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# Ambassadors of Jesus Christ

Prayer Meditations  
for  
Christian Educators

ROME 1995

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Brothers of the Christian Schools  
Rome 1995

*Tipografia S.G.S. - Via Umbertide, 11 - 00181 Roma  
Finito di stampare: Aprile 1995*

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## Introduction

In the *Collection*<sup>1</sup> and also in the *Explanation of the Method of Interior Prayer*,<sup>2</sup> John Baptist de La Salle proposes a method for personal and interior prayer. The method, however, should not be mistaken with the prayer itself. Neither should one mistake personal and interior prayer for the whole of one's relationship with God. De La Salle's method was proposed as a way of entering into conversation with God, the kind of conversation which is capable of illuminating and transforming the whole of one's life. It was for this end that De La Salle developed three series of *Meditations*<sup>3</sup> to help his teacher disciples enter more easily into the daily practice of this conversation.

For De La Salle, there is ultimately no distinction to be made between the quest for closer intimacy with God in prayer, on the one hand, and the duties of one's employment as a Christian educator, on the other. The two are clearly and indissolubly linked in the ministry of Christian education. *Since you are entrusted with the instruction of others, you should endeavor to become competent in the art of speaking to God, about God, and for God; but rest assured that you will never be able to speak to your students in such a way as to win them to God, until you yourself have learned to speak to God and about God.*<sup>4</sup>

The kind of personal and interior prayer recommended by De La Salle really requires that one be immersed in the scriptures. *This process involves the kind of dynamic that happens in making friends with anyone. You have to spend time together, talk together, listen to each other, and get to know each other.*<sup>5</sup> And the scriptures present us with a privileged opportunity to spend this kind of time with God.

Over and over again in the *Meditations for Sundays* and *Meditations for Feasts*, De La Salle begins with explicit references to gospel texts. The *Meditations for the Time of Retreat* reflect a profound assimilation of the Mystery of God's Love at Work in the World as it can be discovered in the writings of St. Paul. *It is God that we strive to know by spiritual reading and by interior prayer so that we might be better able to make Him known and to make Him loved by all those to whom we have made Him known.*<sup>6</sup>

As De La Salle became aware, by God's grace, of the human and spiritual needs of the artisans and the poor, he devoted himself to forming educators totally dedicated to teaching and to Christian education. God's Spirit breathes life into the world. The Holy Spirit, in every generation, continues to confide to teachers a special role in the Christian and

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<sup>1</sup> John Baptist de La Salle, *Collection of Various Short Treatises*, translated by William J. Battersby and edited by Daniel Burke (Landover, MD: Lasallian Publications, 1993).

<sup>2</sup> John Baptist de La Salle, *The Explanation of the Method of Interior Prayer*, translated and edited by Donald Mouton (Landover, MD: Lasallian Publications, 1995).

<sup>3</sup> John Baptist de La Salle, *Meditations for Sundays, Feasts, and Retreat*, translated by Richard Arnandez and Augustine Loes (Landover, MD: Lasallian Publications, 1994).

<sup>4</sup> De La Salle, *Meditations*, N° 64.2.

<sup>5</sup> Parker J. Palmer, *To Know as We Are Known: Education as a Spiritual Journey* (San Francisco: Harper Collins Publishers, 1983, 1993), p. 101.

<sup>6</sup> De La Salle, *Meditations*, N° 41.3.

human formation of the young and, through them, continues to enable students to welcome Jesus into the deepest aspirations of the human heart as Good News.

Personal and interior prayer is not the privatized activity of an isolated Christian. Prayer is *a time when we can still ourselves enough to begin to feel our natural connectedness to each other and the world.*<sup>7</sup> The acquisition of the habit of personal and interior prayer will be out of the question for anyone who does not try to cultivate compassion for others.<sup>8</sup> In prayer, the Spirit unites the one who prays with the whole of the Church gathered around Jesus in need and prayer. It is, therefore, really prayer with the Church; furthermore, it is, for De La Salle, prayer normally made in a Church.<sup>9</sup>

### *Renewal of Lasallian Prayer*

The Brothers of the Christian Schools have designated 1995 as a year devoted especially to the renewal of personal and interior prayer.<sup>10</sup> This small book, therefore, is intended for those Christian educators interested in making a journey of personal reflection and prayerful contemplation with the Christian scriptures according to the tradition of John Baptist de La Salle. Such an undertaking presumes a certain willingness to concern oneself with what is happening in the world and not distance oneself from the social context in which one is situated. The method proposed requires about thirty minutes a day.

It will also require that you put aside your busyness and external clutter for a little while and that you try to free yourself from some of your inward noise and internal static. It requires some solitude, some silence. For, after all, personal and interior prayer is *a way of entering into silence so deeply that we can hear the whole world's speech, a way of entering into solitude so deeply that we can feel the whole world's connections. In prayer we touch that transcendent Spirit from whom all things arise and to whom all things return, who makes all things kindred as they go.*<sup>11</sup>

### *First Movement: In the Presence of the Living God*

Each of the thirty-five succeeding **Prayer Meditations** begins by inviting you to enter into a more conscious awareness of the presence of God. We walk in God's world. The Trinity is immanently present. Our God is neither distant nor indifferent. Rather, God, present in the world, desires that all of us come to *the knowledge of God Himself and of all that He has willed to reveal to us through Jesus Christ, through His apostles, and through*

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<sup>7</sup> Palmer, p. 80.

<sup>8</sup> Thomas Merton, *New Seeds of Contemplation* (New York: New Directions Books, 1972), p. 77.

<sup>9</sup> Much of this introductory section has been taken and adapted from Jean-Louis Schneider, *Ministre de l'Éducation Chrétienne: Un chemin spirituel avec Jean-Baptiste de La Salle* (Rome: Centro Internazionale Lasalliano, 1994), pp. 1-2.

<sup>10</sup> Brothers of the Christian Schools, *Circular 435: 42nd General Chapter* (Rome: Brothers of the Christian Schools, 1993), p. 56.

<sup>11</sup> Palmer, p. 124.

*His Church.*<sup>12</sup> However, there are many other realities in each of our lives that compete for our attention and distract us from awareness of this presence.

Where is God most present to you? Is it in the quiet of your heart? Is it in your relationships? Is it in ministry? Perhaps God is particularly present to you in the beauty of nature or under the rags of the poor who wander in the streets. For some, it is the presence of God in the Eucharist which attracts. Take the time to recall God's presence, and then spend some minutes in its conscious awareness. Spend as much quiet time, as possible, in this way.

Who am I to be in God's presence? Who is this in whose presence I find myself? *Implore Him: Lord, do not pass me by, do not leave until I am aware that you have come. Lord, keep knocking at my door, knock again and again until I open to you. This is the attitude of an open person. One's whole being is a "yes" to God in silence.*<sup>13</sup>

God wills a union of our mind and heart with that of Jesus who came to do the Father's will. *I have come that they may have life, and have it abundantly.*<sup>14</sup> The wonderful news is that God invites me to share, as His son [or daughter], in His own care for my brothers [and sisters].<sup>15</sup>

Ask God present to you to help you to be more aware of this will, to be more open to it, to be one in mind and heart with what God wants most to do in the world through you. *Doing your will, O God, is delightful!*<sup>16</sup>

And so, in the **first movement** of the method of personal and interior prayer proposed here, you are invited to spend some time considering the divine will. Remember that *God's will is certainly found in anything that is required of us in order that we may be united with one another in love.*<sup>17</sup> Ask God to help you to understand where God is leading you through and in the midst of the concrete experiences of your everyday ministry.

### *Second Movement: Living the Mystery of Christ*

The **second movement** of our method of personal and interior prayer is the invitation to contemplate the Mystery of God's Love at Work in the World, and particularly in your own life. This will normally be the main body of your time in prayer, and the Jesus of the gospels will be at the heart of this movement.

De La Salle suggests that we contemplate Jesus Christ in the gospels so that, by the example of His life and teachings, we might be gradually transformed to be more like Him.

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<sup>12</sup> De La Salle, *Meditations*, N° 193.1; cf. 1 Tim 2:4.

<sup>13</sup> Quoted from Ladislaus Boros, *On Christian Prayer*, in Alvaro Rodríguez, *Método de Oración para conversar con Dios, según San Juan Bautista de La Salle* (Guatemala, 1982), p. 11.

<sup>14</sup> Jn 10:10.

<sup>15</sup> Merton, p. 18.

<sup>16</sup> Ps 40:8.

<sup>17</sup> Merton, p. 76.



How are you participating in the Mystery of the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus in your daily efforts to reach and touch the lives of the people with whom you minister? This is, above all, really a matter of identity and re-birth in Christ. *And the life I live now is not my own; Christ is living in me. Of course, I still live my human life, but it is a life of faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me.*<sup>18</sup>

Jesus gives us an example of how human beings can live transcendentally by a love of self-emptying sacrifice on behalf of others. He lives for others. His focus is to bring fullness especially to the poor, the sick, the outcasts of society, the oppressed and the discriminated against, the criminals and the sinners. This is the way we should love. This is how we see the glory of God shining through us. God looks like Jesus! We will be like God if we live like Jesus!<sup>19</sup>

Do not rush this stage. Spend time with the suggested passages. Read them over a few times. Pay special attention to the words or phrases that catch your attention. Listen to what is being said and to the one who is saying it. Be quiet. Go slowly. Look at your life. See how your life compares with the life of Jesus. Allow God to speak to your heart. Enter into the Mystery of God's merciful goodness. Contemplate this God of Love at Work in Your Own Life. Be attentive to all that stirs within you.

Several questions will be provided to assist you in this reflection. However, the questions and inspirations stirring within you are, by far, more important to this conversation with the living God.

### *Third Movement: Empowered by the Spirit*

Finally, we arrive at the **third movement**, or the conclusion, of the prayer period. This will normally take just a few minutes. Quickly remember what has happened during the prayer period. What feelings animated you? What were your principal reflections?

As you come to the end of your prayer time, you are asked to make a resolution to be more open to the work of the Spirit who is in you and trying to work through you for others. Embrace the graced texture of your own life story. Reflect on where God's Spirit seems to be breaking into your life and drawing you to sacrifice yourself that others might have a fuller life. What is it that is helping you to live each day with authenticity and holiness? *Follow the Spirit's lead.*<sup>20</sup> Accept the new life that God is trying to give you today.

Take the time to express the love and admiration you have for God. Thank the Father, Jesus, and the Spirit for the graces received during the prayer period, as well as for the sentiments and feelings that have been experienced. Offer yourself again to God with Christ, with all the activities and efforts that the day will bring.<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> Gal 2:20.

<sup>19</sup> George A. Maloney, *Entering Into the Heart of Jesus: Meditations on the Indwelling Trinity in St. John's Gospel* (New York: Alba House, 1988), p. 19.

<sup>20</sup> Gal 5:25.

<sup>21</sup> A number of ideas, like this one, which are found at different points throughout this introduction have been taken from the booklet by Alvaro Rodriguez, already cited above.

*Always with the Needs of Real People in Mind*

Interspersed among the Prayer Meditations will be found a series of short readings. Each reflects a genuine concern for the human and spiritual needs of the people of today's world. Each is an invitation to examine, in openness to the Spirit who breathes life into the world, the social context in which one is situated. Together with the Prayer Meditations, it is hoped that these readings will assist you to converse with God about your ministry as a Christian educator.

Look around our world with the eyes of faith. Listen in hope to the cries of all of those who wait. Respond in love and zeal, humbled by this opportunity which is ours to share in the renewal and re-creation of the face of the earth *as the ambassadors and ministers of Jesus Christ*.<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> De La Salle, *Meditations*, N° 195.2; cf. 2 Cor 5:20.

## A Good Shepherd

*Consider Jesus Christ as the Good Shepherd of the gospel seeking the lost sheep, placing it upon His shoulders, and bringing it back to the fold. Since you are taking His place, look upon yourself as obliged to do the same thing (Meditation, N° 196.1).*

### First Movement

1. Take a few minutes to quiet yourself and to call to mind that God is present in the poverty and need of those with whom you work.

*Recognize Jesus beneath the raggedness and poverty of those you have to teach. Adore Him in their person (Meditation, N° 96.3).*

2. Ask that God might help you to understand better what God's will is for you.

*I have come not to do my own will, but the will of the one who sent me, which is that I should lose nothing of all that has been given me (Jn 6:38-39).*

### Second Movement

3. Contemplate the Mystery of God's Love at Work in the World

Read the following scripture passages a few times slowly. What words or phrases especially catch your attention? Listen to what is being said; watch what happens; try to become part of the Mystery; lovingly contemplate Jesus Christ, the Good Shepherd of the gospel, and your relationship with Him.

♦ *I came that they may have life, and have it abundantly. I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep. The one who is a hireling and not a shepherd, whose own the sheep are not, sees the wolf coming and leaves the sheep and flees; and the wolf snatches them and scatters them. He flees because he is a hireling and cares nothing for the sheep. I am the good shepherd; I know my own and mine know me, as the Father knows me and I know the Father; and I lay down my life for the sheep (Jn 10:10-15).*

♦ *What do you think? If a man has a hundred sheep, and one of them has gone astray, does he not leave the ninety-nine on the mountains and go in search of the one that went astray? And if he finds it, truly, I say to you, he rejoices over it more than over the ninety-nine that never went astray. So it is not the will of my heavenly Father that one of these little ones should perish (Mt 18:12-14).*

♦ *Jesus unfolded the scroll and read: The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because He has anointed me to preach the good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives and recovering of sight to the blind, and to set at liberty those who are oppressed, to proclaim the acceptable year of the Lord (Lk 4:17-19).*

## The Vine & the Branches

*I am the vine; you are the branches (Jn 15:5).*

### First Movement

1. Remembering that the Spirit of God dwells within you, take a few minutes to quiet yourself and call to mind this presence of God.

*The Spirit of God dwells in you (Rm 8:9).*

2. Ask that God might bring your will and what you want into better harmony with the will of God and what God wants for you.

*I delight to do your will, O God; your law is within my heart (Ps 40:8).*

### Second Movement

3. Contemplate the Mystery of God's Love at Work in the World

Read the following passage slowly. What words or phrases especially catch your attention? Listen to what is being said; try to become part of the Mystery; lovingly contemplate Jesus Christ as the vine, and your relationship with Christ.

♦ *All your care for those entrusted to you would be useless if Jesus Christ did not give the power, the quality, and the energy that is needed to render your care useful. "As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself," says our Lord, "unless it remains attached to the vine, so neither can you bear fruit, if you do not remain in me. This will be the glory of my Father, that you bear much fruit and become my disciples."*

*What Jesus Christ says to His apostles He also says to you, that you may understand that all the good you are able to do in your work for those entrusted to you will be true and effective only insofar as Jesus Christ gives it His blessing and as you remain united with Him. It is the same for you as it is for a branch. It can bear fruit only if it remains attached to the vine and draws its sap and strength from the vine. This is the source of all the goodness of the fruit.*

*Jesus Christ wants you to understand from this comparison that the more your work is energized by Him, the more it will produce good in your disciples. This is why you must ask Him earnestly that all your ministry be energized by His Spirit and draw all its power from Him. Just as He is the one who gives light to everyone coming into the world, He also gives light to the spirit of your disciples and leads them to love and to practice the good that you teach them (Meditation, N° 195.3).*

4. Reflect on the Mystery of God's Love at Work in Your Own Life

For whom are you a shepherd? Who are those that God has entrusted to you? Where is God inviting you to challenge the darkness of ignorance? Where is God sending you to set free those imprisoned by self-doubt...to be a compassionate presence leading back those who are alienated and spiritually abandoned...the lost...those cut off from the Truth in a world where, more and more, religion is perceived as something foreign or superfluous?

God so loved the world that Jesus was sent to bring us home. Are you open to the possibility that the same God so loves the poor...the abandoned...those without good news in their lives that you are being invited to seek them out and help bring them home?

**Third Movement**

5. Resolve to Be More Open to the Spirit Who Works in and through You Today

If you chose to allow this scripture to come alive in you now, what would you have to change in your life? What are the obstacles to this change?

Where is the Spirit drawing you to sacrifice yourself today that others may have life?

4. Reflect on the Mystery of God's Love at Work in Your Own Life  
Who or what is bringing life and light to your life at the present time? Where are you being re-energized? From where do you draw your strength?  
What do you do to remain more closely united with Christ?

### **Third Movement**

5. Resolve to Be More Open to the Work of the Spirit in and through You Today  
Where has God been wanting to meet you? Where have you been being called to conversion and change? What is hindering that transformation?  
How has God been trying to give you new life, so that through you others might have a fuller life?

## The Sower & the Seed

*You have been destined by God to cultivate these young plants (Meditation, N° 193.3).*

### First Movement

1. Take a few minutes to recollect yourself and call to mind the presence of God in all of the natural beauty of creation which surrounds you.

*The glory of Yahweh fills the whole earth (Num 14:21).*

2. Ask that God might help you to be one with the will of God for His creation.

*Many are the plans in one's mind, but it is the purpose of Yahweh that will be established (Pr 19:21).*

### Second Movement

3. Contemplate the Mystery of God's Love at Work in the World

Read the following scripture passage slowly. What words or phrases especially catch your attention? Listen to what is being said; watch what happens; try to become part of the Mystery; lovingly contemplate Jesus Christ as He sows new seeds of life in the world and in your own life.

♦ *One day a farmer went out sowing. Part of what was sown landed on the footpath, where birds came and ate it up. Part of it fell on rocky ground, where it had little soil. It sprouted at once since the soil had no depth; but when the sun rose and scorched it, it began to wither for lack of roots. Again, part of the seed fell among thorns, which grew up and choked it. Part of it finally landed on good soil and yielded grain a 100 or 60 or 30 fold. Let everyone heed what is heard!*

*Mark well then the parable of the sower. The seed along the path is the one who hears the message about God's reign without understanding it. The evil one approaches and steals away that which was sown in that one's mind. The seed that fell on patches of rock is the one who hears the message and, at first, receives it with joy. But that one has no roots; so it lasts for only a time. When some setback or persecution concerning the message occurs, that one soon falters. What was sown among the briars is that which is heard, but then worldly anxiety or the lure of money choke it off. Such a one produces no yield. But what was sown on good soil is that one who hears the message and takes it in. This is the one who bears a yield of 100 or 60 or 30 fold (Mt 13:3-9, 18-23).*

4. Reflect on the Mystery of God's Love at Work in Your Own Life

Allow the following passages to shed some light on difficulties you might be experiencing with some of those with whom you are working.

