Chapter – VII

LASALLIAN SPIRITUALITY

“A spiritualized society would live like its spiritual individuals, not in the ego, but in the spirit, not as the collective ego, but as the collective soul”, What is needed is not an expansion of the false self identified with the world’s good and progress but a discovery of the truth.

One must grow truly in the spiritual, it is the natural way and the only way of salvation both for the individual man and for society. The development of spirituality is a development of the whole nature, with no truncation and no suppression. By raising the searching mind, the ethical are propelled the emotional and aesthetic sensitive to their highest and fullest and purest powers finally achieve in the spiritual the object of his search, the absolute truth, and the Good and the beautiful, all in a harmony of individual, yet mutual glory. All this emerge from surrender to the supreme, by the sacrifice of self giving life of the flamed human for the perfect divine, the obliteration of the separate ego in the spiritual being. Today, in the United States the word ‘spirituality’ is used to describe the totality of an essentially personal experience involving a variety of integrated dimensions.

The spiritual life is the Christian life lived with some intensity. It is the serious response of man to the revelation of God’s love in Christ and consists in loving knowledge and service of God and one’s fellow in the mystical body of Christ. Christian spirituality begins when God’s word is accepted in faith. It manifests itself in the expression of God in prayer and action.

Modern spirituality stresses that God’s invitation touches and seeks to involve the totality of man’s life and person. Acceptance of this invitation, is the full acceptance of a personal relationship and all its consequences.

Spirituality is lived through minds and human thoughts. It makes use of human words, language and ways of expression. It is lived by men. It is marked by their character. It is lived in an actual world, faces actual problems and is moulded and affected by them⁴.

Spiritual means to know and to live according to the knowledge, that there is more to life than meets the eye. Spiritual means, beyond that, to know, and to live according to the knowledge, that God is present to us in grave as the principal personal, inter personal, social and even cosmic transformation. To be ‘open to the spirit’ is to accept explicitly who we are and who are called always to become and to direct our lives accordingly⁵.

Spirituality has to do with one’s style of life, with one’s way of experiencing god and of shaping one’s life on the basis of that experience. It is the way of being religious. Since God is available in principle to everyone. Spirituality cannot be deemed exclusively Christian⁶.

Christian spirituality from the beginning, therefore is shaped by the church’s expectation of the coming of the kingdom of God, this adds a lot of urgency to the mission of proclamation in word, in sacrament, in witness and in service.

---

⁵ Ibid., p.93
Spirituality is the life blood of humanity’s journey. It gives conviction to values and enlivens the action packed, divergent paths followed by devote Christian Men and women who enacted the meaning of the Gospel. It fosters relationships between God and his devotees. Infact it is nothing short of a common thread that runs and guides every aspect of the human journey. The word spirituality was coined in France during the 17th Century and in turn gave expressions to such terms as “Jesuit Spirituality”, “Lasallian spirituality” give to the whole concept a distinctive flavour. It is inseparably linked to the life story of Saint John Baptist De Lasalle and the world wide educational movement, which he introduced to the world7.

Lasallian spirituality is connected to the life journey of the teacher. Its important symbol is the star which is the motto “Signum fidei” (Sign of faith). It is reference to the sine qua non of Lasallian Spirituality which is the spirit of faith. But the symbol of the star, in its simplicity, says a great deal: it permits us to approach the great wealth and potential that are contained in what we are calling “Lasallian Spirituality”8.

**Characteristic of Lasallian Spirituality:**

When one looks at the lasallian part of spirituality two things are evident. 1) Lasallian spirituality is intimately associated with Lasallian pedagogy and 2) Christ’s life lines at the heart of Lasallian spirituality9.

De La Salle makes no difference between search for salvation and professional obligations. Similarly, ascetical or professional practices are not the matters he calls into the process of judgment. Lasallian spirituality has as its

---

focus, on the Christian and human education of the young, especially those in greatest need. It is in this context that the face of Jesus is encountered and manifested. “It is a spirituality that has the school as its setting, the teacher as its focus, and the salvific potential of education as its inspiration. De La Salle’s writings show that the Lasallion educator’s life with the students constitute the very centre of his (or) her religious experience. For the Lasallian educator, the school is the privileged place where god is to be encountered. Educational historians connect De La Salle with many educational innovations, but not one of these historians has yet pointed out that it is ultimately the life of faith that has motivated and shaped the pedagogy of De La Salle and his Brothers.  

