

25. GUARDIAN ANGELS

Summary:

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1. DEVOTION TO THE GUARDIAN ANGELS IN CHURCH HISTORY

The worship of angels goes as far back as the early days of the primitive Church since mention is made of it already in the writings of the Fathers and Doctors of the Church, St. Justin at Athena-gora, Origen, John Damascene, Eusebius of Cesa-rea (disciple of Origen), St. Ambrose, St. Augustine and St. Jerome.

When reading, the Apologists and the Fathers, we notice their constant preoccupation to clarify the nature of Christian monotheism in order to free the worship of angels from any theological ambiguity and prevent it from being identified with the cult of minor pagan deities and merged with Hebrew worship vitiated by Iranian influences or a Phrygian atmosphere often associated with the orgiastic worship of Cibebe and Atti. It all started with St. Paul who when writing to the Colossians warned the Christians about the danger arising from the Judeo-gnostic doctrines related to so-called angelic messages, pretending to originate from a superior doctrinal wisdom (cf. Col. 2,18).

Saint Justin affirms that we must adore in the Trinitarian mystery a unique God, and honour at the same time the angels that constitute his escort: "With God, let us venerate, adore, honour, in spirit and in truth, the Son issued from the Father

and the army of good angels who form his court". Affirmation of the worship due to the Angels in neo-platonic and neo-stoic philosophy, which savours of polytheism and the cult of minor deities, later influenced Christian circles and rendered more circumspect the language and writings of Christians concerning the worship of angels. In a reply to Celsus, Origen says: "We Christians, do not adore angels, as the Hebrews do... and refuse to worship the devils who are not servants of the supreme God but we imitate the angels just as they imitate God...". That does not prevent him from holding firmly to his devotion to the Guardian Angel whom he prays: "Come, dear Angel, welcome him who has given up his error.

With reference to the worship of angels we also have the opinions of St. Ambrose, of St. Jerome and St. Augustine. The latter, to avoid mixing up the angels with the devils, makes this suggestion: "Honoramus eos caritate, non servitute", adding also the theory according to which they have a clear knowledge of Christian mysteries.

During the first part of the Middle-Ages, concurrently with repeated invitations to honour the angels by St. Gregory, the devotion to the Archangel Michael, especially in Italy on Mount Gargano, as early as 494, and in France at Mont Saint Michel from 709 onwards, began to spread. Moreover, it was believed that an angel had appeared to Pope St. Gregory on the Mole d'Ad-

riano, putting back his sword in the scabbard, thus signifying that the plague would soon be over in Rome.

So, the devotion to the Guardian Angels has never known any interruption in the history of the Church. That explains the frequent references to it in the lives of the Desert Fathers, from St. Anthony to St. Pacomius and St. Simon Stylites, to mention but a few.¹ Likewise in the earliest known ascetic writings, this devotion is mentioned again, such as in the thirty volumes of the Golden Ladder of St. Climacus.

2. ST. BERNARD AND THE BENEDICTINE TRADITION REGARDING THE WORSHIP OF ANGELS

During the Middle-Ages, the greatest propagator of the devotion to the angels was undoubtedly St. Bernard, Abbot of Clairvaux, a man of great moral and cultural stature in the whole of Europe. He revived the Benedictine tradition and thanks to his impetuous and aggressive action, as well as by his writings, he became the apostle of a joyful devotion to the angels, easily accessible to the ordinary people. The Church constantly refers to this saint's works to reaffirm the devotion to the Guardian Angel and has included in the Office of October 2, several excerpts from his Sermons. The friendship of and trust in the Guardian Angel characterise the writings of Saint Bernard: "May the angels be your confidants, pray often those who are at your side unceasingly to protect you and console you".² Or again: "Would you dare to do, in any place and circumstance, to your angel who is present, what you would not do if you could see him?" (Sermon XII.6) "It is quite true that all honour is due to God alone; but we cannot be ungrateful towards the angels whom he has chosen as ministers of his mercy and distributors of his gifts to us. We will never show enough love for these noble creatures and their affection for us" (Commentary on Psalm 90).