♦ *The young people sent to you either have no instruction or have learned things badly. If perchance some have been taught properly, bad companions and bad habits have prevented them from profiting thereby. God sends them to you, therefore, that you may instill in them the Christian spirit, and bring them up in accordance with the teaching of the gospel” (Meditation, N° 37.2).*

♦ *Consider that it is only too common for the children of the working class and the poor to be allowed to live on their own, roaming all over..The results of this condition are regrettable. These unfortunate children..., through association with bad companions, learn to commit many faults which, having been contracted over a long period of time, are difficult to stop (Meditation, N° 194.1).*

♦ *You have two kinds of children to instruct: those who are idlers and inclined to misbehavior and those who are good or who, at least, have a tendency to good. Pray continually for both...and more especially for those who are prone to misbehaving (Meditation, N° 186.3).*

Do these passages relate to the ministry you are doing?

Are there perhaps some students for whom you would like to spend some moments now in prayer?

What will help you to be better able to cultivate *these young plants* that God has entrusted to your care?

### **Third Movement**

#### **5. Resolve to Be More Open to the Work of the Spirit in and through You Today**

If you chose to allow this scripture to come alive in you now, what would you have to change in your life? What are the obstacles to this change?

Where is the Spirit drawing you to sacrifice yourself today that others may have life?



## A Healer

*You who are teachers have the responsibility to use every possible means to bring those under your guidance into that liberty of the children of God which Jesus Christ obtained by dying for us (Meditation, N° 203.2).*

### First Movement

1. Take a few minutes to recollect yourself and call to mind God's presence in the people whom you instruct.

*The faith which animates you should lead you to respect Jesus Christ in their persons (Meditation, N° 80.3).*

2. Ask God to help you to truly want in life what God wants.

*He is able, by the power at work within us, to do far more than we could ever ask or think (Eph 3:20).*

### Second Movement

3. Contemplate the Mystery of God's Love at Work in the World

Read the following scripture passages slowly. What words or phrases especially catch your attention? Listen to what is being said; watch what happens; try to become part of the Mystery; lovingly contemplate Jesus Christ, Healer, and your relationship with Christ.

♦ *Jesus went on from there and passed along the Sea of Galilee. And He went up on the mountain, and sat down there. And great crowds came to Him, bringing with them the crippled, the maimed, the blind, the dumb, and many others, and they put them at His feet, and He healed them, so that the throng wondered, when they saw the dumb speaking, the maimed whole, the crippled walking, and the blind seeing; and they glorified the God of Israel (Mt 15:29-31).*

♦ *And they arrived at the country of the Gerasenes, which is opposite Galilee. And as He stepped out on land, there met Him a man from the city who had demons; for a long time he had worn no clothes, and he lived not in a house but among the tombs. When he saw Jesus, he cried out and fell down before Him, and said with a loud voice, "What have you to do with me, Jesus, Son of the Most High God? I beseech you, do not torment me." For He had commanded the unclean spirit to come out of the man...Jesus then asked him, "What is your name?" And he said, "Legion," for many demons had entered him (Lk 8:26-30).*

4. Reflect on the Mystery of God's Love at Work in Your Own Life

Who are the people coming to you to be formed? to be re-formed? Who are those who come to you looking for help? What is their need?

What hungers and thirsts would need to be satisfied to heal the brokenness in the society in which you live?

In what way are you yourself blind and crippled, hindered from being all that God wants you to be in Christ, and so also in need of healing?

Do you believe that it is a miracle to help young people grow in the awareness that they are both loved by God and good? Could it be that it is a miracle to help a person grow in self-knowledge, self-discipline, and self-worth?

Where in our world is Jesus most needed as healer? as savior? as peace-maker? as life-giver?

### **Third Movement**

5. Resolve to Be More Open to the Work of the Spirit in and through You Today

If you chose to allow this scripture to come alive in you now, what would you have to change in your life? What are the obstacles to this change?

Where is the Spirit drawing you to sacrifice yourself today that others may have life?

## Ambassadors & Ministers

*So we are ambassadors and ministers for Christ, God making an appeal through us (2 Cor 5:20).*

### First Movement

1. Take a few minutes to recollect yourself and recall that God is always present wherever we are.

*There is already among you one whom you do not know (Jn 1:26).*

2. Ask God to help you better understand and want the same things in life that God wants.

*As you did send me into the world, so I have sent them into the world...that they may all be one; even as you are in me, and I am in you, that they also may be in us, so that the world may believe that you sent me (Jn 17:18-21).*

### Second Movement

3. Contemplate the Mystery of God's Love at Work in the World

Read the following passage. What words or phrases especially catch your attention? Listen to what is being said; try to enter into the Mystery: lovingly contemplate Jesus Christ and the relationship of trust that Christ has established with you.

♦ *Since you are ambassadors and ministers of Jesus Christ in the work that you do, you must act as representing Jesus Christ Himself. He wants your disciples to see Him in you and receive your teaching as if He were teaching them. They must be convinced that the truth of Jesus Christ comes from your mouth, that it is only in His name that you teach, that He has given you authority over them.*

*They are a letter which Christ dictates to you, which you write each day in their hearts, not with ink, but by the Spirit of the living God. For the Spirit acts in you and by you through the power of Jesus Christ. He helps you overcome all the obstacles to their salvation, enlightening them in the person of Jesus Christ and helping them avoid all that could be displeasing to Him.*

*In order to fulfill your responsibility with as much perfection and care as God requires of you, frequently give yourself to the Spirit of Our Lord to act only under His influence and not through any self-seeking. This Holy Spirit, then, will fill your students with Himself, and they will be able to possess fully the Christian spirit (Meditation, N° 195.2).*

4. Reflect on the Mystery of God's Love at Work in Your Own Life

Are you good news in the lives of the people with whom you work? Do you help them realize the tremendous dignity they have received because of Christ's life-saving and life-giving action?

Are you willing to allow God to become flesh in you and, through you, to touch the lives of your students?

What role does Jesus have in your life? How does His presence and meaning in your life affect your students?

Do you often, by reading the gospels, spend time with Jesus? Do you yourself understand His word and live according to His teachings?

Who are those far from the promises of the covenant to whom you have been sent with the message of God's unconditional love?

Are you confident that the God who has begun this good work in you (Phil 1:6) can bring it to completion? Is this what you hope for?

### **Third Movement**

5. Resolve to Be More Open to the Work of the Spirit in and through You Today

Take a few minutes and express your gratitude for the goodness of God in having chosen and sent you as His envoy among the young.

Ask God for the help you need to be effective and faithful in this ministry which has been entrusted to you.



# True Cooperators with Jesus Christ

by

William Mann, FSC<sup>23</sup>

Almost a year ago now as Hurricane Hugo was heading up the east coast of the United States, at the novitiate in Central New York tremendous winds preceded the storm; and I remember sitting in our glass-walled chapel on that particular Friday morning looking out at the white caps on the lake and at the leaves being torn from the surrounding trees. One of the novices was unsuccessfully attempting to secure our boat which was being pulled away from the shore, and so two of us went down and out into the water to help. All three of us working together were barely able to bring the boat to shore.

As I reflected later that morning on the experience, it suggested to me the image of so many parents today caught in the stormy conditions of our present social and cultural reality — parents finding their children being pulled away — and increasingly unable to bring their sons and daughters back to shore — parents being overwhelmed and children in danger of being lost — parents in need of someone willing to accompany them into the turbulence — someone willing to assist them in the Christian guidance and formation of their children.

What also struck me on that particular Friday morning in Skaneateles was that the boat wasn't doing anything wrong; the boat was only doing what a boat does in a storm; and I believe the same can be said about the young people with whom we work today. Their behavior is most often an understandable response to the tremendous social and cultural upheaval of these final days of the twentieth century.

Far too many of these young people find themselves tossed about in a society replete with a tremendous cultural diversity and an unfortunate moral ambiguity and confusion. Too many are consumed by their own materialism and pursuit of instant gratification. For many, a tremendous peer group stress, rampant substance abuse, chronic low self-esteem, and poverty of love and affection are a daily reality. Many find themselves without sufficient or appropriate role models. Unfortunately, the time and energy of so many parents, an increasing number of whom are single, is dominated by the task of meeting the material support of their families; and so once again, as in the time of our Founder, we see parents in urgent need of our support and assistance.

Within this context, I suggest we hear again today the exhortation of John Baptist de La Salle to understand ourselves as one with Jesus Christ, the Good Shepherd of the gospel, who goes in search of the lost sheep to bring it back to the fold.<sup>24</sup> In the real "poverty" and

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<sup>23</sup> This article is a slightly adapted version of a homily given on 13 August 1990 at the Second Regional Convocation of the USA/Toronto Region of the De La Salle Christian Brothers. It appeared in *Lasalliana*, 20-18-D-52.

<sup>24</sup> De La Salle, *Meditations*, N° 196.1.

“abandonment” of North American youth today, we glimpse the awesome responsibility of our mission as true cooperators with Jesus Christ for the salvation of children.<sup>25</sup>

For God so loved our world that, when we were in danger of being lost, God sent the beloved son Jesus Christ to bring us home.<sup>26</sup> De La Salle believed that God so loves these children that the Holy Spirit raised up our family in the Church and sent us out among them to help bring them home.<sup>27</sup> I believe that, in the deepest center of so many individual teachers today and in the heart of an aging and much humbled Institute of the Brothers of the Christian Schools, this same Holy Spirit continues to cry out and pray: Father, bring me home<sup>28</sup> — a Spirit which cries out in the abandonment and needs of young people and their parents today — cries out among the too often fatherless urban poor, whose champions we once were — cries out from among an upwardly mobile middle class youth, so often lacking affection and spiritually abandoned by parents who know of God but too often don’t know God — a Holy Spirit who cries out and prays to us from the depth of their need: Bring me home.<sup>29</sup>

I suggest to you that, with the prophet Jeremiah, the Institute of the Brothers of the Christian Schools has in recent history — as its numbers have dropped by more than half and the entrance of new candidates has, in numerous countries, slowed to a trickle — been invited with Jeremiah to the potter’s shed. “And so I [Jeremiah] went down to the potter’s house, and there he was working at the wheel. And whenever the vessel he was making came out wrong, as happens with the clay handled by potters, he would start afresh and work it into another vessel, as potters do.”<sup>30</sup>

Can we any longer afford to doubt that it really is God who is acting decisively in the circumstances in which we find ourselves to recall and reclaim the Institute and the whole of the Lasallian educational venture to a more honest and authentic living of our own unique identity in the Church? In a world where teaching religion is like teaching a foreign language, the catechetical evangelization and re-formation of poor and abandoned youth in the lived love of God is our principal ministry. And yet, how many of us really believe the words of the *Declaration* that this world in which we live has more need than ever, even at the center of humanity’s temporal pursuits, for a witness given by a people who know and love God as a living being?<sup>31</sup> How many of us are really willing to pay the price, re-establish the priority, and allow Jesus Christ to be so wholly alive in us that everything we do gives unambiguous and irrefutable witness on behalf of the gospel...that who we are becomes a clear invitation to the people with whom we work to leave behind the glamour of worldliness and enter more fully into the glory of God’s children? How many of us are willing to stand together and pray: Your kingdom come...your will be done here on earth...in my life and for these children?

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<sup>25</sup> De La Salle, *Meditations*, N° 196.1.

<sup>26</sup> Jn 3:16 and Rom 5:1-11.

<sup>27</sup> De La Salle, *Meditations*, N° 193.3.

<sup>28</sup> Gal 4:6.

<sup>29</sup> De La Salle, *Meditations*, N° 37.

<sup>30</sup> Jer 18:1-8.

<sup>31</sup> *The Brother of the Christian Schools in the World Today: A Declaration*, N° 11.4 (Rome: Thirty-ninth General Chapter, 1967).

Each time that we gather for the Eucharist, we baptized Christians, stand around the table of eucharistic remembrance and pray with Jesus: Father, I remain committed — not my will but yours.<sup>32</sup> By our vocation as Christian educators within the Lasallian tradition, we are those who stand with John Baptist de La Salle and consecrate our lives to procure God's glory — the salvation of children — as far as we are able, without counting the cost, and in the manner required of us because we have the confidence that the work we do is truly God's holy work.

This is the time, then, to re-commit ourselves to the Christian and human education of youth, confident that, not alone, we are surrounded<sup>33</sup> by our beloved Founder, by the young people for whom and with whom we toil, by the parents of our students and all of our Lasallian colleagues all around the world, and by the very real and human brothers and sisters with whom we work every day, all of us impelled by that mighty energy of Christ's which is so powerful a force within us.<sup>34</sup>

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<sup>32</sup> Mt 26:39.

<sup>33</sup> Heb 12:1.

<sup>34</sup> Col 1:29.



## Fathers & Mothers

*God honored you when...you were made the guides and guardians of these children (Meditation, N° 203.3).*

### First Movement

1. Take a few minutes to recollect yourself and recall that God is already present to you in those you daily meet and whose needs you serve.

*Truly, I say to you, as you did it to one of the least of my brethren, you did it to me (Mt 25:40).*

2. Ask God to draw your will into a more perfect union with God's will.

*It is not the will of my Father in heaven that one of these little ones should be lost (Mt 18:14).*

### Second Movement

3. Contemplate the Mystery of God's Love at Work in the World

Read the following passage. What words especially catch your attention? Listen to what is being said; try to enter into the Mystery; lovingly contemplate Jesus Christ and the relationship into which Christ is inviting you.

♦ *And He took a child, and put the child in the midst of them; and taking the child in His arms, Jesus said to them, "Whoever receives one such child in my name receives me; and whoever receives me, receives not me but Him who sent me" (Mk 9:36-37).*

4. Reflect on the Mystery of God's Love at Work in Your Own Life

Allow the following passages to illuminate the nature of your relationship with those who have been entrusted to you.

♦ *The gospels hold up to our admiration the great care which St. Joseph took of the child Jesus...You ought to have as great a care and affection for the children entrusted to you...as he had for the welfare of Jesus, since you are commissioned by God to look after them just as St. Joseph was with regard to Our Savior. This, in fact, is the first thing you must do in your employment, if you wish to imitate St. Joseph, who had nothing so much at heart as to provide for the needs of the child Jesus (Meditation, N° 110.3).*

♦ *St. Monica was the mother of St. Augustine...She did all in her power to withdraw him from his bad ways and win him back to Christ...She even crossed seas and undertook long journeys...Do you also take every possible care to win over to God those who are entrusted to you...? (Meditation, N° 122.3).*

♦ *St. Margaret, Queen of Scotland, herself performed the functions of tutor to her children, giving them reading lessons, and applying herself with all possible care to their education, for she rightly considered that this work was the most agreeable to God that she could do. For this reason, it was also the chief intention of her prayers. She is a striking example of what you should do with regard to the children whom God has confided to your care. Here you see this noble lady making it her chief concern to do that which constitutes the essential object of your state. Let it be an honor for you to do the same, and look upon those whom God has entrusted to you as the children of God Himself (Meditation, N° 133.2).*

♦ *God has bestowed on you an honor equal to that of St. Joachim by placing you in the position you occupy, since He destines you to be the spiritual parent of the children whom you instruct. If St. Joachim was chosen to be father of the Most Blessed Virgin, you are called to engender children in Christ, and also to make Jesus live anew in their hearts. Can it be said that you have fully entered into the designs of God upon you? (Meditation, N° 157.1).*

♦ *Do you, like St. Francis de Sales, have similar sentiments of charity and tenderness toward the children whom you have to instruct? Do you avail yourself of the affection the children have for you to attract them to God. If you show the firmness of a father in withdrawing them from bad habits, you should also show them the tenderness of a mother in gathering them together, and in doing them all the good in your power (Meditation, N° 101.3).*

In what way do you feel most empowered by God to care for those who have been entrusted to you? What gifts or graces have been given to you to enable you to do this work well?

What difference would it make in your life if you would truly love your students in the same way that God has loved you? What difference could such a love make in their lives?

### **Third Movement**

5. Resolve to Be More Open to the Work of the Spirit in and through You Today  
Take a few minutes giving thanks for God's relationship with you. Thank God for the ministry with which you have been entrusted.

In what ways could you re-order your daily activities so that you would be a better *guide and guardian* of others?

## Intercessors

*Whatever you ask for in prayer, you will receive, if you have faith (Mt 21:22).*

### First Movement

1. Take a few minutes to remember that God is always with you, supporting and sustaining you in the work you do.

*Behold, I am with you always, even until the end of time (Mt 28:20).*

2. Ask for the grace to know what it is that God wants of you and the determination to do that which your baptism and ministry require.

*Speak, Lord, for your servant listens (1 Sam 3:10).*

### Second Movement

3. Contemplate the Mystery of God's Love at Work in the World

Read the following scripture passage. What words or phrases especially catch your attention? Listen to what is being said; try to enter into the Mystery; lovingly contemplate Jesus Christ and the relationship into which Christ is inviting you.

♦ *Ask, and you will receive. Seek, and you will find. Knock, and it will be opened to you. For the one who asks, receives. The one who seeks, finds. Would one of you hand your children stones when they ask for a loaf of bread, or a poisonous snake when they ask for a fish? If you in your sinfulness know how to give your children what is good, how much more will your heavenly Father give good things to anyone who asks Him! Treat others the way that you would have them treat you; this sums up the whole of the law and the prophets (Mt 7:7-12).*

4. Reflect on the Mystery of God's Love at Work in Your Own Life

Allow the following passages to illuminate the nature of your relationship with those who have been entrusted to you.

