

An analysis of the article "On Humility"
in the Collection of Short Treatises for the
Use of the Brothers of the Christian Schools.
(2/2)

Brother Joseph Le Bars

The third paragraph follows Roland's text closely, at least at the beginning. Pronouns are changed as the text now refers to Brothers and not to Sisters. The addition of "the weakest" reflects a point the Founder never tired of repeating: by ourselves we can do nothing. Is he also referring to the idea in the sentence he omitted from the previous paragraph ("very convincing reasons to make us humble ourselves")?

The replacement of "all your Sisters" by "there is no one" instead of by "all your Brothers" makes the reference more general. This generalisation occurs again later in "a wicked person" - a somewhat surprising expression.

The expression "make you think the opposite" is another way of saying "can make you think otherwise of yourself", but the word "opposite" is more striking and precise than "otherwise".

In French, "when you hear of a wicked person", is linked only loosely, from a syntactical point of view, with the beginning of the paragraph. In French an inserted "de" would have made the connection clearer. Perhaps De La Salle included this final sentence to stress the general nature of his reference. We find a similar use in RB 207.2.532 where we read: "There is no one, however wicked he may be, of whom we cannot say some good".

Paragraph 4 is a copy except for the change in order of the first sentences. Roland's expression "when you are employed to do something" is perhaps surprising. In De La Salle's writings "employment" and "that at which I shall be employed" ensure that no one is idle. Was this true in Roland's case? One can perhaps guess why the Founder omitted this sentence. Or should we understand it as meaning: "when you are doing something"? This is possible. The rest of the paragraph is a copy apart from the replacement of "any useful purpose" by "of no use". Both expressions mean the same thing in the present context.

There follow two paragraphs which do not correspond to anything in Roland's article on humility. On the other hand, we find borrowings from the article "On abnegation" which is found at the end of the collection of "Counsels", and from the "Maxims". The quotation from the latter occurs in the first of these two paragraphs. These passages are indicated in the texts in parallel columns by means of italics.

De La Salle's two paragraphs include all the important words as well as the main ideas, but the latter are expressed in terms that are more economical than those used by Roland. Words and expressions such as "beware", "nothing more than a punishment" "act", "that attracts attention" are not used in the 1711 edition of the Collection.

There follows a passage inspired for the most part by Roland. The addition of "on the contrary" to the first sentence is justified by the previous paragraph which does not correspond to anything in Roland's article "On humility". The change in the order of "rejection" and "scorn" and the use of the singular in the place of "things that are justified" make no substantial difference in the meaning. Why were these changes made? The three suspension points and the following sentence which are not found in De La Salle's text would seem to indicate that this passage is being quoted by Roland.

"Take always what is worse when you have a choice". De La Salle seems to be advocating here a more general attitude than the more specific expressions used by Roland: "the most humble employment", "the oldest clothing in the house". Roland's reference to "conversation" leads the Founder to speak of recreations. He had included a whole chapter on them in his 1705 Rule which included also the list "Of things Brothers should speak about in recreation" (CL 25, pp. 32-33). This same list, with a few minor variations, was included in the 1711 edition of the Collection: "Collection of things about which the Brothers will converse during recreations" (R 10.1 ff). The Founder attached much importance to recreation. There is a long chapter in Blain on the subject (CL 8, chap. 15, pp. 136 f) in response to the attempt of certain Brothers to make changes in the Rule on this matter in the 1717 Chapter. While it contains the ideas of the Founder it does not reflect his language.

In chapter 13, art.4 of the 1705 Rule we read: "They will always speak to their Brothers in a respectful manner without affectation or compliments, but with Chris-

tian and religious simplicity without giving rise to familiarity". In chapter 6, art.12 we find: "No Brother will ever contradict or correct what the others say".

Was this edition of the Rule written before the Collection?

There follows a short paragraph based on Roland. It is interesting to see the inclusion of a reference to the "advertisement of defects", which the Founder considered as one of the four external supports of the Society of the Brothers of the Christian Schools, together with, among others, "the manner of spending recreation well", to which he had referred to indirectly in the previous paragraph.

De La Salle uses vocabulary here that is more concrete. Instead of putting "unless you are obliged to through obedience", he says "unless your Superior orders you to tell the truth".

The next paragraph in De La Salle's text has no corresponding passage in Roland's text.

However, as was the case in the two preceding paragraphs, it does correspond to quite a long passage in Roland's article "On abnegation" already quoted.

We find that, apart from using identical words and expressions, De La Salle expresses the same ideas, but in a different way and in terms that are more economical.

It is a fine subject for meditation, as is indeed the text as a whole. It is a text that deserves to be read and re-read, for it speaks "Of the principal virtues the Brothers must practise" (R 15).

Roland's text ends with a paragraph which is not even hinted at in De La Salle's text. What is most sur-

prising about this is that the reference to Jesus Christ (here and earlier) does not lead De La Salle to make some comment.

As can be seen, De La Salle borrowed quite extensively when writing his article, and the changes he made were minimal.

It is curious to note that De La Salle used material from another article (Of abnegation) when he was writing about humility. This would seem to indicate that the Founder had a copy of Roland's work and was quite familiar with it.

It is also quite astonishing that while Roland refers twice to Jesus Christ in his article: "Ask Jesus Christ often to give you a share of his humility" and "follow Jesus Christ closely", De La Salle does not mention him at all in this article. And yet the articles included in the Collection under the heading: "Means that it is proper for the Brothers of the Christian Schools to take in order to do their actions well", include more than thirty references to Jesus Christ.

Perhaps we should consider the possibility that there was a third text, based on Roland's and modified, on which the Founder, in his turn, based his own text. This question has been asked before with reference to the Founder's work. The discovery of one of these intermediary works, if in fact they exist, would be most valuable.

Perhaps it would be a good idea to change the introductory paragraph of the present article to read as follows: "Setting out the two texts in parallel columns makes it easy to see immediately how John Baptist de La Salle made use of Roland's text, if indeed it is this text and not a "modified copy" that he used. ■