

DUTIES OF A CHRISTIAN 1: ITS READERS.

3. THE PARENTS

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(Cf. 1. The Brothers: 28-8-A-125; 2. The students: 29-6-A-129)

Introduction:

We had better clarify from the beginning what was meant in "Duties 1" by "chrétiens", "fidèles", "pères et mères".

Often "chrétiens" includes "fidèles" and "pères et mères". "Pères et mères" is counted as a singular concept when dealing with

- Christian duties of the family.
- Parents' duties to their children (4th commandment).
- Discovering vocation by parents and children (sacrament of ordination)

So whenever "Duties 1" refers to "Christians" and "Faithful" we shall understand it to mean PARENTS.

Parents of the students according to De La Salle.

De La Salle was fully convinced of the role of parents in the education of their children. He recognised that one of their most important duties was the Christian Education of their family. However, he realised that "the majority of them do not know the catechism well enough, and that some are busy with their temporal affairs and the care of their families; others are constantly wondering how to earn enough to feed their children and themselves, so that they cannot teach them their duties as Christians." (Med 193, 2)

Poverty and ignorance were two evils to be remedied; that is why he founded the Christian Schools. The school in the opinion of De La Salle was always a help not a substitute for the family, which was the first and vital school of good behaviour. There was a need therefore to give the family the means to make christians of their children. De La Salle who conceived the small catechism for children and the larger one for the Brothers, did not forget one for the parents and for Christians in general.

Several works produced by him are proof of his reasoning, for example, "Instructions and prayers for Holy Mass", "Method of learning how to make a good confession", "Rules of good manners", in the preface of which he writes: "Parents have to bear these rules in mind in teaching their children".

This is so true that according to Charles Demia "the schools were created as much for the parents as for the children" (Rules for the schools of the town of Lyons)

Books for families at that time.

De La Salle was a man of his time and lived with his eyes open to what was going on then: he knew what parish priests were telling parents about the Christian education of their children, and he knew all about the books directed to Christian families. Here are some of the titles recommended by Bishops and teachers: "Instructions for young people" by Gobinet, "Summary of the lives of the Saints" by Bonnefons, "Christian teaching", excellent for doctrine and examples, "The great guide for sinners" by Grenade, "Lives of the Saints" by Ribadeneira, and the catechisms of Trent, Belarmino and Charles Demia, César Bus etc.

In his methodology he improved many aspects of teaching, and encouraged his followers to do the same. Why should we not suppose therefore that he also wanted to help christian families in his "Duties 1"?

Parents in "Duties of a Christian 1"

The internal criticism of "Duties 1" confirms the absence of Brothers and students in the volume, but from the very first page there is frequent direct or indirect mention of parents-faithful. Basing myself on the text, I hope to show that the intended readers of "Duties 1" were the parents-faithful, in other words adults, who it was hoped would become true Christians.

Parents, their instruction in the mysteries of the faith.

Most of the passages of "Duties 1" which refer to parents-faithful, are explicit in their intention of teaching them about the themes being dealt with.

In the short introduction to "sin", we read: "This is what makes us believe that this is the place to study the subject and instruct the faithful in it" (Duties 1, p.162)

Further on, when talking about capital sins, it says: "As these sins are rather frequent, it is only proper that the faithful should be instructed about them, in order to avoid them" (p.168) There is an effort also to instruct the faithful in virtue: "The faithful should know what these practices called virtues consist of, so that they can begin to practise them" (Duties 1, p 180..) There is also an extensive treatise on the Sacrament of Penance, in which he makes a direct approach to the faithful: "The faithful must be taught so that they will not fall into sin" (Duties 1, p 309)

In explaining the sacrament of matrimony, the book insists several times on the need to teach the faithful about the attitude of those about to receive the sacrament (p.386), the

meaning of the ceremonies (p. 397), etc... It is surely significant that twenty eight pages are devoted to the explanation of this sacrament: eleven derimental impediments!!

