

**INSTITUTE OF SPIRITUALITY  
AND RELIGIOUS FORMATION**

**TANGAZA COLLEGE**

**THE CATHOLIC UNIVERSITY OF EASTERN AFRICA**

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**TOUCHING HEARTS:**

**Mentoring in Lasallian Spirituality**

Supervisor

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A Long Essay Submitted in Partial Fulfilment  
of the Requirements for a Diploma in Spirituality and Spiritual Direction

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**To my parents, Antonio and Feliciano, with deepest admiration and gratitude;**

**In loving memory of the late novice Brother Jaime Cea Borja, FSC;**

**To the De La Salle Brothers of the District of Andalucia (Spain) and the  
Community of De La Salle Centre, Nairobi.**

## EPIGRAPH

The more ardently you apply yourselves to prayer for the good of the souls entrusted to you, the more God will help you find the skill to touch their hearts.

John Baptist de La Salle, *Meditation* 148.2

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# STUDENT'S DECLARATION

I, the undersigned, declare that this long essay is my original work achieved through my personal reading, scientific research method, and critical reflection. It is submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the Diploma in Spirituality and Spiritual Direction. It has never been submitted to any other college or university for academic credit. All sources have been cited in full and acknowledged.

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*This long essay has been submitted for examination with my approval as the college supervisor.*

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## INTRODUCTION

As early as in the seventh century A.D., Dorotheos stated: “No man is more unfortunate or nearer perdition than those who have no teachers on the way to God.”<sup>1</sup> Mediation, spiritual direction, accompaniment, mentoring... are all synonyms for the art of going hand-in-hand with others during their life journey to help them see more clearly the path to God.

Saint John Baptist de La Salle, the founder of the Brothers of the Christian Schools, was a dedicated spiritual mentor who had been influenced by the contemporary spiritualities. As a guide for his Brothers, he adopted a unique style of mentoring that has become a significant part of Lasallian spirituality. As the founder of an institute of lay Brothers devoted to the Christian education of children and the young, he also formulated how the Brothers as mentors were and are to approach their pupils. Almost three centuries after his death, Brothers and Lasallian partners try to be faithful to De La Salle’s inspiration to be “ministers and ambassadors of Jesus Christ” for young people, especially among the poor.

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<sup>1</sup> I apologize because I cannot recall the exact reference of this quotation.

The aim of this essay is to define the principles that John Baptist de La Salle used to mentor his Brothers in the various aspects of their lives and in their ministry, as well as the principles he proposed to mentor students. What has motivated me to write about this topic? I am strongly convinced that in the midst of the rapid changes in our society, religious life, and the Church, good mentors are required to guide others in their search for the knowledge of the truth coming from Christ as the means to discover their own identity. In addition, the Brothers of the Christian Schools, as lay religious educators, have numerous potentialities to respond to the always-urgent need to be models, guides, and mentors for present and future Brothers, as well as for the students who will be entrusted to their care.

While the Brothers are the heart and memory of the Institute, thousands of lay Lasallian partners are called today and tomorrow to share the charism and mission of De La Salle. The limitation of pages has forced me to focus exclusively on the Brothers, though virtually all that is presented here can be applied to our lay Lasallian partners as well. Further research upon the specificity of the Lasallian mentoring for and from lay partners would be tremendously useful and complementary to this paper.

## Chapter I

### The Concept of Mentoring

#### 1.0 Introduction

There is often a favourite book that one considers to be a permanent companion during one's lifetime. In a sense, the book matures with the reader. *The Little Prince*, by Antoine de Saint Exupéry, is that book for me. The main character, the *Little Prince*, meets a fox in the desert. The fox is in need of a friend, someone who can fully understand him. After their encounter, the *Little Prince* has to leave the fox. He bids farewell to the four-legged animal saying, "And now here is my secret: it is only with the heart that you can see fully; what is essential is invisible to the eye."<sup>2</sup>

#### 1.1 Definition of Mentoring

Each of us needs an external mediator who helps us *to see with the heart*, someone to whom we can apprentice ourselves. This symbiotic phenomenon, by which

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<sup>2</sup> A. DE SAINT EXUPÉRY, *The Little Prince*, 87.

two persons can produce something beyond themselves and greater than each, is referred to as mentoring. As Hamilton states, "Mentoring is as old as history. The *Shorter Oxford Dictionary* states that the word is Greek in origin. It has connections with 'to remember, think, counsel'."<sup>3</sup> The Greek term is linked with mythology, to the extent that *Webster's New 20<sup>th</sup> Century Dictionary* defines mentor as "the friend and counsellor of Odysseus and Telemachus, a wise and faithful counsellor."<sup>4</sup> The *Oxford American Dictionary* interprets mentor as a "trusted adviser", in reference "to the name of the entrusted friend who in Ulysses' absence protects, nurtures, educates and guides his son Telemachus into adulthood."<sup>5</sup> *Mentor's* task implied the tutelage of Telemachus by providing him an education in wisdom that would go beyond the mere passing of information.<sup>6</sup> Educating in wisdom affects not only the superficial dimension of the person, but also involves the development and integrity of the entire human being. We are born with the ability to see, but we need to be trained "to see the essential, which is invisible to the eyes." This is the interiority of the person where one recognises the spiritual dimension of the reality. In this paper I will focus mainly on spiritual mentoring, the one that Anderson and Reese define as:

A triadic relationship between mentor, mentoree and the Holy Spirit, where the mentoree can discover, through the already present action of God, intimacy with God, ultimate identity as a child of God and a unique voice for Kingdom responsibility.<sup>7</sup>

In this approach, the relationship between mentor and mentoree is directed to the presence of God, whose action in the mentoree's experience is to be interpreted.

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<sup>3</sup> R. HAMILTON, *Mentoring*, 5.

<sup>4</sup> R. KIGAME, "Mentoring", 6-8.

<sup>5</sup> E.C. SELLNER, *Mentoring*, 24.

<sup>6</sup> Cf. K. ANDERSON - R.D. REESE, *Spiritual Mentoring*, 38.

<sup>7</sup> Anderson - Reese, 12.

Mentoring is focused on the two-way process of discovering the presence of God who is journeying with the mentor and the mentoree. Each one of them has a role to play. The mentor is expected to help the mentoree discern God's plans for him. The mentoree is encouraged to show an open disposition to the voice of God through the mentor. Intimacy with God will provide the mentoree with an ideal environment to deepen his or her own identity. Mentoring is meant to contribute to the mentoree's personal development as well as providing an effective means to discern God's will in decision-making.

## 1.2 Mentoring as Guidance

Mediation is at the core of the history of salvation. God has sent a number of messengers to show the way to reach him. Jesus, as the genuine Mediator for Christians, "chose, maintained and cultivated an inner circle of disciples for special guidance, preparing them to succeed him."<sup>8</sup> He became the teacher who showed his disciples how to put into practice the good news coming from the Father. He even said of himself: "I am the way, and the truth, and the life" (Jn 14:6). The numerous images of Christ as the good shepherd, father, vine, threshold and teacher denote the need for mediation and guidance in order to understand God's plan of salvation for us.

Anderson and Reese suggest that "Christian faith is an imitative faith which is enlightened by the guidance of a variety of ministers who try to follow the guiding tradition inspired by God."<sup>9</sup> Saint Paul, who acted as mentor to Timothy, exhorted him

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<sup>8</sup> T. EDWARDS, *Spiritual Friend*, 39.

<sup>9</sup> Anderson – Reese, 15.

to teach another what he has been taught: “And what you have heard from me through many witnesses entrust to faithful people who will be able to teach others as well” (2 Tim 2:2).

### 1.3 Aims of Mentoring

Quite often the human person experiences fragmentation, due to the very different realities to be faced. We, as individuals, also experience disconnection, dislocation, and discontinuity within ourselves. The different experiences of the person form part of the same life and as such need to be put together in a harmonious way. Mentoring acts as a connector that helps us to bond and to interpret the continuous events in life as distinct yet related chapters of the same sequence. Therefore, the aim of mentoring “becomes that of helping persons get the various parts of their life in tune with the larger Mystery as it flows throughout the whole.”<sup>10</sup>

When someone seeks to be mentored, there is a deep and genuine desire to seek a relationship based upon trust, as the foundation that endows the person with peace of mind and heart. As Gratton states, “When we seek spiritual guidance, what our heart wants to do is to trust God more.”<sup>11</sup> Trust in God is the key to removing the masks that impede the soul from living in authentic freedom.

As Christians we strive to find the Christ who lives within us.<sup>12</sup> The mentor facilitates the mentoree’s search for Christ. The mentoree is helped to hollow out in his

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<sup>10</sup> C. GRATTON, *The Art of Spiritual Guidance*, 5.

<sup>11</sup> Gratton, 111.