With St. Bernard, we drift away from the purely theological angeliological tradition, thanks to his reminding us of the zeal and loving charity the angels have for us. Whence a natural invitation to be grateful, to practise a frequent devotion

to and show a deep faith in the Guardian Angels. The devotion of SJBS owes a great deal to the impression made on him by St. Bernard and his considerations on our spiritual attitude. Besides the Founder knew well and frequented Benedictine circles even when he lived in Rheims. As we shall see later on, the language of La Salle will fit quite well with that of St. Bernard and he will see in the Guardian Angel a model for the School Teacher. The Teacher, he says in the Meditations for retreat time, must be the Guardian Angel of his pupils (MR 197-198). Thus, La Salle, faithful to St. Bernard's exhortation, sees in the angels, models of moderation, of chastity and spirit of prayer, and especially models of charity and builders of peace.

St. Ignatius uses the same words in the Rules of his Company, where he invites his disciples to imitate the angels. Well known Benedictines have followed the example of St. Bernard of Clairvaux in this devotion, from Bernard, abbot of Cluse to Abbot Gervin de Saint Riquier (who used to hear angels mixing their voices with those of the monks during the recitation of the Office, filling the choir with a sweet perfume); to Hugo of Cluny (who enjoyed the vision of his Guardian Angel), to Pierre de Celle and Guillaume de Saint Thierry (who used to compare the activity of the monk in his cell to that of angels in heaven)... All these disciples have exhorted us to practise a genuine devotion to the Guardian Angels, and especially to Saint Michael, whose statue and altar are to be found in the chapel of the monastery.

The doctrine and mystic reflections of St. Bernard concerning the angels were taken up later by the monks of the different Benedictine branches. Among them, St. John Gualbert, and especially Dennis the Carthusian who, in the 15th century, offers us in his writings, either the theological speculation on the heavenly hierarchy and its nature, or practical devotional advice towards these important agents of our mystic perfection. In his "Sermons".³ Dennis comes up with the famous suggestion regarding our relationship with the Guardian Angels: "diligendo cordialiter, quotidie honorando, assidue invocando, imitando, eis colaborando".

In the steps of Saint Bernard, in relation to this devotion, we can also include in the 14th century, Jean Taulier of Strasbourg, first a Carthusian, then a

Dominican: "predicator egregius, litterarum sciento clarus" who influenced the spirituality of the 17th century with reference to divine grace, particularly St. Paul of the Cross. Still in the 14th century, Ludolfo of Saxony, a Carthusian, author of a famous *Life of Christ*,⁴ a real treasure of valuable instructions and meditations based on Scripture and the Fathers of the Church. Referring to the devotion to the Guardian Angels, he holds on to the ideas of Saint Bernard, especially in his book "De Angelis"⁵ published in Barcelona in 1394.

To those we can still add, in the 15th century, Jean Gerson who wrote the "Sermo de Angelis",⁶ Jean Vos and the Spanish Franciscan Fra Francisco Eiximenis⁷ author of a popular book on the angels (1392) and a promoter of devotion towards them, first in Valencia, then in the whole Spanish peninsula.

3. THE PRESENCE OF ANGELS IN CARMELITE SPIRITUALITY

La Salle's familiarity with Carmelite spirituality is undeniable thanks to the frequency of his "Carmelite deserts" aimed at reinvigorating his spirituality in those retreat days as well as to his intimacy with the writings of St. Theresa and St. John of the Cross, as mentioned by his biographer (Blain 2, p. 166). Carmelite spirituality had, in 17th century France, as its main intermediary, the Sulpician school, all the more so since it was Bérulle who divulged the thought and leading ideas of the spirituality of St. Theresa.