♦ *Those who come to you...are convinced that you have received the grace to support the weak, to teach the ignorant, to correct the delinquent. They come to you, as tired and weary travellers, beseeching you to relieve their needs (Meditation, N° 37.1).*

♦ *You may be quite certain that God will refuse you nothing that you ask with faith and confidence in His goodness (Meditation, N° 38.2).*

♦ *Admire the goodness of God, providing for all the needs of His creatures, taking the means to procure for them the knowledge of what is truly good...Offer yourself to God...to assist those who are entrusted to you as far as He will require of you (Meditation, N° 197.1).*

## Guardians & Guides

*Ask God today for the grace of watching so well over those confided to you that you will take every possible care to shield them from serious faults and to be such good guides, through the light your prayer will obtain for you from God and the fidelity you bring to your work, that you will see clearly every obstacle to their good and keep away every harm that could injure them (Meditation, N° 197.3).*

### First Movement

1. Take a few minutes to quiet yourself and to remember that God is present within you and that through you God chooses to make His care and presence known to those whom you serve.

*Earnestly ask Jesus Christ to make His Spirit come alive in you, since He has chosen you to do His work (Meditation, N° 196.1).*

2. Ask for a more perfect union of your will with God's will.

*Teach me your way, O God, and lead me on a level path (Ps 27:11).*

### Second Movement

3. Contemplate the Mystery of God's Love at Work in the World

Read the following scripture passage a few times slowly. What words or phrases especially catch your attention? Listen to what is being said; enter into the Mystery of God's benevolent care; lovingly contemplate this God who watches over you and on whose behalf the care of others has been entrusted to you.

*♦I lift up my eyes toward the mountains;  
from where is my help to come?  
My help comes from Yahweh,  
who made heaven and earth.  
Yahweh does not allow our footsteps to slip!  
Indeed, our guard does not sleep!  
The guardian of Israel  
neither slumbers nor sleeps.  
Yahweh is our guardian;  
Yahweh is our shade.  
Yahweh is beside us at our right hand.  
The sun cannot harm us by day,  
nor the moon at night.  
Yahweh guards us from all harm,  
and protects our lives.  
Yahweh watches over our coming and going,  
both now and forever more (Ps 121).*

♦ *It is your duty to go up to God every day in prayer to learn from Him all that you must share with those confided to you, and then come down to them by accommodating yourself to their level in order to share with them all that God has communicated to you for them—as much in your prayer as in the holy scriptures which furnish you with the truths of religion and the practical maxims of the holy gospel (Meditation, N° 198.1).*

♦ *God...cares for them as their protector, their support, and their Father. But the care He seeks to take of them He devolves upon you. This God of mercy places them in your keeping promising to give them all that you ask for them (Meditation, N° 37.3).*

♦ *Ask God to be such good guides, through the light your praying will obtain for you and the fidelity you bring to your work, that you will see clearly every obstacle to their good and help keep away every harm that could injure them on their way to a fuller union with God (Meditation, N° 197.3).*

Do you present to God the hopes and the prayers of those with whom you work? Do you pray for them and with them, giving voice to what is often difficult for them to express for themselves?

Do you often, fervently and insistently, ask God for what you know they need?

Do you inspire them with the kind of good and holy thoughts which are capable of leading them to God? Do you encourage them to ask forgiveness for their faults and to resolve to do what is good and truly pleasing to God and helpful for their neighbor?

### **Third Movement**

#### **5. Resolve to Be More Open to the Work of the Spirit in and through You Today**

Take a few minutes and speak to God about those who have been confided to your care.

Thank God for the ministry with which you have been entrusted, and ask for the grace to do it well.

What changes are being called for in your life as you attempt to respond to the needs of others? Is there anything inhibiting this change from happening?

4. Reflect on the Mystery of God's Love at Work in Your Own Life

As you have been invited to be the guardians and guides of God's children (*Meditation*, N° 205.1), spend some time now reflecting on how well you exercise this ministry.

Are you doing as much as you are able and as God requires of you for the human and Christian formation of those who have been entrusted to you?

Do you inspire your students by your instruction and good example and help them to keep clear of whatever obstacles they might encounter?

Do you help them to be kind to one another, compassionate, mutually forgiving, just as God has forgiven them in Christ, and loving one another even as Jesus Christ has loved them?

Have you helped them to develop the virtues of gentleness, patience, love, respect for their parents, and all the conduct that is proper for a Christian?

Do you reprove and correct those in your care when they fall into some fault? Do you exhibit prudence, gentleness, and patience when making corrections?

Do you help those with whom you work to come to a more loving knowledge of God?

Have you taught them to pray to God, as Jesus taught those who followed Him?

Through the ministry you exercise, how are the hearts of the faithful being strengthened in holiness and justice?

### **Third Movement**

5. Resolve to Be More Open to the Work of the Spirit in and through You Today

Take a few minutes and thank God for the ministry with which you have been entrusted, and ask for the grace to do it well.

What could you do today that would help you to give yourself with greater zeal and affection to this ministry?

Where is the Spirit drawing you to sacrifice yourself today that others may have life?

## Builders of the Church

*Look upon your work as one of the most important and excellent in the Church, since it is most capable of sustaining it and of giving it a solid foundation (Meditation, N° 155.1).*

### First Movement

1. Take a few minutes to quiet yourself, to remember that God is present, and to renew your confidence in Him.

*Blessed be, Yahweh, my rock (Ps 144:1).*

2. Placing your trust in God once more, ask for a more perfect union of your will with God's will.

*Happy are those who put their trust in you (Ps 84:12).*

### Second Movement

3. Contemplate the Mystery of God's Love at Work in the World

Read the following passages a few times slowly. What words or phrases especially catch your attention? Listen to what is being said. In openness to the Mystery into which you are being drawn, contemplate this God who chooses to work in the world through you.

♦ *For we are God's fellow workers; you are God's field, God's building. According to the grace of God given to me, like a skilled master builder I laid a foundation, and another is building upon it. Let each take care how one builds upon it. For no other foundation can any one lay than that which is laid, which is Jesus Christ (1 Cor 3:9-11).*

♦ *In His providential care, God has [when necessity required it] appointed others to fill in for fathers and mothers...He sends persons with the necessary enlightenment and zeal to help children attain the knowledge of God and His mysteries. According to the grace of Jesus Christ given to them by God, they are like good master builders who give all possible care and attention to lay the foundation of religion and Christian virtue in the hearts of children...You have been called by God to this ministry and you have been given the grace of teaching and the gift of exhortation for the sake of those entrusted to your responsibility (Meditation, N° 193.2).*

♦ *You are no longer strangers and sojourners, but you are fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God. You form a building which rises upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus Himself as the capstone. Through Him, the whole structure is fitted together and takes shape as a holy temple in the Lord; in Him, you are being built into this temple, to become a dwelling place for God in the Spirit (Eph 2:19-22).*

## Disciples & Mediators of the New Covenant

*You act as mediators in their regard, God making use of you to teach them what is necessary for their entrance into new and everlasting life (Meditation, N° 56.3).*

### First Movement

1. Take a few minutes to quiet yourself. Recall God's active presence in the world and in your own life.

*Behold, I am doing something new. Now it springs forth; do you not perceive it? (Is 43:19).*

2. Offer yourself to God to do God's work and to fulfill God's wishes.

*Here am I! Send me (Is 6:8).*

### Second Movement

3. Contemplate the Mystery of God's Love at Work in the World

Read the following passages a few times slowly. What words or phrases especially catch your attention? Listen to what is being said. Contemplate Jesus, who invites us to be Love's messengers.

♦ *A new commandment I give you, that you love one another; even as I have loved you, that you also love one another. By this all will know that you are my disciples, if you have love one for another (Jn 13:34-35).*

♦ *I say to you, love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you, pray for those who abuse you...If you love those who love you, what credit is there in that? Even sinners love those who love them. And if you do good to those who do good to you, what credit is that to you? Even sinners do the same. And if you lend to those from whom you hope to receive, what credit is that to you? Even sinners lend to sinners, to receive as much again. But love your enemies, and do good, and lend, expecting nothing in return; and your reward will be great, and you will be the children of the Most High; for He is kind to the ungrateful and the selfish. Be merciful, even as your Father is merciful (Lk 6:27-28, 32-36).*

♦ *The Lord God has given me a disciple's tongue, so that I may know how to reply to the weary. Each morning He wakes me to hear, to listen like a disciple. The Lord God has opened my ears. For my part, I made no resistance; neither did I turn away. I offered my back to those who struck me and my cheeks to those who tore at my beard. I did not cover my face against insult and spittle. For the Lord God helps me; therefore, I am untouched by the insults. So, too, I set my face like flint; and I know that I shall not be shamed. My vindicator is near at hand (Is 50:4-7).*



4. Reflect on the Mystery of God's Love at Work in Your Own Life

Do you look upon the good you are trying to accomplish with them as the foundation of the good they will be able to practice for the rest of their lives?

Do you realize that when you teach young people the mysteries of their faith that you are laying the foundation for the building of the Church?

Do you help your students grow in a greater appreciation of the Church and a greater love of the whole People of God?

Are you helping them in all things to grow to full maturity in Christ, our head, through whom the whole body of the Church is growing, being supported, and building itself up in love?

Does your work contribute to the promotion of the common good? Have you helped your students to acquire those traits that will enable them to help make the world in which we live a better place?

Do you help form young disciples to bear witness by their behavior to gospel values and to cooperate with all people of good will to bring about greater peace, justice, liberation, and wholeness of life for the whole human family?

### Third Movement

5. Resolve to Be More Open to the Work of the Spirit in and through You Today

Take a few minutes and thank God for the grace He has given you of sharing in this important ministry in the Church.

What could you do that would help make you a more "skillful master builder" and a more qualified minister of the new covenant?

Where is the Spirit gifting and drawing you to sacrifice yourself today that others may have fuller life?

4. Reflect on the Mystery of God's Love at Work in Your Own Life

Is your ministry motivated by an unconditional love of your students and a commitment to help procure fullness of life for them ?

Do you give special help to those who are most in need of giving up some of the habits formed in the past and of conversion to a new life of love and forgiveness?

Are you patient, gentle, prudent, self-sacrificing, and wholehearted in the exercise of your ministry?

Since by baptism you have "put on Christ," are you ready and willing to shoulder part of His cross in your daily life, not grudgingly, but with joy and conviction?

### Third Movement

5. Resolve to Be More Open to the Work of the Spirit in and through You Today

Take a few minutes and thank God for the small, but significant, role you play in the mediation of this new covenant of love.

What activities give meaning to your life, nourish your spiritually, and sustain your commitment?

Where is the Spirit gifting and drawing you to sacrifice yourself today that others may have fuller life?



## Have We Opened Our Eyes?

by

Rev. Dudley Attanayake<sup>35</sup>

De La Salle lived and worked in a more pragmatic way seeking to remedy the social situation of France in his time in the context of the problems with which they were confronted. He was a social reformer “who was more concerned with the solutions than with theories.”<sup>36</sup>

The most important thing at this juncture is not to present a perfect picture of De La Salle, with all his wonderful work done for the education of the poor children but rather to find out how he could be relevant for today. De La Salle will not have ready made answers to Shri Lankan problems today, but we could inquire to see how his spirituality could be applied to today's Shri Lankan society.

Our situation in Shri Lanka, here today, stands in need of transformation, renewal, and re-creation. Our existence has also to be based on the same spiritual dynamism of De La Salle if we are to find solutions and answers to the problems of today. We too need very badly the Spirit of the Lord to bring newness and creativity into the current affairs of our time.

Most of the Asian countries are struggling now with serious socio-economic and political problems. The huge reality of the poor constitute the great majority of the populations of these countries. Shri Lanka forms a part of this Asian reality. Though the country has deep religious traditions, an irreligious way-of-life rules the day: it is really poor, economically weak, and politically struggling. Since its political independence, it has been a question of crooked politics, craving after power, exploitation, and corruption. There is increased dishonesty, incompetence, and violence in society. The gap between the rich and the poor is widening. The unemployment and the under-employment, dissatisfaction, and unrest among youth is ever increasing. The main agricultural sector, the farmers, are being gradually and steadily neglected and oppressed. The North-East war is still raging with much violence and death. All this leaves us utterly weakened, impoverished, and demoralized.

Given this situation of Shri Lankan reality, a question can be asked whether we, as the followers of De La Salle, can have a liberating influence and help heal the sins of inhumanity and injustice in our country. To follow De La Salle means to follow in his

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<sup>35</sup> Rev. Dudley Attanayake is a priest in Colombo, Shri Lanka. This article is the slightly adapted third part of a reflection paper on Lasallian spirituality submitted for a course he was taking at the Institute for Spiritual Formation in Asia, a program founded by the De La Salle Brothers of Shri Lanka in conjunction with De La Salle University in the Philippines. The article first appeared as “Lasallian Spirituality in Shri Lanka” in the *Colombo District Newsletter* (August 1993), Vol. 18, No. 2, pp. 9-11.

<sup>36</sup> Othmar Wurth. *John Baptist de La Salle and Special Education* (Romeville: ILL: Lasallian Publications, 1988).

freedom to preach the Kingdom of God. To follow him means that we become free and pliable enough in the hands of God to become servants of His mission!

Undoubtedly, we have a yeoman service to render to redeem this sinful situation, especially when we consider the situation of child prostitution in Shri Lanka. Approximately about 400,000 children constitute the student population of Shri Lanka. The educational system and the type of education that caters to them is far from being desirable. Among the non-school going children, many have become victims of child labor. Let's consider the latest report done in Shri Lanka.

One in every five children in Shri Lanka of the age group 10-14 years does not attend school because of child labor practices. Of the 1,900,000 Shri Lankan children in the 10-14 age group, about 250,000 are in the non-formal labor market. Around 100,000 children between 10-14 are in refugee camps. Nearly 20,000 in the same age group are in male prostitution, and some 10,000 are estimated to be street children. The social cost and consequences of this tragedy may hinder the future development of the nation as a large number of these children will be "handicapped" for the rest of their lives. Children are found working in a variety of work situations and under varying conditions. About 28 per cent of female child laborers and 24 per cent of male child laborers are said to be working in agricultural and plantation sectors. They work under extremely difficult and abusive situations.<sup>37</sup>

The situation here seems to be very opportune for the followers of De La Salle to be an effective and salvific means to redeem this situation. De La Salle's *spirit* was creative and innovative. He enhanced the appreciation of the teacher and the teaching profession which formerly was very low, low in esteem and poor in body and spirit; and he created it anew to be a channel of God's saving power. He called teachers to be the ambassadors of Christ. The very educational system was revolutionized. The image of the Church was changed from that of a very well established, rich, elitist church to that of a serving Church of the poor, the people of God. De La Salle himself was born anew, from the very first moment of his calling.

Year after year, De La Salle had gone along the streets of Reims, from his house to the Cathedral and back, and never had his social conscience given any twinges. That is how society was, and there was nothing more to be said about it. *But one day*, he must have *opened his eyes and seen* the crowds of children and young people in Reims [and all over the world including Shri Lanka] who had no chance of ever achieving any kind of human dignity. He must have thought how easy it would be, and the idea was beginning to develop.<sup>38</sup>

The crucial question is, *have we opened our eyes and seen* the crowds of children and young people in Shri Lanka? Perhaps, we have gone along the streets of Shri Lanka year after year and never had our social conscience given any twinges. We may be prompted to say, "That's how the society is." Some things were done, and the situation is such that nothing more could be done.

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<sup>37</sup> From a survey by K. Kulathasan and L. B. Beddewala as reported in the *Island*, 16 September 1992.

<sup>38</sup> Manuel Olivé, *Lasalliana*, 14-6-A-59.

But if one thinks, and thinks seriously and truly in the spirit of De La Salle, perhaps a new idea will begin to develop. During the very first years of community life with the first few Brothers, De La Salle saw how they worked and in what spirit. "And so he made his decisions, and from that time onwards nothing and no one would be able to divert him from the path he had chosen and which he followed for 40 years working to establish his Institute in spite of innumerable obstacles."<sup>39</sup>

De La Salle's spirit was free, innovative, courageous, selfless, and deeply committed to God's will. We will do very well to examine in ourselves whether we have this spirit or some other spirit. Sometimes, as many people do, we may also very discretely replace this spirit of God with that of our own. Our external behavior and way of life, both personal and communal, give indications as to what kind of spirit is the motive force behind everything.

"God's providence must be the only foundation on which the Christian schools are established." God worked miracles in the case of De La Salle's foundations. He will surely work miracles in our day too if we have the same reliance on divine providence. "Therefore, stir up your trust in His infinite goodness and honor Him by leaving in His hands the care of your persons. Be not troubled about the present or disquieted about the future, but be concerned only about the moment you must now live. Do not let the anticipation of tomorrow be a burden on the day that is passing. What you lack in the evening, the morrow will bring you, if you know how to hope in God."<sup>40</sup>

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<sup>39</sup> Manuel Olivé, *Lasalliana*. 14-6-A-59.

<sup>40</sup> John Baptist Blain, *The Life of John Baptist de La Salle*, Vol. 1, Book 1. Translated by Richard Arnandez (Romeoville, ILL: Lasallian Publications), p. 82.

## Ambassadors of the New Creation

*The Son of God came down on earth, and...wishes to come into our hearts in order to make us sharers in His truly heavenly nature (Meditation, N° 85.3).*

### First Movement

1. Take a few minutes to quiet yourself and to recall that God is present in us by His grace and by His Spirit.

*If anyone loves me, my Father will love them; and we will come to dwell in them (Jn 14:23).*

2. Place your trust in God once more, and ask for the grace to do what God wants.

*My food is to do the will of the one who sent me and to accomplish the work which I was given (Jn 4:34).*

### Second Movement

3. Contemplate the Mystery of God's Love at Work in the World

Read the following passage a few times slowly. What words or phrases especially catch your attention? Listen to what is being said. Contemplate this loving and faithful God, who reveals Himself most clearly in Jesus Christ.

