CALLED FORTH BY THE CHILD TO TEACH: LASALLIAN MYSTICISM OF FAITH AND TEACHING FOR CHILDREN'S LIBERATION

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A dissertation

submitted to the Department of Religious Education and Pastoral Ministry (STM)

in partial fulfilment

of the requirements for the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

Boston College
Morrissey College of Arts and Sciences
Graduate School

July 2020

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There is a pressing need to re-awaken in teaching the prophetic call to serve the liberation of children, whose complex humanity remains systemically marginalized. This proposal is grounded in a study of the Lasallian tradition of education, which originates from John Baptist de La Salle (1651-1719), founder of the Institute of the Brothers of the Christian Schools in seventeenth century France and the patron saint for Christian teachers of the young. From a Lasallian perspective, the prophetic call to teach for children's liberation is rooted contemplatively in a Christian mysticism of faith, which energizes an incarnational mission of education in zeal, shaped by a preferential option for children as the poor and marginalized. This preferential option for children is a hermeneutical key that reads the Lasallian mission of education forward into the twenty-first century.

I develop this idea of a preferential option for children, locating it in an interpretive study that critically synthesizes a Lasallian theology of child with literature in childhood studies, spirituality, critical pedagogy and participatory action research. Building on the Lasallian imagination, this study contributes to a Christian spirituality of education as it examines how contemporary theological perspectives on children and

childhood serve as a lens that deepens the interconnection between Christian mysticism, liberation, and child in teaching as a prophetic vocation.

To teach for children's liberation is to promote their flourishing as full human beings created in the image and likeness of God. It attends to conditions that protect children in their social marginalization while engaging and developing their social participation as responsible agents in our common belonging to God as God's children and siblings-in-Christ. It demands just presence in teaching, which begins with listening as receptivity to the mystery of the child as graced irruption. The prophetic call to teach for children's liberation is mystically rooted in contemplative wonder at the Incarnation. Such wonder must also open the teacher to being disturbed by the scandalizing action of God, who steps out of God-self not only to be *with* the poor, but also *in* the least as a human child in Jesus Christ. It is this recognition of God's presence in each child and with children that calls forth the responsibility of teachers, making an ethical claim on them to be courageously present in ways that prioritize the human dignity of children in education.

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Acknowledgements

I wish to thank Boston College for funding my doctoral study at the School of Theology and Ministry. It has given me an opportunity to learn from some of the most accomplished scholars in theology, religious education, and educational psychology. I am deeply indebted to my dissertation committee for accompanying me intellectually, pastorally, and spiritually: Dr. Hosffman Ospino, my advisor, for his mentorship and invaluable feedback on my drafts; Dr. Margaret E. Guider, O.S.F., for inspiring and encouraging me to "carry the message forward" on children's rights and human liberation; and Dr. M. Brinton Lykes, for believing in me, and whose careful reading of my near final draft has helped refine my ideas in this work.

I am grateful for the friendship and support of the De La Salle Christian Brothers in Australia and North America: Bros. Paul Rogers, Quentin O'Halloran, Gerard Rummery, Peter Ryan, George Van Grieken, William Mann, Robert Smith, Ernest Miller, Jack Curran, Robert Berger, Timothy Coldwell, Frederick Mueller, Edward Shields, Francis Eells, Thomas Casey and Peter Nguyen. I recall the late Br. Charles Kitson who said to me, "You are a scholar and we await your contribution." I hope this effort captures some sense of the enduring richness of the Lasallian tradition as God's gift to the world of educating children and young people justly and for justice.

My heartfelt thanks to the Assumptionist Center at Brighton, whose vibrant community of residents, staff and religious provided a home away from home to pray, study, and write. I am deeply grateful for the ministry of the late Fr. Claude Grenache, Fr. Donald Espinosa, Fr. Roland Guilman, Fr. Alex Castro, Fr. Dennis Gallagher, Br. Blair Nyuda, and Sr. Clare Bertero. I cherish the bonds formed with so many good people

during my residency at the Center. I wish to especially thank Andrew Mercado, Armando Guerrero Estrada, Raphael Yabut, Erwin Susanto, Cédric Dussart, Matthew Thomson, Nick Munsen, Fr. Bernard Disco, O.S.B., and Nicholas Collura for being there to lift me up with joy and hope during the arid seasons of doctoral work – and there had been many.

To many friends, colleagues, and former students who have walked this arduous journey with me, thank you for your generosity and kindness. While I am unable to mention each of you by name here, please do know how appreciative I am of your presence. There are some, however, whom I wish to thank in particular for their presence at times when the journey became too personally challenging: Fr. Adrian Danker, S.J. and Sr. Barbara Quinn, R.S.C.J. for being my spiritual directors; Dr. Theresa O'Keefe for being available and ready to offer a word of wisdom and encouragement; the community at the Paulist Center for their gift of an inclusive space for worship; Shan Overton, John Falcone, Fiona Dyball, Robert Shine, Dan Kim, Sam and Hannah Kim, Jeremy Chan, Eugene Yeow, Fiona Koh, Alvin Low, Timothy Wong, Valerie Baptist, the Tan and Leong families for their close and enduring friendships through the years.

Last but not least, I am immensely indebted to my family for their unwavering support and faith in me: my parents, Bernard and Mary; and my sister, Dorothy. This dissertation is dedicated to Mum and Dad, who are my first educators in life. Thank you for teaching me the sacrifice of love through the witness of your lives. Thank you for loving me as I am.

Praise be to God, who, in the words of Saint John Baptist de La Salle, "guides all things with wisdom and serenity, whose way it is not to force the inclinations of

persons … so that one commitment led to another in a way that I did not foresee in the beginning." Indeed, the gift of this completed work, which has providentially involved the holy company of so many, is a miracle this writer could not have foreseen. Live Jesus in our hearts – Forever!

PROLOGUE

During my ministry placement at a Catholic elementary and middle-school in Boston, I facilitated a series of lessons to have students at each grade level reflect on the Stations of the Cross. As I read their reflections, I was moved by their openness in naming significant losses in their lives. These children mentioned missing their grandparents who had passed on. They wondered about why they had to move away from their previous neighborhoods, hence missing their friends and struggling to make new ones. The one that stood out for me was a child's question about whether a relative would forgive the person who shot him. This episode did not just illustrate the pedagogical importance of creating a space for children to express themselves. It was about learning to listen to them that left me disturbed and amazed. I was disturbed by the degree of pain that I observed that these children had experienced and wished that they should never had to at their ages. Yet, I was also amazed at their directness and resilience. This episode is significant because for the first time, I noticed children beyond my presumption of their innocence. I began to see children in their humanity and wondered how until this episode, their complexity had been invisible to me. These children whom I encountered sowed the seed for this dissertation. They reinforced a simple truth: teaching begins with wanting to know children and risking to be in a relationship with them. How we see the humanity of children is at the heart of what it means to teach justly.

I propose the need to reclaim teaching as a prophetic vocation that serves the human flourishing of children whose humanity is systemically marginalized. This proposal is grounded in a study of the Lasallian tradition of education, which originates

from John Baptist de La Salle (1651-1719),[1] founder of the Institute of the Brothers of the Christian Schools in seventeenth century France and the patron saint for Christian teachers of the young. The gift of the Lasallian tradition for teachers is its offer of a Christian prophetic mysticism of faith that energizes an incarnational mission of education shaped by a preferential option for children. The call to teach is thus not apart from the struggle for children's liberation within the task of educating for justice in faith. By liberation, I mean the promotion of conditions that protect children in their social vulnerability while engaging and developing their social participation as agents, thereby encouraging their flourishing as full human beings created in the image of God. We begin to teach justly when we learn to receive the mystery of God present in each child, who calls forth our vocation.

Mapping my Location

I come to this study as a Catholic theologian with experience as a classroom teacher. I taught English at a Catholic high school in Singapore before embarking on my studies in theology and education at Boston College. I am also not a Christian Brother of De La Salle, although I was educated in Lasallian schools in Singapore. Hence, I approach the Lasallian tradition not as a religious brother but as a lay teacher-scholar who has found De La Salle's writings to be formative for my life as a Christian and educator. I remember when De La Salle's *Meditations for the Time of Retreat* first found its way to me through a Christian Brother at a point when I was discerning God's call in my life.

[1] Form of name used follows the Lasallian Style and Publication Guide of the District of San Francisco New Orleans, 2014: 'de' is not capitalized when De La Salle is written as part of the person's full name. 'De' is used when De La Salle is written as a stand-alone reference.

There was an immediate resonance with what he wrote about teaching as a gift of the Spirit. That resonance has remained with me.

As a lay teacher-scholar, I write with the aim of opening up and critically developing the Lasallian tradition as a source of Christian spirituality for education in general. While my primary audience would still be Christian educators (and specifically teachers in schools), Lasallian spirituality is not solely reserved for them or even to Catholic education. Lasallian spirituality is 'catholic' in the sense of how theologian and religious educator Thomas Groome explains it - "that any and every person can learn from and be enriched by its spiritual wisdom for life, even if they do not embrace it as their identity in faith."[2] In fact, as Lasallian scholar Jean-Louis Schneider highlights, Lasallian spirituality is 'catholic' by its openness to all who share in its commitment to educate the young as whole persons with a spiritual dimension that calls them to something deeper and more in life:

> to live the Lasallian charism today it is not necessary to be a Christian or a believer or to belong to one of the religions named by Transcendence; but it is necessary to be at least convinced that one wishes to go and ought to go with the young people confided to us beyond the earthly, economic, political and cultural horizons or even beyond humanist solidarity. Living this charism implies that we have ourselves discovered the spiritual dimension of man [sic], of humanity, of creation that we wish to share it with children and young people; that we are capable of "giving meaning" and transmitting it, explicitly or implicitly.[3]

There are of course particular complexities around the reception of Christian spirituality in different institutional and socio-cultural settings of education. Nonetheless, my best hope is to communicate the richness of the Lasallian tradition as a viable source of

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[2] Thomas H. Groome, *Faith for the Heart: A "Catholic" Spirituality* (New York and Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 2019), 6.

[3] Jean-Louis Schneider, FSC, "Making the Lasallian Charism Live Today," in *Lasallian Studies No. 13: The Lasallian Charism*, ed. The International Council for Lasallian Studies, trans. Aidan Patrick Marron, FSC (Rome: Brothers of the Christian Schools Generalate, 2006), 245-246.

spiritual inspiration that sustains the soul of teachers. The Lasallian tradition expands and deepens the imagination of teaching as a prophetic call to serve children.

Defining 'Children', 'Child', and 'Childhood'

Let me clarify from the onset who and what I mean by the terms - 'children', 'child', and 'childhood.' Historian Hugh Cunningham offers a useful starting point: "children as human beings and childhood as a shifting set of ideas."[4] Any definition of 'children' and 'child' is multivalent because childhood is a social construction that is relationally shaped historically and culturally.[5] The current interdisciplinary field of childhood studies has emphasized "that the idea of a universal child is an impossible fiction and that children's lives are influenced as strongly by their culture as by their biology."[6] This social constructivist paradigm also "places an emphasis on the concept of agency – the ability of children to understand their own world and to act upon it."[7] While highlighting this agency of children as human beings, it is as important to recognize that human beings are also more dependent on others for protection and care as children. As ethicist Mary Doyle Roche rightly points out, injustice happens when this dependency is

[4] Hugh Cunningham, *Children and Childhood in Western Society Since 1500* (London and New York: Longman, 1995), 1.

[5] As Karen Well discusses in *Childhood in a Global Perspective* (Malden, MA: Polity Press, 2015), 4-5, this idea of childhood as a social construction is traced back to Philippe Ariès' seminal work *L'Enfant et la vie familiale sous l'ancien régime* (1962), which was published in English as *Centuries of Childhood: A Social History of Family Life* (1962). Ariès contends that the idea of childhood is a modern invention in the West from the late seventeenth century. While this claim has been critically questioned based on his use of sources, his recognition of childhood as a variable construction contextually situated in time and place is still relevant.

[6] Heather Montgomery, *An Introduction to Childhood: Anthropological Perspectives on Children's Lives* (Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell, 2009), 1.

[7] Brendan Hyde, Karen-Marie Yust and Cathy Ota, "Editorial: Defining childhood at the beginning of the twenty-first century: children as agents," *International Journal of Children's Spirituality* 15, no. 1 (February 2010): 1.

manipulated and exploited, rendering children socially vulnerable to marginalization and exclusion.[8]

Thus, I understand 'children' and 'child' multi-dimensionally in three interrelated ways. First. they are not simply descriptive of younger people at a particular stage of life. More conceptually, these terms express a relational significance grounded in the multiple meanings that particular societies construct of "childhood." These meanings also include those that children co-construct with others in the contextual realities of their lives. It is this complexity about children as relational beings and situated meaning-makers that I explore, with a focus on how theological meanings constructed about childhood also shape the ways educators relate with children in their classrooms. Second, I also apply the definition used by the United Nations that refers anyone under the age of eighteen as 'children'. This is in light of my conceptualization of a preferential option for children that is concerned with the systemic marginalization of the world's children as human beings. This does not of course preclude the construction of diverse childhoods experienced by persons within this age range, depending on a variety of factors that include the developmental, biological, social, economic and cultural. Third, given my focus on classroom teachers, my study draws on literature pertaining to the teaching of children in K-12 schools in the United States.

Methodology

The vitality of the Lasallian tradition lies in its dynamism through time. It develops in critical dialogue with the present so as to be responsive to the needs of education in the contemporary world. I offer an interpretive study of the tradition and

[8] Mary M. Doyle Roche, *Children, Consumerism and the Common Good* (Lanham, Maryland: Lexington Books, 2009), 4.

situate it within the contemporary turn to children and childhood in theological research. The child as student is at the center of the Lasallian commitment to education. This interpretive study is a critical synthesis of Lasallian theology of child with literature in childhood studies, spirituality, critical pedagogy and participatory action research. It is critical in engaging "a process of retrieval, critique, and reconstruction":

> A method of retrieval, critique, and reconstruction encourages and facilitates the reframing and recasting of treasures from the past in ways which are fitting, lively, and meaningful in the contemporary context.[9]

It facilitates "an imaginative use of tradition."[10] In other words, it enacts a process of discerning how the Lasallian tradition is alive in orienting educators to recognize and respond to God's presence in present realities. What moves this process of retrieval, critique, and reconstruction along is a preferential option for children as critical hermeneutic within the Lasallian tradition. This critical hermeneutic underpins a Lasallian dynamic of "double contemplation" in educational relationships, which discerns on the one hand, God's saving will for all, but from the concrete social realities of children on the other hand.[11] Where I go further is to consider how the contemporary theological interest in children and childhood is a resource that deepens this dynamic, renewing the interconnection between Christian mysticism, liberation, and the child in the Lasallian imagination of teaching as a vocation.

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[9] Marie McCarthy, "Spirituality in a Postmodern Era," in *The Blackwell Reader in Pastoral and Practical Theology*, ed. James Woodward and Stephen Pattison (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishers, 2000), 202.

[10] Philip Sheldrake, *Spirituality and History: Questions of Interpretation and Method* (London: SPCK, 1991), 168.

[11] Luke Salm, FSC, "The Lasallian Educator in a Shared Mission," *AXIS: Journal of Lasallian Higher Education* 8, no. 1 (2017): 150. [Address originally delivered on October 8, 1993 at a gathering of teachers from Christian Brothers Academy, La Salle Institute, and La Salle School in the Capital District, Albany.]

Organization of Dissertation

The chapters are organized to analyze the Lasallian contribution to a prophetic vision of teaching as a call to serves the human flourishing of children whose humanity has been systemically marginalized. In Chapter One, I argue for the need to re-awaken an incarnational spiritual vision of educating, with the purpose of reclaiming the mystical that is intertwined with the prophetic in teaching children. This paves the way to critically retrieve the Lasallian tradition as a source of Christian mysticism for forming educators to teach justly toward the liberation of children. In Chapter Two, I retrieve the Lasallian educational imagination, with a focus on drawing out a preferential option for children in discerning the vocation of teaching as a human act of faith in zeal. The Lasallian tradition offers a prophetic mysticism that discerns and energizes the vocation of teaching from the standpoint of God's solidarity with children as poor and marginalized.

In Chapter Three, I distil a theological anthropology of relational belonging that underpins this preferential option for children in Lasallian education. This anthropology structures the teacher-student relationship along two interrelated axes - as *God's children* and *siblings-in-Christ*. I also situate this interpretation of Lasallian anthropology within the wider scholarship on children and childhood as a frame to critique the adultism in the tradition and to reconstruct a more expansive vision of the learning child as agent in a vulnerable relation of belonging.

In Chapter 4, I draw on the literature in Freirean critical pedagogy and participatory action research with children ((C)PAR) to discuss how this Lasallian anthropology of belonging can be enacted by teachers, with a focus on listening as a critical-contemplative pedagogical practice. This practice is framed theologically within a

wider discussion of God's call to just presence in teaching. This theological framing also extends the reconstruction of the mystery of the child in Lasallian anthropology as graced irruption. From the standpoint of its preferential option for children, the child as graced irruption is positioned as an agent of God's call to teaching as a prophetic vocation.

In Chapter Five, I pull together the different strands of the interconnection between mysticism, liberation, and the child in the Lasallian tradition to reflect on the contemplative calling of the teacher. The gift of the Lasallian tradition for education is its offer of a Christian prophetic mysticism of faith that positions the teacher as contemplative in relation to the wondrous mystery of God's life incarnated in and shared with children. Such is a wonder that a divine pedagogy of trust inspires while contemplating the call to teach at the manger in the Lasallian tradition. The future of the teacher as contemplative lies then in a recovery of the capacity to be amazed at children as one *with* us and *of* us in the mystery of God's life. Such is an amazement simultaneously re-learnt in wonderment alongside and from children, and which energizes the prophetic vocation of teaching.

Finally, in the Epilogue, I reflect on this time of upheaval in the face of a global pandemic and massive protests against racism in the United States. This time of social disruption makes it all the more urgent for teachers to reclaim teaching as a prophetic calling at the service of the human flourishing of children. To remember teaching as a call is to reflect on the reason for hope that the act of teaching presupposes. The Lasallian call to teach is a call to hope which summons us to trust - that what we regard to be little in our best efforts as teachers do have an impact beyond what we can see because nothing is wasted in God. This is a mighty hope that paradoxically rests on God choosing to come

to us in the smallness of a child, entrusting God-self to human care. This is a prophetic hope found in the promise that God will be there to meet us in the lives of children because in coming as a poor child, God stands in solidarity with them as the least and marginalized. To teach is to hear and respond to God's call through children, who are bearers of hope in the just Reign of God already here.

CHAPTER ONE
RE-AWAKENING TEACHING AS A VOCATION

In his essay, "The Interior Life of a Teacher," educational theorist Robert Starratt imagines a reflection paper written by Blue to a professor at a school of education.[1] Blue, a graduating Master's student in his early thirties, "wanted to put down his reflections on his experience of graduate studies and his convictions about teaching."[2] Having been a junior high school social studies teacher before embarking on a Master's degree in Education, he observes that while coursework has widened his content knowledge in pedagogy and educational psychology, "never was [he] ever challenged to be a better person by any of [his] professors."[3] This is not an indictment of Blue's professors. Rather, it invites us to ask to what extent teacher education as a process takes seriously human formation and the moral integrity of educators.

This sense of moral integrity is critical because teachers influence the values of their students; they do so from how they see the world. Thus, as Blue asserts, "it's important for a teacher to discern the intelligibility and trustworthiness of life, important to acquire a larger and deeper perspective on human values, important to have a sense of one's own sanity and integrity and humanity."[4] It is essential, then, for teachers to cultivate an "interiority" that gives coherence to the ultimate meaning of what they do, which is to accompany and guide students to see that their lives matter for the

[1] Robert J. Starratt, "The Interior Life of a Teacher," *California Journal of Teacher Education* 9, no. 2 (1982): 31-39.

[2] Ibid., 31.

[3] Ibid., 33.

[4] Ibid., 36.

transformation of the world.[5] The reflection paper ends provocatively with a question that is still relevant in our day: "If the world of teaching flows essentially out of the person of the teacher, out of the interior life of that person, why is everyone in the profession silent about it?"[6] At the heart of this question is a need to reclaim the vocation of teaching as the ground for the spiritual in education.

I address the notion of teaching as a Christian vocation from three interrelated angles. First, I embed it within a wider frame that reclaims the spiritual nature of education. Second, I highlight the prophetic dimension teaching as a calling in relation to God's wider mission that makes a preferential option for children. Third, I consider how the mystical is intrinsic to the imagination of teaching as a vocation. Through these three angles, I argue that vocation expresses an incarnational spiritual vision of educating, with the purpose of reclaiming the mystical that is intertwined with the prophetic in teaching. This paves the way to critically retrieve the Lasallian tradition as a source of Christian mysticism for forming educators to teach justly toward the liberation of children.

1.1 The Place of the Interior in Education

1.1.1 The Spiritual Nature of Education

Underscored in this concern for the teacher's interior life is the connection between spirituality and education. Spirituality is a term that eludes any easy definition, depending on its use in varied contexts. Nonetheless, contemporary scholarship in the West has conceived of spirituality more expansively in terms of meaning, purpose, and connectedness in life. As theologian Marie McCarthy puts it:

[5] Ibid., 37-38. By interiority, he means "living life beneath or beyond the surface, looking for truth or truths of the moment or the experience, unmasking what poses as real or valuable in order to reach beyond posturing" (37).

[6] Ibid., 39.

> Spirituality is a fundamental component of our human beingness, rooted in the natural desires, longings, and hungers of the human heart. It is concerned with the deepest desires of the human heart for meaning, purpose, and connection, with the deep life lived intentionally in reference to something larger than oneself.[7]

The spiritual is as such relationally experienced from within and in-between persons. Arising from the depths of our being as a longing to belong, the spiritual also nudges to pull us out of ourselves to be with one another. The spiritual awakens us to a search for wholeness with others, propelled by a passion for life as gift that requires tender nurture. Spirituality beckons us to life's open future in the present. It orients us to make concrete sense of what matters in life at this moment, in relation to a deeper and wider reality that grasps our imagination by its dynamic unfolding across time and through relationships. Spirituality is not limited to interiority if interiority is taken to imply a solipsistic retreat into an enclosed self.[8] However, it reclaims interiority as the "lived experience of depth" that is inextricably and organically woven into who we are as human persons fully alive in composing relationships of meaning with one another.[9]

Seen in these terms, spirituality is not synonymous with religion. It "is broader and more encompassing than any religion."[10] "Nor … does religion have a monopoly on spirituality," cautions Hanan Alexander.[11] Yet, religious traditions articulate a grounding for spirituality to be experienced, expressed, and practiced in its particularity as a community. I locate my understanding of spirituality in the Christian tradition. This

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[7] McCarthy, "Spirituality in a Postmodern Era," 196.

[8] Sheldrake, *Spirituality and History: Questions of Interpretation and Method*, 50.

[9] McCarthy, "Spirituality in a Postmodern Era,", 196.

[10] Ibid., 196.

[11] Hanan A. Alexander, *Reimagining Liberal Education: Affiliation and Inquiry in Democratic Schooling* (New York: Bloomsbury, 2015), 218.

particularity is imbued with theological assumptions about God, self, and community. As theologian Philip Sheldrake concisely remarks:

> While spirituality, in Christian terms, is not about some kind of life but about *the whole of human life at depth*, our understanding of what this might mean cannot avoid questions posed specifically by the Christian tradition of revelation about the nature of God, human nature and the relationship between the two. [12]

Following theologian and religious educator Thomas Groome, I understand Christian spirituality as life in the power of God's Spirit patterned after the way of Jesus Christ as the God in history who reveals the mystery of God's self-giving love.[13] Christian spirituality is "a God-conscious way of life";[14] it awakens us to the imperceptibility of God's closeness in our everyday lives, and whose Spirit draws, gathers, and recreates all to be in communion with one another as God's beloved children. Christian spirituality intentionally attends to the presence of God alive in the interior depths of our being so as to discern and embody life-giving service to God present in the neighbor.

While I address primarily Christian teachers, the contribution of Christian spirituality to education is not solely reserved for them. As Groome argues, Christian spirituality offers itself as a well of "wisdom for life" for all people, "even if they do not embrace it as their identity in faith."[15] It does, however, matter that I begin with Christian teachers with the hope of inviting them to (re)-discover and deepen their commitment to education as a call to lived discipleship with Jesus Christ. The concern for the teacher's

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[12] Sheldrake, *Spirituality and History: Questions of Interpretation and Method*, 52. Emphasis his.

[13] Thomas Groome, *Educating for Life: A Spiritual Vision for Every Teacher and Parent* (New York: The Crossroad Publishing Company, 2001), 335: "In Christian faith, Jesus is the catalyst in history of God's grace, now empowering humankind to live in right and loving relationship with God, self, each other, and the world. Jesus Christ is the sacrament of Christian holiness, the One who both shows 'the way' and lends the grace to follow."

[14] Ibid., 330.

[15] Groome, *Faith for the Heart: A "Catholic" Spirituality*, 6.

interior life is also not simply a case of including spirituality as if it were an add-on to education. More fundamentally, it is to reclaim education as a profoundly spiritual activity. As education theorist Dwayne Huebner contends:

> Education is the lure of the transcendent – that which we seem is not what we are for we could always be other. […] The source of education is the presence of the transcendent in us and in our midst. We can transcend ourselves, go beyond ourselves, become what we are not, because we participate in the life which is transcendent. If we do not "love the Lord with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might" then our education comes to an end for we cannot get beyond ourselves and we are no longer open to that which is new.[16]

In other words, education can be personally and socially transforming because of our orientation to the transcendent not simply as a dimension of being human but as that ultimate horizon which becomes constitutive of why I exist, with whom and for what. It is in this light that "education is a call from the other that we may reach beyond ourselves and enter into life with the life around us."[17]

Central to Huebner's thought is his appropriation of Christian theological language to imagine a vision of the spiritual as integral to education. For him, the Christian proposal to education is the mystery of the incarnation. The transcendent who is God's presence in us is revealed in the other encountered as neighboring stranger. The "lure of the transcendent" is "threatening" because that which is other is often perceived in a relation of difference that is inconvenient. Yet, what lies at the heart of education as a process of transformation is this: the courageous journey of being led out to encounter the possibility of newness in life through an openness to otherness-in-difference. Thus, "education is not only a leading out from that which I am, it is also a leading toward that

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[16] Dwayne E. Huebner, "Religious Metaphors in the Language of Education [1985]," in *The Lure of the Transcendent: Collected Essays by Dwayne E. Huebner*, ed. Vikki Hillis (Mahwah, NJ and London: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, 1999), 360-361.

[17] Ibid., 360.

which I am not … Differences are manifestations of Otherness … They are invitations to be led out, to be educated."[18] In light of the incarnation, it is the free gift of God's love that calls us out to encounter Jesus Christ present in otherness.[19] Education, then, is spiritual activity that co-participates in the creative life of God impelled by love as the ground for trust and hope. "Education happens because creation is still happening, in and through us – individually and collectively," writes Huebner.[20] It is incarnational practice that draws out "gifts and talents [that] invite and push us to find new ways to be in and for the world, while still not of it."[21]

It is this incarnational dimension in Christian spirituality, I argue, that is worth reclaiming for teachers. Such a spirituality is foundational to a vision of educating for liberating wholeness. That is, education is sacred work that struggles to resist and remake conditions that dehumanize the wholeness of who we are as persons in community. It participates in God's loving action to co-create conditions for people to imagine into action possibilities of being together in our differences as gift to one another. To educate for liberating wholeness is teaching *from* and *for* the dignity of "life for all" as created in the image of God.[22] Educator bell hooks alludes to this vision when she writes: "To be guided by love is to live in community with all life … learning to live in community must

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[18] Ibid., 361.

[19] To be clear, "otherness" is used here in a theological sense to see the other as neighbor who reflects Christ to us and through whom we belong to God. It is not used to construct a relation of difference to exclude, but an invitation to embrace differences in humanity as a moment of encountering God as living mystery. Rather it points to being in relationship with the other as other, as human in their irreducible uniqueness as God's creation.

[20] Dwayne E. Huebner, "Educational Activity and Prophetic Criticism [1991]," in *The Lure of the Transcendent: Collected Essays by Dwayne E. Huebner*, ed. Vikki Hillis (Mahwah, NJ and London: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, 1999), 397.

[21] Ibid., 397.

[22] Groome, *Educating for Life: A Spiritual Vision for Every Teacher and Parent*, 36.

be a core practice for all of us who desire spirituality in education."[23] Christian incarnational spirituality invites teachers to become aware of the nearness of God as the greater and enduring Love who not only comforts but also makes a claim on them to become "ambassadors for Christ" (2 Corinthians 5: 20)[24] as liberating Love who heals the world into wholeness. "We love because [God] first loved us" (1 John 4: 19).

An incarnational spirituality thus invites teachers to make space not just for themselves, but for God as the very source of love that awakens our common life together as God's beloved children. Education is a spiritual journey of learning to become the mystery of who we already are as God's children in Jesus Christ. I focus on teaching children. This stems from my conviction that for us to live together as God's children with integrity, we ought to pay first attention to the actual lives of children whose humanity continues to be marginalized. The liberating wholeness of humanity in creation is intimately tied to how children as the youngest and the least amongst us are being regarded. This is a theme that I develop throughout in relation to a spirituality for teaching. For now, I consider the importance of reclaiming an incarnational spiritual vision of teaching as a counterpoint to what I describe as soul weariness in our contemporary educational landscape in the West.

1.1.2 Spiritual Thirst: Interior Silencing and Soul Weariness in Education

Generally speaking, the educational landscape in the West is marked by an arid feeling of soul weariness. By this, I mean a numbness of heart toward the act of educating that it no longer brings a deep sense of joy and fulfilment to the lives of teachers and

[23] bell hooks, *Teaching Community: A Pedagogy of Hope* (New York and London: Routledge, 2003), 163.

[24] All Scriptural references are from *The New Interpreter's Study Bible: New Revised Standard Version with the Apocrypha* (Nashville, Abingdon Press, 2003).

students. As philosopher David Tacey highlights, "The heart has long stood as a symbol for the soul, but a particular kind of soul, a soul which is discovered through experience and incarnated in the body."[25] Soul weariness points then to what spiritual writer Parker Palmer has described as "the pain of disconnection" within oneself and with others in education, resulting in the loss of passion and life for teaching and learning.[26] Soul weariness in education sets in when teachers and students cannot be vulnerably present to one another as they are, and as a community of persons learning to compose life's meaning and purpose in and through their differences.

This soul weariness is symptomatic of what educational theorist David Purpel has highlighted as a moral and spiritual crisis in education. According to him, we paradoxically value and fear "[s]erious education" that "has a way of forcing continual confrontation with our basic moral commitments and, more unnerving, with our failures to meet those commitments."[27] At the heart of this crisis is the struggle for what it means to live well together with others: "the difficulty of creating a vital, authentic, and energizing vision of meaning in the context of significant diversity, pluralism, division, skepticism, dogmatism, and even nihilism."[28] The reduction of education into a host of technical questions and solutions masks an avoidance to address deeper questions of moral meaning and responsibility. The conditions that give rise to this reductionism have also contributed to a silencing of the interior life in educational spaces. The pain of soul

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[25] David Tacey, *The Postsecular Sacred: Jung, Soul and Meaning in an Age of Change* (New York and London: Routledge, 2020), 39.

[26] Parker J. Palmer, *To Know As We Are Known: Education as a Spiritual Journey* (New York: HarperOne, 1993), x.

[27] David E. Purpel and William M. McLaurin, Jr., *Reflections on the Moral and Spiritual Crisis in Education* (New York: Peter Lang, 2004), 24.

[28] Ibid., 74.

weariness in education lies in the alienation from the depths of ourselves; as Palmer puts it, "it comes from being disconnected from our own truth, from the passions that took us into teaching, from the heart that is the source of all good work."[29]

There are at least three dynamics that underlie the conditions around this interior silencing within our current educational landscape: commodification of education, techno-professionalization of teaching, and secularization.

a) Commodification of Education

The market is not simply the external context in which education takes place. As Richard Pring highlights, the market has become a dominant metaphor in shaping educational discourse; it construes education into a commodity transacted between teachers and students as providers and consumers.[30] What is at stake is the intrinsic good of education as involving "[t]hat search for meaning, that engagement in argument, that enjoyment of discovery, that struggle to gain insight."[31] It develops "the capacity to think intelligently, to engage imaginatively with problems, to behave sensitively and with empathy towards other people."[32] It emphasizes "[t]hat search for meaning, that engagement in argument, that enjoyment of discovery, that struggle to gain insight."[33] These qualities presuppose the personhood of human beings who can transcend their immediacy to be in relation with others and act for the good of others as community.

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[29] Parker J. Palmer, *The Courage to Teach: Exploring the Inner Landscape of a Teacher's Life* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1998), 21.

[30] Richard Pring, "Markets, Education and Catholic Schools," in *The Contemporary Catholic School: Context, Identity and Diversity*, ed. Terence McLaughlin, Joseph O'Keefe SJ and Bernadette O'Keeffe (London and New York: RoutledgeFalmer, 1996), 60.

[31] Ibid., 67.

[32] Ibid.,65.

[33] Ibid., 67.

Education is as such a process of learning to make sense of one's moral commitments *in* and *for* life with others.

The commodification of education, however, assumes a more limited anthropology. It views the human being not in terms of who s/he is but by what s/he produces for the economy. A marketized educational philosophy imbibes the idea of efficiency due to competition, which in turn favors conditions that breed individualism concerned more with self-interest.[34] It engineers a culture of measurement fixated on outcomes and behaviors through standardized testing, school ranking and other performance indicators. Such a culture reframes the teacher-student relationship. Instead of the possibility of an encounter between persons, teachers manage their students as objects. Both are caught in the pressure to perform because their sense of worth is defined by achievement instead of their intrinsic dignity as human beings. Purpel expresses this as "a glaring contradiction between our most deeply felt moral conviction – that which affirms the essential dignity of each person – and our most widespread social and cultural expectation – that which demands that each person must achieve (i.e., that each of us has to *earn* our dignity)."[35] The mindset created is one in which "we are responsible only to and for ourselves."[36] We bother to care for someone and about something insofar as it does not "deflect us from competition and the pursuit of individual success and achievement."[37]

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[34] Ibid., 61.

[35] Purpel and McLaurin Jr., *Reflections on the Moral and Spiritual Crisis in Education*, 47-48.

[36] Ibid., 53.

[37] Ibid., 53.

Unfortunately, this mindset reproduces the impression that some lives are more or less worthy of life, depending on the value of their productivity to the economy. This has implications for how teachers understand their moral commitment toward children's wellbeing in education. As I will discuss later in this chapter, the commodification of education has exacerbated the inequitable treatment of children in schools, at least in the context of the United States. The competition generated does not take place on a level playing field, with some children already finding themselves systematically disadvantaged at the complex intersection of social identity markers such as race, gender, and class

To qualify, I do not discount the economic benefits of education in the sense of preparing people for meaningful work. However, I question education that serves primarily the market instead of people, when making a living and a life with others is reduced to making money at the expense of others. Purpel argues:

> There can be no greater indictment of our entire culture and particularly our entire educational program than this shocking state of affairs – that with all our knowledge and with all our creativity, imagination, and sensibilities, we find ourselves without a serious competitor to a [market] system that is killing us with its popularity. If nothing else, this speaks to an immense failure in imagination but at a deeper level, it represents the triumph of one set of spirits over another. The spirits of individual gain, self-gratification, hedonism, competition, and possessiveness are beating the pants off the spirits of interdependence, peace, joy, and love.[38]

Perhaps Purpel overstates his case but he highlights sharply the effects of hyper-individualism when economic productivity and growth becomes the ultimate value in life. To illustrate this hyper-individualism, writer David Brooks refers to a study at the Harvard Graduate School of Education, which reported that eighty percent of ten

[38] Ibid., 263.

thousand middle and high school students "said their parents cared more about achievements – individual success over relational bonds."[39] Brooks further writes:

> The core flaw of hyper-individualism is that it leads to a degradation and a pulverization of the human person. It is a system built upon the egoistic drives within each of us … Hyper-individualism does not emphasize and eventually does not see the other drives – the deeper and more elusive motivations that seek connection, fusion, service, and care. These are not the desires of the ego, but the longings of the heart and soul: the desire to live in loving interdependence with others, the yearning to live in service of some ideal, the yearning to surrender to a greater good. Hyper-individualism numbs these deepest longings.[40]

The commodification of education feeds the dominance this hyper-individualistic culture, which leads to soul weariness. It socially reproduces a utilitarian paradigm that sidelines and hollows out the interior depth of teachers and students as relational human beings. The primacy of fostering connected relationships in education as the foundation for learning is increasingly eroded, with teachers performing the role of pedagogical technicians in the wider discourse of techno-professionalization in education.

b) Techno-professionalization of Teaching

Connected to the commodification of education is the discursive articulation of a techno-professionalism around teaching. Joseph Buijs identifies four dimensions of this language of professionalization in teaching: first, there is financial remuneration: "professional teachers ought to be paid for what they do." Second, professionalization ensures that teachers are adequately trained in terms of pedagogical skills and content knowledge of their subject matter. Third, professionalization holds teachers formally accountable to the practice, their students, and the educational institution. Fourth,

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[39] David Brooks, *The Second Mountain: The Quest for a Moral Life* (New York: Random House, 2019), 12. The study cited is from the Making Caring Common Project. For a report of the study, see "Making Caring Common Project: The Children We Mean to Raise: The Real Message Adults Are Sending About Values," Harvard Graduate School of Education, July 2014, https://mcc.gse.harvard.edu/reports/children-mean-raise.

[40] Ibid., 298.

professionalization implies choice in that individuals choose to teach as an option among many and for a variety of reasons.[41]

The idea of teaching as a profession should not be opposed to its conception as a vocation. In fact, Buijs argues for the need to hold both in "a dialectical tension": "The challenge is, on the one hand, to elevate a teaching vocation with the values of professional status and, on the other, to imbue the teaching profession with the values of a vocation."[42] I further contend that teaching as a vocation demands professionalism. Vocation serves as an overarching frame not to impose, but to invoke and inspire the moral commitments that undergird why one regards teaching as a profession in the first place. It goes beyond a conception of teaching as being *only* about the development of pedagogical skills and content knowledge. More significantly, vocation serves as a framework that is critical of the commodification of this professionalizing discourse, which reduces the enterprise of teaching into a matter of technical competency, managerial ability, and information transmission. Who the teacher is as a person with a name and biography is in turn diminished.

At the heart of this techno-professionalization in teaching lies a deeper disconnect between knowing and being. Palmer discusses this disconnect in light of how truth ceases to be an intersubjective 'objectivity' co-constructed between human subjects as relational knowers: "truth is an eternal conversation about things that matter, conducted with passion and discipline."[43] In its place is an objectivism that abstracts and reduces the

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[41] Joseph A. Buijs, "Teaching: Profession or Vocation?" *Catholic Education: A Journal of Inquiry and Practice* 8, no. 3 (March 2005): 333-334.

[42] Ibid., 342.

[43] Palmer, *The Courage to Teach*, 104.

depth of truth into a 'given' out there that experts can measure and verify as 'facts' in a given field.[44] The argument here is not against the verifiability of what comes to be known as 'facts.' Rather, it is problematizing what Alexander describes as a "narrow rationalism and naïve empiricism" [45] This is a logic that assumes "the material world, the observable world, the world of objective fact [as] truly real. Beyond what we can see or measure, there is no truth."[46] These working assumptions, Alexander argues, continue to be reflected "in the very technological development" of today's schools, whose bureaucratic structuring has been inherited from the industrial revolution.[47]

This technological development is reflected today in the curricular emphasis on a STEM education, in standardized testing, as well as in data-driven innovations in instruction methods. While these are not necessarily negative developments in education, their working assumptions ought to be critically assessed in terms of their anthropological significance for education. The inner life of teachers (and their students) is dismissed as dangerously and unhelpfully subjective within an outcomes-based or evidence-based education of 'best practices' that functions on teacher control and efficiency. The result, as Alexander points out, is that the "educator is no longer a paradigm of the moral life" but "a business manager."[48]

This managerialism is a dominant theme in the professional development of teachers. In their book *Professional Capital: Transforming Teaching in Every School*, education researchers Andy Hargreaves and Michael Fullan signal a shift from

[44] Ibid., 100.
[45] Alexander, *Reimagining Liberal Education*, 25.
[46] Ibid., 27.
[47] Ibid., 27.
[48] Ibid., 27.

individualistic to communal-relational approaches in enhancing teacher development.[49] Yet, their understanding of teacher effectiveness, I argue, remains rooted in the dominant key of managerialism due to techno-professionalization. What is needed to transform teaching in the twenty-first century, they argue, is a collective investment in "professional capital" that includes commitment *and* capability.[50] They write, "in teaching, impassioned commitments and moral causes are just pious posturing unless they come with experiences of success."[51] Professional capital is the "presence and product" of "human, social, and decisional" capital.[52] Human capital in teaching refers to developing the necessary knowledge and skills in subject mastery and pedagogy.[53] Social capital relates to building "the quantity and quality of interactions and social relationships" that mobilizes human capital; an important dimension of social capital is fostering a culture of trust.[54] Decisional capital refers to the "ability to make discretionary judgments."[55] This is cultivated through cycles of reflection and action mediated through collegiality that underpins social capital.[56] In sum, professional capital "is about what you know and can do individually, with whom you know it and do it collectively, and how long you have known it and done it and deliberately gotten better at doing it over time."[57] Professional capital undergirds "what it means to teach like a pro," which involves teamwork and

[49] Andy Hargreaves and Michael Fullan, *Professional Capital: Transforming Teaching in Every School* (New York and London: Teachers College Press, 2012).

[50] Ibid., 58.

[51] Ibid., 58.

[52] Ibid., 88.

[53] Ibid., 89.

[54] Ibid., 90.

[55] Ibid., 93.

[56] Ibid., 96-101.

[57] Ibid., 102.

community support in and between schools.[58] Professional capital, as Hargreaves and Fullan assert, "means having and building a system that will be truly *great*."[59]

Hargreaves and Fullan's work recognizes that the self-efficacy of teachers lies not only in competency building, but also in the social contexts of their lives as persons: "If we want to improve teaching and teachers, we must therefore improve the conditions of teaching that shape them, as well as the cultures and communities of which they are a part."[60] This is particularly important in the context of the United States, where respect for schoolteachers as professionals is wanting. Hargreaves and Fullan are also critical of current U.S. policy strategies in educational reform as a quick-fire and misfire of "silver bullets" that oversimplify the work of teachers.[61] Yet, while their conception of professional capital aims to integrate teacher competency with moral purpose, they remain silent on the interiority of teachers that gives depth to professional commitments. Moreover, what remains unchallenged is the good of market competition; that is, teacher effectiveness is still rationalized within the dominant managerial discourse of achievement and performance that techno-professionalization supports. Their proposal to transform teaching through professional capital may not necessarily lead to teaching toward social transformation, which engages structurally with the inequalities experienced by students and promotes their participation as agents for social change.

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[58] Ibid., 23.

[59] Ibid., xvi.

[60] Ibid., 45.

[61] Ibid., 39-41. Their critique of educational reform in the U.S. is that its policies are grounded in "wrong drivers and flawed fallacies … The four wrong drivers of policy are negative accountability, individualistic solutions, fascination with technology, and piecemeal or fragmented solutions. The five fallacies of misdirected educational change are excessive speed, standardization, substitution of bad people with good ones, overreliance on a narrow range of performance metrics, and win-lose interschool competition."

Techno-professionalization induces a feeling of soul weariness in the experience of what Dennis Shirley and Elizabeth MacDonald has described as "alienated teaching": "that kind of teaching that teachers perform when they feel that they must comply with external conditions that they have not chosen and from which they inwardly dissent because the reforms do not serve their children well."[62] Policy mandates aside, alienated teaching is ironically "a result of educators' own (often unconscious) capitulation to cultural norms that undermined their own sense of moral purpose and sense of efficacy."[63] Purpel makes a similar point: "As educators we often are the system, even as we are both its cause and effect."[64] The issue for him is "less in our [i.e. teachers'] ability and capacity to do what we sense is right and more in our willingness to do so."[65] At the heart of this tension is an educational culture averse to risk that techno-professionalization has in part brought about.

Yet, as education philosopher Gert Biesta argues, "education always involves a *risk"* because it "is not an interaction between robots but an encounter between human beings."[66] This risk is not so much failure to meet some measurable standards, though it is reasonable to expect teachers to be competent in facilitating and enabling students to learn. What calls for critique are the high stakes attached to these standards such that they are managed to attain "a perfect match between 'input' and output.'"[67] What ought to be questioned is the compulsion by policy makers, politicians, the media and the public to

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[62] Ibid., 3.

[63] Ibid., 4.

[64] Purpel and McLaurin, Jr., *Reflections on the Moral and Spiritual Crisis in Education,* 73.

[65] Ibid., 105.

[66] Gert J.J. Biesta, *The Beautiful Risk of Education* (London and New York: Routledge, 2013), 1. Emphasis his.

[67] Ibid., 1.

make education "strong, secure, and predictable," which in turn presses teachers to remove any risk of encountering their students and themselves as complex in their multi-dimensionality and in the classroom where learning is open-ended.[68] This is the risk of being vulnerably open to otherness encountered in students and subject matter. It is also the risk of discomfort that comes from the process of learning, the outcome of which cannot be guaranteed. It is the risk to be in relationship with another. Thus, Biesta argues, "if we take the risk out of education, there is a real chance that we take out education altogether."[69] The soul is also taken out of teaching as a human act of courage that is inherently risky. The risk aversion in education leaves no space for the inner lives of teachers and their students to show up in the classroom for fear of their subjectivity and ambiguity, which is potentially subversive and disruptive of the managerial sensibility in educational markets.

Biesta also contends that this demand for a risk-free education is rooted in an impatience with "the slow way" of being properly educated.[70] The process of learning takes time to bear fruit in people's lives, and it involves frustration and pain as much as excitement and joy. "Yet we live in impatient times in which we constantly get the message that instant gratification of our desires is possible and that is good," notes Biesta.[71] This is the impatience of consumer culture extended into education and fed by the techno-professionalization of teaching. Biesta's analysis, however, raises a more foundational question that he does not address: why risk at all to undertake "the beautiful

[68] Ibid., 1.
[69] Ibid., 1.
[70] Ibid., 3
[71] Ibid., 3.

risk inherent in all education"?[72] This, I suggest, points to a deeper issue about faith. Faith is not only and simply about religious beliefs. Faith is more broadly understood as a relation to that which gives us ultimate meaning in life, and which energizes our being-in-action with others in the world. It "may be understood as the activity of meaning making – composing and being composed by what we trust as ultimately true and dependable."[73] Theologian Judith Merkle points out, "The problem of faith today is not disbelief; it is paralysis before the question of what is worth my effort." In other words, why persevere to undertake at all the risk of educating? Techno-professionalization does not only mechanize teaching work; it also glosses over these deeper questions of faith by overlooking or denying interiority its place in education. Yet faith remains a specter that rises up ever so frequently to haunt the secular trappings of our world, calling us to search farther and deeper for meaning in the everyday.

c) Secularization

Education in our contemporary world takes place in a landscape that has generally been described as secular in the modern Western context. The secular or secularity is conventionally understood pejoratively as antithetical to religion. Yet, this is an opposition that developed historically after the Reformation and through the Enlightenment into the modern. Philosopher Charles Taylor analytically distils the mechanisms that undergirded this development in *A Secular Age*. For him, secularity is not simply unbelief. Rather, his account goes deeper to articulate "the conditions of belief" that underlie "a move from a society where belief in God is unchallenged and

[72] Ibid., 9.

[73] Laurent A. Parks Daloz, Cheryl H. Keen, James P. Keen, Sharon Daloz Parks, *Common Fire: Leading Lives of Commitment in a Complex World* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1996), 141.

indeed, unproblematic, to one in which it is understood to be one option among others, and frequently not the easiest to embrace."[74] Modern secularity saw conditions of belief being reconfigured into "the possibility of exclusive humanism,"[75] which, as James Smith explains, projects "[a] worldview or social imaginary that is able to account for meaning and significance without any appeal to the divine or transcendence."[76] This exclusive humanism is in other words forged within an "immanent frame" that posits life in this material- temporal and natural - world as all that there is.[77]

Of critical significance in Taylor's historical account of secularization as process is his anthropological turn to the human subject as spiritual being, thirsting for the more that he calls "fullness" in life.[78] The immanent frame is constructed alongside the re-configuration of the "porous self" in the pre-modern to the modern "buffered self." [79] In contrast to the porous self that is open to the "enchanted world, the world of spirits, demons, moral forces," the buffered self construes itself as a bounded individual, self-sufficient and impervious to the transcendent.[80] This re-configuration constitutes the immanent frame that makes it thinkable for religion to be pushed aside and contested against for its believability as one among many options of belief. The non-dominance of religious faith in God, however, does not imply that human beings have become faith-*less* in a secular age. To recall, faith as "meaning-making … is something that all human

[74] Charles Taylor, *A Secular Age* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2007), 3.

[75] Ibid., 19.

[76] James K.A. Smith, *How (Not) To Be Secular: Reading Charles Taylor* (Grand Rapids, Michigan and Cambridge, U.K.: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2014), 141.

[77] Taylor, *A Secular Age*, 542.

[78] Ibid., 768.

[79] Ibid., 27.

[80] Ibid., 539; 38-41.

beings do in the everyday dialogue between fear and trust, hope and hopelessness, power and powerlessness, alienation and belonging."[81]

For Taylor, this shift from the porous to buffered self is part of a complex social re-ordering in the ways human beings relate to themselves and with one another meaningfully as spiritual beings. Accompanying this shift is a re-articulation of interiority. Interiority as the sense of depth in life for the porous self is permeable and organically related to the influences of the outer enchanted world. For the buffered self, however, interiority is construed as an inwardness, a retreat into "minds" as "the only locus of thoughts, feelings, spiritual élan."[82] From this standpoint, the marginalization of religion (and often in its institutionalized forms) does not diminish the primordial impulse of faith that sets people to be spiritual seekers, except that this seeking within the immanent frame tends to be "a personal search" that "occurs for its own sake."[83] The sense of the interior for the buffered self is privatized within the imaginary of an insulated individual - rational and autonomous - as promoted since the Enlightenment in the Western world.

The commodification of education with its drive toward techno-professionalization reifies this buffered self in the immanent frame. It is not so much the loss (or even lack) of meaning in the immanence that underlies the soul weariness or flatness in education. It is rather the unquenchable human yearning for a fuller meaning that raises the possibility of (re)-admitting the transcendent, or as Groome puts it, "the

[81] Daloz et al., *Common Fire*, 141.