The devotion to the Guardian Angel, which we find once more in the Carmelite writings of St. John of the Cross and St. Theresa found in La Salle's readiness to accept them, a fertile field of action. It is therefore interesting to note the references to this devotion in the works of these two Saints. In St. John of the Cross the references serve to point out to souls engaged in spiritual asceticism models of intense and continuous adoration of God. In Chapter 12 of the *Dark Night*, he says that "God communicates all his inspirations by means of the angels and the latter pass these on to others, without any delay, just as a solar ray goes through numerous sheets of glass placed behind each other" (Ch.12.3). And: "All these prayers reach God, offered

by the angels, according to what one of them said to Tobias: "When you were praying, shedding tears and burying the dead, I was offering your prayers to the Lord".⁸

In passages of his minor works St. John of the Cross exhorts the mystic soul: "Remember that your Guardian Angel does not always make you eager to act, even though he enlightens your reason. Therefore, in order to exercise yourself to be virtuous, do not wait until you feel you would like to act, for reason and intelligence are enough". There are also numerous other references to the presence of the Guardian Angel as a collaborator in the building up of our personal perfection.

In her autobiography, St. Theresa tells us about the presence of the angels in her visions, whilst they accompany Jesus, Mary and Joseph. It is with an arrow that a Seraph pierced her heart, leaving her heart burning with love for God. her writings constitute a continual exhortation to believe in this angelic collaboration during the course of our life towards a more intimate union with God, union of which the angels are models.

4. THE DEVOTION TO THE ANGELS IN THE 17th CENTURY

When we mention the devotion to the angels in the 17th century we cannot consider the reason for its existence a matter of convenience which would ignore the pithy structures which govern human beliefs and spirituality itself. In Europe, this century it was in fact founded on sincere and conscious religious interior life, free from any desire to show itself as something marvellous or ingenious. Discriminating therefore all that concerns theological doctrine from pragmatism and popular devotion, it certainly cannot be asserted that the scholastic theologians of the 17th century were particularly biassed pastorally to that of the Guardian Angel, because little was known about the nature, intelligence and language of angels. As a matter of fact, the theologian and moralist Suárez, a Spanish Jesuit and protagonist of this line of thought in the 17th century, ignores the devotional aspect in his treatise *De Angelis*, published in 1630. He starts off with the analysis of the essence, the intellectual level of the angels, which he considers superior to

that of men, and then dwells on the substance and kinds of angels, failing consequently to supply practical behavioural advice regarding devotional piety or the veneration of angels. On the other hand, his doctrine abounds in references to other schools of thought to such an extent that this renders his work eclectic.⁹

Just as theological studies about the angels progressed, there was in this century a strengthening of the devotion towards them and particularly to the Guardian Angel. And it was not solely in the baroque art where gilded and smiling angels make their appearance in the churches, but also in the writings of the period where we find an abundance of exhortations and suggestions about practical devotions to be carried out fortnightly to the Guardian Angel and the litanies in his honour. *The Guardian Angel in Christian devotion*¹⁰ with the corresponding celebration and its own litanies was published by J. Coret at Liège in 1725, therefore at the dawn of the following century, and shows to what extent the devotion to the angels was practised and how it drew its origin from the doctrine of St. Bernard of Clairvaux. It is interesting to note in connection with the devotion to the angels what an anonymous trappist monk of the Abbey of Sept-Fonts d'Allier wrote in his book *Divine marvels wrought in souls thanks to the ministry of the holy angels*.¹¹ It must be said, however, that the truly popular character of this devotion in the 17th century owes its origin to the Jesuit Fathers.

