

# 10. CONSOLATION - TEPIDITY - DRYNESS

## Summary:

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**B. Tepidity:** 1. Frequency. – 2. Definitions. – 3. The meaning for La Salle. 3.1. Causes. 3.2. Manifestation. 3.3. Remedy. – 4. Definition. – 5. The word tepid.

**C. Dryness:** 1. Frequency (with which La Salle uses the word). – 2. La Salle's meaning of the term. 2.1. Causes. 2.2. Response of the soul. – 3. Dictionary definitions – 4. Conclusion. – 5. Other themes that are related. – 6. Bibliography.

## A. CONSOLATION

### 1. LA SALLE'S USE OF THE WORD:

The word consolation is used 62 times in the writings of La Salle: Da: 3, Db: 1, Dc: 4, E: 1, EM: 1, Ga: 1, I: 7, L: 3, MD: 14, MF: 8, MR: 6 (Reference: Vocabulaire Lasallien). It is used 45 times in texts written for the Brothers, 17 times in those written for the students. In the first instance the purpose is spiritual formation; in the second, the teaching of catechism.

Five of the 77 meditations for Sundays are related to the topic of consolation; in these the word is used 14 times. The word "spiritual" accompanies "consolation" four times and in these instances the expression is used in the plural. These citations are the principal times when the topic is treated, though the other citations when the adjective is not used, are equally relevant. Only once is the word used with the word "edification", which seems to indicate that the consolation is of human origin.

In the meditations for feasts the word is used 13 times, of which two have an explicit reference to Saint Paul. In these two cases the word is equivalent in Pauline language to "filled with joy", or "to do all things for the glory of God".

In the meditations for the time of retreat the word is used eight times and each time there is a reference, usually explicit, to Saint Paul. Here the word is equivalent to such expressions as "overflowing with joy", "subject of your joy", "your hope, you joy and your crown of glory".

In the other works of the Founder of the Brothers the word is generally used in the same spiritual sense. It is found once, however, with the meaning of the comforts of life: "Woe to you rich, because you have here below your consolation" a citation from the Gospel; also three times in the sense of relief, especially in reference to the torments of hell, where the damned "suffer all sorts of evils without any consolation".

## 2. LA SALLE'S IDEA OF SPIRITUAL CONSOLATION:

### 2.1. Treatise on consolation:

Though La Salle does not give an explicit definition of consolation, fortunately there is a short treatise on spiritual consolation in his meditation for the second Sunday of Lent, which is related to the Gospel of the day, the Transfiguration (Mt 17: 1-9). This meditation, which is numbered 18, is entitled "Spiritual Consolations" and comes after the meditation for the First Sunday of Lent, entitled "Temptation". In about 70 lines La Salle gives a description of consolation. He says that the Transfiguration teaches: 1) the way God gives us consolations, 2) the way we ought to respond to them, 3) to whom they are given, 4) why God gives them. These points correspond to the description given in the *Dictionnaire de la Spiritualité*, which will be described in part 3d of this article.

In this meditation La Salle writes as an experienced spiritual director. He shows his competence, no doubt without desiring to do so. We know from his biographies that he was much sought after as a guide and that he had good reasons not to become too involved in this kind of work.

### 2.2. God's purpose:

According to La Salle, it is "the usual way of God to support a pure soul by spiritual consolations after it has suffered with patience interior temptations and trials".

It is important not to read a restriction in such statements as "the spiritual consolations which God **sometimes** gives to souls who lead a true interior life", or, "consolations that God **sometimes** gives in this life".

However, in another place he adds, "God, **who is pleased to communicate himself** to pure souls who have no attachment to sin", or, "as God **uses** consolation to support a soul and give it some respite shortly after it has itself supported the trial of tribulation". According to La Salle this is the usual way that God acts.

### 2.3. Beneficiaries:

The Founder continues, "The Gospel lets us know that it is on souls that apply themselves much to interior prayer and who love this holy exercise that God pours out his consolations". He then describes the necessary conditions with a negative approach, "Lukewarm and lax souls who have little love for interior prayer need not be astonished if they are not among the number whom God loves in a special way ... they do not have an intimate union with him, because they do not give themselves at all to the exercise that unites them with God".