♦ *Christ died for all, that those who live might live no longer for themselves but for Him who for their sake died and was raised. From now on, therefore, we regard no one from a merely human point of view. Even though we once regarded Christ from a human point of view, we regard Him thus no longer. Therefore, if any one is in Christ, such a one is a new creation; the old has passed away; behold the new has come. All this is from God, who through Christ reconciled us to Himself and gave us the ministry of reconciliation; that is, in Christ, God was reconciling the world to Himself, not holding their human faults against them; and He has entrusted to us the message of reconciliation. So we are ambassadors for Christ, God making His appeal through us. We beseech you, therefore, on behalf of Christ: be reconciled to God (2 Cor 5:15-20).*

4. Reflect on the Mystery of God's Love at Work in Your Own Life

How do you help prepare the way of the Lord in the hearts of your students?

Where is God asking you to die to self and to rise in Christ?

How do you announce the message of reconciliation? What work of reconciliation needs to be accomplished in you?

Have you helped others to let go of past hurts and turn toward what is life-giving and life-sustaining?

Are you reconciled with your own past? Have you embraced in Christ the promise of the present moment?

What do you do to help make real and more readily accessible for children the salvation that is given in Jesus Christ?

Does your own tender love manifest to others the gratuitous love of God? Who has shared with you this same tender love?

### **Third Movement**

5.     Resolve to Be More Open to the Work of the Spirit in and through You Today  
Take a few minutes and thank God for the grace He has given you of sharing in this important ministry in the Church.  
What will you do today to share this newness of life in Christ with others?



## Heralds of God's Kingdom

*Those who instruct others...are but the voice that disposes hearts to receive our Lord and His holy doctrine; but the one who really disposes them, and the one who gives efficacy to their words, is none other than God Himself (Meditation, N° 3.1).*

### First Movement

1. Take a comfortable posture and quiet yourself. Breathe slowly, deeply; concentrate on your breathing, relax your mind and body. What are the visible signs of God's Kingdom within yourself, in your surroundings, and, more particularly, in the place where you exercise your ministry? Recognize God's powerful presence in all these places.

*If anyone loves me, my Father will love them; and we will come to make our abode in them (Jn 14:23).*

2. Thank God for His continuous presence in your life. Admire God's goodness in revealing to you the Good News which you are to share with those whom you serve. Ask God's Spirit to come and take possession of your heart, so that you radiate His love to others.

*It is likewise by the movement of the same Spirit that all those who announce God's Kingdom speak even today (Meditation, N° 3.2).*

### Second Movement

3. Contemplate the Mystery of God's Love at Work in the World

Read the following passage a few times slowly and reflectively. Walk with Jesus, stay close to Him as He speaks and acts. Try to understand His feelings.

♦ *And they brought young children to Him, that He might touch them; but the disciples rebuked those who brought them. But when Jesus saw it, He was greatly displeased and said to them, "Let the little children come to me and do not forbid them; for of such is the Kingdom of God. Assuredly, I say to you, whoever does not receive the kingdom of God as a little child will by no means enter it." And He took them up in His arms, put His hands on them, and blessed them (Mk 10:13-16).*

♦ *Then Jesus said to His disciples, "Assuredly, I say to you, that it is hard for a rich person to enter the kingdom of heaven. And again I say to you, it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for rich person to enter the kingdom of God." When His disciples heard it, they were exceedingly amazed, saying, "Who then can be saved?" But Jesus looked at them and said to them, "With human beings this is impossible, but with God all things are possible" (Mt 19:23-26).*

4. Reflect on the Mystery of God's Love at Work in Your Own Life

Read the following passage:

♦ *Since those who teach are but the voice of God, it is from God that their words must proceed to make Him known to those whom they instruct. It is God who is heard through those who speak of Him and of what relates to Him. Hence, St. Peter says: "One of you preaches, let him remember that it is God's message he is uttering; another distributes relief, let him remember that it is God who supplies him the opportunity; that so, in all you do, God may be glorified through Jesus Christ" (Meditation, N° 3.2)*

Become aware of your giftedness. Be grateful to God for the gifts and graces you have received.

How do you radiate God's love and goodness to those around you?

How open and sensitive are you to receive God's message, which He wants you to share with others?

### **Third Movement**

5. Resolve to Be More Open to the Work of the Spirit in and through You Today

What are the ordinary events in your daily schedule wherein you can today announce God's Kingdom?

## Instruments of Divine Providence

*He who did not spare His own son, but delivered Him up for us all, how shall He not also freely give us all things with Him? (Rm 8:32).*

### First Movement

1. Take a few minutes to quiet yourself. Become aware of the present moment of your existence, your breathing, your body sensations. What is going on within you? You are alive. God's creative power is at work within you, making you live and grow, bringing out the best in you.

*For in Him we live and move and have our being (Acts 17:28).*

2. Feel confident in God who dwells in you. Release all anxiety and worry about your life, and the lives of your loved ones. Pray these words several times as you breath slowly:

*In you, I put my trust (Ps 143:8).*

### Second Movement

3. Contemplate the Mystery of God's Love at Work in the World

Read the following scripture passage slowly and reflectively. Try to understand the mind and the feelings of the characters in the story. What words or phrases of this dialogue specially catch your attention?

◆ *After these things, God tested Abraham, and said to him, "Abraham!" And he replied, "Here am I." God said, "Take your son, your only son Isaac, whom you love, and go to the land of Moriah, and offer him there as a burnt offering upon one of the mountains of which I shall tell you" ...And Abraham took the wood of the burnt offering, and laid it on Isaac his son; and he took in his hand the fire and the knife. So they went both of them together. And Isaac said to his father Abraham, "My father!" And he replied, "Here am I, my son." Isaac said, "Behold, the fire and the wood; but where is the lamb for a burnt offering?" Abraham said, "God will Himself provide the lamb for a burnt offering, my son." So they went both of them together.*

*When they came to the place of which God had told him, Abraham built an altar there, and laid the wood in order, and bound Isaac his son, and laid him on the altar, upon the wood. Then Abraham put forth his hand, and took the knife to slay his son. But the angel of the Lord called to him from heaven, and said, "Abraham, Abraham!" And he replied, "Here am I." The angel said, "Do not lay your hand on the lad or do anything to him; for now I know that you fear God, seeing you have not withheld your son, your only son, from me." And Abraham lifted up his eyes and looked, and behold, behind him was a ram, caught in a thicket by its horns; and Abraham went and took the*

*ram, and offered it up as a burnt offering instead of his son. So Abraham called the name of that place "The Lord will provide"; as it is said to this day, "On the mount of the Lord, it shall be provided" (Gen 22:1-2, 6-14).*

4. Reflect on the Mystery of God's Love at Work in Your Own Life

What is the "mount of the Lord" in your life? What does God provide you? What does He ask of you? What do you withhold from Him? What do you give to Him?

Lovingly contemplate the Mystery of Christ, the paschal sacrifice. How do you better unite yourself with Him today?

You may read the following passage as well:

♦ *When, in your troubles, you have had recourse to those who guide you and they have been unable to supply the appropriate remedy, God requires that you should remain in a state of entire abandonment to His good pleasure, awaiting from His goodness the help you need, after the example of the multitude of people who had followed Our Lord and who waited patiently for Him to supply their wants without even troubling to expose them. You may, in fact, rest assured that God will not allow you to be tried beyond your strength. It is when we are powerless that He does all, and thereby manifests His power and goodness in a striking manner (Meditation, N° 20.2)*

What are your needs, hopes, fears, and anxieties in your ministry? Can you put your trust in God's loving care?

How do you feel, right now, as a Christian educator? Be grateful to God for the growth that is taking place in your life and in the lives of those whom you serve.

When do you feel weak or powerless in your ministry? *Cast your burden on the Lord, and He will sustain you (Ps 55:22).*

### Third Movement

Resolve to be more open to the Spirit who leads you along the path of righteousness. *Teach me to do your will, for you are my God. Let your good Spirit lead me on a level path (Ps 143:10).*

How are you an instrument of God's providential and loving care for others?

Where is the Spirit drawing you to sacrifice yourself that others may have life?

## Living Temples of the Spirit

*Ask God that, after filling you with His Holy Spirit to sanctify yourselves, He also communicates Himself to you in order to procure the salvation of others (Meditation 43.3).*

### First Movement

1. Take a few minutes to quiet yourself. Call to mind the presence of the Spirit of God who dwells in you.

*The love of God has been poured out into our hearts by the Spirit living in us (Rm 5:5).*

2. Ask God to give you the grace to know what God wants to communicate to you and to help you respond in a way that will be pleasing to God and helpful for your neighbor.

*The Holy Spirit will teach you all things and will remind you of all I have said to you (Jn 14:26).*

### Second Movement

3. Contemplate the Mystery of God's Love at Work in the World

Read the following scripture passage slowly and reflectively. What words or phrases especially catch your attention? Listen to what is being said; try to enter into the Mystery; lovingly contemplate Jesus Christ and the relationship into which Christ is inviting you.

♦ *On the evening of that first day of the week, even though the disciples had locked the doors of the place where they were for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood before them. "Peace be with you," He said. When He had said this, He showed them His hands and His side. At the sight of the Lord, the disciples rejoiced. "Peace be with you," He said again. "As the Father has sent me, so I send you." Then He breathed on them and said: "Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive others their wrong doings, they are forgiven them. If you hold them bound, they are held bound" (Jn 20:19-23).*

4. Reflect on the Mystery of God's Love at Work in Your Own Life

Do you frequently recall the presence of God's grace and Spirit within you?

Does openness of heart to this indwelling Spirit help you to be one with God in all you do?

Does the fact that God has chosen to dwell in you make any difference in the way you live your life, and in the way you relate to others?

Are you attentive and responsive to the interior stirring and inspirations of the Spirit?

Does your life mirror the goodness and the love of God? Are you merciful and forgiving in your dealings with others?

### **Third Movement**

Ask God to send forth the Spirit of new life into your heart (Ps 104:30) that, in part through you, the face of the earth and the lives of youngsters might be renewed.

Where is the Spirit drawing you to sacrifice yourself that others may have this new life?

Ask God to send you this Holy Spirit to banish whatever fear hold you back from putting yourself wholeheartedly into God's hands. Ask the Spirit to help you know peace.

## A Lover

*Owe no debt to anyone except the debt that binds us to love one another. Anyone who loves their neighbor has fulfilled the law (Rom 13:8).*

### First Movement

1. Pause for a few minutes and call to mind the presence of God made visible in our lives through the love we have for and the goodness we show to one another.

*As I have loved you, so you must love one another. If you have love for one another, then everyone will know that you are my disciples (Jn 13:35).*

2. Open your heart to this God of love, and ask for the grace necessary to do God's will.

*Are you especially faithful then to the inspirations God gives you? (Meditation, N° 115.2).*

### Second Movement

3. Contemplate the Mystery of God's Love at Work in the World

Read the following scripture passage a few times slowly. What word or words especially catch your attention? Let these words be another expression of God's love for you.

♦ *When Israel was a child I loved him; out of Egypt I called my son. The more I called them, the further they went from me, sacrificing to Baal and burning incense to idols. Yet it was I who taught Ephraim to walk, who took them in my arms; I drew them with human cords, with bands of love; I fostered them like one who raises an infant to one's cheeks; Yet, though I stooped to feed my child they did not know that I was their healer (Hosea 11:1-4).*

♦ *Yes, God so loved the world that He gave His only Son that whoever believes in Him may not die but may have eternal life. God did not send the Son into the world to condemn, but that the world might be saved through Him (Jn 3:16-17).*

♦ *Everyone who loves is begotten of God and has knowledge of God. The person without love has known nothing of God, for God is love. God's love was revealed in our midst in this way: He sent His only Son to the world that we might have life through Him (1 Jn 4:7-9).*

4. Reflect on the Mystery of God's Love at Work in Your Own Life

Who has loved you and taught you how to love? Who has helped you learn how to be charitable to others?

Who are the people coming to you in need of love? Is it easy for you to reach out to other people? What are the obstacles to your doing this?

Do you believe that bearing one another's burdens and failings is an act of love? How about challenging those who doubt their abilities?

Where in your society do you see a great need for love today?

How do you evaluate your own commitment to living in a charitable way?

### **Third Movement**

5. Resolve to Be More Open to the Spirit Who Works in and through You Today

What act(s) of love can you build into your daily life? What are the obstacles to your doing this?

Where are you being invited to be more loving today?





## The Call to Share Ministry

by

Ms. Rita Maloney<sup>41</sup>

I have read over many times the Message of Shared Ministry from the 42nd General Chapter and I want to commend you on the inclusivity of your language. At a time when the Church is so torn in struggles between men and women, hierarchy and laity, liberals and conservatives, you speak a language which calls to religious, priests and laity, men and women, people of the Christian faith, those of other religious traditions and humanists. While many are receding into their separate corners of fundamentalist right and radical left, you dare to step forward with the intention of sharing with the entire Lasallian family, and beyond, the charism of your holy founder, John Baptist de La Salle. In his book, *The Work is Yours*, Brother Luke Salm writes about the period in De La Salle's life when he felt a calling to involve himself more fully in the lives of the poor.

Brother Luke writes: "The decision to go through with his resolution to invite the teachers to his table would also have profound consequences for Father De La Salle, deep within the very core of his being. It was a bold and significant first step that would bring him personally face-to-face with the world of the poor. There he would experience within himself the cry of the poor in need...In that cry, the young priest would hear the voice of God, challenging him to begin the work of his own conversion to live the Gospel. It was the beginning of a process that would bring him along a road that he had neither the intention, the desire, nor the courage to travel by himself."

The poverty of the people with whom you choose to share your ministry today may not be the extreme economic poverty of the teachers and the students with whom De La Salle worked. Rather, there is the spiritual poverty of our times. For it is an extreme spiritual poverty that cries out through our society and our world. In his book, *The Care of the Soul*, a modern day, psychotherapist who had been a monk for eleven years writes that "as individuals and as a society, we are suffering from 'loss of soul.'" Some of the symptoms of this, he tells us, are emptiness, meaninglessness, vague depression, disillusionment about marriage, family and relationships, a loss of values, yearning for personal fulfillment, and a hunger for spirituality. Are these not the signs of our times? Is it possible that we, like your founder in the past, are being called to hear the cry of people in their loss of soul?

Shared ministry will include the youth of our Lasallian family — the students whom we teach. In an interview with Matthew Fox, one reporter asked him what changes he would make if he were Pope. Among a list of changes, Fox said that he would address the despair

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of our adolescents today. Without even referring to updated statistics on the plight of adolescents, may I share with you just four of the many experiences which I have had with students? A few years ago, I was assigned as the leader of eight seniors on one of our weekend retreats. Four of the eight students in my group admitted that they had attempted suicide — not considered - but actually attempted suicide. On another occasion, I was teaching a class when a generally depressed student kept her head down on her desk. Having approached her and getting no response, I asked her to step outside. As she reached the hall, she burst out sobbing. When she left her home that morning — two hours earlier — her father had her mother up against a wall with a knife to her throat and warned this student that by the time she returned home from school, her mother and her younger brother would be dead.

On still another occasion, I was teaching a student who was responding with great hostility. I wondered what it would be like dealing with such an angry and disrespectful person for the next few months. After doing some follow-up work, I discovered that this young student had just returned to school, having missed the last semester. Six months before, she had an argument with her mother who pulled a gun and shot her in the head, leaving her in a coma.

Finally, we had a young student who was killed on his way home from school for the gold caps on his teeth. When the young killer was asked at the police station if he realized that he had just killed a 17-year old boy, his answer was, "So what?" Indeed, the loss of soul is screaming out to us.

These are not stories from some horrendous and exaggerated work of fiction, and I am sorry to say that they are not so rare as we would like to believe. These are the lives of our own students and their families — members of the Lasallian family. Most of us don't want to get into the muddiness of all this. It is easier to teach content, mark papers, and hand in grades. But our students are crying out to us. Can we claim to believe in the Gospel of Jesus Christ and the mission of John Baptist de La Salle and close our ears to them? Is it possible that opening our hearts to these cries may have profound consequences on us, as similar cries did deep within the heart of Father De La Salle? Could it be that in these cries we too will hear the voice of God, challenging us to begin the work of living out the Gospel, not alone but together?

There are two ways which we can respond to the crisis of loss of soul in our teenagers. We can say, "This is too overwhelming. We cannot look at it. So let us just teach. They'll have to take care of their own personal problems." Or, we can say that the Brothers of the Christian Schools have the timely and powerful charism to train teachers and to train the laity to join you in your work of mission, in our work of mission — one step at a time — so that your work is enhanced and the kingdom of God is spread without anyone burning out.

The Church is now seeing the effects of grasping on to things as they have been instead of welcoming in people who are willing to do the work, who were baptized to do the work. Somewhere along the way, the institutional Church gave cultural accretions precedence over the gospels.

But you have a founder who dared, with great courage, to stand up against a system that did not live out the gospels. And you continue to do that, and I admire you for it. It is so clear that old paradigms are not working. The Spirit needs to pour new wine into the

Church; but we insist on holding onto our old wineskins, which are bursting at the seams. We must have the courage to create new vision and then to live it out. I think it is time to involve more the parents of our students.

One day I was eating lunch with a few younger colleagues. I heard them discussing the parents of some of our students — uninterested, not returning phone calls, not involved enough in their children's education. While I was listening to them, I realized that I was relating more to the parents. A large percentage of our parents are raising children alone — trying to be both mother and father to them — working, cooking, cleaning, financially and emotionally strained — not able to give much more than they do, yet knowing that their children are not getting what they need. As a teacher I say, "There is only so much I can do. I cannot do it all." Yet, I said the same as a parent, hoping desperately that my children would encounter some teachers who would love them and encourage them when I was so tired — hoping that the children would have good programs at school that would allow them to express themselves and share their pain about our broken family.

Could we not have annual retreat programs for the parents of our students? Offering the opportunity for nurturing their souls would contribute to the healing of the environment in which our students live. Can we discover the real needs of the parents of our students and bring in excellent speakers to address them? Topics like the following could be treated: Learning to Communicate With Our Adolescent Children; Teenagers and Drugs; Effective Discipline; the Facts About AIDS; or other topics of interest could be a vital service to them. Nurtured themselves, the parents become a source of nurturing others.