The same life of Christ is the essential nuclear of De La Salle and Lasallian spirituality. Christ is to be found in the teacher. “You are ambassadors and ministers of Christ representing Christ himself. He wants your disciples to see him in you and receive your instructions ad if he were giving them. Lasallian educators have been chosen to be ‘cooperators in the salvation of souls, pre curors of Christ even apostles. They make Jesus Christ a reality in the lives of their students.

Christ is to be found in the student ‘Recognize Jesus…… the children whom you have to instruct. Adore him in them, would it make a difference, do you think if teachers treated their students as living images of Jesus Christ and as children of God him self? “De La Salle calls each soul a living plant in the field of the church, the body of Christ, a soul for which the educator is responsible.

---

Christ is to be detected in the work of education, the task is to help the disciples to be save themselves.... They must be connected to unite all their actions to those of Jesus Christ. The work of salvation the proclamation of the Gospel, is truly encountered and practically enacted in the day – to – day activities, relationships, and realities that makes up school life. The goal is nothing less than ‘to establish and maintain the region of God in the hearts of your students’\(^\text{13}\).

Christ is to be detected in the prayer of education. Constantly, the needs of the disciples need to be put across to Jesus Christ, explaining to him the difficulties you experience in teaching them. Prayer gets all than one needs for effective teaching drawing ‘upon the light one must have to know to create Jesus Christ in the hearts of the children entrusted to the teachers’ guidance\(^\text{14}\).

De Lasalle’s spirituality revolves around four pillars, compassion, faith, prayer and practical action. The compassion is what Jesus expressed through the Gospels. The Gospels written also testify that Jesus evinced great compassion for the crowds. It is this compassion that motivated Jesus to heal people’s infirmities, teach multitudes of people and also feed the poor. In fact Jesus gave his disciples the job of actually moving among crowds and distributing the bread. The bread here symbolizes the role of the Christian educator, the word of God and the source of true life. As God’s disciples it is up to humanity to feed those in need. It is this compassion Jesus experiences for ordinary people, that gets reflected through Saint John Baptist De Lasalle’s effort to feed the poor children of his day. Hence compassion should be the primary act of the Christian Missionaries to ordinary folks who are lost and forlorn and are in great danger of spiritual death. This Lassallian spiritually is coming to terms with the real world and its stock realities. Lasalle was a man of

---


For him Christian spirituality can be embodied in ordinary actions; which includes the basic virtue of “Christian Politeness”. This is international understanding of spirituality, a secular spirituality of the busy city streets of today. Thus it becomes a discovery. It is the power of oneself of communion with the day to day world. It also voices inturn a Mission in life. This mission is firmly linked with the educational service of the poor resulting in a higher awareness. Lasallian spiritually is concerned with interiority. The aim of Lasallian spirituality is to promote spiritual growth by helping people to internalize. The elements of Lasallian spirituality is to adopt the attitudes and mentality it requires. It should lead to spiritual maturity, creating real Christians who live the Gospel. Learning how to pray is an important part of it. Lasallian spirituality can be deemed ideal for groups of people committed to living and working in association with others, for the educational service of the poor. In short Lasallian spirituality is synonymous for the Brothers as well as the lay Lasallians.

In Hebrew ‘Pistis’ means steadfastness towards both God and Man. Belief includes trust and has also the meaning of conscience. Trust in God is faith and faith inturn culminates in charity. Objectively speaking faith is a sum total of truths revealed by God in scriptures and creeds. Life is an act of faith. It is intellect assenting to truth which is actually beyond the mystery of the Holy trinity.

---

The mission of the La Sallian school is a mission of Evangelization. This is performed by the Christian community who commit themselves towards the programme of evangelization of the school. The community of teachers fosters union along with other practicing which Christians who have and in the process have developed the ministry of Christian education. Originally this role was assigned to the Brothers. Today it is the community of Faith and the feeling of oneness which helps them to work together in unison\(^\text{18}\).

However, in the educational fields all members do not possess same level of faith but strangely, these extremists participate in the running of the Lasallian school giving vent to the community of faith for the quality to be supported and nurtured.

Faith and mission bind these believers which include both lay partners and the brothers. To these devotees the community of faith becomes a place of encounter and a pathway leading them towards fulfilling the ambition. Thus faith becomes a motivating factor in their job of education which they understand to be a Mission emerging from God and the church, through which both God and the church gets manifested and become visible. In order to deepen the response they mobilize the youth to ensure continuity of the programmes. Thus the efforts launched build up the church and create a sense of brotherhood to which the community functions as a witness\(^\text{19}\).