<sup>12</sup> Cf. Gal 2:20.

or her 'inner spiritual freedom' the true, alive image of Christ. A mentoring relationship entails the waking up of those aspects in life that have remained latent. Hence, the goal of spiritual mentoring is to "give voice to the song God has sung into your life, to liberate the son that has laid dormant or imprisoned in your history."<sup>13</sup>

#### 1.4 Functions and Features of Mentoring

We all have goals to accomplish in our life. They form part of our ideals or dreams that we expect to fulfil. Very often we need the assistance of the mentor to "support and facilitate the realization of the dream."<sup>14</sup> Mentoring also invites and assists the person to attend to the presence of God in the surrounding reality. It involves the teaching of opening the eyes, ears, and heart to the divinity that is present anywhere, anytime, everywhere, every time.

According to Anderson and Reese, the essential functions of mentoring are as follows:

1. Holy listening. The mentor pays attention to the mentoree keeping in mind and heart the presence of the Holy Spirit behind what occurs.
2. Holy seeing. Coming back to *The Little Prince*, the essential is invisible to the eyes. Therefore, the mentor has to develop a genuine pair of eyes so that he or she can help the mentoree to look within, i.e. to see with the eyes of faith.

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<sup>13</sup> Anderson – Reese, 180.

<sup>14</sup> D.J. LEVINSON, *The Seasons of a Man's Life*, 98.

3. Wholly listening. It is indispensable to fully attend to both the mentoree and the Holy Spirit. When the mentor is able to listen wholly, holy listening occurs.<sup>15</sup>

The mentor makes an effort to listen to God whispering in the mentoree's voice, while trying to help the mentoree see the presence of God along the journey.

### 1.5 Mentoring as a Process

Hamilton defines mentoring as “a way of helping another understand more fully and learn more comprehensively from their day-to-day experience.”<sup>16</sup> Every learning attempt has to do with a process that includes the person contrasting, interpreting, and integrating their previous experience with new experiences. The experiences are to be integrated in order to help the person grow and mature. Rubin and McIntyre analyse the “experiential learning cycle” which consists of four stages:<sup>17</sup>

1. The experience itself;
2. The reflection upon the experience;
3. The linking of the experience with other existing knowledge, previous experience, and mental maps;
4. The plan to incorporate the new experience into the new behaviour of knowledge.

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<sup>15</sup> Anderson – Reese, 104.

<sup>16</sup> Hamilton, 21.

<sup>17</sup> Cf. Hamilton, 28. For further information, see K. RUBIN – MCINTYRE, *The Learning From Experience Cycle*, New York 1974.

In this cycle it is important to rely on an external, objective agent, who acts as a mirror for the person. The mentor assists the mentoree in such a way that he or she can walk together during the mentoree's spiritual journey. Saint Augustine used to suggest that the best way to attract the disciples is by one's way of life. The mentor's power of attraction lies on his or her own testimony of life. This attitude of honesty, integrity and openness is crucial to catch the fancy of the mentoree. As a result, intimacy between mentor and mentoree can be created, as well as an on-going development of sincerity and authenticity. All these elements contribute to the proper listening for God's will.

## 1.6 The Role of the Mentor

The gift of listening to others embraces a number of attitudes that ought to be reflected in the role and person of the mentor. An old Irish tradition used the term "Anam Cara" (soul friend) to designate "the person to whom you could reveal the hidden intimacies of your life."<sup>18</sup> The mentor is thus an *Anam Cara*, a facilitator to the mentoree in the process and journey of self-discovery, since the mentor can take on the most secret intimacies.

As Hamilton states, "any mentor is inevitably a role model for their mentee"<sup>19</sup> since the mentor's experience and attitude are the foundations of his or her ministry. As spiritual mediators, they are to refer to their own experiences of their relationship with God. The following are among the most significant features of the role of the mentor:<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> J. O'DONOHUE, *Anam Cara*, 15.

<sup>19</sup> Hamilton, 17.

<sup>20</sup> Anderson - Reese, 12.

- An inductor of an atmosphere of trust and intimacy
- Someone capable of discerning God's plans
- A supporter of the potentialities within the mentoree
- A committed seeker of an authentic life with God
- A prayerful person
- Someone experienced in life
- A skilful listener
- A disciplined spiritual person
- A healer "who cleans the wounds, aligns the sundered parts, and gives it rest."<sup>21</sup>

The mentor is thus expected to combine both human and spiritual maturity, since his or her commitment includes allowing the mentoree to express his or her own internal world, as well as pointing out where God is speaking. Mentors have to avoid the temptation to satisfy their own needs or make the mentoree depend on them. While dependence may be a passing phase in the relationship, it is not encouraged.

### **1.7 Mentoring as Relationship**

Relationship is another key word that forms the basis of spiritual mentoring. The intimacy between mentor and mentoree enables the deepening of the relationship with the Holy Spirit, who is present within and between both of them. Friendship seems to be the most appropriate form of relationship in mentoring. In fact, *soul friend*, *spiritual*

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<sup>21</sup> Edwards, 125.

*friend*, and *spiritual companion* are some of the most commonly used terms referring to both the concept and the reality of mentor.

Friendship is the prototype of a relationship based on trust and love. In the context of spiritual mentoring, friendship cannot be reduced to an exclusive or sentimental relationship. Moreover, “it is a movement toward community that yet maintains the intimacy of friends.”<sup>22</sup> In spiritual mentoring, the linking component in this relationship of friendship is the journey towards God that both mentor and mentoree share. Intimacy is an image that has been used to explain the concept of mental prayer, which is considered to be “nothing else than an intimate sharing between friends.”<sup>23</sup> However, the idea of friendship needs to be set in its proper context, since mentoring “is not a relationship of reciprocity, spontaneity and equality.”<sup>24</sup> In general, mentor and mentoree live in different sets of age and experience, which explains the reason for such inequality. To some extent, “the relation between mentor and learner is not analogous to that of parent and child, but it is a good point of comparison.”<sup>25</sup> The unequal relation between mentor and mentoree does not imply dependence or excessive attachment either. Vulnerability and boundaries are to be respected: the mentor will easily listen to the mentoree when a ‘safe space’ has been created.

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<sup>22</sup> L. CUNNINGHAM – K.L. EGAN, *Christian Spirituality*, 178.

<sup>23</sup> T. OF AVILA, *The Book of Her Life*, 67.

<sup>24</sup> J. M. McNAMARA, “Mentoring: A Costly Form of Love”, 22.

<sup>25</sup> Hamilton, 104.

## 1.8 The Benefits and Effects of Mentoring

There is no doubt that one who has a friend has a treasure. One who can entrust one's intimacies, fears, and struggles in the search for authenticity has better conditions for self-knowledge and for an encounter with God. Mentoring helps the person in the "beautiful, but difficult spiritual work of learning to love [oneself]."<sup>26</sup> As Dostoevsky once said, "many people live their lives without ever finding themselves in themselves."<sup>27</sup>

Besides contributing to the mentoree's self-knowledge, the mentor also helps the mentoree to know God's will towards him. Anderson and Reese enumerate some of the most important values derived from mentoring:

- Strengthening of one's intimacy with God
- Recognition of the presence of God
- Clues for the discernment of God's will
- Self-discovery of one's own identity
- Source of encouragement and hope
- Providing of a clear mind in order to make decisions.<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>26</sup> O'Donohue, 140.

<sup>27</sup> O'Donohue, 140.

<sup>28</sup> Anderson – Reese, 56-57.

Those who have been mentored from early age ought to be more ready to make good decisions about their life, because they have learned how to interpret the on-going events in their life process.<sup>29</sup>

### 1.9. Summary, Conclusion, and Transition

This chapter addressed the existence of a spiritual reality that has to be interpreted with a *sixth sense*, different from those five we use to perceive what comes from the external. We need to *see with our heart* to recognise the presence of God within us, and to discover our personal identity in connection with the successive events in our life. This task can be more easily achieved with an external objective agent or mediator, the mentor, who acts as a mirror for the mentoree and facilitates his/her search for Christ along the journey.

Mentoring is a never-ending process in which mentor and mentoree build up a friendly intimate relationship directed toward hearing and interpreting God's voice. We conclude that a mentor is really a treasure, who assists the mentoree to discern God's will and hence make the right decisions.

We can now look at St. John Baptist de La Salle, the founder of the Brothers of the Christian Schools. As the reader will notice, De La Salle was advised by a number of mentors who accompanied him during the decisive moments of his life. He mentored the Brothers so that they could learn to *see with their hearts* their vocation as ministers and ambassadors of Jesus Christ.

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<sup>29</sup> Cf. S.W. SYNAN, "Mentoring Improves Vocation Promotion", 27-33.

## **Chapter II**

### **Saint John Baptist de La Salle: Founder and Mentor**

#### **2.0 Introduction**

The previous chapter has led us to the threshold of a myriad of examples of mentors. John Baptist de La Salle, the founder of the Brothers of the Christian Schools, is one of them. As a founder, his life was an on-going process of searching for the will of God. Even though his early expectations led him to become a prestigious priest and canon at the Cathedral of Rheims (France), he often discerned and interpreted God's plans as not coinciding with his own.

