

**The Letters
of
John Baptist de La Salle**



Frontispiece: John Baptist de La Salle, portrait by Pierre Léger, dated 1734, preserved in the Rome archives of the Institute. Photo by E. Rousset (*J.-B. de La Salle; Iconographie*, Boulogne: Limet, 1979, plate 5).

The Letters of John Baptist de La Salle

Translation, introduction, and commentary
by Colman Molloy, FSC

Edited with additional commentary
by Augustine Loes, FSC

1988, reprinted 2007
Lasallian Publications

This first volume of Lasallian Publications is dedicated to Maurice-Auguste Hermans, FSC (1911–1987), Doctor of Canon Law, former Assistant Superior General and Procurator General of the Institute of the Brothers of the Christian Schools, in appreciation for his scholarship and his commitment to Saint John Baptist de La Salle and to the Institute.

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of John Baptist de La Salle

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Cover: John Baptist de La Salle, an engraving by Jean-Claude Manigaud (before 1888) that reproduces the 1734 portrait by Pierre Léger. Photo by E. Rousset (*J.-B. de La Salle; Iconographie*, Boulogne: Limet, 1979, plate 6).

A Note About Lasallian Publications

This volume is the first in a series of publications intended to make available to the English reader the life and writings of John Baptist de La Salle together with the rich heritage bequeathed by this seventeenth-century French saint, educator, spiritual writer, and Founder of the Institute of the Brothers of the Christian Schools.

Lasallian Publications will include 13 volumes of the writings of De La Salle, the 3 early biographies, 4 volumes of thematic studies of various aspects of the life of De La Salle and the origins of the Institute, 3 volumes of current research, and several volumes devoted to Lasallian studies.

These publications will be drawn mainly from the documents published and analyzed in the monumental collections known as the *Cahiers lasalliens*. Presently numbering some 46 volumes, that series is the result of a decision by the 38th General Chapter of the Institute (held in Rome in 1956) to sponsor Lasallian research.

The inspiration for this decision came from Father André Rayez, SJ, whose essays on Lasallian studies and Lasallian spirituality appeared in 1952 and 1955 in *Revue d'Ascétique et de Mystique*. In the course of his research for these essays, Father Rayez took the occasion to alert the superiors of the Institute to what had already been done and what needed to be done for a more sophisticated and scholarly study of the Lasallian texts. Fortunately at that moment, perhaps for the first time in its three-hundred-year history, the Institute had the qualified men and the resources for such an undertaking.

Since its inception, the *Cahiers lasalliens* series has been under the general direction and editorship of Brother Maurice-Auguste Hermans, who spent over 50 years of service to the Institute in the Generalate in Rome. Brother Maurice died in 1987.

The first volume of the *Cahiers lasalliens* is a study by Brother Michel Sauvage of the New Testament sources for De La Salle's *Méditations pour le temps de la retraite*. Volumes 2, 3, and 11, authored by Brother Maurice, treat the various aspects of the foundation of the Institute prior to the papal Bull of Approval granted in 1725. Volumes 45 and 46 contain the doctoral dissertation of Brother Miguel Campos, an extensive and profound study of De La Salle's spiritual odyssey as manifested in specific moments of his life and expressed in the *Méditations pour le temps de la retraite*.

The biographies of De La Salle written by his contemporaries are presented in their original published form, with appropriate introductory material, in volumes 4 through 9 of the *Cahiers*. All of De La Salle's extant writings, with introduction and commentary, are to be found in volumes 10 through 25.

Volumes 26 through 42 of the *Cahiers lasalliens* contain the published results of the lifelong research of Brother Léon de Marie Aroz. These volumes present

documents pertaining to all aspects of the life and work of De La Salle: familial, civil, ecclesiastical, theological, educational, and financial. Not content with the documents that were known to exist, Brother Léon conducted an intensive search of municipal, departmental, and national archives all over France. This material is published, much of it for the first time, in the *Cabiers lasalliens*, with photographs of the original documents, extensive introductions, and scholarly commentary.

