

6. CHRISTIAN

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1. THE TERM CHRISTIAN IN THE WRITINGS OF THE FOUNDER¹

1.1. The term christian

The term **Christian** appears frequently in the writings of the Founder (738 times). In the majority of cases it is used as a noun (519) or as an adjective (244) and more rarely as an adverb (17) or as a derivative — Christendom (3). Except in FD, RD and Vx, the term appears in all the works of the Founder — CE (30), Da (164), Db (125), Dc (132), E (5), EM (7), GA (55), I (24), L (13), MD (13), MF (77), MH (7), MR (30), PA (1), R (21), RB (63), RC (16).

It will be appreciated that the frequency of the term is more evident in the works which are specifically catechetical or pastoral - eg. Da, Db, Dc, GA, PA, E, I (506). It is less evident in the works which are explicitly pedagogical, although its use in these is very significant - eg. CB, RB (93). Moreover, the presence of the term **Christian** is also striking in the works written with the formation of the Brothers in mind - ie. EM, L, MD, MF, MH, MR, R, RC (184). The Brother is a both Christian and a Christian educator and his work must be distinguished by its Christian stamp.

1.2. The adjective christian

The adjective **Christian** primarily qualifies or

determines the nouns **religion** (41) and **school** (40) both of which, for the Founder, had to be Christian and it is possible that, in his mind, one could not be understood without the other. It was also used to qualify nouns such as **spirit** (15), **life** (11) and **education** (10). Other nouns related to life are also qualified by the term Christian; for example, **manner** - style, disposition (9), **action** (6), **conduct** (4), **courtesy and politeness** (9), **practice** (2) and **virtue** (6). Continuing in this same semantic field, the virtues which the Founder qualifies as Christian are: **faith** (2), **prudence** (2), **piety** (6), **charity** (6), **patience** (2), **generosity** (1), **justice** (2), **sincerity** (1), **simplicity - naturalness** (2), **obedience** (3), **honesty** (1), **modesty** (1), **mildness** (1), **unity** (1) and, in a general sense, **morality** (3).

Similarly, for the Founder, **doctrine** is **Christian** (2) as are **maxims** (6), **truths** (5) and **motives** (3) with reference to the contents of the Christian message. Finally, the adjective Christian is also used to qualify **people** (2), **countries** (2), **Brothers** (1), **the child-youth-pupil** (5), **the prince** (1), **the king** (1), **the soul** (1), **recreation** (1) and **burial** (1).

1.3. The noun christian

In the literature and theology of the Founder the noun **Christian** normally appears without either qualification or article (more than 350 times). Consequently, when it is qualified or determined the adjective becomes as significant as the noun.

Thus, the noun **Christian** is qualified as; **catholic** (37), **true** (19), **good** (24), **perfect** (9) and it appears in opposition to **worldly and profligate** (8), **evil** (4), and **profane** (1). It is also worth noting the expression **first Christians** which appears 24 times. In the literature and theology of the Founder these “first Christians” are the constant reference point for the Brothers of the Christian Schools, for Christian educators and for the true Catholic Christians which the pupils of the Christian schools must become.

Moreover, in the Founder’s writings, the noun **Christian** is usually linked with the one of the following activities or attitudes:

* To know, be aware of, believe in... the truths, the doctrine, the articles... of the Christian faith (some 25 times).

* To live, to practise, to do, to apply oneself to... bear the name of... to worship... to pray... in relationship with God, Jesus Christ, the Church, the person, the doctrine, the maxims, the virtues, the exercises... proper to the Christian (some 200 times).

* To recognise the true Christian, to acquire the dispositions, the spirit, the manner of the Christian, to display the signs by which one identifies the good and true Christian, to appear as... (some 60 times).

* To become, to educate, to form, to instruct... the Christian person (some 30 times).

* Actions which take life or significance from, or which are celebrated in, the Sacraments, to be baptised, married... the sacraments make us Christian... (some 30 times)

2. THE CONTENTS OF THE TERM CHRISTIAN IN THE WRITINGS OF THE FOUNDER

2.1. The starting point

The aim of the Founder is very clear in that he wants the school to be Christian since those who are involved in it, both teachers and pupils alike, are Christian. Moreover, the pedagogy of the school is also Christian since it favours the initiation into the Christian life from a perspective of

liberty while the programme of the school is also Christian because it sets out, by means of educational action, to progressively develop the potential that both pupil and teacher have through nature and through the action of grace. Through nature - i.e. as a person created in the image and likeness of God and able to know and love this God and their neighbour. Through grace - i.e. having been baptized and become sons of God, brothers of Jesus Christ, temples of the Holy Spirit and members of the Church. The initiation into the Christian life which the pupil undergoes in the school must begin from the potentialities mentioned above so as bring them to maturity and fullness.²

It is in the light of this aim that the Founder’s understanding of the identity of the **good Christian** must be considered.

