Gospel for a New People: Studies in Matthew*. Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1992.
- Stevens, Gerald L. *New Testament Greek Primer: From Morphology to Grammar*. Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2010.
- Tertullian. 'De Oratione,' Tertullian.org.  
[http://www.tertullian.org/articles/evans\\_orat/evans\\_orat\\_03latin.htm](http://www.tertullian.org/articles/evans_orat/evans_orat_03latin.htm).
- Thistleton, Anthony C. 'Biblical Studies and Theoretical Hermeneutics.' In *The Cambridge Companion to Biblical Interpretation*, edited by John Barton, 95-113. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998.
- . *New Horizons in Hermeneutics: The Theory and Practice of Transforming Biblical Reading*. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1992.
- Tholuck, August. *Der Bergpredigt*. Gotha: Friedrich Andreas Verthes, 1856.
- . *Philologisch-theologische Auslegung der Bergpredigt Christi nach Matthäus, zugleich ein Beitrag zur Begründung einer rein-biblischen Glaubens und Sittenlehre*. Hamburg: Friedrich Verthes, 1833.
- Thomas à Kempis. *Imitatio Christi*. 'Thomas à Kempis De Imitatione Christi Liber Secundus,' thelatinlibrary.com.  
<http://www.thelatinlibrary.com/kempis/kempis2.shtml>.
- . *The Imitation of Christ*, edited by William C. Creasy. Macon, Georgia: Mercer University Press, 2007.
- Trainor, Michael. *The Body of Jesus and Sexual Abuse: How the Gospel Passion Narratives inform a Pastoral Response*. Northcote, VIC: Morning Star Publishing, 2014.
- Tronson, Louis. *Traité de l'Obéissance*. Paris: Librairie ecclésiastique, 1822.
- Vallodolid, José Maria, ed. *Obras Completas de San Juan Bautista de la Salle*. Madrid: Ediciones San Pio X, 2001.
- Varela Martínez, Luis. *Biblia y espiritualidad en San Juan Bautista de La Salle*. Tejares-Salamanca: Instituto Pontificio San Pio X, 1966.

- . *Sacred Scripture in the Spirituality of Saint John Baptist de La Salle*. Translated by Francis Vesel. Landover, MD: Lasallian Publications, 2000.
- Voltaire [François-Marie Arouet]. 'Letter XXXIV'. In *Œuvres complètes de Voltaire*. Basle: Jean-Jaques Tournaisen, 1789.
- Watson, Francis. 'Philosophy'. In *A Dictionary of Biblical Interpretation*, edited by R.J. Coggins and J.L. Houlden, 546-549. London: SCM Press, 1990.
- Wright, Gregory, ed. *John Baptist de La Salle: The Rules of Christian Decorum and Civility*. Romeoville, IL: Lasallian Publications, 1990.