The community is a “fount” of the mission for it is here the functionaries experience their work as a mission. Community has the sacrament of God’s love, presents the experience of God and of his love to those that comprise it so that subsequently, it becomes a part of the mission. A major factor governing the community of faith is to realise that it is already existent in germinal form. What is essential is to proceed forward from the starting point. This will shape

into structures, that will further increase communion among the members towards expansion of the educational community\textsuperscript{20}.

This community of faith was initially created by the Brothers and other practicing Catholics. Thus they become the initial nucleus which gradually evolved into a circle that will envelop believers of other Christian Church. This can be established by ignoring the differences and respecting intern the characteristics common to all. Again this community of faith integrates the teachers who even belong to non Christian creeds. Based on their intrinsic beliefs, they experience acts that are multiple aspects of Lasallian spirituality, that facilitate the convergence and participation in faith from religions that are totally different. Thus it is a testimony of unity solidarity, collaboration and openness. It has the power to attract members from other community and set examples to youngsters and adults who have to realize how a community project can be formed, with the help of different ministries through cordial relations, through visibility and openness. The community turns out to be a living witness towards how faith can be lived in an authentic communication of persons\textsuperscript{21}. Thus it will be a sign of being in tune with hopes, joys, sorrows and anguish of men and women of the time. It thus functions as a prophetic sign to bring about the commitment of the school to a humanising culture. To achieve this is the curricular programme of the school alone cannot voice its beliefs. Rather it becomes the critical conscience of the school so that at every movement, these paths of culture are at the service of the needy persons. The paths undertaken should pave way for encounter with other persons leading to provoking competitions and the will to dominate. Thus it conforms to conciliatory interpretations. In one hand it upholds power, but at the same time it calls for an absolute utilization of people and also the danger of giving importance to efficiency and turning a blind eye, to the needs of the under-


\textsuperscript{21} \textit{Ibid}, p.232.
privileged. Thus faith in the Lasallian sense becomes transformed into a virtue. The believers study them to get a better grasp of them and in turn make it more healthy in order to overcome the intellectual difficulties in the way

As Saint Augustine has said,

“What can be the reward of faith, what can its very name mean if you wish to see now what you believe? You ought not to see in order to believe, you ought to believe in order to see; you ought to believe so long as you do not see, lest when you do see you may be put to the blush”

The third pillar is the necessity of prayers which in turn is a distinctive cornerstone for salvation. Without prayer temptations cannot be resisted nor can God’s grace be obtained. This necessity is binding on different status in life and is of cardinal importance in priesthood where prayer becomes a religious obligation. Without prayer, as Jesus has pointed out, obstacles cannot be overcome. Again prayer is mandatory for charity which involves praying for others. Thus the obligations to pray has become so frequent that it is considered necessary. Some writers speak of a virtuous life as uninterrupted prayers. This practice of the church to pray devotedly adhered by the faithful is to begin and end the day with prayers. Prayers again can be classified as vocal or mental, private or public. In vocal prayer, the external action adds to its intensity. The examples are seen in the prayer of Israelites in Captivity (Exudes). The Lords prayer (Mathew) Christ own prayer after resuscitating Lazarus (John) and the testimonies in Hebrews.

Mediations, is mental prayer consisting in the application of the various faculties of the soul, memory, imagination, intellect and will. In the same degree, other prayers always have been practised by God fearing souls.

24 Ibid., p.137.
Abundant evidence of this, is witnessed in Old testament, Psalms and Isaiah. In then New Testament have Christ giving frequent examples of it. Thus always it has been practiced in the church\textsuperscript{25}.

Prayer also includes meditations through which attributes of God are made evident. Meditation carefully practised, form habits of recalling and reasoning rapidly about divine things which inturn excite Pius affections attaching the practitioner to Gods will. Thus prayer helps to grasp truth, to be aware of sentiments faith, hope and charity. It also prompts the practitioners inspire the devotee to make attempts at self sacrifices towards the better understanding of God. It helps souls to unite with God. The degrees of prayer are known by such phrases as active response, active quietitude, active silence, Saint Francis de sales describes the prayers as a simple commitment to God to be insured, that the practitioner is fully devoted to him. Naturally this sphere of meditation when cultivated, help distractions to cut into, until God alone becomes the soul object of undisturbed attention. Thus the classification of private and public prayer of the individual and other prayers offered officially or liturgically. These public prayers are usually offered in the chapels\textsuperscript{26}.