2.2. Who is the Christian?

The name **Christian** signifies being a disciple of Christ - as a Catholic. He is a person who is baptized and lives as the disciples of Jesus were commanded to live and who believes all that the Church proposes and commands. The adjectives **good** and **true** which the Founder deliberately uses with the noun **Christian**, synthesize the identity of the disciple of Christ. Thus, the true Christian is one who is both baptized and Catholic. **The good Christian** is a person who, having being baptized, practises everything that Jesus taught his disciples. Both Da and Db, in their expositions as well as in their questions and answers, indicate this with Cartesian clarity. In these contexts the Founder is at pains to establish the differences between Christians and Catholics, Christians and heretics and Christians and schismatics. The Catholic Christian alone is the good and true Christian, the follower of Christ. Distant echoes of the Protestant controversy of the 16th and early 17th century will be appreciated here.

For the Founder, this true and good Christian must live what he professes in that his life must give evidence of the following “exterior signs” of his identity:

1. Attend Holy Mass and assist at the Divine Office

2. Receive the Sacraments of the Church
3. Hear the Word of God in the Catholic Church
4. Recite the profession of faith of the Catholic Church
5. Make the sign of the Cross.³

However:

Q: Are all those who bear the external signs of a Catholic Christian authentic disciples of Jesus Christ?

A: No, all are not.

Q: Are all Catholics true disciples of Jesus Christ?

A: No, all are not because not all put into practice what Jesus Christ commanded of his disciples.⁴

Consequently, according to the Founder, the Christian is a baptized person who is recognizable through external signs (concrete and visible practices and exercises), belonging and obedient to the Catholic Church (one, holy, catholic, apostolic and Roman) through being baptized into it, and who is a true disciple of Jesus Christ since he practises all that Jesus commanded of his disciples.

2.3. How must a person live in order to be a true and good Christian?

The obligations, or duties, of the Christian are located in the areas which we have just finished indicating in the previous point:

2.3.1. The first obligation, or duty, refers to knowledge of God. In Da it is expressed as follows; "...Since Jesus Christ says in the Gospel that life consists in knowing the one, true God and his Son, Jesus Christ, sent on earth, what a Christian must do in this life is to apply himself to knowing God both in himself and in his works, and to knowing the Son of God made man, and what he has done for our salvation".⁵

Immediately following this, the Founder dedicates his first study in Da to an explanation of what this knowledge of God entails. This takes the form of an exposition in 93 pages, arranged in 5 chapters as follows:

- a) on faith;
- b) on God and the Trinity;
- c) on the creation of the world;
- d) on the redemption;
- e) on the Church.

The exposition on knowledge of God is restated by the Founder, in catechism-form, in Db where it is introduced by the distinction between "speculative truths" and "practical truths":

Q: How many types of truths does the Church propose and command us to believe?

A: There are two types, speculative truths and practical truths.

Q: What are speculative truths?

A: Speculative truths are those truths that we must simply believe: for example, that there is only one God.

Q: What are the practical truths that the Church commands us to believe?

A: Practical truths are those truths that we must not only believe but also put into practice: for example, that we must forgive our enemies and do good to them.

Q: What practical truths does the Church propose and command us to believe?

A: They are those taught by Jesus Christ, Our Saviour, in the Holy Gospel as well as all those which are proposed to us in Sacred Scripture.⁶

As J. PUNGIER, indicates, "De La Salle attributes much importance to this distinction because of the educational implications that are contained in it".⁷ **The practical truths** are those which he calls **maxims** of the Gospel or of Sacred Scripture: "The term **maxim** is applied to certain texts or sentences in Scripture which contain truths necessary for salvation, or to certain words in Scripture, which enable us to know what we must do or avoid, what we must value or reject, what we must seek or flee from, what we must love or hate... The New Testament is full of these, some containing mandatory truths and imposing the obligation of practising what is taught...".⁸

"The truths that are taught to those who have received the Holy Spirit are the **maxims** contained in the Holy Gospel which he has enabled them to

understand and put into practise and according to which he teaches them to live since only the Spirit can reveal the true meaning and lead to effective practise given that they are beyond the reach of the human spirit... These must be so well assimilated by you that you can profoundly impress them on the hearts of the children".⁹

Speculative truths, some of which were then called truths necessary for salvation, did not encompass the totality of Christian initiation. Thus, "...it is not sufficient for salvation to be instructed in the Christian truths which are purely speculative given that faith without works is dead, like a body without a soul and, in consequence, insufficient for the attainment of our salvation. It is not enough, then, to procure the spirit of Christianity for the children, and to teach them the mysteries and the speculative truths of our Religion - it is necessary that you teach them the practical maxims that are contained in the Gospel".¹⁰