When I was in Chicago, I met Brother Thomas Brown from St. Raymond's in the Bronx. He told me that he works as a Family Intervention Counsellor there. When students are having difficulties, he gets involved with both the student and the family, doing individual as well as family counselling. Then he goes to the teachers of that student and tells them that this particular student is going through very rough times and is under a great deal of stress. How is that for shared ministry? The family is being supported, the student is being assisted, both are being taught better, more effective means of communication, the teacher has some knowledge of why the student is behaving the way he or she is and so the teacher's heart is called to greater compassion. Now that's pretty powerful shared ministry within the school, isn't it? It seems to me to be a very natural response to hearing the cry of the student and extending beyond to the parent as well. Brother Thomas said that if we attend effectively to the woundedness of our students that academics will fall into place.

As a teacher I find the prospect of shared ministry to be an interesting and exciting one. I am always interested in learning how I can be a more effective teacher. Most of all, I would like to learn how I can better teach Religion to adolescents. I need the networking of shared ministry. Should I take courses? Are there workshops available? What can I read? How can I better approach my topics?

Regarding my own personal life, I am at an interesting crossroads. My children are grown and more on their own. I am beginning to consider the possibility of some kind of community. I would like to be with people with whom I can be genuine, share myself, and be present to others sharing themselves. I would like to share some prayer with others and perhaps some meals. And yet, I wouldn't really consider moving out into community, I don't think, because I still want to be there for my children when they come home and perhaps for grandchildren one day; and so I'm juggling all of these possibilities in my own

life. I do not find that the local parishes offer the kind of community I seek. It's a strange time — one of those periods of transition when I'm uncertain of what's coming or where I am going.

Shared ministry comes at a time when many of us are saying we cannot do it alone. Our students and their parents are crying out that they cannot do it alone. You Brothers seem to be saying that you cannot do it alone. Teachers feel the same way. Perhaps this is the way it is meant to be — none of us doing it alone. Shared ministry is an attempt to build bridges with one another and into the future. Anthony De Mello used to say, "We must be faithful to the Church — the Church of the future."

I would like to close with a quote from Joseph Campbell, the renowned mythologist. The interviewer asks if we must go beyond our traditional concepts and Campbell says: "Indeed we must...because life is different from the way it was and the rules of the past are restrictive of the life process. The moment the life process stops, it starts drying up. We must find the courage to follow the process. In order to have something new, something old must be broken. And if you're too heavily fixed on the old, you're going to get stuck. That's what hell is, the place of people who could not yield their ego system to allow the grace of a transpersonal power to move them."

*Domine opus tuum.* The work, O Lord, is yours. And to Your call for shared ministry, we say "Yes."



## Disciples of the Word

*Your disciples...must be convinced that your instructions are the truth of Jesus Christ who speaks with your mouth, that it is only in His name that you teach them, and that it is He who has given you authority over them (Meditation, N° 195.2).*

### First Movement

1. Take a few minutes to recall the presence of Jesus who prays before the Father on behalf of those whose care has been entrusted to you.

*I do not pray for them alone [those I have sent into the world]. I pray also for those who will believe in me through their word (Jn 17:20).*

2. Ask God to help you to continue to be welcoming of the unfolding of God's will in your regard.

*In your kindness give me life, that I may keep the decrees of your mouth (Ps 119:88).*

### Second Movement

3. Contemplate the Mystery of God's Love at Work in the World

Read the following scripture passage a few times slowly. What words or phrases especially catch your attention? Listen to what is being said; watch what happens; try to become part of the Mystery; lovingly contemplate the Word of God.

♦ *As for you..., obey me when I speak to you: be not rebellious like this house of rebellion, but open your mouth and eat what I shall give you. It was then I saw a hand stretched out to me, in which was a written scroll which He unrolled before me. It was covered with writing front and back, and...He said to me...eat what is before you; eat this scroll, then go, speak to the house of Israel. So I opened my mouth and He gave me the scroll to eat...He then said to me, feed your belly and fill your stomach with this scroll I am giving you. I ate it, and it was as sweet as honey in my mouth. He then said...go now to the house of Israel, and speak my words to them (Ezek 2:8-3:4).*

4. Reflect on the Mystery of God's Love at Work in Your Own Life

Do you work at filling yourself daily with the word of God, that is to say with God Himself (*Meditation*, N° 100.2 and 80.2)?

Are you in the habit of spending some time each day reading the scriptures?

Are you faithful to the practice of regularly spending time in meditative prayer?

Do you share God's word with others? Do you share it with those whom you instruct?

### **Third Movement**

5. Resolve to Be More Open to the Spirit Who Works in and through You Today

If you chose to allow this scripture to come alive in you now, what would you have to change in your life? What are the obstacles to this change?

Where do you sense that the Spirit is calling you to change so that you might be a more effective minister of Jesus Christ and of the Gospel?

What will you, in part as a consequence of the time you have just spent in prayer, do differently today?



## Loving Brethren

*Entreat the God of hearts to keep your heart and that of your brothers and sisters one in the heart of Jesus (Meditation, N° 39.3).*

### First Movement

1. Pause for a few minutes and recall that God dwells in you.

*God is love, and those who abide in love abide in God and God in them (1 Jn 4:16).*

2. Ask God for the grace to be faithful to the word that God speaks in the depths of your being.

*Anyone who loves me will be true to my word, and my Father will love them; we will come to them and make our dwelling place with them (Jn 14:23).*

### Second Movement

3. Contemplate the Mystery of God's Love at Work in the World

Read the following scripture passage a few times slowly. What word or words especially catch your attention? Let these words be another expression of God's love for you.

♦ *I declare and solemnly attest in the Lord that you must no longer live as the pagans do...That is not what you learned when you learned Christ! I am supposing, of course, that He has been preached and taught to you in accord with the truth that is in Jesus: namely, that you must lay aside your former way of life and the old self which deteriorates through illusion and desire, and acquire a fresh, spiritual way of thinking. You must put on that newness of one created in God's image, whose justice and holiness are born in truth...Therefore, be imitators of God as His dear children. Follow the way of love, even as Christ loves you. He gave Himself for us as an offering to God, a gift of pleasing fragrance (Eph 4:17, 20-24; 5:1-2).*

4. Reflect on the Mystery of God's Love at Work in Your Own Life

Do you follow the way of love in your dealings with those with whom you live and work? Are you kind, patient, and forgiving of others?

Are you seriously striving to acquire a fresh, spiritual way of thinking and to put on that newness of one created in God's image?

Are you as selfless in your love of others as Christ has been in His love and acceptance of you?

What progress have you made in the way of justice and holiness?

### **Third Movement**

5. Resolve to Be More Open to the Spirit Who Works in and through You Today

Spend a few minutes thanking God for all He has done for you and for all of those whose love is a tangible sign of God's faithful care of you.

What obstacles remain to allowing you to be all that God wants you to be in Christ?

Where and with whom do you sense that God is inviting you to be more loving today?

## A Grain of Wheat

*Unless a grain of wheat falls to the ground and dies, it remains just a grain of wheat (Jn 12:24).*

### First Movement

1. Take a few minutes to recollect yourself; take a comfortable position; try to relax. Remember that God is present in your being. Let go of whatever tension is in you. Breathe in deeply, and breathe out slowly. As you do so, imagine that you are actually breathing the Spirit of God.

*Yahweh God shaped man...and blew the breath of life into his nostrils; and man became a living being (Gn 2:7).*

2. Ask God to help you understand what He means by the dying of the grain of wheat in your life, especially as a Christian teacher.

*Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find...for anyone who asks receives; anyone who seeks finds (Mt 7:7-8).*

### Second Movement

3. Contemplate the Mystery of God's Love at Work in the World

Read the following scripture passage a few times slowly. What words or phrases especially catch your attention? What is being said about your ministry? Enter into this mystery of the dying of the grain.

♦ *Amen, amen, I say to you. Unless the grain of wheat falls into the ground and dies, it remains a grain of wheat; but if it dies, it produces much fruit. Whoever loves their life loses it, and whoever hates their life in this world will preserve it for eternal life. Whoever serves me must follow me, and where I am, there also will my servant be. The Father will honor whoever serves me (Jn 12:24-26).*

4. Reflect on the Mystery of God's Love at Work in Your Own Life

In what way(s) are you the grain of wheat mentioned in this passage?

How is God calling you, in your daily life, to be the grain of wheat?

Are you willing to die for those entrusted to your care? *For this had to be the kind of ardent zeal you had for the salvation of those you teach, when you were led to sacrifice yourself and to spend your whole life to give these children a Christian education and to procure for them the life of grace in this world and eternal life in the next (Meditation, N°201.3).*

What are some of the things that you must give up?

### Third Movement

5.     Resolve to Be More Open to the Spirit Who Works in and through You Today  
        Promise God that you will be as open to His Spirit as you are to the air you breathe.

        Promise Him that you will be willing to die today in order to procure His glory for those entrusted to you, e.g. you will spend more time with them, or you will be kinder to them, or you will be ready to listen to the problems they will bring to you.

## Shepherds of the Flock of God

*Be the shepherd of the flock of God that is entrusted to you; watch over it, not simply as a duty but gladly... (1 Peter 5:2).*

### First Movement

1. Take a few minutes to recollect yourself and then contemplate God's presence in the persons of those entrusted to your care.

*The faith which animates you should lead you to respect Jesus Christ in their persons (Meditation, N° 80.3).*

2. Ask God to make your will one with His.

*My food is to do the will of the one who sent me (Jn 4:34).*

### Second Movement

3. Contemplate the Mystery of God's Love at Work in the World

Read the following passages a few times slowly. What words or phrases especially appeal to you? Ponder what is being said. Lovingly contemplate Jesus the Good Shepherd, and how you resemble Him.

♦ *In the Gospel, Jesus compares those who have care of souls to a good shepherd who is very careful of his sheep. One of the qualities which Our Lord says distinguishes him is that he knows them each individually. This is also one of the essential qualities required of those who instruct others, for they must get to know their pupils and discern the manner in which to act toward them (Meditation, N° 33.1).*

♦ *It is also necessary, says Our Lord, that the sheep should know their shepherd, in order to follow him. Two things are required, therefore, of those who have charge of others and should characterize them. First, they should be very virtuous, in order to serve as an example, for unless they walk in the right path, those who follow them would be led astray. Secondly, they should manifest great tenderness for the well-being of those confided to them, so that anything which might be capable of injuring or wounding these young people will call for their attention. In this manner, the sheep will love their shepherd and be pleased in his company, since they will find therein their repose and their relief (Meditation, N° 33.2).*

4. Reflect on the Mystery of God's Love at Work in Your Own Life

Who are the people for whom you are a shepherd?

How careful of them have you been?

How well do you know them individually?

Do you teach by example?

Are those with whom you work happy in your company?

### **Third Movement**

5. Resolve to Be More Open to the Spirit Who Works in and through You Today

How could you better be a good shepherd who cares for those who are entrusted to you?

Where is the Spirit drawing you to resemble Jesus, the Good Shepherd?

Ask God to give you the Spirit to help you to be a good shepherd so that through you others might find repose and relief.

## A True Liberator

*The Spirit of the Lord has been given to me, for He has anointed me, He has sent me to bring the good news to the poor, to proclaim liberty to captives and to the blind new sight, and to set the down trodden free, to proclaim the Lord's year of favor (Is 61:1-2).*

### First Movement

1. Take a few minutes to quiet yourself and to call to mind that God is present with all of those who, in any way, need to be set free from bondage.

*You who are teachers have the responsibility to use every possible means to bring those under your guidance into that liberty of the children of God which Jesus Christ obtained by dying for us (Meditation, N° 203.2).*

2. Abandon yourself to God's providence so that He can give you the necessary graces both to understand His will and to do it.

*I have heard the voice of the Lord saying, "Whom shall we send? Who will go for us?" And I said, "Here I am." I said, "send me" (Is 6:8).*

### Second Movement

3. Contemplate the Mystery of God's Love at Work in the World

Read the following scripture passages a few times slowly. What words, lines, or phrases attract your attention? Listen to what God is saying to you through the passage. Picture the scene in your mind. What is happening? Try to place yourself in the scene as God's instrument of liberation. See Jesus as the true liberator using you and sending you into the poverty and abandonment of the children of this world.

◆ *You are set free from sin and bound to the service of God. Your gain will be sanctification and the end will be eternal life. For the wage paid by sin is death; the gift freely given by God is eternal life in Christ Jesus Our Lord (Rom 6:22-23).*

◆ *Whoever looks closely into the perfect law that sets people free, who keeps on paying attention to it, and does not simply listen and then forget it, but puts it into practice, that person will be blessed by God in what is done (Jas 1:25).*

◆ *There was the hope that creation itself would one day be set free from slavery to decay and would share the glorious freedom of the children of God (Rom 8:21).*

4. Reflect on the Mystery of God's Love at Work in Your Own Life
- As Christ's instrument of liberation, to whom have you been sent as a liberator? Is it to the poor children confided to your care?
- From what are you liberating them? What will be the gain of this liberation?
- How do you liberate a world characterized, on the one hand, by hunger, poverty, and war and, on the other hand, by materialism and by the rich becoming richer at the expense of the poor?
- Have you anything more at heart than helping others find their happiness as children of God? *Let the children come to me for theirs is the kingdom of God* (Mt 19:14-15).

### Third Movement

5. Resolve to Be More Open to the Spirit Who Works in and through You Today
- What are you willing to renounce and let go of in order to be a more perfect instrument of God's liberation of others?
- Which part of your life have you been called to convert and to change in order to help set the children of this world free from bondage?





## Reaching the Unreached...in the Steps of De La Salle

by

James Kimpton, FSC<sup>42</sup>

In my work among the poor remote villages of this part of South India, De La Salle and his special charisms have been the heart and soul of what I do. Without the very particular atmosphere that the whole Lasallian drive has given to my own individual outreach, I think little would have been achieved of any permanence.

### *The Unknown Future — As It Was for De La Salle, It Is for Us*

Quite definitely De La Salle's whole life was one of several displacements in which he had to take steps out into the dark of the unknown future. These steps, these displacements, he had to make in total trust in the call of divine Providence. He had to make them, not asking for light to see the whole road, but just enough to make the next few steps. He was called gradually to leave all aspects of his established life for which he had been specially prepared during his earlier years. Thus, he gave up his position in the Cathedral of Reims to go down and live with the much lower level of society his new work demanded. He had eventually to leave his aristocratic paternal house and family in order to live among the uncultured men with whom God had chosen for him to work. He went into work that was wholly new, started off in an apostolate which he could not possibly have foreseen. So much so that eventually, toward the end of his life, he admitted that if he had known the amount of suffering and hardship entailed in the work he had founded, he would not have touched it with the tip of his little finger.

Our work sometimes requires that we leave absolutely everything connected with the first part of our lives or even with subsequent parts of them, so that we are making new starts in unknown territories during different times of our lives. We may be asked to leave family and all established friends, home, and even country, permanently. We may have to abandon any connection with our own culture and accept another which is completely foreign. And we may have to step out into a way of life and work which is totally unknown.

Thus, I, as an Englishman, have, at the choosing of Providence, spent most of my life in countries of the East, doing work I never dreamed I would do, and of such a wide variety that I too would have taken fright had it been presented to me in the beginning years: healing the sick, housing the homeless, teaching the untaught, caring for orphans, even mothering the tiny babies that are brought to us unwanted and uncared for, caring for leprosy patients... In all this, God's voice was heard and a step was made into the dark of the unknown future, taking the risk of launching out into the deeps pointed out by God.

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<sup>42</sup> This article appeared in *Lasalliana* 02-18-E-03. Not far from Madurai, South India, Brother James is engaged in an impressive work of development and training among very poor children and families.

### *Trust in Providence Which Did Not Fail De La Salle and Does Not Fail Us*

De La Salle taught me that his Brothers must have blind and total trust in divine Providence. He made it clear in his own life that God gives only so that we may give it all away, and that the more we give the more we will receive to give away, and what is held on to can only stagnate and be fruitless.

Thus, when De La Salle consulted his spiritual director to find out what he should do with all his inherited wealth, he was quite bluntly told to give it all away and not keep even a fraction of it in any form. So-called wiser persons thought he should use it to found his new schools, or that he should put it into the bank and live off the interest. But no, once again there was that step into the dark to be made, a challenge from God to be faced and a risk to be taken. And De La Salle took it. He literally gave everything away to the non-productive poor and went off and lived like them, completely dependent henceforth on Providence for all his needs and those of his earliest followers. Surely that too was meant as a lesson for us all; and so De La Salle made sure that his Brothers understood that their work was to be among the poorest and to be wholly gratuitous, and that they too were to depend on Providence — in the spirit of faith to which he so often referred.

In our work among the poorest of people in these villages, which are primitive and so lacking in every kind of security and necessity, our approach has always been, and I hope always will be, that if there is a need shown to us by God, then the first step is not to look into purses or bank accounts, but to attend to the need, knowing full well with deep conviction that God will provide all that is needed in materials, finances, and personnel. Never once has this failed. We came here with an allowance of 2,000 Rupees, and we were asked not to request more hereafter. We looked around at our neighbors who lived in the most abject poverty and saw what we must do. We reached out. We attended to the greatest needs. We did the most foolish things in the eyes of the world and of those who depend upon large bank accounts or strong sources of income. We simply gave away what we had and we also started to build and heal and to care for children and the very needy, with no money. Our annual expenditure (not our budget, please note, because only God can budget) is now 2,600,000 Rupees in the villages alone; and we also run a children's home for the most destitute and for unwanted babies, with its own separate accounting of close to 700,000 Rupees.

Our Founder stepped out into the dark with empty hands and apparently inadequate helpers. But divine Providence never failed him. Divine Providence has never, in any way, failed us. Always there is enough to feed the five thousand in the desert — with twelve baskets of superabundance left over for still others.

### *The Saint's Enduring Message: To Radiate Christ to Others*

But De La Salle knew full well that his real work was to be a redeemer with and for Christ. He knew that there was no other reason for his call from God that he should spend himself in order to lead other souls to God, in order to be another redeemer in the work chosen for him by God. He knew also full well, and kept on reminding his Brothers, that the whole reason and meaning for their being Brothers was that they should radiate Christ to all with whom they came into contact the whole day long. They were to carry Christ in

themselves because Christ in others awaited their love, and also their love was *His* love. There was to be this mutual interchange of Christs from the carrier to the receiver, as is always the case. De La Salle kept on insisting that we meet Christ in the early part of the day, at meditation and Mass and Communion, and that we keep in close touch with Him all day long, and that thus, indeed, we would be able to radiate Christ, that thus we could be other redeemers — and only thus. How frequently he came back to that refrain; how much he insisted that the Brothers be men of deep prayer — or else be worthless as pruned vine twigs.