[82] Taylor, *A Secular Age*, 30; 439-540.

[83] Ibid.,507.

conviction that God Is" in a vision of educating.[84] Herein lies the crux of Taylor's thesis: the secular condition cannot place a lid on the spiritual impulse within human beings for the infinite; in fact, the secular made thinkable by religious developments in the West also contains within itself a propulsion for the recovery of the sacred. David Tacey notes well Taylor's position: "that the indwelling soul of the individual was never secular, even if the age itself was secular … Secular and sacred were always permeable to each other, not opposites or opponents as has been believed."[85] An opportunity arises then to retrieve from our religious traditions a wellspring of living wisdom to quench the spiritual thirst latent in the soul weariness of our current educational landscape.

Yet, this retrieval calls religious traditions to be self-critical and creative. It dares one to ask how "religion is to get connected with the spirit of the time and the spirit of the individual, showing people how and why religion is relevant to their lives."[86] The task is for religious adherents to reflect and clarify for themselves why they would critically choose from the many options of belief to live a *religious* faith without being ensnared in sectarianism. The believability of religious faith in a secular age lies increasingly in how it is credibly lived in practice. Taylor makes this point when he calls for Christianity to reclaim the mystery of the Incarnation as "essential to itself."[87] The credibility of Christian faith is in the integrity of incarnational witness that embodies the presence of Christ in our being with each other.

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[84] Groome, *Faith for the Heart*, 35.

[85] Tacey, *The Postsecular Sacred*, 5.

[86] David Tacey, *The Spirituality Revolution: The Emergence of Contemporary Spirituality* (Hove and New York: Brunner-Routledge, 2004), 198.

[87] Taylor, *A Secular Age*, 771.

It is this incarnational vision of faith that can serve to re-awaken the heart of teaching in the soul weariness of our educational landscape. This vision is also worth reclaiming in light of a resurgence of academic interest in the West on contemplative approaches to teaching and learning, which I will review in Chapter Five. Where an incarnational faith goes deeper is that contemplative practices in education do not just make space for the selfhood of teachers; they must make space for God who is the very source of life as mystery that grounds our social participation and calls us to justice and compassion.[88] It also recalls the conception of teaching as a vocation, "a 'calling'(vocatus) [that] is heard, indeed, from one's own depths, but also comes from *beyond the self*, as not of one's own making."[89] Vocation casts teaching as a living practice of faith responsive to a faithful God who calls all to life. It is important, however, not to oppose teaching as a vocation to its conception as a profession. In fact, teaching as a vocation demands professionalism. Vocation serves as an overarching frame not to impose, but to invoke and inspire the moral commitments that undergird why one regards teaching as a profession in the first place. A dimension that I wish to highlight is how this incarnational vision of teaching as a vocation is energized through a dynamic relationship between the prophetic and mystical in Christian faith. I develop this with a particular interest in the education of children as prophetic work.

1.2. Rekindling Teaching as a Christian Vocation

To conceive the vocation of teaching through a Christian theological lens is to inspire and awaken possibilities for imagining the meaning of its practice as incarnational

[88] Groome, *Educating for Life*, 340.

[89] Ibid., 37.

work, patterned after the way of Jesus Christ who reveals God's passion and compassion for people in history. Teaching as incarnational work is profoundly relational – human and divine. Religion scholar Mark Schwehn writes, "To think of teaching as a calling, then, will not mean … that its *quality* will necessarily differ at all times from the quality of teaching rendered by a non-Christian. But its *meaning* will."[90] This meaning is bound up and enabled by "transcendent horizons."[91] As theologian Mario D'Souza puts it, "The vocation of the teacher is spiritual because education is ultimately a spiritual act, a communion of persons who are engaged in human transformation."[92]

In other words, to envision teaching as a Christian vocation is not to oppose it as a profession. Rather, it expands and deepen its ultimate meaning as participating in God's call to liberating wholeness in life, as discussed earlier in this chapter. The Christian call to teach is an invitation of the Spirit of Jesus to participate in God's loving action in history, co-creating conditions that enable us to learn how to make a life together in and through our differences as gift to one another.[93] It is located in a vision of education as a journey of learning to become who we already are as God's beloved children. The Christian call to teach is rooted within the creative life of God, who, through Jesus Christ and in the power of the Holy Spirit, calls teachers and students into being and becoming as persons-in-relation and loving-in-action for the life of the world. Teaching is as such

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[90] Mark R. Schwehn, "Teaching as Profession and Vocation," *Theology Today* 59, no. 3 (2002): 405.

[91] Ibid., 406.

[92] Mario O. D'Souza, *A Catholic Philosophy of Education: The Church and Two Philosophers* (Canada: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2016), 154.

[93] I am influenced here by Dwayne Huebner, "Teaching as a Vocation [1987]" in *The Lure of the Transcendent: Collected Essays by Dwayne E. Huebner*, ed. Vikki Hillis (Mahwah, NJ and London: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, 1999), 387: "When we regard teaching as a vocation, acknowledging that it is a way of living and not a way of making a living, and if we attend to the meanings and value making of the teacher, we will rebuild our educational communities so that we live more truthfully, justly, openly and beautifully in the classroom."

incarnational work that plunges one into the mystery of God's divine life as its source and goal.

1.2.1 Noninterchangeability of the Teacher as Person

The idea of vocation emphasizes the importance of the teacher as person, who brings her or his particular historical and socio-cultural existence into the relational practice of teaching. Educational philosopher David Hansen highlights: "It is the person *within* the role and who *shapes* it who teaches students, and who has an impact on them for better or for worse."[94] Who the teacher is as person matters because the vocation of teaching is a social practice that serves the intellectual and moral growth of students in a formal and public way.[95] Hansen makes a significant contribution in reclaiming the sense of vocation in teaching for an audience beyond the religious in contemporary education.

Drawing from his US-based qualitative research on the everyday working lives of teachers in urban schools, Hansen delineates what he calls a quality of "noninterchangeability" tied to the teacher as person in relationship with one's students.[96] What this noninterchangeability means is that "no two teachers have the same personal and moral impact on students."[97] That is, "the webs of meaning one can trigger as teacher cannot be replicated by another."[98] To put it in another way, no two students would also experience the presence of a teacher in a similar way. It is this noninterchangeability of the teacher as person that the language of vocation captures, more so than profession.

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[94] David T. Hansen, *The Call to Teach* (New York and London: Teachers College Press, 1995), 17. Emphasis his.

[95] Ibid., 5; 140.

[96] Ibid., 144.

[97] Ibid., 11.

[98] Ibid., 145.

Noninterchangeability, however, should not be taken to imply that any teacher is indispensable, which could lead to problems such as an inflated sense of self-importance or teacher fatigue and burnout. Rather, as Hansen contends, its recognition can lead "to a conviction that one can make a difference in the classroom and that endeavoring to make that difference is worth the trouble."[99] Recognition of one's noninterchangeability in teaching as a vocation humanizes the person who is teacher to somebody and not something in a relationship.

In reclaiming the value of teaching as a vocation, however, I am cautious against idealizing it as ennobling teachers. Such idealization abstracts the teacher as person away from her or his concrete experiences. Yet, to become aware of one's noninterchangeability paradoxically leads teachers to confront the vulnerability of their insufficiency and incompleteness in the face of challenges to their sense of self-efficacy.[100] "One can conceive teaching as a vocation and still harbor real doubts about how successful one might be (or is) in the classroom," writes Hansen.[101]

The most immediate challenge comes from the complexity of students as persons. Huebner notes, "Our competence as teachers is continuously brought into question by the newness of the young people who call us farther into our journey of selfhood."[102] Every start of a class is a restart. There will always be more students to whom a teacher wishes to reach out but is unable to either because of the lack of resources or personal limitations. There is also no guarantee in making learning happen, not forgetting those

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[99] Ibid., 145.

[100] Gloria Durka, *The Teacher's Calling: A Spirituality for those who Teach* (Mahwah, NJ: St. Pauls, 2002), 71.

[101] Hansen, *The Call to Teach*, 11.

[102] Huebner, "Teaching as a Vocation," 384.

days of drudgery when teachers would wring their hands in frustration wondering why they even bothered to prepare their lessons. Indeed, "[i]t is a truism that teachers often cannot know what their influence on students has been."[103]

Another source of challenge comes from the institutional contexts of power in which teachers work. People in positions of authority have unfortunately co-opted an idealized language of vocation to manipulate and exploit teachers on account of the sacrifices they supposedly should make as public servants. As Ellul pointed out, vocation has been unjustly misappropriated as "a pretext to give lower salaries (and sometimes no salary at all) to nurses, social workers, pastors, teachers."[104] In light of the bureaucratization of social institutions, he further argued, "[i]t is no longer possible in our society to incarnate a vocation concretely."[105] Teachers are thus unable to enact a meaningful sense of vocation because of bureaucratic constraints that often undermine their sense of self-efficacy and override personal agency.

Yet, it is in these challenges that the sense of teaching as a vocation is most alive. That quality of noninterchangeability is seen in the particular creative energy that each teacher brings to the classroom. As Hansen reports, the teachers in his study did not allow themselves to be determined by difficult circumstances in the classroom and at school. Instead, they stayed on course by remaining open and responsive to the complexity of teaching through time and in context, embracing the ambiguity and frustration that students do not learn in the ways one wants them.[106] Vocation serves as "an idiom that

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[103] Ibid., 117.

[104] J. Ellul, "Work and Calling," in *Katallagete* 4, 1972: 12. Cited in Hansen, *The Call to Teach*, 141-142.

[105] Ibid., 12. Cited in Hansen, *The Call to Teach*, 159.

[106]Hansen, *The Call to Teach*, 60.

takes us into, not away from" the experiences of these teachers as "[t]hey began to understand students, and teaching, in rich and broader terms."[107]

Thus, the sense of vocation in teaching does not call educators to a life of achievement. Rather, it calls them to a life of commitment, to continually make sense of that which is life-giving. Teaching as a vocation has less to do with fulfilling some educational goals and outcomes, though they are part of the work. It has more to do with an unspoken fidelity and a quiet felt-sense of fulfilment that compels educators to persist in the daunting task of influencing students' lives towards goodness. The idea of vocation, Hansen argues, "is a mirror that invites teachers to self-scrutiny and self-reflection."[108] It is not an idealized standard that teachers are expected to meet. It is rather a point of departure that continually invites teachers to launch into critical reflection and imagination, which "turns the focus of perception in such a way that the challenges and complexity in teaching become sources of interest in the work, rather than barriers or frustrating obstacles to be overcome."[109] The idea of vocation is as such a lens through which teachers make sense of the reasons for their moral commitments, which sustain not only the what and how of teaching through challenging situations, but also who they are teaching and whose good they are contributing. In this light, one also cannot presume or even expect educators to profess and embrace the notion of teaching as a calling from the get-go. It is in reality more like a place that teachers stumble into discovery as they navigate the ways of living and loving well with others.

[107] Ibid., 147-148.

[108] Ibid., 139.

[109] Ibid., 144.

Where a Christian theological vision of vocation goes farther is to propose that this stumbling into discovery is a growing awareness of falling deeper into the mystery of God's grace that holds, lifts, and carries teachers through their work as a sacred calling. It situates a teacher's experience of noninterchangeability in the context of an encounter with the divine present incarnationally in relationship. As Groome puts it, "To be educator is to stand on holy ground – people's lives."[110] The teacher-student relationship becomes the site for a breaking-in of God, who reveals both as the living mystery of God's image *to* and *through* each other in Christ.

As Luigi Giussani writes, "The journey that educator and pupil are called to take together is the journey of explicitly running the risk of accepting the call and the challenge of this definition of ourselves, of the mystery that invites us to recognize ourselves as made by [God]."[111] In this journey, vocation as that mirror for self-reflection is rooted in a dynamic process of discerning where and to whom God calls each one to in life. If "[t]he essence of [Christian] spirituality is our relationships – not only with God, but with self, others, and the world,"[112] the call to teach is discerned dynamically from within the lives of teachers in response to and intertwined with the lives of their students they encounter. Noninterchangeability experienced by the teacher as person emerges in vulnerable relation with students, nested in a deeper belonging to God who calls all to abundant life in Jesus Christ.

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[110] Groome, *Educating for Life*, 35.

[111] Luigi Giussani, *The Risk of Education: Discovering Our Ultimate Destiny*, trans. Marianngela Sullivan (Canada: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2019), 10.

[112] Ibid., 330.

1.2.2 The Christian Call to Teach as Prophetic Witness in God's Mission

From a Christian theological perspective, then, vocation is not some life purpose of one's sole own making. Neither is it a blueprint of "prearranged details of our lives worked out by God."[113] Rather, Christian vocation "is the language to describe the lifelong task of figuring out our life purposes in relationship to God's purposes."[114] Vocation is thus discerned along the path of Christian discipleship as a dynamic response to God's call to mission in the world. Mission is the praxis of God revealed in the self-giving love of Jesus Christ as the Word Incarnate, and whose way continues to be walked by his followers as life in the Spirit. Mission "is the extension of God's loving, saving, and redeeming activity and encounter throughout the world by whatever means and in whatever circumstances."[115] "With Christian educators," writes theologian John Sullivan, "this participation in the mission of Christ will express itself in a ministry of witness."[116]

Theologian Edward Hahnenberg constructs a relational theology of Christian call that frames well the dynamics of discernment in Christian witness. Building on Karl Rahner's expansive theology of grace that affirms the possibility of encountering God's presence in the world, Hahnenberg argues that God's call to *me* is discerned *through* and *for* others in community.[117] At the heart of the vocational call to Christian discipleship is

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[113] Kathleen A. Cahalan, "Callings over a Lifetime: In Relationship, through the Body, over Time, and for Community," in *Calling All Years Good: Christian Vocation throughout Life's Seasons*, ed. Kathleen A. Cahalan and Bonnie J. Miller-McLemore (Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2017), 16.

[114] Ibid., 16.

[115] Anthony J. Gittins, CSSp, *A Presence That Disturbs: A Call to Radical Discipleship* (Liguori, Missouri: Liguori/ Triumph, 2002), 14.

[116] John Sullivan, *Catholic Education: Distinctive and Inclusive* (Dordrecht, The Netherlands: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 2001), 123.

[117] Edward P. Hahnenberg, *Awakening Vocation: A Theology of Christian Call* (Collegeville, Minnesota: Liturgical Press, 2010), 230-231.

the journey toward conversion. To qualify, conversion here is not about making someone into a Christian. For Hahnenberg, it is a turning of the heart toward the God crucified in the neighbor whenever we choose to look away and negate her or his humanity. He writes, "the kind of conversion demanded by our postmodern and deeply pained world is a conversion as extro-version - a turning outward, an opening up to the other, particularly the other who suffers."[118] Drawing on the work of Ignacio Ellacuria, Hahnenberg demonstrates that God's call is shot through history as "the place where the creative and liberating future of God is most fully realized."[119] In this light, "God's call comes in a special way through the history of those who suffer, particularly those who suffer unjustly and in poverty."[120] That is, we become more truly ourselves by responding openly to Christ in the other who calls forth our witness as "presence to the suffering, the oppressed, the marginalized, and the forgotten."[121]

Hahnenberg offers a theological frame that illumines the missional dimension of teaching as a Christian calling. It is imperative to discern the call to teach in relation to the prophetic. How one is to share in the prophetic witness of Christ through solidarity as a relation of *being with* the impoverished, marginalized and forgotten is integral to the vocation of the Christian educator. As Schwehn remarks, to properly regard the meaning of teaching as a Christian calling is "at some times and in some places … to act counterculturally, over and against the norms of their professions."[122] To teach in a prophetic key is to counter structural forms of injustice that degrade the dignity of human

[118] Ibid., 227.
[119] Ibid., 206.
[120] Ibid., 207.
[121] Ibid., 232-233.
[122] Schwehn, "Teaching as Profession and Vocation," 404.

beings and struggle for their flourishing. It demands that educators recognize their complicity in these structures and take up responsibility for transforming them. As Purpel argues, the prophetic in teaching "must begin with the perspective of hunger, war, poverty, or starvation as its starting point, rather than from the perspective of problems of textbook selection, teacher certification requirements, or discipline policies."[123]

The Christian teacher who shares in the prophetic witness of Christ is called first to be with those he identifies – the poor and the marginalized. Discipleship as following Christ presumes that one sees Christ. As theologian Craig Hovey writes, "Witness begins with what we might call a hermeneutical practice of identifying Christ in order to follow him."[124] That is, "witness is concerned first with seeing Christ in order to deliver a testimony by speaking about what is seen."[125] In particular, I highlight the prophetic witness of the teacher called forth by seeing Christ in children whose humanity continues to be systemically marginalized (as discussed in the next section). Jesus proclaims in Matthew 19:14 – "Let the little children come to me, and do not stop them; for it is to such as these that the kingdom of heaven belongs." He also sternly warns his adult disciples, "If any of you put a stumbling block before one of these little ones who believe in me, it would be better for you if a great millstone were fastened around your neck and you were drowned in the depth of the sea" (Matthew 18: 6). Jesus does not only identify with the marginal status of children. He is also present in them: "Whoever welcomes one such child in my name welcomes me" (Matthew 18: 5).

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[123] Purpel and McLaurin, Jr., *Reflections on the Moral and Spiritual Crisis in Education*, 263.

[124] Craig Hovey, *Bearing True Witness: Truthfulness in Christian Practice* (Grand Rapids, Michigan and Cambridge, U.K.: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2011), 21.

[125] Ibid., 20.

To teach, then, as Jesus did is to share in his solidarity with children who continues to be the most socially vulnerable. Hahnenberg writes, "Actualizing our discipleship through a spirituality of solidarity helps us to discover our true selves: I am not only a child of God, I am among the children of God."[126] Yet, this recognition of our interconnectedness as God's children must orient us to take seriously the real existential lives of children in our midst as one of us and with us. Recognizing the plight of children as the least amongst us calls forth teaching as prophetic activity that upholds their human dignity and promotes their flourishing in life. What is countercultural is a need to reclaim what I conceive as a *preferential option for children* in forming the prophetic consciousness of those called to teach.

1.3 Educating toward the Human Flourishing of Children as Prophetic Work

1.3.1 Preferential Option for Children

As I am writing this dissertation, the Roman Catholic Church in America is being shaken by yet another round of reporting on the sexual abuse of children by clergy, ever since the disclosures in Boston in 2002. In August 2018, the grand jury in Pennsylvania issued a report revealing the Church's cover up of child sexual abuse committed by more than 300 Catholic priests over a period of 70 years.[127] The debate on its causes has focused on issues of clericalism, the need for greater lay participation as a check on clergy power, seminary formation, homosexuality, celibacy, and pedophilia. These issues, whilst relevant and complex in themselves, are beyond the scope of my

[126] Hahnenberg, *Awakening Vocation*, 228.

[127] Laurie Goodstein and Sharon Otterman, "Catholic Priests Abused 1,000 Children in Pennsylvania, Report Says," *The New York Times*, August 14, 2018, https://www.nytimes.com/2018/08/14/us/catholic-church-sex-abuse-pennsylvania.html. For access to the Grand Jury Report, see https://www.attorneygeneral.gov/report/.

discussion. What I wish to highlight, however, is how attention on these issues crowd out the actual plight of children. It is this that I find most disconcerting: that the church's leadership could so readily look away from the humanity of children it also paradoxically professes to uphold. How could this be so? What is going on?

These questions find an echo in the provocative insights of religion scholar Robert Orsi, who writes:

> Whatever else the dreadful crisis still unfolding in the American Catholic Church is about – and the news media, the courts, and Church hierarchy in Rome and in the United States, and an increasingly infuriated laity have offered different interpretations – it is fundamentally about children. It is about children's vulnerability to adult power and adult fantasy in religious contexts and it is about the absence of real children in these settings – real children as opposed to 'children' as the projections of adult needs and desires or 'children' as extensions of adult religious interiority. The necessary response to the crisis must be about children, too.[128]

At the heart of the abuse crisis, argues Orsi, is a crisis in theological anthropology constructed about children and childhood. The Christian tradition has tended to speak about children in a reductive way as either purely innocent or primarily sinful. It is "the child-as-holy-innocent" that has dominated European and American Christian imagination from the modern period.[129] As Orsi explains, in elevating the holy innocence of children, adults hollow them out of their capacity for agency as complex human beings. On the one hand, it is violation of this perceived innocence that triggers a public outcry against the abuse scandal. On the other hand, the adult projection of innocence also "puts children at the greatest risk" as it "deprives [them] of the authority and

[128] Robert A. Orsi, "A Crisis About the Theology of Children [2002]," in *The Bloomsbury Reader in Religion and Childhood*, ed. Anna Strhan, Stephen G. Parker and Susan B. Ridgely (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2017), 349.

[129] Ibid., 350.

integrity of their own experience ('tell the child to forget about it')."[130] The outcry against a violation of the innocence of these children as victims paradoxically misrecognizes and displaces their humanity as they are. Thus, Orsi opines:

> The problem, then, is not celibacy, homosexuality, or liberalism but the unstable presence/absence of children in a religious and political culture that denies then the full complexity of their experience and renders them porous to adult need and desire. The necessary response to the crisis in the church is to find ways of making children more authentically and autonomously present in contemporary Christian contexts and of genuinely protecting them. [131]

Orsi's provocative analysis draws attention to the urgent task of retrieving, critiquing, and reconstructing interpretations in Christian theological anthropology to reflect more diverse and nuance understandings about children and childhood. This task has been a major focus in contemporary theological research, which I will review further in Chapter Three. At stake, however, is a bigger issue: God's mission to love and care for children as a mandate of the Gospel. As mentioned earlier, Jesus does not only identify with the marginal status of children. He is also present in them by being born to the world as a human child in the mystery of the Incarnation.

Until and unless the care for children is radically taken as an imperative for Gospel living, Christian commitment to the policies and measures on child protection (no matter how well intentioned) is at best a matter of procedural duty than of witnessing to Jesus Christ. Orsi perceptively highlights, "I have not read a single commentator on the Catholic crisis say what is needed are mechanisms for giving children greater voice in the Church."[132] This observation is not only a critique of the Catholic Church's response to the scandal in particular. It is indexical of a greater Christian call to work prophetically

[130] Ibid., 351.

[131] Ibid., 354.

[132] Ibid., 354.

toward a world that upholds the full human dignity of children as social beings and includes their participation in God's mission. One must be careful not allow a "[f]ear *for* children" that underlies their protection to regress into a "fear *of* children" that keeps away responsible adults from their company.[133] The challenge is for adults to rethink critically and creatively how they can be incarnationally present to children and be responsibly involved in their growth while "honoring children in their fullness and complexity of their real lives in the circumstances of the present."[134]

Herein lies the need to re-awaken what I conceive as a *preferential option for children* in Christian mission generally, and in education particularly. This idea of a preferential option for children will be developed in the ensuing chapters with a particular connection to the Lasallian tradition. It does not replace a preferential option for the poor but builds on it by recognizing that the humanity of children as a socially diverse group continues to be systemically marginalized. By a preferential option for children, I highlight the social marginalization of children, whose human dignity is being trampled by structural injustice at the intersection of social, political, cultural, and economic conditions that impoverish their lives. These conditions do not only create an environment that targets and exploits children's social dependency, making them socially vulnerable. Yet, they also paradoxically draw out children's creative capacity for agency with others in contributing to the life of their wider community. Thus, a preferential option for children commits us to resist against socio-structural conditions that threaten and refuse children their possibilities to life in the present, while also recognizing the

[133] Ibid., 353. Emphasis his.

[134] Ibid., 354.

agency of children as protagonists of social change in advancing the open future of God's reign of justice in the here and not yet.

This call for a preferential option for children is echoed in an ethical concern for the global well-being of children whose right to life continues to be threatened by structural conditions of violence, poverty, malnutrition, and disease. Ethicist Ethna Regan argues, "Children have become a new measure of justice for the church *ad intra*, a measure that will determine our credibility to speak on matters of justice for children, born and unborn, in a world where poor children continue to suffer from having too much to bear and from being given too little to develop properly."[135] This call of justice for children has perhaps been amplified with the promulgation of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) in 1989. The UNCRC articulates a social framework that addresses the social suffering of the world's children with a set of protective and participation rights to attend to their welfare while promoting their capacity for self-determination. The language of rights for children has a complicated history and it remains controversial, especially when it pertains to their rights to public participation.[136] A detailed engagement with the complexities of the UNCRC, however, is beyond the scope of this dissertation. Rather, I highlight the UNCRC with the broader purpose of considering how it has challenged Christianity to examine the breadth and depth of its tradition for sources to reclaim a preferential option for children in mission

[135] Ethna Regan, "Barely Visible: The Child in Catholic Social Teaching," *Heythrop Journal* 55, no. 6 (2014): 1030.

[136] For a discussion on the theoretical controversies and historical development of the idea of children's rights, see John Wall, *Children's Rights: Today's Global Challenge* (New York: Rowan & Littlefield, 2017), 17-67. See also Douglas Sturm, "On the Suffering and Rights of Children: Toward a Theology of Childhood Liberation," *Cross Currents* 42, no. 2 (1992): 163-170 for a discussion on the philosophical traditions that undergird the interpretation of protection and participation rights in the UNCRC.

that serves the creation of a more just society. This examination must also challenge Christians to confront the adultism in their religious tradition. Adultism, as explored further in Chapter Three, is a form of structural dominance that adults have over children.

1.3.2 Responding to the Call of Children to Life through Teaching

Huebner writes, "To accept the vocation of a teacher is to answer the call of children and young people."[137] Teaching is not reduced to a mere transmission of knowledge and skills as if it were value-free. It is an ethical practice responding to the vocational call of children to life in dignity with others in compassion and courage. From the standpoint of a preferential option for children, the call to teach as caring for children also extends to countering and transforming those structural conditions antithetical to the human flourishing of children as whole persons created in God's image and likeness. It calls for an incarnational presence in teaching that is affected by and affecting of the social realities of children such that "care must give rise to a cry for justice."[138] This is significant in light of the structural injustices experienced by children in schools.

Schools as the main educational sites for children are paradoxical spaces. They reproduce the harmful effects of social inequalities seen in society while bearing the promise of overcoming them. As psychologist Penelope Leach sharply observes: "We make children go to school, leaving them no options, no appeal, but we do not insist that somehow or other schools must be places where everyone can feel safe and each valued individual can flourish."[139] Indeed, not every child experiences school positively.

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[137] Huebner, "Teaching as a Vocation," 380.

[138] Sturm, "On the Suffering and Rights of Children: Toward a Theology of Childhood Liberation," 150.

[139] Penelope Leach, *Children First: What Society Must Do – and Is Not Doing – for Children Today* (New York: Vintage Books, 1995), 159.

School violence continues to be a problem that has deleterious effects on the well-being of children. Bullying is one such form of violence common in schools. According to a UNICEF report in 2017 on violence against children, approximately 130 million students worldwide between the ages of 13 and 15 experienced bullying.[140] In the United States, children between the ages of 6 and 17 have reported being bullied as their top worry in school safety, based on the Children's Defense Fund's Parent and Child Trends survey by YouGov in 2018.[141] Bullying takes the form of racism, sexism, homophobia, and any targeting of some difference as minoritized. The GLSEN's National School Climate in 2017 reported that a "sizeable number of LGBTQ students were also bullied or harassed at school based on other characteristics – 26.9% based on religion, 25.6% based on actual or perceived race or ethnicity, and 25.5% based on actual or perceived disability."[142] School shootings are another form of violence that threatens the safety of children. UNICEF reported that out of the total number of fifty-nine school shootings documented in fourteen countries between November 1991 and December 2016, nearly three in four happened in the United States.[143] School shootings are also the second most common fear expressed by children in the United States, who also wish that adults do more to address gun violence.[144]

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[140] United Nations Children's Fund, *A Familiar Face: Violence in the Lives of Children and Adolescents* (New York: UNICEF, 2017), 38. https://data.unicef.org/resources/a-familiar-face/#.

[141] Children's Defense Fund, "School Shootings Spark Everyday Worries: Children and Parents Call for Safe Schools and Neighborhoods," September 2018: 1, https://www.childrensdefense.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/09/YouGov-SafeSchools-Final-Sep-18-2018-1.pdf.

[142] Joseph G. Kosciw, Emily A. Greytak, Adrian D. Zongrone, Caitlin M. Clark, Nhan L. Truong, *The 2017 National School Climate Survey: The experiences of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer youth in our nation's schools* (New York: GLSEN, 2018), xix, https://www.glsen.org/research/2017-national-school-climate-survey-0.

[143] United Nations Children's Fund, *A Familiar Face,* 43. UNICEF defines school shootings as "involving two or more victims, with at least one fatality." The fourteen countries documented were from Europe, North America, South America, East Asia, Southern Africa and the Middle East.

[144] Children's Defense Fund, "School Shootings Spark Everyday Worries," 1-2.

Connected to the experience of violence is child poverty. In the United States, child poverty persists as a crisis. In 2018, the child poverty rate is scandalously high at 16%, making them the age group with the highest percentage of impoverished people in a country that is regarded as developed. Nearly 11.9 million children were poor, with children of color (73%) continuing to suffer disproportionately.[145] It is these children and their families in lower income households – many of whom are Black and Hispanic - who are more likely to be living with neighborhood violence that becomes a source of stress and anxiety.[146] The debilitating effect that this has on the mental and emotional well-being of children also affects their educational achievement. More significantly, beneath this issue of unequal educational achievement is the widening opportunity gap between children due to deepened racial and socioeconomic segregation in American society at large.[147]

Disparities in educational opportunities occur in the context of consumer culture, which, as discussed earlier, promotes the idea that the market would distribute education as a product efficiently to meet the public want for diverse choices. The market, however, is limiting when it comes to addressing equity in education. The logic of the market reduces children to commodities; it regards them as an economic burden and reduces their future to become an asset as producer and consumer. As Roche points out, corporate

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[145] Children's Defense Fund, *The State of America's Children 2020* (Washington, DC: CDF, 2020), 12: "Children are considered poor if they live in a family with an annual income below the Federal Poverty Line of $25,701 for a family of four, which amounts to less than $2,142 a month, $494 a week or $70 a day."

[146] Children's Defense Fund, "School Shootings Spark Everyday Worries," 2. As reported, about "1 in 4 Black and Hispanic children worry about a shooting in their neighborhood, compared with 16 percent of White children."

[147] Robert D. Putnam, *Our Kids: The American Dream in Crisis* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2015), 160-184; Children's Defense Fund, *The State of America's Children 2020*, 24-25.

education reforms of public schools in the United States have not benefited children as they "are not considered in their own right and many of their needs are not addressed in any meaningful way."[148] She cites the analysis of education researcher Alex Molnar, who commented on a 1992 United States Labor Department report entitled "Learning for Living":

> Despite its advocacy of some sound teaching principles, the report gave no consideration to the aspirations and dreams of children. In fact, a person searching through corporate reform literature would, in general, have little hope of finding concern about educational equity for girls or minority group members or about the simple justice of spending at least the same amount of money to educating each child. Nor do corporate-sponsored reforms consider the possibility that perhaps we should provide decent, humane schools for all our children because we love them and because childhood in the United States should be a rich and rewarding time during which children learn to care for each other through the example of adults who care for them.[149]

Children are valued not for who they already are as human beings in the present, but for the adults they will become at the service of the market. Children face the increased pressure of having to outperform one another in studies and even at play, as their parents are propelled by competition in consumer culture to "seek advantage over other people's children."[150] Yet, this competition does not take place on a level playing field, with some children already finding themselves systematically disadvantaged by factors such as race, gender, class, and nationality. The commodification of education thus widens the inequitable treatment of children. Drawing on the writings of Jonathan Kozol, Roche illustrates how poor children in the United States, who are also mostly children of color, do not only have fewer resources but also experience schooling as "keeping them

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[148] Roche, *Children, Consumerism and the Common Good*, 39.

[149] Alex Molnar, "Giving Kids the Business", 4-5. Cited in Roche, *Children, Consumerism, and the Common Good*, 38-39.

[150] Roche, *Children, Consumerism, and the Common Good*, 95.

contained or training them to be dutiful workers in factories or service industries. Children of privilege on the other hand, are encouraged to be creative, and to strive for leadership in the professions."[151] Children of immigrants are also adversely affected by these structural inequities, with many today facing the psychological toll of fear that their parents would be arrested and deported for being undocumented.[152] These inequities are exacerbated with schools in high-poverty school districts remaining under-funded.[153]

Schools are, therefore, a barometer of the wider social climate; they are relational spaces fraught with tensions and anxieties brought in by the social divisions that children and their families are already experiencing in the larger community. Yet, schools can also be healing spaces when they serve a vision of justice that strives to restore the wholeness of children in their diversity as reflective of God's image. Roche proposes the common good in the Catholic tradition as an approach to structure this vision. The common good expresses a relational ethic grounded in a recognition of our human interdependency as social beings, and whose "dignity …is achieved only in community with others."[154] The common good points to a vision of God's justice whose intention for life's flourishing is constituted in the dignity of our belonging to one another as God's children participating to bring forth God's peaceable reign. It commits us to work responsibly toward mutuality that "understands one' own flourishing as deeply connected to the flourishing of

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[151] Ibid., 41.

[152] Sarah Elizabeth Richards, "How Fear of Deportation Puts Stress on Families," *The Atlantic*, March 22, 2017, https://www.theatlantic.com/family/archive/2017/03/deportation-stress/520008/.

[153] As reported in *The State of America's Children 2020*: "As of 2015, only twelve states distributed more funding to high-poverty school districts than love poverty districts. In many states, the wealthiest districts spent two to three times what poorer districts spent per pupil."

[154] David Hollenbach, S.J., "The Common Good, Pluralism, and Catholic Education," in *The Contemporary Catholic School: Context, Identity and Diversity*, ed. Terence McLaughlin, Joseph O'Keefe SJ and Bernadette O'Keeffe (London and New York: RoutledgeFalmer, 1996), 95.

others."[155] It is enacted through solidarity with the marginalized other who is the preferential site for God's revelation in Christ.

Noteworthy in Roche's proposal is that the common good must necessarily include children as full participants with adults in families and communities:

> The common good is not determined by any utilitarian calculation in which the greatest good for is sought at the expense of the few – which in reality often amounts to the greatest good for the wealthy few at the expense of the many poor. The individual is not lost or obscured in the context of the group but is rather welcomed as one who brings unique gifts to the pursuit of common goals and who receives the benefits of the pursuit itself and its fruits. In one important sense then there is no "common good for children." If it is authentically the common good that is sought, then that would by definition include children.[156]

Roche retrieves the common good as the ground to welcome and foster the participation of children in families and communities as social agents in their own right. Children do not only contribute to the common good when they become adults; they do so *as they are* while also growing to learn and live responsibly with others different from them. Children in service of the common good make a claim not only for society to protect them from being exploited in their social dependency, but also to see, hear, and engage them as interdependent members with adults in public life.[157] In shifting from an individualist to communal perspective, the common good "expand[s] the circle of solidarity beyond the children in our own homes and neighborhoods"; that is, it articulates a moral commitment to see other people's children as our own and as one of us.[158] In relation to education, the common good engenders a vision of schooling that resists the more limited anthropological vision of the child as burden, client, and future

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[155] Roche, *Children, Consumerism, and the Common Good*, 95.

[156] Ibid., 89.

[157] Ibid., 83.

[158] Ibid., 90. See also Putnam, *Our Kids*, 261.

worker in market-based reforms. Instead, it encourages children not only to be of service to others in their families and the wider community; it also engages their participation as social protagonists of justice in the schools themselves.[159] The common good in upholding the dignity of all persons makes a claim on schools to create the conditions for the flourishing of children's lives as prophetic work.

Roche's articulation of the common good as an ethic in education for the just treatment of children echoes my conception of a preferential option for children. She writes:

> An adequate vision of the common good must account for the vulnerabilities and the possibilities of children and childhood, and bring children in from the margins to the center to insure [sic] that our assumptions about the "common" good are not distorted by the perspective of those in positions of power and privilege. With children's experiences at the center, the common good of society allows for children as individuals, as members of families and other communities to flourish.[160]

Like Roche, I speak of a preferential option for children as a move to bring the struggle for social justice *for* and *with* children to the heart of our prophetic consciousness in the Christian call to mission in general, and to teaching in particular. To be clear, in my focus on grade school classroom teachers. I am not suggesting that one *has* to teach children in schools to demonstrate a preferential option for children. If it is indeed true that children as a third of all humanity are the world's future, it is then the moral obligation of all to wrestle with why and how children are still being systematically marginalized from participating in the future they are called to build in the here and now. It must disturb all to ask how even survival to adulthood remains a problem for some children. Neither am I implying that teachers in schools are the sole or the most important educators of children.

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[159] Ibid., 104.

[160] Ibid., 91.

They are significant partners with parents and other non-parenting adults in families and communities in educating the young.

I focus on classroom teachers because they have the power to influence and shape the character of children by initiating and building relationships of trust. This is a significant dimension in educating toward the common good that Roche leaves implicit. Teachers, however, have also contributed to what Chap Clark describes as "a culture of abandonment" that isolates children from adults with whom they want a committed relationship but have learned not to readily trust.[161] As Clark observes: "by the time adolescents enter high school, nearly every one has been subjected to a decade or more of adult-driven and adult-controlled programs, systems, and institutions that are primarily concerned with adults' agendas, needs, and dreams."[162] He further delineates three attitudes and behaviors of teachers that have contributed to the anonymity that students experience in school:

> (1) Most teachers believe that learning for its own sake should be enough to motivate students. (2) Far too many teachers pigeonhole students to the detriment of their developmental health and progress. (3) Teachers feel overburdened and overwhelmed, and the consequences of this spill over into their teaching.[163]

Naming these should not be seen as an indictment of teachers, many of whom are also working in conditions that do not adequately support them administratively, professionally and pastorally. These attitudes and behaviors are also manifestations of the

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[161] Chap Clark, *Hurt 2.0: Inside the World of Today's Teenagers* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2011), 27; 38-39.

[162] Ibid., 30.

[163] Ibid., 77-78.

soul-wearying effects of a managerial mindset due to the commodification of education, as discussed earlier.

Yet, this is where it becomes significant to recall teaching as a prophetic vocation to reflect on who is being taught, the good that is brought about and for whom. To be clear, awakening the prophetic in the call to teach is not a panacea to the structural injustices suffered by children in schools. Rather, my argument is that the prophetic awakens the possibilities for re-imagining the teacher-child relationship as foundational to the transformation of social structures that enable the human flourishing of children. To educate children to serve the common good makes a demand on teachers to relate justly with children. As I will discuss in Chapter Four, this sense of what I call *just presence* is relationally ordered around whether and how teachers see the full humanity of children in their complexity by being with them. Teachers begin to do this when they learn to listen to children as people with agency shaped by and shaping of their social contexts with adults. Listening is at the heart of building trustworthy relationships of belonging in which teachers accompany children to recognize, embrace and nurture their giftedness in the now for the life of the world. As Clark notes, "All kids, regardless of their background, family, ethnicity, gifts or power, are desperate for a society that will help them discover who they are, what gifts and voice they have, and how they belong in a multigenerational community that values all."[164]

To educate toward the common good is to teach for belonging, which liberates children not only from dehumanizing conditions of impoverishment but also for shared participation in a community of persons that realizes the dignity of who they are as God's

[164] Ibid., 186.

children.[165] Where I go further than Roche in this dissertation is to mine the Christian mystical tradition (and more specifically the Lasallian tradition) for a spirituality that grounds this prophetic dimension of teaching in service of children.

1.4 Uprising of God's Spirit: Cultivating a Christian Mysticism of Teaching

It is instructive to lay out my understanding of mysticism in the Christian faith before proceeding to discuss the Lasallian tradition. Theologian Janet Ruffing expresses succinctly the many interpretations of mysticism as:

> a subjective and mainly affective phenomenon, a particular form of discourse, an element of lived religion, a source for doing theology, the experience of a kind of intersubjectivity, and a set of texts from a variety of traditions requiring a complex hermeneutics. [166]

A theme that cuts through these varied interpretations is the connection between mysticism and social justice as a dimension of lived discipleship. More specifically, I explore this connection in relation to teaching children as an incarnational act of prophetic witness in the public. The depth and force of a Christian spirituality for teaching lies precisely in the dialectical flow of God's Spirit between the mystical and prophetic.[167]

Perhaps, rather than what *is*, Christian mysticism is more constructively imagined through images that capture a glimpse of God's activity within and between us in

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[165] I allude to Hollenbach's discussion on the biblical understanding of liberation in relation to the common good in "The Common Good, Pluralism, and Catholic Education": "the biblical understanding of freedom, portrayed in the account of the Exodus that is so central in liberation theology today, is not simply a freedom from constraint but freedom for participation in the shared life of a people. Liberation is *from* bondage *into* community." (95)

[166] Janet K. Ruffing, RSM, "Introduction," in *Mysticism and Social Transformation*, ed. Janet K. Ruffing, RSM (New York: Syracuse University Press, 2001), 1.

[167] Philip F. Sheldrake, "Christian Spirituality as a Way of Living Publicly: A Dialectic of the Mystical and Prophetic," in *Minding the Spirit: The Study of Christian Spirituality*, ed. Elizabeth A. Dreyer and Mark S. Burrows (Baltimore, Maryland: John Hopkins University Press, 2005), 283.

creation. Jonathan Kozol, writer and advocate for social equity in US public education, recounted a conversation he had on God with Stephanie, one of the children he knew in the poor neighborhood at the South Bronx:

> I asked her [Stephanie] what she believed would make the world a better place. "What would make the world better is God's heart," she answered. "I know God's heart is already in the world. But I would like if He would … *push* the heart more into it. Not just halfway. Push it more!"[168]

Stephanie's response leads us to imagine mysticism as a cultivated awareness of God's presence in the everyday. It is a presence rhythmically imagined as the pulse of God's heart in the world. Yet, it is not enough to know that God's heart is in the world as the source of all life. Stephanie calls our attention to God's pushing action. The mystical, I suggest, is this attentiveness to the push of God's Spirit from within that is simultaneously felt as a pull from without toward a creative newness in the here and not yet. Tacey writes, mysticism "is the awareness that, even before we set out on our quest, something is already seeking us. The mystic is the one who becomes aware that, beyond personal striving, and deeper than aspiration, there is a hidden movement toward us."[169] The mystic is thus a discerner of the movement of God's spirit who leads one out to encounter another, but from an awareness of being found by a greater love to which we belong as one. This is a greater love broken and poured out from God's heart in and through the Incarnation and Passion of Jesus Christ. Christian mysticism is intrinsic to vocation as an incarnational expression of life in the Spirit. Theologian Maria Clara Lucchetti Bingemer puts this well: "What characterizes Christian mysticism is not

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[168] Jonathan Kozol, *Ordinary Resurrections: Children in the Years of Hope* (New York: Perennial, 2001), 72. Emphasis his.

[169] Tacey, *The Postsecular Sacred*, 46.

immaterial sublimity, but sanctification of and in the flesh."[170] This sanctification takes root in "living publicly," which according to Sheldrake, "implies real encounters, learning how to be truly hospitable to what is different and unfamiliar, and establishing and experiencing a common life."[171]

The mystical is thus intertwined with the prophetic; both are mutually constitutive of each other in pushing the birth of Christian witness.[172] This connection is emphasized in liberation theologies committed to the risky task of doing justice as enfleshing the fidelity of God's love in the face of human suffering. Theologian Gustavo Gutiérrez writes on the complementary relationship between the mystical and prophetic: "Mystical language expresses the gratuitousness of God's love; prophetic language expresses the demands this love makes."[173] Both form a twinned dynamic in which conversion of heart is conversion to the neighbor as the poor and marginalized. The prophet in being drawn to friendship with God in the Spirit shares the firm tenderness of God's heart "responsive to the other who is excluded or in pain, sick, oppressed, or overburdened."[174] The prophetic task that pushes back against forces that dehumanize is rooted in and energized by an intimacy with God. Theologian Dorothee Söelle pushes this further: "Resistance is

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[170] Maria Clara Lucchetti Bingemer, "Mystical Theology in Contemporary Perspective," in *The Oxford Handbook of Mystical Theology*, ed. Edward Howells and Mark Allen McIntosh (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2020), chap. 5: 4, https://www.oxfordhandbooks.com/view/10.1093/oxfordhb/9780198722380.001.0001/oxfordhb-9780198722380-e-5.

[171] Sheldrake, "Christian Spirituality as a Way of Living Publicly," 290.

[172] Robert J. Egan, "The Mystical and the Prophetic: Dimensions of Christian Existence," in *Christianity and the Mystical*, ed. Andrew Louth (England: The Way, 2001), 102-103.

[173] Gustavo Gutiérrez, *Essential Writings*, ed. James B. Nickoloff (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1996), 313.

[174] Egan, "The Mystical and the Prophetic." 100.

not the outcome of mysticism, resistance is mysticism."[175] What she means is that social action against forces that trivialize or deny life is inseparable from that oneness with God as life-in-the-Spirit that mysticism awakens and propels.

Educating toward justice for children calls for a prophetic mysticism of teaching that serves the liberation of children from conditions that trivialize, violate and deny their intrinsic human dignity as God's children. At the root of these conditions is the treatment of children as nonbeings with some more so than others, depending on their race, ethnicity, gender, and socio-economic class among many other identity markers. It is this presumption of nonbeing that belittles the possibility of children as already agents, *and* who also require the accompaniment of responsible adults to guide and model their commitments to creating a just and compassionate society. To educate toward justice is to commit to the task of social and cultural transformation, which according to Purpel, "has to do with a fundamental change in moral and spiritual consciousness in which we reject the excesses of individualism, materialism, competitiveness, and acquisitiveness."[176] Yet this change must begin with teachers who are both the gatekeepers and reformers in education. Purpel writes:

> As educators we must also confront ourselves as both oppressor and oppressed. We must have the courage not only to examine the nature and impact of the culture but also to consider how we as individuals reflect the values and norms of the culture. As educators we often are the system, even as we are both its cause and effect.[177]

At stake here is the integrity of the teacher as a person and moral witness when upholding the common human dignity of all students in their differences. Teaching with integrity is

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[175] Dorothee Söelle, *The Silent Cry: Mysticism and Resistance*, trans. Barbara and Martin Rumscheidt (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2001), 199.

[176] Purpel and McLaurin, Jr., *Reflections on the Moral and Spiritual Crisis in Education*, 276.

[177] Ibid., 73.

difficult work. It is spiritual work that demands educators to wrestle with their frustrations and failures but without losing hope. It is risking the vulnerability to be humble without falling into despair, "for it is one thing to be realistic and honest about our capacities and another thing to surrender to a consciousness of determinism and fatalism."[178]

This is where the retrieval of an everyday prophetic mysticism in Christian sources of spirituality is vital for educators. It serves as "spiritual capital" that guides educators to discern, deepen, and sustain their commitment to teaching children as a prophetic vocation in the public square.[179] It integrates moral depth to Hargreaves and Fullan's conception of professional capital in transforming teaching, as discussed earlier. More significantly, cultivating a prophetic mysticism of teaching attends to the uprising of God's Spirit that energizes and expands the imagination of what teaching could be as a vocation. Imagination is forming and transforming of one's moral commitments. It also "shapes the possibilities from which the choices for perceiving, knowing and acting are selected."[180] Teaching is transformed when teachers are able to re-imagine their ways of relating to students and subject matter beyond the technical.

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[178] Ibid., 283.

[179] Gerald Grace, "Renewing spiritual capital: An urgent priority for the future of Catholic education internationally," in *Faith, Mission and Challenge in Catholic Education* (London and New York: Routledge, 2016), 39. [Originally published in *International Studies in Catholic Education*, 2, no. 2 (2010), 117-128.] The concept of 'spiritual capital' was initially theorized for Catholic education. It is defined as that "which has been the animating, inspirational and dynamic spirit which has empowered the mission of Catholic education internationally largely (although not exclusively) through the work of religious congregations with missions in education in the past." I am using 'spiritual capital' in a more expansive way; that is, spiritual sources in Catholic education (such as the Lasallian tradition) have a value for education as a whole.

[180] Dwayne E. Huebner, "Challenges Bequeathed [1996]," in *The Lure of the Transcendent: Collected Essays by Dwayne E. Huebner*, ed. Vikki Hillis (Mahwah, NJ and London: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, 1999), 436.

Theologian and religious educator Maria Harris argues that the mystical-contemplative is intrinsic to teaching because teaching is fundamentally an "activity of religious imagination":

> Teaching, when seen as an activity of religious imagination, is the incarnation of subject matter in ways that lead to the revelation of subject matter. At the heart of this revelation is the discovery that human beings are the primary subjects of all teaching, subjects who discover themselves as possessing the grace of power, especially the power of re-creation, not only of themselves, but of the world in which they live.[181]

Teaching is as such a spiritual practice of revelation that is relationally witnessed between teacher and student around a subject matter. "Revelation," she writes, "is a *relation* between subjects, knowing subjects. Revelation is a meeting between persons."[182] Such a perspective emphasizes receptivity to divine mystery as the dynamo of teaching. Teaching is first of all learning to wait on mystery and see what it discloses anew about the subject matter and the claim that it has on the lives of teacher and student in a moment of encounter. This process of coming to see anew is learning to imagine. Christian sources of spirituality offer a rich reservoir of images to fund this religious imagination.

I highlight the importance of retrieving a Christian mysticism that ignites the prophetic dimension of this religious imagination in teaching. Biblical scholar Walter Brueggemann explains this "prophetic imagination" as evoking "a consciousness and perception alternative to the consciousness and perception of the dominant culture around us."[183] I propose a preferential option for children as a principle for structuring this prophetic imagination in teaching, which resists the systemic marginalization of

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[181] Maria Harris, *Teaching and Religious Imagination* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1987), xv.

[182] Ibid., 62.

[183] Walter Brueggemann, *The Prophetic Imagination* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2001), 3.

children's humanity in dominant Western culture. A mysticism that energizes this prophetic stance calls teachers to cultivate a contemplative way of being that does not only receive and attend to children in the complex contextual realities of their lives, but also behold them as the revelation of God as mystery. Huebner writes:

> We can help the child only if we respond to him [sic] also as a subject of mystery – producing wonder and awe in us. We can help only if we walk together with children, though time, with faith and love, made more effective through knowledge, but not replaced by knowledge.[184]

To be clear, contemplating the mystery of the child must not be used to mystify and minimize the situations of impoverishment suffered by children. Rather, mystery carries educators to face squarely the reality of children's lives but with hope that God is present in and with them. That contemplative sense of "wonder and awe" at the mystery of the child must also awaken educators to conditions that dehumanize and violate the fragile dignity of children's lives. Missiologist Anthony Gittins speaks of Christian discipleship as being stirred by "God's disturbing presence within ourselves."[185] Cultivating a prophetic mysticism for teaching children calls educators to be open to the disturbance of the Spirit rising within them through their encounters with children. This is because by the mystery of the incarnation, God steps out of God-self not only to be with the poor, but also *in* the least as a child. This revelation must make an ethical claim on teachers to be present and act in courageous ways that prioritize and elevate the human dignity of children in education.