Moreover, as J. Pungier indicates, initiation into the Christian life, according to the maxims of the Gospel demands much more of the teacher than simply knowing how to teach. He must become a guide, an expert disciple in the things of God, a visible angel: "...because the children's intelligence is not sufficiently developed to understand and put these maxims into practise, (the Brothers) must act as visible angels for them in both leading them to know these maxims, contained in the Holy Gospel, and directing them in such a way that they come to put them into practise".¹¹

2.3.2. According to the Founder, the second obligation, or duty, of the true and good Christian is to "love God with one's whole spirit, with all the affection of the heart and with all one's abilities and to love one's neighbour as oneself".¹² All of this constitutes the virtue of charity for the Founder. The development of all that is implied by love of God is indicated in his exposition in the second treatise of Da, arranged in 16 chapters as follows (pp. 89-192):

* on the charity that makes us love God, on the commandments of God and of the Church (chapters 2-12);

* on sin in general as well as the seven deadly sins (chapters 13-15);

* on the virtues and the evangelical counsels.

This second obligation is arranged in question-and-answer, catechism-form, in Db (pages 73-138).

Finally, in both Da and Db, the Founder presents the means by which the true and good Christian applies himself to both of these obligations - ie. through the sacraments of the Catholic Church and through prayer. Through these means the Christian obtains the graces necessary to develop and live the obligations previously mentioned. The following words of the Founder synthesize this: "Jesus Christ calls Christians to perfection which has been expressed through faith and through the holy Apostles, as well as through their writings (in the New Testament). Christians must frequently read and meditate on these writings in order to be in a position to practise them and, in this way, to become perfect Christians".¹³

2.3.3. The study and presentation of the sacraments, especially the sacraments of Christian initiation — Baptism, Confirmation, Eucharist — enables the Founder to clearly sketch the identity of the Christian:

— through Baptism a person becomes a Christian, a son of God and of the Church, a member of Jesus Christ and a living temple of the Holy Spirit. This new reality in the person is achieved through grace.¹⁴

— this grace is augmented in Confirmation through which the person becomes a perfect Christian disposed to profess, confess, support and defend the maxims of Jesus Christ and the doctrine and commands of the Church.¹⁵

— through the Eucharist a union is established between Jesus and the person that is so intimate and close that it is with difficulty that one can be separated from the other because this sacred flesh is assimilated into the soul of the person who willingly receives it in such a way that the soul immediately participates in the virtues of Jesus Christ, evoking the experience indicated by the spouse in the Cantic of Canticles: "...My love is everything for me and I am everything for him".¹⁶

Finally, the perfect Christian, or the good and true Christian, understands and experiences his relationship with, and mystery of, God in prayer, defined by the Founder, with one or other var-

ients, as “an interior occupation, since the soul is concerned with what is proper to this life, that is to know and love God and to take all the means necessary to obtain these two objectives”¹⁷ which, as we have seen, are Christian obligations or duties.

In his exposition of the Sacraments the Founder remains faithful to the dogmatic theology of the Church as it was then understood. Obviously, the theological approaches developed with Vatican II, and with recent biblical investigation, will offer a new exposition of sacramental theology.

2.4. In the ministry of Christian education

There remains a final aspect that a Christian educator in the Christian school must always have in mind as a reference, namely, the ineluctable work of his ministry which is Christian education. “The Founder calls the attention of the Brothers — especially with regard to their interior spiritual attitude which is the inspiration of their educational activity — to that which he calls zeal. Zeal is the awareness of a responsibility for children before God. It is the possibility of collaborating in the work of God by contributing to the salvation of these children. It is a deep-rooted confidence, much of the time in spite of appearances, in their capacity for growth stemming from their human vocation and from their dignity as sons of God”.¹⁸ It is a work which is always present — to educate, to shape, to form, to bring the identity of the Christian person to full maturity. In this context, as explains H.A.A. Morales: “...The Catholic reform movement in 17th century France had the school very much in mind for the evangelization of the country and for the rooting of the faith among the popular classes. They readily acknowledged the Christian School as the **Christian novitate** — indicating by this that the children were initiated into the Christian life by means of religious teaching, sacramental formation and Christian moral education”.¹⁹

This was the response to religious ignorance — to the evil of the world as it was then described — and to the moral and spiritual misery of the villages and country side of 17th century France.²⁰ This situation was well expressed by the Founder,