In our work among the Hindus and Muslims in these small villages hidden away behind their veils of coconut palms, we rarely meet with Christians. And when I questioned myself why God had put us in such a place, among people we would not ever convert, He made it very, very clear that He was the one who was working and not us. He, Christ, was the one who would reach out to whomsoever He put in our paths each day. We know full well that only God can convert if He sees the need and when He is ready. He, Christ, would do His work, in His way — and often without our ever knowing what He is doing or why. *Our* responsibility was merely to keep in the closest touch with Christ and then to let Him work in the way He wanted. Our part was merely to show Christianity in action. All the rest was His doing.

**Prayer:** Lord, when I am hungry, give me someone to feed; when I am thirsty, give water for their thirst. When I am sad, give me someone to lift from sorrow. When burdens weigh upon me, lay upon my shoulders the burden of my fellows. Lord, when I stand greatly in need of tenderness, give me someone who yearns for love. May your will be my bread; your grace my strength; your love my resting place.

## Bearers of the Holy Presence of God

*And the life I live now is not my own; Christ is living in me. Of course, I still live my human life, but it is a life of faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me (Gal 2:20).*

### First Movement

1. Take a few minutes to quiet yourself and to recall that God is present to you in the very depths of your being.

*Do you not know that your are God's temple and that God's Spirit dwells in you?...God's temple is holy, and you are that temple (1 Cor 3: 16-17).*

2. Ask God to speak to you and to reveal more clearly what it is that He asks of you.

*It is in the interior of our being that the Holy Spirit communicates Himself and unites Himself to us, and makes known what God asks in order for us to belong entirely to Him (Meditation, N° 62.3).*

### Second Movement

3. Contemplate the Mystery of God's Love at Work in the World

Read the following passage a few times slowly. What words or phrases attract your attention? Listen to what is being said to you through the passage.

♦ *Your sole concern...should be the establishment of God's reign in your heart, both in this life and in the next. In this present life, you should not be concerned about anything except to bring about the reign of God in your heart by His grace and by the fullness of His love. You should live for God alone, and the life of your soul should be the life of God Himself. You ought likewise to nourish yourself with God's life by thinking of His holy presence as often as you possibly can. That which constitutes the life of the saints is precisely their continual attention to God, and this also should form the life of those who...seek only to accomplish His holy will, to love Him, and to cause Him to be loved by others (Meditation, N° 67.1).*

4. Reflect on the Mystery of God's Love at Work in Your Own Life

Do you regularly keep God company? Do you often spend time meditating on His holy presence?

Are you open to the movement and stirring of God's life within you and docile to whatever God may require of you?

Do you strive to love God more wholeheartedly and to cause Him to be better known and loved by others?

Are you concerned with the establishment of God's reign both in your own heart and in the lives of those to whom you minister?

### **Third Movement**

5.      **Resolve to Be More Open to the Spirit Who Works in and through You Today**

Take a few minutes to thank God for the many blessings you have received, especially the gift of divine life within you.

What will you do today to share God's life in you with others?

## Faithful Stewards of God's Household

*Have you been faithful managers of the wealth God has entrusted to you and of the talents...and graces you have received to fulfill well the service that has been given to you (Meditation, N° 205.1).*

### First Movement

1. Take a few minutes to recall that you are in the holy presence of God, a presence that not only called you into being but one which also sustains your very existence even today.

*Yet, in fact, He is not far from any of us, since it is in Him that we live, and move, and have our being (Acts 17:28).*

2. Ask for a clearer understanding of where and how God is inviting you to a fuller and more complete response to His will.

*Lord, what more must I do? (Mt 19:20).*

### Second Movement

3. Contemplate the Mystery of God's Love at Work in the World

Read the following passages a few times slowly. What words or phrases attract your attention? Listen to what is being said to you through the passages.

♦ *A man who was going on a journey...called in his servants and handed his funds over to them according to each one's abilities. To one he disbursed five thousand silver pieces, to a second two thousand, and to a third a thousand. Then he went away. Immediately the one who received the five thousand went to invest it and made another five. In the same way, the one who received the two thousand doubled that figure. The one who received the one thousand went off instead and dug a hole in the ground, where he buried the master's money. After a long absence, the master of those servants came home and settled accounts with them (Mt 25:14-19).*

♦ *Let your belts be fastened around your waists and your lamps be burning ready. Be like those awaiting their master's return from a wedding, so that when the master arrives and knocks, you will open the door without delay. It will go well for those servants whom the master finds wide-awake upon returning. I tell you, the master will put on an apron, seat them at table, and proceed to wait on them. Should the master happen to come at midnight or before sunrise and find them prepared, it will go well with them. You know, as well as I, that if the head of the house knew when the thief was coming, they would not be allowed to break into the house. Be on guard, therefore. The Son of Man will come when you least expect Him (Lk 12:35-40).*

4. Reflect on the Mystery of God's Love at Work in Your Own Life

Who are those people (God's dear children; His "wealth"; His "personal property") who have been entrusted to your guidance? How attentive and watchful are you in your care of them?

What are the talents and the graces that have been given to you so that you might fulfill well your ministry (e.g., the gifts of zeal, of teaching, of vigilance, of patience, and of self-control)?

Do you eagerly await Our Lord's return? Will He, upon **His return**, say to you; *Well done, my reliable and industrious servant* (Mt 25:21). *Come, you have my Father's blessing* (Mt 25:34)?

### Third Movement

5. Resolve to Be More Open to the Spirit Who Works in and through You Today

*Name one thing you have that has not been given to you (Meditation, N° 196.3).* So pause now for a few moments and give thanks.

To what better use could you put today the gifts and talents with which God has blessed you for the guidance and well-being of others?

*Since God is the one who has given you the ministry you exercise (Meditation, N° 205.1),* ask for the graces necessary to be good and faithful stewards in His divine service.



## Building Up the Body of Christ

*Consider that since you should be working in your ministry for the building of the Church on the foundation which has been laid by the holy apostles by the instruction you are giving to the children whom God has entrusted to your care..., you must fulfill your ministry as the apostles fulfilled theirs (Meditation, N° 200.1).*

### First Movement

1. Take a few minutes to quiet yourself and recall God's presence both within yourself and in the midst of your dealings with others.

*You are the temple of the living God: just as God has said: 'I will dwell with them and walk among them. I will be their God, and they shall be my people (2 Cor 6:16).*

2. Ask that God make clearer His will for you; and that, thus more fully glimpsing your vocation, you might be helped to give yourself zealously to its accomplishment.

*May the God of peace...make you capable of all that is good for the doing of His will, that through Jesus Christ you may carry out all that is pleasing to Him (Heb 13:20).*

### Second Movement

3. Contemplate the Mystery of God's Love at Work in the World

Read the following passage a few times slowly. What words or phrases attract your attention? Listen to what is being said to you through the passage.

♦ *I plead with you, then, as a prisoner for the Lord, to live a life worthy of the calling you have received, with perfect humility, meekness, and patience, bearing with one another lovingly. Make every effort to preserve the unity which has the Spirit as its origin and peace as its binding force. There is but one body and one Spirit, just as there is but one **hope given all of** you by your call. There is one Lord, one faith, one baptism; **one God and Father** of all, who is over all, and works through all, and is in all...It is He who gave apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors, and teachers in roles of service for the faithful to build up the body of Christ, till we become one in faith and in the knowledge of God's Son, and form that perfection which is Christ come to full stature (Eph 4:1-7, 11-13).*

4. Reflect on the Mystery of God's Love at Work in Your Own Life

Who are those people through and by whom God fashioned you to be more kind, loving, patient, gentle, and humble in your dealings with others?

How attentive and careful are you in helping to lay a solid Christian foundation in the lives of those entrusted to your instruction and guidance?

How comfortable are you to be God's co-worker in "roles of service for the faithful to build up the body of Christ"?

Where are you being invited to be more apostolic and prophetic, more worthy of the calling you have received, in your zeal on behalf of the construction of a *new heavens and a new earth* (Rev 21:1-7)?

### **Third Movement**

5.      **Resolve to Be More Open to the Spirit Who Works in and through You Today**

Where is God inviting you to change what you are doing and the manner in which you are living so that others may enjoy a fuller and more human existence?

Take a few moments to renew the consecration of the temple of your being by re-offering today to God your whole heart and all your will (*Meditation*, N° 188.3).

## Trust in God

*When we abandon ourselves to the providence of God, it is like putting ourselves out on the high sea without sails or oars (Meditation, N° 134.1).*

### First Movement

1. Pause for a few minutes and remember that God is always and everywhere present with us.

*Be strong and of good courage; be not frightened, neither be dismayed; for the Lord, your God, is with you wherever you go (Joshua 1:9).*

2. Ask for the grace necessary to be one in mind and heart with Jesus as you try to do the Father's will.

*Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven (Mt 6:10).*

### Second Movement

3. Contemplate the Mystery of God's Love at Work in the World

Read the following scripture passage a few times slowly. What word or words especially catch your attention? Let these words gradually draw you further into the unfolding of God's mystery and God's kingdom in the world and in your own heart.

♦ *Then He said to His disciples, "That is why I am telling you not to worry about your life and what you are to eat, nor about your body and how you are to clothe it. For life means more than food, and the body more than clothing. Think of the ravens. They do not sow or reap; they have no storehouses and no barns; yet God feeds them. And how much more are you worth than the birds! Can any of you, for all of your worrying, add a single cubit to the span of your life? If the smallest things, therefore, are outside your control, why worry about the rest? Think of the flowers; they never have to spin or weave; yet, I assure you, not even Solomon in all his glory was robed like one of these. Now if that is how God clothes the grass in the field which is there today and thrown into the furnace tomorrow, how much more will He look after you, O you of little faith! You must not set your hearts on things to eat and things to drink; nor must you worry. It is the pagans of this world who set their hearts on all these things. Your Father well knows you need them. No; set your hearts on His kingdom, and these other things will be given you as well. There is no need to be afraid, little flock, for it has pleased your Father to give you the kingdom" (Lk 12:22-32).*

4. Reflect on the Mystery of God's Love at Work in Your Own Life  
Do you trust in the providence of God?

Are you really trusting of those with whom you live and work? Through whom and by what means have you been helped to be both a more trusting and a more trustworthy person?

Have you truly set your heart on God's kingdom? Have you done this with no thought of turning back? Do you *seek, above all else, to establish within yourself this reign of God* (Meditation, N° 67.1)?

Are you seeking *only to do His holy will, to love Him and cause Him to be loved by others* (Meditation, N° 67.1)?

### **Third Movement**

5.     Resolve to Be More Open to the Spirit Who Works in and through You Today

Where are you being invited to be more trusting today?

If you chose to allow this passage of scripture to come more alive in you now, what would you have to change in your life? What are the obstacles to this change?

Where do you sense that the Spirit is calling you to be a more effective minister of Jesus Christ and of the Gospel?

## Dying to Self

*I solemnly assure you, unless the grain of wheat falls to the earth and dies, it remains just a grain of wheat. But if it dies, it produces much fruit (Jn 12:24).*

### First Movement

1. Take a few minutes to recollect yourself and recall that God is always present wherever you are.

*Even though I walk in the dark valley, I fear no evil; for you are with me; your rod and your staff give me courage (Ps 23:4).*

2. Ask God to help you better understand and want the same things in life that God wants.

*"Whoever wishes to come after me must deny one's very self, take up one's cross, and follow me," says the Lord (Mt 16:24).*

### Second Movement

3. Contemplate the Mystery of God's Love at Work in the World

Read the following passages a few times slowly. What word or words especially catch your attention? Listen to what is being said; lovingly contemplate Jesus Christ and the relationship of love into which He invites you.

♦ *Let it be clear, then, in all your relations with the children who are entrusted to you that you look upon yourselves as ministers of God, acting with love, with a sincere and true zeal, accepting with much patience the difficulties you have to suffer, willing to be dishonored by others and mistreated, even to give your life for Jesus in the fulfillment of your ministry (Meditation, N°201.1).*

♦ *Insults, rebuffs, calumnies, persecution, and even death were the rewards meted out to the saints, the apostles, and even Jesus Christ Himself. Do not hope for any other if you really have God in view in the work He has confided to you (Meditation, N° 155.3).*

♦ *Your zeal must go so far...that you are ready to give your very life, so dear to you are those entrusted to you (Meditation, N° 198.2).*

♦ *Your faith should...lead you to show that...you are true disciples of Jesus Christ, having only God in view in your actions. You should manifest...courage and intrepidity in teaching the maxims of the gospel, your zeal and your faith being strengthened by the thought that you are God's ministers, and that you act in His name (Meditation, N° 87.1).*

4. Reflect on the Mystery of God's Love at Work in Your Own Life

In the service of what do you spend your life and your resources?

What activities sustain your commitment, nourish you spiritually, and give meaning to your life?

Does your union with Christ in the ministry you do enable you, in some way, to lay down your life each day for others?

Do you exhibit great concern and patience in your care of others? Or do you give in to the first impulse of ill humor or anger and give corrections heedlessly or inappropriately?

**Third Movement**

5. Resolve to Be More Open to the Spirit Who Works in and through You Today

Where is the Spirit drawing you to sacrifice yourself today that others may have life?

Ask God for the help you need to be effective and faithful in this ministry which has been entrusted to you.



## “Higher Expectations” in the Catholic Inner City High School

by

William Harkins, FSC<sup>43</sup>

*Christian hope, shaped by teachers, school climate, and curriculum design,  
thwarts the realities of early death and poverty.*

Antoine's mother thanked the young men and women who had organized everything, who had spoken, who had led the prayers. She repeated what she had said a year before, that Antoine was a good boy. He was not an angel; but he was a good, respectful boy. Every morning he prayed a psalm with his mother before leaving the house, as he did a year ago when he left for school but did not return.

The students who shared their reflections at the memorial service voiced a wide range of feelings: anger, frustration, fear, hope, and love. No one expressed surprise.

On his way home from school, near the East New York housing projects in which he lived, a group of older teenagers had without cause beaten Antoine so badly that he died a few days later. Death is always shocking, especially when the victim is young. But murder is so frequently the cause of death for young blacks that it is not a surprise. Most of Antoine's friends knew of other youngsters who had been murdered in their neighborhoods. When you are young and black and male, murder may be the final fact of life.

Homicide is the leading cause of death for black males between the ages of 15 and 44, and for black females between the ages of 15 and 24. During his lifetime, a black male has a one in 21 chance of becoming a homicide victim; he is six times more likely to be murdered than is a white male. When a murder victim is a 16-year-old student in your own school, there is new import to these and like statistics:

- In 1976, when many of today's eighth-graders were born, more than half of all black children and 45% of all Hispanic children born in New York City were born to single mothers.

- In 1985, one out of every two black children under the age of 6 lived below the poverty line; for Hispanic children, the figure was two out of five children.

- In 1985, median income for white families was \$29,152; for black families, it was \$16,786; and for Hispanic families, it was \$19,027, with poverty rates growing faster for the Hispanic population.<sup>44</sup>

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<sup>43</sup> William Harkins died in December 1993. He had been the Dean of School of Education at Manhattan College in New York City, USA. This article was written when he was the Assistant Principal of Bishop Loughlin Memorial High School in Brooklyn, New York. It appeared in *Lasalliana*, 18-13-C-76.

<sup>44</sup> Statistics on murder rates are from *Report of the Secretary's Task Force on Black and Minority*



What are the implications of these statistics for the Catholic high school with a large minority population? When students, by virtue alone of being Hispanic or black, are more likely to be murdered than are white students, death is not far from student consciousness. In fact, when ninth-graders in our school are asked at the start of a class retreat to name what they most fear, 30% to 50% name "death." When 11th or 12th graders sign up for electives, sections fill up most quickly in the *Death and Dying* course. The Catholic high school offers something that public schools cannot easily allow: open discussion of life and death, of death and dying, with a difficult but clear position grounded in faith. Central in such discussion is the reality of hope: not as a palliative, but as a leavening agent.

A second implication of statistics about death and poverty in minority communities is that "higher expectations" in a Catholic high school must be rooted in the death and resurrection of Jesus. It is important to assert this clearly because when the phrase "higher expectations" is used in educational writing, it is often unwittingly rooted in an assembly line view of school popularized earlier this century by the Efficiency Movement.<sup>45</sup> If education means simply choosing the best "raw material" and producing a well-educated "final-product," Catholic schools would have only to assure some final Catholic coating. Students in such schools might implicitly learn that success is a matter of performance and production, reward and consumption — hardly Christian values.

Instead, a Catholic high school community can call all of its members to respond to the challenge of prophets of every age: to see visions and to dream dreams. For a black or Hispanic youngster, it may be especially important to have a dream. It is not utopian thinking that a school must sanction, but firm hope and Christian expectation grounded in the death and resurrection of Jesus. The clearest statement of Christian expectation is the Nicene Creed: *exspecto resurrectionem mortuorum et vitam venturi saeculi* — I expect, I am fully confident about, I have as my living hope the resurrection of the dead and life in an age soon to be.

These are the "higher expectations" fundamental to the Christian community and central to a Catholic inner city high school.

Hope is at the heart of such a Catholic high school; and hope can take shape in the lives of students through the teachers, the school climate, and the careful design of curriculum.

Where many young people face unrelentingly harsh realities in life, the teacher is a sacramental sign of gentleness and acceptance. Where many young people find few adults concerned enough to guide and correct them, the teacher is a sure and firm guide. Three hundred years ago, the Church's patron saint of teachers, John Baptist de La Salle, defined the role of the Christian teacher.

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*Health*, Vol. 5, *Homicide, Suicide, and Unintentional injuries* (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, January 1986), pp. 5-10. For statistics on poverty, see *The New York Times*, 4 September 1986 and 16 September 1986. See also Henry M. Levin, "The Educationally Disadvantaged: A National Crisis," *Working Paper No. 6 of Public/Private Ventures: The State Youth Initiative Project* (Philadelphia, 1985), pp. 3-5.

