

Brother Agathon's Foreword of 1785

My very dear Brothers,

It would not be enough for us to know the duties imposed on us by our vows if we remain ignorant of the means we need, so as to correspond, as we should, with the end of our Institute, which is the instruction of children. This is why we intend, in the following pages, to discuss the virtues characteristic of a good teacher.

You will certainly, very dear Brothers, eagerly welcome a work which is of such great importance for you. We have followed the plan given us by M. de La Salle, our venerable Founder. We have composed this treatise in accordance with his principles and maxims; and what we have drawn from others was taken from the most reliable authors.

The virtues, or, what comes to the same thing, the qualities and characteristics of a good teacher are: Gravity, Silence, Humility, Prudence, Wisdom, Patience, Reserve, Gentleness, Zeal, Vigilance, Piety, and Generosity.

We do not intend to speak of these virtues in theory; we are satisfied, and must be satisfied, with simply making an application of these virtues to the end we propose to attain; and it is in this perspective that we shall consider them in the pages that follow.

Here is the order to which we shall conform. We shall explain the true character of each virtue, the particular traits proper to it, and the defects opposed to it. Thus, we are going to offer you a series of tableaux, as many as there are virtues to consider. In beholding these, an intelligent and attentive teacher will easily perceive what he needs to do and to avoid, so as to make his teaching more effective.

Before beginning, we might observe that it would perhaps be easy to find a link concerning all these many virtues. Thus, we might list Wisdom first, because it presents the main objective, the total objective that a teacher should propose to himself. Prudence might be placed second, because it makes a teacher know how he should act so as to fulfill his role properly. Then the other virtues should follow, each in its place, and the work might end with Gentleness, the crowning virtue of a good teacher, thanks to the value given it by Charity, the queen and mistress of all virtues. But such an arrangement seemed to us a merely artificial one, of no real utility. We felt that we should follow the order that M. de La Salle himself considered proper to indicate to us.

We have added, as a sort of post script, some reflections on the conditions which he calls for so that correction may be salutary both to the one who inflicts it, and to the one who receives it.