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[184] Dwayne E. Huebner, "The Capacity for Wonder and Education [1959]," in *The Lure of the Transcendent: Collected Essays by Dwayne E. Huebner*, ed. Vikki Hillis (Mahwah, NJ and London: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, 1999), 8.

[185] Gittins, *A Presence That Disturbs: A Call to Radical Discipleship*, 43.

1.5 Conclusion

In this chapter, I argued for the need to re-awaken an incarnational spiritual vision of teaching as a counterpoint to the soul weariness in our contemporary educational landscape in the West. Conceiving of teaching as a Christian vocation expresses this incarnational vision. Vocation casts teaching as a living practice of faith responsive to a faithful God who calls all to life. In articulating a relational theology of teaching as a vocation, I argued for a preferential option for children in forming the prophetic consciousness of those called to teach. The call to teach is in other words at the service of God's mission to educate toward the human flourishing of children. Cultivating a prophetic mysticism is vital in nourishing this call. Among the many reasons for a Christian mysticism of teaching, this is the most important: the recognition that education is God's mission to which we are called to serve as teachers. This does not imply passive resignation or an abandonment of ethical commitments. Rather, it calls teachers to be boldly humble in entrusting themselves, their students, and their work to God in whom nothing is lost. A Christian mysticism of teaching calls educators to de-center themselves and put God in the center. It reminds educators that teaching that redeems is fired by the closeness of a mystical love rooted in God's faithfulness and creativity amongst human beings in creation.

Huebner leaves us with a provocative image of John the Baptist as a model for the attitude of the teacher as prophet-mystic:

> God educates. We don't. But God can educate only if we hearken to John's call "Prepare ye the Way!" We participate in God's educational work by bringing under criticism our self made world, and by proclaiming God's presence. "… for you have one teacher." We are but the Teacher's servants.[186]

[186] Huebner, "Educational Activity and Prophetic Criticism," 400.

These words paint the prophetic witness of the teacher as a herald to God's coming, preparing the hearts of children to encounter God. Yet, this obliges the teacher to become aware of how s/he could be in God's way of encountering them – God's way of being Teacher revealed in Jesus Christ, who has come as a human child to learn with us. It is to the Lasallian tradition that I turn for deeper inspiration as to what this mystery of the Incarnation might mean for imagining a Christian mysticism of teaching that serves the liberation of children.

CHAPTER TWO

THE LASALLIAN EDUCATIONAL IMAGINATION

"Let us remember that we are in the Holy Presence of God" - this was an invocation we began with every morning at assembly when I was a student at a Lasallian school in Singapore. This practice is traced back to the first schools started by John Baptist de La Salle (1651-1719), founder of the Institute of the Christian Brothers in seventeenth century France. As Lasallian scholar Gerard Rummery recounts, a boy would ring a small bell every half-hour and say these words, which would be followed by a moment of silence.[1] The invocation was (and still is) a reminder that God is closely present and actively alive in the relationships between the teacher and the young.

This invocation remained with me when I went on to teach in a Catholic high school after graduating from college. Till this date, I still pray it as a student and educator of theology. It reminds me that God is the abiding reality wherein we find life as teachers and students along the journey of education. Remembrance of God's Presence is to live the Spirit that is presently and intensely alive in the relationships between teachers and students. At the heart of the Lasallian educational imagination is this: teaching is a spiritual practice of incarnational presence that is attentive to the movement of God's Spirit, who dynamically calls us to creative action for the salvation of students in general, and children in particular. As George Van Grieken puts it, "Lasallian pedagogy is Lasallian precisely *because of, not in spite of or along with*, its spiritual dimensions."[2]

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[1] Gerard Rummery, FSC, "Let Us Remember That We Are in The Holy Presence of God," *AXIS: Journal of Lasallian Higher Education* 8, no. 3 (2017): 75.

[2] George Van Grieken, FSC, *Touching the Hearts of Students: Characteristics of Lasallian Schools* (Landover, Maryland: Christian Brothers Publications, 1999), 123. Emphasis his.

I provide an overview of the Lasallian educational imagination, with a focus on drawing out what I conceive as a preferential option for children in discerning the vocation of teaching as a human act of faith in zeal. I propose that what is worth reclaiming from the Lasallian tradition is a "mystical realism"[3] that integrates contemplation with the public activity of educating children as an act of prophetic witness. The Lasallian tradition offers a prophetic mysticism that discerns and energizes the vocation of teaching from the standpoint of God's solidarity with children as poor and marginalized.

2.1 The Prophetic Mysticism of Faith in De La Salle's Missionary Imagination of Christian Education

The life of John Baptist De La Salle is recalled as the primary context for understanding the spiritual legacy of the Lasallian tradition in Christian education. The Lasallian educational imagination is as much an ongoing articulation through time of De La Salle's faith journey as the founder of the Institute of the Christian Brothers. Several biographies have been written on De La Salle, alongside much critical commentary on biases implicit in their sources and approaches.[4] It is beyond the scope of this dissertation

[3] Michel Sauvage, FSC, "The Gospel Journey of John Baptist de La Salle (1651-1719)," trans. Luke Salm, FSC, in *Spirituality in the Time of John Baptist de La Salle,* ed. Robert C. Berger, FSC (Landover, Maryland: Lasallian Publications, 1999), 224. [Originally delivered as a presentation in a series of lectures on French spirituality sponsored by the Center of Saint Louis of the French, Rome, Italy, December 11, 1984.]

[4] Jean-Baptiste Blain wrote the earliest biography of De La Salle in 1733. See Jean-Baptiste Blain, *The Life of John Baptist de La Salle, Founder of the Institute of the Brothers of the Christian Schools. A Biography in Three Books*, trans. Richard Arnandez, FSC, ed. Luke Salm, FSC (Landover, Maryland: Lasallian Publications, 2000). For an important critical review of Blain and other early biographers following him, see André Rayez, S.J., "Lasallian Studies in the Mid-Twentieth Century," trans. Philip Smith, FSC in *Spirituality in the Time of John Baptist de La Salle*, ed. Robert C. Berger, FSC (Landover, Maryland: Lasallian Publications, 1999), 81-131 [Published originally under the title, "Études lasalliennes," in *Revue d'Ascétique et de Mystique*, tome 28 (1952), pp. 18-63]. For contemporary historical research and biography of the Founder, see Luke Salm, FSC, *The Work is Yours: The Life of Saint John Baptist de La Salle* (Romeoville, Ill: Christian Brothers Publications, 1989); Alfred Calcutt, FSC, *De La Salle: A City Saint and the Liberation of the Poor through Education* (Oxford: De La Salle Publications, 1993).

to review extensively this literature. Given my interest in a spirituality for teaching, my aim is more modest in drawing out key highlights in De La Salle's life that shaped his emphasis on teacher formation and his mission-oriented vision of education. More particularly, the narrative I present highlights his prophetic mysticism of faith that lies at the heart of his theological-spiritual response to educational reform in seventeenth-century France. As historian and biographer W. J. Battersby noted:

> The most outstanding feature in the spirituality of De La Salle is undoubtedly the Spirit of Faith. A considerable portion of the Saint's ascetical writings is taken up with the explanation of it, and this, in fact, forms the most original part of his work.[5]

Born in Rheims on April 30, 1651, De La Salle was the eldest of eleven children in an affluent family. He was drawn to the priesthood from an early age, such that he received the tonsure at the age of eleven and appointed a canon on July 9, 1666. De La Salle had an illustrious educational background. Although the deaths of his parents disrupted his theological formation at the Seminary of Saint Sulpice and at the Sorbonne in Paris, he resumed his studies at the University of Reims and earned a doctorate in theology in 1680. This was in the midst of being a guardian for his brothers and sisters. De La Salle was ordained as a priest on April 9, 1678.

On May 15, 1950, fifty years after his canonization in Rome by Pope Leo XIII, De La Salle was proclaimed "special Patron under God of all educators of children and youth of both sexes, whether cleric or lay."[6] Yet, it was never the intention of De La Salle to found a lay religious teaching order for the Christian education of poor boys in

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[5] W. J. Battersby, *De La Salle: Saint and Spiritual Writer* (New York: Longmans Green, 1950), 111.

[6] Jacques Goussin, FSC, *The Mission of Human and Christian Education: The Gospel Journey of John Baptist de La Salle*, trans. Finian Allman, FSC, Christian Moe, FSC, and Julian Watson, FSC, ed. Gerard Rummery, FSC (Melbourne: Lasallian Education Services, 2003), 159.

seventeenth century France. In fact, he first saw his involvement in education as primarily administrative and temporary. As De La Salle wrote in retrospect:

> Indeed, if I had ever thought that the care I was taking of the schoolmasters out of pure charity would ever have made it my duty to live with them, I would have dropped the whole project. For since, naturally speaking, I considered the men whom I was obliged to employ in the schools at the beginning as being inferior to my valet, the mere thought that I would have to live with them would have been insupportable to me. In fact, I experienced a great deal of unpleasantness when I first had them come to my house. This lasted for two years. *It was undoubtedly for this reason that God, who guides all things with wisdom and serenity, whose way it is not to force the inclinations of persons, willed to commit me entirely to the development of the schools. God did this in an imperceptible way and over a long period of time, so that one commitment led to another in a way that I did not foresee in the beginning.*[7]

These words are significant in highlighting the spirit of faith as the foundation of De La Salle's prophetic mysticism. This faith has its source and end in God's providence, a theme prominent in Lasallian spirituality. To be clear, God's providence is understood here not in the sense of a distant and all controlling monarch with an unchanging plan for each person. Rather, as I will illustrate in this recount, what is recoverable from De La Salle's journey is a dynamic relationship with a God, who is profoundly present and active in the concrete human interrelationships that unfold in the ebb and flow of life. What marked his experience was an "imperceptible" but sure movement of self-surrender to the Spirit. This movement accompanied a conversion to the poor. André Rayez well pointed out:

> Shaped by the effects of providential events, John Baptist De La Salle never turned a deaf ear to the calls of the Spirit … This attitude of faith inclined him more and more toward a spirituality of self-abandonment which clearly characterizes his actions as a founder and also his ascetic and mystical life.[8]

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[7] Jean-Baptiste Blain, *The Life of John Baptist de La Salle*, *Book 1* (Landover, Md.: Lasallian Publications, 2000), 79-80.

[8] André Rayez, S.J., "The Spirituality of Self-Abandonment: Saint John Baptist de La Salle," trans. Philip Smith, FSC, in *Spirituality in the Time of John Baptist de La Salle*, ed. Robert C. Berger, FSC (Landover, Maryland: Lasallian Publications, 1999), 134. [Originally published under the title, "La spiritualitié d'abandon chez saint Jean-Baptiste de La Salle, in *Revue d'Ascétique et de Mystique*, tome 31 (1952).]

Faith drew De La Salle to live into God's providence more deeply, not only as the ever-present creative source of life, but also with the One who never forsakes. In fact, it is this faith that compelled De La Salle to follow the example of a God who, through the mystery of the Incarnation, steps out of God-self to be with the poor. This is the founding spirit of Lasallian faith that integrates the two worlds of education and Christianity, with the vocation of teaching conceived missionally as an act of Christian discipleship.

2.1.1 Stumbling into the World of Educating the Poor

Education in seventeenth century France was situated in a period in which the Catholic Church and the State under the reign of Louis XIV were closely intertwined. In fact, the Church controlled the system of education in France. In the context of the Counter-Reformation, the Church regarded schools as instrumental in the teaching of Catholic doctrine, in addition to their task of forming a civil and responsible citizenry.[9] While royal policy regulated teacher salaries and decreed that boys were to be taught by men and girls by women, the daily supervision of schools was an ecclesiastical function; that is, the bishop was the local superintendent of public instruction, and his authorization was required for anyone who wished to teach.[10] It is important to note that the bureaucratic complexity of the education system was highly clerical.

At the same time, the poor had limited access to opportunities for schooling. Educating the poor was also a contentious issue because the dominant belief then was that human inequality was innate, and that the socio-economic hierarchy was inevitable.

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[9] John Mark Crawford, FSC, "Extending Lasallian Charism: Its Texts and Lived Contexts for the Spirituality of Teachers" (PhD diss., Boston College, 2008), 32.

[10] Salm, *The Work is Yours*, 48.

On the one hand, there were proponents like Charles Démia of Lyon who pleaded urgently for schools to educate the city's poor children as a matter of enabling upward social mobility. On the other hand, opponents like La Chalotais argued against any generalized instruction of the poor: "The good of society demands that knowledge of the people not surpass that which is necessary for their work. Each man who looks beyond his sad trade will not dedicate himself to it with diligence and patience."[11] Opposition also came from parents, who "were not aware of the importance and necessity of sending their children to school, which they themselves had not attended."[12]

Even with the greater push for obligatory elementary schooling under Louis XIV, the system unfortunately reproduced structures of social inequalities. There were four types of primary schooling.[13] First, children from wealthy families had the privilege of having private tutors for their primary education before entering colleges that offered classical and philosophical courses to prepare them for study in a university. This was the way that De La Salle himself was educated. Second, there were the "Little Schools" attended by children of the bourgeoisie who had no intention to enter the university. While these "Little Schools" were expected to provide free education for those certified poor, the teachers were not interested in reaching out to them. The poor also stayed away because of their felt-sense of shame. The writing masters, who were a guild of professional scribes protected by the civil authorities, provided the third type of schooling. They frequently fought with the teachers in the "Little Schools" for monopoly

[11] La Chalotais, cited in Edgard Hengemüle, FSC, *Lasallian Education: What Kind of Education is It?*, trans. Rose M. Beal, ed. William Mann, FSC (Minnesota, Winona: Institute for Lasallian Studies of Saint Mary's University, 2016), 16. For a further discussion on contending views around educating the poor in seventeenth to eighteenth century France, see also p. 14-18.

[12] Hengemüle, FSC, *Lasallian Education,* 14.

[13] Salm, *The Work is Yours*, 49-51.

over the teaching of writing. The fourth and last group were the charity schools for the children of the poor, who had been "[e]xcluded by choice and necessity from both the university and the Little Schools."[14] These charity schools were set up in response to the Council of Trent (1545-1563) that had mandated free parish schools for the poor. However, these schools were disorganized, and staffed by teachers who were uncommitted and poorly trained. An alternative for poor, abandoned children would be to attend school at the General Hospice or the poorhouses, where conditions were worse than the charity schools.

It was in such a social setting of class inequality that De La Salle discerned a great need for education to the poor. In particular, his attention was drawn to their children, as stated in the *Rule* for the Institute of the Brothers in 1718:

> The necessity of this Institute is very great, because the working class and the poor, being usually little instructed and occupied all day in gaining a livelihood for themselves and their children, cannot give them the instruction they need and a respectable Christian education. nor a suitable education. It was to procure this advantage for the children of the working class and of the poor that the Christian Schools were established.[15]

Yet, this necessity was something that De La Salle came to see progressively, while being drawn into a larger movement of educational reform for the poor that he had not started.[16]

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[14] Ibid., 50.

[15] John Baptist de La Salle, "Chapter 1 The Purpose and the Necessity of This Institute in the Rule of 1718," in *Rule and Foundational Documents*, trans. and ed. Augustine Loes, FSC, and Ronald Isetti (Landover, Md.: Lasallian Publications, 2002), par. 4-5. For a more detailed description of who these children were in the first Christian Brothers schools, see Bruno Alpago, FSC, "The Target Group," in *Lasallian Studies No. 17: That Your School Runs Well: Approach to Lasallian Educational Model,* ed. Pedro Maria Gil, FSC and Diego Muñoz, FSC (Rome, Italy: International Council of Lasallian Research and Resources, 2013), 21- 28; Edward A. Fitzpatrick, *La Salle: Patron of All Teachers* (Milwaukee: Bruce Publishing Company, 1951), 206-208.

[16] Salm, *The Work is Yours*, 51-54. Salm discusses the influences of Father Pierre Fourier (1565-1640) who founded the Congregation of Notre Dame at Nancy; Jacques de Bethencourt whose book *L'Escole Paroissiale* (1654) influenced the pedagogical reform of parish schools; and Charles Démia who, in 1666, pleaded passionately for the need to educate the children of the poor in his "Remonstrances."

He first became involved in education through his spiritual director Nicholas Roland, who also founded the Congregation of the Sisters of the Holy Child Jesus to care for orphans and the instruction of poor girls. De La Salle's commitment to help administer the work of the Sisters after Roland's death led to his fortuitous meeting with Adrien Nyel in 1679, at the doorstep of the Convent in Rheims.

Adrian Nyel, a layperson, had come to Rheims with plans to open a school for poor boys. When De La Salle knew about this, he invited Nyel to stay at his house. "For De La Salle this act of generosity proved the opening wedge which Divine Providence drove into his hitherto peaceful existence," wrote historian and biographer William Battersby.[17] What began as an offer of support to Nyel's project gradually became a personal involvement in organizing and forming the teachers and schoolmasters, who were "slovenly men of marginal intelligence."[18] On Easter in 1680, De La Salle invited these men for meals at his family table, which became occasions for him to provide them with spiritual counsel, as well as practical ideas to improve their pedagogy. This led him to undertake the next decisive move of having the teachers stay with him, an act deemed as transgressive in a class-conscious society. Consequently, family relatives questioned De La Salle's suitability as a guardian to care for his younger siblings. "Some of them were disgusted at John's brothers [Jean-Louis, Peter and Jean-Remy] being in the same house as these masters, and there was move to take them out of his control," writes Alfred Calcutt.[19] Yet, it was in this "cultural shock" between the two opposing worlds of the common poor and grand bourgeoisie that he discerned the recognizable beginnings of

[17] Salm, *The Work is Yours*, 61.

[18] Van Grieken, *Touching the Hearts of Students,* 23.

[19] Calcutt, *De La Salle: A City Saint and the Liberation of the Poor through Education*, 140.

a call to the mission of Christian education.[20] He resolutely left his home to live with the poor schoolmasters in a rented place.

Another significant turning point happened with De La Salle relinquishing his canonry and giving his wealth away to the poor. This came about after he moved in with the schoolmasters who became increasingly anxious about their future. Even with De La Salle's exhortation of the Gospel to trust in Divine Providence, they remained unconvinced and rejected it, saying:

> You speak with inspiration amid your ease for you lack nothing. You have a rich canonry and an equally fine inheritance; you enjoy security and protection against indigence. If our work fails, you risk nothing … Where can we go, and what can we do if the schools fail or if people tire of us? Destitution will be our only portion, and begging our only means to relieve it.[21]

Ironically, it was these poor schoolmasters who were teaching De La Salle to live authentically in God's providence. They confronted him of his economic and religious privilege:

> I have been reduced to silence. As long as I am not poor myself, I have no right to speak the language of perfection, as I once did on the subject of poverty. I cannot speak of abandonment to Providence, so long as I am comfortably insured against penury, nor about perfect confidence in God, if my sound investments leave me no reasons for worry.[22]

Père Barré, who had encouraged De La Salle to live with these poor schoolmasters, also advised him to entrust the foundation of gratuitous instruction in their schools to Divine Providence.[23] De La Salle finally cast his lot to associate himself with the poverty of these teachers by resigning from his canonry in 1683, and distributing his fortune to those

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[20] Sauvage, FSC, "The Gospel Journey of John Baptist de La Salle (1651-1719)," 230; 235.

[21] Blain, *The Life of John Baptist de La Salle Book 1*, 107.

[22] Ibid., 111.

[23] Battersby, *De La Salle: Saint and Spiritual Writer*, 66. For a discussion on Père Barré's spiritual influence on De La Salle, see Battersby, *De La Salle: Saint and Spiritual Writer,* 60-70. Père Barré was another prominent figure in providing schools for the poor, particularly girls

suffering from the great famine in 1684. For him, God's voice remained but the direction of its call had changed:

> Finally, since I no longer feel any attraction to the vocation of a canon, it would seem that it has already left me even before I have given it up. This calling is no longer for me. While I entered it through the right gate, indeed, it seems to me that God is opening another door before me today so that I may leave it. The same voice that called me to it seems to be calling me elsewhere.[24]

Central to De La Salle's stumbling from an aristocratic world into a world of poverty is a mysticism of faith. which practically orients him to surrender himself to a God who disrupts and meets him there in the poor. It is from the place of the poor that he discerned in faith the Spirit's movement that dared him to creative action in the social world.

2.1.2 Prophetic-Mystical Response to Educational Reform

De La Salle's social involvement in educating the poor, then, was first and foremost theological. By theological, I mean he engaged the task of educating the poor from a perspective of faith by discerning where "the hand of God" was leading him.[25] While De La Sa did not name his involvement as such, it emerged from his incarnational spiritual vision of education adapted from Bérullianism - a significant strand within the French School of spirituality in the seventeenth century that traces itself back to the mystical-theological thought of Cardinal Pierre de Bérulle (1575-1629).[26]

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[24] Blain, *The Life of John Baptist de La Salle Book 1*, 113.

[25] Ibid., 113.

[26] See Philip F. Sheldrake, "Seventeenth-Century French Spirituality," in *A Brief History of Spirituality* (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, 2007), 133-138. Sheldrake notes that there were many strands within the French school, one of which was the tradition associated with Pierre de Bérulle (1575-1629). He situates De La Salle in this tradition. In his introduction to *The French School of Spirituality and John Baptist De La Salle*, Yves Krumenacker prefers to use the term "Bérullianism" to describe the dynamic movement that consisted of Bérulle's followers: Condren, Bourgoing, the French Carmelites, Vincent de Paul, Louise de Marillac, Olier, Saint-Cyran, Jean Eudes. For a detailed discussion on Bérulle's spiritual thought, see Jean-Guy Rodrigue, FSC, "Religious Life in France During the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries," trans. Augustine Loes, FSC, in *Spirituality in the Time of John Baptist de La Salle,* ed. Robert C. Berger, FSC (Landover, Maryland: Lasallian Publications, 1999), 21-33.

To the extent that De La Salle received a Sulpician formation and maintained connections with his spiritual directors Louis Tronson and François Lechassier,[27] De La Salle's spirituality may be said to be Bérullian. After all, the Founder of the Sulpicians was Jean-Jacques Olier (1608-1657), a spiritual follower of Bérulle and leader in developing his thought.[28] The Bérullian strand of Christocentrism is strongly present in De La Salle's incarnational vision of education. His understanding of faith may be traced to Olier's conception as "the mainspring of the actions of all Christian people."[29] De La Salle's contemplative disposition of self-surrender to God's Providence echoes the Bérullian sense of becoming nothing in order to receive God fully,[30] though he is less extreme and more hopeful than Charles De Condren and Olier's accounts of self-annihilation.[31] Bérullian influence is also reflected in his devotion to the Holy Child Jesus.[32]

Yet, De La Salle was original not in developing but adapting Bérullian spirituality for the lay teachers of his time through his spiritual writings.[33] In fact, as theologian and Lasallian scholar Michel Sauvage observes, De La Salle "was original in the very eclecticism of his [spiritual] sources."[34] His creativity "comes through his ability to

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[27] Rodrigue, "Religious Life in France During the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries," 53.

[28] For a discussion on the life and contributions of Olier to the development of Bérullian spirituality, see Rodrigue, "Religious Life in France During the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries," 40-47.

[29] Ibid., 45.

[30] Ibid., 32.

[31] Ibid., 34-44.

[32] It is noteworthy that Battersby included a chapter in *De La Salle: Saint and Spiritual Writer* examining the significance of the Holy Child Jesus in De La Salle's piety. The theological significance of this devotion to the Holy Child Jesus and its contemporary implications for contemplating the lives of children in education will be discussed in Chapter Three and Five.

[33] Rodrigue, "Religious Life in France During the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries," 54.

[34] Sauvage, "The Gospel Journey of John Baptist de La Salle," 223.

assimilate, in his genius for being able to restyle these sources for his own use."[35] The spiritual formation of teachers was De La Salle's theological response to the difficulty of having schoolmasters of good character in the primary education of poor boys. There was no privilege in teaching these poor boys, and, as Edward Fitzpatrick points out, "the men who drifted into school teaching were too often what might be called the dregs of humanity."[36] De La Salle, however, recognized that the effective Christian education of poor children depended on quality teachers who must not only be pedagogically competent. They must also be persons of faith and moral integrity. Indeed, as Luke Salm argues, his key contribution "was to create, resolutely and against great odds, a stable community of religiously motivated laymen to construct a network of schools throughout France that would make practicable and permanent the best elements from the pioneers who had gone before him."[37] The spiritual formation of teachers was part of De La Salle's theological creativity in sustaining their sense of mission to practically stabilize an extended network of quality schools for the poor. Through his spiritual writings, De La Salle affected the imagination of these "bedraggled schoolteachers"[38] to see their work as a sacred vocation tied to the human dignity of the poor children they served.

De La Salle's response to educational reform was rooted in an incarnational way of being. It emerged from cultivating a prophetic mysticism that stirred him toward a process of conversion to Jesus Christ encountered in the poor schoolmasters and children. Lasallian scholar Luke Salm writes:

> In his [De La Salle's] view of faith the entire enterprise was due to the working

[35] Ibid., 223.

[36] Fitzpatrick, *La Salle: Patron of All Teachers*, 209.

[37] Salm, *The Work is Yours*, 54.

[38] Salm, "The Lasallian Educator in a Shared Mission," 151.

> of God's Providence that enabled him to hear God's voice in the cry of the poor. He was deeply conscious that in his lifetime, and in his schools, at least one sign of the Kingdom of God was being realized: the poor had the Gospel preached to them.[39]

In contemporary parlance, De La Salle could be said to have viewed the education of poor children as a human right. Yet, as Lasallian scholar Edgard Hengemüle points out, this language was not present in De La Salle's time even as he had been advocating for universal education:

> His formation in the cultural context in which he lived would neither allow him to speak of education as a human right, an anthropological requirement out of respect for human dignity and the global development of the human person, nor as a social right of the citizen, imperative to their inclusion in society.[40]

Instead, De La Salle turned to the theological language of faith as the ground for practicing universal education, beginning with giving the poor access to it. The provision of universal education was for him a call to participate in God's salvific mission of drawing all persons to know and love God through relationships. The Brothers were to imagine themselves as "chosen" to be "cooperators [with Jesus Christ] in the salvation of souls,"[41] proclaiming the Gospel by the witness of their lives as teachers in their relationships with students. They "should look upon the children whom [they] are charged to teach as poor, abandoned orphans," in the same way as God "looks on them with compassion and takes care of them as being their protector."[42] Thus, De La Salle's missional response to educational reform was incarnational with a mystical-

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[39] Salm, *The Work is Yours*, 57.

[40] Hengemüle, *Lasallian Education: Which Kind of Education Is It?*, 18.

[41] John Baptist de La Salle, *Meditations by John Baptist de La Salle*, trans. Richard Arnandez, FSC, and Augustine Loes, FSC, ed. Augustine Loes, FSC, and Francis Heuther, FSC (Landover, Maryland: Lasallian Publications, 1994), 196.2. Hereafter cited as *Meditations* followed by the meditation number standardized in this text.

[42] *Meditations* 37.3

contemplative base: he looked upon the poor children to be educated "as images of Jesus Christ, and as those who are best disposed to receive his Spirit in abundance."[43]

2.2 Imagining Teaching as a Vocation in the Lasallian Key

The wisdom that the Lasallian tradition has for us today is that it imagines the vocation of teaching within a mission theology of Christian education that is incarnational. Spirituality is also not an add-on or mere enhancer to the art of education. Spirituality is constitutive of a Lasallian educational vision that emphasizes the teacher-student relationship as the site for personal and social transformation in Christ. Teaching is spiritual activity; it is a spiritual practice of presence. As Fitzpatrick described it:

> The teacher [for De La Salle] presides over and directs an activity that has eternal consequences. It is God's work in God's presence. The stake is the eternal destiny of the souls of children. The children must themselves co-operate in the work but the influence of the teacher is ever present. It is, therefore, of supreme importance that the teacher be a living example of the qualities, attitudes, and conceptions that the school would have the child develop.[44]

To inspire in teachers this sense of their work as God's calling, De La Salle drew heavily on Scripture in his meditations to shape their moral imagination. Teachers are "ambassadors and ministers of Jesus Christ."[45] Like Jesus Christ the "good shepherd who has great care for the sheep," they are morally obliged to know students individually so as "to discern the right way to guide them."[46] As guides and companions to the young, teachers are also their Guardian Angels.[47] They also must "have for them the tenderness

[43] *Meditations* 173.2

[44] Fitzpatrick, *La Salle: Patron of All Teachers*, 255.

[45] *Meditations* 195.2

[46] *Meditations* 33.1

[47] *Meditations* 197-198

of a mother to draw them to [her/him], and to do for them all the good that depends on [her/him]."[48]

Scholarship on Lasallian spirituality has exegeted well these images of teaching.[49] However, as theologian and Lasallian scholar Miguel Campos perceptively points out, the dominant accent in much of this scholarship is on De La Salle's asceticism and its implications for the teacher's practice of virtues.[50] Campos in turn asks if we could go further to recover the "mystical and ministerial thrust" in De La Salle's spirituality, and articulate more deeply a Lasallian dynamic of discernment in the Spirit for Christian education.[51] One of the criteria proposed is a "passion for the service of education for the poor."[52] I expand on this criterion by drawing out what I conceive as a preferential option for children in discerning the vocation of teaching as a human act of faith in zeal. Within the Lasallian tradition, then, is the development of a prophetic mysticism that is socially responsive and praxis-oriented toward the liberation of children as *Missio Dei* in education. What ought to be reclaimed and deepened is this prophetic-mystical dimension of education that contemplates and discerns the vocation of teaching from God's solidarity with children *of* the poor, and *as* the poor. From this standpoint, teaching as a prophetic call to educate the poor is inseparable from the struggle for social justice that

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[48] *Meditations* 101.3

[49] For examples, see Fitzpatrick, *La Salle: Patron of All Teachers*, 254-265; Gregory Wright, FSC, "The Lasallian Educator according to John Baptist de La Salle," *AXIS: Journal of Lasallian Higher Education* 8, no. 1 (2017): 79-94; Antón Marquiegui, FSC, *MEL Bulletin No. 52: Contribution of John Baptist de La Salle (1651-1719) to the Esteem for the Teaching Profession* (Rome, Italy: Institute of the Brothers of the Christian Schools Secretariat for Association and Mission, 2018), 27-36.

[50] Miguel A. Campos, FSC, "Fidelity to the Movement of the Spirit: Criteria for Discernment," *AXIS: Journal of Lasallian Higher Education* 3, no. 2 (2012): 1, https://axis.smumn.edu/wp-content/uploads/2018/01/46-206-1-PB.pdf. [Paper originally delivered as a presentation at the Forty-fourth General Chapter of the Institute of the Brothers of the Christian Schools, May 9-12, 2007, Rome, Italy.]

[51] Ibid., 1.

[52] Ibid., 16.

lifts up the humanity of children being served. Teaching is participating in the dynamic creative work of God's Spirit in history for the wholeness of children as salvation.

2.2.1 Preferential Option for Children: The Prophetic Dimension in the Lasallian Educational Imagination

De La Salle's educational commitments were formed by his personal conversion to the poor and by the poor.[53] His spiritual vision emerged from a struggle to cross over to the world of the destitute and impoverished, to be *with* them rather than *for* them in his educational apostolate to children (specifically boys) from "the working class and the poor."[54] This commitment to educate children is enshrined in the *Rule* and it is more recently articulated as follows: "The purpose of this Institute is to provide a human and Christian education to the young, especially the poor, according to the ministry which the Church has entrusted to it."[55] The prophetic edge in the Lasallian educational imagination lies precisely in its elaboration of what I conceive to be a preferential option for children in its mission to the poor.

An option for children builds on a preferential option for the poor by recognizing the further systemic marginalization of children as human persons within the conditions of social, political, cultural, and economic impoverishment. It is worth highlighting that De La Salle's attention on children was not separated from the poverty of families and adults whom they depended on for care. He described the reality of the poor:

> Consider that it is a practice only too common for the working class and the poor to allow their children to live on their own, roaming all over like vagabonds as long as they are not able to put them to some work; these parents have no

[53] Goussin, *The Mission of Human and Christian Education*, 26.

[54] *Meditations* 194.1.

[55] The Institute of the Brothers of the Christian Schools, *The Rule of the Brothers of the Christian Schools – Revised* (Rome: 2015), par. 3.

> concern to send their children to school because their poverty does not allow them to pay teachers, or else, obliged to look for work outside their homes, they have to abandon their children to themselves.

Notwithstanding his language which may strike some readers today as didactic and perhaps condescending, De La Salle recognized that children required the guidance of parenting adults as their primary educators, who because of conditions of poverty were unable to be fully present. He saw the role of the teacher in the Christian school as being entrusted by parents to offer their children "a suitable education" that they were unable to give.[56] This remains relevant today as Lasallian teachers understand themselves as being in partnership with parents and families in educating children. The preferential option for children in Lasallian education, then, does not only demand that teachers strive to critique and transform those conditions of social, political, cultural, and economic impoverishment that close off children's possibilities to life in the present. It also compels them to recognize that these conditions relationally affect the capacity and ability of those adults who care for children, and seek to work with them to build the common good with children as agents.

This preferential option for children serves as a hermeneutic that reads forward the mission of Lasallian education. This is traceable in the Institute's documents, which, I argue, underline a shift in how this option is articulated: from De La Salle's concept of the poor child to a more radical contemporary interpretation of the child as poor and marginalized. Two documents are significant in highlighting this shift: *The Brother of the Christian Schools in the World Today: A Declaration* and *On the Defense of Children,*

[56] De La Salle, "Chapter 1 The Purpose and the Necessity of This Institute in the Rule of 1718," par. 3.

the Reign of God, and the Lasallian Mission.[57] Although these documents are specifically addressed to the Christian Brothers and their Lasallian partners, they reflect a richness in the Lasallian tradition that is graced by the Spirit for the world of Christian education and beyond.

a) *The Brother of the Christian Schools in the World Today - A Declaration*

The *Declaration* is an important document promulgated during the Thirty-ninth General Chapter in 1966-67 for the renewal of the Institute after the Second Vatican Council.[58] As Pedro Maria Gil points out, "The *Declaration* offers a reading of the Lasallian present from the viewpoint of the future. It is an act of faith expressed in words and proposals."[59] That is, the *Declaration* remains a foundational text in articulating and renewing the spirit of Lasallian education for the current world. Its proposals go beyond the religious identity of the Brother to encompass the broader vocation of teaching as a prophetic call to educate for justice.

Noteworthy in this document is a thicker understanding of poverty as impoverishment. It "avoid[s] a rigid interpretation that defines the poor only from an economic point of view."[60] For example, it extends the definition to include a poverty "of

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[57] The Institute of the Brothers of the Christian Schools, *Thirty-ninth General Chapter: The Brother of the Christian Schools in the World Today - A Declaration* [1967], trans. Luke Salm, FSC (Revised English translation, 1997). Subsequent references to this document are mentioned in text and cited as *Declaration*; John Johnston, FSC, "On the Defense of Children, the Reign of God, and the Lasallian Mission [January 1, 1999]," in *The Pastoral Letters of Br. John Johnston, FSC.* (1986-2000) (Napa, CA: Lasallian Resource Center, 2016), 443-480.

[58] For a recent critical review of the context of the *Declaration* and its relation with the pedagogical movements in the 1960s, see Pedro Maria Gil, FSC, "Lasallian Pedagogy and the Lasallian Community," and Fabio Coronado, FSC, "The Declaration in Dialogue with the Pedagogies of the Time," in *Lasallian Studies No. 17: That Your School Runs Well: Approach to Lasallian Educational Model*, ed. Pedro Maria Gil, FSC, and Diego Muñoz, FSC (Rome, Italy: International Council of Lasallian Research and Resources, 2013), 323-353.

[59] Gil, "Lasallian Pedagogy and the Lasallian Community," 324.

[60] *Declaration*, 29.2.

affection, and of faith."[61] Yet, it also recognizes that "material poverty very often lies at the root of these other forms of poverty [poverty, and that there are many of the poorest who have no family, who are in poor health, or who cannot adjust socially."[62] Lasallian commitment to educate the poor is articulated as an ongoing and necessary "struggle against poverty as frustration."[63] Such is a poverty "born of injustice, physical and social evils, or personal insufficiency and failure" that "makes it impossible for certain cultures, social groups, or individual persons to attain a standard of living that would allow them real freedom."[64] The *Declaration* clearly insists that educating the poor as a matter of social justice is not merely serving the poor; it must engage in resisting and transforming dehumanizing structures of injustice that impoverish people's lives:

> Jesus Christ is not the solution for material deprivation, however much he may be a source of comfort in such situations [of poverty as frustration] through the inspiration that faith brings for action in the temporal order. *It would be blameworthy to make of Christianity an endorsement of the established social order, thus dispensing with the need for social protest and efforts to establish social justice.*[65]

The *Declaration* focuses in on children: "The Institute ought to be *particularly* sensitive to the fact that in countries that are suffering from poverty, it is the young who suffer most in their health, their education, and their human development."[66] Herein lies an option for children that casts a light on their non-visibility and marginalization in suffering the effects of structural impoverishment. The poor child in De La Salle's founding vision is re-articulated as a focus on children in situations of impoverishment.

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[61] Ibid., 29.3

[62] Ibid., 29.3.

[63] Ibid., 30.1.

[64] Ibid., 29.5.

[65] Ibid., 30.2. Emphasis mine.

[66] Ibid., 33.3. Emphasis mine.

b) *On the Defense of Children, the Reign of God, and the Lasallian Mission*

Perhaps nowhere is a preferential option for children as clearly demonstrated within the Institute in this millennium than in *On the Defense of Children, the Reign of God, and the Lasallian Mission*. This was a "bold pastoral letter" in 1999 that the then Brother Superior-General John Johnston, FSC (1986-2000) wrote; it urged the Brothers and the wider Lasallian community to incorporate the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) as integral to its mission of educating the poor.[67] Johnson writes impassionedly:

> The thesis of this pastoral letter is that the situation of poor children in today's world is an unspeakable scandal that our Lasallian charism invites us to make solidarity with neglected, abandoned, marginalized, and exploited children a particular focus for our mission.[68]

This message is also extended to all Christians that "we can and must respond with love and creativity to the cries of oppressed and exploited children."[69] According to Lasallian scholar Ernest Miller, Johnston's pastoral letter was significant as "a catalyst for the Institute's eventual decision to situate the difficult challenge of the UNCRC in the context of living today the Founding Story and Vision [of De La Salle]." It culminated in the Forty-third General Chapter in 2000, which "made the defense and the promotion of the rights of children not simply an activity of the Institute, but the part of the very fabric of the Lasallian mission itself."[70] I would add that this document awakens us not only to

[67] Ernest J. Miller Jr., FSC, "Let Us Bear Witness to the Reign of God: Reimagining Lasallian Education and Evangelization in the Name of Justice" (DMin. diss., Catholic Theological Union, Chicago, 2015), 43. For a fuller analysis of the Institute's documentary history to contextualize the significance of Johnston's pastoral letter, see p. 27-52.

[68] Johnston, "On the Defense of Children," 466.

[69] Ibid., 443-444.

[70] Miller, "Let Us Bear Witness to the Reign of God," 44.

discern conditions that impoverish the lives of children. It also shifts us to see the child as marginal in status as a human being.

There is much debate around the extent to which the specific articles in the UNCRC are compatible with the Christian tradition.[71] It is beyond the scope of this thesis to examine in detail the arguments that underlie Christianity's ambivalence toward the idea of children's rights. Notwithstanding the tensions, I lift up here how Johnston mines the Lasallian tradition to articulate a preferential option for children as a hermeneutical key that reads forward the Lasallian heritage and mission into the third millennium. It is this preferential option for children that allows for the Institute's theological engagement with the UNCRC in the first place.

Johnston recalls the Institute's *Rule* to frame the preferential option for children as a Lasallian imperative:

> Our *Rule* concisely and poignantly links De La Salle's progressive awareness of the situation of poor children with the *origin and development* of the Institute. As he became aware, by God's grace, of the human and spiritual distress of 'the children of artisans and of the poor,' their neglect and abandonment moved him profoundly. (The French text says literally that their abandonment "seized" him.)[72]

De La Salle's incarnational educational vision, then, is a response in faith to the social suffering of children. Johnston re-interprets this founding insight to include the violation of children's rights in situations of economic exploitation, discrimination, sexual abuse,

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[71] For examples, see William Werpehowski, "Human dignity and social responsibility: Catholic social thought on children," in *Children, Adults, and Shared Responsibilities: Jewish, Christin, and Muslim Perspectives,* ed. Marcia J. Bunge (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 79-98; and Don S. Browning and John Witte Jr., "Christianity's mixed contributions to children's rights: Traditional teachings, modern doubts," in *Children, Adults, and Shared Responsibilities: Jewish, Christin, and Muslim Perspectives,* ed. Marcia J. Bunge (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 272-291.

[72] Johnston, "On The Defense of Children," 457.

illiteracy, violence and armed conflict.[73] "In all the above we observe a common denominator: societies – nations, their governments, their citizens – are violating the rights of children by not permitting them to be children," he notes.[74] When these violations happen, we "too often close our eyes and mouths and unwittingly play the role of the priest and Levite in the parable of the *Good Samaritan*."[75] These provocative words signal that we cannot turn our backs on acts of injustices – interpersonal and systemic – committed against children. Where Johnston adds to the discourse in the *Declaration* is this: The Christian mandate to educate the poor must also engage in the struggle for the human rights of children as a matter of justice "in accord with what the Reign of God requires."[76] The preferential option for children is paradoxically an intentional choice to see the care for children and their liberation from social oppression as a non-option in light of Christian discipleship.

The impetus for the renewal of the Lasallian tradition lies in the Institute's preferential option for children, which forms its prophetic mission of a human and Christian education committed to their liberation.[77] The source of renewal is, of course, the Holy Spirit, whose presence in the lives of children presses on educators to discern the contours of their prophetic witness. What I retrieve as a preferential option for

[73] Ibid., 446-454.

[74] Ibid., 453.

[75] Ibid., 446.

[76] Ibid., 459.

[77] Johnston powerfully writes, "We commit ourselves to the 'liberation' of oppressed children not because we are social activists, but because we are Brothers of the Christian Schools. Our vocation in its very nature requires such a commitment." (460) While Johnston is addressing the Brothers directly here, I do not think that he intends the educational mission of liberation to be exclusive to them. In fact, he speaks of the defense of children as mission shared with "all other members of the Lasallian family." (467) I also do not think that Johnston is implying a dichotomy between social activism and Christian mission. His accent is on discipleship toward the Reign of God as the starting point and ground for the Brothers' commitment to liberation.

children does not replace a preferential option for the poor. Yet, it is also not only about making children who are economically disadvantaged a missional priority in education. A preferential option for children pushes teachers to recognize, resist and remake social structures that systemically impoverish the lives of children. That is, it cultivates a practice of critical discernment that pays attention to children first, whose social realities also find them further marginalized at the complex intersection of class, race, nationality, religion, able-ness, gender and sexuality. A preferential option for children could and should disturb us to grapple with the marginalization of children *as* children because of adult-centrism, which gets in our way of seeing and listening to children as neighbors with full human dignity in the public square; they are worthy not only of protection but also for participation in the common good.[78] It reclaims the call to teach within a missionary vision of Christian education committed "to building an international communion of persons in which all children can live as the children they have the right to be."

2.2.2 The Spirit of Faith and Zeal: A Lasallian Dynamic Energizing the Prophetic Witness of Teachers

From a Lasallian perspective, the prophetic witness of teachers as shaped by a preferential option for children is propelled by a twinned dynamic of faith and zeal. This dynamic sets the holistic formation of children within the wider horizon of God's salvific love that beckons teachers to educate justly and for justice. To educate children holistically is inseparable from resisting and transforming structural conditions of injustice that deny their wholeness and close off their possibilities for life in the present.

[78] I will discuss in Chapter Three the strain of adult-centrism in our Christian theological anthropology in general, and Lasallian anthropology in particular.

Faith and zeal are important components characterizing the Spirit of the Institute of the Brothers of the Christian Schools:

> The spirit of this Institute is, first, a spirit of faith, which ought to 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 everything to God […] The spirit of this Institute consists, secondly, in an ardent zeal for the instruction of children and for bringing them up in the fear of God, inducing them to preserve their innocence if they have lost it, and inspiring them with a great aversion and a very great horror for sin and for all that could cause them to lose purity.[79]

Jacques Goussin distinguishes this 'Spirit of the Institute' from 'the spirit of your state,' which refers specifically to the state of being 'Brother' in De La Salle's writings.[80] According to him, De La Salle writes of 'the Spirit of the Institute' as "a spiritual reality which is at one and at the same time more elevated and profound, more universal and even more necessary, and of which 'the spirit of our state' represents only one effect of the spirit of the Institute."[81] This distinction is helpful in pointing to the wider applicability of the Institute's Spirit beyond the Brothers, and as a living wisdom shared with *all* Christian educators and even beyond.

The Spirit of faith, as Goussin points out, is at the heart of Lasallian discernment in education. It is "a Christian viewpoint, a way of seeing and judging that is in harmony with the Gospel."[82] It confronts educators to "learn to see in every happening and in

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[79] John Baptist de La Salle, "Chapter 2: The Spirit of the Institute in the 1718 Rule," in *Rule and Foundational Documents*, trans. and ed. Augustine Loes, FSC, and Ronald Isetti (Landover, Md.: Lasallian Publications, 2002), par. 2; 9. In his articulation of zeal in the instruction of children, De La Salle was limited by the language of his time, which reflected a theological anthropology of children that would be problematic for contemporary readers. This issue will be discussed further in Chapter 3. Of emphasis in this chapter is the spirit of zeal as a ministerial posture of enthusiasm and passion toward the education of children.

[80] For examples, see *Meditations* 92.3; 109.2; 192.2

[81] Goussin, *The Mission of Human and Christian Education*, 89.

[82] Ibid., 91.

every person, especially in the poor, a sign and a call of the Spirit."[83] The Spirit of faith that enables educators to touch the hearts of students is also the "light to judge all visible things, and to learn what is true and false about them, what is only apparent and what is substantial."[84] It underpins a dynamic of "double contemplation" in educational relationships that discerns on the one hand, God's saving will for all, but from the concrete social realities of children on the other hand.[85] Through the eyes of faith, there is no reality outside of God who remains faithfully present *to* and *in* the world. Furthermore, God is dynamically involved in its transformation as "the origin, principal agent, purpose and kerygmatic theme of education, which is the perfecting action of human beings towards holiness."[86] Lasallian faith "inspirits us with a passionate force by the God of the poor"; it "brings into focus the reality that we are presently living and the conviction that God's action is always present in it."[87]

This Christian spirit of faith serves as a unifying principle toward an integrative education, which values secular knowledge alongside rather than subordinate to religious instruction, in the holistic formation of children.[88] As Lasallian scholar Edgard Hengemüle notes, "secular subjects were not seen by [De La Salle] as a mere adjunct to the substantive reality of religious instruction,"[89] and this is reflected in *The Conduct of the Christian Schools,* which includes the teaching of catechism alongside reading,

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[83] Article 5 of the 1987 Rule. Cited in Goussin, *The Mission of Human and Christian Education*, 93.

[84] *Meditations* 44.1

[85] Salm, "The Lasallian Educator in a Shared Mission," 150.

[86] Enrique García Ahumada, FSC, *MEL Bulletin 47: De La Salle and the Theology of Education*, trans. Peter Gilfedder, FSC (Rome: Brothers of the Christian Schools, 2013), 17.

[87] Campos, "Fidelity to the Movement of the Spirit," 15.

[88] Hengemüle, *Lasallian Education: Which Kind of Education is It?*, 77.

[89] Ibid., 79.

writing and arithmetic in the everyday life of the classroom in school. De La Salle recognized "that catechesis was not just a Church matter," but how it ought to permeate the life of the whole student as a Christian "in all places and at all times."[90] It was not just "to make his student a Christian," but "a useful Christian in the secular world."[91]

Now, while we live in a context of religious pluralism today that is different from the Christendom that characterized De La Salle's world in France, the wisdom of an education that integrates faith and human development for life in the world remains alive in the Lasallian imagination. It is in light of this Spirit of faith that De La Salle assumes the union of "the mission of teachers to announce the Gospel of Jesus Christ and the professional work of teachers in the total education of their students."[92] As he wrote:

> Make no distinction between the duties of your profession and those that refer to your salvation and perfection. Be convinced that you will never achieve your salvation more surely nor acquire greater perfection than by fulfilling well the duties of your profession, provided you do so with the view of God's will.[93]

From the perspective of faith, then, vocation and profession are united in the practice of teaching. As Hengemüle puts it: "For the Lasallian teacher, the exercise of the profession assumed the dignity and responsibility of a religious duty."[94] Yet, to regard teaching as a religious duty is, as Luke Salm qualifies, "not [to] be confused with religiosity – Church attendance, devotional practices, adherence to Church teachings, and the like – however important these expressions of religion may be to many people."[95] Rather, it is to infuse

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[90] Ibid., 84.

[91] Ibid., 169.

[92] Rodrigue, "Religious Life in France During the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries," 79.

[93] *Rule* 184, iv. Cited in Rodrigue, "Religious Life in France During the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries," 79.

[94] Hengemüle, *Lasallian Education: Which Kind of Education is It?,* 87.

[95] Salm, "The Lasallian Educator in a Shared Mission," 154.

teaching with a deeper sense of purpose, and faith cultivates in teachers "an uncanny ability always to suspect that in persons and events there is more than meets the eye."[96]

In other words, the Spirit of faith as understood in the Lasallian tradition interprets the witness of teachers in a contemplative key to expect the more-ness of God, not as an impersonal abstract being, but as living Mystery active in sustaining and drawing educational relationships into the fullness of divine life. Such faith goes beyond religious piety. It paradoxically demands that we freely give of ourselves to participate in God's educational mission, to trust radically in the Providence of God with the conviction that "the One-Who-Calls creates us *for* vocation, a capacity for responding to relationship."[97] It is this faith that underpins De La Salle's invocation of prophet Habakkuk's words: "Lord, the work is yours."[98] What one hears in these words is a hope-filled abandonment to an open future in God, whose Spirit calls teachers toward an ardent zeal to incarnate God's presence in the everyday educational activity with children as children of God.