De Lasalle penned his meditations towards the end of his life. It is rightly named “Meditation for the time of retreat” where in Lasalle outlined the story of his own life as he progressively expressed the society of brothers in the light of Scriptures. La Salle, was a Christian evangelist, he followed and practiced a inseparable unity of dialogue between the scriptures and events of life. Since they are authentic, a Brother finds in the Meditations an echo of the lived reality of his own life. Hence Scriptures automatically become more relevant and profound than being a simple proof of authority. Truly comprehended Lasallian Meditations one has to get an inkling of the


understanding of the interplay of the Gospel which has a direct bearing on the life of the saint. It also gives us a refreshing insight into the human and Christian dimensions of the course he adopted. It also emphatically declares the directions undertaken by the saint and the quality he was able to confer in his relationship with God. This in turn proved informative for the Brothers he groomed to follow his footsteps. A systematic use of autobiographical materials enlarge on the sequence of events in the life of Saint De Lasalle. This bring to light four key events which indications are of powerful currents in the history of a saint.

1. The acts through which saint De La Salle made his decision to accept the vocation to work for the project of the Christian schools.

2. The acts through which saint De La Salle made irrevocable commitment, the project which he had recognized and accepted to be in the light of the gospel. He vows all his powers to the work of establishing and consolidating the brothers of the Christian schools.

3. The acts are related to the extension and further consolidated to the world, which he understood as a work of God. This event helps towards understanding of De La Salle’s Charisma his gift of spirit, which motivated him to organise a community for a mission. It also spells out, the rules that De La Salle imposed on himself.

4. This makes explicit the conflicts undergone by the founder towards establishing authority over the institute. Both external and internal causes provoked problems and tensions within the community. It is a pointer to his determination to achieve total self-effacement before his death bringing about the consolidation of the body and soul of society.

28 Ibid., p.78.
Thus the Meditations for the time of Retreat constitute a summit. This summit is the peak experience, when La Salle discovered a present movement loaded with totality of past history. Thus the Meditations should not be confused with those written for Sundays and the feast. They are addressed in a special manner to the brothers in the community. Thus it is a communitarian perspective with De La Salle speaking to each of the brothers who have associated themselves to do service to the young, who are most neglected and marginalised. Thus La Salle’s challenge to the Brothers is on a personal level. Consequently, each and every member under the guidance of God realizes his responsibility to ensure the salvation of the young helpers and rudderless children. Mediation for the time of retreat becomes a life – line for the brothers in their climb towards their own peak experience. Thus these meditations become a part and parcel of their daily living. It virtually gets transmitted into their community life.

Thus the Mediations for the time of retreat veer around the history of La Salle. They can also be viewed as a clarion call to the brothers to voice their own personal history; They are specially addressed to the brothers of the community. The personal note is the most striking aspect in these meditations. It is an earnest appeal to the brothers of the Institute to associate themselves in order to serve the young neglected orphans. In fact they can be looked upon as challenges, thrown open to each of the brothers for them to comprehend their responsibilities to bring about the Salvation of the young. In the process they get transformed into prayers to God to support and judge them in inturn. They constitute an entire panorama of daily living. It is the performance of the educational work, which includes their community life. The Meditations expose the brothers to the pedagogical and ascetic writing of the saint and is a pointer to the Rule which they had formulated together. In a way it is a teaching of the Gospel Meaning, rendering the whole experience

comprehensive and dynamic; they do not provide the brothers with the historical summary of the origin and formation of the institute. They steer clear of any identity formulation and hence perform the important job of negating the Brothers’ ego\textsuperscript{30}.

La Salle’s motive is not to engage them in historical, theological or pedagogical consideration. Rather it is an earnest invitation to them to deepen the understanding of their mission to contemplate a prayer. Thus, the Gospel dimensions of their work is rung home\textsuperscript{31}. La Salle’s effort in to break through the walls of space and time to reveal the mystery of God. Thus these Meditations bring out the progressive establishment of the society of Christian schools founded exclusively radically on Gods marvelous role in history. His inordinate love gets visibly actualised in the creation of the community who were disposed to the call of the poor. They are far from being doctrines, nor do they remain on the level of ideas, rather they seek to be in union with the mystery of God who in turn has united them to propound the good news of salvation\textsuperscript{32}.

Thus in this historical adventure, the brothers recognize a charismatic gift for doing good to others. De La Salle considered himself minister of God and as a cooperator with Christ to bring salvation to all. Thus the meditations envision, a historical relationship among the brothers and between each brother and students. This fosters a life of conversion and mutual education. It can also be termed as one of love and forgiveness. The whole process formulates the experience of the generous love of God and inturn live as children of God. This smacks of enlightenment\textsuperscript{33}.