The cardinal principle of De La Salle's spiritual life was dependence on the will of God. Because of this openness to God's will, he relied on mentors, who helped him to accept actively the decisive changes he experienced during his lifetime. De La Salle reflected this way on God's intervention in his own life:

God, who conducts all things with wisdom and sweetness, and who does not force the inclination of men, wishing to employ me wholly in the work of schools, did so in an imperceptible manner, and over a period of time, in such wise that one thing led to the next without my perceiving it from the beginning (De La Salle, *Memories of the Beginnings*).<sup>30</sup>

The Spirit of God guided De La Salle to a world and a life that he could never have imagined. In fact, the idea of founding a teaching congregation devoted particularly to the poor had never entered his consciousness.

Born in 17<sup>th</sup>-century France, De La Salle was influenced by the spirituality of his time and it was this that determined clearly his original contribution to both Church and society. After enumerating the influences that were the foundations of his responses to the contemporary needs, I will focus on De La Salle's process of mentoring. First of all, I will analyse the various experiences that provided him with insights for his decision-making process. Then I will study De La Salle as a guide for the Brothers of the Christian Schools.

## **2.1 John Baptist de La Salle, a Founder and Searcher for God's Will**

### **2.1.1 De La Salle's Portrait**

John Baptist de La Salle was born in Rheims, France, within a bourgeois family. De La Salle's elementary education was entrusted to private tutors, after which he was admitted in the prestigious Collège des Bons-Enfants in Rheims. At the early age of 11, he received the clerical tonsure, which signified the starting point of his journey towards priesthood. When the young De La Salle was only 15, his cousin Pierre Dozet resigned

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<sup>30</sup> Cf. A. CALCUTT, *De La Salle. A City Saint and the Liberation of the Poor through Education*, 602.

as a canon of the Cathedral of Rheims. Dozet handed the canonry over to the young De La Salle. De La Salle's career gained in both prestige and honour.

At the age of 18, De La Salle entered the Seminary of Paris, run by the priests of the Society of Saint Sulpice.<sup>31</sup> He graduated successfully in theology, was ordained priest and was awarded the degree of Doctor of Theology in 1680.

During his first years of priesthood, De La Salle began his contacts with the world of education. His friend and spiritual director, Nicolas Roland, died suddenly while he was in the process of applying for legal recognition of his newly founded teaching congregation –the Sisters of the Child Jesus. In his last will, Roland asked De La Salle to complete the application process, and De La Salle managed to obtain for the Sisters the letters of authorization. Around the same time, De La Salle was requested to sponsor and help to organise a school for the poor boys of Rheims. This request would change the course of his life.<sup>32</sup>

De La Salle gathered a group of teachers who joined him in the establishment of the Institute of the Brothers of the Christian Schools, which consolidated as an instrument to respond to the urgent educative needs of France in the 17<sup>th</sup> century:

The necessity of this Institute is very great because the working class and the poor being usually little instructed, and being occupied all day in gaining a livelihood for themselves and their families, cannot give their children the needed instruction, or a suitable Christian education. It was to procure this advantage for the children of the working class and of the poor, that the Christian schools were established.<sup>33</sup>

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<sup>31</sup> The Society of Saint Sulpice was very much influenced by Francis de Sales' spirituality.

<sup>32</sup> Cf. L. SALM, *The Work is Yours. The Life of Saint John Baptist de La Salle*, 31.

<sup>33</sup> *RFSC* 5.

Before his death in 1719, De La Salle had begun an unprecedented project: a congregation composed of lay men whose main focus was to teach the children of the artisans and the poor in France. As Calcutt points out, De La Salle created a new style for the teaching profession.<sup>34</sup> Calcutt also indicates that “the full meaning of La Salle’s work would only be seen after some time as his Institute spread.”<sup>35</sup> Within a century, 10,000 Brothers spread throughout all of France and 5,000 abroad. On 24 May 1900, the Catholic Church declared De La Salle a saint, and fifty years later he was recognised as the principal patron of Catholic teachers.

### ***2.1.2 De La Salle’s Spiritual Background***

De La Salle was born when France was still in the process of implementing the decisions of the Council of Trent, held between 1545 and 1563. In the 17<sup>th</sup> century, the Catholic Church was affected by the spread of Protestantism. These challenges, however, seemed to provide fertile soil for a strong movement to grow. Ryan and Rybolt state:

In the midst of the political, social, economic and religious background, this period of late 16<sup>th</sup> and early 17<sup>th</sup> century in France witnessed a providential flowering of one of the most remarkable periods of mystical vitality and spiritual creativity in the long history of the universal Church.<sup>36</sup>

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<sup>34</sup> Cf. Calcutt, 602.

<sup>35</sup> Calcutt, 602.

<sup>36</sup> F. RYAN – J.E. RYBOTT, *Vincent de Paul and Louise de Marillac*, 4.

That “spiritual creativity” is expressed in a lively relationship with Christ, which served as the foundation for De La Salle’s style of mentoring. Among the spiritual influences embodied within that tradition of mystical vitality are:

a) *Salesian Spirituality*

Francis de Sales (1567-1622) was a devout humanist who emphasized the true love of God. He composed a method of prayer that paved the way for the one De La Salle was to introduce to his novices. Jane Frances de Chantal (1572-1641), foundress of the Visitation Sisters, also pointed out the living experience of God. As Wright and Power suggest, “Jesus was for the two early 17<sup>th</sup> century founders of the Salesian tradition (Francis de Sales and Jane de Chantal) a presence to be experienced, a reality to be lived.”<sup>37</sup>

b) *The Practice of the Presence of God*

The experience of God is reflected in the practice of the presence of God, which became popular with Lawrence of the Resurrection.”<sup>38</sup> In a modern edition to *The Practice of the Presence of God*, Dorothy Day affirms, “the practice of the presence of God consists of conversations, letters, and maxims on how we should live, with the idea of cultivating this sense of the presence of God in the soul, and indeed in the world about us.”<sup>39</sup>

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<sup>37</sup> W.M. WRIGHT · J.F. POWER, *Francis de Sales and Jane de Chantal*, 11.

<sup>38</sup> Brother Lawrence of the Resurrection (1614-1691) was the religious name of Nicolas Herman. He became a lay brother Carmelite in 1640. In his daily work as a cook in the monastery, he was able to recognise the presence of God in his everyday activities.

<sup>39</sup> BR. LAWRENCE OF THE RESURRECTION, *The Practice of the Presence of God*, 11.

c) *The French School*

The *French school* of spirituality was founded by Cardinal Pierre de Berulle. It included others such as Condren, Olier, Eudes, Tronson, and Vincent de Paul. The central themes in its spirituality are as follows:

1. The glory of God and our need to adore God
2. Christocentrism, which implies one's adherence to the Incarnate Word in humility and love
3. Christ's self-humiliation provokes our abnegation and humility.
4. Pessimistic view about human nature
5. Devotions to the mystery of Jesus and Mary.<sup>40</sup>

The also called *Berullian School* was the inspiration for a handful of holy men who decided to follow Christ fully. Calcutt points out that

Under Berulle's influence, imitating Jesus by spiritual infancy became a major theme of the French school. To centre on Jesus, to adore him, to ask his Spirit in us, to share with us his dispositions and to act by this same spirit was a spirituality taken up by Olier, St John Eudes and St John Baptist de La Salle.<sup>41</sup>

De La Salle was influenced also by the priests of the Society of Saint Sulpice, who were running the seminary in Paris. "The spirituality of this school was dominantly Christocentric,"<sup>42</sup> which would inspire De La Salle to insist that his Brothers adhere to Jesus Christ. De La Salle interacted with numerous orders and religious congregations,

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<sup>40</sup> Cf. S. GALLEGO, *An Introduction to the Writings of John Baptist De La Salle*, 20. Footnote 26.

<sup>41</sup> Calcutt, 62.

<sup>42</sup> Salm, 20.

both male and female. He was imbued with the spirit of the religious orders contemporary to his, including those of St. Ignatius of Loyola, of St. Teresa of Avila, and St. Peter of Alcantara.

### 2.1.3 *De La Salle's Personal Spirituality*

As a child of his time, De La Salle was affected by the spiritualities aforementioned. Maurice-Auguste and Michel Sauvage state: "There is hardly any spiritual theme of the founder [De La Salle] which does not appear to be inspired by the currents of his time. Nevertheless, it is equally true that his spiritual teaching possesses a real originality."<sup>43</sup>

The practice of the presence of God, the Christ-centred spirituality, the battle against Protestantism and, therefore, his total fidelity to Rome are always present in De La Salle's spirituality. But his originality lies in connecting closely the spirit of faith that allows us to sense God's caring presence in our midst, with the zeal to spread salvation, particularly to the poor. The establishment of the Christian Schools came to be the means for the Brothers to touch the hearts of the young, especially to those who were far from the truth contained in the gospel, and to those deprived of integral education. They could reach salvation through the knowledge of the wisdom contained in the Scriptures. The Brothers would become mentors for those entrusted to their care, not only of their human development, but of their faith as well.