Lasallian zeal, then, flows out of faith *in* and *as* "the overpowering urge to bring the good news of salvation in Jesus Christ to the educational world, specifically to those whose poverty in one form or other places them 'far from salvation.'"[99] As Goussin highlights, the word 'zeal' appears 196 times in De La Salle's writings. Its frequent use signals an importance that De La Salle attaches to zeal as the concretization of faith

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[96] Ibid., 154.

[97] Cahalan, "Callings over a Lifetime: In Relationship, through the Body, over Time, and for Community," 17.

[98] John Baptist de La Salle, "Rules I Have Imposed on Myself," in *John Baptist de La Salle: The Spirituality of Christian Education*, ed. Carl Koch, Jeffrey Calligan, FSC, and Jeffrey Gros, FSC (New York: Paulist Press, 2004), 225.

[99] Salm, *The Work is Yours*, 212.

through missionary action in the field of education. Citing from De La Salle's *Duties of a Christian*, Goussin speaks of zeal as "a passion … defined 'as the opposite of envy', that other passion 'which leads us to be displeased with the goods and success to which our neighbor attains and the satisfaction we take in the misfortune [one] experiences.'"[100] Zeal is expressed as a tenacious generosity that is rooted in God's passion and compassion for the neighbor as other, with a preferential option for children.

Zeal shapes the prophetic witness of teachers after the Paschal mystery; it patterns the contours of discipleship after Christ's kenotic love to be *with,* and be *of service to* children:

> Let it be clear, then, in all your conduct towards the children who are entrusted to you that you look upon yourselves as ministers of God, carrying out your ministry with love and a sincere and true zeal, accepting with much patience the difficulties you have to suffer, willing to be despised by men to be persecuted, even to give your life for Jesus in the fulfillment of your ministry.[101]

This zeal *to* educate children and *for* God's mission is thus impelled by God's saving love through Jesus Christ.[102] It is that fire in the belly, which charges teachers to announce the Gospel in the context of the school as Christ's body, whose members include children as fellow disciples and as "heirs of the kingdom of God."[103] To announce the Gospel, as Campos points out, "is not reduced to practices and prescriptions."[104] Rather, it obliges educators to "become incarnate, that is, take on the flesh and blood realities of the students' lives in an affective and effective manner, to

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[100] Goussin, *The Mission of Human and Christian Education*, 96.

[101] *Meditations* 201.1; 201.3

[102] *Meditations* 201.2

[103] *Meditations* 87.1; 96.3; 201.2

[104] Miguel Campos, FSC, "Introduction to *Meditations for the Time of Retreat*," in *Meditations by John Baptist de La Salle,* tr. Richard Arnandez, FSC, and Augustine Loes, FSC, ed. Augustine Loes, FSC, and Francis Huether, FSC (Landover, Maryland: Lasallian Publications, 1994), 424.

walk around in their shoes, to unite [their] own history to that of [their] students, to the whole history of salvation, to the mystery of Christ."[105] In other words, teachers proclaim the Gospel by the witness of their lives in solidarity with children. Lasallian zeal "is an insistent and a dynamic urge" that "drives the Lasallian educator to make the students aware that their lives have meaning and value."[106] It draws forth courage and perseverance from teachers to desire for and work toward the human flourishing of children as their students.

Faith and zeal constitute a twinned dynamic of the same Spirit that sets aflame the heart of education in Lasallian spirituality. As Van Grieken explains:

> Faith and zeal were two aspects of the same commitment, two dimensions of the same experience. One without the other would have been an empty shell. Without zeal, faith had no substance, and without faith, zeal had no purpose. Faith and zeal more than complemented each other; they brought both to life. With zeal, faith found expression, and with faith, zeal found direction. In De La Salle, both came to fruition in the ministry of teaching and the work of education.[107]

What is underscored is the organic coupling of faith and zeal in an apostolic and lay spirituality that is mission-oriented toward education. In Salm's words, "faith overflows into zeal; zeal is rooted in faith."[108] Carried by this dynamic rhythm of faith and zeal, educators are led to recognize humbly and live boldly into the charismatic depth of their calling as co-creators with God to transform humanity (creation?) anew. This is in light of the Gospel that mandates not only the care for children as God's beloved, but also their liberation from social oppression.

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[105] Ibid., 424.

[106] Salm, "The Lasallian Educator in a Shared Mission," 155.

[107] Van Grieken, *Touching the Hearts of Students*, 74.

[108] Salm, *The Work is Yours*, 212.

2.3 A "Mystical Realism"[109] in Educating Children Toward Liberation

At the heart of the Lasallian imagination of education is a vision of teaching as "divine work" within God's mission of educating children for life, in faith and with zeal.[110] More profoundly, teaching children as a vocation participating in the ever-widening creative action of God's salvific love through Jesus Christ and in the Spirit. Salvation, according to Lasallian scholar Pierre Ouattara, "is not something for the next life; it consists in changing the present life."[111] To educate for salvation is to work toward transforming our present realities within an ongoing struggle for liberation that is ultimately found in Christ. The preferential option for children calls teachers to educate toward their liberation in two senses: first, freedom from dehumanizing conditions that threaten the survival of children and violate their human dignity; second, freedom for their participation in the social fabric of life through a sense of belonging in the world as responsible agents and protagonists of social change. From this stance of liberation, "the first question is not so much what content I have to teach, but towards what new man and new woman, and towards what new culture we teach what we need to, want to, and can, teach."[112]

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[109] Sauvage, "The Gospel Journey of John Baptist de La Salle (1651-1719)," 224.

[110] George Van Grieken, FSC., "Soul for Soul – the Vocation of the Child in Lasallian Pedagogy," in *The Vocation of the Child*, ed. Patrick McKinley Brennan (Grand Rapids, Michigan and Cambridge, U.K.: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2008), 379.

[111] Pierre Ouattara, FSC, "The Lasallian Service of Education: A Means of Salvation for Today?" in *Lasallian Studies No. 17: That Your School Runs Well: Approach to Lasallian Educational Model*, ed. Pedro Maria Gil, FSC, and Diego Muñoz (Rome, Italy: International Council of Lasallian Research and Resources, May 2013), 284.

[112] Patricio Bolton, FSC, "A Curriculum for Learning How to 'Live Well', for Good Living, for Living the Good Life," in *Lasallian Studies No. 17: That Your School Runs Well: Approach to Lasallian Educational Model*, ed. Pedro Maria Gil, FSC, and Diego Muñoz (Rome, Italy: International Council of Lasallian Research and Resources, May 2013), 319.

Yet, to teach in a liberating way toward the salvation of children is an orientation of faith that sees God *as, in,* and *with* the child. It is ignited and sustained by the prophetic-mystical dimension integral to Lasallian pedagogy, which contemplates our common liberation as a new creation in Christ through the education of children. Theologian and Lasallian scholar, Michel Sauvage, has described this contemplative stance in De La Salle's spiritual doctrine as "mystical realism."[113] That is, his spiritual teaching emerged gradually from the "concrete existential situation" of the Brothers in "their interpersonal relations" with one another, and "with the youngsters in their charge."[114] What Sauvage encapsulates is that "the source of the spirituality of De La Salle is the lived experience of God, but an experience that is reinterpreted, reconstructed and relocated in the context of the history of salvation."[115] He further distills a four-fold "rhythm" to this mystical realism,[116] which I visually represent in Figure 2.1 (see p. 96) as iterative and cyclical rather than linear.

Sauvage's distillation of De La Salle's mystical realism highlights the dialectical relationship between contemplation and social action in teaching. Contemplation composes a pedagogy of witness to God as trustworthy Presence experienced in the existential conditions of teachers' lives, in the everyday of educational activity as co-creatorship with God's Spirit, walking with children on the journey of discipleship.[117]

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[113] Sauvage, "The Gospel Journey of John Baptist de La Salle," 224.

[114] Ibid., 224.

[115] Ibid., 227.

[116] Ibid., 224-227.

[117] De La Salle frequently refers to children as disciples in his *Meditations.*

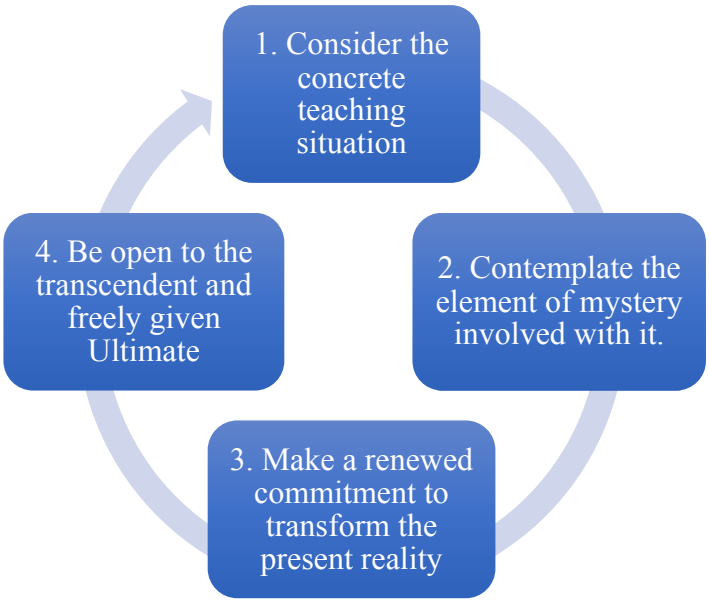

Figure 2.1: Four-fold 'Rhythm' in Lasallian Mystical Realism

The vocation of teaching is intensely relational. Teachers stumble into an experience of their calling through their relationship with students in general, and children in particular. I contend that, from a Lasallian perspective, the lived relationship between teachers and students is the starting point of contemplation. "Look at the life you are living; be aware of the distressing situation of the youngsters that God has placed in your path; use that as a measure of what is at stake in your teaching service," writes Sauvage on what he meant by considering the concrete teaching situation.[118] The connection with the prophetic is suggested in the third movement regarding transformative praxis:

> Show as much creativity and inventiveness as you can, never losing sight of the true character of the teaching function that is your ministry. Since you are all ministers of Jesus Christ, be resolved to live in imitation of Christ by reason of your incorporation into Christ, into the mystery of his incarnation and nearness to us, the mystery of his role as servant and *prophet*, *the mystery of his struggle for justi*ce … Redouble, therefore, your pedagogical creativity while at the same time you enter into dialogue among yourselves, with the students, with their

[118] Sauvage, "The Gospel Journey of John Baptist de La Salle," 225.

> families and their world, as well as with others who want to serve the Church in this way.[119]

Central to the dynamic of this mystical realism between teachers and students is the Lasallian vision of education as the touching of hearts. As De La Salle writes: "You carry out a work that requires you to touch hearts, but this you cannot do except by the Spirit of God."[120]Yet, we cannot touch the hearts of students as educators until we allow them to break open our own hearts. Recall that De La Salle's heart was seized by the poor children he encountered. Lasallian mystical realism reclaims for Christian education this dynamic of discernment in that moment of encounter with children. Lasallian mystical realism fosters an attentiveness and receptivity to the cry of God's Spirit in the lives of children as poor and marginalized. It is this cry that awakens the hearts of teachers and summons them to prophetic witness.

The liberatory impulse in Lasallian mystical realism is also reflected in Johnston's pastoral letter on the defense of children's rights as integral to the Lasallian mission. Our prophetic witness as teachers is expressed through "solidarity with poor children when, by word, action, and quality of presence, we manifest to them profound love and reverence."[121] Johnston's emphasis on reverence underscores the centrality of contemplation in the Lasallian missionary imagination of education, where the mystical in faith is inseparable from prophetic action in zeal. As he evocatively puts it:

> We meet Jesus Christ in children when we welcome children as children, when we love and reverence them as they are. As Jesus makes unambiguously clear in his description of the Last Judgment, we respond to Christ when we respond lovingly to people as they are. In reply to the question, "Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you?" Jesus explains that they responded to him when they fed the hungry. "I was hungry and you gave me food." (Mt. 25:35–40) There is

[119] Ibid., 226. Emphasis mine.

[120] *Meditations* 43.3

[121] Johnston, "On The Defense of Children," 468.

> no question of penetrating through a kind of outer "shell" of children to find and love Christ somehow hidden in the center. No. On the contrary. Jesus identifies himself with children as they are. It is only when we meet them as they are that we meet Christ.[122]

Noteworthy here is that the call to follow Christ is to be with those he identifies – children as the poor and marginalized. The teacher is a witness to the Gospel when s/he encounters Christ in them: "Jesus comes to us as a poor man because he comes to us as neglected, exploited, abandoned children."[123] The Christian witness of teachers begins from their receptivity of children in the way that Jesus welcomes them unconditionally because "the kingdom of God belongs to such as these" (Mark 10:14).

In his address to Lasallian educators and administrators at the Huether Conference in 2001, Johnston spoke again of this receptivity as resting on reverence as a contemplative way of seeing through the eyes of Jesus in faith. Reflecting on Mark's gospel account of Jesus welcoming children (Mk 10: 13-14, 16), he challenged participants to consider if they shared in Jesus's indignation when he saw his disciples scolding the people for bringing "little children" to him:

> Lasallians, Christ expects all those who wish to follow him and live under God's Rule to do the same. He expects them to be indignant when individuals and society fail to treat children with love, with respect, with reverence. He expects his followers to express that indignation and act to remedy the injustice.[124]

Reverence goes deeper than respect; it demands that we embody Jesus's loving attentiveness to the other. "His eyes were open, wide open. He 'saw' children. He saw

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[122] Ibid., 478.

[123] Ibid., 478.

[124] John Johnston, FSC, "Jesus was Indignant - Are We?" in *AXIS: Journal of Lasallian Higher Education* 2, no. 1(2011): 1, https://axis.smumn.edu/wp-content/uploads/2017/12/18-87-1-PB.pdf. [Presentation originally given at *Huether Lasallian Workshop 30: Promoting the Rights of Children*, November 15, 2001, Chicago, IL, USA.]

them as human persons," asserts Johnston.[125] Through the eyes of Jesus, we see that "God takes children seriously, reverences them as human persons, and welcomes them as full participants."[126] This seriousness recalls Mark 9:42 - "If anyone causes one of these little ones – those who believe in me – to stumble, it would be better for them if a large millstone were hung around their neck and they were thrown into the sea." Reverence for children as being God's own is a precondition for responsibility toward them.

Lasallian mystical realism, then, echoes Johann Baptist Metz's conception of political mysticism: "a mysticism of open eyes … that especially makes visible all invisible and inconvenient suffering, and – convenient or not – pays attention to it and takes responsibility for it, for the sake of a God who is a friend to human beings."[127] This mysticism is at the heart of prophetic witness that opens itself to an encounter with the other who confronts. It nurtures our persistence to struggle toward social transformation through "grand hopes" that "demand a self set on fire in the presence of and with others."[128] In the Lasallian key, this persistence is a demonstration of zeal rooted in a prophetic mysticism of education that makes a preferential option for children, where Jesus Christ does not only identify *with* children but also lives *in* them and calls us to God *through* them. The call to teach, then, as an incarnation of God's creative passion in the Spirit is in the first place a fragile human act of faith courageously responsive to Christ's presence in the child with full human dignity. Zeal as passion for the education of children is grounded in God's passionate love that is radically inclusive.

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[125] Ibid., 1.

[126] Ibid., 1.

[127] Johann Baptist Metz, *A Passion for God: The Mystical-Political Dimension of Christianity*, trans. J. Matthew Ashley (New York: Paulist Press, 1998), 163.

[128] Ibid., 164.

2.4 Conclusion

The Lasallian educational imagination inspires us to envisage the vocation of teaching children as participating in God's prophetic action with the poor and marginalized. Making a preferential option to educate children is not simply a social necessity. Rather, it is at the heart of God's mission, who, through Jesus Christ and in the Spirit, reveals the faithful presence of zealous love that cares for children and their liberation. Teachers inspired by an awareness of God in Jesus Christ are called to incarnate this presence. "Do this, then, with all the affection of your heart, working entirely for [God]," exhorts De La Salle.[129] This passion for God's mission is nurtured by a mystical realism retrievable from the tradition that stresses the deep connection between the interior lives of educators and the public activity of teaching children. "Lasallian interiority is not opposed to creativity," writes Sauvage.[130] Rather "interiority and creativity are joined together most profoundly because they are at one and the same time a searching for, a welcoming of, and a manifestation of the Spirit" that "makes us sensitive to the richness of life spread out before us in our human surroundings."[131] Lasallian mysticism draws educators to cultivate an inner hospitality to the Spirit, who forms and transforms their imagination to see teaching as building God's Reign of justice to which children already belong.

Let us then remember we are in the Holy Presence of God. The renewal of teaching as a vocation calls us to be present to the cry of the Spirit discerned in the social

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[129] *Meditations* 201.2

[130] Michel Sauvage, FSC, "Lasallian Spirituality: Our Heritage," tr. Luke Salm, FSC, in *Spirituality in the Time of John Baptist de La Salle,* ed. Robert C. Berger, FSC (Landover, Maryland: Lasallian Publications, 1999), 277. [An address prepared for and delivered at the 41st General Chapter of the Brothers of the Christian Schools, Rome, 1986.]

[131] Ibid., 277.

realities of children. In the Lasallian educational imagination, teaching children is holy work because the Holy One dwells in the child, who reveals our common belonging to God as children and siblings-in Christ.

CHAPTER THREE

WHOSE CHILD IS THIS? –

A LASALLIAN ANTHROPOLOGY OF RELATIONAL BELONGING

The radicality of the Lasallian tradition lies in its articulation of a prophetic mysticism that makes a preferential option for children in its educational mission to the poor. Lasallian scholar Jean-Louis Schneider highlights this well when he writes:

> Fidelity to the Spirit is, in the case of John Baptist de La Salle, coupled with another fidelity: fidelity to the [children and] young people confided to us, such as they are. This implies respect for their convictions, attention to all their needs and recognition of the presence of God in them and in their destiny.[1]

As argued in Chapter Two, it is this option for children that I perceive to be a prophetic aspect of Lasallian mysticism, which warrants development for understanding the call to teach. In other words, Lasallian mysticism is socially responsive and praxis-oriented toward the liberation of children as *Missio Dei* in education. I understand liberation as promoting conditions that protect children in their social marginalization while engaging and developing their social participation as agents, thereby encouraging their flourishing as full human beings created in the image of God.

In this chapter, I unpack the theological anthropology that undergirds this preferential option for children in Lasallian education. I situate my discussion within a wider contemporary interest on children and childhood in theological research. What is worthy of critical retrieval and development in the Lasallian tradition, I propose, is an anthropology of relational belonging. This anthropology situates the human dignity of children theologically in terms of whose they are in God. It structures the teacher-student

[1] Jean-Louis Schneider, FSC, "Making the Lasallian Charism Live Today," in *Lasallian Studies No. 13: The Lasallian Charism*, ed. The International Council for Lasallian Studies, trans. Aidan Patrick Marron, FSC (Rome: Brothers of the Christian Schools Generalate, 2006), 245.

relationship along two interrelated axes - as *God's children* and *siblings-in-Christ*. Within this communal anthropology, each child as God's own is encountered as gifted and growing. It affirms the dignity of children as continual learners who deserve an educational community of attentive teachers that will gently hold them in a vulnerable relation of belonging while patiently nurturing their growth to exercise their social agency in responsible and life-giving ways as God's children.

3.1 The Contemporary Turn to Children and Childhood in Theological Research

Over the past two decades or so in the Western academy, there has been considerable interest on children and childhood in contemporary theological scholarship and religious studies.[2] This interest is in part propelled by the emergence of a "new social studies of childhood," which, since the 1990s, has instigated a paradigm shift that approaches childhood as a social construction.[3] In other words, conceptions of childhood are relationally shaped in place and time, through social, cultural, economic and politically processes imbued with power.[4] This new paradigm highlights the social

[2] The recent publication of Anna Strhan, Stephen G. Parker, Susan Ridgely, ed., *The Bloomsbury Reader in Religion and Childhood* (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2017) is perhaps an indication of this continual interest. The editors' introduction provides a helpful overview of this growing body of literature "that explore[s] how children's lives and the meanings of childhood are shaped by particular social and cultural expectations and practices across different times and places, and to address the significance of religion with these processes." (2)

[3] For a general discussion on research developments within this new sociology of childhood, see Wells, *Childhood in a Global Perspective*, 2-4. According to her, this new sociology of childhood began with the publication of Allison James and Alan Prout, ed., *Constructing and Reconstructing Childhood: Contemporary Issues in the Sociology of Childhood* (London: Falmer, 1990) and Allison James, Chris Jenks and Alan Prout, *Theorizing Childhood* (Cambridge: Polity, 1998).

[4] Research on the history of childhood also echoes this idea of childhood as a social construction, starting from Philippe Ariès' *L'Enfant et la vie familiale sous l'ancien régime* (1960), which was published in English as *Centuries of Childhood: A Social History of Family Life* (1962). Ariès contends that the idea of childhood is a modern invention in the West from the late seventeenth century. While this claim has been critically questioned based on his use of sources, his recognition of childhood as a variable construction situated in time is still relevant. For a critical discussion on Ariès' work, see Hugh Cunningham, *Children and Childhood in Western Society Since 1500* (London and New York: Longman, 1995), 30-40; Colin Heywood, *A History of Childhood: Children and Childhood in the West from Medieval to Modern Times*

agency of children in the contextual realities of their lives. Thus, children are positioned as active makers of meaning in societies with those around them; they "participate in the knowledge construction and daily experience of childhood."[5] Sociologist David Oswell advances a more dynamic understanding of children as agents. For him, social agency is also "always relational and never a property; it is always in-between and interstitial."[6] From this standpoint, the agency of children is less a capacity that they either have or do not have as separate individuals. Rather it is located in the difference that children have the capacity to make by their presence, and in various socially structured ways *with* and *to* others.[7]

In light of this paradigm shift and a focus on children's agency, religion scholars and theologians are giving more explicit attention to how religious traditions construct their understandings of childhood and children.[8] Of significance is their commitment to develop theological interpretations that reflect "the dignity and complexity of children" as human persons.[9] While the care for children and their instruction in faith are an enduring theme in the Christian tradition, there is a lack of critical analysis of the anthropology assumed in the theological discourses constructed about childhood and

(Cambridge: Polity, 2001), 11-18; David Archard, *Children: Rights and Childhood* (London and New York: Routledge), 15-28.

[5] Emma Uprichard, "Children as 'Being and Becomings': Children, Childhood and Temporality," *Children and Society* 22, no. 4 (2008): 311. See also Allison James and Alan Prout, "A New Paradigm for the Sociology of Childhood? Provenance, Promise and Problems," in *Constructing and Reconstructing Childhood: Contemporary Issues in the Sociology of Childhood, Second Edition* (London: Falmer, 1997), 8.

[6] David Oswell, *The Agency of Children: From Family to Global Human Rights* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 270.

[7] Ibid., 6.

[8] Marcia J. Bunge, "The Child, Religion, and the Academy: Developing Robust Theological and Religious Understandings of Children and Childhood," *The Journal of Religion* 86, no. 4 (October 2006), 555-559.

[9] Ibid., 574.

children. There has been a tendency for example to speak about children in a unidimensional way as either purely innocent or primarily sinful. Ethicist John Wall writes:

> It is remarkable that, while Christianity has consistently held up humanity's ambiguous nature as simultaneously good and sinful overall, when it comes to children it has generally swung to one extreme or the other. The root of children's dehumanization throughout Christianity has been this tendency to reduce children's ontological natures to a single oversimplified dimension.[10]

A crucial theological task, then, is to retrieve, critique, and reconstruct interpretations in Christian theological anthropology that reflect more diverse and nuance understandings about children and childhood.[11] Yet, the analytical focus on these multiple perspectives about children and childhood must also be followed by a disruption of adultism in Christian theological discourse. That is, while children are spoken about in the Christian tradition, they are also often constructed as silent "reflections of adult concerns about the present or as projections of adult concerns for the future."[12] These projections are part of an adultism, which, according to theologian Douglas Sturm, systemically essentializes the differences between adults and children in a "structure of domination: adults have authority to control children, to direct their lives, to set the parameters of their behavior,

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[10] John Wall, "Childism and the Ethics of Responsibility," in *Children's Voices: Children's Perspectives in Ethics, Theology and Religious Education*, ed. Annemie Dillen and Didier Pollyefeyt (Leuven: Uitgeveru Peeters, 2010), 255.

[11] Bunge, "The Child, Religion, and the Academy: Developing Robust Theological and Religious Understandings of Children and Childhood," 563-568. She distils six perspectives about children that are held in tension with one another in the Bible: "gifts of God and sources of joy," "sinful creatures and moral agents," "developing beings who need instruction and guidance," "whole and complete human beings made in the image of God," "vehicles of revelation, models of faith," and "orphans, neighbors, and strangers who need to be treated with justice and compassion." For other works, see also Diana Wood, ed., *The Church and Childhood* (Oxford, UK: Blackwell, 1994); Marcia J. Bunge, ed., *The Child in Christian Thought* (Grand Rapids, Michigan and Cambridge, UK: Eerdmans, 2001); Bonnie J. Miller-McLemore, *Let the Children Come: Reimagining Childhood from a Christian Perspective* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2003); David H. Jensen, *Graced Vulnerability: A Theology of Childhood* (Cleveland: The Pilgrim Press, 2005).

[12] Susan B. Ridgely, ed., *The Study of Children in Religions: A Methods Handbook* (New York: New York University Press, 2011), 1.

to fix the structure of possibilities open to them."[13] This adultism ought to be critiqued as we pay greater attention to children's constructed perspectives of their present realities in this contemporary theological focus on children and childhood.[14]

The move to develop broader and thicker theological conceptions of childhood and children is also ethically grounded in a global concern for the well-being of children. It serves to articulate an anthropological foundation for a social ethics that takes seriously the marginalized humanity of children as participants for the common good in society beyond the family, and whose individual and collective well-being are threatened by structural conditions of violence, poverty, malnutrition, and disease. Ethicists Todd David Whitmore and Tobias Winwright have argued that Catholic social teaching on children remains "undeveloped" because it "subsumes its treatment of children under the rubric of the family."[15] Similarly, Ethna Regan has also highlighted the "hyper-natalism in Catholic social teaching which does not defend the lives of born – hungry, impoverished, exploited, abandoned – children with the same zeal as the defence of the unborn child."[16] Underscored, then, is a need to articulate "a consistent ethic of justice for children" that corrects this imbalance.[17] This is a task rendered more crucial not only in the wake of more recent reports on the clergy sexual abuse of children within the Roman Catholic Church. It is also integral to whether and how churches understand Christian mission as a

[13] Sturm, "On the Suffering and Rights of Children: Toward a Theology of Childhood Liberation," 154.

[14] For examples, see Annemie Dillen and Didier Pollyefeyt, ed., *Children's Voices: Children's Perspectives in Ethics, Theology and Religious Education* (Leuven: Uitgeveru Peeters, 2010).

[15] Todd David Whitmore and Tobias Winwright, "Children: An Undeveloped Theme in Catholic Teaching," in *The Challenge of Global Stewardship: Roman Catholic Responses*, ed. Maura A. Ryan and Todd David Whitmore (Notre Dame, Indiana: University of Notre Dame Press, 1997), 161.

[16] Regan, "Barely Visible: The Child in Catholic Social Teaching," 1027.

[17] Ibid., 1027.

response in "wisdom to become a strong and reliable advocate for children in contemporary public and political debates on child well-being,"[18] especially in view of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) passed since 1989.[19]

In what ways might the Lasallian tradition contribute to this contemporary theological turn to childhood and children? Also, what possibilities does this turn open up for developing the Lasallian tradition theologically? I argue in Chapter Two that a preferential option for children *of* and *as* the poor is a hermeneutical key that reads forward the Lasallian heritage and mission of education, allowing for its present engagement with the UNCRC. In this chapter, I propose that what is worthy of retrieval and development is a Lasallian anthropology of relational belonging which undergirds this option. It structures the teacher-student relationship along two interrelated axes - as *God's children* and *siblings-in-Christ*. Within this communal anthropology, each child as student is encountered as God's own, and as an agent in vulnerable belonging to a set of educational relationships in dependent interdependency.

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[18] Bunge, "The Child, Religion, and the Academy: Developing Robust Theological and Religious Understandings of Children and Childhood," 553.

[19] As noted in Chapter Two, there is much debate on the extent to which the rights-based framework the UNCRC are compatible with the Christian tradition. Literature on this debate presents at least two significant themes. The first clarifies how the human rights of children upheld by the UNCRC echoes Christian values (e.g. William Werpehowski, "Human dignity and social responsibility: Catholic social thought on children," in *Children, Adults, and Shared Responsibilities: Jewish, Christin, and Muslim Perspectives,* ed. Marcia J. Bunge (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 79-98; Don S. Browning and John Witte Jr., "Christianity's mixed contributions to children's rights: Traditional teachings, modern doubts," in *Children, Adults, and Shared Responsibilities: Jewish, Christin, and Muslim Perspectives,* ed. Marcia J. Bunge (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 272-291.) The second considers how children's participatory rights pushes Christian social ethics to rethink its adult-centered foundation. See John Wall, *Ethics in Light of Childhood* (Washington, D.C.: Georgetown University Press, 2010), and *Children's Rights: Today's Global Challenge* (London: Rowan & Littlefield, 2017). It is beyond the scope of this dissertation to review this literature in detail. Instead, I draw on their arguments to critique and develop the anthropology that undergirds a preferential option for children in Lasallian education.

3.2 Retrieving a Lasallian Anthropology of Relational Belonging

3.2.1 Beginning at the Manger: From What to Whose Child is This?

Of the many places in the spiritual landscape of De La Salle's writings, I begin with the Nativity of Jesus with the aim of drawing out key categories that constitute a Lasallian anthropology of child. This focus is intentional for two reasons. First, the Child Jesus is a central icon for contemplation in De La Salle's writings, largely thanks to the influence of French Bérullian spirituality.[20] Second, it addresses a lacuna in our theological anthropology that tends to be christologically grounded in the public ministry and passion of the adult Jesus. To take seriously the mystery of the Incarnation is to regard the Nativity of Jesus as an integral part of God's mission, and not apart as some form of preparation for it. As theologian Elizabeth O'Donnell Gandolfo puts it:

> But the liberating good news of divine Incarnation does not begin with Jesus' public ministry as an adult, nor with Jesus' shameful torture and death on the cross. Rather, it begins with a socially high-risk pregnancy; with a humble, messy, and painful birth; and with a squalling, dependent, and vulnerable infant.[21]

Missiologist Margaret Guider points out further the theological connection between the manger and the liberation of children. Arguing for a discipleship of solidarity in caring for the world's children, she writes:

> Though every Christian believes that God enters human history as a child, it seems that outside of the Christmas season, our christological emphases neither encourage nor support sustained reflection on the mystery which Paul Claudel referred to as the "eternal infancy of God." There is something about this

[20] For examples, see *Meditations* 6, 96, 85, 86. See also John Baptist de La Salle, *Explanation of the Method of Interior Prayer,* ed. and revised trans. Donald C. Mouton, FSC (Landover, Maryland: Lasallian Publications, 1995), 86-101, in which he composes several reflections on the Christ Child to teach the Brothers how to consider the mystery of the Incarnation. Subsequent references to this text will be cited as *EM*. For an exegesis of De La Salle's reflections on the Christ Child in *EM*, see Miguel Campos, FSC and Michel Sauvage, FSC, *Encountering God in the Depths of the Mind and Heart* (Rome, Italy: Brothers of the Christian Schools, 1995), 228-262.

[21] Elizabeth O'Donnell Gandolfo, *The Power and Vulnerability of Love: A Theological Anthropology* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2015), 225.

> mystery, this experience of standing in the shadow of the manger, that leads us in the ways of radical discipleship. For in taking God on God's own terms, we find the question "Who do you say I am?" recast as "What Child is this?"[22]

From a Lasallian standpoint, the contemplative moment of standing in the manger's shadow makes an ethical demand on teachers to see children's liberation as *Missio Dei* in education. De La Salle's meditations on the Child Jesus articulate a communal anthropology that grounds this vision of children's liberation. This is an anthropology that situates the human dignity of the child in relation to our common belonging along two interrelated dimensions: as *God's children* and as *siblings-in-Christ* walking the way of discipleship together. More than "What Child is this?", the question is also "Whose Child is this?"

In his Meditation on the Feast of the Epiphany, De La Salle draws a creative parallel between teachers and the holy Magi, who are being led "by the light of faith" in search for wisdom.[23] This wisdom is ultimately found in the Child Jesus, who reveals God's saving love. Teachers are invited to follow the example of the Magi, who, in adoring the Child Jesus, see God's compassion for and companionship with children in their poverty and marginalization: "Recognize Jesus beneath the poor rags of the children whom you have to instruct. Adore him in them."[24] It is in finding and seeing Jesus Christ in these children that one hears the Spirit's summon to teach: "May faith lead you to do this [instruct] with affection and zeal, because *these children are members of Jesus Christ*."[25] Of significance is the relational language that emphasizes that children belong

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[22] Margaret E. Guider, O.S.F., "Living in the Shadow of the Manger: Mission, Ecumenism, and the State of the World's Children," *Word & World* 18, no. 2 (Spring 1998): 183.

[23] *Meditations* 96.1

[24] *Meditations* 96.3

[25] *Meditations* 96.3, emphasis mine.

to God not only because they are God created. Rather, it is because God has come to encounter us as a child in Jesus Christ. Children are recognized as already being in the Body of Christ as disciples.[26]

Retrievable from De La Salle's reflections on the Child Jesus, then, is a communal anthropology of relational belonging that stems from a theology of adoption. The Magi's adoration is a faith-filled response to God's kenotic descent as the Word made flesh in the birth of Jesus Christ, through whom we are elevated as God's children. De La Salle passionately writes:

> It is your love, O my Lord and my God,
> to which I am indebted for this incomparable favor.
> When you became the child of the most pure Virgin
> you won for me the power of enjoying the grace of adoption
> as a child of God,
> according to an expression of Saint Paul.[27]

Adoration of the Christ Child in Lasallian spiritual thought is not at all sentimental. Rather, it invokes what theologian Karl Barth has distinguished as the sense of "real amazement" as opposed to "careless astonishment" at Christmas.[28] Real amazement orients us to the inherently irruptive nature of the Incarnation that shakes us out of our individualist complacency and self-sufficiency. For De La Salle, the Child Jesus is an inbreaking of God's presence into human history, with God taking the risk to be at one with children as the poor and marginalized. The prophetic call to educate toward the liberation of children is mystically rooted and charged in amazement at Christ's solidarity

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[26] De La Salle frequently refers to children as disciples (e.g. *Meditations* 196.1; 198.3; 202.1; 204.1; 206.2; 208.3).

[27] *EM*, 89. I retain the original formatting in *EM*.

[28] Karl Barth, *Christmas*, trans. Bernhard Citron (Edinburgh and London: Oliver and Boyd, 1959), 61. In this homily, he wrote: "As long as our amazement about the Christmas message remains just a careless astonishment, the real meaning of the shepherds' words has not yet penetrated to us. If it were to reach us in the form in which it was delivered, then all would suddenly wonder at it; but this amazement would be different, it would not be so carefree."

with them at his birth.[29] Also, the theological theme of adoption makes a claim on Christians "to transcend common biological loyalties and extend the same generosity of spirit toward children not their own."[30]

One discerns in this inbreaking or irruption, then, the call of the Gospel to welcome all children as God's own in Lasallian education. As Pierre Ouattara argues, the educational commitment of De La Salle and the first Brothers "was inspired by the fact that Christianity reveals to us a God who comes into our world, through Mary, in search of a welcoming hospitality."[31] It follows, then, that the call to educate children in the Lasallian tradition is not apart from but situated in a wider struggle against forces such as social discrimination inhospitable to their human flourishing. This vision is rooted in the mystery of the Incarnation at the manger, where God chooses to entrust God-self to human care and nurture by breaking into history *as* a child and *for* the world's children in Christ. In doing so, God embraces our human vulnerability that powerfully calls forth a wider community of care formed around children beyond their biological families. In light of the Incarnation, a child's dependence calls forth a configuration of interdependent relations as community. For De La Salle, this community is the Christian school that "God has had the goodness" to establish.[32] Undergirding this is a theological anthropology that sees the human child as a social being hungering to belong and connect. The vocation of teaching is as such a response to God's call through the child to be loved into loving in community. God who comes as a child to be accompanied also

[29] I will discuss in detail how amazement energizes the prophetic in teaching through the educator as contemplative. in Chapter Five.

[30] Miller-McLemore, *Let the Children Come*, 167.

[31] Ouattara, "The Lasallian Service of Education: A Means of Salvation for Today?" 284.

[32] *Meditations* 194.1

accompanies the teacher as a gift "not just … *to* society but … *of* a new and living social relation."[33]

Lasallian preferential option for children is rooted in a theological commitment to the intrinsic human dignity of children as *Imago Dei*. Emerging from the manger's shadow is a Lasallian anthropology that does not only frame the full human dignity of children in terms of their being created by God. It also grounds their dignity relationally in terms of whose they are – as belonging to God in our shared humanity. Teachers as such cannot educate toward liberation until and unless they first see and receive children as being one *of* them and *with* them as gift in light of the Incarnation. Children as God's gift are valuable in themselves for who they are. Yet, the radicality of being gift also lies in who children become in time while bearing God's presence throughout their lifespan in the world. "Children as gift demand responsible action on the part of adults," notes theologian Bonnie Miller-McLemore.[34] The anthropology of relational belonging in the Lasallian tradition affirms this dialectic of children as "gift and task.[35] It structures the teacher-student relationship along two interrelated dimensions: as *God's children* and *siblings-in-Christ*.

3.2.2 Children as God's Children

At the heart of Lasallian education is the care for and nurture of the child as whole person. The intrinsic human dignity of children is located transcendentally in their identity as God's children. De La Salle writes:

> Consider this an honor for you and look upon the [poor] children God has entrusted to you as the children of God himself. Have much more solicitude for

[33] Wall, *Ethics in Light of Childhood*, 43.

[34] Miller-McLemore, *Let the Children Come*, 104.

[35] Ibid.,101.

their education and instruction than you would have for the children of a king.[36]

The verb "entrusted" is significant in De La Salle's writings. Its frequent use is observable, for example, in the *Meditations for the Time of Retreat*, with some translating it as "those who are *confided* to your care, those that God has *confided* to you."[37] Such expressions acknowledge that the child is from the outset not a human possession but a gift from God, who calls forth the human task of care and nurture.[38] God "has made you [teachers] the guardians and guides of children who *belong to him*."[39] This language of guardianship recalls how De La Salle took responsibility for his two sisters and four brothers after the deaths of his parents. More significantly, it theologically frames the serious responsibility that a teacher ought to have toward the child as a form of stewardship: God "will then look into the depths of your heart to examine whether you have been faithful managers of the wealth he has entrusted to you and of the talents which he has given to you to work in his service."[40]

For De La Salle, "children of God" as a theological category is not an abstract ideal. His insight, I suggest, is that for the category to be meaningful, one ought to take seriously the struggles of real children in our midst. For him, it was recognizing how children of the artisans and poor were left to themselves like "poor, abandoned orphans."[41] The economic impoverishment of these children with their families was

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[36] *Meditations* 133.2

[37] See footnote 188 in Schneider, "Making the Lasallian charism live today," 248.

[38] Cf. Miller-McLemore, *Let the Children Come*, 101-104. She argues that the radicality of children as God's gift involves a dialectic that obliges adults to care for them responsibly as valuable in themselves. This dialectic is traceable in the Lasallian tradition.

[39] *Meditations* 205.1

[40] Ibid.

[41] *Meditations* 37.3

exacerbated by a host of factors in seventeenth-century France: an economic recession from about 1630-1700, wars in the reign of Louis XIV, heavy taxation, and harsh winters.[42] Consequently, as De La Salle describes, "these parents have no concern to send their children to school because their poverty does not allow them to pay teachers."[43] Moreover, "under the constant anxieties of earning the necessities of life for themselves and their children, [they] cannot take the time to teach their children their duties as Christians."[44] The early Christian Schools set up then by De La Salle and the Brothers aimed "to place elementary education within the reach of the poor" in towns.[45] Their first pupils were boys, mainly from ages six to twelve years old.[46]

De La Salle was realistic about the impact that social neglect had on children while affirming their fundamental goodness. On the one hand, in being "abandoned to their own will," children were susceptible to negative influence from the company they keep "because their minds have not developed yet and they are not capable of much reflection."[47] Yet, on the other hand, children were also perceived as "the most innocent part of the Church, and usually the best disposed to receive the impressions of grace."[48] What De La Salle meant by 'innocence,' according to Lasallian scholar George Van Grieken, is a foundational goodness "rooted firmly in a deeper, longer faith perspective that looks beyond and behind the challenging and often disturbing realities prevalent

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[42] David Hamilton, *Towards a Theory of Schooling* (London: Falmer, 1989), 63. See also Alpago, "The Target Group," 23.

[43] *Meditations* 194.1

[44] *Meditations* 193.2

[45] Alpago, "The Target Group," 31.

[46] Ibid., 28.

[47] *Meditations* 203.2

[48] *Meditations* 205.3

outside, and sometimes inside, the classrooms of the time."[49] The teacher, then, has the task of cultivating habits for virtuous living in children "so that they are no longer … tossed here and there, no longer turned around by every wind of doctrine, by deceit, and trickery, whether through the companions with whom they associate, or men leading them into falsehood by their evil proposals."[50]

De La Salle's language about the child's nature may strike contemporary readers as arguably paternalistic, a charge that I will examine ahead in this chapter.[51] What is relevant here is to recognize De La Salle's emphasis on the difficult work of teaching that instructs and guides children to grow in their responsibility as moral agents. His insistence on the dignified nobility and equality of even poor children as God's children is noteworthy, especially in seventeenth century France where the social hierarchy between rich and poor was strictly maintained. This is the foundation for the teacher to love and know each individual child personally, in the way that Jesus the good shepherd "has great care for the sheep." Thus, De La Salle "knew children, related to children, spoke about children, and prayed for children as individuals who reflected God's presence and were growing and learning persons with a dignity of their own."[52] Indeed, his writings passionately highlight the fact that children deserve the spiritual care and moral guidance of a community of dependable adults in general, and teachers in particular, who would respect and lift up their God-given dignity.[53]

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[49] Van Grieken, "Soul for Soul – the Vocation of the Child in Lasallian Pedagogy," 363.

[50] *Meditations* 205.3

[51] See Section 3.3.2.

[52] Van Grieken, "Soul for Soul – the Vocation of the Child in Lasallian Pedagogy," 361.

[53] This is a recurrent theme in De La Salle's reflections on the zeal of a teacher. See in particular *Meditations* 201 and 202.

3.2.2 Common Siblinghood-in-Christ

The child's dependent interdependent relationship with the teacher is further imagined in Lasallian terms as a common siblinghood-in-Christ. Theological educator and Lasallian scholar, John Crawford, has in fact proposed "a sibling model of education" as "the most significant element of the Lasallian charism."[54] He writes, "For those called to teach, we are to be brothers and sisters to our younger siblings, if we are to imitate Jesus' praxis."[55] This sibling model is traced back to how De La Salle and his earliest followers understood the lay character of their fraternal relations as 'Brothers of the Christian Schools.' As Lasallian scholar Edgard Hengemüle recounts:

> the followers and collaborators of De La Salle did not want to call themselves teacher but purposefully chose to be known as Brothers, not only because for them, in their time, *teacher* implied money, payment, and that *Brother* brought to mind gratuity and Gospel simplicity; not just because they proposed to live fraternally and by association amongst themselves; but also, and foremost, they wanted to be older Brothers to their younger brothers, that is their students.[56]

In the Lasallian tradition, the term Brother is not simply a religious title. It intentionally marks a way of being teacher to student in a "pedagogy based on mutually respectful relationships."[57] It is this founding inspiration of being an elder brother to another that Crawford wishes to extend to all teachers as they reflect on their vocation:

> This Lasallian ethos works toward claiming our common inheritance as brothers and sisters of Jesus Christ. Lasallian teachers are not about their own importance in some hierarchically "more significant" place than their students. Rather Lasallian siblinghood is about assuring that the young will take their places side-by-side with us in our shared human dignity as brothers and sisters in the eyes of

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[54] John M. Crawford, FSC, "Lasallian Pedagogy: Who We Are is What We Teach," *AXIS: Journal of Lasallian Higher Education* 6, no. 2 (2015): 9, http://axis.smumn.edu/john-m-crawford-fsc-phd/lasallian-pedagogy-who-we-are-is-what-we-teach/.

[55] Ibid., 3.

[56] Hengemüle, *Lasallian Education: What Kind of Education Is It?,* 227.

[57] Gerard Rummery, FSC, "Role of the Community in Lasallian Education," in *Lasallian Studies No. 17: That Your School Runs Well - Approach to Lasallian Educational Model*, ed. Pedro Maria Gil, FSC, and Diego Muñoz, FSC (Rome, Italy: International Council of Lasallian Research and Resources, May 2013), 89.

our loving God.[58]

Common siblinghood-in-Christ serves as a communal anthropological foundation for the mutuality between teacher and student.[59] This mutuality underlines not only the respect that the teacher and students have for one another, but also the bi-directionality in which the teacher is an elder learning *from* their students in education as a dialogical moment of encounter. Crawford writes, "The teacher is to be elder Brother or Sister to the learner, and is able to be taught by their younger siblings. A sound educational community thrives when the participants are secure enough in the dignity of their own personhood to be open to the insights of the other."[60]

I agree with Crawford that common siblinghood is a rich metaphor to imagine "a vision of equality: teachers are not 'above' students, but are their elder siblings who hope that the ultimate purpose of their mutual work will be realized in the shared experience of God's Holy Presence."[61] Where teachers and students are equal is in their human dignity before God on their journey together as God's children. In emphasizing the inter-connectedness between teacher and student, common siblinghood energizes the inter-generational depth of education. That is, learners are invited "to understand themselves as the next generation of brothers and sisters to those who will follow after them in the cycle of life."[62] Teaching is "the greatest miracle [one] could perform" precisely because "to touch the hearts of your students" as siblings is to feel and fire up the pulse of a

[58] Crawford, "Lasallian Pedagogy," 4.
[59] Ibid., 5.
[60] Ibid., 12.
[61] Ibid., 19.
[62] Ibid., 4.

generation, in cooperation with God's Spirit who is creative and creating.[63]

However, Crawford's articulation of mutuality sidesteps the significant issue of a power differential not just between teacher and student, but also adult and child. To the extent that the teacher is an *elder* sibling, we need to critically consider the significance of what 'elder' means in the context of power when fostering mutual educational relationships. In fact, De La Salle showed a pastoral sensitivity to the teacher's use of power in his writings. For him, mutuality as respect for the dignity of the child as an equal does not call for an abdication of teacher authority. Rather, it demands that the teacher reflect on how that authority is used not for control but to create conditions that positively influence the child in life-giving ways.

Hence, De La Salle emphasized that teachers "must look at how they make themselves or their actions unbearable to those entrusted to their care."[64] This is reflected in his philosophy on school discipline "that deeply respects the integrity of both teachers and students.[65] Teachers "must reprove and correct with justice"; that is, children "must not be corrected like animals, but like reasonable persons."[66] Indeed, De La Salle rejected any coercive display of power by teachers. In *The Conduct of the Christian Schools*, he listed ways in which teachers could become overbearing on children. These included: "the teacher immediately rejects the reasons and excuses of children and is *not willing to listen to them at all*;" "the teacher, not mindful of personal faults, does not know how to sympathize with the weaknesses of children, and so exaggerates their faults too much.

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[63] *Meditations* 140.3.

[64] Van Grieken, "Soul for Soul – the Vocation of the Child in Lasallian Pedagogy," 367.

[65] Ibid., 367.

[66] *Meditations* 204.1

This is the situation when a teacher reprimands them or punishes them and acts as though *dealing with an insensible instrument rather than with a creature capable of reason.*"[67] The authority of teachers over children is relativized in terms of their common belonging to God, whose power is relationally manifested in the Spirit and through Christ as loving passion and greater compassion. Thus, for De La Salle, "The first thing to which we [teachers] must pay attention is not to undertake reproofs and corrections except under the guidance of the Spirit of God."[68] The teacher as an elder sibling has the greater responsibility in drawing children to God by following the example of Christ's passion and compassion in educational practice: "Every day you have poor children to instruct. Love them *tenderly* … following in this the example of Jesus Christ."[69]

Retrievable from De La Salle's pedagogical thought is an insight that contemporary theological and ethical research on children is coming to recognize: mutuality in love becomes more complicated when children are involved. "Consideration of children forces us to recognize that conceptions of mutuality are multivalent or age-, expertise-, and context-dependent," writes Miller-McLemore.[70] She further notes:

> Children's love can be effusive and spontaneous, but they are also in no position initially to offer love in the same way as adults. Physically and cognitively, until a certain age, children are not capable of the kind of inverse thinking and acting required for genuine mutuality in which one can think and feel oneself into the other's skin. Nor are they prepared or able to meet the responsibilities of care or offer material aid to others.[71]

While some may critically question the presumptions Miller-McLemore makes about

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[67] John Baptist de La Salle, *The Conduct of the Christian Schools*, trans. F. de La Fontainerie and Richard Arnandez, FSC, ed. William Mann, FSC (Landover: Lasallian Publications, 1996), 136. Emphasis mine. Subsequent references to this text will be cited as *Conduct*.

[68] *Meditations* 204.1

[69] *Meditations* 166.2. Emphasis mine.

[70] Miller-McLemore*, Let the Children Come*, 131.

[71] Ibid., 128-129.

children's competency, she rightly recognizes that mutuality in the context of child care is complicated by the asymmetrical relationship between children and adults due to biological and psychological factors. As much as children do form and shape those around them,[72] they still require guidance from responsible adults with more experience and "(hopefully) life-earned wisdom."[73] Children also depend on adults who generally have more social power to advocate for structural changes to promote their well-being.

