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**THE SPIRITUAL CHALLENGES OF HUMAN AND CONSECRATED LIFE FOR
RELIGIOUS: UNDERSTANDING AND BALANCING POWER, PLEASURE, AND
POSSESSION WITH EMPHASIS ON DE LA SALLE BROTHERS**

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**A Long Essay Submitted to the Institute of Spirituality and Religious Formation in Partial
Fulfillment of the Requirement for a Diploma in Spirituality and Religious Formation**

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MARCH 2025

STUDENT'S DECLARATION

I, EYAYA DZEMELA JORDI-CLAVER, solemnly attest that my long essay is original and the exclusive fruit of my efforts, research, and independent analyses. It is Submitted to the Institute of Spirituality and Religious Formation in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for a Diploma in Spirituality and Religious Formation. It has never been submitted to another university for academic credit. All information and conclusions presented in this long essay are my own and have not been borrowed from other sources without proper citation.

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This long essay has been submitted with my supervisor's approval.

Supervisor's name: SISTER MARIA FELIX MWIKALI, ASN

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DEDICATION

I dedicate this work to my parents, FIRMIN EYAYA IKABE and PAULIN EYAYA ASUBWA, as well as my grandparents, ANTOINE EYAYA LONGANGE and MARIE-JEANNE MOKUBA NKANDO. They passed on to me the faith, their love of hard work, and the values that guide my life. Their wisdom, kindness, and example have been an inexhaustible source of motivation for me. Although death separated us too soon, their legacy lives on within me, inspiring me every day to move forward with determination and integrity. I am deeply grateful to them. May their souls rest in peace.

EPIGRAPH

I adore in all things the will of God in my regard.¹ Live Jesus in our hearts, forever!²

¹ The last words of St. John Baptist de La Salle before his death on Good Friday, April 7, 1719, thus expressed the entire spiritual meaning of his existence.

² One of the Lasallian prayer formulas that reminds us of the presence of Jesus in our hearts

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ABSTRACT

This study examines the spiritual challenges encountered by religious individuals, particularly the De La Salle Brothers, in their commitment to the evangelical counsels of poverty, chastity, and obedience. In an era increasingly shaped by materialism, individualism, and hedonism, the temptations of power, pleasure, and possession present significant obstacles to living a consecrated life with authenticity and fidelity. Drawing from theological perspectives, Church teachings, and the spiritual insights of St. John Baptist de La Salle, this research explores the impact of these temptations on personal and communal religious life and the mission and witness of religious communities.

Employing a qualitative approach that integrates theological reflection, spiritual analysis, and personal testimonies, this study identifies practical strategies for navigating these tensions. It emphasizes the importance of spiritual resilience through prayer, discernment, communal support, and adherence to the evangelical counsels. Additionally, it highlights the transformative role of divine grace in overcoming these challenges.

The findings contribute to the ongoing discourse on consecrated life by providing a deeper understanding of the struggles religious individuals face and offering practical recommendations for sustaining their vocation in a rapidly changing world. By reaffirming the relevance of the evangelical counsels, this study underscores their capacity to serve as pathways to joy, freedom, and faithful witness amid contemporary societal pressures.

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

ASN: Assumption Sisters of Nairobi

CCC: Catechism of the Catholic Church.

LM: Refers to Leadership and Management (as in "Reg. No: LM 88/00014/2022").

St: Saint (e.g., St. John Baptist de La Salle).

OPERATIONAL DEFINITION OF KEY TERMS

De La Salle Brothers: Another name for the congregation of the Brothers of the Christian Schools is directly derived from the name of its founder, Saint John Baptist de La Salle.

Power: According to Merriam-Webster, power is "the ability or right to control people or things." In the religious context, it refers to the authority or influence exercised in leadership, which, when misused, can become a spiritual challenge.

Pleasure: The Oxford English Dictionary defines pleasure as "a feeling of happiness, enjoyment, or satisfaction." In religious life, it can refer to the desire for bodily or emotional gratification that may conflict with spiritual discipline.

Possession: According to the Cambridge Dictionary, possession is "something that you own or have with you at a particular time." In the spiritual sense, it refers to material attachments that may hinder the vow of poverty.

Evangelical Counsels: The Catechism of the Catholic Church (CCC 915) defines the evangelical counsels as "the vows of poverty, chastity, and obedience, which are taken by those who commit themselves to the consecrated life in imitation of Christ."

Consecrated Life: According to the Vatican's *Apostolic Exhortation Vita Consecrata*, consecrated life is "a stable form of living, recognized by the Church, in which the faithful follow Christ more closely through the profession of the evangelical counsels."