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<sup>43</sup> M. A. HERMANS M. SAUVAGE, "Jean Baptiste de La Salle", in *Dictionnaire de Spiritualité*. Col. 809, in: Gallego, 20.

## 2.2 Mentoring in De La Salle's Journey

### 2.2.1 *Spiritual Direction in the 17th Century*

Behind a relevant spiritual master there is often an experienced spiritual director. The 17<sup>th</sup> century “was a great period for seeking spiritual guidance by a person of experience for one’s spiritual life or journey.”<sup>44</sup> The previous century produced spiritual writers such as Teresa of Avila and John of the Cross, who contributed significant reflection about spiritual guidance. Ignatius of Loyola played a decisive role on the matter with his *Rules of Discernment*. The Society of Jesus adopted the training of spiritual directors as an important part of their charism and ministry. The well-spread doctrine of *The Imitation of Christ*<sup>45</sup> had previously urged Christians to seek mentors who could assist them in their search for union with God by meditating on Christ’s humanity.

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<sup>44</sup> Calcutt, 167.

<sup>45</sup> *The Imitation of Christ* is the most widely circulated book in Catholic history, second only to the Bible. Attributed to Thomas a Kempis (1379-1471), it provided the basis of the doctrine of the 16<sup>th</sup> century *Devotio Moderna*: the imitation of Christ. Cf. J Aumann, *Christian Spirituality in the Catholic Tradition*, 162-170.

To some extent, the role of spiritual directors went beyond helping the directee to discover God's will. Hence, "directors tended to make decisions for their clients instead of accompanying them as they tried to discover God's will and ways with them."<sup>46</sup> An attempt to rectify this extreme attitude was made by some new approaches such as the Salesian style of direction. Focusing more on the person than the content, this type of spiritual direction "was always personal and unique to each directee. It was concrete and adapted to the particular temperament and life circumstances in which a given individual found himself or herself."<sup>47</sup> This is the approach that surrounds De La Salle's experience of spiritual direction. The fact that most of his spiritual directors were formed within the Sulpician spirituality enabled De La Salle to discover Christ as the authentic Mediator. Spiritual directors were a means to interpret the living presence of Christ in daily events.

### ***2.2.2 Mentors in De La Salle's Process of Discernment***

De La Salle's openness to the will of God was evident in his search for guidance from a number of spiritual directors who helped him interpret God's designs. "Due to his Sulpician training and his personal need to discern the will of God, De La Salle decided to seek spiritual direction."<sup>48</sup> At every stage of his career, De La Salle relied on qualified mentors who were authentic keystones who offered influential assistance at crucial crossroads in his life.

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<sup>46</sup> Calcutt, 168.

<sup>47</sup> Right – Power, 14.

<sup>48</sup> Salm, 37.

De La Salle received the sad news of the death of his mother and then his father while he was studying at the Seminary of St Sulpice. He had to discern his future, since he was the first born and had to take care of his siblings. As one of his biographers points out, "He was old enough to act independently, but in a matter of such importance he did not wish to act without the advice of enlightened persons. With this in mind, he consulted Nicholas Roland, canon and theologian of Rheims."<sup>49</sup> Roland is described as a skilful mentor "who possessed the qualities which would give him great influence over the mind of his disciple."<sup>50</sup> A modern biographer recognises the providential role that Roland exerted in De La Salle's process of insertion in the world of education. God made use of mentors such as Roland to help De La Salle interpret the divine will. Salm states, "It was no doubt through his spiritual director, Nicolas Roland, that John Baptist de La Salle would have become aware of the movements in Rouen to provide religious instruction for the children of the poor."<sup>51</sup> For De La Salle, the process of discernment always began with one's relationship with God through prayer. Maillefer reminds us that "before attempting anything else, De La Salle first addressed himself to God in prayer... but because he did not trust his own ideas, he wished to seek counsel. For this reason he sought the advice of his superiors, men of learning and experience."<sup>52</sup> Therefore, God's will was to be interpreted through personal prayer and through in dialogue with mentors.

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<sup>49</sup> D.E. MAILLEFER, *The Life of John Baptist de La Salle*, 3.

<sup>50</sup> Maillefer, 4.

<sup>51</sup> Salm, 54.

<sup>52</sup> Maillefer, 12.

Once De La Salle had begun to establish his first schools for the poor children of Rheims, he continued to consult with mentors about what God was expecting from him. De La Salle was aware that the *work of God* should be based on abandonment to Providence. After Nicolas Roland died, Nicolas Barré became his mentor. "Barré had a reputation as gifted director who could see intuitively into the heart of a problem and the heart of a person."<sup>53</sup> As a result of De La Salle's encounters with Barré, he decided to take the teachers into his house and live with them. He then decided to use his patrimony to found new schools. But God revealed again a different plan through De La Salle's mentor's words. "Barré told him that the schools were founded on the sole support of Divine Providence."<sup>54</sup> New inspirations came to his mind to the point of taking into consideration the possibility of renouncing his canonry so that he could be more fully committed to the work of the schools and more dependent upon Providence. Maillefer describes it so: "He consulted some friends about the matter [the authorization to renounce his canonry], including Canon Philbert, the Vicar General, who advised him not to hesitate to give up his canonicate."<sup>55</sup>

A number of conflicts arose during the early growth of the Institute. Some of them ended in persecutions and even trials against De La Salle. It was then that De La Salle underwent a deep personal crisis. Convinced that he was the cause of the Institute's difficulties, he withdrew to the peaceful mountains at Parmenie, in France. There he met another mentor, Sister Louise, a 68-year-old woman who lived in seclusion on the mountain. "Her reputation for sanctity spread throughout the region,

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<sup>53</sup> Salm, 37.

<sup>54</sup> Maillefer, 27.

<sup>55</sup> Maillefer, 29.

until she began to be looked upon as a model of holiness.”<sup>56</sup> In the encounters they had, De La Salle shared with her his desire to live peacefully in Parmenie the rest of his life. “The sister replied that it was not according to God’s will that he should neglect the care of his Institute. God had destined him for this working, and it was His will that he should persevere in it until the end of his days.”<sup>57</sup> Once again, the mentor provided De La Salle with an insight that helped him discern more clearly.

A final example of mentoring in De La Salle’s life is linked with Lasallian spirituality. After some years away and without having contacted his Brothers, De La Salle received a letter signed by the new Superior and the principal Brothers. Almost at the end of De La Salle’s life, the Brothers had acquired the Lasallian motto, “together and by association” and had agreed to come together to mentor their father and founder by means of a moving letter that seems to contain God’s will for him:

Reverend and our very dear Father, we, the leading Brothers of the Christian Schools, having in view the greater glory of God, the greater good of the Church and of our Society, acknowledge that it is of extreme consequence that you should resume the care and the general conduct of the holy work of God which is also yours, since it has pleased the Lord to make use of you to found it and to guide it for so long.

Everyone is convinced that God gave you and still gives you the grace and the talents necessary to govern well this new society, which is of such great usefulness to the Church, and it is with justice that we bear you the testimony that you have always led it with much success and edification.

And so, Monsieur, we beg you very humbly and we command you in the name and on behalf of the body of the Society to which you have promised obedience, to take care immediately of the general government of our Society. In faith of which we have signed. Done at Paris, this 1<sup>st</sup> April 1714. And we are, with the most profound respect, reverend and very dear Father, your very humble and obedient inferiors.<sup>58</sup>

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<sup>56</sup> Maillefer, 138.

<sup>57</sup> Maillefer, 138.

<sup>58</sup> Calcutt, 552-553.

The letter convinced him of what God wanted. He accepted the “command” to go back to the Brothers and to take up again the governing of the Institute, although he delegated some of the responsibilities. The Brothers really mentored him at a time when he most needed a community sign from those he had been mentoring for many years.

### **2.2.3 De La Salle as a Mentor**

De La Salle became convinced that the work of God had to depend on Providence. However, he was also aware of the hands that were to work on the establishment of the schools for the poor. The success of the Christian Schools depended a great deal on the integrity and human qualities of the workers of such an enterprise. In the introduction to *Meditations by John Baptist de La Salle*, Jean-Guy Rodrigue affirms: “In the process, he [De La Salle] saw the urgent need to provide spiritual formation and pedagogical guidance to these teachers, recognizing as he did the great importance of the schools.”<sup>39</sup>

From the origins of the Institute, De La Salle mentored the Brothers with the conviction that the work of Christian education of poor children was an expression of God’s plan of salvation. This plan was to be achieved in the daily activity of teaching. It was important for the Brothers to understand their teaching ministry as the work of their own salvation. De La Salle “frequently stated that the Brothers were to make no distinction between the work of their own salvation and the work of the Christian

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<sup>39</sup> A. LOES - F. HUETHER, ed., *Meditations by John Baptist de La Salle*, 8.

education of the children in their classes.”<sup>60</sup> In De La Salle’s mind there was an understanding of the “union between the mission of the teachers to announce the gospel of Jesus Christ and the professional work of teachers in the total education of their students.”<sup>61</sup> Therefore, the Brothers needed to be assisted in that integration of their vocation as consecrated teachers.