\textsuperscript{30} Celler, Judes, \textit{op.cit.}, p.305.
\textsuperscript{31} \textit{Ibid.}, p.135.
\textsuperscript{32} \textit{Ibid.}, p.207.
\textsuperscript{33} Hannesse, A Vie De Nicolas Roland, Rheims. Improvement Co-operation, 1888,p.27
The brothers function as messengers or angels who take upon themselves the challenge of educating and empowering children, ensued their sociological improvements, the cooperators in this work of God\(^{34}\).

In this sense La Salle places the brothers and their ministry in an historical and apostolic lineage. It has traces of the Son sent by the Father, the apostles sent by Christ, the bishops as successors of the apostles. So the brothers are more or less the ministers of the church, sharing and continuing this, apostolic heritage. They function as guides which they do it with vigilance towards initiation and growth in the Christian life it is therefore living, participation in the actual reality of the work of God, the body of Christ, sacramentally visible, the work of the church\(^{35}\).

This sharing of the students in the “promises and the covenant”. It is the body of Christ which glows in history, involves also the relationship of the Brother-Student. The Brother does not free his students from the “life of the flesh”, except insofar as he himself takes on the flesh and blood condition of their lives, even to the giving of his life, made free together by the action of the spirit, in a fraternal union. Brothers and Students mutually educate one another to live the gospel in their daily lives not only verbally but in the interaction of the words and deeds of teacher and students\(^{36}\).

In this interaction the activities of the Brother are those of a prophet who corrects. His charismatic gift makes him “See” more clearly, and energize him with “Zeal” driving him irresistibly to neglect nothing in regard to his students, urging them to renounce any shortcomings in their former way of life, supporting them in their conversion, and encouraging them in the new life of the covenant. Just as the first six meditations challenge the faith of the Brothers

\(^{34}\) Hannesse, *op.cit.*, p.35.


and call upon them to see the dynamic mystery of God in the concrete actions of their ministry, so the second six meditation challenge the zeal of the Brothers. They are continually renewed in their awareness, that their faith is totally inseparable from a zeal that drives them to identify with their students even to the point of laying down their lives. Such faith and zeal have no other origin than the power of the spirit of God, of Christ, and have no other purpose than the purpose of the coming of the son of man. This prophetic zeal of the Brother, the grace of his charismatic gift for the work of God which is the work of the church, constitutes the very heart of his continual impulse to identify with the flesh and blood realities of his students, the world in which they live, the poverty of their lives. At the same time the Brother’s zeal never leaves its religious dimension, towards its final achievement of the total Christ in whom all men and all the world will be made subject of God.

Giving thanks or the Eucharistic in a major characteristic of the meditations. Since De La Salle was suffused with the mystery of God, he took upon himself to express literary quotation from the Bible. His purpose was not to give prescription or norms of behaviour for the brothers to adopt both their personal and professional life. This is because De La Salle did not make any distinction between the professional and community life of the brothers. This non-distinction is De La Salle’s original attitude to life. De La Salle implicitly believed that salvation is part and parcel of professionalism. Faith and zeal, the continual, demand of God, submission to the judgement of God is tuned into a singular approach, which gets evidenced through educational activities. Community obligations go hand in hand with professional endeavours. Judgement is an other subject examined in Meditations. This judgement is subject to the brothers vocation, the daily experiences, the efforts to respond to the poor are part of their Mission. This inturn becomes a charismatic gift, the gift of instructing, teaching, watching and implicit faith. The judgement

38 Ibid., p.67.
demands clearness of visions energy, enthusiasm, to put the talentia into action, to go beyond routine procedures, ceaselessly. Again, judgement is not structured on the formula of vows. Again life is a gift and the brothers have to identify with the students and be one with them\textsuperscript{39}.

De La Salle rules out any distinction between the church for salvation and professional obligations. He is firm on the brothers total surrender to the Holy Spirit. Asceticism and ministry blend into an active contemplation and contemplative action. Thus this asceticism is fidelity to the Spirit, which is in short to announce the Gospel to the World at large. Thus scripture becomes the ultimate guideline for the life of the brother and his students. Again announcing of the Gospel is not minimised to practices and prescriptions or teaching catechism. It does not consist in giving good examples or to give an explicit witness of it. The brothers must become “Incarnate” to the hole history of salvation, in short the Mystery of Christ. It is a new covenant with God. The brothers should educate and empower their students, induce into them a sacramental celebration of life and in the process to unite them to edifice of the Church. Thus, it is not a spirituality of motives but an attitude of mind which focuses on the meaning of life beyond the walls of the school. This De La Salle felt will steer the students to live continuously according to the Christian spirit. It is a growth on all fronts, present, ordinary, everyday activities, which get merged into the very fabric of Brother lives\textsuperscript{40}.