Spiritual Challenges: The concept of spiritual challenges is broadly defined as "difficulties that arise in maintaining one's faith and commitment to religious principles," often due to personal struggles, societal influences, or temptations.

Temptation: The Catechism of the Catholic Church (CCC 2847) defines temptation as "an attraction, either from outside oneself or from within, to act contrary to right reason and the commandments of God."

Detachment: Christian spirituality, detachment refers to "the practice of renouncing worldly attachments to grow closer to God" (*Interior Castle*, St. Teresa of Avila).

Discernment: The Ignatian tradition defines discernment as "the process of recognizing and choosing between movements that lead toward God and those that lead away from Him" (*Spiritual Exercises*, St. Ignatius of Loyola).

Religious Formation: The *Congregation for Institutes of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life* defines religious formation as "the structured and ongoing process of spiritual, intellectual, and pastoral development for individuals preparing for consecrated life."

GENERAL INTRODUCTION

This essay explores the spiritual challenges that consecrated persons face in their sacred journey of living the evangelical counsels of poverty, chastity, and obedience. These vows are not mere symbolic gestures but radical commitments that challenge the dominant culture of power, pleasure, and possession. The De La Salle Brothers, whose charism focuses on the Christian and human education of the underprivileged, serve as a case study for understanding these challenges and how they can be balanced.

Human desires for power, pleasure, and possession are deeply rooted in human experience and are often celebrated in secular society.³ However, these aspirations are in direct opposition to the Christian call to simplicity, selflessness, and service. The vows provide a countercultural framework: Chastity fosters a selfless love untainted by possessiveness, poverty encourages detachment from material wealth, and obedience cultivates a spirit of abandonment to the divine will and communal discernment.⁴

Despite their sacred commitments, consecrated persons, including the De La Salle Brothers, are not immune to these temptations. The modern world, characterized by materialism, hedonism, and individualism, exacerbates these struggles. Consumerism and materialism encourage hedonistic behavior, individualism, and unhealthy social competition. It promotes constant dissatisfaction, stress, and anxiety due to the endless pursuit of material wealth.⁵ These temptations threaten to erode the brothers' spiritual life, community solidarity, and apostolic mission. Inspired by their

³ cf. Matthew 6:19-21

⁴ Catechism of the Catholic Church §§915-917

⁵ Amrillah, M. D. (n.d.). *Consumerism and Materialism Culture: Its Impact on Society and the Environment*. UIN K.H. Abdurrahman Wahid Pekalongan.

founder, St. John Baptist de La Salle, the brothers commit themselves to a life of service to the poor, but they must navigate the constant tension between their vows and social pressures.⁶

This research examines the appeal of power, pleasure, and possession in consecrated life, focusing on the De La Salle Brothers. Drawing on St. John Baptist de La Salle's spiritual insights and the teachings of the Church, it seeks to provide a framework for effectively addressing these challenges. The study also contributes to the broader theological discourse on consecrated life while offering practical strategies for maintaining spiritual integrity and fidelity to evangelical counsels.

For the De La Salle Brothers, the universal Church, and all those seeking a meaningful spiritual life, this survey underscores the transformative power of grace to overcome challenges. It highlights how evangelical counsels can serve as a source of joy, freedom, and profound witness in a world marked by conflicting values.

Background and Context

The spiritual challenges of human and consecrated life, particularly in the setting of religious congregations, revolve around the delicate balance of authority, pleasure, and possession.⁷ These three dimensions often interact with the vows of poverty, chastity, and obedience, which are important to the consecrated life. These difficulties are made even more difficult for the De La Salle Brothers, a religious congregation devoted to education, by their goal of interacting with the outside world while being true to their spiritual beliefs. Focusing on the conflict between their

⁶ Van Grieken, 1999. *Touching the Hearts of Students; Characteristics of Lasallian Schools*

⁷ Anthony B. Robinson. *Transforming Congregation Culture* 2003. Chapter 3

apostolic mission and their consecrated life, this essay examines how the De La Salle Brothers and other congregations deal with these spiritual difficulties. The essay looks at their lived experiences to shed light on how religious congregations might better comprehend and balance these dynamics and give workable answers to maintain their spiritual integrity in a rapidly evolving society.