De La Salle’s role as mentor was above all else to show the Brothers how they should open their minds and hearts to the guidance of the Spirit. In his *Meditations*, De La Salle wrote: “Dispose yourselves today to receive Him without reserve as a King, giving yourselves wholly to His direction, and leaving Him to rule over each one of your interior impulses.”<sup>62</sup> His style of mentoring was based on his close relationship with the Brothers: “Early in his association with the teachers, De La Salle put himself at their level, lived their lives, learned first-hand their problems and their weaknesses, and encouraged and supported their efforts day by day.”<sup>63</sup>

#### 2.2.3.1 *Mentor Through his Writings*

De La Salle wrote a number of works to promote the growth of the Brothers both as teachers and as spiritual guides:

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<sup>60</sup> A. LOES, ed., *The Letters of John Baptist de La Salle*, 7.

<sup>61</sup> Loes – Huether, 27.

<sup>62</sup> *Med.* 22.2.

<sup>63</sup> Loes – Huether, 15.

- *Meditations for Sundays and the Principal Feasts.* These meditations present the fundamental doctrine of the Christian life so that the Brothers may apply it to themselves and for the education of their students.
- *Meditations for the Time of Retreat.* They invite the Brothers to reflect before God on their vocation as ministers for the youth.
- *The Conduct of the Schools.* This work was published in 1720, one year after De La Salle's death. It contains instructions "to make of poor children good Catholic Christians, well instructed in their religious duties and practices."<sup>64</sup> De La Salle had been compiling general principles to procure uniformity among the teachers so that the aim of the Institute would be accomplished:

The end of this Institute is to give a Christian education to the children; it is for this purpose that Brothers keep schools, that having the children under their care from morning until evening, they may teach them to lead good lives, by instructing them in the mysteries of our holy religion and by inspiring them with Christian maxims and thus give them a suitable education.<sup>65</sup>

- *Explanation of the Method of Interior Prayer.* The purpose of this book was to train the novices in the practice of interior prayer. De La Salle "reflects the responsibility he assumed during his later years of instructing novices at Saint Yon in the exercise of interior prayer."<sup>66</sup> The method reflects the influence of the method of prayer he practised during his days at the Seminary of Saint Sulpice.

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<sup>64</sup> F. DE LA FONTAINEIRIE, ed., *The Conduct of the Schools of Jean-Baptiste de La Salle*, 40.

<sup>65</sup> RFSC 4.

<sup>66</sup> D. MOUTON, ed., *Explanation of the Method of Interior Prayer*, 1.

- *The Letters*. This is the focus of the next section of the present chapter.

### 2.2.3.2 *Mentor Through his Letters*

De La Salle's preoccupation with the spiritual growth and welfare of his Brothers is patent in the *Letters* that he wrote as a reply to the monthly correspondence the Brothers maintained with him.<sup>67</sup> In the *Letters*, "the paternal concern De La Salle had for the Brothers is revealed, showing how he adapted his advice to the unique needs of each individual Brother in the Institute."<sup>68</sup>

As Superior and spiritual director, De La Salle intended to give the Brothers encouragement, guidance, and advice. The *Letters* were his response to what the Brothers shared with him concerning community life, problems with their teaching in class, prayer, and other matters. This is why I prefer to use the term *mentoring* rather than *spiritual direction* to describe De La Salle's relationship with and guidance of the Brothers. In addition to several levels of spiritual approach to the Brothers within the *Letters*, De La Salle touched other issues, e.g. the practice of teaching, classroom management, living together in community, and so on, that are not strictly spiritual matters.

In reading the *Letters*, one might have the impression that De La Salle "spends too much time dealing with trivialities, insisting on minor points of the Rule, like sounding the bell the correct number of times for the various spiritual exercises."<sup>69</sup> In

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<sup>67</sup> The monthly correspondence between the Brothers and De La Salle was adopted as a practice in the Institute. The Brothers used to call it "reddition".

<sup>68</sup> Loes, 282.

<sup>69</sup> Loes, 9.

fact, the Brothers were still beginners in religious life and they needed to be trained even in the tiny details of community life.

The content of the *Letters* reveals the basic principles De La Salle insisted on with the Brothers. Noticeable is the influence of monastic life in the principles applied to the life of the Brothers. As a matter of fact, such monastic emphasis and style was the pattern for all religious orders at the time. Thus, the main topics are related to separation from the world, silence, stability in the society, poverty, prayer, and commitment to the “work of God”, which for the Brothers was the Christian education of the children in class.

The style provides accurate information about the relationship between De La Salle and the Brothers, and his notable qualities as spiritual director. Two features are worthy of being mentioned:

1. The tone of the letters addressed to the Brothers denotes affection and approachability: “my very dear Brother,” “devotedly yours,” and so on.
2. The observations are direct and precise. As Loes points out:

They give the impression that De La Salle had his correspondent’s letter in front of him as he wrote his reply point by point, with here a word of encouragement, there a reprimand, now a little irony, but mostly with advice for living in community and the management of class.<sup>70</sup>

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<sup>70</sup> Loes, 9.

I will refer now to three categories of the *Letters*:

a) Letters to Brother Directors

De La Salle had great esteem for Brother Directors –the Superiors of the communities, since they had to be guides and mentors for the Brothers. Their position in the community is that of an *older brother in a family*.<sup>71</sup> They were expected to direct everything concerning the management of the community and school, and to direct interiorly the Brothers in their charge. In that sense, they directed the Brothers' consciences. This practice was maintained until 1890, when the Decree "Quemadmodum" of Pope Leo XIII "forbade superiors to induce their inferiors directly or indirectly to make a manifestation of conscience, while it left to inferiors the liberty of doing so freely and spontaneously."<sup>72</sup> Such a task of dealing with the Brothers' consciences obliged the Brother Directors to have high moral qualities such as: ardent faith, humility, gentleness, discretion, prudence, and simplicity.<sup>73</sup>

In the letters to Brother Directors, De La Salle insists on a number of practices that the Directors were expected to model for the Brothers: silence, punctuality, and fidelity to the Rule. "I am delighted that you take pleasure in observing the Rules. The great love you show for their observance is a sure sign of your vocation."<sup>74</sup> The Brother Directors were also to model obedience, a spirit of faith and good example: "Do, please,

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<sup>71</sup> Cf. J. BONILLA – A. HOURY, "Director", 96.

<sup>72</sup> Loes, 45.

<sup>73</sup> Cf. Bonilla – Houry, 97.

<sup>74</sup> Loes, 186. *Letter 67*.

try to have an engaging manner, and make it one of your chief occupations to bring about union among your Brothers.”<sup>75</sup>

b) Letters to other Brothers

These letters are characterized by a number of directives that go directly to the point. De La Salle had many responsibilities and his time to reply to the many letters he received was quite limited. The themes of the advice he offered include:

- Community issues: “Take care not to become impatient with your Brother, but always speak politely to him;”<sup>76</sup> “Don’t worry yourself about what your Brothers do. It is for God to judge them, not you.”<sup>77</sup>
- Prayer and mission: “One of your main preoccupations, my very dear Brother, should be to apply yourself to prayer and to your class work, for these are your two principal occupations and the ones for which you will have to give account to God.”<sup>78</sup>
- Docility to God’s will: “Pray to God, I beg you, that he may touch your heart and make you docile to his will.”<sup>79</sup>
- Discernment: “Please, be prudent, my very dear Brother, and don’t do anything rash;”<sup>80</sup> “Who has being telling you that God does not want you to be doing what you are presently doing?”<sup>81</sup>

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<sup>75</sup> Loes, 185. *Letter 66.*

<sup>76</sup> Loes, 25. *Letter 4.*

<sup>77</sup> Loes, 20. *Letter 2.*

<sup>78</sup> Loes, 35. *Letter 7.*

<sup>79</sup> Loes, 151. *Letter 47.*

<sup>80</sup> Loes, 152. *Letter 48.*

<sup>81</sup> Loes, 167. *Letter 56.*

- Obedience: “You may be sure that the less obedient you are, the less love you will have for what concerns your vocation.”<sup>82</sup>
- Honesty and sincerity: “Well, then, my very dear Brother, so you still want me to be your spiritual guide. I will be glad to act in this capacity on one condition, however: that you tell me my faults without any flattery.”<sup>83</sup>
- Interior life: “So, my very dear Brother, you must make an effort to become interiorly recollected once more. As you are well aware, recollection is fundamental and will lead you surely to God.”<sup>84</sup>
- Fidelity to community exercises: “Be careful to leave everything and everybody as soon as the bell rings.”<sup>85</sup>
- De La Salle appears to be very gentle and encouraging when matters of health arise: “I am greatly consoled, my very dear Brother, that your rheumatism is cured;”<sup>86</sup> “I am quite distressed to hear of the illness that you are suffering, my very dear Brother: we must try to find some way of remedying this.”<sup>87</sup>

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<sup>82</sup> Loes, 184. *Letter 65.*

<sup>83</sup> Loes, 215. *Letter 97.*

<sup>84</sup> Loes, 215. *Letter 98.*

<sup>85</sup> Loes, 25. *Letter 4.*

<sup>86</sup> Loes, 155. *Letter 50.*

<sup>87</sup> Loes, 28. *Letter 5.*

c) Letters to Brother Gabriel Drolin

The most valuable evidence of De La Salle's qualities as a mentor is manifest in the correspondence he had with Brother Gabriel Drolin for 17 years. Drolin was sent to Rome, where he remained alone, without the support of a community, in an environment completely foreign to him. Drolin had made the so-called *Heroic Vow* together with De La Salle and another Brother —the latter to leave the Institute some years later. The three of them promised by a vow of association and union to establish the Society of the Christian Schools, even if they were the only three left in the Society and even if they were obliged to beg for alms and live on bread alone. It is then understandable that De La Salle selected Brother Gabriel Drolin for such a challenging assignment: to establish the Society in Rome.