### 2.4. Response of the soul:

It is necessary to accept consolations "with the simple view that they are very pleasing to God, without being pleased with oneself over the personal satisfaction that is experienced". Avoid becoming attached "too much to his gifts". It is necessary "to contemplate the greatness of the goodness of God, who deserves to occupy all their spirit and take over all their attention". Seek "God alone".

"God does not wish the soul to become too attached to his gifts, for attachment is a fault that gives God a disgust for a soul, since it shows that it is not purely God that it seeks, but the gift of God and its own satisfaction".

God "usually takes away the sensible satisfaction which there is in consolation, when the soul is too attached to it and when it takes this satisfaction with too much complacency".

In order to achieve this discernment La Salle implicitly invites the reader to speak to a spiritual director, when speaking of the behavior he describes them as "little instructed in the ways of God".

### 2.5. Purpose of consolations:

They are given to "support" souls, "to give them a little respite" after they have endured "the trial of tribulation. ... To help them endure the interior desolations with more courage, ... to increase their affection, encourage and strengthen

their love for suffering, ... and their interior and exterior trials”.

## 2.6. Definition:

For John Baptist de La Salle, then, consolation is “A small comfort ... that God sometimes gives after courageous efforts, in order to endure suffering and to increase charity, ... a sensible pleasure ... a refreshment that God provides holy souls in the midst of their interior desolation. God communicates himself to the soul familiarly. The soul experiences foretaste of the delights of heaven ... a joy, an interior peace which it is unable to express...”.

## 2.7. Additional considerations:

Of the eight times the word consolation appears in the *MTR*, six occur in the 15th Meditation, entitled “The reward that can be expected even in this life by those who have instructed children and acquitted themselves well of this duty”. Seven are more or less explicitly related to a citation from Saint Paul.

# 3. DESCRIPTIONS AND DEFINITIONS:

The descriptions of the word consolation which follow show how La Salle relates to the spiritual writers of his time.

3.1. *Dictionnaire* (1721, Trévoux): “Consolation, as a term of devotion and spirituality, means a certain joy for a devout soul, an interior movement of love and hope. Those who want to nourish their devotion only with consolations and hope look upon God as Father, and believe that they have nothing to do with him as judge (Fléchier). When spiritual persons lack consolations they fall into what they call aridity and dryness” (St. Evr.).

3.2. *Le Vocabulaire de Théologie biblique*: This work does not include the noun “consolation”, but it does have a study on the verb “console” in the 5th edition of 1981, columns 208 - 210. The article begins, “In sadness, sickness, sorrow, persecution, a person needs comfort and searches for a

comforter”. Often no one is found, “God himself seems to remain absent”.

(1) “Jerusalem has met in the course of its history the experience of this total abandonment”. If it is abandoned by God for a time, it is in order to teach it that God alone is the true comforter. God intervenes with love ... In this way Israel learns to trust in God”.

(2) “God, as the one who consoles, comes to his people in Jesus. The consolation Jesus brings does not cease at death. The Spirit of Pentecost is the Consoler who enables Christians to surmount obstacles and persecutions”.

“The Apostle Paul has laid the foundation for a theology of consolation: in the face of a trial as fearful as death he discovered that consolation comes even in the midst of desolation itself, when this is united to the suffering of Christ. The unique source of this consolation is the joy of the Risen Christ; Christ is the source of all consolation”.

3.3. *Dictionnaire de la Vie spirituelle* (Cerf, 1983): Saint Ignatius is quoted: “I call spiritual consolation an interior motion produced in the soul, thanks to which the soul is inflamed with love for its Creator and Lord. As a consequence it is able to love nothing created on the face of the earth for itself, but loves only in reference to the Creator of everything. ... In a word, I call consolation every increase of hope, faith, and love, every interior joy that leads to heavenly things and the salvation of the soul, giving it calm and peace in its Creator and Lord. ... It is, then, a question of an experience of the fruits of the spirit”.