The spiritual battle to strike a balance between possession, pleasure, and power in the context of human and consecrated life, especially as it is experienced by the De La Salle Brothers, is the main phenomenon of this study. Theoretically, this phenomenon can be comprehended via the prism of spiritual and psychological frameworks that study the human need for material security (possession), gratification (pleasure), and control (power). The tenets of consecrated life, poverty, chastity, and obedience frequently clash with these inclinations. The conflict emerges when people try to balance their human tendencies with their spiritual commitments, a process that necessitates constant self-awareness, discernment, and change. The De La Salle Brothers, being religious and educators, have particular difficulties in this area because their mission requires them to be involved with the world while retaining their spiritual identity. This phenomenon is important because it provides a framework for comprehending how religious communities can overcome these obstacles to attain spiritual growth and holistic integration.

Humans are naturally inclined to seek possessions, pleasure, and power, desires that profoundly shape their decisions and aspirations. For consecrated persons, the vows of poverty, chastity, and

obedience serve as a countercultural response, calling them to live in conformity with Christ and the values of the Kingdom of God.⁸

The De La Salle Brothers, driven by Saint John Baptist de La Salle, are dedicated to the mission of educating the poor while striving to live these evangelical counsels. Their commitment to poverty challenges materialism by embracing simplicity; chastity transforms their relationships into a universal love for all, and obedience fosters humility and collaboration in their mission.⁹

However, these ideals are continually tested by the temptations of modern society. The rise of consumerism, instant gratification, and a culture of individualism intensifies the struggle to remain faithful to the vows. For the Brothers of the Christian Schools, these temptations not only affect their spiritual growth but also threaten the unity of their community and the authenticity of their educational mission.¹⁰

The potential for this essay to address Evangelical Counsels justifies it. It aims to shed more light on how religious congregations might deal with the spiritual difficulties of power, pleasure, and possession. In addition to adding to the scholarly conversation on consecrated life, the essay's conclusions will provide useful guidance for religious congregations looking to uphold their spiritual integrity in a world that is changing. In the end, this research seeks to address the Church's concerns regarding the viability and relevance of religious life in the twenty-first century by enabling the De La Salle Brothers and other congregations to continue to be strong and true to their purpose.

⁸ cf. Lk 9:23-24; Mt 19:21

⁹ Van Grieken, 1999. *Touching the Hearts of Students; Characteristics of Lasallian Schools*

¹⁰ Acts 4:32

Statement of the Problem

The human desire for power, pleasure, and possessions poses significant challenges to anyone seeking to live a meaningful spiritual life, especially those who are consecrated. In a secular society, these aspirations often manifest themselves in the pursuit of wealth, status, and personal gratification, which are consistent with societal norms but contradict the values of the Kingdom of God.¹¹

For consecrated persons, including the De La Salle Brothers, these temptations are in contradiction with the vows of poverty, chastity, and obedience. Poverty requires detachment from material goods, chastity calls for disinterested love, and obedience requires the submission of the personal will to the plan of God and the mission of the community.¹²

These challenges are not just theoretical; they impact the daily lives of consecrated persons. For the De La Salle Brothers, whose mission is centered on the education of the poor, distractions related to materialism, excessive pursuit of pleasure, or ambition can weaken their spiritual foundation and hinder their ability to provide authentic Christian witness.¹³

If these challenges are ignored, the spiritual integrity of consecrated life may be compromised, leading to a gradual erosion of the values that define religious commitment. Without addressing the temptations of power, pleasure, and possessions, religious people may struggle to maintain their dedication to their vows, weakening their ability to serve as effective witnesses of the Gospel. Materialism can lead to a loss of trust in divine providence, excessive pursuit of pleasure can diminish the spirit of selfless service, and unchecked ambition can undermine communal

¹¹ Matthew 6:19-21

¹² CCC §§915-917

¹³ Van Grieken, 1999

discernment and obedience. Ultimately, these issues could result in a decline in vocations, reduced credibility of religious life, and a weakened impact on their educational mission among the poor.

Addressing these challenges, this essay will adopt a qualitative approach rooted in theological and spiritual analysis. It will explore Church teachings, the writings of St. John Baptist de La Salle, and contemporary reflections on religious life to develop a framework for maintaining spiritual balance. Additionally, interviews with the De La Salle Brothers and some religious will provide practical insights into how these challenges are experienced and addressed. It will also examine strategies such as communal support, ongoing formation, spiritual direction, and fostering a deeper trust in divine providence. By integrating theological reflection with practical application, this research aims to offer a path for the De La Salle Brothers and all religious to strengthen their commitment to their vows and sustain their mission as authentic witnesses of Christ in the modern world.

The major Objective of the Study

To understand and address the spiritual challenges faced by humans and religious individuals, especially the De La Salle Brothers, in resisting the lures of power, pleasure, and possession. It also aims to offer practical methods for enhancing their spiritual fortitude in upholding the vows of chastity, poverty, and obedience within the consecrated life.