The *Cabiers lasalliens* series is by no means complete, and Lasallian scholarship continues to develop. Volume 5, dealing with the Founder's *Mémoire sur l'habit*, has yet to appear. Volumes 43 and 44 presumably await further results from the research of Brother Léon de Marie Aroz. Meanwhile a new Lasallian scholar is emerging in the person of Brother Jean-Guy Rodrigue, a Canadian, whose research on the sources of the Founder's *Méditations pour les Dimanches et les principales Fêtes de l'année* is soon to be published in the *Cabiers*.

Not all the recent research and publication relative to De La Salle and the origins of the Institute is confined to the volumes of the *Cabiers*. A notable exception is the doctoral dissertation of Brother Michel Sauvage published in 1962 in Paris under the title, *Catéchèse et Laïcat*. This seminal work treats of the role of the laity in the ministry of the Church, with special attention to the originality of the role De La Salle established for the teaching Brother in this context.

Another independently published doctoral dissertation that has contributed significantly to our understanding of De La Salle and his times is the work of Brother Yves Poutet. The study, *Le XVII^e Siècle at les Origines lasalliennes*, comprising two enormous volumes, was published in Rennes, France, in 1970.

De La Salle's educational and catechetical writings have been the special object of the research of Brother Jean Pungier. To date he has published commentaries on De La Salle's *Conduite des Écoles chrétiennes* and a source study with commentary on the catechetical sections of the Founder's *Les Devoirs d'un Chrétien envers Dieu*. Brother Jean continues his research in the Generalate of the Brothers in Rome.

In addition to these studies by seasoned scholars, many other monographs and essays have appeared over the last twenty years dealing with the education or spiritual vision of De La Salle. Most of these were originally research papers or dissertations written to fulfill requirements for advanced degrees in European universities and catechetical centers such as the Lateran University and the now defunct Jesus Magister Institute in Rome, the Institut Catholique in Paris, Lumen Vitae in Brussels, the Catholic University in Louvain, and the Pius X Pontifical Institute conducted by the Brothers in Salamanca.

This brief survey of recent Lasallian scholarship provides a context in which to understand the timeliness of Lasallian Publications.

Lasallian Publications

[updated list, 2007]

Sponsored by Christian Brothers Conference (Regional Conference of Christian Brothers of the United States of America and Toronto), the Lasallian Publications project includes eighteen volumes on the life, writings, and work of John Baptist de La Salle (1651–1719), Founder of the Institute of the Brothers of the Christian Schools, and on the early history of the Brothers.

Lasallian Sources: The Complete Works of John Baptist de La Salle

The Letters of John Baptist de La Salle. Translated and edited by Colman Molloy, FSC, and Augustine Loes, FSC. Volume 1 of Lasallian Sources: The Complete Works of John Baptist de La Salle, 1988, 2003.

The Rules of Christian Decorum and Civility. Translated by Richard Arnandez, FSC. Edited by Gregory Wright, FSC. Volume 2 of Lasallian Sources: The Complete Works of John Baptist de La Salle, 1990.

Collection of Various Short Treatises. Translated by William J. Battersby, FSC. Edited by Daniel Burke, FSC. Volume 3 of Lasallian Sources: The Complete Works of John Baptist de La Salle, 1993.

Meditations by John Baptist de La Salle. Translated by Richard Arnandez, FSC, and Augustine Loes, FSC. Edited by Augustine Loes, FSC, and Francis Huether, FSC. Volume 4 of Lasallian Sources: The Complete Works of John Baptist de La Salle, 1994.

Explanation of the Method of Interior Prayer. Translated by Richard Arnandez, FSC. Revised translation by Donald C. Mouton, FSC, editor. Volume 5 of Lasallian Sources: The Complete Works of John Baptist de La Salle, 1995.

The Conduct of the Christian Schools. Translated by F. de La Fontainerie and Richard Arnandez, FSC. Edited with notes by William Mann, FSC. Volume 6 of Lasallian Sources: The Complete Works of John Baptist de La Salle, 1996.

Rule and Foundational Documents. Translated and edited by Augustine Loes, FSC, and Ronald Isetti. Volume 7 of Lasallian Sources: The Complete Works of John Baptist de La Salle, 2002.

The Duties of a Christian to God. Translated by Richard Arnandez, FSC. Edited by Alexis James Doval. Volume 8 of Lasallian Sources: The Complete Works of John Baptist de La Salle, 2002.