I could go on giving further examples; but I shall end with this one from the treatise *De Oratione*: "This is why the faithful should know and understand all the things they can ask God for".

Parents, educators of the faith of their children

Frequently "Duties 1" reminds parents of their inescapable duty to educate their children in the mysteries of the Faith. We have only space to choose a few passages about this duty.

In the first pages, when dealing with the Apostles' creed, we read: "Parents have the duty to teach their children" (p 15). Similar remarks do not appear in Duties 11. The quotation taken from page 121 is interesting from two points of view: "If there is any time left after parish services mothers and fathers are advised to read some good book- (why not "Duties 1"?) to their children". On this matter "Duties 11" simply talks of the duties of children to their parents, on the other hand, "Duties 1" insists forceably on the duties of parents to their children.

Those who are getting married have to consider beforehand with great seriousness the duties they are going to assume with regard to their children: "Concerning the third duty of a married couple, which consists in educating their children in the fear of God..." a Christian education will help them in this.

An engaged couple must examine whether "they have the qualities to bring up a family in a Christian manner and to ensure that those under their jurisdiction do their duty" (Duties 1, p 387). Finally the promises of matrimony oblige parents to "educate their children in the fear of God, if he grants them children". (Duties 1, p 486)

The treatise on the Sacrament of Holy Orders gives "Duties 1" the chance to remind parents of their obligations, concerning their children as a very important matter. Finding out one's vocation through child-parent discussion is an interesting factor: "Parents are recommended to be very careful before allowing their children to receive the tonsure, when it is not fitting. They should examine whether they have the required aptitudes necessary to enter the ecclesiastical state..They should ensure that their son is instructed well in advance, about the duties of this state" (Duties 1, p 376)

From the several occasions when "Duties 1" mentions parents' duties with regard to prayer, I shall single out the following: "It is fitting that the heads of families gather all their children and servants together every day to say their prayers morning and evening" ("Duties 1").

Parents and sins of omission.

Christians are guilty of many sins of omission, either by failing in their personal duties or with regard to others, their state in life or their profession.

Parents can fail by omission: "if they do not see to it that their children or servants go to Holy Mass or attend catechism lessons" ("Duties 1") There is no reference to this in "Duties 11". Parents also fail in their duty "when they do not ensure that their children or servants do all that they are required to do to fulfil adequately their obligations and thus be faithful to God" ("Duties 1", p 179)

The middle class and "Duties of a Christian 1"

Judging by certain direct references, we can affirm that the middle class, sometimes then called the Bourgeoisie, were among the possible readers of "Duties 1"

– I am choosing the following passages:

Artisans (p.120,122, 158), lawyers (142), shopkeepers and tradesmen (122, 143), innkeepers (123), domestics (128, 137, 140, 152, 338), farmers (140), judges (299), magistrates (123, 124, 129), teachers (124, 128, 137), merchants (299, 300), doctors (310), solicitors (142), workmen (122, 140, 133), farm workers (120, 122), state prosecutors (142, 310), landlords (124), servants (120, 122, 124, 128), Those who travel (122), those who libel (146), plays (134).

– The above passages depict the kind of urban setting which De La Salle knew.

I hope that I have proved conclusively that the "Duties of a Christian, vol 1, was directed explicitly to the **Christian adult** and especially to **parents**.

Conclusions.

1. De La Salle joins family and school in the common enterprise of forming good citizens and giving a Christian Education. The "Conduct of Schools" shows the Brothers how to join with parents in the education of their children, the "Duties of a Christian 1" shows parents their duties towards their children".

2. De La Salle, in his writings, goes beyond the school premises and reaches the Christian and the family in general.

3. Nowadays we are tending to link parents more and more with our educational work, so I end this article with the exhortation of Brother John Johnston in his pastoral letter of 1988: "Brothers, let us give ourselves fully and generously and with determination to the building of strong lasallian educational communities and to the formation, after the example of St. De La Salle, (I add the animation) of groups of Lasallian teachers, Parents, former students and young people"