Specific Objectives

The following goals will serve as the study's compass:

1. To analyze the underlying factors that explain why religious, particularly the De La Salle Brothers, face the temptations of possession, pleasure, and power, and how these challenges impact their spiritual life and commitment to consecrated life.
2. To examine how power, possession, and pleasure conflict with religious values and the core values of poverty, chastity, and obedience and impact the personal and community lives of humans and religious.
3. To propose practical strategies and frameworks to balance the challenges posed by power, pleasure, and possession, drawing on the teachings of the Church and of St. John Baptist de La Salle.

Prospective Research Questions

1. What are the underlying factors that contribute to the temptations of power, pleasure, and possession faced by religious individuals, particularly the De La Salle Brothers, and how do these factors affect their spiritual life and commitment to the vows of consecrated life?
2. In what ways do the temptations of power, possession, and pleasure conflict with the religious values and the core values of poverty, chastity, and obedience, and how do these conflicts influence both the personal and communal lives of religious individuals and humans in general?
3. What practical strategies and frameworks can be developed, drawing from Church teachings and the spirituality of St. John Baptist de La Salle, to help religious individuals,

particularly the De La Salle Brothers, resist and balance the challenges posed by the temptations of power, pleasure, and possession?

The Significance of the Study

This study explores the spiritual challenges that religious, including the De La Salle Brothers, face in resisting the lure of possession, pleasure, and power. It offers practical solutions to strengthen their spiritual resilience, enabling them to live out their vocation fully by their vows of poverty, chastity, and obedience. In addressing these challenges, the study highlights ways to preserve the brothers' mission to educate the poorest while ensuring the authenticity of their spiritual commitment.

In addition, the research contributes to theological and spiritual discourse by examining how the teachings of St. John Baptist de La Salle, Christian spirituality, and the doctrine of the Church can respond to contemporary challenges. Its broadly applicable findings offer guidance to both religious and laypeople for leading lives that are spiritually satisfying. Finally, by proposing concrete strategies for overcoming spiritual obstacles, the study helps religious communities remain faithful to their mission, strengthen their community bonds, and consistently witness Gospel values in their daily lives.

Justification of the Study

In a world where materialism, self-satisfaction, and individualism are becoming more and more prevalent, the research is crucial because it focuses on the experiences of the religious, and specifically the De La Salle Brothers, a religious congregation dedicated to the education of the

poor, whose mission can be directly threatened by these temptations. This study is important because it addresses the universal struggle against human desires for power, pleasure, and possession, which are particularly difficult for consecrated persons who have taken vows to live a life of poverty, chastity, and obedience.

Understanding the factors surrounding these conflicts gives important insights into the spiritual challenges faced by both individuals and religious communities. Additionally, the study provides frameworks and practical strategies rooted in Christian spirituality, the teachings of Saint Jean-Baptiste de La Salle, and the theology of the Church, giving the La Salle Brothers and other religious figures tools to uphold their commitments.

This research also has broader implications for lay and consecrated persons seeking to live spiritually meaningful lives. By offering theological, spiritual, and practical perspectives, it contributes to a deeper understanding of how to navigate modern societal pressures while maintaining the integrity of one's faith and vocation.

Scope of the Study

The research focuses on the spiritual difficulties that religious and lay people, and notably the De La Salle Brothers, experience, especially in light of their chaste, poor, and obedient vows. The study looks at how the fundamental principles of dedicated human existence clash with the temptations of ownership, pleasure, and power. It also emphasizes how these difficulties have affected their communal and spiritual lives. The paper analyzes these difficulties and suggests workable solutions by drawing on the Church's teachings, St. John Baptist de La Salle's spirituality, and pertinent theological and spiritual frameworks. The conclusions are meant to be useful to both

religious communities and laypeople looking to grow spiritually, even though the De La Salle Brothers are the main focus.

Limitations of the Study

Personal, collective, and theological interpretations of Church teachings impact perspectives on spiritual difficulties and suggested remedies. These differences could affect how well-suggested tactics fit the spiritual sensibilities or beliefs of both individuals and communities.

The study focuses on issues that arise in contemporary societies that are strongly impacted by individualism and consumerism. Although the concepts addressed are universal, this may limit the findings' applicability to cultural or geographic contexts where these influences are less noticeable.

The study does not thoroughly examine the experiences of non-Christians or non-religious persons who encounter comparable temptations, even while it covers the spiritual and human struggles of religious and Christians in general.

The study is constrained by the period for the research as well as the availability of data on the particular practices of the Church and the De La Salle Brothers. Although the suggested tactics are based on good ideas, they might need to be modified or further validated before they can be successfully applied to other religions.