Religious Instructions and Exercises of Piety for the Christian Schools. Translated by Richard Arnandez, FSC. Edited by Eugene Lappin, FSC. Volume 9 of Lasallian Sources: The Complete Works of John Baptist de La Salle, 2002.

Lasallian Resources: Biographies of John Baptist de La Salle by His Contemporaries

John Baptist de La Salle: Two Early Biographies. Dom François-Élie Maillefer, OSB, and Brother Bernard, FSC. Translated by William J. Quinn, FSC. Revised translation with notes by Donald C. Mouton, FSC. Edited by Paul Grass, FSC. Volume 1 of *Lasallian Resources: Biographies of John Baptist de La Salle by His Contemporaries*, 1996.

The Life of John Baptist de La Salle, Founder of the Institute of the Brothers of the Christian Schools; A Biography in Three Books. Jean-Baptiste Blain. Translated by Richard Arnandez, FSC. Edited by Luke Salm, FSC. Published in separate bindings with continuous pagination, 2000. *The Mind and Heart of John Baptist de La Salle.* Jean-Baptiste Blain. Translated by Edwin Bannon, FSC. Edited by Augustine Loes, FSC, 2002. The four books by Jean-Baptiste Blain are volume 2 of *Lasallian Resources: Biographies of John Baptist de La Salle by His Contemporaries*.

Lasallian Resources: Early Documents

John Baptist de La Salle: The Formative Years. Luke Salm, FSC. Volume 1 of *Lasallian Resources: Early Documents*, 1989.

The First De La Salle Brothers; 1681–1719. Augustine Loes, FSC. Volume 2 of *Lasallian Resources: Early Documents*, 1999.

Lasallian Resources: Current Lasallian Studies

John Baptist de La Salle and Special Education: A Study of Saint Yon. Othmar Würth, FSC. Translated by Augustine Loes, FSC. Adapted by Francis Huether, FSC. Edited by Bonaventure Miner, FSC. Volume 1 of *Lasallian Resources: Current Lasallian Studies*, 1988.

So Favored by Grace: Education in the Time of John Baptist de La Salle. Edited by Lawrence J. Colhocker, FSC. Volume 2 of *Lasallian Resources: Current Lasallian Studies*, 1991.

Spirituality in the Time of John Baptist de La Salle. Edited by Robert C. Berger, FSC. Volume 3 of *Lasallian Resources: Current Lasallian Studies*, 1999.

John Baptist de La Salle: The Message of His Catechism. Jean Pungier, FSC. Translated by Oswald Murdoch, FSC. Edited by Gerard Rummery, FSC. Volume 4 of *Lasallian Resources: Current Lasallian Studies*, 1999.

Sacred Scripture in the Spirituality of Saint John Baptist de La Salle. Luis Varela Martínez, FSC. Translated by Francis Vesel, FSC. Edited by Donald C. Mouton, FSC. Volume 5 of *Lasallian Resources: Current Lasallian Studies*, 2000.

Contents

Illustrations	xiv
Abbreviations	xv
Acknowledgments	xvi
Introduction	1
 The Letters of John Baptist de La Salle	 13
[Information within brackets is conjectural, based on internal evidence.]	
1 To the Mayor and Councilors of Château-Porcien. June 20, 1682	 15
2 To a Brother. May 15, 1701	18
 3 to 5: To Brother Denis	 21
3 May 30, 1701	22
4 July 8, [1708]	24
5 August 1, 1708]	28
 6 To a Brother. [1702]	 31
 7 to 12: To Brother Hubert	 33
7 May 5, 1702	34
8 June 1, 1706	35
9 January 30, 1708	40
10 April 18, [1708]	42
11 July 20, [1709]	45
12 October 2, 1710	48
 13 to 32: To Brother Gabriel Drolin	 54
13 August 13, 1704	59
14 [October 1704]	63
15 December 23, [1704]	67
16 February 11, 1705	68
17 April 27, 1705	71
18 August 28, 1705	75
19 September 4, 1705	78
20 October 28, 1705	82
21 February 11, 1706	84
22 April 16, 1706	87
23 May 12, 1706	89