3.4. *Dictionnaire de spiritualité*: Under the signature of Louis Poullier it is stated that consolation and desolation must be considered together. From the 5th to the 17th Centuries not all of the spiritual writers used the words “consolation” or “desolation”. Twelve authors are cited, from Evagrius Ponticus († 399) to Francis de Sales († 1622). Bishop Diadochus of Photice, in the middle of the 5th Century, is especially noteworthy. “The two terms, consolation and desolation, appear with their precise meaning, ... their nature is described exactly, ... and their role in the spiritual life clearly enunciated. In consolation the grace of God is manifest in the soul, warming it and some-

times affecting the exterior senses ... the Holy Spirit gives the soul moved by love a feeling of the sweetness of God and a true taste of God. ... On the contrary, in desolation grace is hidden, sometimes God abandons the soul to the malice of the demons and deprives the intellect of light. ... He [Diodochus] is aware that a person passes often from consolation to desolation and vice-versa, that the spiritual life is made up of little desolations and frequent consolations".

The *Dictionnaire* does not formulate a definition. The author of the article speaks first of the psychological nature of consolation and desolation. He explains that these words have a natural meaning and are transferred analogously to religious experience. He then presents the characteristics of these two states from the psychological and the ontological points of view. He also studies

these experiences on the mystical and the ascetical levels. There follows four further points: practical considerations, sources of the two experiences, the method of recognizing these sources, and the attitude to adopt in these experiences. According to the *Dictionnaire* "Spiritual consolation comes from God. There is also a consolation that is human in origin".

#### 4. CONCLUSION:

It is clear from the study of these traditional definitions, and the study made in this article of La Salle's own understanding of consolation that he was very much in harmony with the thought of his time. This seems especially true of the material presented in the *Dictionnaire de spiritualité*.

## B. TEPIDITY

### 1. FREQUENCY:

The word **tepidity** is used by La Salle only five times, according to the *Vocabulaire lasallien*. *CL* 22: 111c; *CL* 14: 25d; *CL* 12: 151c; *CL* (R) 15: 36, 16; (RD) 11, 19; the word **tepid** occurs only twice, in *CL* 12: 66c, 146b.

### 2. DEFINITIONS:

The dictionary of 1724 says that **tepidity** is used in a figurative sense to mean indolence, negligence: "Love desires fervor; it is not the least compatible with **tepidity**. What shall I say of the **tepidity** that makes our prayers useless and our devotions halfhearted" (Fléchier). "Is it inevitable that passion is subject to **tepidity** after its fulfillment?" (Vill.) "There are times when **tepidity** in a friendship is infidelity" (S. Evr.). "Fainthearted **tepidity** destroys courage" (Boileau).

Neither the *Dictionnaire de spiritualité*, nor the *Vocabulaire de théologie biblique*, nor the *Dictionnaire spirituel* include this word. *Larousse* says it is a "lack of ardor, of zeal, of enthusiasm" and quotes, "Friendship has moments of *tepidity*, and so also does devotion" (Mme de Puissieux).

In classical language there are plural expressions, such as, **tepid** actions without zeal, without energy; periods of indifference: "what **tepidity**!, what negligence!" — plural expressions in French (Bourdalué). "The rest of my life, wasted in **tepidity** and dryness, I would compare to dried out wells" (Fromentin).

The *Dictionnaire des mots de la Foi chrétienne* says, "**Tepidity**, a spiritual malady that is a state of laxity, of negligence, of laziness, of dislike for making any effort, accompanied by frequent deliberate venial sins; it is a state of willing halfheartedness and spiritual indifference, the result of which is a progressive weakening of the soul's energy and the loss of the Christian life".

### 3. THE MEANING FOR LA SALLE:

La Salle does not give a definition of the word, but he uses it most of the time with the words **laxity** and **negligence**, especially in reference to the worship of God, and most often in reference to the Eucharist and related behavior, as “approaching the Eucharist”, or in reference to “correcting one’s faults”.

3.1. **Cause:** The context of his writings indicates clearly that **tepidity** is due to a lack of will, a negligence, or a laxity, in the performance of duty.