Mutual love with children is thus not necessarily opposed to hierarchy, but requires it as "a temporary inequity between persons – whether of power, authority, expertise, responsibility, or maturity – that is moving toward but has not arrived at genuine mutuality."[74] The educational wisdom of De La Salle holds this tension between mutuality and hierarchy in his insistence on balance in the teacher-student relationship: "balance between firmness on one hand and kindness, affability, tenderness, and gentleness on the other."[75] As expressed in the *Conduct*: "that firmness may not degenerate into harshness and that gentleness may not degenerate into languor and weakness."[76] Crawford's espousal of mutuality in "a sibling model of education"[77] needs to be qualified by a certain flexibility in navigating a teacher's hierarchical relationship with students. Hierarchy is not necessarily dominance, through it can be when "[p]ower-

[72] Bonnie J. Miller-McLemore, "Childhood: The (Often Hidden yet Lively) Vocational Life of Children," in *Calling All Years Good: Christian Vocation throughout Life's Seasons,* ed. Kathleen A. Cahalan and Bonnie J. Miller-McLemore (Grand Rapids: William. B. Eerdmans, 2017), 54: "children form adults more than adults realize, a distinctive vocational role to which adults should be alert and receptive." I will examine this dynamic more in Chapter Four.

[73] Miller-McLemore*, Let the Children Come*, 131.

[74] Ibid., 130.

[75] Hengemüle, *Lasallian Education: What Kind of Education Is It?*, 229.

[76] *Conduct*, 135.

[77] Crawford, FSC., "Lasallian Pedagogy," 9.

over relationships … are unchanging and exploitative."[78] In this regard, I highlight adultism as a form of structural dominance that adults have over children. How might a critique of adultism serve as a lens to examine De La Salle's conception of the child's nature in his writings? This critical analysis is crucial in reading forward the Lasallian educational mission that envisions solidarity with children as key to the prophetic vocation of teaching.

3.3 Critical Assessment of De La Salle's Conception of the Child's Nature

3.3.1 A Critical Lens on Adultism

A critique of adultism does not discount the asymmetry in the adult-child relationship. Although there is no universal conception of childhood, one must still recognize some features that warrant the responsible care from adults. As theologian Douglas Sturm notes:

> To be sure, children, especially in their earliest years, live in a state of deep dependency and vulnerability. They are relatively unsophisticated in the ways of the wider world. They confront a sequence of stages of development which challenge them mightily as they proceed.[79]

What adultism points to, however, is a power differential in which differences between adults and children are essentialized in a simplistic binary that "constitutes a structure of domination: adults have the authority to control children, to direct their lives, to set the parameters of their behavior, to fix the structure of possibilities open to them."[80] Adultism indicates "a prejudice in favor of adults."[81] It calls out "the moral illegitimacy of treating children and adults as two radically different kinds of human beings, … and

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[78] Miller-McLemore, *Let the Children Come*, 130.

[79] Sturm, "On the Suffering and Rights of Children: Toward a Theology of Childhood Liberation," 157.

[80] Ibid., 154.

[81] Elisabeth Young-Bruehl, *Childism: Confronting Prejudice Against Children* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2012), 8.

withdrawing from children and young people basic respect."[82] This disrespect is shown when adultism presumes the passivity of children as unformed adults, rather than as "creative agents engaged in creative interaction with the world." Adultism is blind to the value of children in and of themselves; it is also deaf to the value of what children have to say in the present. Adultism diminishes the full human depth of children as created in God's image and likeness.

Current theological literature on childhood and children is critical of adultism as it interrogates the adult-centric epistemologies in our contextually-bound social constructions of 'child' and 'childhood.' For example, John Wall's work in theological ethics traces the adult-centric assumptions that undergird interpretations of childhood in the history of ethical thought in the West. He identifies three enduring models: the first is a "top-down" approach that conceives of childhood as "humanity's original natural state of moral disorder or corruption" that requires "careful disciplining into strong moral communities."[83] The second is a "bottom-up" approach that understands childhood as "humanity's original goodness, which should therefore be appreciated, nurtured, and cultivated in order to redeem historically corrupt societies."[84] Finally, the third approaches childhood from a "developmental" perspective that interprets childhood as "neither pure nor unruly … but in a state of fundamental ethical neutrality or blankness."[85] Wall argues that the adultism in each of these three models has constructed

[82] Annemie Dillen, "Religious participation of children as active subjects: toward a hermeneutical-communicative model of religious education in families with young children," *International Journal of Children's Spirituality* 12, no. 1 (April 2007), 42.

[83] Wall, *Ethics in Light of Childhood*, 15.

[84] Ibid., 20.

[85] Ibid., 25.

deficit views about children and undermined their human complexity as moral agents. "Children have been socially marginalized throughout history, not just because adults have failed to think about them, but more profoundly because children have not been considered moral thinkers themselves," he writes.[86]

Beyond issues of moral formation, adultism has also shaped Christian theologies of mission in relation to children. As theologian D.J. Konz argues, the church's "mission postures" toward children in Christian history are being mediated through the "many childs" imagined in theological discourses at any particular time and place.[87] 'Mission postures' refer to "ways the church has sought to pass on faith to successive generations," and they are: "idealise; save; admonish parents; rescue and protect; and educate toward faith and virtue."[88] Implicated in these postures are five images of 'child': "inherently innocent; inherently sinful; situated in family; vulnerable and suffering; and Christian-adult-in-the-making."[89] Recognizing this multiple constructed-ness of 'child' "alerts us to our adult tendency … to 'construct' what we understand a child to be."[90] It must lead us to critically examine our preconceptions, "discarding the assumption that because we exist in and around children, we know objectively who and what a child is; yet at the same time realizing it is indeed through being with and around children that real understanding – a relational knowing – can occur."[91]

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[86] Ibid., 177.

[87] D.J. Konz, "The Many and the One: Theology, Mission and Child in Historical Perspective," in *Theology, Mission and Child: Global Perspectives*, ed. Bill Prevette, Keith J. White, C. Rosalee Velloso Ewell and D.J. Konz (Eugene, Oregon: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2014), 23.

[88] Ibid., 24.

[89] Ibid., 24.

[90] Ibid., 23.

[91] Ibid., 42.

Underscored then is a posture of critical self-reflexivity that interrogates and disrupts adult-centric presuppositions about children and childhood. "The key point here," according to Konz, "is doing the difficult work of self-critical disengagement of one's own preconceptions to make space to encounter the child on its own terms – achieving not a 'pure' objective knowledge, and yet a real, existential understanding all the same."[92] In other words, critiquing adultism points us to insist on the human complexity of children in their relationships with themselves, others, and God in community. It dialectically presses us to examine and dismantle the dominant meanings socially constructed about adulthood that become projected on children. As theologian David Jensen writes, "To understand children in God's image, moreover, is to reject the multiple attempts to mold children in our image."[93] Critique of adultism, then, holds out a space for children to be dynamically encountered as children in their own terms, and as human beings created in God's image.

3.3.2 "Children at birth are like a mass of flesh": Interrogating the Charge of Paternalism

Seen through a critique of adultism, I contend that a key limitation in De La Salle's anthropological interpretation of the child's nature lies in the assumption that the child is a rational adult-in-the-making. In this construction, the child is seen as being less than the rational adult European white male, who has historically been privileged in the West as normative of a full human being. To the extent that this assumption is left uninterrogated, the Lasallian tradition risks falling prey to paternalistic approaches in

[92] Ibid., 42.

[93] Jensen, *Graced Vulnerability*, 43.

education that obscures the complex agency of children in their various social contexts while purporting to uphold their human dignity.

De La Salle's writings on the developing nature of children are shot through with paradox. On the one hand, he emphasizes their human dignity in stating that "people, and *even* children, are endowed with reason and must not be corrected like animals, but like reasonable persons."[94] On the other hand, he also writes: not only are children's minds "more dull," they "can easily be led into sin" as "they have little use of their reason, and because nature is consequently more lively in them and strongly inclined to enjoy the pleasures of the senses."[95] The most startling description of the nature of children is probably found in Meditation 197:

> It can be said that children at birth are like a mass of flesh. Their minds do not emerge from the matter in them except with time and become refined only little by little. As an unavoidable consequence, those who are ordinarily instructed in the schools are not yet able by themselves to understand easily the Christian truths and maxims. They need good guides and visible angels to help them learn these things. […] If this help is not given, they often remain all their lives insensitive and opposed to thoughts of God and incapable of knowing and appreciating them.[96]

With reference to this meditation, Van Grieken acknowledges that the "anthropological foundation for De La Salle's educational perspective … may appear to be somewhat condescending or paternalistic."[97] Instead of probing deeper into how it may be paternalistic, he suggests that "given the popular movements of seventeenth-century France (Jansenism, Quietism, Gallicanism, etc.) and De La Salle's own wide-ranging educational experience," the meditation "should still be also seen as remarkably

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[94] *Meditations* 204.1, emphasis mine.

[95] *Meditations* 197.1, 56.2

[96] *Meditations* 197.1

[97] Van Grieken, "Soul for Soul – the Vocation of the Child in Lasallian Pedagogy," 369.

insightful and direct."[98] Yet, how so?

Indeed, De La Salle's articulation of the child's developing nature ought to be understood in light of various philosophical, pedagogical, and theological influences of his time in seventeenth-century France, at the cusp of early modernity in Europe and after the Catholic Counter-Reformation. Focused on elementary schooling for poor boys (ages six to twelve years old), De La Salle's educational project was also situated within a wider socio-cultural milieu in Europe shaped by Renaissance humanism. This humanism projected an optimism "that all human beings are educable, transformable."[99] Alongside this was the privileging of the rational adult European white male as the full measure of humanity. In this regard, the child as "a small person, but without the prerogatives of an adult" was also "identified by the lack of the use of reason, by ignorance and weakness."[100] However, this did not mean that children were unimportant. As historian Hugh Cunningham notes of the Renaissance, "[c]hildren were thought to hold the key to the future of the state, and their proper upbringing was crucial to that future."[101]

A notable figure in this Renaissance humanism was Desiderius Erasmus, who stressed on the importance of early education for children. He wrote:

> The child that nature has given you is nothing but a shapeless lump, but the material is still pliable, capable of assuming any form, and you must so mould it that it takes on the best possible character. If you are negligent, you will rear an animal; but if you apply yourself, you will fashion, if I may use such a bold term,

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[98] Ibid., 369.

[99] Léon Lauraire, FSC., *Cahiers lasalliens Vol. 63: The Conduct of Schools – A Comparative Approach* (Rome: Brothers of the Christian Schools, 2011), 22. For a discussion on key figures influencing the humanist movement in the Renaissance (e.g. Erasmus, Rabelais, Montaigne) and their connection with De La Salle's educational thought, see p. 23-48.

[100] Hengemüle, FSC, *Lasallian Education: Which Kind of Education is It?,* 132.

[101] Cunningham, *Children and Childhood in Western Society since 1500*, 42.

a godlike creature.[102]

Noteworthy is how Erasmus's language is echoed in De La Salle's Meditation 197: "It can be said that children at birth are like a mass of flesh. Their minds do not emerge from the matter in them except with time and become refined only little by little." What is striking here is a pre-scientific psychological sensibility about the child as a developing being through time. This is significant especially since psychology was still at a nascent stage in separating itself from philosophy in De La Salle's time in the seventeenth century.[103]

This proto-psychological dimension in De La Salle's educational thought could also be traced in the educational movement of "pedagogical realism" in the seventeenth century.[104] This was a philosophical outlook that envisioned education as "preparation for life, rather than aesthetic and literary formation."[105] It assumed a physical world out there that can be concretely experienced by the senses and objectively known through the method of scientific experimentation.[106] Following from this epistemology, the distinctive nature of the child increasingly became an object of study as a separate developing being from an adult. In theorizing a method of educating that is within the child's reach, for instance, Comenius "explained that children should be taught not

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[102] 'A declamation on the subject of early liberal education for children,' in *Collected Works of Erasmus*, Vol. 26, p. 297, 301-2, 305, cited in Cunningham, *Children and Childhood in Western Society since 1500,* 44.

[103] Hengemüle, *Lasallian Education: Which Kind of Education is It?,* 131.

[104] Ibid., 157

[105] Ibid., 158. As Hengemüle highlights, De La Salle's educational thought and practice agreed with the ideas of pedagogical realists like John Amos Comenius, Wolfgang Ratke, August Hermann Francke, and John Locke. For a discussion of their possible influences, see p. 158-159. See also Fitzpatrick, *La Salle: Patron of All Teachers* (Milwaukee: Bruce Publishing Company, 1951), 223-227.

[106] George R. Knight, *Philosophy and Education: An Introduction in Christian Perspective* (Berrien Springs, Michigan: Andrews University Press, 2006), 50-54.

according to the logical structuring of the disciplines but according to their nature or psychological development."[107] He also proposed that children are most easily formed because of the malleability of their minds. De La Salle's writings echoed some of this pre-scientific psychological understanding of the child in emphasizing a pedagogy adapted to the age and ability of the student. He would remind the Brothers:

> Have you been careful to teach them the maxims and practices of the holy Gospel and to see that they practice them? Have you suggested to them practices appropriate to their age and condition? [108]

One also finds in the *Conduct* a systematic description of whether and how children must be corrected in the Christian Schools based on practical observations of their temperaments and social situations.[109] That is, "the criterion of correction was not simply the nature and seriousness of the fault committed, but also, and even more so, the type of student who committed it."[110] Notwithstanding the outmoded language of this typology that did not have the backing of later psychological science, it retains the practical wisdom in Lasallian pedagogy of knowing the whole child as a physical, social, spiritual, *and* psychological being. As Lasallian scholar Edgard Hengemüle points out, De La Salle anticipates what Rousseau would write later in the eighteenth century: "Begin by studying better your students, because you certainly do not know them."[111] The teacher is in the Lasallian tradition obliged to "come down to them [the children] by

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[107] John L. Elias, *A History of Christian Education: Protestant, Catholic, and Orthodox Perspectives* (Malabar, Florida: Krieger Publishing Company, 2002), 110.

[108] *Meditations* 91.3.

[109] *Conduct*, 145-153. This description is set under the following headings: "Ill-bred, Self-willed, or Delinquent Children," "Stubborn Students," Gentle Children, Newcomers, Special Cases," and "Accusers and Accused."

[110] Hengemüle, FSC, *Lasallian Education: Which Kind of Education is It?,* 143.

[111] Ibid., 145.

accommodating yourself to their level," adapting their methods "according to their age and ability."[112]

Although there are elements within De La Salle's educational thought that echo ideas in humanism and pedagogical realism, it is difficult to establish conclusively that he actually drew on these philosophical sources. As Hengemüle observes, "there are no proven signs that De La Salle had contact either with the people or with the referenced writings promoting the new education according to the modern spirit, or with those who gave that education its scientific and philosophical grounding."[113] He argues that De La Salle was instead "a realist more by nature" in the sense of being practically engaged with what needed to be done at that particular moment in the life of students to prepare them for life.[114] Thus, "his educational enterprises – experimented, observed, reflected on and constantly revised – did not arise from theoretical musings, the incarnation of abstract principles, but from the specific needs to be served and of the everyday student."[115]

Nonetheless, to the extent that these philosophical influences shaped the norms of the European context in seventeenth century France, I believe it is reasonable to claim that they formed the backdrop which De La Salle inherited to make sense of his everyday reality. More significantly, these influences assumed the human child as a rational adult-in-the-making, a view which De La Salle took for granted in his time. Yet, this assumption is problematic as a deficit construction of childhood, when seen through the

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[112] *Meditations* 198.1; 206.1.

[113] Hengemüle, *Lasallian Education: Which Kind of Education is It?,* 159

[114] Ibid., 160

[115] Ibid., 160.

critical lens of adultism in contemporary research on children and childhood. It suggests the child as having an "unformed potential" that unfolds relationally "through increasingly rational dialogue" with others across time.[116] Childhood, then, becomes "understood as a path or passageway to something other than childhood. Adulthood, in contrast, is usually considered somehow complete, or at least more complete" by way of reason.[117]

This deficit view of childhood was also reinforced in the theological context of De La Salle's time. There was concomitantly the pervasive influence of an Augustinian theological anthropology that viewed the child as "born marked and even corrupted by original sin, which inclined him or her naturally to evil."[118] To be clear, while Augustine believed that infants are tainted with original sin, he did not claim their innate depravity. Infants are, for him, physically weak to inflict harm on another though they become more culpable for their actions when they grow in acquiring language and reason from childhood onward.[119] This Augustinian anthropology reverberated in the early modern period, and was stretched to the extreme as some reformers during the Catholic Counter-Reformation in France, like the Puritans, "had a similarly low opinion of children, being no less vehement in denouncing them as feeble and guilty of original sin."[120]

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[116] Wall, *Ethics in Light of Childhood*, 25.

[117] Ibid., 29.

[118] Hengemüle, *Lasallian Education: Which Kind of Education is It?,* 132.

[119] For a nuanced reading of Augustine's theological interpretation of childhood, see Martha Ellen Stortz, "'Where or When Was Your Servant Innocent?': Augustine on Childhood," in *The Child in Christian Thought*, ed. Marcia J. Bunge (Grand Rapids, Michigan and Cambridge, U.K.: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2001), 78-102. Stortz argues that Augustine's view of childhood is one of "non-innocence," a third way between innocence and innate depravity (p. 82). See also Gillian Clark, "The Fathers and the Children," in *The Church and Childhood*, ed. Diana Wood (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 1994), 23-25.

[120] Heywood, *A History of Childhood: Children and Childhood in the West from Medieval to Modern Times*, 22.

De La Salle shared Augustine's idea of the child as weak in nature, but "balanced the idea of the inclination to evil with the possibility of overcoming it through the development not only of acts but of good habits themselves."[121] Consider, for instance, the following meditation:

> People are naturally so inclined to sin that they seem to find no other pleasure than committing it. This is seen especially in children because their minds have not developed yet and they are not capable of much serious reflection. They seem to have no other inclination than to please their passions and their senses, and to satisfy their nature. […] if they are abandoned to their own will, they will run the risk of ruining themselves and causing much sorrow to their parents. The reason for this is because the faults turn into a habit which will be difficult to correct. The good and bad habits contracted in childhood and maintained over a period of time ordinarily become part of nature.[122]

Notwithstanding the deficit view of children, this passage is still significant in its presentation of a developmental anthropology that theologically grounds a relational account of habit formation in the reality of children's lives. The child is "a being in the process of becoming … a being given specific aptitudes to develop; physically and spiritually malleable; inclined to evil, yet perfectible."[123] For De La Salle, this hope-filled possibility of children being transformed through education is borne out of faith in each child as God's own, and whom God never abandons but entrusts to the attentive and vigilant care of the teacher called to be a reliable moral guide.[124] Thus, Van Grieken writes:

> It would be accurate to say that he [De La Salle] did not have any romantic or idealistic ideas about children. Forty years with the poor would quickly erode the best of intentions in that regard. Instead, De La Salle gave children their due, recognizing both their limitations and their strengths, and setting their vocation in the midst of their experience. Children have a vocation to see themselves as part of the world around them, and they have a God-given right to be treated with a

[121] Hengemüle, FSC, *Lasallian Education: Which Kind of Education is It?,* 133.

[122] *Meditations* 203.2.

[123] Hengemüle, FSC, *Lasallian Education: Which Kind of Education is It?,* 153.

[124] Cf. *Meditations* 193.2.

> respect that reaches beyond their years, drawing them forward to live into the deeper version of their vocation as a child of God.[125]

From this standpoint, the charge of paternalism in De La Salle's view of children as condescending is arguably restrictive. Perhaps, rather than paternalism, De La Salle reveals more a paternal love for children to whom the Brothers are to devote their pedagogical attention that is at the same time pastoral. Yet, it is important to critically recognize the limits in De La Salle's assumption about the child as a rational adult-in-the-making.

To be clear, the point of my critique here is not to negate the view that children are developing beings. Nor am I rejecting the future of children to become adults. As sociologist Emma Uprichard argues, children are both "being and becomings."[126] That is, the temporal dimension of a child's 'being' implies her or his 'becoming' an open-ended dynamic self, (re)-composing who s/he is interdependently with others through time. "'Looking forward' to what a child 'becomes' is arguably an important part of 'being' a child," she writes.[127] From this standpoint, "[c]hildren have the right to become adults and experience their childhood as children who will be future adults."[128] This conception of children as "being and becomings" is recoverable from and worth affirming in De La Salle's writings. In fact, De La Salle goes further theologically to ground the 'being' of children in 'becoming' "heirs to the Kingdom [which] called for and required preparing them to be a useful part of human society" through education.[129]

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[125] Van Grieken, "Soul for Soul – the Vocation of the Child in Lasallian Pedagogy," 368-369.

[126] Uprichard, "Children as 'Being and Becomings': Children, Childhood and Temporality," 303.

[127] Ibid., 306.

[128] Ibid., 306.

[129] Hengemüle, *Lasallian Education: Which Kind of Education is It?,* 165. See also *Meditations* 201.2.

However, what deserves critique is a constructed understanding of children and childhood that takes "adult-centered rational individualism" as its norm.[130] Failure to do so would reproduce a deficit view of children as unformed adults, which diminishes their full human complexity as already agents in the present for the future, with capacities for creative meaning-making in relation with others in diverse contexts. This in turn gives rise to paternalistic adultist approaches in education, which negate the possibility that adult teachers *can* and *must* learn *from* and *alongside* children. This critique is important not only because adultism distorts the striving for mutuality in the teacher-student relationship. It is crucial if the prophetic edge of the Lasallian educational mission that makes an option for children is to be seriously sustained, sharpened, and refreshed. A Lasallian anthropology of belonging that embeds children as "being and becomings" must be careful not to equate their dependent interdependency in educational relationships with subordination that underestimates or negates their agentic capacity as meaning makers. Underneath this is another deeper issue that relates to how the vulnerability of children is interpreted.

3.4 The Learning Child as Agent in a Vulnerable Relation of Belonging

The dominant focus on rationality in Western philosophical and theological thinking has sidelined vulnerability as a significant dimension of our intrinsic human dignity in God's image. Moral theologian Mary Doyle Roche writes:

> Human dignity includes but is not limited to the exercise of reason as the Western philosophical traditions have defined it. […] Vulnerability, including the vulnerability characteristic of childhood, and finitude are not contrary to dignity but are constitutive features of it. [131]

[130] Wall, *Ethics in Light of Childhood*, 39

[131] Roche, *Children, Consumerism, and the Common Good*, 88.

The etymology of 'vulnerability' has its roots in the Latin *vulnus*, which denotes susceptibility to wound or harm. According to Wall, there are at least four possible meanings of its use in the history of Western ethical thought about childhood: first, there is the sense of "being overwhelmed by one's own disordered animality;" second, "having one's inner gifts and talents squashed by a larger corrupted society;" third, a state of "remaining captive to an undeveloped or uneducated ignorance;" and fourth, "the potential to be excluded from the levers of social power."[132] These interpretations tend to dichotomize and subordinate vulnerability to a concept of agency that takes "adult-centered rational individualism" as its norm.[133] Claims about the vulnerability of children end up reinforcing their inherent weakness and passivity, whilst raising the spotlight of protection over them.

Yet, as Wall argues from a phenomenological perspective, "All human beings from birth to death must negotiate a lifelong dynamics of agency and vulnerability in relation to one another. Being-in-the-world is from the very beginning both passively constructed by others and societies and actively constructed by a self."[134] The more profound meaning of vulnerability, then, is associated "not with lack of agency, but with openness and relationality to the world."[135] The human dignity of children is realized, then, through a respectful engagement of their social participation as vulnerable agents, but with a caution and resistance against their exploitation and manipulation.[136]

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[132] Wall, *Ethics in Light of Childhood*, 39.

[133] Ibid., 39

[134] Ibid., 40.

[135] Ibid., 39.

[136] Roche, *Children, Consumerism, and the Common Good*, 83.

The consideration of childhood vulnerability in a Christian theological anthropology that supports the ethical treatment of children remains an important issue. In this regard, David Jensen proposes a contemporary advocacy theology of childhood as "graced vulnerability." He locates childhood within a theological elaboration of vulnerability as a dimension of human interrelatedness wherein the gracious mystery of God's life is abundantly experienced. As he writes, "The vulnerability of children, then, is a fact of the God-given relatedness into which all persons are born: though most visible in infancy, we never outgrow it."[137] Vulnerability as a constitutive dimension of the *imago Dei* "does not emerge as an essence of children's lives, but in the network of difference and personal relationships in which children live."[138] In other words, rather than an essentialized trait of weakness in children, vulnerability is positively reframed here as intrinsic to human interrelatedness. The presence of children tangibly reminds us about this primordial vulnerability that we share in being relationally human. The uniqueness of each child and the diversity of children's lives reveal our shared human vulnerability-in-difference as reflective of the *imago Dei*. To be created in God's image and likeness is to reflect "a God who becomes vulnerable in relation to others, who calls us to live in vulnerability with others."[139]

It is important, however, not to romanticize the vulnerability of children. The primordial vulnerability in being human is to be distinguished from the particular social vulnerability of children in structures of power that render them being possibly preyed upon, manipulated, and exploited by adults. As Jensen highlights:

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[137] Jensen, *Graced Vulnerability*, 49.

[138] Ibid., 48.

[139] Ibid., 15.

> If children's vulnerability renders them open to the world, it also means that they are particularly susceptible to violation by predators, both individual and systemic. Violation and violence permeate the world of children, and in countless instances destroy remnants of childhood. Closing our eyes will not help them. Only by paying attention to the violence that afflicts children's lives can we arrive at a better theological understanding of childhood, and more importantly, offer the kind of prophetic witness and care that will protect and nurture each child chosen by God.[140]

This does not mean that children are no longer susceptible to falling into sin. Rather, Jensen argues more specifically that the adult-centrism in our Christian doctrine of sin has obscured how children are more often sinned against through the wounding effects of adult neglect, rejection, and violence that become internalized throughout their lives. He reworks an understanding of vulnerability to highlight the social sin committed against children as the least when they are systemically subject to various forms of refusal in society – a refusal of being listened to and trusted in, a refusal of their voices, a refusal of their right to education in a safe neighborhood, a refusal of their need for care and protection, a refusal of love. In this regard, adultism can collude with racism, classism, and hetero-sexism as social sin that closes our eyes to the human complexity of children. This is tantamount to "being treated as something other than a child of God."[141]

Children in our midst therefore orient us to recognize vulnerability as a condition of who we are in relation with others. What is sinful is the trespassing of human vulnerability, especially in relation to children as the marginalized. Any participation in social structures that sins against children is to sin against God in the dignity of our created humanity. Recognizing the social vulnerability of children also should not be

[140] Ibid., 63.

[141] Ibid., 94.

seen as diminishing their sense of agency. Rather, it points to how their sense of agency can so easily be obscured and stifled when they are not heard and seen for who they are.

What does this contemporary theological lens on the vulnerability of childhood and children illumine about the relevance of the Lasallian tradition today? What insights of De La Salle's conception about the child does it affirm and extend? First, it highlights and extends the dimension of social sin in De La Salle's writings. As discussed earlier, they reflect an Augustinian understanding of sin that assumes vulnerability to mean children's susceptibility to depravation. For De La Salle, the teacher is "in a position to stop and curb their corrupt inclinations … and to establish them in such a way in the practice of good, that they give the demon no entrance to them."[142] Yet, another significant strand is his recognition of the social neglect of children due to poverty and its impact on who they become:

> The results of this condition are regrettable, for these poor children, accustomed to lead an idle life for many years, have great difficulty adjusting when it comes time for them to go to work. In addition, through association with bad companions they learn to commit many sins which later on are very difficult to stop, because of the persistent bad habits they have contracted over such long time.[143]

Hengemüle comments on this passage: "Without using current language, he [De La Salle] admitted that sin is also structural, that is, that these children had also been victims of a society that ignored or excluded them."[144] It is this admission that continues to inform the prophetic dimension of Lasallian education, in which the call to teach children as an act of faith is not separate from the struggle for justice that promotes their human flourishing

[142] *Meditations* 198.2. Emphasis his.

[143] *Meditations* 194.1.

[144] Hengemüle, *Lasallian Education: Which Kind of Education is It?,* 47.

through schools that serve their families and communities. The contemporary theological emphasis on the social vulnerability of children sharpens this vision.

Second, where the Lasallian educational imagination goes further is its proposal that schools informed by the Christian faith are called to be a counter-cultural force that challenges and transforms social conditions that render children vulnerable to exclusion from abundant life in God. This proposal is rooted in its anthropology of belonging in which children are received as God's own, and one with us as siblings-in-Christ. This anthropology is foundational to De La Salle's conviction that "it was all children, without distinction, who had a right to salvation."[145] His outreach to include all, however, began with a missional priority to the poor. Thus, De La Salle and the early Brothers went against the status quo in France by teaching writing for free in their schools. This of course incurred the wrath of the Writing Masters who, until then, had monopolized the teaching of writing for a fee that the poor could not afford. In all of this, "De La Salle gave to [children of the poor] the possibility of breaking the barriers that confined them, breaking through the circle of social determinism that enclosed them."[146] As he wrote, "the child that knows how to read and write will be capable of anything."[147]

What is enduring in the Lasallian tradition is this spirit of educating in Christian faith that guides children to recognize and nurture the gift of who they are in service to others and for the life of the world. More profoundly, it is educating toward a growing recognition of their social agency in a vulnerable relation of belonging to diverse others in multiple communities as responsible neighbors bearing witness to God's presence of

[145] Schneider, "Making the Lasallian charism live today," 261.
[146] Hengemüle, *Lasallian Education: Which Kind of Education is It?,* 59.
[147] *Conduct*, 161.

passion and compassion. As Lasallian scholar Pierre Ouattara reflects, "Just as the baby begins its existence with the welcome it receives into the world, so education contributes to teaching the child how to find and to create hospitality from within."[148] The Lasallian school has, for him, "its vocation as a school of hospitality," which is realized through the teacher-student relationship that mirrors God's presence to each other.[149] Noteworthy, again, is the communal anthropology of relational belonging as foundational to the Lasallian educational imagination. It embeds the contemporary theological discussion on children's vulnerability within a wider frame of their relation of belonging to God as the ground of life for their social "being and becomings."[150] This communal anthropology affirms the dignity of children as continual learners who deserve an educational community of attentive adults that will gently hold them in a vulnerable relation of belonging while patiently nurturing their growth to exercise their agency in responsible and life-giving ways as God's children.

While my focus is on the teacher-child relationship, I am cognizant that it is interconnected to the multiple relationships each child has with other adults outside the classroom in their families and communities.[151] A Lasallian anthropology of relational belonging opens itself to a more multi-faceted engagement with how children navigate their sense of agency across different types of relationships with adults and within multiple intersecting social systems. The Lasallian tradition emphasizes the need for

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[148] Ouattara, "The Lasallian Service of Education: A Means of Salvation for Today?", 294.

[149] Ibid., 294.

[150] Uprichard, "Children as 'Being and Becomings': Children, Childhood and Temporality," 303.

[151] For a discussion on the Lasallian School and parents in the time of De La Salle, see Hengemüle, *Lasallian Education: Which Kind of Education is It?,* 268-277. De La Salle did not view teachers as replacing parents, but supporting and working with them when they were unable to exercise their roles as the child's primary educators. At the same time, he also saw children of the poor having an influence on their parents from what they had learnt in school.

teachers to engage with this complexity in faith through contemplation. "Recognize Jesus beneath the poor rags of the children whom you have to instruct"[152] – this forms the basis for Lasallian prophetic critique and social transformation in education. Lasallian contemplation calls teachers to enter into a relation of human vulnerability in God's presence that is the birthplace for their connection with children. Lasallian contemplation presses teachers to see that the process of educating for social transformation is rooted in an ongoing interior conversion to each child in the classroom as God's own and a member of Jesus Christ.

3.5 Conclusion

In light of the turn to children and childhood in contemporary theology, I argue that what is worthy of retrieval and development is a Lasallian anthropology of relational belonging. This anthropology situates the human dignity of children theologically in terms of whose they in God as a diverse creation. It structures the teacher-student relationship along two interrelated axes - as *God's children* and *siblings-in-Christ*. Within this communal anthropology, each child as student is encountered as God's own, and as a learner growing into responsible agency in a vulnerable relation of belonging to others in dependent interdependency. Solidarity with children in the liberative vision of Lasallian education rests on this foundational anthropology: that children as "members of Jesus Christ" participate in the mystery of the Incarnation to reveal God's presence as being one *of* us and *with* us. Children are right from the start our companions in life, who walk the way of co-discipleship with adults, in the presence of God as the source of life. Children call forth a wider community of care beyond their own biological families. A

[152] *Meditations* 96.3.

Lasallian anthropology of relational belonging undergirds its preferential option for children in educating toward the common good. The call to teach children is also a call to build a more just world that welcomes, engages, and develops their participation *now* as responsible agents building up God's peaceable reign while also attending to their social vulnerability that warrants protection. Lasallian pedagogy begins to do this through a presence of *being with* that the teacher fosters with students in the classroom. This presence is a relation of trust the teacher builds with students, patterned after God's communion with us as siblings-in-Christ. How might teachers then enact this sense of presence within a communal anthropology of belonging? To this question I now turn, with a consideration of how critical pedagogical theory can be relevant.

CHAPTER FOUR

LISTENING TO CHILDREN AS JUST PRESENCE IN TEACHING

Jonathan Kozol, educator and advocate for children in American inner-city schools, writes, "The best of teachers are not merely the technicians of proficiency; they are also ministers of innocence, practitioners of tender expectations … Teachers like these believe that every child who has been entrusted to their care comes into their classroom with *inherent* value to begin with."[1] These words highlight the duty that teachers have in treating children justly by honoring their full humanity. As argued in Chapter Three, the Lasallian tradition situates the inherent value of children in its anthropology of relational belonging that regards each child as irreplaceably God's own and a fellow younger sibling-in Christ. This anthropology is foundational to its preferential option for children in education, where the call to teach children is also a call to build a more just world that welcomes, engages, and develops their participation *now* as responsible agents building up God's peaceable reign, while also attending to their social vulnerability that warrants protection.

Drawing on the literature in critical pedagogy and participatory action research with children ((C)PAR), I discuss how this Lasallian anthropology of belonging can be enacted by teachers, with a focus on listening as a critical-contemplative pedagogical practice. This emphasis on listening stems from my conviction that creating spaces for children's voices to be attentively received is at the heart of their being and becoming in relational belonging. Listening to learn from children's perspectives is learning to teach. I also frame this practice theologically within a wider discussion of God's call to just

[1] Jonathan Kozol, *Letters to a Young Teacher* (New York: Broadway Books, 2007), 4-5. Emphasis his.

presence in teaching. This call, I propose, is discerned *in* a relation of *being with* that is receptive to the mystery of the child as *graced irruption*. This is an insight extended from the Lasallian tradition: between the teacher and child is the incarnational revelation of God's presence to each other in education as a spiritual journey. From the standpoint of its preferential option for children, the child as graced irruption is positioned as an agent of God's call to teaching as a prophetic vocation.

4.1 Just Presence and Spirituality in Teaching

To speak about teaching as a vocation is to underscore its profoundly relational character that is at the same time ethical. Educational philosopher David Hansen emphasizes the moral dimension that intertwines with the intellectual in teaching. He writes, "The practice of teaching, as contrasted with merely supplying information to others, obliges its practitioners to cultivate their capacity to attend intellectually and morally to students."[2] From the standpoint of Brazilian educator and critical theorist Paulo Freire, this intellectual and moral attentiveness to students must implicate teachers to reflect critically who they are and are becoming. As he evocatively puts it, "The beauty of the practice of teaching is made up of a passion for integrity that unites teacher and student."[3] By integrity, he means a harmony between what one says and does as "words not given body (made flesh) have little or no value."[4] Indeed, "the exercise of my teaching activity does not leave me untouched."[5] The teacher is continually challenged to

[2] David T. Hansen, *Exploring the Moral Heart of Teaching: Toward a Teacher's Creed* (New York and London: Teachers College Press, 2001), 11.

[3] Paulo Freire, *Pedagogy of Freedom: Ethics, Democracy, and Civic Courage*, trans. Patrick Clarke (Lanham, Maryland: Rowan & Littlefield Publishers, 1998), 88.

[4] Ibid., 39.

[5] Ibid., 89.

(re)-think how s/he embodies the values and commitments to life that underlie subject matter, which is never merely content as disseminated information but a matter of engaged relational knowing that shapes human lives.

The practice of teaching is thus inseparable from the person of the teacher, whose self-understanding is dynamically composed through one's presence to another. I call this just presence, not in the sense of a rigid moralism that prescribes a code of conduct for teachers. Rather, just presence is understood in terms of how the teacher positions oneself in right relation with the student that promotes the flourishing of life through educational practice. Just presence manifests a quality of passionate teaching that flows from an authentic search within to live outwardly with integrity. Again, I do not intend integrity to be an ideal by which we moralize and judge ourselves severely as teachers, although the temptation to do so is real. Rather, the ideal of integrity calls us to embrace gently the tender parts of ourselves paradoxically revealed in our multiple failures to live it fully. This gentle embrace is also firm in hope - that we can and do in fact change for the better, accompanied by others (including children) along the way as agents acting together in history to transform it. This conviction in the possibility of change is, according to Freire, grounded in "the unfinishedness of our being," which is at the root of critical self-reflection that teaching with integrity requires.[6] Just presence in passionate teaching with integrity demands a firm and tender heart open to other-ness. It is cultivated slowly but surely through the practice of self-awareness along an ongoing journey of becoming in "being with" others in the world.[7]

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[6] Ibid., 52. A recurring theme in Freire's critical pedagogical theory is his insistence on human subjects as already agents who "know themselves to be *conditioned* but not *determined*" by history. (p. 26, emphasis his)

[7] Ibid., 58.

Fostering self-awareness in just teaching reaches into the depths of our longing for meaningful connection. In this regard, teaching is ethical because it is spiritual. Moral theologian Richard Gula expresses well this connection between the ethical and spiritual:

> A relational-responsibility oriented morality is born in the heart. It begins with a sensitive awareness of the worth of another. Not to sense the moral call that the preciousness of another makes in our presence is to have an underdeveloped heart. […] Moral living, then, expresses our sensitivity to what this perception of preciousness requires of us so that we can contribute to the full flourishing of persons and community in harmony with the environment.[8]

Spirituality and moral living share "a critical-dialogical relationship" in that both "shape and reshape one another."[9] The "moral life [is] spiritual at its source and the spiritual life moral in its manifestation."[10] A teacher's sense of just presence as a "relational-responsibility oriented morality" is as such grounded in and mediated by a cultivated awareness of that which gives her or him ultimate meaning and value in life.[11]

In the context of Christian spirituality, this ultimate value is rooted in faith as a relational response to God's love revealed in Jesus Christ through the Holy Spirit.[12] The Lasallian tradition offers teachers a Christian spiritual resource that grounds an ethic of just presence in teaching children as an incarnational act of faith in zeal. The dialectical relationship between spirituality and ethics is expressed in the dynamic of double contemplation in Lasallian mystical realism, which discerns on the one hand God's saving will for all, but from the concrete realities of children's lives. Within this dynamic, the starting point for discerning a just educational relationship is not what adult teachers

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[8] Richard M. Gula, "Spirituality and Morality: What Are We Talking About?" in *Ethics and Spirituality*, ed. Charles E. Curran and Lisa A. Fullam (New York and Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 2014), 50.

[9] Ibid., 58.

[10] Ibid., 53.

[11] Ibid., 50.

[12] Ibid., 49.

want the child to be and become in educational practice. By this, I do not mean that we disregard societal expectations and aspirations for the child's socialization as a human being. Rather, I caution against a criterion that is outcome-based as the starting point because it risks turning the child into an object that serves the dominant interests of adults. The point of departure is also not about who teachers are to become for the child, although this is significant because children learn from their witness of adults in their company.

From a Lasallian perspective, the starting point for adjudicating a just relationship rests on a more foundational question: *whose* child are we called to *be with* as educators?[13] Stemming from its anthropology of relational belonging, it is from recognizing the mystery of each child as God's child and a younger sibling-in-Christ that the preceding two criteria flow. Yet, this recognition that undergirds a preferential option for children is at the same time rooted in the incarnational revelation of God as being in solidarity with children as the poor and marginalized in Christ. Herein lies the crux of my argument in this chapter: the sense of just presence in teaching is relationally ordered around whether and how educators see the full humanity of children by being with them. This seeing is in the listening to children. That is, until and unless teachers listen when they are with children and see them as complex persons shaped by and shaping of their social contexts with adults, they cannot educate justly. Critical pedagogy and participatory action research with children (C)PAR, I suggest, offer resources that extend this idea of listening as a practice of just presence in teaching children.

[13] This emphasis on 'being with' echoes Freire, who argues that our presence in the world is constituted in our being with another. See *Pedagogy of Freedom*, 25-26, 58.

4.2 Listening as Just Presence in Teaching Children

4.2.1 Listening to Teach Justly in Freirean Critical Pedagogical Thought

Listening is the beginning of teaching justly in love. This is an insight gleaned from Paulo Freire's critical pedagogical thought, which situates listening in the context of dialogue as liberative praxis in education. For Freire, dialogue is not merely an exchange of information. It is rather a communicative event which engages interlocutors in a dynamic interpretive activity of co-constructing knowledge. This co-construction of knowledge between people is value-laden and imbued with power. For this reason, Freire theorizes dialogue as a site for relational encounter that facilitates conscientization, which is an iterative process of critical reflection and action by which interlocutors recognize and realize their situated agency as meaning-makers and legitimate knowers in transforming their social reality:

> And since dialogue is the encounter in which the united reflection and action of the dialoguers are addressed to the world which is to be transformed and humanized, this dialogue cannot be reduced to the act of one person's "depositing" ideas in another, nor can it become a simple exchange of ideas to be "consumed" by the discussants […] Because dialogue is an encounter among women and men who name the world, it must not be a situation where some name on behalf of others. It is an act of creation; it must not serve as a crafty instrument for the domination of one person by another. [14]

Dialogue is thus constitutive of a relational pedagogy that commits itself to struggle with the oppressed for their liberation, not from above but by being-with as solidarity. As Freire notes, "Solidarity requires that one enter into the situation of those with whom one

[14] Paulo Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed (30th Anniversary Edition)*, trans. Myra Bergman Ramos (New York and London: Bloomsbury, 2012), 88-89. Noteworthy is Freire's focus on adult men and women, which raises questions on the place of children in his critical pedagogical thought.

is solidary; it is a radical posture."[15] Commitment to this posture is borne out of love as "the foundation of dialogue and dialogue itself."[16]

From a Freirean perspective, then, listening is not merely one of many pedagogical skills that a teacher acquires. More profoundly, it is integral to the integrity of teaching as a prophetic vocation committed to the task of liberation as humanization. What Freire proposes, then, is a socially just mode of listening as a practice of solidarity in encounter with the other. As he puts it, listening "is a permanent attitude on the part of the subject who is listening, of being open to the word of the other, to the gesture of the other, to the differences of the other."[17] Listening is central to dialogue as relational pedagogy since "[i]t is in listening to the student that I learn to speak with him or her."[18] It is in listening that teacher and student become conscientized to each other's values and assumptions as learners. Yet, it is also the teacher who can and should use her or his authority to commit to listening as a practice of just love that recognizes, affirms, and lifts up each student as an agent-in-relation with others to act in and on the world. Thus, listening is integral to being and becoming a just teacher because it recognizes the humanity of students as knowing subjects from and with whom s/he learns in the context of an educational community. "There is, in fact, no teaching without learning. One requires the other," asserts Freire.[19] Listening to learn is learning to teach justly.

It is important to note though that Freire's critical pedagogical principles were initially envisioned for educating primarily adults. This raises at least three challenges

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[15] Ibid., 49.

[16] Ibid., 89.

[17] Freire, *Pedagogy of Freedom*, 107.

[18] Ibid., 106.

[19] Ibid., 31.

when applying to the relationship between adult teacher and child.[20] First, Freire's conception of dialogue may not translate so seamlessly when the participation of children (and especially younger children) is predicated on competency in language use. They are also generally viewed as having less experience with socio-cultural rules of dialogical engagement in a world largely defined by adults. Second, Freire's theory of conscientization presumes a developmental level of cognitive capacity for recognizing and externalizing one's values and assumptions for self-reflection. From this standpoint, does conscientization exclude children? Alternatively, how might conscientization look like for children from their perspectives?

Third, and most significantly, Freire's liberative pedagogy presumes the sense of agency in adulthood; it takes for granted the ability of adults to function as co-equals, even as his emphasis is on the possibility of the oppressed to liberate themselves and their oppressors in society. This is generally not the case for children. As ethicist John Wall observes, "A peculiarity of the ethical situation of children, and the more so the younger the child, is that children can neither socialize nor liberate themselves."[21] Given the dependency of children (and especially younger children) on the quality of care that adults provide, it is reasonable to claim that their liberation as the marginalized relies

[20] In *Pedagogy of Freedom*, Freire writes: "In my view, it's preferable to emphasize the children's freedom to decide, even if they run the risk of making a mistake, than to simply follow the decision of the parents. It's in making decisions that we learn to decide … One of the pedagogical tasks for parents is to make it clear to their children that parental participation in the decision-making process is not an intrusion but a duty, so long as the parents have no intention of deciding on behalf of their children. The participation of children is most opportune in helping the children analyze the possible consequences of the decision that is to be taken" (97). This would seem to suggest Freire's support for the idea of the child as an agent participating in a reciprocal process of meaning making with adults. However, he does not engage further and explicitly with the complexities of children's agency and their possible challenges to his pedagogical philosophy. I discuss these possible challenges but with a focus on how contemporary critical research in childhood studies complements and extends the Freire's pedagogical principles to child-adult interactions.

[21] Wall, "Childism and the Ethics of Responsibility," 251.

materially and relationally on structures and networks of power managed by adults. Yet, this reliance becomes problematic when adults are not aware and critical of their adultism, reproducing it through structures that reinforce the social vulnerability of children as a minoritized group.[22]

I highlight these challenges neither to resolve them nor to negate the relevance of Freirean critical thought in teaching children. Rather, it is to illumine how listening to and learning from children as social agents depicts a more complicated picture. A thread that runs through these challenges is the complex presumption that adults make of children's incapacities as agents. In the West, at least, children are still often regarded as being not yet adults, a view that underestimates their agentic role in meaning making and devalues their perspectives in communities. Presumptions about children's capacities or their lack of as meaning makers become intertwined with the marginal position structurally ascribed to them by adults. As Wall puts it, "Children have been socially marginalized throughout history, not just because adults have failed to think about them, but more profoundly because children have not been considered moral thinkers themselves."[23]

Various disciplines researching on children and childhood have echoed one another to problematize such deficit views about children. Philosopher Gareth Matthews,

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[22] I recall Gerison Lansdown's distinction between children's *inherent* and *structural vulnerability* in "Children Rights," in *Children's Childhoods: Observed and Experienced*, ed. Berry Mayall (London: Falmer Press, 1994), 34-35. Wall's statement is rooted in children's inherent vulnerability, which accentuates their "biological and psychological vulnerability." Yet, as Lansdown argues, in the development of law policy and practice, there has been "insufficient focus" on children's structural vulnerability due to "their lack of civil status." She writes, "Children are also [structurally] vulnerable because of their complete lack of political and economic power and their lack of civil rights in our society. This aspect of childhood derives from historical attitudes and presumptions about the nature of childhood. It is a social and political construct and not an inherent or inevitable consequence of childhood itself." Wall does not consider the extent to which children's dependence on adults for their socialization and liberation reinforces this structural vulnerability.

[23] Wall, *Ethics in Light of Childhood*, 177.

for example, explains that the marginalization of children's perspectives is partly due to the omission of their philosophical thinking in theories of cognitive and moral development.[24] As he writes, "we must guard against letting those models [of development] caricature our children and limit the possibilities we are willing to recognize in our dealings with them as fellow human beings."[25] Whilst not disregarding the value of developmental theories, Matthews cautions against any epistemological "condescension" that segregates children's conceptual worlds from adults as if they were structurally different and inferior.[26] Such segregation has the unfortunate effect of sidestepping or silencing children's voices. "Any developmental theory that rules out, on purely theoretical grounds, even the possibility that we adults have something to learn, morally, from a child, is for that reason, defective; it is also morally offensive," argues Matthews.[27] Critical developmental psychologist Erica Burma makes a similar point when she argues for the need to be critically attentive to the discourses that developmental theories construct about childhood, as their "attribution of knowledge to children is bound up with images of the child and what we imagine them and ourselves to be."[28]

Robert Coles' work extends not only the possibility of being in conversation with children. It also illustrates their agency as co-makers of meaning with one another and with adults. Through careful listening, Coles was challenged to re-consider his adult-

[24] Gareth B. Matthews, *The Philosophy of Childhood* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1994), 12.

[25] Ibid., 29.

[26] Ibid., 66.

[27] Ibid., 67.

[28] Erica Burman, *Deconstructing Developmental Psychology* (London and New York: Routledge, 1994), 60.

centered epistemological categories in psychiatry that had obscured the demanding work that children were doing in navigating multiple social roles as active meaning-makers at the intersection of 'race,' class, and nationality. "They led an active moral life that was not only part of a family's 'psychodynamics,' but the life of a neighborhood, a city, a country, a world; the life, also, of a religion, a culture," he writes.[29] They were composing "a moral life that was chronically buffeted by conflicting commitments" in their roles as "citizen", "churchgoer," "the law's instrument of legal redress," "a parent's hope," "a society's obsessional regard," among many others.[30] Thus, children are active "moral protagonist[s] or antagonist[s]"[31] creating meaning in and of their life worlds, in search of a moral purpose that "comes down to an often-professed desire to stay alive, to stay free, and to stay worthy of adults whom [one] has had occasion to respect, no matter how flawed, limited, inadequate they may be."[32] Compared to adults, children generally have relatively less experience in the world, but they are not inexperienced. They are actively making sense of their relational experiencing of themselves with others in their particular contexts.

This set of literature points then to a need to rethink and reimagine our images of children and childhood that have hindered our view of them as complex human agents. It also extends Freire's conception of listening as a process of conscientization through child-adult and child-child interaction.[33] My focus, however, is on how the adult teacher

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[29] Robert Coles, *The Moral Life of Children* (Boston and New York: The Atlantic Monthly Press, 1986), 10.

[30] Ibid., 7-8.

[31] Ibid., 9.

[32] Ibid., 112.