<sup>45</sup> Raymond Callahan. *Education and the Cult of Efficiency* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1962).

“You who are teachers have the responsibility to use every possible means to bring those under your guidance into that liberty of the children of God which Jesus Christ obtained by dying for us. You must do this by possessing two qualities in your relationship with them. The first is your gentleness and patience. The second is prudence in your reproofs and correction.”<sup>46</sup>

The teacher, as sacramental sign, reveals some of life’s unsuspected dimensions. A teacher helps a student to believe in him or herself. In inviting a student to believe in the power of life over death, in the possibility of shaping a world in the image of the Lord and the beatitudes, the teacher is a sign of hope.

Not only the teacher but the total school community is to be a sign of hope, somehow reflecting the Mystical Body of Christ. It is a tribute to the honesty of Catholic high school administrators that, in the National Catholic Educational Association’s survey of Catholic high schools, two areas of school life given some of the lowest evaluations were: a) responding to the special needs of minority students [rated fair or poor by 28%] and b) recruiting and retaining low-income students [rated fair or poor by 40%].<sup>47</sup> Perhaps the lead question on climate questionnaires distributed to black students in Catholic high schools should be: “Does this school receive you as you think Jesus Christ would receive you?” The total school community teaches the basic lessons: This school cares about you, believes in you, supports you. This school challenges you to reshape yourself and society in the image of the risen Lord.

Excellence in course design and curriculum planning is another practical way that a Catholic school builds hope. Courses must challenge students to think clearly, to work hard, to be creative. Courses must offer students a realistic opportunity to succeed. Good curriculum design calls forth from students new belief in themselves, new trust in their ability to learn.

Minority students are often low income students with predictably lower scores on standardized tests than higher income students. Such test scores can debilitate adolescents and cause them to lose hope. In such circumstances, thoughtful curriculum planning and competent, caring teachers are especially important.

Thirty years ago, philosopher Etienne Gilson reminded teachers of the limitations and the importance of their work. Gilson wrote: “We should not imagine that school children know nothing more than what they are taught in schools. In fact, what we teach them is but an infinitesimal part of their knowledge, but it is made up of what, without us, they would never learn.”<sup>48</sup>

What most minority youngsters learn about the Catholic faith and Catholic attitudes toward minorities will be learned not only from teachers in Catholic schools, but from Catholics in the local community. Minority youth will surely learn whether Catholic high

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<sup>46</sup> De La Salle, *Meditations*, N° 203.2

<sup>47</sup> National Catholic Educational Association. *The Catholic High School: A National Portrait* (Washington, DC, 1985), p. 133.

<sup>48</sup> Etienne Gilson. “The Eminence of Teaching,” *A Gilson Reader* (New York: Image Books, 1957), p. 303.

schools reach out enthusiastically to them or reach out only to those among them with special academic or athletic promise. This said, Gilson's words can encourage and challenge teachers of minority youngsters in Catholic high schools. Without such teachers, students might not learn the "higher expectations" open to them through the power of the resurrection, and their responsibility, as children of God, to cooperate with the Holy Spirit in reshaping the world in the spirit of the beatitudes.



## Children of Light

*Your faith should be for you a light which guides you in all things, and a shining light for those whom you instruct, to lead them on the way to heaven (Meditation, N° 178.1).*

### First Movement

1. Pause for a few minutes and remember that God, who is always and everywhere present, dwells in your heart.

*For it is the God who said, "Let light shine out of darkness," who has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ (2 Cor 4:6).*

2. Ask for the grace necessary to be one with Christ in your trust and your willingness to do the Father's will.

*"For I know the plans I have for you," says the Lord, "plans to prosper you, and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future" (Jer 29:11).*

### Second Movement

3. Contemplate the Mystery of God's Love at Work in the World

Read the following scripture passages a few times slowly. What word or words especially catch your attention? Let these words gradually draw you further into the mystery of God.

♦ *You are the salt of the earth; but if salt has lost its taste, how shall its salt be restored? It is no longer good for anything except to be thrown out and trodden under foot...You are the light of the world. A city set on a hill cannot be hid. Nor does one light a lamp and put it under a bushel, but on a stand, and it gives light to all in the house. Let your light so shine before others, that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven (Mt 15:13-16).*

♦ *I have come as light into the world, that whoever believes in me may not remain in darkness (Jn 12:46).*

♦ *This is the message we have heard from Him and proclaim to you, that God is light and in Him is no darkness at all. If we say we have fellowship with Him while we walk in darkness, we lie and do not live according to the truth; but if we walk in the light, as He is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus His Son cleanses us from all sin (1 Jn 1:5-7).*

4. Reflect on the Mystery of God's Love at Work in Your Own Life

In what way do you bring light into the lives of those with whom you live and work? How are they light in your life?

Are there any pockets of darkness still remaining in you? Are there any areas of your life still in need of the transforming light of Christ?

Who or what is bringing life and light into your life at the present time? Where are you being re-energized?

**Third Movement**

5. Resolve to Be More Open to the Spirit Who Works in and through You Today

If you chose to allow this scripture to come alive in you now, what would have to change in your life? What are the obstacles to this change?

Where is the Spirit drawing you to change and to sacrifice so that others, through you, might more readily have access to a fuller life and to the light of Christ?

## Precursors

*Remember that you are obliged...to prepare the way of the Lord in the hearts of your students (Meditation, N° 162.2).*

### First Movement

1. Take a few minutes to be quiet and recall the presence of God in the place where you are.

*Rejoice in the Lord always; again I say, rejoice!...The Lord is near (Phil 4:4-5).*

2. Now, once again, offer yourself into God's hands to do His will, especially as it concerns the care of those who have been entrusted to you.

*O Lord, remember how faithfully and wholeheartedly I conducted myself in your presence, doing what was pleasing to you! (Is 38:3).*

### Second Movement

3. Contemplate the Mystery of God's Love at Work in the World

Read the following scripture passage a few times slowly. What word or words especially catch your attention? Let these words gradually draw you further into the mystery of God.

♦ *The crowds, who were gathering to be baptized by John, asked him, "What should we do?" In reply John said to them, "Whoever has two coats must share with anyone who has none; and whoever has food must do likewise." Even tax collectors came to be baptized; and they asked him, "Teacher, what should we do?" He said to them, "Collect no more than the amount prescribed for you." Soldiers also asked him, "And we, what should we do?" He said to them, "Do not extort money from anyone by threats or false accusations, and be satisfied with your wages." As the people were filled with expectation, and all were questioning in their hearts concerning John, whether he might be the Messiah, John answered all of them by saying, "I baptize you with water; but one who is more powerful than I is coming; I am not worthy to untie the thong of his sandals. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire. His winnowing fork is in his hand, to clear his threshing floor and to gather the wheat into his granary; but the chaff he will burn with unquenchable fire." So, with many other exhortations, John proclaimed the good news to the people (Lk 3:10-18).*

4. Reflect on the Mystery of God's Love at Work in Your Own Life

What are the expectations, the questions, and the concerns of the people who come to you in need and with whom you work and interact every day?

The word that you speak to those entrusted to you, is it good news for them? What is the advice that you give? Do you invite them to be people of integrity? Do you encourage them to be all that they can be in Christ?

Who has helped to prepare the way of the Lord in your own heart? When have you been helped to see and understand more clearly the direction that God has been inviting you to follow in life?

Are you willing to be a font of living water among those for whom life, unfortunately, seems to be parched and dry? Do you try to bring hope to the troubled, refreshment to the weary, and new vision to those who seemingly wander in darkness and confusion?

### **Third Movement**

5.     Resolve to Be More Open to the Spirit Who Works in and through You Today

Has any one thing particularly stirred in you during this time in prayer? What response, if any, to Christ and God's movement in you do you feel inclined to make today?

Ask God's pardon for those times that you have been less than you have been asked to be in Christ.

Thank God for giving you again today the opportunity to love and serve Him in others.



## Humble Servants

*Guard against any merely human attitude toward your disciples; and do not pride yourself over what you do. These two things are capable of spoiling all the good there is in carrying out your service. What have you...that has not been given to you? And if it has been given to you, why...boast as if you had it on your own? (Meditation, N° 196.3).*

### First Movement

1. Pause for a few minutes and put yourself into the presence of our God, who came into the world in loving service of all humankind.

*The Son of Man came not to be served but to serve (Mt 20:28).*

2. Ask God, humbly and lovingly, to give you those attitudes and that wisdom necessary to give yourself, like Him, in loving service of all of those who come to you in want and need.

*Learn from me; for I am gentle and humble of heart (Mt 11:29).*

### Second Movement

3. Contemplate the Mystery of God's Love at Work in the World

Read the following scripture passages a few times slowly. What word or words especially catch your attention? Listen to what is being said; watch what happens; try to become part of the Mystery; lovingly contemplate Jesus and your relationship with Him.

♦ *Jesus, knowing that the Father had given all things into His hands, and that He had come from God and was going to God, rose from supper, laid aside His garments, and girded Himself with a towel. Then He poured water into a basin, and began to wash the disciples' feet, and to wipe them with the towel with which He was girded...And when He had finished washing their feet, and taken His garments, and resumed His place, He said to them, "Do you know what I have done to you? You call me Teacher and Lord; and you are right, for so I am. If I then, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another's feet. For I have given you an example, that you also should do as I have done to you." (Jn 13:3-5, 12-16).*

♦ *Jesus called the twelve to Him and said, "You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them; and their great men exercise authority over them. It shall not be so among you; but whoever would be great among you must be your servant, and whoever would be first among you must be your slave; even as the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give His life as a ransom for many (Mt 20:25-28).*

♦ *Behold, my servant, whom I have chosen, my beloved in whom I delight; I shall place my spirit upon Him; and He will proclaim justice to the Gentiles...and in His name the Gentiles will hope* (Mt 12:18-21).

4. Reflect on the Mystery of God's Love at Work in Your Own Life  
Where are you being called to help and to serve others?  
Are you truly a humble, sensitive, and caring servant of others?  
In your ministry, do you have those attitudes in you that were in Christ Jesus (cf. Phil 2:5-8)?

### **Third Movement**

5. Resolve to Be More Open to the Spirit Who Works in and through You Today  
Has any one thing particularly stirred in you during this time in prayer? What response, if any, to Christ and God's movement in you do you feel inclined to make today?  
If you chose to allow this scripture to come alive in you now, what would have to change in your life? What are the obstacles to this change?

## Visible Angels

*School children usually are not able by themselves to understand easily the Christian truths and maxims. They need good guides, like visible angels, to help them learn these things (Meditation, N° 197.1).*

### First Movement

1. Pause for a few minutes and put yourself more consciously into the presence of the living God, who has promised to be with us always.

*I will not leave you orphans; I will come to you (Jn 14:18).*

2. Ask God that you might have the graces necessary to one in mind and heart with Him.

*My food is to do the will of the one who sent me, and to accomplish His work (Jn 4:34).*

### Second Movement

3. Contemplate the Mystery of God's Love at Work in the World

Read the following passages a few times slowly. What word or words especially catch your attention? Listen to what is being said; watch what happens; lovingly contemplate Jesus who invites you to become part of the Mystery

♦ *One of the main duties of fathers and mothers is to bring up their children in a Christian manner and to teach them their religion. But many parents are not sufficiently enlightened in these matters; some are taken up with their daily concerns and the care of their family; others, under the constant anxiety of earning the necessities of life for themselves and their children, cannot take the time to teach their children their duties as Christians (Meditation, N° 193.2).*

♦ *Behold, I send an angel before you, to guard you on the way and to bring you to the place which I have prepared (Ex 23:20).*

♦ *It is characteristic of the providence of God and of His vigilance over human conduct to substitute for fathers and mothers persons who have enough knowledge and zeal to bring children to the knowledge of God and of His mysteries (Meditation, N° 193.2).*

♦ *I am Gabriel, who stand in the presence of God; and I was sent to speak to you, and to bring you this good news (Lk 1:19).*

♦ *At times you may have to teach children who do not know God, because they have been brought up by those who do not know Him themselves. Strive then to know God — that you may be able to make Him known to others and*

*that you may be able to help make Him loved by all those to whom you have made Him known (Meditation, N° 41.3).*

4. Reflect on the Mystery of God's Love at Work in Your Own Life

How well do you understand and appreciate the obligations and demands being experienced by the parents and the families of those with whom you work? How do you, in your ministry, try to support the family and assist parents in the education and formation of their children?

Do you help others know and love God?

In what ways are you being invited to guard others on their journey, to bring them good news, and to lead them to the place and into the fullness of their humanity that God has prepared for them?

How is Jesus inviting you to become part of the Mystery of His love unfolding in the world?

How do you feel about being called a "visible angel"?

### **Third Movement**

5. Resolve to Be More Open to the Spirit Who Works in and through You Today

Has any one thing particularly stirred in you during this time in prayer? What response, if any, to Christ and God's movement in you do you feel inclined to make today?

If you chose to allow this scripture to come alive in you now, what would have to change in your life? What are the obstacles to this change?

## Successors to the Apostles

*You are successors to the apostles in their task of catechizing and instructing the poor (Meditation, N° 200.1).*

### First Movement

1. Pause for a few minutes and try to place yourself in a more conscious awareness of the presence of the God who wants you to know the secret mysteries of His being.

*For He has made known to us in all wisdom and insight the mystery of His will, according to His purpose which He set forth in Christ (Eph 1:9).*

2. Since God has, out of His infinite love, chosen to reveal to you things which others do not see and to make known to you secrets which are hidden from many, take some time now and re-offer yourself to God to do His work and to fulfill His will.

*I have chosen you from the world, says the Lord, to go and bear fruit that will last (Jn 15:16).*

### Second Movement

3. Contemplate the Mystery of God's Love at Work in the World

Read the following passages a few times slowly. What word or words especially catch your attention? Listen to what is being said; watch what happens; try to become part of the Mystery; lovingly contemplate Jesus who invites you to be His ministers in the world.

♦ *And Jesus said to them, "Go into all the world and preach the gospel to the whole creation. Those who believe and are baptized will be saved; but those who do not believe will be condemned. And these signs will accompany those who believe: in my name they will cast out demons; they will speak in new tongues; they will pick up serpents; and if they drink any deadly thing, it will not harm them; they will lay their hands on the sick, and they will recover" (Mk 16:15-18).*

♦ *After this the Lord appointed seventy others, and sent them on ahead of Him, two by two, into every town and place where He Himself was about to come. And He said to them: "The harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few; pray, therefore, the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into His harvest. Go your way; behold, I send you out as lambs in the midst of wolves. Carry no purse, no bag, no sandals; and salute no one on the road...When you enter a town and they receive you, eat what is set before you; heal the sick in it and say to them, 'The Kingdom of God has come near you.'" (Lk 10:1-9).*

4. Reflect on the Mystery of God's Love at Work in Your Own Life

Spend some minutes in a more conscious awareness of the realities of the world around you. Who are those who are thirsting and hungering for truth, love, and justice? Who lacks education? Who is excluded from hearing the good news of the gospel?

In what ways are you being invited to continue the mission of Jesus in the world today? How might you be able to "quench the thirst" and to "satisfy the hunger" of those who come to you in expectation and need?

How is God inviting you to leave behind your own small, secure "world" and to become more available for the work of the Kingdom?

### **Third Movement**

5. Resolve to Be More Open to the Spirit Who Works in and through You Today

Has any one thing particularly stirred in you during this time in prayer? What response, if any, to Christ and God's movement in you do you feel inclined to make today?

What step would you be willing to take today to put yourself a bit more completely at the service of the will and the reign of God?



## They Gave Meaning to My Life

by

Jean-Pierre Lauby, FSC<sup>49</sup>

A few days ago, I celebrated in the privacy of my prayers the thirtieth anniversary of my first commitment as a religious in the Institute of the Brothers of the Christian Schools. I was then nineteen when I made that commitment. I was happy then; and I am happy still, but in a deeper sense!

You may wish to know what I have done since that first commitment, especially as all my active life has been spent in Africa: Morocco, Burkina Faso, the Ivory Coast, and Niger.

### *"The Seed Has Been Sown"*

September 1957 saw the realization of a youthful dream; I began teaching on African soil. The early years of my apostolate were marked by several meetings with the "Patriarch of Atlas," Fr. Peyriguère, who died in 1959 after spending thirty years of his life among the Berbers. A life of prayer and silent presence at the heart of Islam without making a single convert! The strongest impression he made on me was one of faith in the living Good of the Eucharist, Savior of the milieu in which he lived. His deepest conviction at the end of his life was: "The Seed has been sown"! I have retained the certitude that beyond the visible, God is acting and that the important thing is to render Him present wherever I am, to plant and to water, knowing that the rest is up to God. That is what has given meaning to my apostolate in the Islamic world.

### *"The Tree Trunk May Be a Long Time in the Water But It Never Becomes a Crocodile"*

In 1965, I arrived in Africa. My activities there have been varied: teaching, formation of young Brothers, study of African sociology. On my first arrival in Africa..., I told myself: "I have come for good. I want to remain a Brother to the end of my life." That seemed to me as natural as it was exhilarating!

The year 1970 brought a turning point in my missionary thinking. My sociological studies brought me to numerous villages of the Ivory Coast. It was there that I heard more than one old man say with some malice, "The stranger has big eyes but he sees nothing!," which meant: you're curious, but all you see, all you think you understand, you always see

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<sup>49</sup> Brother Jean-Pierre Lauby is a De La Salle Christian Brother of the District of France. This article first appeared in *Lasalliana*, 06-18-E-14. Also of interest is his "Je Ne Suis Que Prière" ["The Whole of My Life is a Prayer"], which appeared on pp. 83-91 of *Mental Prayer in the Life of the Brothers Today* (Rome: Brothers of the Christian Schools, 1980).



with the eyes of an outsider, with the reasoning of an outsider. You only grasp appearances. To really understand you must belong here!