In fact, if the mysticism of the monks and the doctrine of the theologians had defined the Christian doctrine regarding the angels, specifying the nature, their functions and hierarchy based on biblical references, those who contributed most to the diffusion of a truly popular devotion in the 17th century were the Fathers of the Company of Jesus. Their Founder, Saint Ignatius, had received from the Carthusian Ludolfo of Saxony (author of the famous *Life of Christ*) and from García Jiménez Cisneros ("Exercitations", a work of an anthologic nature) ample information which he included in the Rules of the Company,¹² offering the angels as models of charity, of zeal, of quiet self-mastery. Thus, in the *Spiritual Exercises*, he respectfully draws the attention of the retreatants, underlining the intervention of the angels in the different mysteries of the life of Christ, for exam-

ple, the Annunciation, the Birth, the Circumcision, the visit of the Magi, the Flight into Egypt, the Temptation in the Desert, the apparitions after the Resurrection and the Ascension. In the first preamble to his book *Contemplation as a way to learn to love*, in the composition of place, he recalls the presence of the angels. In the Rules, which with discernment of the spirits, he dwells on the presence of good and bad angels who influence souls and he probably alludes to a psychological intuition of good and evil in the human person's heart, on behalf of the angels, and for that offered as models. It is easy to understand then how the Ignatian doctrine is related in this matter to Origen and to St. Augustine.

Among the followers of St. Ignatius, we find Pierre Faber (called le Fèvre), a Jesuit who had met St. Ignatius after his priestly ordination and had become one of the Founders of the Company. He later helped to evangelise several European countries. his biographers say of him that he lived in deep intimacy with the angels, whose help he requested in his sermons, considering them — according to a doctrinal tradition of the Jesuits — the protectors of the provinces and the towns where he preached, as well as his own guardians.

Other Jesuits promoted this devotion in this period: Saint Peter Canisius, translator of Tauler; Francesco Albertini with his treatise on the Guardian Angel, translated in French in 1613; Saint Francis Borgia¹³ who wrote: *Treatise on the practice of the devotion to the angels*.¹⁴ We also find a long reference to the devotion to the angels in Saint Aloysius Gonzaga in the *Meditations on the principal mysteries* (1950).

The directors of Marian Congregations instilled this devotion when forming their members to piety and in the manual of the congregation "Libellus sodalitatis" (that of Ingolstadt is dated 1588) in which people are invited to recall the presence of the Guardian Angel during evening prayer. In the college of the Jesuits at Dinant, we find yet another text: *Règles de la petite Sodalité angélique adressées au Collège de la Compagnie de Jésus*, edited in Namur in 1628. Let us quote also other publications of the Jesuits of the 17th century because they would have eventually interested La Salle, even though we possess no precise indications on this matter: Etienne Andebert: *Belle*

confession de foi touchant l'invocation de l'ange gardien (1624); p. de Barry:¹⁵ *Dévotion aux anges* (Lyons 1641) and P. Grasset:¹⁶ *Traité des saints anges* (1691).

Besides the Jesuits, we also find the devotion to the angels being spread through the teachings and spiritual influence of Bossuet, of Cardinal Bérulle and the Sulpician school, especially by Olier, as may be seen from the book of H.J. Icard: *Doctrine de Monsieur Olier*, and the Carmelite School of St. Theresa of Avila, in France. Let us remember also that Olier himself was the spiritual director of Mother Agnès de Jésus, dominican prioress of the convent of Langeac and the apostle of the devotion to the Guardian Angel in the 17th century. We are told that this Mother Superior enjoyed a mystic relationship with her Guardian Angel who used to appear to her under the guise of an adolescent. Olier's spiritual direction enriched the devotion of both of them. It has been further said that the holy prioress lent her Guardian Angel to Olier to help him undertake the foundation of seminaries.

The bonds that link La Salle with the Sulpician School of spirituality help to clarify his constant personal practice of the devotion to the Guardian Angel.

5. THE DEVOTION TO THE GUARDIAN ANGEL IN LA SALLE'S WRITINGS

The diffusion of the devotion to the Guardian Angel, with a special feast, was therefore somewhat recent in the 17th century. The feast of the Guardian Angels had been fixed only throughout the Habsburgs' Empire by Pope Pius V in 1608, and it was then extended to the universal Church by Pope Clement X in 1670, who moved the date of its celebration to October 2, from the first Sunday in September.