[33] As my primary focus in this dissertation is on the teacher-student relationship, I concentrate on the child-adult interaction. The dynamics of how children are learning from other another as peers and students is not discussed. I acknowledge, however, the importance of such interactions between children in the context of

listens because, as Wall observes, "however much children do have their own voices and agency, they are always to a higher degree than adults dependent on others for interpreting these into a transformed world."[34] Teachers are as such challenged to a mode of listening that conscientizes them to recognize their assumptions about children and childhood, as well as their power to remain open and learn from children. At stake here is the dignity of children who are listened into being and becoming as responsible agents in their classrooms. Moreover, such listening that presumes and respects children as agents is not necessarily opposed to their protection. In fact, protection that takes seriously the human flourishing of children also demands that teachers critically discern when and how adult-centric presumptions about their capacities structurally silence and marginalize them. Teachers who care for children justly are also called to listen to them to the point of having their adult roles and perceptions challenged. I turn to consider how Participatory Action Research with children (C)PAR serves as a critical pedagogical resource that frames such listening for teachers.

4.2.2 Listening as Critical-Contemplative Practice of Belonging: Perspectives from (C)PAR[35]

a conversational pedagogy. The teacher plays an important role in facilitating these interactions. Listening on the part of the teacher also becomes more complicated as it extends to being present to what might emerge from in-between children's voices in dialogue with one another in the classroom.

[34] Ibid., 251.

[35] My discussion of (C)PAR incorporates some of the literature on PAR with youth (i.e. YPAR), following the definition of 'child' as a person under 18 years of age in the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC). I follow this definition because the engagement of PAR with children's participation is situated within a wider and growing emphasis on children's rights, as noted in Daria P. Shamrova and Cristy E. Cummings, "Participatory action research (PAR) with children and youth: An integrative review of methodology and PAR outcomes for participants, organizations, and communities," *Children and Youth Services Review* 81 (2017): 400-412.

Participatory Action Research with children (C)PAR draws on the critical epistemology in Freirean pedagogy and the new sociology of childhood to "envision children as collaborative change agents in the settings and contexts of their lives."[36] (C)PAR offers a resource to form teachers in the practice of listening to children that advances a vision of educating justly. I describe this listening as a practice of belonging which takes seriously the voices of children because they are with us in one shared created humanity. There are two main parts in my discussion: first, I review the general literature on (C)PAR to draw out a twinned dynamic of the critical and contemplative in listening that meaningfully engages the participation of children as protagonists of social change with adults; second, I focus on Alice McIntyre's work as an example of using (C)PAR as a pedagogical resource for teaching educators how to listen justly to children in their classrooms.

a) Listening as Critical Practice

As critical practice, listening in PAR attends to the circulation of power in the dynamic co-construction of context-specific knowledge between teachers and students as learners on a journey. Echoing Freire, listening in PAR is grounded in a critical epistemology, which engages with the ideological meanings invested in the dialogical practice of shared knowledge creation in education. As Michelle Fine states, "PAR is not a *method*" but "a radical *epistemological* challenge" to the positivist assumptions in social science that view knowledge as objective, value-neutral and generalizable.[37] As

[36] Regina Day Langhout and Elizabeth Thomas, "Imagining Participatory Action Research in Collaboration with Children: an Introduction," *American Journal of Community Psychology* 46, no. 1-2 (2010): 61.

[37] Michelle Fine, "An Epilogue of Sorts," in *Revolutionizing Education: Youth Participatory Action Research in Motion*, ed. Julio Cammarota and Michelle Fine (New York and London, 2008), 215.

research that is "done *with* and *by* participants, rather than *on* or *for* them,"[38] PAR further "assumes that those who have been most systematically excluded, oppressed, or denied carry specifically revealing wisdom about the history, structure, consequences, and the fracture points in unjust social arrangements"[39] Specifically, (C)PAR draws out the marginalized knowledge of children, engaging them as agents capable of knowing and acting. It challenges the presumed passivity of children as victims, and promotes their social situatedness "as actors with the potential to resist and/or transform the social inequalities that confront them."[40] Its premise, then, is that children, and especially those in disadvantaged communities, are engaged as protagonists of social change through critical research that values their perspectives as partners and knowledge producers.[41]

It is important to note that (C)PAR is not naïve about the de facto power dynamics that exists between children and adults. In fact, it wrestles with and reveals the complexity of engaging children as social protagonists in contexts where power is still something one gains and exercises as an adult. For this reason, a significant strand in the literature on (C)PAR is the roles of adults within intergenerational collectives, and how they are challenged to re-imagine their relationships with children when embracing them as social actors. As Tina Durand and Brinton Lykes contend, not only is the committed

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[38] Bryan S.R. Grimwood, "Participatory Action Research: Democratizing Knowledge for Social Justice," in *Fostering Social Justice Through Qualitative Inquiry: A Methodological Guide*, ed. Corey W. Johnson and Diana C. Parry (Walnut Creek, California: Left Coast Press, 2015), 219.

[39] Ibid., 215.

[40] Tina M. Durand and M. Brinton Lykes, "Think Globally, Act Locally: A Global Perspective on Mobilizing Adults for Positive Youth Development," in *Mobilizing Adults for Positive Youth Development: Strategies for Closing the Gap between Beliefs and Behaviors*, ed. E. Gil Clary and Jean E. Rhodes (New York: Springer, 2006), 248.

[41] Michelle Fine and Maria Elena Torre, "Recognizing the Knowledge of Young People: An Interview with Michelle Fine and Maria Elena Torre on Youth Action Research," 2004, http://www.whatkidscando.org/featurestories/previous_years/color_of_learning/interview.html

presence of adults crucial "by virtue of [them] holding more societal status, controlling more resources, and having more *power over*," PAR processes shift their thinking from a relation of empowerment to "social solidarity, where adults might work *with* rather than *for* youth."[42] For adults to work with youth, they must also work through their "paternalistic and paradoxical conceptions about children and youth and the nature of youth involvement."[43] That is, while adults bemoan the apathy of the young on social issues, they also dismiss their activism "as idealistic, insubordinate, or merely reflective of an adult-run organization that possibly is manipulating them."[44]

Thus, (C)PAR facilitates a process in which adults listen critically to children from a position of *power with* children as participatory knowers and doers in various social contexts. Yet, to recall theologian Bonnie Miller-McLemore, mutuality with children is not necessarily opposed to hierarchy, but requires it as "a temporary inequity between persons – whether of power, authority, expertise, responsibility, or maturity – that is moving toward but has not arrived at genuine mutuality."[45] This tension between mutuality and hierarchy in adult-child relationships is reflected in the literature on (C)PAR, which shows children's participation as structurally multi-leveled, varying in depth and extent according to age.[46] As Regina Langhout and Elizabeth Thomas

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[42] Durand and Lykes, "Think Globally, Act Locally," 250; 251.

[43] Ibid., 250.

[44] Ibid., 250.

[45] Miller-McLemore, *Let The Children Come,* 130.

[46] For a review of some of these projects, see Shamrova and Cummings, "Participatory action research (PAR) with children and youth: An integrative review of methodology and PAR outcomes for participants, organizations, and communities," especially 407-409. PAR papers selected for review operationalize the five upper levels of "genuine participation" in Hart's ladder of children's participation i.e. "assigned to participate but informed" (Level 4), "consulted and informed" (Level 5), "adult-initiated, decision shared with children" (Level 6), "child-initiated and directed" (Level 7), "child-initiated, shared decisions with adults" (Level 8). Notable in this review is the underrepresentation of children under the age of 10 in PAR. Majority of participants were from 10-18 years old. Yet, as the authors argue, PAR with younger children

highlight, children's participation in child-adult collaborations occurs on a continuum, "from children who serve as primary problem posers to children who participate as data collection experts in studies that have already been clearly defined by adults."[47] Alongside this continuum is the mediatory role of adults, who find themselves having to move in-between being managers and facilitators in eliciting and making known the perspectives of children. This position as mediator requires the adult co-researcher to play the role of what Alison Clark calls an "authentic novice" in (C)PAR.[48] That is, the adult co-researcher "is not pretending not to know what are the children's experiences of the space, but is genuinely hoping to learn from the children more about how they perceive their environment."[49]

In these child-adult interactions, listening in (C)PAR as critical practice involves three interrelated tasks of conscientization for adults. First, it fosters a habit of critical self-reflexivity that interrogates their adultist assumptions about children as not being sufficiently mature, responsible and competent for their perspectives to be taken seriously. Second, critical listening also involves adults being mindful of their roles and positionality vis-à-vis the media and methods used to facilitate the construction, documentation, and dissemination of children's perspectives. Clark, for example. reports on a "Mosaic approach" that deploys multiple methods such as photography, child-led

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"should become a priority … as it would help to address the discrimination against young children's right to participate or at least be consulted, as proposed by UN Convention on the Rights of Child" (407). For a review of PAR with younger children, see Langhout and Thomas, "Imagining Participatory Action Research in Collaboration with Children: an Introduction," 60-66.

[47] Langhout and Thomas, "Imagining Participatory Action Research in Collaboration with Children: an Introduction," 65.

[48] Alison Clark, "Young Children as Protagonists and the Role of Participatory, Visual Methods in Engaging Multiple Perspectives," *American Journal for Community Psychology* 46, no. 1-2 (2010): 120.

[49] Ibid., 120.

tours, and mapping to enable younger children under five years old to document their experiences for the design of spaces in their pre-school.[50] Where critical listening occurs is in adults making adjustments to "'tune into' the diverse ways of communication adopted by children" beyond verbal language.[51]

Third, listening as critical practice in (C)PAR challenges existing ideas about "what it means to be an adult within a grossly inequitable world."[52] This is important for two reasons. One, children remain dependent on adults who generally have more social power to advocate for structural changes to promote their well-being. Mary Kellet reports that even in her own project on child-led research, children still need to be supported by adults who "can open gates and seek platforms" that enable their perspectives to be heard more publicly.[53] Recognizing this dependency accentuates the responsibility that adults have to educate and raise responsible children, so as to participate together in building the common good now *and* into the future. This brings me to my second reason: children have the right to survive and grow into adulthood. To recall sociologist Emma Uprichard, children are "being and becoming": they "have the right to become adults and experience their childhood *as children who will be future adults*."[54] Uprichard illustrates that the being of children as agents in the present also encompasses them constructing meanings about who they see themselves becoming as adults in the future.[55] For this reason, it is

[50] Ibid., 116-117.

[51] Ibid., 117.

[52] Ibid., 251.

[53] Mary Kellett, "Small Shoes, Big Steps! Empowering Children as Active Researchers," *American Journal for Community Psychology* 46, no. 1-2 (2010): 201.

[54] Uprichard, "Children as 'Being and Becomings': Children, Childhood and Temporality," 306. Emphasis hers.

[55] Ibid., 309-310.

important that adults critically examine their own social constructions of adulthood, not only because they relationally shape the experiences of childhood for children. They also challenge adults to critique and recreate social conditions that enable the flourishing of children as competent persons in the now of human childhood, which stretches into life's future to become life-giving adults.

Listening as critical practice in (C)PAR is committed to disrupting the culture of silence around children's experiences. Such listening serves to create intergenerational spaces of learning that allow for the complexity of children's voices to emerge *in* and *as* a collective on social issues that most affect them (e.g. gang violence, suicide, and educational injustices).[56] (C)PAR cautions against essentializing and idealizing children's voices as if it were possible to 'hear' them unadulterated. Children's voices are multi-faceted and multiply-mediated; they are "layered with other people's voices, and the social practices and contexts they invoke."[57] The task of critical listening is to engage children's voices as always and necessarily a dynamic co-construction between children and with adults in social and institutionalized contexts of power still held by the latter. Critical listening also requires adults to be open to having their worldviews disturbed and even disrupted by what children say. As Langhout and Thomas note, "listening to children sometimes sounds nice until we hear what they have to say."[58] Cultivating an openness to the possibility of such disruption stretches listening into the contemplative mode.

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[56] Ernest Morrell, "Six Summers of YPAR: Learning, Action and Change in Urban Education," in *Revolutionizing Education: Youth Participatory Action Research in Motion*, ed. Julio Cammarota and Michelle Fine (New York and London, 2008), 158.

[57] Kellett, "Small Shoes, Big Steps! Empowering Children as Active Researchers," 196.

[58] Langhout and Thomas, "Imagining Participatory Action Research in Collaboration with Children: an Introduction," 65.

b) Listening as Contemplative Practice

Listening as critical practice in PAR is also profoundly contemplative. In fact, the critical is grounded in the contemplative. While the critical is oriented toward the analytical in "making connections and seeing implications," it emerges from the contemplative that gives rise to insight as "wisdom or understanding from the inside in dealing with facts or people."[59] Contemplative listening, then, is "deep listening," which according to the Center for Contemplative Mind in Society, involves "pay[ing] full attention to the sound of the words, while abandoning such habits as planning their next statement or interrupting the speaker. It is attentive rather than reactive listening."[60] It fosters "an attention to and beholding of our interior selves, a noticing of what is present in that self and in the moment."[61]

Such listening in (C)PAR is crucial for building trust between adults and children. Trust is integral to establishing social solidarity with the young, who "frequently view adults as 'outsiders' who are either unwilling to or incapable of fully understanding their points of view."[62] Durand and Lykes write, "can we trust youth enough to let them make more of their own decisions? This requires that we suspend our own beliefs about what is in the best interests of youth and believe that youth themselves have something important to share."[63] Adults would have greater difficulty doing so for younger children. Yet, as Catherine Stonehouse and Scottie May argue, while younger children do generally need

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[59] Elizabeth Conde-Frazier, "Participatory Action Research: Practical Theology for Social Justice," *Religious Education* 101, no. 3 (2006): 326.

[60] Cited in Patricia Owen-Smith, *The Contemplative Mind in the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning* (Bloomington, Indiana: Indiana University Press, 2018), 42.

[61] Owen-Smith, *The Contemplative Mind in the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning*, 33.

[62] Durand and Lykes, "Think Globally, Act Locally," 250.

[63] Ibid., 250.

more protection and guidance, this "does not inhibit our openness to listen and learn from them."[64] Contemplative listening in (C)PAR cultivates this openness from within; it facilitates a suspension, not a negation, of beliefs by being a practice of unassuming presence to encounter children as they are. Contemplative listening challenges adults to let go of their need for control from within while holding open a space for children's perspectives to disrupt their views and assumptions. Contemplative listening does not only widen their hearts interiorly to receive children as they are. More importantly, it is also a process of patient waiting for children to invite and lead adults into the terrains of their lives as sacred ground. Between this active waiting and inner widening of hearts turned to one another is the cultivation of trust, which digs deep into our human longing for connection and belonging – adults and children alike.

Listening contemplatively in (C)PAR moves beyond the critical. It embraces disruption as a critical opening to imagine what may be on the horizon in the now and not yet. It orients the listener to anticipate and witness the birth of newness that presses the imagination to give it form. It corresponds to what early childhood educational theorist Bronwyn Davies has conceptualized as "emergent listening":

> it means opening up the ongoing possibility of coming to see life, and one's relation to it, in new and surprising ways. Emergent listening might begin with what is known, but it is open to creatively evolving into something new. Emergent listening opens up the possibility of new ways of knowing and new ways of being, both for those who listen and those who are listened to.[65]

Emergent listening orients one to encounter the other in "being open to difference and, in particular, to difference in all its multiplicity as it emerges in each moment between

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[64] Catherine Stonehouse and Scottie May, *Listening to Children on the Spiritual Journey: Guidance for Those Who Teach and Nurture* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Academic, 2010), 21.

[65] Bronwyn Davies, *Listening to Children: Being and Becoming* (London and New York: Routledge, 2014), 21-22.

oneself and another."[66] It (re)-creates community, not as a static entity but as "encounters in an always -evolving story."[67] Acts of emergent listening are acts of doing community, where an "openness to the not-yet-known" in difference "is crucial, not only to the capacity of a community to endure, but to the constitution of that community as an ethical place."[68] More provocatively, Davies further suggests that children mirror to adults our human capacity for emergent listening. "Children open themselves up in multiple ways to new possibilities, and in doing so make the very basis of an ethical community possible," she writes.[69] That is, adults do not only listen deeply to children, but also "learn from them how to engage in reciprocal listening."[70] Thus, children draw adults to be present to the moment of being in community that is becoming constructed and re-constructed together.

Davies' conceptualization of emergent listening has a wider application beyond early childhood education. I suggest that it also articulates the dynamics of contemplative listening in (C)PAR projects, which set up intergenerational collectives for the children and adults to talk, think, and feel through their differences together. Participants do not only listen critically to see more clearly their own social bias and resist structural patterns of injustice. They also listen contemplatively to discern that which is emerging as the more, the new, the 'not yet' that inspires creative action. This sense of the emergent in contemplative listening carries participants to the threshold of knowing while also invoking creative possibilities of re-making a community, led by children and

[66] Ibid., 1.
[67] Ibid., 7.
[68] Ibid., 11.
[69] Ibid., 12.
[70] Ibid., 12.

accompanied by adults. This sense of the emergent draws participants to move deeper within themselves *and* into a wider circle of relational belonging through an iterative cycle of critical reflection and creative action. Listening in (C)PAR, then, is a critical and contemplative practice of belonging in its communal orientation toward social change.

4.2.3 (C)PAR as Pedagogical Resource for Forming Teachers to Listen Justly

PAR serves as a resource that generates new ways of educating critically toward social change. In *Revolutionizing Education*, editors Julio Cammarota and Michelle Fine showcase projects in Youth Participatory Action Research (YPAR) that demonstrate what they call "a pedagogy for transformational resistance."[71] That is, "YPAR represents not only a formal pedagogy of resistance but also the means by which young people engage transformational resistance."[72] While equipping youth with research skills to initiate social action, YPAR reframes education as "something students do – instead of something being done to them – to address the injustices that limit possibilities for them, their families, and communities."[73] However, these projects presented involved primarily youth in US public high schools. There remains the challenge of extending PAR to younger children.

In this regard, Alice McIntyre's PAR projects with middle-school children offer an example. I highlight her work because apart from her focus on younger students, PAR is drawn on as a pedagogical resource for university-based students in teacher preparation, many of whom identified themselves as white and upper-middle class with

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[71] Julio Cammarota and Michelle Fine, "Youth Participatory Action Research: A Pedagogy for Transformational Resistance," in *Revolutionizing Education: Youth Participatory Action Research in Motion*, ed. Julio Cammarota and Michelle Fine (New York and London: Routledge, 2008), 1.

[72] Ibid., 4.

[73] Ibid., 10.

little or no experience working with children from low-income communities of Color.[74] In a PAR project with middle-school children (aged twelve and thirteen years old) at Blair in Ellsworth, McIntyre documented a process of accompanying them to see themselves as agents undertaking responsible action for "a long-term, ongoing community cleanup project aimed at eliminating the 'trashy way the community looks.'"[75] These middle-school children started up One STEP (Save The Earth Program), which implemented activities that involved the school and the wider community in a cleanup. the PAR project enabled them to see their self-efficacy as agents of change, or in the words of a participant Tonesha, "feeling smackin' good about ourselves and the work we are doin' in our community."[76]

One of the guidelines for (C)PAR that McIntyre has derived from her work is this: "Urban youth need committed adults who will accompany them in processes of change."[77] She provocatively frames the PAR project as challenging adults to be led in ways by how children expect to be accompanied on issues that affect them. Reproduced below are responses from her middle-school participants when asked about what they need from adults:

> **Tonesha**: … They gotta listen to what we got to say. Help us wherever we need help. 'Cause adults don't listen to us and what we have to say. You [Alice] listen to us. You listen to us all the time and all the adults in this project listen to us, too …
> **Blood**: They need to take us seriously.
> **Tee:** Yeah, understand what we are sayin' and take us seriously.

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[74] Alice McIntyre, *Inner-City Kids: Adolescents Confront Life and Violence in an Urban Community* (New York and London: New York University Press, 2000); Alice McIntyre, "Participatory Action Research and Urban Education: Reshaping the Teacher Preparation Process," *Equity and Excellence in Education* 36, no. 1 (2003): 28-39; Alice McIntyre, "Activist Research and Student Agency in Universities and Urban Communities," *Urban Education* 41, no. 6 (2006): 631.

[75] McIntyre, *Inner-City Kids*, 170.

[76] Ibid., 211.

[77] Ibid., 205.

> **Alice:** How do you know when adults are taking you seriously?
> **Tee:** They take time with us, like you have been doin' and pay attention to us. And they stay with us, like you, through the rough and smooth.[78]

Adult commitment to accompanying children as co-participants requires a commitment to listen and be with them. Noteworthy, then, is McIntyre's involvement with graduate students in education and psychology to participate in this project. She uses PAR as a critical pedagogical resource for forming them as prospective teachers to *really* listen, because this is integral to what Beauboeuf-Lafontant has described as "politically relevant teaching … [where] teachers are mindful not only of cultural norms, values, and practices of their students, but more importantly of the political realities and aspirations of people of color."[79] Such listening reflects the twinned dynamic of the critical and contemplative, as discussed earlier.

The critical aspect lies in these student teachers being disturbed by their listening to undo their social stereotypes of urban schools and communities as violent and dangerous. It conscientizes them to "personal biases, assumptions, and anxieties that may have heretofore prevented them from engaging fully in teaching-learning experiences with white students and students of Color living in low-income communities."[80] I draw out the adult-child binary, which seems implicit in McIntyre's analysis but is implicated at the intersection of racial and class relationships. Consider the shock felt by one of her graduate students Jen:

> It was shocking and upsetting to listen to the kids talk about the events that occurred within their community … Although the kids openly discussed their concerns, I frequently found that I did not know how to respond to them because

[78] Ibid., 210.

[79] Cited in McIntyre, "Participatory Action Research and Urban Education," 29.

[80] McIntyre, "Participatory Action Research and Urban Education," 28.

> I had never experienced these issues in my own life. I was afraid that I would say the wrong thing causing them to become more upset.[81]

To what extent might this feeling of shock be attributed to Jen's presumptions about childhood? Could it perhaps be indicative of an adult's presumption about childhood innocence? PAR in teacher preparation conscientizes prospective educators to recognize childhood as a relational construction that is bound to the social situatedness of children's lives. It confronts teachers to examine their own socialized experiences of childhood in entanglement with any forms of privilege due to identity markers like 'race,' socio-economic class, ability, gender and sexuality. Lived experiences of childhood are exposed as multiple and "bound up with systems of social power" that teachers as adults maintain and/or transform.[82]

This conscientization through critical listening, while self-implicating, is however not intended to be self-recriminating. Rather, it challenges these prospective teachers to work through what McIntyre described as "privileged affect"; that is, instead of remaining paralyzed in "their own feelings of powerless[ness] and fear," they were encouraged to "do something" with them by being willing to "hang out" with these children and "get to know" them as people.[83] All of these propel educators "to reframe what they know – or think they know – about urban life and its relationship to education."[84]

The contemplative aspect of listening is thus integral to this process of reframing by "expanding their [teacher-researcher-participants'] perspectives about the relationship

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[81] Ibid., 33-34.

[82] Wall, *Ethics In Light of Childhood*, 103.

[83] McIntyre, "Participatory Action Research and Urban Education," 34.

[84] Ibid., 32.

among schooling, community, and the lived experiences of all students."[85] It reframes what they know by drawing them in to rethink their positionality as adult teachers from being experts to facilitators. This facilitates the paradigm shift in educating as conceived by Freire: "to teach is not to transfer knowledge but to create the possibilities for the production or construction of knowledge."[86] It positions adult teachers to engage children not as passive recipients of information but as partners in co-creating "new ways of teaching, learning, doing, and being" that are anchored on how children see their realities, "not on what adults want those realities to be or what adults think those realities should be."[87] PAR pushes teachers to shift their mode of listening *for* to listening *with* and *to* students. [88] The contemplative, I suggest, also stretches them to listen *in-to* themselves as connected to the lives of the young in mutually transforming ways. The contemplative grounds this process of reframing within an emergent mode of listening, as discussed earlier. The process of reframing is as much a posture of sitting with ambiguity and active waiting for the emergence of new insight and wisdom.

It is worth noting, though, that the tenets of PAR run against the grain of institutional constraints on teachers in US schools. These include "the current budget climate, testing mandates that limit teacher autonomy over curriculum construction and implementation, constraints on teachers' time, and the limited availability of alternative

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[85] Ibid., 30.

[86] Freire, *Pedagogy of Freedom*, 30. See also McIntyre, *Inner-City Kids*, 207: "This PAR project was not about *us* [adults] transmitting knowledge to *them* [urban youth] – a teaching paradigm all too common in educational systems in the United States. This was about us constructing knowledge together so that participants would have the opportunity to make informed choices about their lives."

[87] McIntyre, *Inner-City Kids*, 211; 199.

[88] Danielle Kohfeldt, Lina Chhun, Sarah Grace, Regina Day Langhout, "Youth Empowerment in Context: Exploring Tensions in School-Based yPAR," *American Journal of Community Psychology* 47, no. 1-2 (2011): 30.

teacher identities."[89] Teachers are traditionally bound to their adult roles as "guardians, gatekeepers, authorities, and disciplinarians."[90] Listening to the young narrate stories of their lives and allowing them to raise critical conversations on schooling and social justice are risky acts for teachers, who are in turn "seen as eccentric, if not outrageous."[91] Teachers become entangled within a culture of containment in schools, where students end up serving various competing adult agendas. This makes it difficult to sustain the interest of school leaders and teachers to recognize the value of PAR as engaging the young as legitimate agents responsible and mature enough for social change.[92]

Yet, it is precisely these challenges that makes it crucial for PAR to be integrated in teacher education, particularly the contemplative dimension in its processes. PAR does not nullify issues of power and control that teachers will have to navigate as authorities and disciplinarians. Rather, it re-contextualizes these issues as part of the messiness in education as a process of accompaniment in which listening is key.[93] "Of all the forms of psychological research, participatory action research (PAR) is most resonant with the idea of accompaniment," writes Mary Watkins.[94] The focal point of accompaniment is primarily not on the destination. Neither is it even on the journeying. The primary focus of accompaniment is on the moment of encounter, where the teacher as accompanier is

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[89] Ibid., 38.

[90] Ibid., 36.

[91] M. Zembylas, "Emotions and teacher identity: A poststructural perspective," *Teachers and Teaching: Theory and Practice* 9, no. 3 (2003): 226. Cited in Ibid., 30.

[92] Emily J. Ozer, Miranda L. Ritterman and Maggie G. Wanis, "Participatory Action Research (PAR) in Middle School: Opportunities, Constraints, and Key Processes," *American Journal of Community Psychology* 46, no. 1-2 (2010): 159.

[93] Recall McIntyre's argument on the presence of "committed adults who will accompany them in processes of change." For a discussion on how participating graduate students learned to negotiate issues of control, see McIntyre, "Participatory Action Research and Urban Education," 35-37.

[94] Mary Watkins, "Psychosocial Accompaniment," *Journal of Social and Political Psychology* 3, no. 1 (2015): 335.

also being accompanied by child with an openness to being transformed from within by that relationship. To be clear, both teacher and child are simultaneously accompanying and being accompanied. However, it is the teacher who has formal authority to initiate the process of accompaniment, and in doing so must understand that "[t]he accompanier requires not only an invitation, but a practiced and certain humility," and "wonders how others desire to make their experiences known."[95] Where the contemplative dynamic in PAR comes through is in the letting go along the way.

Theological educator Bert Roebben writes, "Teachers will only have relevance in the future when they have learned to listen empathetically and to react responsibly. The educational relationship is deeply connected with this responsibility-within-letting-go and with this letting-go-within-responsibility."[96] McIntyre's research attests to the value of PAR in preparing such teachers, when her participating graduate students "realized that they didn't have to 'fix' the young people, have the 'right' answer for all the issues that arose in the project, or control the overall discourse." They learned to suspend a managerial mode of relating that was reminiscent of their "educational histories as students who performed well in traditional, hierarchical-style classrooms, and whose educational experiences were embedded in middle-class cultures of niceness, politeness, and conformity." They listened *with* the young *in-to* "seeing the world through their eyes."[97] For teachers, contemplative listening in PAR is more than empathetic; the summon to let go is in itself also a moment of stepping *back* (as opposed to stepping

[95] Ibid., 331.

[96] Bert Roebben, *Theology Made in Dignity: On the Precarious Role of Theology in Religious Education* (Leuven: Peeters, 2016), 122.

[97] McIntyre, "Participatory Action Research and Urban Education," 36.

away) to make room for the presence of children as knowing agents to co-create "new ways of teaching, learning, doing, and being."[98]

The critical-contemplative dynamic of listening in (C)PAR facilitates an educational encounter between teacher and student. Where an encounter is different from a mere exchange lies potentially in its depth for mutual transformation between them from within and out as relational beings. The vocation of teaching calls educators to be people of encounter, to be continually called out of themselves onto a journey of conversion as self-transformation in the process of serving children justly. This self-transformation from within is dialectically connected to the public activity of teaching as socially transforming of structures to promote the human flourishing of children alongside with them. At the heart of the educational encounter in (C)PAR is listening, which challenges teachers to be open to having their values and worldviews disturbed and even disrupted by what children say. It is listening that opens the heart of a teacher to be formed and transformed by the presence of children. Theologically speaking, it is listening as receptivity to the mystery of each child as what I call graced irruption.

4.3 Listening as Receptivity to the Mystery of the Child as Graced Irruption

(C)PAR offers a method and pedagogy for listening that facilitates a theological commitment to recognize and lift up the human dignity of each child as God's child. Its engagement with children as protagonists of social change advances Annemie Dillen's suggestion that "the concept 'child of God' can take on social-critical meaning through a dialogue with the new image of children as competent subjects."[99] (C)PAR is consonant

[98] McIntyre, *Inner-City Kids*, 211.

[99] Dillen, "Religious Participation of Children as Active Subjects: Toward a Hermeneutical-Communicative Model of Religious Education in Families with Young Children," 42.

with the theological view that children are equal in human dignity with adults as God's children, worthy of being listened into participation as disciples together with adults. I suggest that it also pushes forth a theological image of the child as *graced irruption*. The mystery of the child as graced irruption is positioned as an agent of God's call to teaching as an ethical vocation.

4.3.1 The Child as Agent of God's Call

The critical-contemplative dynamic of listening modeled in (C)PAR is attuned to God's irruption through the child. That is, God breaks in and becomes incarnationally present in transforming and grace-full ways through the child as a socially situated person. To conceive of the child as graced irruption is to cultivate an openness to being surprised, amazed and even unsettled by what children are saying, feeling, and doing. It is to hold out the possibility for children to disrupt and challenge the status quo, often through their persistent questioning on "how and why things are the way they are." Such moments can be revelatory of the power of God's Spirit working relationally through children and calling communities to ethical action.

Children, then, serve as agents who mediate God's call to life and shape those whom they encounter. Theologian Miller-McLemore argues, "children form adults more than adults realize, a distinctive vocational role to which adults should be alert and receptive."[100] She illustrates this with an experience of theologian Nancy Bedford, who testified "on how 'God's Spirit [used] the voices of children'" to push an urban congregation in Buenos Aires to act against poverty:

> I would hold that the questions of young children – when taken seriously – are often among the most important catalysts in the process of discernment, especially in societies where small children and their conversation are valued

[100] Miller-McLemore, "Childhood – The (Often Hidden yet Lively) Vocational Life of Children," 54.

> highly, as in Argentina … Some questions posed by my oldest daughter, three years old at the time, that were significant to me in clarifying my priorities were: "Does that woman sleep outside at night? Why? Shouldn't we find her a place to stay?" (observation made on the street). "Does God give all people food or just some?" (asked after giving thanks for the food).[101]

This testimony bears witness to how perspectives of children borne from "their qualities of smallness, freshness, openness, and immediacy" can surprise and confront adults to clarify their values and convictions.[102] In this case, God works through the physical smallness of a child to draw attention to what adults have overlooked or do not wish to see. Children may be physically smaller than adults but their vision of the world is not necessarily narrow. The immediacy of children's vision and their capacity to name it starkly and spontaneously bear an incisive depth that is life-transforming, provided adults are open and willing to listen and act with children on what they are noticing.

Retrievable from (C)PAR is a process that facilitates this listening to the presence of God active in the lives of children as they are. It is "incarnational research," which facilitates listening as a spiritual practice that discerns children's perspectives of their experiences as "sources of revelation."[103] Yet, we must also be careful not to deify children when doing so. As Miller-McLemore writes:

> Children promise delight, bewilderment, and enlightenment, certainly. But caution in stating what children reveal is warranted. Undiscriminating assertions run the risk of romanticizing and idolizing children, stigmatizing those unable to bear or care for them, and overlooking the possible harsh realities of child care and the many times in which children do not promote revelatory insight. These

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[101] Nancy E. Bedford, "Little Moves Against Destructiveness: Theology and the Practice of Discernment," in *Practicing Theology: Beliefs and Practices in Christian Life*, ed. Miroslav Volf and Dorothy C. Bass (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2002), 168. Cited in Miller-McLemore, "Childhood – The (Often Hidden yet Lively) Vocational Life of Children," 57.

[102] Ibid., 48.

[103] Conde-Frazier, "Participatory Action Research: Practical Theology for Social Justice," 325; Marcia J. Bunge, "Beyond Children as Agents or Victims: Reexamining Children's Paradoxical Strengths and Vulnerabilities with Resources from Christian Theologies of Childhood and Child Theologies," in *The Given Child: The Religions' Contribution to Children's Citizenship*, ed. Trygve Wyller and Usha S. Nayar (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2007), 35.

> caveats, however, should not keep us [adults] from teasing out what children make known, and even from speculating about what God might be making known through them.[104]

(C)PAR offers a process of listening that could create the conditions for adults to discern what God may be revealing through children in their complex humanity as dependent interdependent subjects calling all of whom they encounter into a relation of ethical responsibility.

4.3.2 Called to Responsibility Through Children

The child as graced irruption is an agent of God's call precisely because of the ethical demand that s/he makes on an expanding communal network of relationships. Children call adults into an ethical relation of responsibility. This is a central thread in recent theological-ethical research on the agency of children.[105] Much of this work fruitfully mines the phenomenological ethics of Jewish philosopher Emmanuel Levinas. According to him, responsibility emerges in the context of human connectedness as a response to the face of the Other who calls: "The Other becomes my neighbor precisely through the way the face summons me, calls for me, begs for me, and in so doing recalls my responsibility, and calls me into question."[106] Being is preceded by a prior recognition of my being-with another whose mortality confronts and binds me in a relation of ethical responsibility.

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[104] Miller-McLemore, *Let The Children Come*, 150.

[105] For examples, see Annemie Dillen, "Children between liberation and care: ethical perspectives on the rights of children and parent-child relationship," *International Journal of Children's Spirituality* 11, no. 2 (August 2006): 237-250; Roger Burggraeve, "The Ethical Voice of the Child: Plea for a Chiastic Responsibility in the Footsteps of Levinas," in *Children's Voices: Children's Perspectives in Ethics, Theology and Religious Education*, ed. Annemie Dillen and Didier Pollefeyt (Leuven, Belgium: Peeters, 2010), 267-291; John Wall, *Ethics in Light of Childhood* (Washington, D.C.: Georgetown University Press, 2010).

[106] Emmanuel Levinas, "Ethics as First Philosophy," in *The Levinas Reader*, ed. Seán Hand (Oxford and Cambridge: Blackwell, 1992), 83.

Moral theologian Roger Burggraeve draws on the work of Levinas to formulate a relational-ethic that positions the child as irreducibly other and as active subject. For him, Levinas's conception of responsibility offers a "philosophical-phenomenological" foundation that shifts the anthropology that undergirds the child as agent.[107] The shift is from an "autonomist image of humans" to one that is "heteronomous" within a network of relations that already precede but possibly connect to the child.[108] In other words, children are from the beginning creative social beings situated in a communal world of relations that they do not choose but to which they can make a life-giving difference when responsibly cared for and nurtured. "The existence of the child – and every human begins life as a child – does not rely on a contract that has to be negotiated between equals. All human existence begins, therefore, with a fundamental inequality," writes Burggraeve.[109] From this standpoint, "the child's dependency is the condition of possibility of its independency."[110] That is, the child as dependent other is paradoxically an active independent subject that summons the adult interdependently to responsibility. In this light, "[i]t is not in the first place the parents and educators who pass on their insights, wisdom and convictions to the learning child. It is the child itself that comes first in education: the radical priority of the other."[111]

It is important, however, to qualify that Burggraeve is not naïve about or dismissive of the dynamic of power in the adult-child relationship. Neither is he setting adults and children on a leveled plane. Rather, he highlights the adult-child relationship

[107] Burggraeve, "The Ethical Voice of the Child," 272.
[108] Ibid., 270-272.
[109] Ibid., 272.
[110] Ibid., 272.
[111] Ibid., 280.

to be fundamentally asymmetrical because each child is not only physically and biologically vulnerable. More significantly, each child is also vulnerable in social relation to choices already decided by other people in particular communities into which s/he is conceived and born. Yet, as he argues, this vulnerability of the child as other is not a face of powerlessness but commands an "ethical mastership" that actively calls adults – parents and teachers – to take responsibility for its growth.[112] Paradoxically, in a Levinasian key, ethical responsibility in the face of the child as vulnerable other begins with restraint based on the commandment 'You shall not kill'.[113]In this light, Burggraeve focuses specifically on prohibiting violence toward the child, especially that which happens in families. Besides overt acts of murder, sexual abuse, exclusion and neglect, there is the subtle violence of adults making the child into their image and likeness.[114]

Underscored then in Burggraeve's proposal is an ethical imperative from the child that calls adults to critically recognize and examine how they are using their positions of formal power to responsibly promote the human flourishing of children. This responsibility includes a responsive attentiveness to how "adults can potentially be violent towards children." Yet, it is not only the responsibility of adults to work toward creating conditions in which children can be free from violence that dehumanizes and grow to be themselves. There is also the responsibility to educate children to be with others freely and responsibly. Thus, Burggraeve, goes a step further to propose a "chiastic" vision of responsibility.[115] He writes, "Responsibility of adults for children is

[112] Ibid., 280.
[113] Ibid., 284.
[114] Ibid., 282.
[115] Ibid., 268.

only integral if it grows into the responsibility *for* the responsibility *of* children, not only for themselves … but also, and especially for, others."[116] Adults who care for children responsibly must also protect and educate them to be responsible for others by way of engaging their participation in the present as active agents in service to the common good.[117]

Ethicist John Wall also draws on Levinas to formulate a child-responsive ethics of creative responsibility. For him, moral responsiveness to children is contextually situated in the opening of the self – individual and societal – to being disrupted and stretched by the particular otherness of each child encountered. The moral life is reimagined "not on individual autonomy or on the authority of traditions, but on expanding interdependent creativity" in a poetics of narrative expansion between children and adults in context [118] This expansion takes place around the dynamic of double decentering of the self in relation to the other in a "moral ellipse."[119] Thus, "I am called upon not only to be disrupted by the other but also to disrupt and recreate myself in the process."[120] Within this dynamic, each child as God's created is "not just a gift *to* society but a gift *of* a new and living social relation" that breaks into life with fresh possibilities.[121] Each child as fully human "brings a new center of creativity into the world which demands an ever

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[116] Ibid., 288. Burggraeve derives this from Levinas' emphasis on education "to elevate the *care-for-self* of living beings to the *care-for-the-other* in man."

[117] For a discussion of how Burggraeve's ethical framework allows for a consideration of children as competent subjects with participatory rights in religious education, see Dillen, "Children between liberation and care: ethical perspectives on the rights of children and parent-child relationships," 245-249; and Dillen, "Religious participation of children as active subjects: toward a hermeneutical-communicative model of religious education in families with young children," 40-46.

[118] Wall, *Ethics in Light of Childhood*, 10.

[119] Ibid., 93.

[120] Ibid., 91.

[121] Ibid., 43.

more fully decentered humanity."[122] Between children and adults, then, is a participatory process of co-creativity in which both push one another to recognize and expand their life narratives as organically interdependent.

Wall acknowledges that this interdependency is played against larger social systems that continue to marginalize children. Children "are bound up with systems of social power that are unresponsive to their particular otherness."[123] Like Burggraeve, Wall does not discount the power differential in adult-child relationships. Where he differs from Burggraeve, however, is in his accent on the child's human capacity for "world creativity."[124] "Being-in-the-world is creativity-in-the-world. Young and old are the coauthors of the play of life that they find themselves already born into," writes Wall.[125] His proposal is that we can begin to work toward a child-inclusive society not by simply extending equal social agency to all children. Rather, it is through "the disruption of selves' and societies' basic assumptions" by the particular relation of difference that children make in their human capacity for "world creativity" shared with adults.[126] Children also face disruption in their lives under circumstances shaped by those around them and often against their wishes. Yet, they are not merely passive objects that power acts on. Children are also active subjects recreating the meaning of the effects of power for themselves in relation with others. It is this human capacity for creativity that renders them educable, and legitimizes the importance of being educated responsibly to be responsible toward others. Wall's proposal of a child-responsive ethics, though

[122] Ibid., 88.
[123] Ibid., 103.
[124] Ibid., 57.
[125] Ibid., 57.
[126] Ibid., 94.

ambitious, aims to make space for children's voices and experiences to be taken seriously as sources for theological and ethical reflection because "[b]eing with children draws one into fresh and surprising horizons of meaning."[127]

Wall and Burggraeve provide a theological-ethical frame for listening in (C)PAR as receptivity to the child as graced irruption. This frame also locates listening within a deeper summon heard in the Christian narrative to welcome children. "Let the little children come to me, and do not stop them, for it is to such as these that the kingdom of God belongs," exhorted Jesus in Luke 18:16. He also taught, "Whoever welcomes this child in my name welcomes me, and whoever welcomes me welcomes the one who sent me; for the least among all of you is the greatest" (Luke 9:48). Contemporary biblical scholarship focused on children has reclaimed the unsettling radicality of these teachings.[128] As Judith Gundry-Volf highlights, Jesus challenged the complacency of those in his time who had presumed that they were qualified to enter the reign of God by merely fulfilling the works of the Law since children were not obliged to do so.[129] At the heart of Jesus's teaching is his call to humility for all through children:

> Truly I tell you, unless you change and become like children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven. Whoever becomes humble like this child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven. Whoever welcomes one such child in my name welcomes me. (Matthew 18: 4-5; cf. Mark 9: 35-37)

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[127] Ibid., 90.

[128] See Marcia J. Bunge, ed., *The Child in the Bible* (Grand Rapids, Michigan and Cambridge, U.K.: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2008), especially Judith M. Gundry-Volf, "Children in the Gospel of Mark, with Special Attention to Jesus' Blessing of Children (Mark 10:13-16) and the Purpose of Mark," 143-176; John T. Carroll, "'What Then Will This Child Become?': Perspectives on Children in the Gospel of Luke," 177-194; Keith J. White, "'He Placed a Little Child in the Midst': Jesus, the Kingdom, and Children," 353-374.

[129] Judith M. Gundry-Volf, "The Least and the Greatest: Children in the New Testament," in *The Child in Christian Thought,* ed. Marcia J. Bunge (Grand Rapids, Michigan and Cambridge, U.K.: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2001), 39.

To become humble like a child, as Gundry-Volf interprets, is not simply a reference to a childlike quality of trust in God. In the Matthean context of an ongoing debate about greatness among the disciples, to become humble like *this* child refers to the socially marginal status of the "little ones" (Matthew 18: 6) that God has come to identify with by becoming one of them in Jesus Christ. "The humility of the great thus consists particularly in their stooping humbly to serve children," writes Gundry-Volf.[130] Humility is more profoundly a lowering of oneself to be in solidarity with the socially marginalized and vulnerable which includes children.

The radicality of Jesus's teaching on children, then, is rooted not only in their inclusion as disciples and companions. More provocatively, as biblical scholar Elizabeth Waldron Barnett observes, "[t]he child is called [by Jesus] into the midst of the disciples in order that the disciples be set right."[131] Part of the complexity of children in the Christian tradition is in how they "can be vehicles of revelation, models of faith, and even paradigms for entering the reign of God."[132] Children can lead adults to a deeper conversion of the heart along the way of life's journey in faith (cf. Mark 10:15; Matthew 18:3; Luke 18:17). Gundry-Volf argues even further, "Jesus did not just teach how to make an adult world kinder and more just for children; he taught the arrival of a social world in part defined by and organized around children."[133]

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[130] Ibid., 42.

[131] Elizabeth Waldron Barnett, "The Call of Christ – The Call of the Child," in *Theology, Mission and Child: Global Perspectives,* ed. Bill Prevette, Keith J. White, C. Rosalee Velloso Ewell and D.J. Konz (Eugene, Oregon: Wipf & Stock, 2014), 225.

[132] Bunge, "Beyond Children as Agents or Victims: Reexamining Children's Paradoxical Strengths and Vulnerabilities with Resources from Christian Theologies of Childhood and Child Theologies,"35.

[133] Gundry-Volf, "The Least and the Greatest," 60.

Underscored is the incarnational presence of God in the otherness of children, and whose social marginality as vulnerable agents calls for the world's transformation. The critical-contemplative mode of listening in (C)PAR facilitates a process of discerning this presence because "children call for the still coming kingdom of God on earth, the mystery of an unfolding New Creation."[134] The act of listening expresses a discipleship of solidarity that humbles itself before each child as graced irruption in the mystery of God's presence.

4.3.3 Called to Embrace the Child as Mystery

Mystery holds a space open for each child to be encountered as graced irruption. I draw this idea from theologian Karl Rahner's "Ideas for a Theology of Childhood,"[135] in which he locates the human experience of childhood within the wider and deeper life of God as Mystery. For Rahner, God as "infinite and incomprehensible" Mystery is not so much a puzzle to be solved, but an abiding presence who draws us into a relationship of surrender.[136] In this relationship, God reveals a more-ness to who we are as human persons such that we also remain a mystery to ourselves in relation with others. Human beings are finite creatures with an infinite longing to belong that is abundantly graced. Two points in Rahner's theological treatment of childhood have a bearing on how we interpret the child as graced interruption: first, the child is already in partnership with

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[134] Wall, "Childism and the Ethics of Responsibility," 254.

[135] Karl Rahner, "Ideas for a Theology of Childhood [1963]," in *Theological Investigations* (Vol.8), trans. D. Bourke (New York: Seabury, 1977), 33-50. This author retains Bourke's original translation in English for direct quotations. Where 'man' and 'he' are used, they refer to the human being.

[136] See Karl Rahner, "The Concept of Mystery in Catholic Theology [1959]," in *Theological Investigations* (Vol. 4), trans. K. Smyth (New York: Crossroad, 1982), 41. He further writes, "Man always lives by the holy mystery, even where he is not conscious of it. The lucidity of his consciousness derives from the incomprehensibility of this mystery … the freedom of his mastery of things comes from his being mastered by the Holy which is itself unmastered." (54) This author retains Smyth's original translation in English for direct quotations. Where 'man' and 'he' are used, they refer to the human being.

God as child; and second, the child bears the eschatological future of God's Reign now in the already-and-not-yet.

a) The Child as God's Partner

According to Rahner, the child as fully human is "right from the first, the partner of God," participating in God's divine life breathed into creation.[137] There is the relational subjectivity of each child, a *this*-ness of childhood that is already experienced as graced, lived particularly through time and in place, but remaining open to possibilities in God as inexhaustible Mystery. For Rahner, children are not negatively thought of as adults in the making. Rather, they are graced to encounter God as God is in their particular life-stage in history:

> The strange and wonderful flowers of childhood are already fruits in themselves, and do not merely rely for their justification on the fruit that is to come afterwards. The grace of childhood is not merely the pledge of the grace of adulthood.[138]

Childhood is not simply recognized as a stage of life in preparation for what is to come. Rahner significantly underscores its distinctive value as a good in itself that should not be subordinated to adulthood as "the goal and measure of life."[139] What is experienced in one's childhood has a formative influence throughout life. To acknowledge the distinctive value of human childhood implies that children should also not be treated as adults. Instead, Rahner pushes adults to be attentive to how children are experiencing themselves in relation with others, through an immediacy and openness to the world. A

[137] Rahner, "Ideas for a Theology of Childhood," 38.

[138] Ibid., 37.

[139] Ibid., 34.

space is opened for the child's witness of God to call forth our conversion as fellow pilgrims on a journey.

Rahner, however, is careful not to idealize childhood "as a sort of innocent arcadia."[140] The child as a human being is also a sinner, though abundantly graced. Yet, for Rahner, sin is recognized as a dimension of the human condition into which one is born. Hence, childhood as a beginning is "not simply pure" but implicated in human history that is "right from the outset, also a history of guilt, of gracelessness, of a refusal to respond to the call of the living God."[141] Underscored is a relational understanding of sin in which the child does not only sin but is also sinned against. Yet, Rahner's accent is on the child as already abundantly graced by God through the redeeming love of Jesus Christ. In light of the Incarnation of Jesus Christ as God's free offer of grace, "the child and his origins are indeed encompassed by the love of God,"[142] enveloped by God's "greater compassion."[143] The child is God's partner because of God's free offer of grace operative in human experience that includes childhood. God's grace is operative in and through the humanity of children that is neither fully pure nor utterly depraved.

b) The Eschatological Future of God's Reign in the Now of the Child as Mystery

Rahner's eschatological thinking about childhood is significant. It "enables us to appreciate the relationship of earthly life to eternal life."[144] According to him, childhood

[140] Ibid., 40.

[141] Ibid., 39.

[142] Ibid., 39.

[143] Ibid., 40.

[144] Mary Ann Hinsdale, "'Infinite Openness to the Infinite': Karl Rahner's Contribution to Modern Catholic Thought on the Child," in *The Child in Christian Thought*, ed. Marcia J. Bunge (Grand Rapids, Michigan and Cambridge, U.K.: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2001), 423.

is "a basic condition" that endures the entirety of life as a whole.[145] That is, "we do not move away from childhood in any definitive sense, but rather move towards the eternity of this childhood, to its definitive and enduring validity in God's sight."[146] Childhood is not provisional but primordial when understood in relation to God as "the ineffable future which is coming to meet us."[147] More than a developmental phase of life and a social category, childhood is theologically the beginning of a journey of openness and trust in the mystery of God's presence that envelops the totality of life: "Childhood is openness. Human childhood is infinite openness."[148] It marks the beginning of learning to entrust ourselves in freedom to God as absolute Mystery, who bears and carries us to full term, calling us to become who we already are as children of God. Thus, "we do not really know what childhood means at the beginning of our lives until we know what that childhood means which comes at the end of them; that childhood, namely, in which by God-given repentance and conversion, we receive the kingdom of God and so become children."[149]

Thus, the child as God's partner also announces the now of God's Reign, bearing its eschatological future here in the already and not yet. Children to whom the Reign of God belongs are agents mediating God's call to life on the basis of their openness and receptivity to mystery: "that we can be like children in being receivers and as such carefree in relation to God."[150] Where Rahner goes further is his theological proposal that

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[145] Rahner, "Ideas for a Theology of Childhood," 47.
[146] Ibid., 36.
[147] Ibid., 37.
[148] Ibid., 48.
[149] Ibid., 43.
[150] Ibid., 41.

childhood is not simply a stage we grow out of, but a graced reality into which we paradoxically mature in faith, along a spiritual journey of deeper "vulnerability and radical openness" to God.[151] It is "literally about *mature childhood within adulthood*."[152] This is where Rahner's theology of childhood does not only make an anthropological shift to the human. It is also stretched toward an everyday mysticism in life that contemplates our human interconnectedness from having "received the grace from the life of God himself to be children of God and brothers and sisters of one another."[153] If this is so, then adults "need to look at children and their own childhoods as vocationally and theologically relevant."[154] Children incarnate the mystery of God's presence, and reveal the wonder of who we all are as God's children calling forth one another to service. That we grow from childhood to become who we are as God's children becomes the foundation for "the eternal value and dignity" of our created humanity in Christ.[155]

A note of caution, however, is raised against Rahner's language of submission when writing about the qualities of childhood that orient human surrender to God as mystery: "Childhood as an inherent factor in our lives must take the form of trust, of openness, of expectation, of readiness to be controlled by another."[156] Drawing on a feminist perspective, practical theologian Joyce Ann Mercer argues that just as it is for women, Rahner's framing of openness as "readiness to be controlled by another" is problematic for "children in situations of victimization where control by another who is

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[151] Roebben, *Theology Made in Dignity,* 95.