Others quoted, in the same tone, the Bambara proverb, "The tree trunk may be a long time in the water but it never becomes a crocodile," which means that even if you've been here a long time you always remain an outsider! This made me understand that, in spite of everything, a deep friendship could exist between people but that it sprang from mutual respect and sharing of what one is and what one has. And I realized that I was only an invited guest on African soil, happy to be so, and to act as such, but prepared to accept the possibility of leaving if circumstances compelled me, as we have seen happen in other places.

But, at the same time, I realized that African wisdom and proverbs have their human limits. Happily, faith and love can overcome them. I felt that, despite appearances, and by sheer force of loving and listening, it was possible to reach a certain identification with the other person. True brotherhood [and sisterhood], which knows no barriers, becomes real in Jesus Christ to the point where one feels at home where people really love one another.

It was a great moment for me, when that thought came to me in serenity. It was a little like a second breath to my life in Africa which I am trying to live in a spirit of availability for today as for tomorrow, in receiving as in giving.

### *"You Didn't Even Notice Me"*

At the moment I am teaching in Niamey (Niger). Practically all the students in our technical school are Moslems. How does one live as a Brother amongst them?

Once in class, I had just finished explaining the work to be done. Hands were raised asking for further explanations. I answered the questions and then said, "Get to work now." But one hand was still raised. It was that of the most backward pupil in my class. I thought to myself: "The Lord invites me to love him. Go down to him and answer his question." Wanting to surprise him, I went toward him but without looking at him and passing along the next row of desks. When I reached him and stopped to speak to him, he turned toward me; and I saw a face filled with utter hopelessness and heard a sorrowful voice say, "You didn't even notice me."

The depth of his disappointment surprised me.... What he wanted of me was that I should take notice of him at that moment, not afterwards. Of course, I explained matters to him; and he was happy. But I shall always remember the lesson he taught me.

I found the same expectations in letters from senior students of former years, who occasionally write to me. One begins his letters, "My Dear Educator..."; and after his signature underlines the sentence: "I look forward to hearing from you."

Another expresses more the goodness of his heart and his eagerness to receive an answer than the truth as regards my behavior toward him...Unconsciously, he describes the teacher he would wish to have help him, and that gives food for thought. "I searched my memories of school, but I found no face but yours which I could clearly recall. I remember you because you always fulfilled well your duties as educator. You always had time for us young people; you were always available whether in class, in the playground, or in your office. You easily joined in the conversation of a group of students. You could always

guide, advise, or teach us. You were always patient, smiling, accessible. You knew how to encourage us. You always found something positive and praiseworthy in our work, even in a mediocre poem without form or substance. That is why I write to you and ask you to help me." I could answer these young people and tell them that their letters, their attitudes, and their reflections help us more than they think and that they sometimes shake us up and often challenge us.

### *Being a Christian Changes One's Life*

At the center of this attention to the person, which for us means attention to the young people who pass through our schools, lies the wonderful riches of the presence of Jesus, recognized and made actual in our lives. I am more conscious, perhaps, in this Moslem world where He is not really known that I am His sign, His ambassador. Every time a group of pupils enters my class, my prayer goes something like this: "Lord, if my visible role is to teach them the profane subjects they expect from me, my invisible role is to offer their existence, their daily work, their efforts, their fears and sorrows, and their more or less conscious expectations as a prayer and a consecration of their lives to you."

It seems to me that my presence among them helps, in faith, to start something of which they are not yet conscious, but which for many of them will be lost on the way. To this priesthood of offering, which is the duty of every baptized person, is added the duty of witness through a manner of living and acting which surprises and challenges. "Be ready at all times to explain the hope that you have in you" (1 Peter 3:15). In a country where Christians form only one per cent of the population, a person must live Christianity ninety-nine per cent, a Christianity which is a sign of the love of God for humanity and which calls forth the action of the Holy Spirit everywhere.

How encouraging to hear that statement from a Moslem student at the end of the year: "Being a Christian changes one's life." To spend one's life transmitting something of the love of God incarnate in Jesus Christ, is this not to live one's life genuinely and to the fullest? It is to live through the season of sowing, and therefore of hope!

### *My Heart is Ready, Lord (Ps 57:8)*

I said at the beginning of this reflection that I was happy.... I have, in fact, been happy throughout my stay in Africa, a stay marked by frequent changes of place because of the work that I was asked to do. These successive uprootings in the service of a common cause, however trying they may have been, convinced me, in their own way, that the only "incarnation" demanded of us, and which removes all illusion, is that which coincides with the will of God expressed in our readiness to accept events. Then nothing surprises, nothing disappoints; the heart is ready to listen to the invitation of Peter: "Each one, as a good manager of God's different gifts, must use for the good of others the special gift one has received from God. Whoever preaches must preach God's message; whoever serves must serve with the strength that is given by God, so that in all things praise may be given to God through Jesus Christ" (1 Peter 4:10-11).

## Mediators of God's Plan

*Not only does God will that everyone come to the knowledge of truth, but He wants everyone to be saved. God can not truly desire this without providing the necessary means, without giving children the teachers who will assist them in the fulfillment of His plan (Meditation, N° 193.3).*

### First Movement

1. God, the source of life, is with you, in you, and around you. Pause for a few moments to recall this presence, and to put your trust in this holy and loving God.

*For God so loved the world that He gave His only Son, so that everyone who believes in Him might not perish but might have eternal life (Jn 3:16).*

2. Try to relax as much as possible, and listen to the voice of God deep in your heart, calling you by name and inviting you to be part of God's loving plan for all of humanity.

*Before I formed you in the womb, I knew you; before you were born, I consecrated you; a prophet to the nations I appointed you (Jer 1:4-5).*

### Second Movement

3. Contemplate the Mystery of God's Love at Work in the World

Read the following passages a few times slowly. What word or words especially catch your attention? Listen to what is being said; lovingly contemplate the ongoing revelation of God's love for humanity in Christ.

♦ *I became a minister of this church through the commission God gave me to preach among you His word in its fullness, that mystery hidden from ages and generations past but now revealed to His holy ones. God has willed to make known to them the glory beyond price which this mystery brings to the Gentiles—the mystery of Christ in you, your hope of glory. This is the Christ we proclaim while we admonish all people and teach them in the full measure of wisdom, hoping to make every person complete in Christ. For this I work and struggle, impelled by that great energy of Christ's which is so powerful a force within me (Col 1:25-29).*

♦ *Since in your state you are the ministers of God, you must cooperate with Him and enter into His designs to bring about the salvation of those children for whom you are responsible (Meditation, N° 56.1).*

4. Reflect on the Mystery of God's Love at Work in Your Own Life

Who are today's "Gentiles," those who are excluded or marginalized, and

seemingly left without the good news of Jesus? What do you sense to be your relationship with them? What do you sense is to be your response to this unfortunate condition in which so many find themselves?

How is God calling and leading you to be an instrument of His care and providence on behalf of others? How do you proclaim Christ in their midst? Are you willing to accept and embrace this invitation that God makes to you?

*Are you faithful in cooperating with the designs of God in your regard (Meditation, N° 131.1)?*

### **Third Movement**

5. Resolve to Be More Open to the Spirit Who Works in and through You Today

Has any one thing particularly stirred in you during this time in prayer? What response, if any, to Christ and God's movement in you do you feel inclined to make today?

What step would you be willing to take today to put yourself a bit more completely at the service of those who find themselves excluded, marginalized, or in need of hearing the good news of the gospel?

## A Master Builder

*God chose and destined Saint Paul...to preach the gospel to the nations; and God gave him such a knowledge of the mysteries of Jesus Christ that he was established, as a good master builder, to lay the foundation for the building of faith and religion which God erected in the cities where Saint Paul announced the gospel (Meditation, N° 199.1).*

### First Movement

1. Take a few minutes to place yourself into the creative presence of the Creator, God who is the perfect master builder. Think for a few minutes of the beauty, majesty, and perfection of God's creation and of God's loving care for everything that He has made. Recall that this is the God who made you and gifted you and watches over you with infinite tenderness.

*Lift up your eyes on high and see: who created these? He who brings out their host by number, calling them all by name (Is 40:26).*

2. While you are aware of the creative presence of God, try to be more aware of how beautifully and wonderfully you have been made. Try to be aware of the desire that God has placed within you to grow into that person He wants you to be in Christ.

*God created man and woman in His own image, in the divine image He created them (Gn 1:27).*

### Second Movement

3. Contemplate the Mystery of God's Love at Work in the World

Read the following passages a few times slowly. What word or words especially catch your attention? Listen to what is being said; lovingly contemplate the ongoing re-creation of the world in Christ.

♦ *Thus says God the Lord, who created the heavens and stretched them out, who spreads out the earth with its crops, who gives breath to its people and spirit to those who walk in it: "I, the Lord, have called you for the victory of justice. I have grasped you by the hand; I formed you, and set you as a covenant of the people, a light for the nations, to open the eyes of the blind, to bring out prisoners from confinement, and from the dungeon, those who live in darkness. I am the Lord, this is my name; my glory I give to no other, nor my praise to idols. See, the earlier things have come to pass, new ones I now foretell: Before they spring into being, I announce them to you" (Is 42:5-9).*

♦ *Then I saw new heavens and a new earth. The former heavens and the former earth had passed away, and the sea was no longer. I also saw a new*

*Jerusalem, the holy city, coming down out of heaven from God, beautiful as a bride prepared to meet her husband. I heard a loud voice from the throne cry out: "This is God's dwelling among humanity. He shall dwell with them and they shall be His people and He shall be their God who is always with them. He shall wipe every tear from their eyes, and there shall be no more death or mourning, crying out or pain, for the former world has passed away." The one who sat on the throne said to me, "See, I make all things new!" (Rev 21:1-5).*

4. Reflect on the Mystery of God's Love at Work in Your Own Life

As you reflect on the plan of God to restore and renew the world and to make it a place of peace, love, happiness, and justice, do you have any thoughts about how this might affect your life? Do you think that you, like Saint Paul, might have a role to play in restoring and renewing the lives of those with whom you live and work, and especially in the world of youth and of the poor?

Think about the world in which you live. Try, in your mind now, to walk along its streets, along the corridors of its schools, and among its families. What are its joys? What are its sorrows? What invitation does this world make to you? How does God speak to you in the hopes and the sorrows of the people of this world?

How is God calling and leading you to be an instrument of His ongoing recreation and renewal of the earth and of all humanity in Christ?

### Third Movement

5. Resolve to Be More Open to the Spirit Who Works in and through You Today

Has any one thing particularly stirred in you during this time in prayer? What response, if any, to Christ and God's movement in you do you feel inclined to make today?

Try to make just one resolution now to involve yourself in and to make a contribution to the building up of a society of love and justice here in the place where you are.

## People of Hope

*Jesus Christ...is your glory, the motive of your hope, and the promise of your happiness (Meditation, N° 40.3).*

### First Movement

1. Take a few minutes to recollect yourself in silence and to be aware of the power of God's living and loving presence which flows out from the very core of your being.

*May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, so that by the power of the Holy Spirit you may abound in hope (Rm 15:13).*

2. Now offer yourself in patient confidence into the hands of this loving God to do, as far as you are able, whatever God and your ministry requires.

*For you, O Lord, are my hope, my trust, O Lord, from my youth (Ps 71:5).*

### Second Movement

3. Contemplate the Mystery of God's Love at Work in the World

Read the following scripture passages a few times slowly. What word or words especially catch your attention? Let these words gradually draw you further into the unfolding of the mystery of God's love at work in the world.

◆ *Through Our Lord Jesus Christ, we have obtained access to this grace in which we stand; and we rejoice in our hope of sharing the glory of God. More than that, we rejoice in our sufferings, knowing that suffering produces endurance, and endurance produces character, and character produces hope, and hope does not disappoint us, because God's love has been poured out into our hearts through the Holy Spirit which has been given to us (Rm 5:2-5).*

◆ *I therefore, a prisoner for the Lord, beg you to lead a life worthy of the calling to which you have been called, with all lowliness and meekness, with patience, forbearing one another in love, eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. There is one body and one Spirit, just as we were called to the one hope that belongs to your call, one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of us all, who is above all and in all. Grace was given to each of us according to the measure of Christ's gift (Eph 4:1-7).*

4. Reflect on the Mystery of God's Love at Work in Your Own Life

How in your life and in your work do you experience yourself to be a sharer in the glory of God?

For what and in whom have you placed your hope? How does this manifest itself in the way you daily live your life?

In what ways have you had to suffer for Jesus in your ministry? What does your belief in and your ministry on behalf of the gospel cost you?

What graces and gifts have been given to you for the building up of Christ's body?

Have you truly set your hope on the living God? Is it with and for Him that you toil and strive (1 Tim 4:10)?

### **Third Movement**

5. Resolve to Be More Open to the Spirit Who Works in and through You Today

Take a few minutes to think back over this brief time you have spent in prayer. What sentiments stirred within you? To what is God inviting you in Christ?

What would have to change in your life if you were to be free enough to be the fullness of that new person, full of hope, that God has destined you to be? What are the obstacles to this change?

Pause for a few minutes and thank God for the graces of this time spent with Him in prayer.



## A Daily Offering of Self (1)

*The obligation you have to instruct children and bring them up in the spirit of Christianity should make you very assiduous in prayer, in order to obtain from God the graces you need to carry out your work well and to draw upon yourselves the light you must have to know how to form Jesus Christ in the hearts of the children who are entrusted to your guidance, and give them the spirit of God. Realize that to fill yourself with God as much as you should in the state in which Providence has placed you, you are obliged to converse frequently with God (Meditation, N° 80.2).*

### First Movement

1. Pause for a few minutes to quiet yourself and to remember that God is, even in this very moment, present to you.
  - in all of Creation, everywhere around you
  - in your very self, keeping you alive
  - in the midst of those with whom you are praying
  - in the Eucharist
2. Ask for the graces necessary to understand better what God's will is for you and that you might give yourself wholeheartedly to a more conscious accomplishment of this will...to God's plan.

*I consecrate myself entirely to you to procure your glory as far as I am able and as you will require of me (John Baptist de La Salle, 1694).*

### Second Movement

3. Contemplate the Mystery of God's Love at Work in the World  
Read today's gospel a few times slowly. What word or words especially catch your attention? Listen to what is being said; watch what happens; try to become part of the Mystery; lovingly contemplate Jesus and your relationship with Him.

Today's Gospel
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4. Reflect on the Mystery of God's Love at Work in Your Own Life

Does today's gospel have any relevance to your life?

Are you willing to allow God to become flesh in you and, through you, to touch the lives of your students?

How does this text invite you to be more faithful to the ministry of the human and Christian education of youth?

How do you try to share the message of this gospel with those with whom you live and work...with those who have been entrusted to your care?

### **Third Movement**

5. Resolve to Be More Open to the Spirit Who Works in and through You Today

Where is the Spirit drawing you to sacrifice yourself today that others might have a happier, fuller, holier, and more love-filled life?

Take a few minutes now to thank God for this time you have spent in prayer and to re-offer yourself, *as far as you are able*, to the accomplishment of God's will...God's plan.

## A Daily Offering of Self (2)

*Since you are entrusted with the instruction of others, you should endeavor to become competent in the art of speaking to God, about God, and for God; but rest assured that you will never be able to speak to your students in such a way as to win them to God, until you yourself have learned to speak to God and about God (Meditation, N° 64.2).*

### First Movement

1. Pause for a few minutes to quiet yourself and to remember that God is, even in this very moment, present to you.

- *in the Word of God*
- *in you by God's grace at work in your life*
- *in the Chapel as God's dwelling place*
- *in the young and the poor*

2. Ask for the graces necessary to understand better what God's will is for you and that you might give yourself wholeheartedly to a more conscious accomplishment of this will...to God's plan.

*I adore in all things the will of God in my regard (John Baptist de La Salle, 1719).*

### Second Movement

3. Contemplate the Mystery of God's Love at Work in the World

Read today's gospel a few times slowly. What word or words especially catch your attention? Listen to what is being said; watch what happens; try to become part of the Mystery; lovingly contemplate Jesus and your relationship with Him.

Today's Gospel
----------------

4. Reflect on the Mystery of God's Love at Work in Your Own Life

Does today's gospel have any relevance to your ministry?

What role does Jesus have in your life? How does His presence in your life affect your students?

How does this text invite you to be more faithful to the ministry of the human and Christian education of youth?

How do you try to share the message of this gospel with those with whom you live and work...with those who have been entrusted to your care?

### **Third Movement**

5.      **Resolve to Be More Open to the Spirit Who Works in and through You Today**

If you chose to allow this scripture to come alive in you now, what would have to change in your life? What are the obstacles to this change?

Take a few minutes to express your gratitude for the goodness of God in having chosen and sent you as His envoy among the young.



## The Beatitudes

by

Michael Valenzuela, FSC<sup>50</sup>

Blessed are the poor in spirit for theirs is the Kingdom of God.  
Blessed are the weak, for they do not imagine themselves strong without Him.  
Blessed are those who have been hurt by life; in their pain they shall cry, "Lord!" and He will answer, "I am with you."  
Blessed are those who are lonely; you shall rest your head on Jesus' breast.  
Blessed are those whom suffering breaks; God's tears shall wash their wounds.  
Blessed are the helpless; they remind us we should love.  
Blessed are those who fail; Christ crucified is their prize.  
Blessed are the useless; they shall be called God's children.  
Blessed are you when you know that your ingratitude has killed all joy in life; your eyes shall be opened to God's gifts.  
Blessed are those who know their lovelessness; Love Himself shall fill them.  
Blessed are those who know their sinfulness; God enfolds them in His loving arms.  
Blessed are the simple-minded; they do not hide God behind words.  
Blessed are the open-handed. When they receive, they shall say, "Blessed be the Lord who gives His unworthy servant more than one can ever deserve," and when it is taken from them, they shall say, "Blessed be the Lord who makes me grace's poor cup from which the thirsty may drink and be blessed."  
Blessed are those who drive themselves with unrealistic demands and expectations; their hearts true longing has already been given them.  
Blessed are the unloved, the unwanted, the forgotten and rejected; it is for them that Jesus comes.  
And blessed are you who know that you are not poor in spirit; you know your need for God's grace and that is the gateway to His Kingdom.

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