Our holy Founder gives precise explanations regarding the angels and particularly the Guardian Angel in his Meditations MD, MF and MR. There one can find 76 quotations. In the *Devoirs d'un chrétien*, there are 90, in the *Grand Abrégé* 32 and in the *Culte extérieur* 43.

6. SOURCES OF INSPIRATION IN THIS LASALLIAN DEVOTION

The Lasallian devotion to the Guardian Angel draws its inspiration especially from the spirituality of the Benedictines, the Carmelites, the Jesuits and St. Sulpice.

In Paris, in the Abbey of St. Germain-des-Prés, to which was attached the parish of St. Sulpice, La Salle was able to meet Père Jean Mobillion, a well known Benedictine, representing the St. Maur reform movement, who died at St. Germain in 1707. He had classified and published in 1647 the writings of St. Bernard which La Salle may have read. Mobillion stated: "Of all the books that the monks may and ought to read, apart from biblical books, none are more useful and worth knowing well than the writings of St. Bernard. Their contents should be reflected in their soul every day".

St. Bernard is quoted directly by La Salle in the meditation for the feast of the Guardian Angels, in relation to their continual assistance: "It is truly a magnificent effect of his kindness, says St. Bernard, and one of the greatest marks of his love" (MF 172.1). References to the devotion to the Guardian Angels in St. Bernard, are to be found especially in Sermons 11 and 12, where he comments on Psalm 90: "Qui inhabitat", and in the Sermon for the feast of St. Michael the Archangel, repeated again in the Office of Readings of the Breviary. St. La Salle's meditation for October 2, in its first point, drawing its inspiration from Sermon 12 of St. Bernard, recalls the mission given by God to his Son Jesus Christ but also that of the Guardian Angels, "so that they may always be close to us, to rescue and help us in any eventuality" (MF 172.1). In the second point, he quotes once more St. Bernard: "because they will not suffer us to be tempted beyond our strength, and in those occasions which are too difficult or too dangerous, they will take us in their hands and carry us over the trials and difficulties without harm" (MF 172.2). The quotation goes on in the third point: "We owe him respect, because of his presence, says St. Bernard; our devotion because of his kindness towards us, our trust because of the care he takes of us". We are also bound to acknowledge the extreme love with which he obeys the divine order to take care of us in such great

and continual needs" (MF 172.3). However, La Salle, mindful of the Brother's educative mission, concludes the same meditation thus: "Often pray, also, to the Guardian Angels of your pupils so that, under their powerful protection, these may practise more willingly and more easily what you teach them" (MF 172.3).

It is surprising that in MF 158 for the feast of St. Bernard, there is no mention of the devotion to the Guardian Angel. However, La Salle seems to wish to put more stress on the virtues of chastity and mortification, and on the Gospel witness given by this saint, selecting as he was wont those biographical details which served better the needs of the Brothers.

7. THE ANGELS AS MODELS IN THE BROTHER'S LIFE

7.1. The Guardian Angel, a model of religious life, is for La Salle one of the common and basic reasons for the devotion to the Guardian Angel. The angels, in constant adoration before the Almighty, lead substantially the attitude of the person who is consecrated to God. This aspect of the devotion towards the angels seems to derive from Benedictine spirituality, reaffirmed later by that of the Jesuits, and appears very clearly in La Salle's spiritual trend of thought.

7.2. If we attempt a deeper analysis of his Meditations, we come across examples of the angels' role in the principal mysteries of the economy of our salvation. This should urge the Brother to take an active part in the history of the personal salvation of his pupils, following the example of the angels and constitute a further reason for the Brother to emulate the example of the angels.