Thus De La Salle outlines the life he lived with his brothers and how the teaming up, shape into a common project which unite them in all ventures. This is seen in their ability to run schools, rescue the poor and motivate them to

\textsuperscript{39} Rigult, Georges, et Al. Le Maitre Cbretien Selon Sain Jean-Baptist De La Salle, Paris, Ligel, 1951, p.47.

\textsuperscript{40} Ibid., p.76.
enter life meaningfully choosing their salvation. This De La Salle made the scriptures a part of himself\textsuperscript{41}.

In the light of scripture De La Salle understands and invites his brothers to understand this history of the society as the history of a faithful God who began everything, who brings his saving plan to reality everyday, who with faithfulness bring it to a successful conclusion at the Return of Christ. De La Salle cites scripture as a profession of faith\textsuperscript{42}. This is not some ‘profit’ derived from scripture as an authority. It is not an abstract, timeless truth. In these citations the founder is reading a fact of ecclesiastical life, which has been part of the reality of the Brother’s life with in the full history of God’s plans. The references are intended to break through the limits of space and time as they are lived by the Brothers, or better still to open the eyes of his disciples so that they can see what is really at play in their humble tasks – the realization of the plan of God. But this openness to the transcendent reality of their life drives them to be even more practical and more fundamental in their commitments, since what is at play has an historical eschatology, a meaning totally beyond any superficial understanding\textsuperscript{43}.

These meditations were originally concerned with the heart of the experiences of the first Brothers, but the cultural context of these experiences has changed radically. Do the meditations have anything to say to us today? It is quite evident that the meditations are rooted in a particular cultural milieu. The meditations are not easy to read. It must be remembered particularly that the Meditations for the Time of Retreat speak of a spiritual experience that has been lived through in the history of one man’s life time\textsuperscript{44}.

\textsuperscript{41} Rigult, Georges, \emph{op.cit.}, p.80.
\textsuperscript{42} \emph{Ibid.}, p.81.
\textsuperscript{43} \emph{Ibid.}, p.112.
It is commonplace to observe that we are living in a world of profound and rapid change of social and cultural transformations which seriously affect our understanding of religious experience. This cultural explosion has repercussions that are especially experimental in the life of the Brothers of the Christian Schools. The Brother looks upon his consecration to the gospel in the service of education as a direct involvement in the construction of this world. In this his perspective is directed to the future, engaged as he is with the most sensitive element of society: youth. It is the young people of today who are the most affected by the changes that are occurring, because it is the young who are called upon not only to learn in the techniques for integrating themselves harmoniously into society but to learn how ‘to be’ in an entirely new way, in order to make society itself something new. Similarly, we have been witnesses and agents of rapid changes in the understanding of what the church is meant to be with many “models” of the church coming and going at the same time, often creating tension not only between different persons but even within individual persons themselves.

Religious education has probably been one of the major forces to develop new models of the Church, and yet religious education itself has undergone rapid and profound changes within a relatively short period of time. Totally, the Meditations for the Time of Retreat are without doubt a hymn to the Holy Spirit, an act of thanks-giving for the reality of the Spirit’s action experienced. These Meditations are an act of thanks giving to the Holy Spirit of God because he is the continual source of the gift. They are acts of thanks giving the initiative and the energy to offer and to receive the free personal gift which is at the heart of all human relations, which in the foundation of the new world being built together. Finally they are an act of thanks giving for all these spiritual gifts of the father who provide the strength to go constantly beyond.

urging humanity to new life by a continual passage from death to life, giving up the past, ever seeing new possibilities in the life of the new convenant, possibilities of love and of pardon encouraging the weak, sustaining everyone, confirming always the best in everybody\textsuperscript{47}.

At the end of the Seventeenth Century when De La Salle organised his schools for the children of the poor, it was taken for granted that the education to be provided would be of the Christian variety. Although there was plenty of discussion on matters such as the use of the vernacular in schools for the poor, the establishment of the value of whole-class teaching, the relations with parish authorities and the methods of financing the schools, the catholic nature of the schools was never questioned. Religious organisations and diocesan authorities, both catholic and protestant, played a key role in the origins of the modern European educational system. Religion was an essential part of the school’s identity\textsuperscript{48}.