The main topic in the letters to Drolin is fidelity to the vocation of a Brother. Drolin was tempted to become a priest, but De La Salle continually reminded him not to read or study Latin so as to avoid the temptation to leave his state as a Brother: "Please do not buy a Latin one [New Testament] or claim to know Latin."<sup>88</sup> In addition to that, Drolin was advised to teach catechism in school rather than in the church, in order to affirm the Brother's vocation as a teacher and spiritual guide for the students. "With regard to the teaching of catechism, it seems to me that the right thing and the important thing is to teach it in your school."<sup>89</sup> Drolin was also reminded to wear the Brothers' habit as the sign of his identity: "I do beg you, do not give up the Brothers' robe."<sup>90</sup> In his situation of loneliness, the best remedy for Drolin was to trust

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<sup>88</sup> Loes, 60. *Letter 13.*

<sup>89</sup> Loes, 75. *Letter 18.*

<sup>90</sup> Loes, 106. *Letter 29.*

God and to ask for advice: "You must abandon yourself completely to His guidance and you must do nothing without seeking advice."<sup>91</sup>

De La Salle manifests his belief in the importance of mentoring through his correspondence: "In the future, please write more often, and it seems to me that it will be best if you do so every month."<sup>92</sup> De La Salle's disposition to empathise with his mentoree is clear in the following excerpts:

- "I am distressed to see you living in such poverty as you do. Please tell me what I can do to remedy this situation."<sup>93</sup>
- "As I wrote to you, you may be sure that I have not abandoned you."<sup>94</sup>
- "I was quite upset to hear of your illness but I am happy that God has brought you back to health."<sup>95</sup>

Special words of affection are expressed in De La Salle's last letter to Drolin:

I assure you that I have a great tenderness and affection for you and often pray to God for you... I have been greatly encouraged by your last letter, and the assurance of your wholehearted affection gives me much joy... Please let me know how you're getting along.<sup>96</sup>

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<sup>91</sup> Loes, 60. *Letter 13.*

<sup>92</sup> Loes, 74. *Letter 18.*

<sup>93</sup> Loes, 83. *Letter 21.*

<sup>94</sup> Loes, 87. *Letter 23.*

<sup>95</sup> Loes, 94. *Letter 26.*

<sup>96</sup> Loes, 115. *Letter 32.*

### 2.3 Summary, Conclusion, and Transition

St John Baptist de La Salle has been the main character in this chapter. A number of spiritual schools were quite relevant to his forming his own Christ-centred spirituality. For De La Salle, mentoring was an authentic keystone that, together with prayer, led him to interpret God's will, particularly in his role as a founder and superior of a teaching congregation of lay religious. As a mentor for the Brothers, he advised them to open their minds and hearts to the guidance of the Holy Spirit.

Apart from the variety of pedagogical and mystical books he wrote, his letters to the Brothers reflect De La Salle's skills as a mentor, particularly his closeness and approachability to the Brothers.

We can conclude that the experiences of being mentored and mentoring others can be considered as important foundations for the consolidation of the Institute. The next chapter will deal with a Lasallian style of mentoring inherited from De La Salle.

## Chapter III

### Touching Hearts: The Style of Lasallian Mentoring

#### 3.0 Introduction

De La Salle's style of mentoring has been inherited by the Brothers, who are called to foster the spiritual and human growth of the students entrusted to their care. As De La Salle declared to the Brothers, "the necessity of this Institute is very great"<sup>97</sup> because there is always a need for educators of, and consequently mentors for, youth. I agree completely with the statement: "We can justly consider that the future of humanity lies in the hands of those who are strong enough to provide coming generations with reasons for living and hoping."<sup>98</sup> In other words, there is a continual need for mediators to interpret the continuous action of the Holy Spirit, who is an agent of hope and renewal for humanity. That is why De La Salle reminded the Brothers: "In your state you need the fullness of the Spirit of God, for you cannot live or advance in it except in conforming to the Spirit and guidance of faith."<sup>99</sup>

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<sup>97</sup> *RFSC* 15.

<sup>98</sup> *GS* I: II, 31.

<sup>99</sup> *Med* 43.2.

This chapter aims to present Lasallian spirituality, whose key elements are the spirit of faith and zeal, virtues which inspire the Brothers to be *ministers and ambassadors* of Jesus Christ. As *ministers* of Jesus Christ, Brothers are expected to reach the hearts of those entrusted to their care. In Lasallian terms, they are called to “touch” the hearts of their students and the Brothers with whom they live and work.

### 3.1 Lasallian Spirituality: Ministers and Ambassadors of Jesus Christ

Lasallian spirituality is eminently based on a particular way of seeking and experiencing God through children and the young; the unifying force is the spirit of faith:

The spirit of this Institute is first a spirit of faith, which should induce those who compose it not to look upon anything but with the eyes of faith, not to do anything but in view of God, and to attribute all to God.<sup>100</sup>

By the spirit of faith, the Brothers commit to letting God lead their lives in such a way that everything is interpreted through the eyes of faith. Faith is directly connected to zeal, as the realization of faith. “No matter how much faith they have, and no matter how living it might be, if it does not include the practice of good works, faith will serve for nothing.”<sup>101</sup> Then, “secondly, the spirit of the Institute consists in an ardent zeal for the instruction of children.”<sup>102</sup> Faith and zeal are two sides of the same commitment; zeal is the expression of faith and faith provides zeal a direction for the action to be accomplished.<sup>103</sup>

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<sup>100</sup> *RFSC* 2:2.

<sup>101</sup> *Med* 200.3.

<sup>102</sup> *RFSC* 2:9.

<sup>103</sup> Cf. G. VAN GRIEKEN, *Touching the Hearts of Students*, 74.

The pair “faith-zeal” leads the Brothers to a *spirituality of incarnation*<sup>104</sup> by which they are called to integrate their participation in the Spirit of God with the encounter with those waiting to hear the good news in the context of the school. Presence and incarnation determine the quality of the interpersonal relations of the Brothers and, therefore, the style of mentoring based on a close relationship between mentor and mentoree.

For De La Salle, the Brothers are “ambassadors and ministers of Jesus Christ.”<sup>105</sup> The purpose of such a title is to invite the Brother to transform his profession of teaching into the ministry of education.<sup>106</sup> We could also apply the title to the ministry of mentoring the students and the Brothers in their process of human-spiritual growth. Because the Brothers are a sign of Christ’s presence, Botana uses the title “minister” as a synonym for *sacrament* for those who are far from God’s salvation and are to be loved and served by Christ in the person of the Brother.<sup>107</sup> “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.”<sup>108</sup> Furthermore, the Brother is for the students a sign of God’s love for them:

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<sup>104</sup> Cf. A. BOTANA, “El Espíritu del Ministerio: Un Dinamismo Interno”.

<sup>105</sup> *Med* 195.2.

<sup>106</sup> Cf. J. M. THOUARD, *Lasallian Spirituality*, 7.

<sup>107</sup> Cf. A. BOTANA, “The Process of Identification with Christ in the Writings of John Baptist de La Salle (3),” 40-4-A-178.

<sup>108</sup> *Med* 195.2.

The teacher becomes for them [the students] a visible sacrament of the personal love that God has for each one of them. Often this affection provokes an attachment to the teacher on the part of the child. The Founder is not opposed to this, but rather invites his disciples to try to direct this affectionate relationship along its sacramental lines.<sup>109</sup>

Apart from the association with *sacrament*, the term “minister” applies to “one who is in charge of a function, an office. He is the person who is asked to perform certain tasks in the name of some higher authority.”<sup>110</sup> The Brothers are called to accomplish their commitment as a response to God, and as “ministers of Jesus Christ and the dispensers of the mysteries of God.”<sup>111</sup>

Reading and contemplating the word of God are the first steps toward Christian spirituality.<sup>112</sup> They are also the basis of Lasallian spirituality.