An angel stands near Christ during his Passion (MD 27), the angels adore his humanity after the Ascension to heaven (MD 40); an angel intervenes to suggest to St. Joseph to take an active part in the life of Jesus and it is an angel that carries the Message to Mary, an angel also accompanies Peter out of his prison; angels carry the body of Mary into heaven, bury the body of St. Catherine, etc. (MD A; MF 110, 112, 149, 156, 184).

7.3. But apostolic activity is the same activity

as that of the Divine Spirit who penetrates "the very depth of the souls and when in prayer the religious fills himself with God, he unites himself interiorly to Him (cf. EM). The interior attitude of religious, which resembles that of an angel sent by God to his pupils (MD 21), ought to resemble that of the angels in their interior and exterior purity and in the detachment he should feel towards his body. The Brother will consequently apply himself to what concerns the service of God, so as to lead a life similar to that of the angels.

7.4. In this continual journey towards sanctity, the religious receives therefore from God a guarantee thanks to the nearness of the Guardian Angel who enlightens him concerning religious obedience to his superiors, just as he did to the Abbot Posthumous (MD 7.2) and encouraged him, saying, as the angel did to Tobias, that God does not permit temptations which are beyond our strength and that he tries the man who is pleasing to Him in order that he may improve still more" (MD 17.3).

For that, one must build up a relationship based on trust with one's own Guardian Angel, start a dialogue, just as Mary did after the Presentation in the temple, where she talked more with the angels than with her companions, in order to prepare herself to accept the salutation which an angel was bringing her in God's name.

The angels would thus become the collaborators of the Brothers in the daily activities, sharing their apostolate and helping them to assess the good done to souls and inspiring "fathers and mothers to send them their children to be taught, so that through your teaching you may touch the hearts of these poor children, and that most of them would become genuine Christians" (MD 86.3).

7.5. For La Salle, the Brother has one advantage over the angels, that of being able to feed himself upon the Eucharist, for "the angels must content themselves with adoring him; prostrating themselves before this sacred treasure which constitutes man's delight upon earth" (MD 47.1). That is why he adds "you who have the happiness of living retired from the world, and who, in order to be worthy of your ministry, should lead an angelic life, should esteem yourself happy in being

allowed to feed so frequently upon this bread of angels, which Jesus Christ himself offers you for your nourishment" (MD 50.3).

What La Salle sees in educative life, when he speaks about it, is a kind of interaction and identification between the mission of the Guardian Angel with that of the Brother. In *Meditations* (MR 197-198), this topic is dealt with in more detail. The very title of these two *Meditations* is significant: "That those whom Providence has chosen to undertake the education of children, ought to carry out in their employment the functions of the Guardian Angels in their regard" and "How does one exercise the function of the Guardian Angel in the education of youth".

Starting off with the pessimistic vision of the newborn child compared to a "lump of flesh", not yet able to understand easily the Christian truths and maxims (MR 197.1), he concludes that these children need good guides and visible angels to teach them. That is the role of the teacher, as a visible angel. This can be carried out in two ways:

1. Teach them to understand these maxims just as they are presented to us in the Gospel.
2. Direct their steps on the path that leads to the practise of these same maxims (MR 197.2).

To illustrate what he is saying, he resorts to the fine biblical metaphor of the ladder of Jacob: Angels were going up and coming down the ladder. They were going up to God to make known the needs of those entrusted to them and to receive orders for them. They were coming down to teach those whom they were guiding, the will of God concerning their salvation".

"You must do the same thing towards the children entrusted to your care" (MR 198,1).