[152] Miller-McLemore, "Childhood," 45.

[153] Rahner, "Ideas for a Theology of Childhood," 49-50.

[154] Miller-McLemore, "Childhood," 46.

[155] Rahner, "Ideas for a Theology of Childhood," 50.

[156] Ibid., 47.

not benign leads to harm."[157] I agree with Mercer, except that for child-adult relationships, a critique of control cannot be simply taken as a blanket renunciation of hierarchy. A finer distinction ought to be made between adult control as dominance or as influence in caring for and guiding the child to grow in responsibility for others.[158]

Another point of critique is whether Rahner inadvertently essentializes childhood's qualities when he makes the theological shift from the human experience of childhood in history to the mystical. Rahner's theological analysis does not take a social-critical approach that frames childhood as a socio-cultural construction. However, to the extent that Rahner's account of childhood is relational, it complements a social-critical approach that attends to the contextual particularities of children's lives. Rahner writes, "we are obliged to put up with the obscurity and complexity of our experience of childhood, not to try to iron out the complexities, but to endure them and still manage to be true to our own experience of children in arriving at an idea of what a child is."[159]

Thus, the theological language of mystery must not be used to mystify and minimize the situations of impoverishment suffered by children. Properly understood, mystery re-positions the child from being seen as an object that requires fixing to a living subject who is fully present and desires to be loved into loving. For those of us who care for children, it informs and deepens one's conviction that problems affecting children are more adequately addressed when there is a willingness and readiness to know them as

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[157] Joyce Ann Mercer, *Welcoming Children: A Practical Theology of Childhood* (St. Louis, Missouri: Chalice Press, 2005), 154-155.

[158] Martin E. Marty, *The Mystery of the Child* (Grand Rapids, Michigan and Cambridge, U.K.: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2007), 32-33. Marty draws out this "difference between having influence on the child and having control over him" from Margaret Donaldson's philosophy on child discipline.

[159] Rahner, "Ideas for a Theology of Childhood," 41.

full persons in their situated relational complexity. Mystery does not turn us away from the reality of children's lives. Rather, it carries us toward a more-ness in that very reality, which in turn grips our hearts to act in love that dares to hope.

The call to embrace children, then, as the revelation of God as mystery is to behold their complexity as their lives interweave and shape those in their company. Religion scholar Martin Marty argues that "the provision of care for children will proceed on a radically revised and improved basis if instead of seeing the child first as a problem faced with a complex of problems, we see her as a mystery surrounded by mystery."[160] Regarding the child as mystery serves as a check against the dominance of adult-centrism; it "can lessen the temptation of adults to seek and sustain dominance and control over the child, something that reductionism makes possible."[161] An important dimension to this complexity is that children are spiritual beings. This is emphasized in Rahner's theology of childhood, which claims that human persons are spiritual beings right from their beginning in childhood. Children, then, are co-contemplatives with adults in the journey of faith. I will examine this point further in Chapter Five. It is relevant to note here that with this recognition of children as spiritual beings, adults "need to look at children and their own childhoods as vocationally and theologically relevant."[162] Not only is childhood as openness to the mystery of God's call to life a source of human experience for vocational discernment. Children also make a claim on adults to discern their priorities in relation to what matters in this shared life in God.

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[160] Marty, *The Mystery of the Child*, 1.

[161] Ibid., 60.

[162] Miller-McLemore, "Childhood," 46.

Adults are thus pushed to "be receptive to the lessons and wisdom that children offer them, to honor children's questions and insights, and to recognize that children can positively influence the community and the moral and spiritual lives of adults."[163] To embrace the mystery of each child – as God's partner who participates in the eschatological future of God's Reign now in the already-and-not-yet – is to create space from within to encountering her or him as graced interruption. Listening in (C)PAR leans teachers into this mystery of the child as God's agent who calls them into just presence.

4.4 Called to Just Presence in Teaching

Just presence is understood in terms of how the teacher positions oneself in right relation with the student that promotes the flourishing of life through educational practice. It manifests a quality of passionate teaching that flows from an authentic search within oneself to live outwardly with integrity. Just presence underlines teaching as "a prophetic vocation," which "demands of us allegiance to integrity of vision and belief in the face of those who would either seek to silence, censor, or discredit our words."[164] An integrity of vision is central to the practice of just presence, which engages the person of the teacher in a dynamic process of critical discernment based on a conception of teaching as value-laden and situated within social relationships of power, but never apart from grace operative in human creativity. I argue for this integrity of vision to be ordered by the human dignity of children as being created in God's image, which in turn makes a claim on teachers to receive each child as embodying the mystery of God's irruptive presence. This receptivity begins with listening not only as a pedagogical practice of

[163] Bunge, "Beyond Children as Agents or Victims: Reexamining Children's Paradoxical Strengths and Vulnerabilities with Resources from Christian Theologies of Childhood and Child Theologies," 35-36.
[164] bell hooks, *Teaching Critical Thinking: Practical Wisdom* (New York and London: Routledge, 2010), 181.

welcome, but more profoundly as a spiritual practice of discerning the prophetic contours of teaching as a vocation.

This is a dynamic echoed in the educational philosophy Dwayne Huebner, who writes: "education is a call from the other that we may reach out beyond ourselves and enter into life with the life around us."[165] In this light, "[t]o accept the vocation of a teacher is to answer the call of children and young people" through whom the other-ness of God's presence is encountered.[166] What this implies for the vocation of teaching is that educators are continually called out of themselves onto a journey of conversion as self-transformation in the process of serving children justly. This self-transformation from within is dialectically connected to the public activity of teaching as socially transforming of structures to promote the human flourishing of children alongside with them:

> The vocation of teaching offers adventure, an invitation to remain open and vulnerable, and occasions to re-shape and re-compose the story of our life. What dramatic turns, maybe even reversals, has the story of our teaching undergone as we try to hear the calls of children amidst the siren call of drugs, the voyeuristic invitations of TV, and the profit call of the industries of war which consume to destroy? These increasing complexities are not a sign of the decay of teaching, but an invitation to think and feel again what is of value and what we are called to do and be […] Can we look at students as we look at ourselves: on a journey, responding to that which calls them into the world?[167]

The call to just presence in teaching is continually being re-heard, re-awakened, and re-imagined through listening as an openness to having one's life narrative disrupted, reframed, and expanded by the perspectives of children. Such listening, as modeled in (C)PAR, demands that teachers have the humility and courage to confront and make sense of "the conflict between children's voices and the dominating noise of the powerful

[165] Huebner, "Religious Metaphors in the Language of Education," 360.

[166] Huebner, "Teaching as a Vocation," 380.

[167] Ibid., 382.

as a new question about emerging structures of justice and freedom."[168] It calls teachers to recognize moments of disruption in their encounters with children as opportunities for pause and critical re-evaluation of their educational convictions and commitments, as well as their structural positioning in relation to students. In all of this, teachers are not expected to suspend their authority when guiding children. The more urgent task is for them to authoritatively recognize how they are using power to influence without needing to mold children into their own image in authoritarian ways. Teachers are creatively challenged to "a lightness of touch," which "connotes being responsive, nimble, and patient in the act of teaching, while also retaining a sense of educational purpose."[169]

This dynamic of the child calling forth the just presence of the teacher finds an echo in the Lasallian tradition, where creativity in education flows dynamically from a fidelity to being "'seized' in one way or another, by the needs of the children, the young, the poor of our time and of our people and to have found there the fundamental reasons for our commitment to changing this reality."[170] I reframe this experience of 'being seized' as a moment of attentiveness and attending to the in-breaking of God's presence through children. At the heart of Lasallian discernment in education is precisely this: 'being seized' by the mystery of the child as graced irruption, who draws teachers to pay attention to God's purposes for educational communities *through* children in their situated experiencing of the world as full human beings.

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[168] Ibid., 381.

[169] David T. Hansen, *The Teacher and the World: A Study of Cosmopolitanism as Education* (London and New York: Routledge, 2011), 4.

[170] Schneider, "Making the Lasallian Charism Live Today," 241.

Conceiving of the child as graced irruption also deepens the preferential option for children as a hermeneutical key that reads forward the Lasallian mission of education. From the standpoint of such a conception, education is salvific not in the narrow sense of rescuing children from moral depravation and protecting their innocence. Education is salvific precisely from an orientation in faith that sees in each child the regenerative newness of God's presence that summons the teacher, saying - Nurture me. Create God's Reign with me, and to which you and I belong as God's children. Education is salvific when the integrity of teaching as a vocation is inseparable from the struggle for justice that promotes the human flourishing of children. This, I believe, is at the heart of Lasallian education: that we are all children of God is who we begin as and learn to become through educating for life. "It is for you who are teachers of those you guide to take all possible care to bring those under your guidance into that liberty of the children of God which Jesus Christ obtained for us by dying for us," writes De La Salle.[171] This liberty does not only refer to a freedom from conditions that dehumanize children and trivialize their lives. It is also a freedom for children to participate in the world's humanization through appropriate ways that enable them to learn, grow, and act as agents in vulnerable relation with others. Children do not only reveal to adults our common belonging as God's children. They also belong to communities *with* adults, calling all toward the reign of God that is "completely upside down, inside out, and back to front."[172]

[171] *Meditations* 203.2.

[172] White, "'He Placed a Little Child in the Midst': Jesus, the Kingdom, and Children," 364.

4.5 Conclusion

The proverbial saying that 'it takes a village to raise a child' is thus turned on its head. It is children instead who awake the consciousness of a village around them for the responsible task of educating them to live responsibly with others Where the Lasallian tradition continues to go deeper is its offer of a Christian prophetic mysticism that situates this consciousness in the contemplative, awakening first the eyes of teachers to see "Jesus beneath the poor rags of the children whom you have to instruct."[173] Lasallian mysticism goes farther and deeper to stress on reverence as a precondition for responsibility and the ground for encounter in the teacher-student relationship. Reverence is the draw of God's Spirit to behold the mystery of God's presence in each child with a sense of awe and wonder. It is precisely this amazement that energizes the prophetic call to educate toward the liberation of children. Such is an amazement that renders one trembling before the scandalizing action of God who steps out of God-self not only to be with the poor, but also *in* the least as a child in Jesus Christ. It is also an amazement that humbles one before the radicality of God's loving trust: that God has first trusted us enough to entrust God-self as a child into the care of human hands as educators. Recovering this capacity to be amazed at the mystery of children as being one *with* us and *of* us in God is vital for the teacher as a contemplative, whose future shapes the depth and breadth of just presence as prophetic witness in education.

[173] *Meditations* 96.3.

CHAPTER FIVE

THE TEACHER AS CONTEMPLATIVE

On the tricentennial anniversary of Saint John Baptist de La Salle's death in 2019, Pope Francis urged the Brothers of the Christian Schools to "study and imitate his [their Founder's] passion for the least and the discarded."[1] He lifted up in particular De La Salle's conviction that "teaching cannot be merely a trade, but is a mission."[2] Throughout this dissertation, I have argued that this education mission makes a preferential option for children *of* and *as* the poor. Energizing this mission is a mystical realism that grounds the prophetic witness of the teacher in educating toward the liberation of children. A key contribution of this dissertation lies in its turn to a contemporary theological interest in childhood as a resource to renew and deepen the interconnection between mysticism, liberation, and the child in the Lasallian imagination of teaching as a vocation. In this chapter, I pull together the different strands of this interconnection with a consideration of the contemplative calling of the teacher. The gift of the Lasallian tradition for education, I contend, is its offer of a Christian prophetic mysticism of faith that positions the teacher as contemplative in relation to the wondrous mystery of God's life incarnated in and shared with children. The future of the teacher as contemplative lies then in a recovery of the capacity to be amazed at children as one *with* us and *of* us in the mystery of God's life. Such is an amazement simultaneously re-learnt in wonderment alongside and from children, and which energizes the prophetic vocation of teaching.

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[1] Pope Francis, "Address of His Holiness Pope Francis to the Community of the Brothers of the Christian Schools (De La Salle Brothers)," The Holy See, May 16, 2019, http://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/speeches/2019/may/documents/papa-francesco_20190516_lasalliani.html

[2] Ibid.

5.1 The Place of the Contemplative in Teaching

5.1.1 Perspectives from Contemplative Pedagogy

Within the context of the United States, there has been a resurgence of academic interest in contemplative approaches to teaching and learning.[3] This is reflected in the emergence of Contemplative Studies, which Louis Komjathy defines as an "interdisciplinary field dedicated to research and education on contemplative practice and contemplative experience."[4] Komjathy further delineates contemplative pedagogy as "an approach to teaching and learning informed by and perhaps expressed as contemplative practice."[5] It emphasizes the cultivation of "attentiveness, awareness, interiority, presence, silence, transformation, and a deepened sense of meaning and purpose."[6] The conviction is that the contemplative pedagogy returns us to a wisdom-based education that serves to foster relationality built around an ethics of compassionate responsibility.[7] Contemplative pedagogy has been implemented as student-centered learning in various contexts and across different levels in the American educational system.[8] There is, of course, the recurring issue of how educators are being formed to teach contemplatively in the classroom.[9] Yet, beneath this issue is a more pertinent question: how are we to understand the teacher as a contemplative? I believe that a reflection on who the teacher is as a contemplative is integral to an authentic contemplative education.

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[3] For a useful historical review leading up to the current interest in the contemplative dimension of education, see Patricia Owen-Smith, *The Contemplative Mind in the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2018), 11-23.

[4] Louis Komjathy, *Introducing Contemplative Studies* (Hoboken: Wiley, 2018), 282.

[5] Ibid., 166.

[6] Ibid., 167.

[7] Owen-Smith, *The Contemplative Mind in the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning,* 108.

[8] Komjathy*, Introducing Contemplative Studies*, 170.

[9] Owen-Smith, *The Contemplative Mind in the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning*, 105-106.

Dennis Shirley and Elizabeth MacDonald's Mindful Teacher seminars offer an example of how contemplative pedagogy is employed with teachers to reflect on their practice as they grow into their identity as contemplatives. According to them, mindful teaching is:

> a form of teaching that is informed by contemplative practices and teacher inquiry that enables teachers to interrupt their harried lifestyles, come to themselves through participation in a collegial community of inquiry and practice, and attend to aspects of their classroom instruction and pupils' learning that are ordinarily overlooked in the press of events.[10]

Conducted for teachers in the Boston public schools, these seminars created a collegial setting for them to be present to one another as their whole selves while they collectively thought and felt through questions and dilemmas that came up for them in their educational practice. Meditation was integrated into these sessions to create a moment for pause and recollection, not for teachers to find solutions that fix their pedagogical issues, but to expand and deepen their judgment to see the complexity of these issues more clearly in a relational context.[11]

From the participation of these teachers, Shirley and MacDonald conceptualize the dynamics of mindful teaching as an interplay of "seven synergies."[12] These are: i) "a commitment to open-mindedness"; ii) "a disposition of caring"; iii) "stopping" for "an inner account of what is transpiring"; iv) reconnecting with "professional expertise"; v) "authentic alignment" with ethical convictions about teaching; vi) "integrative" teaching that broadens and synthesizes a range of different pedagogies; and vii) undertaking "collective responsibility" for confronting and putting right forms of injustices

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[10] Dennis Shirley and Elizabeth MacDonald, *The Mindful Teacher (Second Edition)* (New York and London: Teachers College Press, 2016), 5.

[11] Ibid., 45.

[12] Ibid., 74.

systemically committed against students in education.[13] From the perspective of mindful teaching, the teacher as contemplative takes a step back to reflect inwardly and critically reframe in first-person perspective one's assumptions about the who, what, how, and why of teaching. The teacher as contemplative inquires deeply by cultivating an interiority as a source of insight and inspiration. Mindful teaching then, facilitates "the integration of our exterior and interior worlds in knowledge construction."[14] It aims to put the 'contemplative' back into the teacher and reclaims the spiritual as the foundation for education.[15]

However, a key concern that I have about mindful teaching specifically and contemplative pedagogy in general is their tendency to psychologize and reduce contemplation into yet another competency to be mastered and measured. This is a recurring issue raised in the literature on contemplative studies. As Patricia Owen-Smith puts it, an ethical question in contemplative pedagogy is the extent to which "practices might become so disconnected from their original [religious] traditions that they are reduced to simple methodologies at the expense of authentic spiritual development."[16] Komjathy discusses this disconnection as "decontextualization and reconceptualization," highlighting the reduction of "contemplative experience to physiology, and of reducing contemplative scholarship to a neuroscientific approach."[17] In this regard, contemplative

[13] Ibid., 75-81.

[14] Owen-Smith, *The Contemplative Mind in the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning*, 3.

[15] I recall Thomas Groome who argues that a spiritual vision is foundational to humanizing education as its very nature involves engaging and nurturing learners as spiritual beings. The spiritual is integral to who we are as human beings as we relate to one another from and through the depth of ourselves. For his discussion, see Groome, *Educating for Life,* 322-326.

[16] Owen-Smith, *The Contemplative Mind in the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning*, 67.

[17] Komjathy, *Introducing Contemplative Studies*, 262; 255.

practices end up being instrumentalized as techniques for therapeutic purposes of stress relief. Even as Shirley and MacDonald aimed to reclaim "teaching as a spiritual practice," it is striking that they described the inclusion of formal meditation as a practice "to calm and concentrate the mind" in their mindful teaching seminars.[18]

Underlying this debate on reductionism is an ambivalence about the position of religious traditions from which contemplative practices are drawn for educational settings that are not faith-based. As Komjathy puts it, how might one honor the "religiously committed and tradition-based contemplative practice" within a movement in contemplative pedagogy that "often consciously attempts to be 'secular,' so that the critique of religious indoctrination or covert proselytization is completely unfounded?"[19] This raises complicated questions around the contextual purposes and reception of contemplative practices in education. Although these questions are critical, it is beyond the scope of this dissertation to address them. What I wish to highlight, however, is that these tensions within contemplative pedagogy present an opportunity for theologians to clarify, revise, expand and deepen the meanings of the 'contemplative' from the dynamism of their particular religious-spiritual traditions. I contribute to this end by critically retrieving the Lasallian tradition as one of many Christian sources of spirituality specific to teaching.

[18] Shirley and MacDonald, *The Mindful Teacher*, 100; 42.

[19] Komjathy, *Introducing Contemplative Studies*, 173.

5.1.2 A Prophetic Mysticism of Faith: Lasallian Contribution to Contemplation in Education

Lasallian educational thought integrates the contemplative as constitutive of the practice of teaching, which is in turn inseparable from the personhood of the teacher in relation to students. To recall the words of Lasallian scholar George Van Grieken: "Lasallian pedagogy is Lasallian precisely *because of, not in spite of or along with*, its spiritual dimensions." [20] As developed in this dissertation, what is worth reclaiming from the Lasallian tradition is a "mystical realism"[21] that integrates contemplation with the public activity of educating children as an act of prophetic witness. This, I contend, is the wisdom that the Lasallian tradition has for contemplative pedagogy: a prophetic mysticism of faith that grounds the vocation of teaching as a spiritual practice of incarnational presence. Its articulation of faith contributes to our understanding of contemplation in education in at least two ways.

First, it serves as a corrective to the reductionism of contemplation into yet another technique added on to a list of innovative best practices for educational improvements. Faith in the Lasallian sense goes beyond religious piety; it is a spiritual conviction that God permeates all life and calls all to be life-giving in just and loving ways. It is a way of being with others in a reality wherein God remains faithfully present *to* and *in* the world. Faith situates the meanings we create of teaching in dynamic relation to the living mystery of God's ongoing creativity in history. Lasallian contemplation, then, does not just make space for teachers to breathe and regain their awareness of self

[20] Van Grieken, *Touching the Hearts of Students,* 123. Emphasis his.

[21] Sauvage, "The Gospel Journey of John Baptist de La Salle (1651-1719)," 224.

in relation to others. Rather, it plumbs them deeper to make space for the mystery of God as the very source of life, and whose Spirit is ever enlivening and energizing the activity of educating, not solely for the purpose of preparing students to make a living but to influence them to make a life responsibly with others for the common good. Lasallian contemplation forms and transforms the teacher from within to *be with* students in the presence of God as the abiding reality in education as a journey that is human and divine. It is an act of faith that awakens the inner life of the teacher as an everyday mystic, whose experience "consists not so much in having extraordinary visions but in having a new vision of all reality, discovering God as the vision's ultimate truth, as its living foundation, active and ever new."[22] This new vision in a Lasallian key is that education is first and foremost God's salvific initiative, and teachers are called to live the depth of their vocation as co-creators with God to transform creation anew.

Second, following from this vision, Lasallian faith turns the contemplative gaze from within outward into action in the world. Through the eyes of faith, the teacher as contemplative infuses the social practice of teaching with a sense of mission that manifests God's passion and compassion for the poor and marginalized. My conviction is that the prophetic edge of Lasallian educational thought is shaped by what I conceive to be a preferential option for children in its tradition (as discussed in Chapter Two). To recall, what I mean by an option for children is a recognition of the further marginalization of children as children by adults, *and* within structural conditions of social, political, cultural, and economic impoverishment. It is grounded in the Gospel,

[22] Maria Clara Lucchetti Bingemer, "Testimony: Mysticism with Open Eyes," in *Witnessing: Prophecy, Politics, and Wisdom,* ed. Maria Clara Bingemer and Peter Casarella (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 2014), 10.

which speaks about the welcome of and care for children as an imperative in Christian discipleship.

Lasallian contemplation, then, is constitutive of the prophetic dimension in teaching, where the holistic education of children is inseparable from resisting and transforming structural conditions of injustice that deny their wholeness and close off their possibilities for life in the present. It presses teachers to see that the process of educating for social transformation is rooted in an ongoing interior conversion to each child in the classroom as God's child. Lasallian contemplation is integral to a mode of educational discernment from the standpoint of God's solidarity with children as the poor and marginalized, and located within the liberating love of God's reign as the horizon for prophetic critique and social transformation. Lasallian contemplation also sustains teaching as an act of hope, not on account of sheer human effort alone, but on its grounding in faith that "inspirits us with a passionate force by the God of the poor," and "brings into focus the reality that we are presently living and the conviction that God's action is always present in it."[23] It is this faith that also opens the contemplative eyes of teachers to behold the presence of children as the revelation of God as Mystery that shapes them spiritually. In other words, as I will discuss later in this chapter, the future of the teacher as contemplative lies in a welcome of children's spiritual lives in the classroom, re-learning from children their capacity for wonder and amazement. This is a trajectory implied in a Lasallian prophetic mysticism of faith in education that makes a preferential option for children.

[23] Campos, "Fidelity to the Movement of the Spirit: Criteria for Discernment," 15.

5.1.3 From the Teacher who Prays to Teaching as Prayer

Lasallian contemplation as prophetic mysticism pushes us to live the way of being teacher *in* and *as* prayer. This is in the active sense of teachers reminding to place themselves and their students in God's presence as a continual dynamic of grace that flows to incarnate itself through human participation in the whole of educational activity. This does not mean that teachers do not retreat from their daily work to cultivate practices of personal prayer in stillness and silence. In fact, De La Salle encourages such practices in his spiritual writings but goes deeper to regard prayer as opening oneself to intimacy with God, in and through the Holy Spirit who unites one's action to Jesus Christ. It is this intimacy that is the source of inspiration and fruitfulness in teaching as a practice of Christian discipleship in life. "All your care for the children entrusted to you would be useless if Jesus Christ himself did not give the quality, the power, and the efficacy that is needed to make your care useful," writes De La Salle.[24] The call of the teacher to follow and imitate Jesus in the task of educating for mission is rooted in intimacy with him, just as "the branch of the vine cannot bear fruit of itself … unless it remains attached to the stem."[25] It is in the context of a deepening love for God who first loved us (cf. 1 John 4:19) that the spiritual practice of prayer in teaching also forms the moral character of the teacher gradually patterned after the way of Jesus' life in the Spirit.

Prayer as a practice of attention to God's Spirit who draws us into intimacy with God in Jesus Christ is a major theme in De La Salle's *Explanation of the Method of*

[24] *Meditations* 195.3.

[25] Ibid.

Interior Prayer.[26] The *Explanation* is the last book that De La Salle wrote during his later years for the formation of novices at Saint Yon. Lasallian scholar Donald Mouton summarizes well the purpose of this spiritual text: "Ultimately, the intention of De La Salle's method of interior prayer is to allow the Holy Spirit to pray in us. This is a capital concept in the spirituality of De La Salle."[27] Beyond its systematic delineation of twenty-one acts across three movements in interior prayer, the *Explanation* proposed a pedagogy to accompany these novices who were mainly beginners in its practice. This pedagogy moved them gradually across three modes of interior prayer: from "a discursive manner by multiple reflections (for beginners)" through "few but prolonged reflections (for the proficient) to a prayer of simple attention (for the advanced)."[28] It is not my purpose in this dissertation to exegete in detail the structure and language of these mechanics. Instead, my aim is to underline the prophetic mysticism in Lasallian spirituality that emphasizes the interwoven nature of interior prayer and the public act of teaching.

Interior prayer, for De La Salle, is "an activity not simply of the mind but … must take place in the depths of the soul."[29] It is "an inner activity in which the soul applies itself to God," with an openness to the Holy Spirit to "fill itself and to unite itself interiorly with God."[30] De La Salle underscores the indwelling activity of the Holy Spirit in interior prayer as filling, guiding, uniting, penetrating, revealing, communicating,

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[26] John Baptist de La Salle, *Explanation of the Method of Interior Prayer* [original: 1739], ed. and revised trans. Donald Mouton, FSC (Landover, Md: Lasallian Publications, 2007). Subsequent references mentioned as *Explanation* in main text and cited as *EM* in footnotes.

[27] Donald Mouton, FSC, "Introduction," in John Baptist de La Salle, *Explanation of the Method of Interior Prayer* [original: 1739], ed. and revised trans. Donald Mouton, FSC (Landover, Md: Lasallian Publications, 2007), 5.

[28] Ibid., 4.

[29] *EM*, 21.

[30] Ibid., 22.

sanctifying, and loving.[31] Interior prayer becomes a conscious deepening in awareness to the presence of the Holy Spirit who lives and prays in our "bodies … [as] houses of prayer."[32] It is important to note that De La Salle's notion of interiority does not equal solipsism, although there are statements from the *Explanation* that may suggest so if taken in isolation.[33] Mouton argues there is an "inner dynamism" in De La Salle's method which relates interior prayer to daily life.[34] This inner dynamism comprises four movements – *Recollection*, *Becoming Aware of God's Presence*, *Considering a Mystery/ Virtue/ Maxim*, and *Resolutions*.[35] I re-present these as an iterative cycle in Diagram 5.1 (see p. 203). This dynamism indicates that what seems to be a dichotomy between the interior and exterior worlds in the *Explanation* is mistaken for at least three reasons:

First, God's presence is encountered relationally in prayer. As De La Salle notes, "We can consider God present in three different ways: first, in the place where we are, second, within us, and third, in a church."[36]The entirety of our lives is grounded in God: "In fact, we have being, movement, and life only because God abides in us, and communicates all of this to us, in such a way that if God ceased for a moment to dwell in us and to maintain us in being, we would immediately fall back into nothingness."[37] In

[31] See especially *Meditations* 62.3.

[32] Meditations 62.2.

[33] For example, see *EM*, 23 in which the exterior world is cast in a negative light: "It is in this way that the soul, imperceptibly filling itself with God, detaches itself from creatures and becomes what we call interior by turning away and disengaging itself from material and exterior objects."

[34] Mouton, "Introduction," 6. Mouton echoes Sheldrake's argument in "Christian Spirituality as a Way of Living Publicly: A Dialectic of the Mystical and Prophetic," 286: "Interiority and exteriority express complementary dimensions of human life that should be held in dialectical tension" (286). This dialectical tension is similarly traced in De La Salle's conception of interior prayer.

[35] Ibid., 6.

[36] *EM*, 25.

[37] Ibid., 32.

this light, the language of distancing from "material and exterior objects" as a movement to the interior is not an absolute rejection of and fleeing from the exterior world. It is more properly interpreted as a renunciation of things that take the place of God.

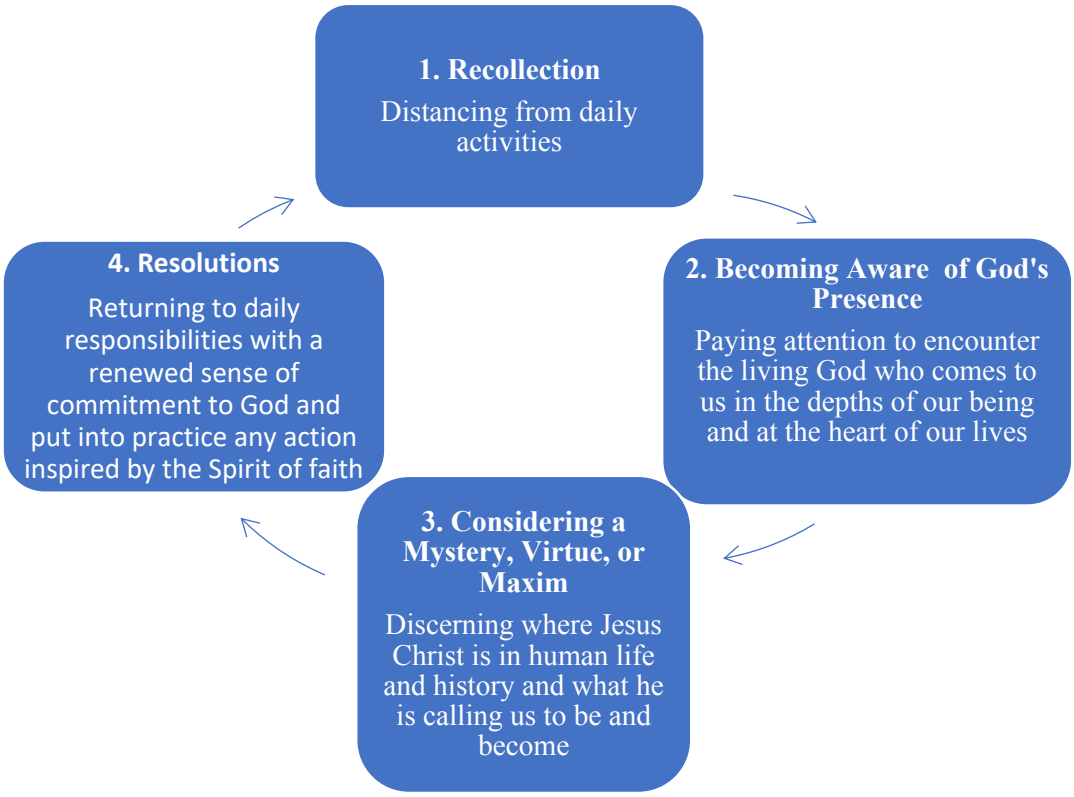

Figure 5.1: Inner Dynamism of De La Salle's Method of Interior Prayer [38]

Rather than the closing in of the self, interior prayer is "a de-centering of self, a conversion, a turning to God 'in whom we live and move and have our being.'"[39] It is more properly interpreted as a renunciation of things that take the place of God. This is a process of allowing the Spirit to shed light on any egoistic attachments to people and things so as to re-order our relationships with them and live life more fully centered on

[38] Adapted from Mouton, "Introduction," 6.

[39] Mouton, "Introduction," 8; *EM*, 32.

God as abiding love. In the context of teaching, these attachments could include the following: negative personal and social biases against students, their families and backgrounds; a preoccupation with personal achievement at the expense of students' well-being; an inordinate fear of being wrong and contradicted by students; a rigid moralism that judges students too quickly and harshly without listening to them; a managerial sensibility that mistakes control for influencing and guiding students; a need to be popular with students, and even unhealthy relationships of codependency on students for self-esteem.

Second, this inner dynamism leads teachers to embody the presence of Jesus Christ in their relationships with students. A significant aspect of De La Salle's method of interior prayer is contemplating the person of Jesus Christ through Scripture: "Jesus Christ, the Life, in what he is (Mysteries), Jesus Christ, the Way, in what he does (Virtues), and Jesus Christ, the Truth, in what he says (Maxims)."[40] In each of these is an act of application that resolves to imitate Jesus in the practice of virtue. "Interior prayer always ought to lead to the practice of virtue," writes De La Salle.[41] Such practice is articulated as resolutions that are "present," "particular," and "effective."[42] A list of twelve virtues applicable to teaching is offered in *The Conduct of the Christian Schools*: "seriousness, silence, humility, prudence, wisdom, patience, restraint, gentleness, zeal, watchfulness, piety, and generosity."[43]

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[40] Mouton, "Introduction," 9.

[41] *EM*, 97

[42] *EM*, 107.

[43] *Conduct,* 187.

Third, the inner dynamism also implies that the movement toward the simple prayer of attention as the goal of the method of interior prayer is also an expansion of deepening faith carried into the daily life of the teacher. What one finds in the *Explanation* is an ascetic sensibility grounded in a contemplative stance that sees reality "with the eyes of faith, not to do anything but in view of God, and to attribute everything to God."[44] Thus, as Mouton writes, "What simple attention is in the context of interior prayer, the spirit of faith is in the context of our daily lives. For De La Salle, the spirit of faith is simple attention 'in action.'"[45] This connection between interior prayer and the daily work of the teacher as an act of faith is more clearly substantiated when reading the *Explanation* in relation to De La Salle's other spiritual writings. Of significance is his instruction in the *Meditations* on the practice of intercessory prayer:

> You must, then, devote yourself very much to prayer in order to succeed in your ministry. You must constantly represent the needs of your disciples to Jesus Christ, explaining to him the difficulties you have experienced in guiding them. Jesus Christ, seeing that you regard him as the one who can do everything in your work and yourself as an instrument that ought to be moved only by him, will not fail to grant you what you ask of him.[46]

The act of praying for students is in the context of an intimate relationship with God whose fidelity is revealed through Jesus. It is not only a confession of dependence on God, but also for teachers to claim the grace given and "assume responsibility to bring about that which [they] pray."[47]

On another occasion, De La Salle compares teachers as the angels going up and down Jacob's ladder in their life of ministerial prayer:

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[44] *Rule*, 1718

[45] Mouton, "Introduction," 12.

[46] *Meditations* 196.1

[47] Richard M. Gula, *The Way of Goodness and Holiness: A Spirituality for Pastoral Ministers* (Collegeville, Minnesota: Liturgical Press, 2011), 158.

> 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.[48]

Conjoined in the teacher as contemplative are the acts of praying for themselves and for students. As Lasallian scholar Jacques Goussin points out, this is a "double movement" that is traceable in De La Salle's teaching on prayer.[49] The teacher prays first to be filled with the Holy Spirit as the source of insight and inspiration for announcing the Gospel. S/he then prays to the Holy Spirit to prepare the hearts of students so that they are open to these insights to which s/he gives form through words and action. This double movement reiterates the dialectical relationship between the inner lives of teachers and the public practice of teaching that is profoundly relational and powerfully shaping of people's lives in society.

The wisdom of the Lasallian mystical tradition for education, then, is not simply its insistence on prayer as a practice that sustains teaching. Rather, it stretches the imagination to see teaching *as* prayer. Interior prayer as loving and knowing God in simple attention flows into the very practice of teaching as prayer attentive to the activity of God's presence in educational relationships between teachers and students. More profoundly, to imagine teaching as prayer is to reclaim it as a spiritual practice of revelation. This recalls an insight of religious educator Maria Harris, who draws on the revelation of God as Mystery as central to the religious imagination that is constitutive of teaching as saving work. She writes, "The more I teach – and teach others to teach – the more I am convinced that the activity of teaching, when viewed as a religiously

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[48] *Meditations* 198.1

[49] Goussin, *The Mission of Human and Christian Education,* 98.

imaginative act, is able to save and to redeem."[50] Teaching as an act of the religious imagination holds out a space for the mystical-contemplative in relation to divine revelation that is relationally witnessed between human subjects:

> It [the religious imagination] enables us to pose the possibility that to dwell as a teacher with other human beings is to dwell in the area of mystery, not because subject matter is dense, but because we humans as the Imago Dei are ourselves mysteries, and interactions between us always takes place on holy ground, the only kind of ground there is … And to believe in the mystical element of human life points paradoxically to the social and political dimensions in the act of teaching.[51]

Harris reinforces a Lasallian insight on the primacy of mystery in its view of teaching as a human act of faith *in* and *as* prayer.

Where the Lasallian imagination of education goes further, however, is its accent on the incarnational revelation of God as the poor amongst children, who call forth the prophetic vocation of teaching. I recall the words of the then Brother Superior-General John Johnston, FSC in his pastoral letter on the defense of children's rights as integral to the Lasallian mission: "Jesus comes to us as a poor man because he comes to us as neglected, exploited, abandoned children."[52] It is in this mystical recognition of Jesus in children that teaching becomes prayer lived as prophetic discipleship, which serves to educate children justly by also seeking to resist and transform social structures that impoverish their lives and marginalize their humanity. Lasallian prophetic mysticism is expressed in how the spiritual practice of prayer is interwoven with the social and political practice of teaching. Being filled with the Spirit in interior prayer is at the same time a readiness to being led out by the Spirit in faith to encounter Jesus in children of the

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[50] Harris, *Teaching and Religious* Imagination, 3.

[51] Ibid.,16.

[52] Johnston, "On the Defense of Children, the Reign of God, and the Lasallian Mission [January 1, 1999]," 478.

poor and as the marginalized in our social systems. The prophetic calling of the teacher in the Lasallian tradition is rooted in the contemplative.

5.2 Contemplating the Call to Teach at the Manger: Toward a Divine Pedagogy of Trust

I retrace my steps back to "standing in the shadow of the manger," which is, according to theologian Margaret Guider, a theologically rich space that leads us to a discipleship of solidarity with children in God's mission.[53] Her argument calls for a more sustained reflection on the theological meaning of the Infant Child Jesus at the service of children who remain the most socially marginalized. "What does the God who comes to us as an infant teach the Christian community about infancy and childhood? In what ways do we perceive the face of God revealed in the face of every infant and child?" she asks.[54] De La Salle's contemplation on the Nativity of Jesus serves as a spiritual resource that deepens our reflection on these questions. He richly articulates for teachers today an incarnational vision of educating in faith that begins with contemplating Christ in the child.

In Chapter Three, I explored how a relational anthropology of belonging is recoverable from De La Salle's meditations on the Nativity of Jesus; that is, the intrinsic human dignity of children lies in their belonging to God who also draws close to us as a human child in history through the Infant Jesus. Standing in the shadow of the manger, the teacher is called to be vulnerable to the dependent interdependency of children, whose lives are shaping and shaped by an unfolding network of relationships situated in

[53] Guider, "Living in the Shadow of the Manger: Mission, Ecumenism, and the State of the World's Children," 183.

[54] Ibid., 183.

structural systems that continue to marginalize them socially. This vulnerability of teachers is interpreted theologically as receptivity to children as graced irruption. Such vulnerability demands courage, which in turn requires trust in God's abiding presence. In this light, I suggest here that De La Salle's contemplation of the Infant Child Jesus also inspires a divine pedagogy of trust. Teaching is, then, caught up as prayer through an ongoing surrender to God in a spirit of trust. Yet, this trust is possible because God has first trusted us enough to entrust children into the care of our hands as educators. It is this radicality of God's loving trust that we witness while standing in the manger's shadow, a trust that holds us accountable to the vocation of teaching as both a gift of the Spirit and a human task of responsible nurture.

5.2.1 Revealing a Divine Pedagogy of Trust at the Nativity of Jesus

Learning to trust in God is a major theme in De La Salle's spiritual life. He passionately wrote:

> Fear nothing. God has never failed to help those who hope in him. Everything is granted to a lively faith and *perfect trust*, even miracles if they are needed. Jesus Christ has obliged himself to provide those who seek the kingdom of God and his justice with everything they need. Never has he refused it to those who serve him. Every page of scripture bears witness to this truth.[55]

Trust is rooted in faith, which, in the Lasallian imagination, has its source and end in God's providence. To recall, God's providence is understood not in the sense of a distant and all controlling monarch with an unchanging plan for each person. Rather, as discussed in Chapter Two, De La Salle's witness borne out an experience of God's providence as dynamically present and active in the unfolding of human relationships in

[55] Carl Koch, Jeffrey Calligan, FSC, and Jeffrey Gros, FSC, ed. *John Baptist de La Salle - The Spirituality of Christian Education* (New York: Paulist Press, 2004), 119. [Originally reported in Jean-Baptiste Blain, *The Life of John Baptist de La Salle Book 3* (Landover, Md.: Lasallian Publications, 2000), 571.]

history. He learned to trust in the gentleness of God, who guided him "in an imperceptible way and over a long period of time so that one commitment led to another in a way that [he] did not foresee in the beginning."[56] The vocation of teaching, then, is rooted in a contemplative call to trust in a God who never leaves us abandoned but gives us the Spirit to take it up more courageously. It is this trust that forms the basis for hope presupposed in why we want to keep teaching through difficult and challenging situations.

This trust also fuels faith as a movement toward God as Mystery revealed in the presence of children. Trust in God, then, is not a posture of passive resignation. It is rather an active anticipation in hope that God remains faithfully committed to the care of children as the poor. This is revealed in the Incarnation when God came to be with us as a human child in Jesus Christ. "Recognize Jesus beneath the poor rags of the children whom you have to instruct," writes De La Salle in his meditation on the Feast of the Epiphany at Christmastide.[57] Lasallian scholar Pierre Ouattara reframes the Nativity of Jesus as a pedagogical moment constitutive of an incarnational spirituality in Lasallian education:

> In the form of a child, God came as it were to seek from us his salvation in this world. That is his way of loving us and of teaching us to love at the same time. The work of salvation begins in childhood with the gift of love that this requires. Having brought a child into the world, we must then educate it. We must find and give it the means it needs to be born into the world with its own existence as a gift … With its concrete need for attention, the child, just like the poor person, calls for our immediate presence.[58]

[56] Ibid., 112.

[57] *Meditations* 96.3

[58] Ouattara, "The Lasallian Service of Education: A Means of Salvation for Today?", 295.

My accent, however, is on God's radical trust in us as a dimension of kenotic love that gives shape to serving the poor in education. Out of self-giving love, God chooses to entrust God-self to human care and nurture by coming in history *as* a child and *for* the world's children. At the heart of the Lasallian educational mission is its fidelity to the children "confided" to teachers by God. [59]This presumes that God trusts us sufficiently as educators to confide them to our care in the first place. It is in light of this trust that gives teaching its dignity as a sacred calling: "Consider this an honor for you and look upon the children God has entrusted to you as the children of God himself."[60] God's dependability is paradoxically revealed in the radical dependency of the Infant Jesus, who allows himself to be received and nurtured through education as a process of growth. Herein lies the importance of the teacher in shaping the minds and hearts of children received as "Jesus Christ in their persons."[61] Yet, this receptivity also calls the teacher to a process of conversion to the child in whom God is encountered. The Infant Jesus also reveals the teacher to her/himself as God's child, called to trust and co-operate in the sufficiency of God's grace operative in the act of educating.

What, then, is the content of this divine pedagogy of trust? God coming to encounter us as an infant child reminds us of our radical human interdependency in life. As Ouattara points out, the Incarnation reveals our "poverty in the sense that it brings us face to face with the fact we start life as the result of choices made by other people."[62] Through the Infant Jesus, God shares in this poverty precisely by becoming dependent on

[59] Schneider,"Making the Lasallian Charism Live Today," 246.

[60] *Meditations* 133.2

[61] Ibid., 133.3

[62] Ouattara, "The Lasallian Service of Education: A Means of Salvation for Today?", 285.

human interdependency for care, nurture, and growth in the world. To be clear, poverty in this positive sense is to be distinguished from conditions such as material poverty, social discrimination, and war that structurally impoverish the lives of children through their relationships in families, schools, and the wider public. In choosing to be born into familial circumstances of material poverty and rejection, God disturbs us as educators to be confronted by the divine presence of the Infant Jesus in the different faces of children particularly marginalized in social systems that structurally dehumanize them. This confrontation makes a claim on educators to be critically vigilant of how their curricular and pedagogical practices contribute to or dismantle unjust systems that obscure and diminish the humanity of children, who are "the members of Jesus Christ."[63] Educators are challenged to live into this claim as they deepen their awareness that Jesus was born poor to be *with* and *for* children *of* and *as* the poor in society.

In the Lasallian educational imagination, then, teaching the young is not apart from but situated in a wider struggle against forces inhospitable to their human flourishing. The call to educate children is also a call to build a more just world that welcomes, engages, and develops their participation *now* as responsible agents building up God's peaceable reign while also attending to their social vulnerability that warrants protection. Lasallian pedagogy begins to do this through a presence of *being with* that the teacher fosters with students in the classroom. This presence is a relation of trust the teacher builds with students, patterned after God's communion with us as siblings-in-Christ. As Ouattara argues, the Lasallian proposal for education can still be a means for salvation today in its insistence on "communion and trust as the foundation of human

[63] *Meditations* 96.3

psychology and the conditions for human growth."[64] They are, I add, also the basis for social solidarity with children in its vision of educating for liberation. Ouattara further writes, "To truly love and serve, the educator must work to liberate him/herself. The wish to serve the poor in a liberating way involves a decision not to act unilaterally as a benefactor."[65] In other words, s/he "must experience the educational relationship in a spirit of poverty."[66] The divine pedagogy of trust revealed at the manger forms the teachers to enter contemplatively into this spirit of poverty as humility in zeal.

5.2.2 Humility in Zeal as Lasallian Rhythm in the Contemplative Heart of a Teacher

Humility is, for De La Salle, an important virtue for teachers. It is central to his Meditation on the Nativity of Jesus Christ, in which the Brothers (and by extension teachers) are challenged to embrace the Infant Child's "lowliness" as an example for their manner of educating:

> We are poor Brothers, forgotten and little appreciated by the people of the world. It is only the poor who come looking for us; they have nothing to offer us but their hearts, ready to accept our instructions. Let us love what is most humiliating in our profession in order to share in some way in the lowliness of Jesus Christ at his birth.[67]

Perhaps, in light of the excesses of capitalism and competition driving education today, this text provokes us to consider if and how our society is prioritizing the education of children – not just one's own but all children, and especially those in disadvantaged situations of impoverishment and marginalization. For teachers, this meditation reminds and calls them to live the depths of their vocation as humble service that corresponds to

[64] Ibid., 296.

[65] Ibid., 292.

[66] Ibid.

[67] *Meditations* 86.2

the way God identifies with the marginal status of children by becoming one of them in the birth of Jesus. As De La Salle puts it, "you will draw them [i.e. poor children] to God only insofar as you resemble them and Jesus at his birth" by the "two outstanding qualities" of poverty and humility.[68]

Contemplating the mystery of Jesus' birth invites educators to imagine teaching as a practice of kenotic love that reveals God's humility in solidarity with children. Humility in teaching as a kenotic act is patterned after the self-emptying love of Jesus Christ at the Incarnation. To be clear, this self-emptying love is not to be interpreted excessively as self-abnegation, although this was part of De La Salle's ascetic sensibility given the spirituality of his time. What is worth recovering for educators is an understanding of kenosis as dying to one's self-centeredness and self-preoccupations in humility: "This is how we must be born in the spiritual life, dispossessed and deprived of everything … so that he [Jesus] may take possession of our hearts." Humility patterned after the kenosis of Jesus Christ does not call us to cast aside or debase one's humanity. Rather, it reclaims the profound blessedness of being fully human, which resides in cultivating a heart of openness to the divine present in the other. Humility gives birth to a space within ourselves to receive and be received by the other in a moment of encounter. Humility requires disciplined practice that wrestles to embrace the difficult grace of our human finitude, which is paradoxically filled with possibilities unfolding through time in relation to the other.

What implications might these claims about humility have on teaching? They demand that teachers hold with firm gentleness the human dignity of children who are

[68] Ibid., 86.3

students in their classrooms. Humility also requires them to hold their own humanity in a vulnerable relationship of *being with* students that is deeply ethical. As educational philosopher David Hansen writes:

> For a teacher, humility entails a refusal to treat students as less worthy of being heard than the teacher him- or herself. It means retaining a sense of students' as well as one own's humanity. Humility attests to a grasp on the reality of human differences, institutional constraints, and personal limitations.[69]

In attesting to personal and institutional constraints, humility does not and should not be taken to imply an uncritical subservience to the status quo. Humility in service as a teacher is not the same as servility. Ideally, humility before students is connected to humility shown to the practice of teaching as creatively risky in two ways: first, it calls teachers to admit that they cannot and do not in fact make learning happen. As educational theorist and literary scholar William Walsh insightfully pointed out:

> Learning cannot be guaranteed. To believe that it can, even with every circumstance and effort cooperating, is to regard humans as infallibly adjusting organisms, teaching as the cunning manipulation of environment, and learning as producing the appropriate reaction in a specific situation … Human dignity requires us to admit the possibility of failure.[70]

Walsh's words are a sharp counter to the "risk aversion that pervades contemporary education," as reflected in its orientation to manage the outcomes of learning and fix the unpredictability inherent in the process of educating.[71] Humility in teaching is in this sense potentially subversive when it reclaims the inherent risk in education that engages learning "not [as] an interaction between robots but an encounter between human beings … as subjects of action and responsibility."[72] This leads me to my second point:

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[69] Hansen, *Exploring the Moral Heart of Teaching,* 167.