24	June 21, 1706	91
25	November 26, 1706	93
26	April 1, 1707	96
27	February 14, 1710	99
28	May 12, 1710	103
29	August 24, [1711]	107
30	[July 1712)	111
31	December 16, 1712	113
32	December 5, 1716	117
32-a and 32-b: From Brother Barthélemy to Brother Gabriel Drolin		123
	32-a, February 18, 1718	123
	32-b, April 13, 1719	126
33 and 34: To Father des Hayes		128
33	September 26, 1704	128
34	November 18, 1704	129
35	To Monsieur Rigoley. July 10, 1705	132
36	To Brother Paulin. October 25, [1705]	134
37	To Brother Thomas. [1705–1707]	136
38 to 48: To Brother Robert		138
38	[1705]	138
39	May 1, [1708]	140
40	May 21, [1708]	141
41	December 7, [1708]	143
42	February 26, [1709]	146
43	[March 1709]	147
44	April 26, [1709]	149
45	[1709]	152
46	[1709]	153
47	[1709]	154
48	November 3, [1710]	155
49	To Brother Ponce. [January 1706]	156
50	To Brother Clément. June 26, 1706	158
51	To Brother Séverin. July 13, 1706	160
52 to 54: To Brother Joseph		161
52	[December 1706]	161
52-a	July 15, 1708	162

52-b	July 30, 1709	163
52-c	November 16, 1711	163
53	December 23, [1710]	164
54	February 6, [1711]	166
55 to 64:	To Brother Mathias	168
55	December 3, [1706]	169
56	November 18, 1707	170
57	December 30, [1707]	172
58	January 13, [1708]	173
59	February 8, [1708]	174
60	March 23, [1708]	175
61	April 4, [1708]	177
62	April 13, [1708]	180
63	[1708]	181
64	May 16, [1708]	182
64-a:	From Brother Ponce to Brother Mathias. June 4, 1708	184
65 to 70:	To various unnamed Brothers	186
65	[September 14, 1709]	187
66	[September 14, 1709]	187
67	[September 15, 1709]	188
68	[September 1709]	189
69	[1709]	190
70	[September 21, 1709]	191
71	To Brother Charles. [1710–1711]	192
72	To Brother Anastase. January 28, 1711	193
73 to 79:	To various unnamed Brother Directors	194
73	To a Brother Director	195
74	To the same Brother Director	195
75	To the same Brother Director	196
76	To a Brother Director	197
77	To a Brother Director	198
78	To a Brother Director	199
79	To a Brother Director	200
80 to 104:	To various unnamed Brothers	202
80	To a Brother	203
81	To the same Brother	205

82	To the same Brother	206
83	To a Brother	207
84	To a Brother	208
85	To a Brother	208
86	To a Brother	209
87	To a Brother	210
88	To a Brother	211
89	To a Brother	212
90	To a Brother	213
91	To a Brother	213
92	To a Brother	214
93	To a Brother	215
94	To a Brother	216
95	To a Brother [Director]	216
96	To a Brother [Director]	217
97	To a Brother	217
98	To a Brother	218
99	To a Brother	219
100	To a Brother	219
101	To a Brother	219
102	To the same Brother	219
103	To a Brother	220
104	To a Brother	220
 105 to 114: To members of religious communities		221
105	To a member of a religious community of men	221
106	To a member of a religious community of women	223
107	To the same woman religious	225
108	To a woman religious he has been directing	226
109	To a fervent woman religious	228
110	To a woman religious who has repented	230
111	To a woman religious	232
112	To a woman religious	234
113	To the same woman religious	234
114	To a religious he has been directing	235
 115 to 118: To a laywoman he has been directing		235
115	To a laywoman he has been directing	236
116	To the same laywoman	236
117	To the same laywoman	236
118	To the same laywoman	237