8. THE GUARDIAN ANGEL IN LA SALLE'S CATECHISM

"The duties of a Christian towards God", which he published three times during his lifetime: in 1703, in 1705/10 in Paris and 1713/16 in Grenoble, constitute the text of catechism lessons for use in Lasallian schools. We are able therefore to quote from these three volumes the theological presentation of the devotion to the angels. The

chapters which deal with the creation of the world, the Redemption of man, the Last Judgement, as well as the treatise on the first commandment, those on the commandments of the Church and the Sacraments, recall the Church's doctrine about the angels, the Guardian Angel, the devils. They present to us the angels as ministers of God and collaborators in man's redemption. In the Old Testament, La Salle places in evidence the passages in which the angels are the chief actors: the rebellion of the bad angels through pride; the archangels Michael, Gabriel and Raphael in their respective roles. The biblical characters of Daniel, of Tobias, serve him to stress the valuable presence of the angel in the history of man and to plead that Christians show entire confidence in him. As a matter of fact, a prayer which he suggests to us when we are about to travel makes us beg God to send one of his angels to guide us on our way (Db 273). In Db, in the sixth instruction we find a complete treatise on the angels, by question and answer, which elaborates on these celestial hierarchies by mentioning their task as God's messengers.

The care which the Guardian Angel has for each of us is clearly evidenced in four different types of intervention:

1. The angels send us good inspiration.
2. They ward off many occasions of sin.
3. They offer our prayers to God.
4. And they pray to God for us (cf. Db p. 27-29).

In the tenth instruction, on prayer, La Salle specifies that the prayer we make to the angels and saints is a reply to their power of intercession with God, from whom they may obtain many of the graces which we ask for.

In the third volume of *Des Devoirs*, referring to reflections on the liturgical feast days, we find further commentaries which complement those in MD and MF. The angel is once more said to be God's messenger in the life of the Christian. For example, an angel informs St. James of the freeing of St. Peter (Db 257), carries the divine message to Zachary about the forthcoming birth of his son John the Baptist and the name he should be given (Dc 222-226), an angel conveys God's message to Mary (Dc 137-206) and to St. Joseph who believes him (Dc 275-278). The angels also play a role in

the lives of the Saints. St. Martin was honoured by their presence (Dc 287) and St. Nicholas saw angels around his deathbed (Dc 293). Confidence in the angels and their important mission play also a role, says La Salle, in the life of the Christian. For the feast of St. Michael and the Guardian Angels, La Salle lists the fundamental aspects of this devotion. To pray to them so that, through their intercession, God may grant us zeal to honour and glorify his name, courage to resist evil as much as they do (Dc 221). As for the Guardian Angels, he insists particularly on their presence at man's side, be he a heretic, a pagan or an infidel, and he winds up with the five duties this devotion entails:

1. To show great respect and not to do anything which would displease him, for he is constantly close to us.
2. To thank him often for the graces he obtains for us.
3. To pray to him every day with great trust.
4. To obey his inspiration.
5. To imitate his virtues, particularly his purity, as well as his prompt and exact obedience to God (Dc 222-223).

The angels are guardians, not only of men, but also of places, particularly of holy places such as churches (Dc 298). This belief is mentioned constantly in the spirituality of the 17th century. La Salle himself refers to it in his Method of Mental Prayer, asking us to honour the angels and to unite ourselves to them in moments of adoration or petition, following the list of acts of the method he suggests to us.

Among the "Hymns" which La Salle has collected for use with prayers in school, we find one directly consecrated to the Guardian Angels. It was sung on a popular tune very much in vogue at the time, a joyful tune full of hope: "Le printemps vient de nature". The words themselves urge us to feel confident in God's help which will free us from the forces of evil.

9. THE GUARDIAN ANGEL AND THE BROTHER'S PRAYER

In the acts which make up the Brother's own form of prayer, the participation of the angels and

especially of the Guardian Angel is asked for. In the "Explanation of the Method of Mental Prayer", when he suggests to us various models of recollection paving the way to prayer, La Salle invites us, in the first part, to ask for this presence of the Guardian Angel when expressing our faith in God to adore him and thank him. Here are a few quotations: "The Angels who accompany you everywhere, adore you; it is therefore quite right that I, a miserable creature, unite myself to them" (EM 46). Likewise, when one meditates on the different mysteries of Christ's life (second part of the method of mental prayer), the Saint invites the Brothers to adopt the posture of the angels in adoration before Christ, who is manifesting himself to the shepherds, and to pay homage in the crib of Bethlehem, with all our soul's faculties, to the Lord of the angels who, obeying a divine order, adored him when he showed himself on earth (EM 74). The Guardian Angel is then expressly invoked in the conclusion of the second part (EM 88,91-93).