Since you are bound to teach every day the doctrine of the holy apostles and of Jesus Christ himself, you are obliged to learn it well so that you possess it perfectly and by this means make your students true disciples of Jesus Christ.<sup>113</sup>

This close relationship to the word makes it possible for the Brother to become the word of God for the young: “They [the students] must be convinced that your instructions are the truth of Jesus Christ who speaks with your mouth.”<sup>114</sup>

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<sup>109</sup> M. SAUVAGE – M. CAMPOS, *Announcing the Gospel to the Poor*, 114.

<sup>110</sup> H. RAHARILALAO – A. HOURY, “Ministry – Minister”, 193.

<sup>111</sup> 1Cor 4:1-12.

<sup>112</sup> *VC* 94.

<sup>113</sup> *Med* 116.2.

<sup>114</sup> *Med* 195.2.

## 3.2 Offering Salvation by Touching Hearts

### 3.2.1 “Salvation” in the Lasallian Context

In the first Meditation for the Time of Retreat, De La Salle states: “God...wants everyone to be saved. For that purpose he has provided the necessary means: he has chosen the Brothers to help in this work.”<sup>115</sup> Therefore, the Brothers are the mediators who announce the salvation willed by God and accomplished in Jesus Christ. God’s promise to save his people is fulfilled in the life, death, and resurrection of Christ. For the Christian, Jesus is the one who brings salvation.<sup>116</sup> Salvation involves the whole person, and not the soul alone. The Lasallian interpretation of salvation implies a harmonious connection between the material and the spiritual levels.

Referring to one of De La Salle’s meditations, Van Grieken states: “God’s designs are fully and constantly directed toward our good. God wills that all be saved, and it is for this purpose that God has called the Brothers to their ministry.”<sup>117</sup> The main task of the Brothers is to mentor others in their search for the knowledge of the true God, who is dwelling within and who is the origin as well as the end of salvation.

The ministry of the Brothers is to be focused on the heart, helping their students to feel the loving and living presence of God. “True teaching involves dynamics of the heart, as salvation itself does. The salvation of souls is a matter of touching hearts, of leading children to live in a Christian manner through winning their hearts.”<sup>118</sup>

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<sup>115</sup> Cf. *Med* 193.3.

<sup>116</sup> See L. SALM, “Salvation”, 208.

<sup>117</sup> Van Grieken, 74.

<sup>118</sup> Van Grieken, 96.

Consequently, salvation involves conquering the hearts of the students to keep them engaged in the work of their own development. De La Salle encouraged the teachers to win the hearts of their students. In fact, the *Conduct of the Schools* considers the lack of affection towards the teacher as one reason for students to lose interest in their own educational progress. “The fourth reason why pupils absent themselves is that they have little affection for their teacher, who is not prepossessing and who does not know how to win them.”<sup>119</sup> Clearly, the ability of a mentor to touch his/her students’ hearts is essential.

### 3.2.2 *Touching Hearts*

As already mentioned, mentoring is a type of relationship in which both mentor and mentoree gradually reach a deep level of affinity. Under the topic “A Fraternal Community,” we read the following article in the *Rule of the Brothers of the Christian Schools*:

The Brothers are determined with one spirit to be brothers among themselves, brothers to the adults they deal with, and older brothers to the young people confided to their care. In all their relationships they are concerned about persons in their deepest hopes and desires.<sup>120</sup>

This excerpt pictures the style of relationship that the Brothers are to promote. Their main focus ought to be the hopes and desires of those who approach them. The only way of getting to know the other’s inner feelings is by *touching their hearts*. When De

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<sup>119</sup> F. DE LA FONTAINEIRIE, *The Conduct of the Schools of Jean-Baptiste de La Salle*, 197.  
<sup>120</sup> NR 53.

La Salle employs this term, obviously he does not mean *to touch* in a physical sense. Moreover, the expression *touching hearts* “carries the meaning of reaching, moving, stirring up, affecting or, sometimes, depending on the context, the sense of winning or converting.”<sup>121</sup> *Touching hearts* is a result of faith, which moves the Brothers to fill their disciples’ hearts with the Spirit of God: “Do you have a faith that is able to touch the hearts of your pupils and to fill them with a Christian spirit? It is the greatest miracle that you can make and that which God demands of you since that is the aim of your employment.”<sup>122</sup> *Touching hearts* is more than a means to communicate salvation: it becomes part of salvation. As a result, Lasallian mentoring aims to reach the other’s very personality, so that it will be invaded by the presence of God, and will make it possible for the person to live and to act only by the Spirit’s action in him or her. To put it in another way, *to touch hearts* is “to establish and maintain the Kingdom of God in the hearts of your students.”<sup>123</sup>

Just as that the Kingdom of God is sometimes by means of prodigious signs, the Brothers can perform daily miracles by conquering their students’ hearts and attracting them to God: “You too can perform several miracles with regard to yourself and to your employment... As regards your employment, by touching the hearts of the children entrusted to your care.”<sup>124</sup> The miracle consists in being compassionate toward all those who approach the Brothers. As Alcazar states, “touching hearts is practicing the compassion of Jesus.”<sup>125</sup> In the exercise of mentoring students, the power comes from

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<sup>121</sup> Gallego, 18.

<sup>122</sup> *Med* 139.3.

<sup>123</sup> *Med* 67.1.

<sup>124</sup> *Med* 180.3.

<sup>125</sup> A. ALCAZAR, “Only Hearts Touch Hearts”, 15.

the Holy Spirit. “You carry out a work that requires you to touch hearts, but this you cannot do except by the Spirit of God.”<sup>126</sup>

The effectiveness of mentoring depends a great deal on the commitment of the Brothers to prayer, which is the source of the gift and inspiration to touch hearts. “The more ardently you apply yourselves to prayer for the good of the souls entrusted to you, the more God will help you find the skill to touch their hearts.”<sup>127</sup> Prayer requires openness, a genuine prerequisite for those who try to touch people deeply. As Alcazar observes: “If we expect genuinely to touch another’s heart, we will succeed only when our heart is open as well. Only hearts touch hearts.”<sup>128</sup>

### *3.2.2.1 Touching the Hearts of Brothers*

If the Brothers are determined with one spirit to be brothers among themselves, it is because they are first of all united with Christ, their elder Brother. When Jesus is recognised in their midst, the community of the Brothers becomes, then, a “holy place, a house of God.”<sup>129</sup> Unity within the community requires the ability and willingness of the Brothers to establish ties, which involves an ongoing process of mentoring. The Brother Director of the community is the key figure as a mentor for the Brothers. “As a religious superior, the Brother Director is at the service of the Brothers to help them in their spiritual growth and in accomplishing their vocation as persons and as a community.”<sup>130</sup>

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<sup>126</sup> *Med* 43.3.

<sup>127</sup> *Med* 148.2.

<sup>128</sup> Alcazar, 24.

<sup>129</sup> See *Med* 77.1.

<sup>130</sup> *NR* 61.

In addition to that, “Each Brother is invited to seek an experienced spiritual director, especially in the most decisive moments of his life, as a companion for his spiritual journey.”<sup>131</sup> The preoccupation of the Institute to mentor the Brothers is derived from De La Salle’s own practice, since “He was concerned to offer to the young men who joined him the best possible spiritual guidance.”<sup>132</sup> Above all, De La Salle tried to touch the Brothers’ hearts; he “wishes to help his Brothers to be interior men, able to recognise the presence of God in their lives and to respond to it. He wishes to educate them in interiority.”<sup>133</sup>

It is by means of quality mentoring that young Brothers in formation are assisted, mainly in the recognition of the presence of God in their lives; the interpretation of God’s will in their personal journeys; and their disposition to act upon both human and Christian values.<sup>134</sup> The art of mentoring a candidate in initial formation requires the skill of listening in order to understand the mentoree and therefore to discern what are his personal motives. The *Guide for Formation* provides us with some clues for that art of mentoring:

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<sup>131</sup> NR 75b.

<sup>132</sup> NR 81.

<sup>133</sup> GF 111.

<sup>134</sup> Cf. W. MANN, “What Does it Mean to Accompany a Candidate in the Initial Formation Process?”, 26-10-B-119.

Knowing how to listen to the candidate is basic. Directing our attention to all the facets of his being is the best form of personal presence in his life. It is important to know how to listen, not only to obtain an objective knowledge of the events of his life, but also to discern what are really his intentions, his motives and his feelings, and what his relations with other persons have been.<sup>135</sup>

As the *Guide* also points out, mentoring a young Brother involves working “to discover the presence of God and his actions in the life of the candidate.”<sup>136</sup> Like the disciples on the road to Emmaus, mentoring helps the Brothers to begin to understand the meaning of the Scriptures and the presence of Christ along their journey.