3.2. **Manifestation:** In the “Directory for giving an account of one’s conscience” the Brother is invited to ask himself concerning the “dispositions he brings to the reception of the sacraments of Penance and the Eucharist”, or “if he has affection for Holy Communion ...”, and in these instances three dispositions are to be considered: “fervor, **tepidity**, or laxity”.

“This negligence is a sign of spiritual **tepidity**”, which shows that **tepidity** is manifest by negligence, and is one of its characteristics (“If he has an affection for Holy Communion; if he receives with **tepidity**”).

This is an attitude totally contrary to love (“I have only spoken to you, you can set me on fire with love”).

3.3. **Remedy:** To correct **tepidity** there is need for personal effort guided and encouraged by rules (e.g., the laws of the Church, as stated in *Les Devoirs d’un Chrétien*); there is also the need for help

that grace can give, which comes from asking for it in prayer. This is, then, a kind of vicious circle: a person must pray for love, but equally a person must love in order to pray.

But La Salle does not doubt that God will respond to the least effort. “It is for him to give you the will and the accomplishment”. It is enough to make the smallest gesture. “I am able only to approach you”. Or, “As we have need to receive his graces, we must also ask for them, and God, who wants to give them to us, has given us a sure means to obtain them; this means is prayer, and it is all the more easy for us since it is always available; we can use it whenever we wish” (CL 12, MD 36:1). The faith of La Salle is deeply rooted.

### 4. DEFINITION:

**Tepidity** is a cooling of love for God, brought about by negligence in the accomplishment of duty, a refusal to do what is difficult, so that duty is done poorly or omitted altogether.

### 5. THE WORD TEPID:

La Salle uses the word **tepid** twice in the *Meditations for Sundays*. The context of this use shows that **tepid** souls “are lax and have little love for prayer”; they do not, for example, want to make any effort to dispose themselves for Holy Communion, a sign that they have very little love for God.

## C. DRYNESS

### 1. FREQUENCY

La Salle uses the word “dryness” in: E.M: 3e, 25c; L: 54,6 55,14; MD: 72b (twice), 110e, 147c; MF: 181e, 182a, 182c; R: 36,9; 130,5; RD: 10,14.

In summary, a study of the *Lasallian Vocabulary* shows that the word occurs only 14 times, and in only 6 of La Salle’s writings. It seems that this word is often used with other words that are,

if not synonyms, at least parallel expressions: **trials** (peines), and **temptations**. The word **distraction** might also at times have the same meaning, though it is more readily tied to the words *negligence* or *laxity* (lâcheté), that is, a lack of effort in general. The word *lukewarmness* (tiedeur) also carries more of the idea of personal responsibility for the condition than the word dryness.

The word **dryness** is also used as the opposite



to the word *taste* (goût) — and the idea of *consolation*, giving a meaning of *dryness* by contrast.

## 2. LA SALLE'S MEANING OF THE TERM:

The word *dryness* is a kind of inability of the spirit to be taken up with spiritual topics, a kind of intellectual sterility.

It also suggests a barren emotional state. Would the intellectual connotation be a reason for La Salle's distrust of "considerations" in "mental" prayer? Is there not an explanation of this in the work of La Salle, "*L'explication de la méthode d'Oraison?*":

"Mental" prayer (*oraison*) is called an interior occupation because it is not simply an occupation of the mind; rather, in order to be really pure and solid, it must take place in the depth of the soul, that is, in the most intimate part of the soul. For if it takes place entirely in the mind, or in the superficial part of the heart, it will be an easy prey to distractions ... this kind of occupation of the mind will not penetrate the soul ... leaving it in a state of dryness and a feeling of the absence of God (*CL* 50, pp. 3-4).

The Founder says that dryness, or interior trial, or desolation, is a condition caused by "the loss of the sense of God's presence", the loss of a "certain taste for 'mental' prayer and the ability to apply oneself to it" (*MD* 35,2), or the inability "to be occupied with God" (*MD* 51,3).

La Salle gives a description of dryness in *MD* 71, when he says, "Let us be supported by the firmness of our faith, though we have no feeling (*sentiment*) of God and we are without any movement towards God". Here he does not use the word "dryness", but rather a sense of paralysis. Elsewhere, in speaking of St. Theresa, he says that "in the midst of the greatest dryness she was totally immersed in God, and entirely abandoned to him, despite the sense of interior obscurity that she was experiencing". He adds to that, "It was faith alone that guided her then in that state".