As we have seen, the angels are models of virtue. To practise virtue is the best way for us to go to heaven and renders infinitely happy both men and angels. It is therefore necessary to consider the angels as models of humility and to invoke them, for they – starting with St. Michael – have preceded us on this journey (EM 108).

CONCLUSION

La Salle practised this devotion and required it in the context of the theological culture of his time. To reflect on the evolution of the theology of the devotion to the angels does not weaken in any way La Salle's spiritual standpoint. What is certain is that modern theology has reached other conclusions regarding the presence of the angels and their role in God's Redemption and the economy of our salvation.

We did not intend to trespass on the historical limits within which we have located our study. Within the framework of the Church the Christian is provided with ample opportunities to help him bring up to date the devotion to the Guardian Angels, without any risk to his personal spiritual life.

We must also recall that during the 19th and 20th centuries the devotion to the Guardian Angel was considerably boosted by numerous testimonies of saints who led a very intense spiritual life and by their participation in God's salvific work.

In the writings of La Salle, we can certainly find ideas which will help us to reassess in concrete terms our present opinion about the devotion to the Guardian Angel as God's collaborator in the work of our personal salvation.

¹ P.M. MARIN: *Vie des Pères du désert* ou F.BAREILLE: *Le culte des anges à l'époque des Pères de l'Église* - Revue Thomiste - 1900 vol. 8.

² Bernardus CLAVARALLENIS: *Choix des textes*, par Béguin, 1988 ou SAN BERNARDO: *Obras completas* - Sermones Liturgicos, Vol. IV, 1986.

³ D. DIGNYSII, Chartreux: *Sermones De Sanctis*, Tournai, op. XXXII, 1906.

⁴ Ludolfs de Sassonia: *Vita domini Nostri Jesu Christi ex quatuor Evangelis* - 1474, traduction par BOUQUIN de 1891.

⁵ Dominican, then Carthusian, deceased in 1377. He follows saint Bernard's train of thought and he is a contemporary of Tauler, deceased in 1361, author of *Friends of God* who represents the angelic hierarchy as eager for our spiritual improvement.

⁶ GERSON: *Sermo de Angelis*, op. Vol. III, 1491.

⁷ F. EXIMENES: *Livre des Anges*. Barcelone 1391, première traduction en français en 1478.

⁸ Saint Jean de La Croix: *Oeuvres transmises par M. Marie du Saint Sacrement*, Paris 1933.

⁹ M. PETROCCHI: *La spiritualità italiana*, Vol. II, Roma 1961, p. 190.

¹⁰ S. CORTES: *L'Ange conducteur dans la dévotion chrétienne*; Liège 1725.

¹¹ Anonyme: *Merveilles divines dans les âmes par le ministère des saints anges*. Paris.

¹² Saint Ignace de LOYOLA: *Gli scritti* a cura di M. GIOIA, Torino 1977.

¹³ F. ALBERTINI: *Trattato dell'angelo custode*, Napoli 1612, traduit en français en 1613 pour la première fois.

¹⁴ F. BORGIA: *Trattato e pratica della devozione agli angeli*.

¹⁵ P. DE BARRY: *Dévotion aux anges*, Lyon 1641.

¹⁶ S. GRASSET: *Traité des saints anges*. 1691.

Complementary Themes:

Adoration, Catechism, Celebration/Public Worship, Heart, Contemplation, Duties of a Christian, God, Spirit of Faith, Meditation, Piety, Prayer, Solitude.

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