[70] William Walsh*, The Use of Imagination: Educational Thought and the Literary Mind* (New York: Barnes and Noble, 1960), 65.

[71] Biesta, *The Beautiful Risk of Education*, 2.

[72] Ibid., 1.

humility to the practice of teaching calls out the person of the teacher to become a "leading-learner."[73] That is, a teacher's commitment to educate children as living subjects also renders her or him open to listen, wonder, and think with the questions and perspectives that they bring from their life worlds to bear on the subject matter being taught. Humility is at the heart of a teacher's willingness to recognize and confront any social biases that get in the way of seeing children for who they are; it facilitates the inconvenience of revising one's presumptions about them, including those entrenched in adultism. Humility, then, directs teachers to critically examine whether and how they are using their power to create inclusive spaces for children to learn and grow holistically. It undergirds and deepens trust in the teacher-student relationship.

In relation to this stance of critical self-reflection, Hansen complements his discussion of humility with tenacity. "Tenacious humility," as he calls it, serves as "a practical, humanizing ideal" that dynamically forms the moral personhood of the teacher,[74] and which also guides the relational practice of teaching toward the service of a greater public good beyond "the desire to gain success, self-esteem, contentment, fame, and the like."[75] While humility draws the teacher to be honest about "the reality of human differences, institutional constraints, and personal limitations," tenacity pushes one not to regard these "as hardened and unchanging;" it "implies staying the course, not giving up on students or on oneself."[76] Tenacious humility as an ideal is not a quest for perfection as if one could actually get teaching right. It is instead a prism that refracts the meaning

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[73] Thomas H. Groome, *Sharing Faith: The Way of Shared Praxis* (Eugene, Oregon: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 1998), 450.

[74] Hansen, *Exploring the Moral Heart of Teaching,* 175.

[75] Ibid., 174.

[76] Ibid., 167.

that teachers continue to expand and deepen of their practice through "contemplation and self-reflection," *because* of mistakes and misjudgments made.[77] Tenacious humility, then, "is an image of determination allied with openness, of a commitment to think and to question wedded to action, of stubborn hope embedded in ungrasping conduct toward others."[78] In short, it keeps the heart of a teacher tender and passionate, sustaining it in times of challenges and difficulties.

Hansen's conception of "tenuous humility" in teaching finds a correlate in the Lasallian tradition as humility in zeal. This zeal, however, is for announcing the Gospel, which grounds the care for children as an imperative in Christian discipleship. To recall the words of Lasallian scholar Miguel Campos, announcing the Gospel in the Lasallian mission of education obliges teachers to "become incarnate, that is, take on the flesh and blood realities of the students' lives in an affective and effective manner, to walk around in their shoes, to unite [their] own history to that of [their] students, to the whole history of salvation, to the mystery of Christ."[79] Underscored here is humility in zeal as a dimension of a teacher's prophetic witness in solidarity with the children entrusted to her or his care. In the Lasallian imagination, the moral heart of a teacher beats humbly like Jesus the Good Shepherd, who, with zeal as hope-filled perseverance, seeks out to guide, instruct, and care for children with "great tenderness," "alert to whatever can harm or wound" them.[80] De La Salle goes even further to propose that "sincere and true zeal" could lead a teacher to humbly lay down her or his life for students, just as Jesus did so

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[77] Ibid., 187.

[78] Ibid., 172.

[79] Campos, FSC, "Introduction to *Meditations for the Time of Retreat*," 424.

[80] *Meditations* 33.1

for "the sheep of which he is the shepherd."[81] This is a challenging call, and it should *not* be appropriated to justify or cultivate a messiah complex in teachers. The accent is instead on the ultimacy of God's passionate love through Christ that is radically embracing and enduring, and how educators are led to respond to that love boldly in humble zeal to serve the human flourishing of children so that "they might have life and have it to the full."[82]

Such prophetic witness in teaching demands courage. Yet, it seems to me that De La Salle is also inviting the teacher to find courage in the mystery of Christmas, where it is to "poor shepherds" whom the joyous news of Christ's birth in the manger is announced:

> Nothing draws souls to God more strongly than the poor and humble condition of those who wish to lead them to him. Why did the shepherds praise and bless God? Because they had seen a poor Infant lying in a manger, thanks to an interior light with which God enlightened them, that this Infant was truly their Savior and that it was to him they should have recourse to escape the misery of their sins.[83]

The teacher is invited to stand as one of these poor shepherds, whose witness begins and grows with a contemplation of the Infant Child Jesus. In the Infant, s/he does not only see through a mysticism of faith God's presence *with* and *in* children. S/he also beholds the mystery of God's closeness as trusted strength in vulnerability. De La Salle's writings on the Infant Child reflect Guider's observation that "the Infant called forth from human persons the goodness in and for which they were created … The Infant trusted that men, women, and children would respond freely to the invitation to be his stewards and his

[81] *Meditations* 201.1, 201.3

[82] John 10:10, cited in *Meditations* 201.3.

[83] *Meditations* 86.3

ministers."[84] In a Lasallian key, this goodness called forth from teachers is a life of humility in zeal at the service of children, and which is renewed interiorly in amazement and wonder at each child as God's own because of the Incarnation.

5.2.3 Standing Amazed: Energizing the Prophetic in Teaching

The mysticism in Lasallian pedagogy stresses on reverence as the ground for encounter in the teacher-student relationship. Reverence for children as being God's own is a precondition for responsibility toward them in teaching, as argued in Chapter Two. As Groome notes, "Reverence pushes beyond respect and responsibility, although it presumes and undergirds both;" it "means first to recognize the dignity of human beings and then to 'look again' and recognize their Creator."[85] Reverence for the irreplaceability of each child encountered as the beloved revelation of God's creative life grounds the just presence of a teacher. It is a contemplative posture of beholding the mystery of God's presence in each child with a sense of awe and wonder. It is precisely this amazement as a source of what Walter Brueggemann calls "prophetic energizing"[86] that De La Salle reminds teachers to live into through his writings on Jesus' birth. "Behold the palace and the bed for presenting Jesus our Savior on his entry into the world!" he writes, highlighting the irony of God's saving power in the dependency of an infant entrusted to human care.[87] To contemplate the Infant Child is to make room for amazement that leans into the divine pedagogy of trust at the manger.

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[84] Margaret Eletta Guider, O.S.F., "Living in the Shadow of the Manger," in *Christian Reflection: Children*, ed. Robert B. Kruschwitz (Waco, Texas: The Center for Christian Ethics, Baylor University, 2003), 27.

[85] Groome, *Educating for Life*, 356.

[86] Brueggemann, *The Prophetic Imagination*, 101.

[87] *Meditations* 86.1

Amazement is more than an arousal of feeling toward something. More profoundly, it is a way of apprehending the world not by grasping, but by being lured into the totality of its reality as mystery. It unpredictably catches us into becoming aware of our deep interrelatedness as one living creation capable of surprises and surprising itself. "Radical amazement," writes Rabbi Abraham Joshua Heschel, "refers to all of reality; not only to what we see, but also to the very act of seeing as well as to our own selves, to the selves that see and are amazed at their ability to see."[88] It is seeing as beholding with wonder our capacity for awe as "a way of being in rapport with the mystery of all reality."[89] Radical amazement leads to an insight in awe at "the creaturely dignity of all things and their preciousness to God;" it is a human capacity that allows for the possibility of a glimpse of the eternal to catch us in the temporal ordinariness of daily living.[90] It is in this regard that the capacity to be amazed is, for Heschel, "at the root of faith."[91]

Liberation theologian Dorothee Söelle argues that it is precisely such radical amazement in the Jewish tradition from which Western Christian mysticism ought to learn anew to sharpen its prophetic edge. She understands Heschel's articulation of radical amazement as pointing to the "origin of our standing-in-relation," which attests anew and with vigor to the fragile goodness of God's creation.[92] Amazement is for Söelle the beginning of a "mysticism of liberation" that "wants nothing else but to love life."[93]

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[88] Abraham Joshua Heschel, *God in Search of Man* [1955] in *Essential Writings*, selected by Susannah Heschel (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 2011), 52.

[89] Ibid., 56.

[90] Ibid., 57.

[91] Ibid., 58.

[92] Söelle, *The Silent Cry: Mysticism and Resistance*, 90.

[93] Ibid., 280, 282.

To love life calls one first to be amazed at life as gift shared with others in the oneness of God's divine breath that never ceases to recreate. Yet, this very capacity for amazement must also awaken us to recognize the fragility of this life that could and has been violated. Amazement is in other words not "an experience of bliss alone" but "has its bleak side of terror and hopelessness that renders one mute."[94] For this reason, amazement also impels us to resist those very forces that do not only dehumanize but also desacralize life. "Resistance is not the outcome of mysticism, resistance is mysticism itself," provocates Söelle.[95] Resistance as bringing forth a more compassionate and just world is integral to life in God who calls us to participate in healing as the work of "ongoing creation" in the Spirit.[96] Such resistance also requires that we "let go of our false desires and needs" in light of life in God that is life-giving to others.[97] For Söelle, then, the mystical-prophetic journey for our contemporary world follows a three-part trajectory in which each flows into the other: "to be amazed, to let go, and to resist."[98] These three stages may be mapped alongside the four-fold rhythm in Lasallian mystical realism as discussed in Chapter Two:

[94] Ibid., 90.
[95] Ibid., 199.
[96] Ibid., 93.
[97] Ibid., 92.
[98] Ibid., 89.

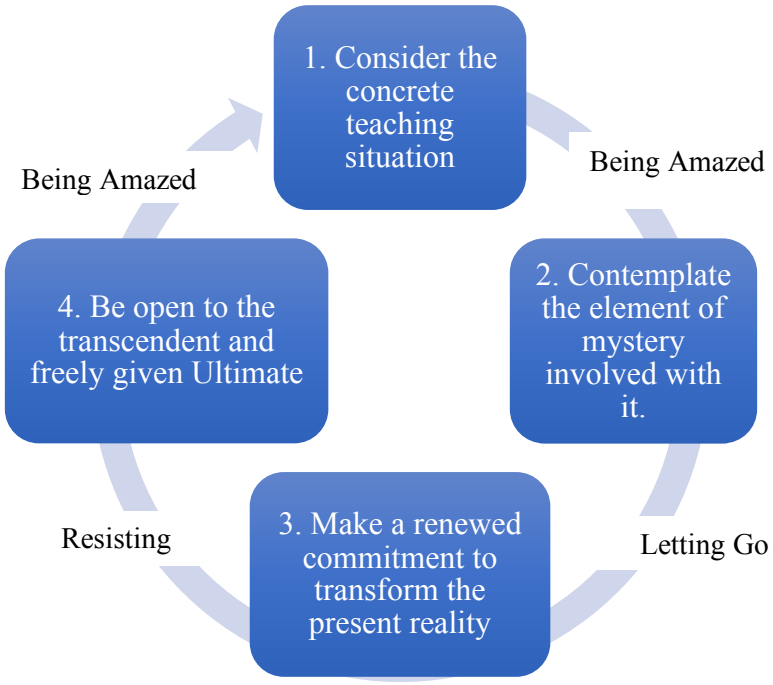

Figure 5.2: Amazement in Lasallian Mystical Realism

De La Salle's meditations on Christmas are more deeply enriching when we pay attention to this element of amazement as energizing the prophetic zeal of the teacher. This is best reflected in his meditation on the Feast of the Epiphany in which he invites the educator to follow the example of the holy Magi as a searcher for wisdom. More particularly, I suggest that the journey of the Magi in this meditation reframes Söelle's three-part trajectory as a triple dynamic of *staying open*, *adoring*, and *cooperating in faith* while educating a child.

First, the dynamic of *staying open*. The capacity to be amazed underlies the Magi's openness to being led out in faith to search for wisdom. This faith is not reduced to the Christian religion as these Magi were "admirable Gentiles."[99] They demonstrate faith, which, in the words of the novelist Frederick Buechner, "is less a position on than a

[99] *Meditations* 96.1

movement toward, less a sure thing than a hunch."[100] The Magi reflect this movement toward in "letting themselves be led by the star," which De La Salle describes as "the light of faith."[101] Yet, there is a paradox here: they "do not set out as those who seek but as those who have been found."[102] The Magi were guided by beholding a star which found them. Their search for wisdom begins in wonderment at being found by God as Holy Wisdom in their present, and who leads them in faith as a yearning for life's breadth and depth. This founding is for De La Salle an act of "grace" on account of God's generosity that invokes "prompt fidelity" from the Magi.[103] Analogously, for educators, De La Salle asks, "Are we attentive to the inspirations we receive from God?"[104] Staying open in amazement is to remain curious about what God is up to in the present reality that finds us as educators both locally and globally. What, then, is the concrete reality – cultural, social, economic, and political - in which teachers find themselves as individuals and in groups in their educational relationships with children? What assumptions about childhood and adulthood are disrupted for teachers? To what particular needs of children are their hearts awakened? What might be that glimpse of newness in the here and now which seizes the imagination of educators and expands their vocation?

Second, *adoring*. In beholding the star, the Magi "leave for a distant land to seek one whom they do not know, who is not known even in his own land." Indeed, the "practice of amazement is also a beginning in leaving oneself," as Söelle has noted.

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[100] Cited in David Brooks, *The Second Mountain: The Quest for a Moral Life* (New York: Random House, 2019), 246.

[101] *Meditations* 96.1

[102] Söelle, *The Silent Cry*, 90-91.

[103] *Meditations* 96.1

[104] Ibid.

Leaving oneself as an interior expression of letting go is represented by the Magi who "prostrate themselves" in adoration of the Infant Jesus. The teacher is invited to follow the example of the Magi, who, in adoring the Infant Jesus, recognized God's compassion and solidarity with children as the least amongst the poor: "Recognize Jesus beneath the poor rags of the children whom you have to instruct. Adore him in them."[105] To adore Jesus in children is not to idolize the child as God. Rather, it is to behold the mystery of each child as being God's own, which makes a claim on educators to uphold the dignity of children as complex human beings. Through the mystery of the Incarnation, God is not only present in the human child but also takes on the flesh and blood realities of children in situations of impoverishment. What prevents us then as teachers from recognizing God's presence in children in all their differences? How attentive and responsive are we to children who also find themselves marginalized by socio-economic, class, 'race,' gender and sexuality? What assumptions about these children – in their particularity and as a collective - are we surprised into rethinking or even letting go so that we teach more justly? How critically discerning are we of curricular and pedagogical practices that diminish or undermine the human dignity of children?

Third, *cooperating in faith*. The act of adoring Jesus in "the poor rags of children"[106] is in itself a cooperation with the Spirit in faith to bear prophetic witness. To prostrate as the Magi did reminds educators to "fight against any idea of domination over or of manipulation of those who are entrusted to them."[107] It also summons them to claim the power of humility in zeal to be in solidarity with children through a humanizing

[105] *Meditations* 96.3

[106] Ibid.

[107] Ouattara, "The Lasallian Service of Education: A Means of Salvation for Today?" 299.

education that seeks to resist and transform structures that keep them in situations of impoverishment. "May faith lead you to do this [instruct] with affection and zeal, because these children are the members of Jesus Christ," writes De La Salle.[108] This statement recognizes children as our younger siblings-in-Christ, who walk the way of discipleship *with* adults. As adults with relatively more experience in the world, teachers have a responsibility to accompany and guide children, not only to equip them with the skills and knowledge needed for survival. They also play an important role inspiring and inviting children to recognize in themselves and others the divinity of God's life that calls them to service.

Yet, the teacher-student relationship is also bi-directional. Children "become not simply the recipients of our care, but guides along the way."[109] If God as Holy Wisdom has come to encounter us as a human child in Christ, then children can and do impart wisdom to those who encounter them.[110] This is the claim and wonder of the Incarnation, which means that teachers must also discern and cooperate with what the Spirit may be speaking through children in and through their differences. How, then, do we as educators make space for children's voices to be heard in our classrooms? Are we in fact listening to their experiences to the point of having our notions about adulthood disrupted? What might be that glimpse of newness in the here and now which seizes the imagination of educators and expands their vocation? What and how might we learn from

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[108] *Meditations* 96.3

[109] Jensen, *Graced Vulnerability*, 132.

[110] This idea echoes the insight from Jennifer Hockenbery: "the Christian has the belief that learning is possible, because human words can contain wisdom. Wisdom can be imparted from one human to another via words that are redeemed by the incarnation of Truth who as a human spoke with a human tongue in a way which human ears could hear." Jennifer Hockenbery, "The Gift of the Magi: Intercultural Conversation and Understanding," *Currents in Theology and Mission* 35, no. 6 (December 2008): 444-445.

children to co-construct a curriculum that responsibly engages their participation in building up the common good?

The Magi also offer educators an image of prophetic resistance from their position not only as outsiders but also in-between "the seat of power" as represented by Herod in Jerusalem and the "site of powerlessness" in Bethlehem where Jesus was born.[111] According to biblical scholar Warren Carter, the magi occupy a liminal space in that they "have access to power but are skeptical of its exercise; are attentive to those on the margins though they themselves are not marginalized."[112] A question that they pose to Christian discipleship is this: "How does our access to the powerful centers and our connection to the powerless margins put us in a unique position to further God's reign?"[113] This question pushes educators to consider how they are also positioned as adults to advocate for children. Such a task demands faith as De La Salle highlights in the Magi, who approached Herod and destabilized his kingship by asking the whereabouts of the "new born King of the Jews":

> What holy audacity in our Magi, to enter the capital and make their way even to Herod's throne! They feared nothing because the faith which inspired them and the grandeur of him whom they were seeking caused them to forget and even to scorn all human considerations, considering the king to whom they were speaking to be infinitely beneath the one announced to them by the star.[114]

Such is a faith energized by amazement, which ultimately led the Magi to "refuse cooperation with the deadly Herod."[115] "But the Magi left without concerning themselves

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[111] Warren Carter, "The Magi and the Star We Follow," *The Other Side* 38, no.1 (January & February 2002): 40.

[112] Ibid., 36.

[113] Ibid., 40.

[114] *Meditations* 96.2

[115] Carter, "The Magi and the Star We Follow," 38.

any further about King Herod. "So, too, should faith make you despise all that the world esteems," writes De La Salle.[116] Their refusal is symbolically a cooperation in faith to renounce and "resist the empire's unjust commitments to power, wealth, and status."[117] The teacher is challenged to follow the example of the Magi, whose prophetic witness is rooted in a conversion of the heart to the poor Christ in children.

In summary, De La Salle's writings on the Infant Child Jesus invite teachers to imagine the classroom as the manger and their particular calling as shepherds and magi in the drama of education, with children as the protagonists whom they serve with humility in zeal. They articulate a prophetic spirituality for teaching that anchors an incarnational vision of education in a liberative theology of Christmas. The prophetic call to educate toward the liberation of children is mystically rooted and charged in amazement. This amazement at the manger is not what theologian Karl Barth described as "careless astonishment" that romanticizes the baby Jesus and domesticates the inherently disruptive quality of the Incarnation at Christmas.[118] Rather, to be truly amazed at the manger is to find God's revelation shocking: that God actually *could* and *has* come to be *with* us by assuming the limits of our human condition and redeeming it from within. To be truly amazed is to be disturbed by the scandalizing action of God who steps out of God-self not only to be with the poor, but also *in* the least as a child. As Gustavo Gutiérrez notes:

> It is often said at Christmastime that Jesus is born into every family and every heart. But these "births" must not forget the primordial, massive fact that Jesus was born of Mary among a people that at the time were dominated by the greatest empire of the age … To the eyes of Christians the incarnation is the irruption of God into human history: an incarnation of littleness and service in the midst of

[116] *Meditations* 96.2

[117] Carter, "The Magi and the Star We Follow," 40.

[118] Barth, Christmas, 61.

> the power and arrogance of the mighty in this world; an irruption that smells of the stable.[119]

One hears in the Lasallian tradition a prophetic call for educators to stay close to the "smells of the stable" because it is there that God in "the poor rags of the children whom you have to instruct" is waiting in trust for their action.[120] Each child is "a gift of a new and living social relation"[121] by one's vulnerability or openness in trust, which is not only worthy of wonder. It also calls forth the responsibility of teachers as adults, making an ethical claim on them to be courageously present in ways that prioritize the human dignity of children in education. What the Lasallian tradition also suggests is this: the future of the teacher as contemplative lies in a recovery of the capacity to be amazed at children as one with us and of us in the mystery of God's life. Such is an amazement simultaneously re-learnt in wonderment alongside and from children.

5.3 The Future of the Teacher as Contemplative: Walking the Way of Wonderment with Children

5.3.1 Called Forth by Children into Holiness

Where the Lasallian tradition is still alive today is that it positions the future of the teacher as contemplative in relation to the amazing mystery of God's life incarnated in and shared with children. To reiterate, this theological language of mystery is not used to mystify and minimize the situations of impoverishment suffered by children. Rather, mystery carries us to face squarely the reality of children's lives but with hope that God is

[119] Gutiérrez, *Essential Writings*, 139.

[120] *Meditations* 96.3. See also Jürgen Moltmann, "Child and Childhood as Metaphors of Hope," *Theology Today* 56, no. 4 (2000): 599-600 – "In children, God is waiting for us to take in God. In helpless children, God is waiting for our compassion. This is also the spontaneous impression the image of the child in the manger awakens in us."

[121] Wall, *Ethics in Light of Childhood*, 43.

present in and with them. At the heart of Lasallian prophetic mysticism of faith is precisely this fidelity to God's presence that calls forth the vocation of teacher in relationship to the children confided to her or him. More deeply, teaching becomes a pathway of holiness walked with children, a journey that reveals through the teacher-student relationship who we already are as God's children.

Christian holiness is cooperating with the Spirit to walk the way of discipleship in Jesus Christ. Holiness through discipleship is participating in the mission of God, whose heart is broken in Christ to draw us into communion with one another in self-giving love. In his apostolic exhortation *Gaudete Et Exsultate*, Pope Francis highlights the universal call to holiness of Christians as inseparable from life as mission in Christ. "A Christian cannot think of his or her mission on earth without seeing it as a path of holiness," he writes.[122] "You too need to see the entirety of your life as a mission."[123] That is, "[w]e are all called to be holy by living our lives with love and by bearing witness in everything we do, wherever we find ourselves."[124] In other words, Christian holiness is neither reduced to those grave external acts of religious piety. Nor is it an exceptional property reserved solely for the bishop, priest, or religious. Rather, to grow in Christian holiness is to become fully alive in the mystery of who we are as God's gift to one another in daily living.

De La Salle's legacy is in articulating a spirituality for lay educators that "not only integrates the mission of the teacher … but it also provides a gospel base for a return

[122] Pope Francis, *Gaudete Et Exsultate*, The Holy See, March 19, 2018, par. 19, http://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/apost_exhortations/documents/papa-francesco_esortazione-ap_20180319_gaudete-et-exsultate.html
[123] Ibid., par. 23.
[124] Ibid., par. 14.

to the church's mission to the poor."[125] What this implies for the vocation of teaching is its situation more broadly within God's greater and deeper call to life as mission. To teach is not only to do God's work; it is also to grow in holiness. Throughout this dissertation, I have argued that the prophetic edge in Lasallian spirituality is in discerning and shaping an educational mission that takes seriously God's preferential option for children. In summary, this preferential option for children as derived and developed from the Lasallian tradition is characterized by the following four commitments that constitute what I conceive as just presence in teaching:

1. It demands that we actually see and hear children as full human beings in their complexity. Children are valuable for who they already are as God's children. They are created in God's image and likeness, not in the image of adults.
2. It emphasizes the notion that responsible care for children in education comes from desiring to know them personally as real persons. The basis of this knowing rests on our common belonging to God as siblings-in-Christ.
3. It positions education as human liberation. Educating the poor as a missional priority is not contra to advancing the cause of social justice for children who suffer most from the effects of poverty. In other words, a preferential option for children does not replace a preferential option for the poor. It goes further to cultivate a critical attention to children who already find themselves marginalized by prejudices at the complex intersection of class, race, nationality, able-ness, gender and sexuality. but with an indignant hope that these are not to be. The accent is on recognizing systemic structures that impoverish the lives of children,

[125] Koch et al., ed., *John Baptist de La Salle: The Spirituality of Christian Education*, 25.

but with an indignant hope that strives to resist and remake them for full human flourishing.

4. It calls us to encounter children as the mystery of God's graced irruption, which in turn summons us not only to protect children but also to welcome and engage their participation as vulnerable agents in building the common good through education. In this regard, we ought to grapple with the marginalization of children *as* children due to adultism, which gets in the way of seeing and listening to children as neighbors with full human dignity in the public square. Children as members of Jesus Christ are already disciples walking with adults in communities. Children form and transform adults in more ways than we realize.

When we take seriously God's preferential option for children, holiness in teaching is found in encountering and being transformed by Christ in and through children. It opens educators to the possibility that children *can* and *do* lead adults to deeper conversion in faith, corresponding to the way Jesus identifies with them. One recalls Jesus' words in Matthew 18:3-4: "Truly I tell you, unless you change and become like children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven. Whoever becomes humble like this child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven." The call to be humble like a child, however, needs to be interpreted in light of how Jesus inverts the expectations that adult disciples have about greatness in the reign of God. As New Testament scholar Elizabeth Waldron Barnett highlights, the "child is called into the midst of the disciples in order that the disciples be set right."[126] The disciples are set right in their vision of God's Reign that is neither "predicated on oppression or abuse of the vulnerable" nor on "self-sufficient

[126] Barnett, "The Call of Christ – The Call of the Child," 225.

strength, confidence and invincibility."[127] Where the least and marginalized are, there the reign of God is that beckons all to act in justice through practices of liberative care. Greatness in God's reign is thus not measured by having power over others, but in being humbly available and ready to identify with and share in the marginality that marked the status of children in Jesus' time and even now. Indeed, "to be great in the reign of God, disciples have to love and serve children."[128]

The theology in Lasallian education affirms this call of the gospel: the greatest disciple is the one who teaches the child. Children therefore call forth teachers to walk humbly and justly (cf. Micah 6: 8) with them in holiness. The holiness of an educator is seen in passionate teaching that begins from the heart. To teach children from the heart is to give oneself over to be fully present to them. The holiness of being present in education as the care for and liberation of children is grounded in the incarnational trajectory of God's mission through Jesus Christ, who stands in solidarity with children by his very infancy and through adulthood. Holiness is also rooted in the gospel call to become like children.

5.3.2 Reclaiming Child-like Wonderment as Holiness

To change and become like children is not for educators "to revert to immaturity, nor is it to escape the responsibilities and obligations of the adult world."[129] Rather, I suggest that it is for educators to reclaim a child-like wonder and amazement at mystery as the starting point for teaching children. It is to re-learn from and alongside children

[127] Ibid., 225.

[128] Gundry-Volf, "The Least and the Greatest," 43. As she points out, "Matthew's Jesus teaches childlikeness as *humility toward children* on the part of *church leaders* in particular and *for the sake of children* who are at the mercy of those greater than themselves in the community." (42)

[129] Jensen, *Graced Vulnerability*, 129.

their openness to mystery while teaching them.[130] As religion scholar Martin Marty argues, "When transactions across the generations begin in wonder, however, the child will probably not merely be on the receiving end of adult initiatives but will become an agent who in turn stimulates a rich sense of wonder."[131] He cites philosopher Sam Keen, who wrote in *Apology for Wonder:*

> Wonder, in the child, is the capacity for sustained and continued delight, marvel, amazement, and enjoyment. It is the capacity of the child to approach the world as if it were a smorgasbord of potential delights, waiting to be tasted. It is the sense of freshness, anticipation, and openness that rules the life of a healthy child.[132]

Keen also warned against "the eclipse of wonder" brought about by adults – parents and teachers – who "educate the wonder out of children."[133] This is unfortunately the consequence of a managerial culture in an outcome-based education that functionally regulates itself through high stakes standardized testing. Underneath this is a teleology that views children only in terms of the productive adults that society wants them to become. "If teleology is the only determinant of human life," cautions Jensen, "then the lives of children who die before becoming adults are devoid of meaning."[134] It also trivializes the value of wonder experienced by children. Yet, it is this human capacity for wonder from its beginning at childhood that is a window to wisdom which education ought to seek and cultivate.

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[130] Recall Rahner, "Ideas for a Theology of Childhood," 48: "Childhood is openness. Human childhood is infinite openness." Drawing on Rahner, Jensen also writes in *Graced Vulnerability*, "This embrace of mystery is another aspect of becoming a child again." (128)

[131] Marty, *The Mystery of the Child*, 101.

[132] Sam Keen, *Apology for Wonder* (New York: Harper and Row, 1969), 43. Cited in Marty, *The Mystery of the Child*, 104.

[133] Keen, cited in Marty, *The Mystery of the Child*, 107.

[134] Jensen, *Graced Vulnerability*, 122.

A critical question, then, that educators should ask, not just for students but of themselves, is one that Söelle poses: "Can amazement, the radical wonderment of the child, be learned again?"[135] I believe we *can* and *must*. From the standpoint of a Lasallian preferential option for children, childhood is not only a sociological and developmental category; it is also theological. To recall, Rahner deepens its theological meaning when he argues that childhood is not a phase we rush to grow out of but the beginning of an openness to mystery that we paradoxically mature into throughout life. What this implies, then, is that the capacity for child-like wonderment is not extinguished in adulthood although it could become obscured. For the teacher, wonderment can be reclaimed as a contemplative practice of witness that is receptive *to* children's receptivity of the world in amazement. This is vital because the sense of awe at the mystery of life that a child inspires by simply being present can energize why one educates at all for life. To behold the lives of children in reverential awe is also a precondition for love, without which teaching cannot possibly be lived as a vocation of service.

In its preferential option for children, then, the Lasallian tradition paves the way for the teacher to reclaim wonderment in being a co-contemplative with children. A key emphasis in Lasallian anthropology is the spiritual nature of children as integral to their being and becoming as whole human persons. Contemporary research on children's spirituality, however, should be drawn on to deepen this emphasis such that the dynamic of co-contemplation calls educators to respect and welcome children as spiritual agents in their own right. The work of psychiatrist Robert Coles attests well to the spiritual agency of children. "Prolonged encounters with children" through careful listening are the means

[135] Söelle, *The Silent Cry*, 91.

by which he is awakened to their spiritual lives in terms of "the abiding interest they have in reflecting about human nature, about the reasons people behave as they do, about the mysteries of the universe as evinced in the earth, the sun, the moon, the stars."[136] The spiritual is located in the children's capacity to be present to the immediacy of their environment and in their spontaneous sense of wonder. "Each child becomes an authority, and all the meetings become occasions for a teacher – the child – to offer, gradually, a lesson … My job, also is to put in enough time to enable a child … to have her say," avers Coles.[137] He demonstrates what co-contemplating with children could look like for an educator: an attentive waiting that allows children to lead one into wondering about mystery, which returns adults to become who they already are as God's children.

With children, the practice of contemplative wonder is rarely tranquil and still. Theologian Bonnie Miller-McLemore proposes that the care for children calls for "contemplation in the midst of chaos."[138] This does not discount the value of seeking the divine in quietude, but as Miller-McLemore contends, conventional notions of spirituality and faith development based on "views of quiet space and linear growth over time often exclude children and those who care for them."[139] Children push us to rethink our rationalistic categories in spiritual development.[140] They claim their spiritual agency

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[136] Robert Coles, *The Spiritual Life of Children* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1990), 27, 332.

[137] Ibid., 27.

[138] Miller-McLemore, *Let the Children Com,* 153.

[139] Bonnie Miller-McLemore, "Children's Voices, Spirituality, and Mature Faith," in *Children's Voices: Children's Perspectives in Ethics, Theology and Religious Education*, ed. Annemie Dillen and Didier Pollefeyt (Leuven: Uitgeveru Peeters, 2010), 23.

[140] Ibid., 39-42. Miller-McLemore draws on research by Tobin Hart, who identifies "five types of general spiritual capacities" in children that have eluded adult-centered and rationalistic theories of spiritual growth: "wisdom, wonder, wondering, relational empathy or resonance, and 'multidimensional perception' or access to the 'nonspace, nontime dimensions of existence.'" She also reports on the work of Herbert

precisely because they shape the faith of adults who guide them in the messy mix of daily activities. Children often reflect "a wisdom that somehow emerges in the chaos itself, stops us dead in our tracks, and heightens our awareness."[141] While Miller-McLemore writes in the context of parenting, her insight is relevant to those who teach children. One finds in the Lasallian tradition a space for such contemplation in chaos through cultivating teaching as a spiritual practice of presence. It offers a practical spirituality for teachers that is as much shaped by the children they encounter. Yet, this capacity for teachers to be attentive to what is going on within them while attending to children is not automatic. It is developed through a habit of reflecting intentionally on their relationships with children as holy wonder.

5.3.3 Practicing Holy Wonder

In the Lasallian tradition, contemplation is the daily practice of remembering the holy presence of God in the teacher-child relationship. To remember is to carry into the present moment a quiet attentiveness to the sacred, be it in the classroom, staffroom or on our own as individuals. Remembering the holy presence of God is transposable into a practice of holy wonder for teachers in their relationships with children. Holy wonder must first entail teachers coming to recognize the classroom as a spiritual space. Frances Schoonmaker writes, "The challenge for professionals who work with children and youth is to teach ourselves to see the spirituality inherent in the acts of learning, in coming to know, and in being in the classroom … to learn to take off our shoes and leave them at

Anderson who names "vulnerability, openness, immediacy, dependence" as qualities of spirituality visible at childhood.

[141] Ibid., 37.

the door."[142] Suggested below are ways that invite teachers to give themselves permission to welcome, name and nurture the spiritual as holy wondering with children:

1. *Making time for yourself to practice gratitude for the presence of each child in your class as gift.*

   Gratitude is the gateway to the spiritual. It admits to the reality of something beyond and larger than ourselves. To be grateful for the gift of each child is to receive and behold her or him as a subject of mystery in wonder. Gratitude for each child as gift does not dismiss the difficult and often inconvenient task of care. It reminds teachers to keep in view the humanity they share with each child. It reframes challenges as an opportunity for teachers to reflect on how they might be led to grow and discover more about themselves as persons. Teachers could recall the names of each child and ask: What would I want to thank this child for? Was there a significant encounter I had with this child that I am grateful for, and why?

2. *Naming what you wonder about.*

   Inviting teachers to raise their own questions of meaning and purpose could be an entry point into holy wonder. Rachael Kessler suggests that teachers name their "questions of wonder" and compare them with those from their students.[143] Adapting some of her questions: What do I wonder about *at this time of my life as a teacher*? How similar and/or different are my questions from those

[142] Frances Schoonmaker, "Only Those Who See Take Off Their Shoes: Seeing the Classroom as a Spiritual Space," *Teachers College Record* 111, no. 12 (2009): 2717.

[143] Rachael Kessler, "Soul of Students, Soul of Teachers: Welcoming the Inner Life to School," in *Schools with Spirit: Nurturing the Inner Lives of Children and Teachers*, ed. Linda Lantieri (Boston: Beacon Press, 2001), 126-127.

of children in my class? How have their questions or responses illuminated or challenged my own wondering?

3. *Taking time to listen to children and in-to yourself.*

Listening is at the heart of practicing holy wonder. Holy wonder calls for a form of listening receptive to the mystery of each child as graced irruption. It calls for teachers to listen *to* and *with* children *in-to* "seeing the world through their eyes."[144] As discussed in Chapter Four, (C)PAR serves as a pedagogical resource that frames such listening as a critical-contemplative practice, which engages teachers to listen *in-to* what is stirring within them by what they are hearing from children. In other words, teachers listen not only to learn *about*, but also learn *from* each child about themselves, un-seeing their own biases and re-envisioning new possibilities of relating in teaching.

Diagram 5.3 (p. 239) shows how the triple dynamic of amazement in Lasallian mysticism – being open, adoring, and cooperating in faith – serves to scaffold holy wonder through listening as a dynamic process of having one's vision and practice as a teacher disrupted, reframed, and expanded by the perspectives of children.

[144] McIntyre, "Participatory Action Research and Urban Education," 36.

Holy Wonder In Listening	Disruption	Reframing	Expansion
Lasallian Mysticism	*Being Open* What am I coming to notice about this child and her/his concrete reality – cultural, social, economic, and political? What am I noticing for the first time about this child that I have not seen? What am I coming to see are the particular needs of this child? What assumptions about childhood and adulthood are disrupted for me?	*Adoring* What is preventing me from recognizing the presence of the divine in this child? How am I led to rethink or even let go of my assumptions about this child and who I am as an adult so that I can teach more justly from a place that upholds her/his human dignity?	*Cooperating in faith* What might be that glimpse of newness I am coming to see of my vocation as a teacher? Which aspects of who I am as a teacher are affirmed and challenged? What possibilities might I imagine to create opportunities for children's voices to continue to be heard in my classroom? What possibilities are there to involve children in co-constructing a curriculum that responsibly engages their participation in building up the common good?

Figure 5.3: Scaffolding Holy Wonder in Listening

4. *Remembering your earliest experiences of the spiritual as a child.*

Holy wonder with children invites teachers to recognize what Söelle calls a "mysticism of childhood," which refers to "moments of heightened experience in childhood in which we are grasped by a remarkable, seemingly unshakeable certainty."[145] Unfortunately, she contends, in the haste to grow out of childhood and abandon it behind, experiences of the spiritual at childhood have been trivialized by adults and "explained away as an overactive imagination,

[145] Söelle, *The Silent Cry*, 11.

> indigestion, overexcitement, and the like."[146] Holy wonder with children as spiritual agents demands that teachers uncover their own "buried mysticism of childhood."[147] Schoonmaker suggests that teachers remember and make sense of their earliest spiritual experiences at childhood as a way of connecting with children as spiritual beings in the classroom.[148] I would add that teachers recall them not in a nostalgic or romanticized manner, but with a critical attentiveness as to how they have shaped their biographies as educators. To what extent have memories of my spiritual experiences as a child shaped my commitment as an educator? How have they enabled and/or obstructed me from being fully present to children?

Teachers are invited to practice these as individuals or in group settings facilitated in teacher education classrooms or at staff development sessions in schools. These practices also supplement Shirley and MacDonald's Mindful Teacher seminars in extending their spiritual component beyond meditation to a more holistic consideration of the classroom experienced as a spiritual arena through the teachers' relationships with children. In general, as these practices will bring up powerful emotions in teachers, it is imperative that educational institutions in create trustworthy spaces to honor their experiences and hold their vulnerability. At the school level, leaders must be committed to provide teachers with the necessary psychological support, as well as foster a community of respect for all that encourages teachers to support one another pedagogically and

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[146] Ibid., 13.

[147] Ibid., 11.

[148] Schoonmaker, "Only Those Who See Take Off Their Shoes: Seeing the Classroom as a Spiritual Space," 2720-2722.

emotionally. This is not for the sake of having teachers perform better. It is what teaching as a calling demands of educational institutions so as to serve children better.

5.4 Conclusion: On the Way to God's Reign with Children as Fellow Pilgrims

The teacher as co-contemplative with children walks with them as pilgrims in education as a spiritual journey. Coles conceives of pilgrimage as a frame to interpret the inner lives of children that interweave with those in their presence:

> So it is we connect with one another, move in and out of one another's lives, teach and heal and affirm one another, across space and time – all of us wanderers, explorers, adventurers, stragglers and ramblers, sometimes tramps or vagabonds, even fugitives, but now and then pilgrims: as children, as parents, as old ones about to take that final step, to enter that territory whose character none of us here ever knows. Yet how young we are when we start wondering about it all. The nature of the journey and of the final destination. [149]

Building on Coles, Jensen notes that children "are pilgrims not because they are on their way somewhere, not because they are growing up to be somebody, but because they already are somewhere and somebody."[150] For him, attentiveness to children as pilgrims directs us to "delight in the journey itself."[151] This could be an important reminder for teachers who become overly centered on preparing children to get ahead in life that they miss the joy of simply being with them, and beholding their giftedness for who they already are. To regard children as pilgrims is to underscore the enduring significance of childhood in life's journey that is at once human and divine.

The child as pilgrim finds a correlate in one of De La Salle's meditations as a "friend [who] comes to you like the weary and exhausted traveler."[152] In the immediate context of this meditation, it refers to children in "destitution" turning to the Brother for

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[149] Coles, *The Spiritual Life of Children*, 335.

[150] Jensen, *Graced Vulnerability*, 53.

[151] Ibid.

[152] *Meditations* 37.1

help to instruct and correct them in their sinful ways.[153] Yet, I suggest that this image of "the weary and exhausted traveler" holds a richer meaning today in light of the commitment to liberation in Lasallian education with its preferential option for children. It is an image that calls forth a vision of educating for dignity in social belonging. Lasallian scholar Ouattara hints at this vision when he writes, "Just as the baby begins its existence with the welcome it receives into the world, so education contributes to teaching the child how to find and to create hospitality from within."[154] Such a vision calls educators to create a culture of belonging that respects all children in their differences. It necessitates that children experience safety in learning, which enables them to see and realize their agency for the life of their communities.

"Will you then abandon them and leave them without any instruction?" De La Salle asks.[155] Beneath this question is a conviction in Lasallian mysticism: God meets us in and through children to call forth our vocation to teach. In a world where children as the least are still more often sinned against, there is an urgent need to heed the gospel call of a preferential option for children. Biblical scholar Judith Gundry-Volf contends: "Jesus did not just teach how to make an adult world kinder and more just for children; he taught the arrival of a social world in part defined by and organized around children … He invited the children to come to him *not* so that he might initiate them into the adult realm but so that they might receive what is *properly theirs* – the reign of God."[156] Lasallian

[153] Ibid. De La Salle draws on Saint Augustine's interpretation of this "traveling friend" in Luke 11:5-6 as "someone who has walked the way of sin, seeking to satisfy his passions in the world, and finding there nothing but vice and vanity, misery and disappointment, turns to you in distress, looking for help and is persuaded that you have received the grace to support the weak, to teach the ignorant, to correct the wayward."

[154] Ouattara, "The Lasallian Service of Education: A Means of Salvation for Today?" 294.

[155] *Meditations* 37.2

[156] Gundry-Volf, "The Least and the Greatest,"60.

mysticism stirs teachers forward to incarnate this prophetic vision in education, in faith and with zeal.

EPILOGUE

As I come to the end of my dissertation journey, the world is reeling from a global pandemic caused by a novel coronavirus (Covid-19). The focus has rightly been on the vulnerable elderly who are more likely to die due to pre-existing medical conditions. Until reported instances of multisystem inflammatory syndrome among children, they have remained fairly invisible in the concern over Covid-19. It is striking that only two prime ministers – Erna Solberg from Norway and Jacinda Ardern from New Zealand – held a special press conference for children to explain about the virus and address their questions directly as citizens. Indeed, this pandemic also affects children's lives. Their education is disrupted. Schools are closed and not every child has access to digital technology to learn remotely.

In the United States, Covid-19 has exacerbated existing racial health disparities. People of color, particularly African-American and Latinx/Hispanic communities, suffer from a disproportionately high rate of death due to the virus.[1] They also face a higher risk of falling ill because many are low-wage workers who do not have the privilege to telework.[2] What is unspoken is that some of these people are providers and caregivers to children in their families. Children of color risk losing their parents to the pandemic. Children from impoverished communities of color are also not even assured access to clean water to wash their hands.[3] The Trump administration is also using the spread of the virus to push for the incarceration and deportation of migrant children and/or their

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[1] Adia Harvey Wingfield, "The Disproportionate Impact of Covid-19 on Black Health Care Workers in the US," *Harvard Business Review*, May 14, 2020, https://hbr.org/2020/05/the-disproportionate-impact-of-covid-19-on-black-health-care-workers-in-the-u-s#comment-section.
[2] Charles M. Blow, "Social Distancing Is a Privilege," *The New York Times*, April 5. 2020. https://www.nytimes.com/2020/04/05/opinion/coronavirus-social-distancing.html.
[3] Justin Worland, "America's Clean Water Crisis Goes Far Beyond Flint. There's No Relief in Sight," *TIME*, February 20, 2020, https://time.com/longform/clean-water-access-united-states/.

parents at the U.S.-Mexico border.[4] Children's social vulnerabilities during this time of a pandemic remain invisible to the public.

At the same time, America is being shaken up by massive protests against racism after the murder of George Floyd, an African American. He was suffocated to death when a white Minneapolis police officer kneeled on his neck for eight minutes and forty-six seconds. In his final moments, George Floyd did not only plead - "I can't breathe." He called out for his mother. George Floyd was someone's child. In his cry are the wails of Black mothers who have lost their children to shootings: Breonna Taylor, Ahmaud Arbery, Michael Brown, Trayvon Martin, Tamir Rice, to name a few. Black *children's* lives matter. What calls all to serious reckoning is when the survival of some children into adulthood cannot be insured because of our participation in perpetuating systemic injustices against them, their families and communities.

As I witness these events, I am reminded of a picture of third-grader Martin Richard holding up a sign that says – "No more hurting people. Peace." This picture was taken before he was killed at the Boston Marathon Bombing in 2013. His untimely death affected me emotionally, especially since it took place not too long after the Sandy Hook school shooting, where twenty first-graders and six school employees were killed. This tragedy hit too close to home as I was attached then as a teacher at a Catholic elementary and middle school in Boston.

In this time of social upheaval, the plain wisdom of Martin Richard's words - "No more hurting people. Peace." – ought to be heard. It must make a claim on teachers to

[4] Ted Hesson and Mica Rosenberg, "U.S. deports 400 migrant children under new coronavirus rules," *Reuters*, April 8, 2020, https://www.reuters.com/article/us-health-coronavirus-usa-deportations/u-s-deports-400-migrant-children-under-new-coronavirus-rules-idUSKBN21P354

commit more deeply to a prophetic vision of educating for justice that is rooted in a preferential option for children. It must make a claim on teachers to educate toward the liberation of children. It is *because of* the press for children's liberation, and *not in spite of it*, that the struggle against systemic injustices for social transformation through education becomes more urgent. Children belong to families and communities, and yet their relationships with them as vulnerable agents in their complex humanity remain buried.

In this time of social disruption, it is vital that teachers commit to being present to children in ways that bring comfort and inspire courage. It also challenges them to become advocates for children, especially in situations where their well-being is being compromised, making it non-conducive for them to thrive and learn. It is all the more important for teachers to listen to children in ways that make them feel seen and understood. Yet, even if teachers agree to the idea of doing these, the reality is that they are also struggling to cope with the changes brought about by the pandemic. With school closures and lockdowns, teachers who are parents find themselves having to care for their own children at home while teaching other people's children. Many also experience the emotional stress of teaching remotely, as they struggle to engage with students online while managing technical glitches and procuring laptops for students in need.[5]

Yet, in the midst of this chaos, it is all the more crucial for educators to pause and remember teaching as a *call.* To do so is to reflect on the reason for hope that the act of teaching presupposes. David Hansen writes:

[5] Mario Koran, "'Every day looks absolutely wild': the chaos of teaching during a pandemic," *The Guardian*, June 3, 2020, https://www.theguardian.com/world/2020/jun/03/teaching-during-coronavirus-pandemic-california.

> The idea of teaching as a vocation does not provide a rose-colored lens through which to perceive education. Instead, it opens a window to the range of accomplishments accessible to any serious-minded teacher. It provides a hopeful perspective that can better position teachers to take advantage of the opportunities present circumstances afford them.[6]

From the perspective of Christian faith, hope is intrinsic to the idea of a call, which is in the first place not of one's own making but God's initiative. God calls. Teaching is a vocation because it is a participation in God's liberating love that "attends to our healing – to the re-integration, re-membering, re-collection of who we are in God's image."[7] Teaching as a vocation is God's living expression of hope in the world through the work and life of educators. This is a stubborn hope rooted in God's closeness to us as Love who "endures all things" (1 Corinthians 13:7). Paul also writes, "hope does not disappoint us, because God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit that has been given to us" (Romans 5:5). Hope in teaching is not a final recourse to the divine in resignation when things fail; it is not wishing for the best. It is perseverance not only in the face of failure but even welcoming it within the wider mystery of God's ongoing creativity in the Spirit. This is the response that educators are called to in a Christian vocation of teaching: a deeper hope that dares them to risk failure in chaos and imagine possibilities for teaching and learning with children anew.

In the Lasallian tradition, this hope in God's closeness is reflected De La Salle's spiritual itinerary that testifies to God's "imperceptible" guidance over time in "all things with wisdom and serenity, whose way it is not to force the inclinations of persons."[8] Hope in education is grounded in God's faithfulness. "Fear nothing. God has never failed

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[6] Hansen, *The Call to Teach*, 161.

[7] Huebner, "Educational Activity and Prophetic Criticism," 397.

[8] Koch et al., ed., *John Baptist de La Salle: The Spirituality of Christian Education*, 112.

to help those who hope in him," he writes.[9] Lasallians invoke this hope when they respond at the end of each prayer with "Live Jesus in our hearts - Forever!" This response invites all to share in a hope that is mystically grounded in our common belonging to God as children and siblings to one another in Jesus Christ. It expresses a Christian conviction in faith that our every being is in Christ, and that the reality we are experiencing is not apart from Christ. It invites all educators to share in the Gospel commitment to live the way of God's self-giving love revealed in Jesus Christ as the Word Incarnate. It challenges all educators to a greater hope, open to God's passion and compassion that touches and transforms the heart of a generation through the students we encounter.

Lasallians say "Forever" not to Christ who will come later in some unknown future. Rather, it is to awaken all hearts to the mystery of God's self-gift as a human child in Jesus Christ. Jesus Christ is already present in the crib of our hearts. What claim must this have for educators – beginning with those of us who profess ourselves as Christians? Mark Schwehn writes:

> But if we worship One who was born in the tiny manger that contained eternity, we can begin to discern the sources of that sense we have when we know that we have been called to do something like teaching. We are called to the small tasks immediately before us in our families, our neighborhoods, and our places or residence. But these small tasks, undertaken as Christian callings, really do transform the world forever. [10]

From a Lasallian perspective, the call to teach is a call to hope that no effort is ever too small in God. It is a hope which summons us to trust – that what we regard to be little in our best efforts as teachers do have an impact beyond what we can see because nothing is wasted in God. This is a mighty hope that paradoxically rests on God choosing to come

[9] Ibid., 119.

[10] Schwehn, "Teaching as Profession and Vocation," 407.

to us in the smallness of a child, entrusting God-self to human care. This is a prophetic hope found in the promise that God will be there to meet us in the lives of children because in coming as a poor child, God stands in solidarity with them as the least and marginalized. To teach is to hear and respond to God's call through children, who are bearers of hope in the just Reign of God already here.

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