### 2.1. Causes:

Only three of the times when he uses the word dryness does La Salle speak of the causes for this

condition. The other uses describe the experience and the means that can be taken to get out of it, or at least to live with it.

The causes are indicated in the previous citations, that is, a superficial attention of the mind, which does not go to the depth of the soul. La Salle refers to this in two letters written to one of the Brothers:

You have so much dryness and so many distractions in prayer because you are too exterior and you talk too much. (54,6)

The dryness you experience in prayer and at holy communion comes from the fact that you do not apply yourself and do not think of spiritual things outside the time of prayer. (55,14)

These are the principal reasons for dryness, but dryness can also be sometimes a trial, as is seen in the case of St. Theresa. The Founder uses the term "spiritual paralysis" in Meditation 71 when he says,

It is not enough for the cure of our spiritual paralysis that Jesus tells us to get up ... unless this dryness is simply a trial coming from God, ... for then all he has to do is give the command.

### 2.2. Response of the soul:

The response of the soul in this circumstance includes having recourse to a spiritual director, assiduity at prayer, and abandon to God.

God wants you to speak to those who guide you, although there may be times ... when the recourse you have to them may appear to be of little use (*MD* 2,1). God wishes that you hold yourself in an entire abandon to his guidance, awaiting everything from him and from his goodness alone... (*MD* 20,2). Ask Jesus Christ to make up for your impotence (*MD* 51,3). Bring yourself to prayer with more feeling when you are in dryness. (*Recueil*)

It is advantageous that God withdraws the sense of his presence from us (*MD* 35,2) because the more that we detach ourselves from what pleases the senses, the more we have the means of really going to God. (*MD* 35,3)

Citing again the example of St. Theresa, he says,

The more that God made her suffer, the more she had recourse to him, because she found everything



in him, however hidden he was to her. It was faith alone that led her then. (MF 177.3)  
She was entirely abandoned to God.

### 3. DICTIONARY DEFINITIONS:

Antoine Furetière's *Dictionnaire Universel* of 1701 give the following definition: "A devout mystic complains of dryness when he has little interior consolation, when his fervor declines, when he believes he is abandoned by God and deprived of his love. The mystics call this state *infernal darkness*, *infernal dryness*, if one gives in to them, and *divine darkness*, or *fertile dryness*, when they serve to reanimate the love of God and render a person more attentive to his duties. There is a sorrowful state in the religious life when consolation is lacking; this is what is called dryness, or aridity, in the language of spirituality. St. Evr."

According to the *Dictionnaire des mots de la Foi chrétienne*, dryness is: "A complex state of the soul characterized by the deprivation of sensible and spiritual consolations, a lack of taste for prayer and of enthusiasm for the practice of virtue, a great difficulty meditating discursively, or forming affections, all of which constitute one of the normal aspects of the spiritual life, especially

after the consolations that are generally experienced by beginners, and which, if accepted, have the effect of purifying the soul; they are often a prelude to a higher level of prayer and of the spiritual life".

The *Dictionnaire de Spiritualité* says, "The article, *Consolation*, which has been treated already, and which necessarily treated spiritual desolation", refers the reader to the article on *Consolation*, and to the words *Aridity*, *Distaste*, *Derelection*, *Spiritual Trial*, *Night*.

### 4. CONCLUSION:

The texts of La Salle do not differ substantially from the dictionary texts cited above. This is especially true in the light of the fact that what he has written on the subject is not a course of doctrine, but concerns the practice of prayer, treated in a brief, simple fashion, adapted to the concrete situation of the teaching Brothers for whom he was writing. These Brothers, it ought to be remembered, in most cases had no opportunity for advanced study, such as would be preparatory for the priesthood. Rather, the writings of La Salle in this matter prepared for a holy way of life in the spirit of faith.

#### Complementary Themes:

God, Role, Gentleness, Joy, Mission, Peace, Suffering, Temptation.

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