“...The children who come to you either lack knowledge or have received inadequate knowledge or, if they have received adequate knowledge, have been prevented from taking advantage of this by bad companions or bad habits. God has sent you with the aim of communicating the spirit of Christianity, to educate them according to the maxims of the Gospel...Those who come to you do so in darkness which, according to Saint Augustin, indicates their profound ignorance, their great necessity... Will you abandon them, leaving them without instruction?”²¹ And, in the “Guide for Schools”, the Founder could not have been more precise with regard to the education of the Christian; “...The teachers will take such care in instructing their pupils that they will not leave a single one in ignorance, or at least in ignorance of those things that a **Christian is obliged to know in practice as well as in doctrine**, with the intention of not neglecting a single aspect in matters so important. They will frequently and attentively consider the account which they will have to give to God of the blame entailed in the ignorance of the children who are in their care — and of the sins into which this ignorance has led them — if they have not applied themselves sufficiently to lead them out of their ignorance, and that there will be nothing over which God will examine and judge them with greater severity than over this point”.²²

Nor does the Founder simply content himself with giving orientations but rather goes further in proposing to the teachers concrete steps which will facilitate the education of the Christian; “...The teacher will question the pupils every day, ...and pay particular attention to question slow learners more frequently than the rest, or those who have difficulty in retaining information, especially over the summary, and particularly over the questions that every Christian is obliged to know”.²³

A couple of other quotations to finish this sensitization to the enormous importance which the Founder gave to this work of thoroughly forming the character of the Christian.

“...Do the pupils know their religion well? If they are ignorant of it, or only half-know it, is this not the result of your negligence? Have you taken special care to teach them the maxims and the practices of the Gospel and to have them observed? Have you suggested practices appropriate

to their age and circumstances? All these aspects of instruction must frequently be the theme of your reflections and you must have studied the way to succeed in them. The teacher who takes piety seriously engenders wisdom — says the Sage. In other words, he obtains wisdom for himself while making those whom he instructs wiser”.²⁴

And, finally,

“Is it your principal preoccupation to instruct your disciples in the maxims of the Gospel and in the practices of the Christian virtues? There is nothing more important that you have to do than that they become attached to them”.²⁵

Quotations such as these could be multiplied because the writings of the Founder repeatedly insist — as much in the affirmations of what the teacher must do as in the questions which the Christian educator must daily ask himself — in Christian education which is willingly undertaken.²⁶

¹ VL, Vol. 1, C 141-C 158.

² Cf. PUNGIER, J., *J.B. de la Salle: Le message de son ca-*

téchisme, Rome, 1984, p. 33.

³ Cf. Db in CL 21, p. 4.

⁴ Cf. Db in CL 21, p. 7.

⁵ Cf. Da in CL 20, p. 1.

⁶ Cf. Db in CL 21, pp. 13-14.

⁷ Cf. PUNGER, J., *op. cit.*, pp. 155-158.

⁸ Cf. EM in CL 14, p. 109.

⁹ Cf. MD in CL 12, pp. 131-132.

¹⁰ Cf. MR in CL 13, pp. 24-25.

¹¹ Cf. MR in CL 13, p. 25.

¹² Cf. Da in CL 20, pp. 90-91.

¹³ Cf. Da in CL 20, p. 192.

¹⁴ Cf. Db in CL 21, p. 157.

¹⁵ Cf. Db in CL 21, p. 166.

¹⁶ Cf. MD in CL 12, p. 142.

¹⁷ Cf. EM in CL 14, p. 4.

¹⁸ CAMPOS, M., and SAUVAGE, M., *Announcing the Gospel to the Poor*, Romeville, 1981, p. 69.

¹⁹ Cf. CAL 557-667. Quoted MORALES, H.A.A., in *Espiritu y estilo de la educación Lasallista*, Dominican Republic, 1982, p. 44.

²⁰ On ignorance in 17th century France cf. PUNGIER, J., *op. cit.*, pp. 19-20 and SAUVAGE, M., *CAL* 409-487.

²¹ Cf. MD in CL 12, p. 115.

²² Cf. CE in CL 24, p. 104.

²³ Cf. CE in CL 24, pp. 99-100.

²⁴ Cf. MF in CL 12, pp. 248-249.

²⁵ Cf. MR in CL 13, pp. 14-15.

²⁶ CAMPOS, M., and SAUVAGE, M., *op. cit.*, pp. 225-228. ALCALDE, C., *El maestro en la pedagogía de S.J.B. de La Salle*, Salamanca, 1961, pp. 193-203.

Complementary Themes:

Decorum and Christian Civility; Celebrate; Chastity; Heart; Commandments of God; Duties of the Christian; Duties; God; Disciples; School; Spirit of Christianity; Holy Spirit; Exercises; Faith; Instruction; Christian teacher, Gospel maxims; Mass-Eucharist; Ministry; Mysteries; Mental Prayer, Prayer; Sacraments; Salvation; Truth; Zeal.

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