Many of the religious and diocesan foundations of the period still exist. The circumstances in which they now operate, however, are fundamentally different. Besides the changes in personnel with the decline in the numbers, of religions and priests, education itself has less of a religious ethos, and even the teaching of religious is now called into question. What has happened in the last three centuries and what further developments can still be expected?\textsuperscript{49}

Religious instruction and education in the faith have frequently made the front pages of Catholic papers all through this century. We have witnessed a remarkable development, and the end is not yet in sight. In the many and varied pastoral initiatives through which it has tried to have dialogue with modern

\textsuperscript{49} Ibid., p.96.
living and secularisation. The Church has had to wrestle with the tension between continuity and discontinuity, stability and reform. In particular, the area of Christian initiation seems to be one where unease is felt and expressed most sharply. This is partly due to the reaction of the young people themselves to the whole way of presenting the tradition, which they find are being put off. It is also due to the many innovatory initiatives taken by catechists, teacher of religion and religious education experts. As a result the question arises as to what are the normative criteria for faith education experts. As a result, the question arises as to what are the tradition no longer seems to be enough to guarantee the continuity of the faith community. As the statistics of the last thirty years clearly show, religion in European countries no longer plays the role fulfilled in the past. Similar changes are taking place in other continents. Established monopolies are dissolving and alternative religious movements are gaining strength. Thus the influence of the neo-liberal orientation of the Western World is causing major, social and cultural upheavals.

The religious divisions of the past have certainly left a deep mark on today’s religious situations. In particular, the Reformation and the Council of Trent’s answer to it are still having an impact on the shape of our religious inheritance. The seminary education of priests is a key strategy for promoting continuity in the Church. In the Post-Vatican II period, Catechism is still the central reference point and universal standard for Orthodox Church Membership. The recent catechism of the Catholic Church deliberately carried on the structure of the catechism of the council of Trent. But against this background, and almost in spite of it, life was going on outside the Church and developing at a vigorous pace. The discipline of scientific method, which gradually shaped the world is developing at a vigorous pace.

51 Ibid., 98.
The discipline of scientific method, which gradually shaped the “human sciences”, also has had an increasing influence on pastoral theology. Views of educational psychologists concerning progressive cognitive development in children and young people which in the nineteen-fifties caused such a stir in the Church, are now taken for granted. The most decisive changes in religious education were brought about by interactions taking place in a society which was constantly re-organising itself. The traditional understanding of the church relied on it having a stable relationship with the established society, often sharing implicitly, the interests of that society.\textsuperscript{53}

This link was broken, with effects which marked the history of religious education throughout the twentieth century. Various authors have assembled the relevant materials to bring these developments clearly to the light. The same changes were evident in all religious traditions and philosophies of life, although not at the same time nor to the same degree. The process was also experienced in other countries and cultures, in so far as they were influenced by the Western World. The Second Vatican Council tried to come to terms with these developments to absorb them, to promote and encourage them.\textsuperscript{54}

The efforts made throughout the world to foster a renewal of religious education and catechetics were incalculable, though today there appears to be less enthusiasm in some Vatican Quarters for this trend. Church leaders have claimed that the Second Vatican Council was misunderstood by many, particularly in connection with the degree of importance to be attached to interacting with social reality, although the latest edition of the Catechetical Director puts forward a different view on this trend.\textsuperscript{55}

\textsuperscript{53} Secondino Scaglione, FSC, Le Citazionoi Dei Padri De Degli Scittori Sacri Nelle Meditations in Rivista Lasalliana, Noil, 1967, p.34.
\textsuperscript{54} Ibid., p.34.
\textsuperscript{55} Ibid., p.35.
Functional commitment prevailed in the spirituality of De La Salle:

Twelve years has passed since the providential meeting of De La Salle and Adrian Nyel, the meeting that launched the teaching movement. As De La Salle himself said, God let him “is an imperceptible way and over a long period of time, so that one commitment led to another in a way that I did not foresee in the beginning”. But in early 1961 the inspiration seems to have died out. Many of the early Brothers had left or died. Misunderstandings and conflicts with church authorities, civil leaders and teachers organizations were causing him loss of little the grief. Canon Blain says that De La Salle was experiencing great ‘perplexity’. This was the sad situation of the pious founder at the end of 1690 after so many sacrifices, after so many difficulties and labours, after so many crosses and persecutions, after so many apparent successes, he found himself in almost the same states as he had been ten years before. He had few brothers to assist him. His work had progressed very little he was afraid it would be aborted.

De La Salle prayerfully searched for God’s will. De La Salle always took his time in making major decisions once he made a decision. Once he made a decision, however, he held to it tenaciously. Blain describes the result of his discernment. After much reflection on the means of showing up ‘building that threatened to collapse as it was being built, he was inspired to enter into an association with the two Brothers he considered best able to maintain the young community and to bind himself, along with them, by irrevocable commitment to persevere in the effort of establishing this community.