The search for the will of God in his Brothers’ lives is one of the most important tasks commended to the Brother Director, as a mentor to the community. “Bearing in mind the principles of co-responsibility and subsidiarity, the Brother Director helps the members of his community to seek the will of God in their daily lives.”<sup>137</sup> The Brother Director is expected to demonstrate to his Brothers that the Institute is interested in them.

One of the principal functions of the Brother Director is the personal accompaniment of the Brothers. It is his responsibility to have regular personal interview with each Brother. He invites him to speak of his health, of his personal, community and apostolic life. In this way he shows the Brother that the Institute is interested in him.<sup>138</sup>

Therefore, the Brother Director is expected to touch the hearts of the Brothers so that the community may be united in mind and heart among themselves and with Jesus Christ.

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<sup>135</sup> *GF* 110.

<sup>136</sup> *GF* 113.

<sup>137</sup> *GBD* 19.

<sup>138</sup> *GBD* 26.

Since God has given you the grace of calling you to live in community, there is nothing that you should more earnestly ask of him than his union of mind and heart with your Brothers. Only by means of this union will you acquire that peace which ought to be all the joy of your life. Entreat the God of hearts to keep your heart and those of your Brothers one in the heart of Jesus.”<sup>139</sup>

The union of minds and hearts among themselves leads the Brothers to touch their students’ hearts, which is the next topic in this chapter.

### 3.2.2.2 *Touching the Hearts of Students*

John Baptist de La Salle affirmed that the Brothers were to be with the students from morning to evening. Hence, their role as mentors was based on a fraternal relationship between the Brother and the student. Through an attitude of closeness and approachability the Brothers “can share their [the students’] interests, their worries, their hopes.”<sup>140</sup> Through closeness and approachability the Brothers may touch the students’ hearts and become like their elder brothers<sup>141</sup> who are capable of reconciling both the firmness of a father and the tenderness of a mother.<sup>142</sup> Touching the hearts of students reveals a God who is good to them.

At least five means are required to conquer the students’ hearts, which is the first step that De La Salle recommends to the Brothers in order to lead the students to God. “You must consider the obligation you have to win over the hearts of the pupils as one of the main ways of inspiring them to lead a Christian life.”<sup>143</sup> Those means include:

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<sup>139</sup> *Med* 39.3.

<sup>140</sup> Cf. *D* 40.4.

<sup>141</sup> Cf. *NR* 53 and *Med* 202.3.

<sup>142</sup> See *Med* 101.3.

<sup>143</sup> *Med* 115.3.

1. *Knowing each one individually.* Like a good shepherd who knows his sheep and is well known by them, the Brother knows the way he should act towards his students. “One of the principal concerns of those dedicated to instructing others is to succeed in getting to know them to understand the way in which each of them acts. This is one of the qualities most necessary to direct those in their charge.”<sup>144</sup>
2. *Leading them to their own freedom.* Mentoring aims to assist mentorees to make their own decisions. The Brothers have the responsibility to use every possible means to bring those under their guidance into the liberty of the children of God.<sup>145</sup>
3. *Assisting them to interpret Christian truths.* For that purpose, the Brothers are guides for their students. “School children usually are not able to understand easily the Christian truths and maxims. They need good guides, like visible angels, to help them learn these things.”<sup>146</sup>  
Guiding others in the path of the gospel presupposes a deep faith in the Christian maxims. Nobody can give something that s/he does not own. De La Salle highlights the importance of the Brothers being rooted in a deep experience of God, so that the Brothers can make a significant impact in their students: “You are obliged to teach these holy maxims to the children you are charged to instruct. You must be

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<sup>144</sup> *Med* 33.1.

<sup>145</sup> Cf. *Med* 203.2.

<sup>146</sup> *Med* 197.1.

thoroughly convinced of them yourselves, so that you may impress them deeply on the hearts of your pupils.”<sup>147</sup>

4. *Providing good example.* As Van Grieken states, “One of the means whereby hearts are touched is in the example of the virtue.”<sup>148</sup> Teachings and good advice are to be accompanied by personal testimony. Otherwise they are not effective at all. “Your first duty to your pupils is that of edification and good example. Have you considered that you must be a model for them of the virtues which you wish to inculcate?”<sup>149</sup> Lasallian tradition has coined the *12 Virtues of the Good Teacher* that can appropriately be applied to the Brothers in their role as mentors. These 12 virtues are: seriousness, silence, humility, prudence, wisdom, patience, reserve, meekness, zeal, vigilance, piety, and generosity.<sup>150</sup>
5. *Praying for the students.* Every day the Brother goes before the Lord in order to present the needs of his disciples and returns to them as the messenger through which God communicates and teaches them.

It is your duty to go up to God every day by prayer to learn from him all that you must teach your children, and then come down to them by accommodating yourself to their level in order to instruct them about what God has communicated to you for them in your prayer as well as in the Holy Scriptures, which contain the truths of religion and the maxims of the holy gospel.<sup>151</sup>

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<sup>147</sup> *Med* 44.2.

<sup>148</sup> Van Grieken, 97.

<sup>149</sup> *Med* 91.3.

<sup>150</sup> D. BURKE, ed., *John Baptist de La Salle: Collection of Various Treatises*, 5. Also: Fontaineire, 230.

<sup>151</sup> *Med* 198,1.

### 3.3 Summary and Conclusion

This chapter has presented an overview of Lasallian spirituality, the core of which is spirit of faith and zeal. By faith the Brothers can *see with their hearts* the multiple manifestations of God. Zeal becomes an expression of such faith. As a result, the Brothers adopt a *spirituality of incarnation*, being a sign of God's presence and love among their students.

God uses the Brothers as mediators to make known salvation to their students. In De La Salle's time, salvation only came through the reception of the Christian doctrine. Today, salvation may be accomplished through winning the students' hearts, so that they can integrate God's plan in their lives. The Lasallian style of mentoring is nicely condensed in the expression *touching hearts*. The spirit of faith and zeal moves the Brothers to be united in heart and mind with one another in community and, consequently, to fill their students' hearts with the Spirit of God who dwells in them.

## CONCLUSION

Life entails an ongoing process of growth, self-knowledge, and discovery of the surrounding reality. The perception and accurate interpretation of daily events determine the subsequent decision-making process. That process should not be individualistic, because we need a mediator or external agent who can serve as a mirror for ourselves. There is always more than meets the eye; the essential is invisible to the eyes. Only with the heart we can see fully because there is a spiritual reality within the human being that requires that special ability to see everything with the eyes of faith. Mentoring becomes an effective means of assisting others in their process of discovering themselves while discovering God's designs for their lives. Mentoring is above all an experience of deep relationship in which the mentor serves as a mediator, assisting the mentoree in his/her understanding and acceptance of God's plan for them.

St. John Baptist de La Salle was convinced that the success of the Christian Schools that God had left in his hands depended very much on the human qualities of the Brothers. Hence, he guided the Brothers so that they would be able to recognise the presence of God in their lives and God as the foundation and source of their mission. *Touching hearts* is the key element in the Lasallian style of mentoring. A Brother is

expected to touch the heart of his Brothers so that the community's fraternal spirit may direct them to touch the hearts of their students, fill them with the Spirit of God, and be like elder brothers to them.

Lasallian spirituality is one of *incarnation*, since the Brothers are called to humble themselves and foster a very human relationship with those entrusted to their care. Through the promotion of genuine relationship they build up the Kingdom of God. The zeal that leads the Brothers towards their ministry is an indivisible effect of the spirit of faith, which comes from a deep prayer life. De La Salle repeatedly called the Brothers to be men of interiority.

The 21<sup>st</sup> century will be an era of heightened technology likely producing a shift, if not a crisis, in the hierarchy of human values. Therefore, new generations will continue to seek capable mediators who can help them to recognise the living presence of the Spirit who provides humanity with reasons to hope. Therefore, the vocation of the Brothers is necessary indeed, since they are to be both facilitators of dreams and soul friends, who walk hand in hand with the young. Mentoring is also an urgent requirement for the Brothers themselves. The number of Brothers who question their vocation and their progress in their life journey without the support of a companion move me to highlight the treasure of mentoring. Like plants that grow to bear fruit, the Brothers are called to nourish their spiritual lives with personal prayer and with the experience, wisdom, and capacity to listen coming from good mentors.

Then, the Brothers will be able to be “watchful guides who have an adequate understanding of what God expects of young people.”<sup>152</sup>

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<sup>152</sup> *Med.* 197.3.

## ABBREVIATIONS

<i>D</i>	The Brothers of the Christian Schools: A Declaration.
<i>GBD</i>	Guide for Brother Directors.
<i>GF</i>	Guide for Formation.
<i>GS</i>	Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World ( <i>Gaudium et Spes</i> ).
<i>Med.</i>	Meditations of John Baptist de La Salle.
<i>NR</i>	The Rule of the Brothers of the Christian Schools. Rome 2002.
<i>RFSC</i>	Rules and Constitutions of the Brothers of the Christian Schools. Rome 1947.
<i>VC</i>	Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation <i>Vita Consecrata</i> .

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