De La Salle, Vuyart and Drolin made a vow of association and union to procure and maintain the said establishment, without being able to withdraw.

---

57 Ibid., p.76.
from this obligation even if only the three remained in the said society and if they were obliged to beg for alms and to live on bread alone. This renewed commitment led him to obtain property near pans (vaugirard) and to open a more structured novitiate than had existed before. He brought to the house in vaugirard groups of brothers for formation programs of some weeks replacing them temporarily with teachers he had trained for country schools. He had the Brother living in Paris area, come weekly to this house outside they were convinced that it would help them renew their spiritual and physical energy and bring wearied and sick Brothers back to health.\(^{58}\)

The spirituality that comes from De La Salle’s own experience (the dynamic integration of foundational convictions, basic operative commitments and consistent practices) can be described as a set of basic operative commitments that turn convictions into practices, that integrate faith and zeal. These commitments are postures orientations intentionality’s that make people decide to do one thing instead of another, the language of commitments is appropriate because they can be described, they can be seen action, and they speak to the hundreds of daily decisions that make up an educators day.\(^{59}\)

Derived from his own life experience De La Salle discerned the spirit of his community of Teachers with which to animate them. The spirit of this Institute of first, a spirit of faith which should induce those who compose it not to look upon anything but in view of God and to attribute all to God, always entering into these sentiments of Job. “The Lord gave and the lord hath taken away as it hath pleased the Lord”. So is it done, and into other similar sentiments so often expressed in Holy Scripture and uttered by the patriarchs of old.\(^{60}\)

\(^{58}\) Edition of 1858, Preface, v-vi, p.90.

\(^{59}\) Ibid., pp.91-92.

\(^{60}\) Ibid., p.169.
Spirituality in Action:

In several of his writings De La Salle underlines the need for such a spirituality in an effective educational activity of an educator. He states, 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. Jesus Christ wants you to understand from this comparison that the more your work is energized by him earnestly that all your teaching be energized by his spirit and draw all its power from him. His belief and understanding is that the teacher ought to be an instrument in the hearts of children and solely dependent of him. In the words of Rayze, the biographer it is a ‘spirituality of abandonment. The same attitude is revealed by De La Salle himself in his personal rule. “They should often consider myself as an instrument, which is of no value except in the land of the worker. For this reason they should wait for indications of providence before acting and his last works were they adore in all things the will of God in regard”\(^{61}\).

His own convictions and experiences are reflected in his teaching. ‘Faith alone is not sufficient it is necessary to live the spirit of faith intensely’. He challenges the Brothers “Is your faith such as the enable you to touch the hearts of your pupils an inspire them with the Christian spirit? This is the greatest miracle you can perform and one which God expects of you since it corresponds with the purpose of your state”\(^{62}\).

The spirit of faith which is regulated and conducted wholly by the maxims and sentiments of faith, taken principally from Holy Scripture. Starting from one of his letters and from what he calls ‘effects’ of the spirit of faith, one

---


\(^{62}\) Ibid., p.93.
could define it as follows, using his own words ‘the spirit of faith is a certain participation in the spirit of God which dwells in every body and which leads all the believers. Guided by the word of God, not no look an anything but with the eyes of faith and not to do anything but with the gaze fixed on God. The God experience of De La Salle in a given situation is the replica for a Lasallian teacher.63

The spirit of faith propelled the founder to a total self – abnegation and he demanded the same of all who followed his teaching. It is a total gift which is expressed in the blind obedience of the religion and in the humility of every educator.64 Become a child like them not in wisdom, but in malice, as St. Paul Says, keep the innocence of children with the thoughts of grown men the more you practice self – abasement, the more you will be pleased to be treated as of no consequences, and the more ardently you cherish the persecutions and humiliations which befall you, the more easily you will touch the hearts of those you instruct and the more easily you will induce them to live like true Christians. He asks of the educator a total surrender which can extend even to the sacrifice of life. Through the spirit of faith he discovered that God does not merit less and neither does Christian education. He insists on the zeal that must stretch so that you one should sacrifice one’s life, so dear are the children entrusted to your care. Acquit your self honestly of the task, and see that those who are constructed are fully acquainted with the truths of holy religion. And after having exhausted in this noble work of your apostolate one should expect no other recompense than suffer and die, as Jesus himself died, in the midst of pains and afflictions.

63 Mengs, Ignacio, op.cit, p.113.
64 Ibid., p.121.