119	To Brother Irénée [1716]	237
120	To his nephew, Jean-François Maillefer [early 1717]	239
121	To Monsieur Gense of Calais [after April 1717]	241
122 and 123:	To laymen who know the Brothers	242
122	To a layman, a benefactor of the Brothers [after the 1717 General Chapter]	242
123	To a notable person at Saint-Denis [after the 1717 General Chapter]	243
124 to 130:	To Brother Barthélemy	244
124	[Between August 1705 and July 1709]	244
125	January 17, 1718	244
126	[March 1718]	246
127	[1717-1718]	248
128	[After 1717]	248
129	[After May 1717]	249
130	[After May 1717]	249
131	To his niece, Jeanne-Remiette de La Salle [1718]	249
132	To Brother Director of the community at Calais, January 28, 1719	251
133	To his brother, Canon Jean-Louis de La Salle, March 2, 1718	255
	133-a, From Canon Jean-Louis de La Salle to his brother, John Baptist, January 3, 1719	258
134	To a Brother. [February or March 1719]	263
	Postscript	265
	Appendix A: Directories	267
	Appendix B: Studies Contained in Circular 335	279
	Appendix C: Numbering of the Letters	289
	Bibliography	293
	Index	299

Illustrations

1.	John Baptist de La Salle, by Pierre Léger, 1734	<i>frontispiece</i>
2.	The Institute in France, 1719	2
3.	De La Salle's signature	13
4.	Letter 1, earliest known letter of De La Salle	17
5.	Letter 2, earliest known letter of De La Salle to a Brother	19
6.	Letter 3, to Brother Denis	23
7.	Ground plan of the manor of Saint Yon, 1777	29
8.	The country house at Vaugirard	52
9.	The seals of the Institute	66
10.	Signatures of the three men who made the Heroic Vow, 1691	73
11.	The school building in Dijon	81
12.	Letter 26, to Brother Gabriel Drolin	98
13.	The school building in Mende	100
14.	Letter 32, to Brother Gabriel Drolin	118
15.	Letter 33, to Father des Hayes	130
16.	Letter 41, to Brother Robert	144
17.	Letter 60, to Brother Mathias	176
18.	Letter 61, to Brother Mathias	178
19.	Letter 133, to his brother, Canon Jean-Louis de La Salle	254

Abbreviations

AE	Archives of the District of England
AMG	Archives of the Brothers of the Christian Schools, Rome, Italy (<i>Archives, Maison Générale</i>)
BL	<i>De La Salle: Letters and Documents</i> , edited by W. J. Battersby
Blain	<i>The Life of John Baptist de La Salle</i> , Books One, Two, and Three, by Jean-Baptiste Blain (Landover, MD: Lasallian Publications, 2000)
BR	<i>Conduite admirable de la divine Providence en la personne du vénérable serviteur de Dieu, Jean-Baptiste de La Salle</i> , by Brother Bernard, FSC, in <i>John Baptist de La Salle: Two Early Biographies</i> (Landover, MD: Lasallian Publications, 1996)
CL	<i>Cahiers lasalliens</i> (Rome: Maison Jean-Baptiste de La Salle)
ÉC	<i>Les Lettres de Saint Jean-Baptiste de La Salle: Édition Critique</i> , edited by Brother Félix-Paul, FSC
MH	<i>The Mind and Heart of John Baptist de La Salle</i> , by Jean-Baptiste Blain (Landover, MD: Lasallian Publications, 2002)
Ms. 22	Manuscript 22, a notebook containing extracts from letters written by John Baptist de La Salle, preserved in the archives of the Generalate of the Brothers of the Christian Schools, Rome, Italy
OC	<i>Œuvres Complètes</i> , Études Lasalliennes, Rome, Italy
OC LA	<i>Œuvres Complètes: Lettres autographes</i> , letters in De La Salle's handwriting
OC LC	<i>Œuvres Complètes: Lettres copiées</i> , copies of De La Salle's letters written in someone else's hand
OC LI	<i>Œuvres Complètes: Lettres imprimées</i> , letters of De La Salle quoted by his early biographers (Bernard, Blain, and Maillefer)

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- ◆ Br. Emile Rousset, FSC, for permission to reproduce from his pictorial production, *J. B. de La Salle: Iconographie*, the portrait of De La Salle by Léger, plate 5; the engraving by Manigaud, plate 6; De La Salle's signature, plate 41; the engraving of Vaugirard, plate 109; the plan of St. Yon, plate 114; the photo of Dijon, plate 122, and the photo of Mende, plate 124
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1984

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Augustine Loes, FSC
1987

Introduction

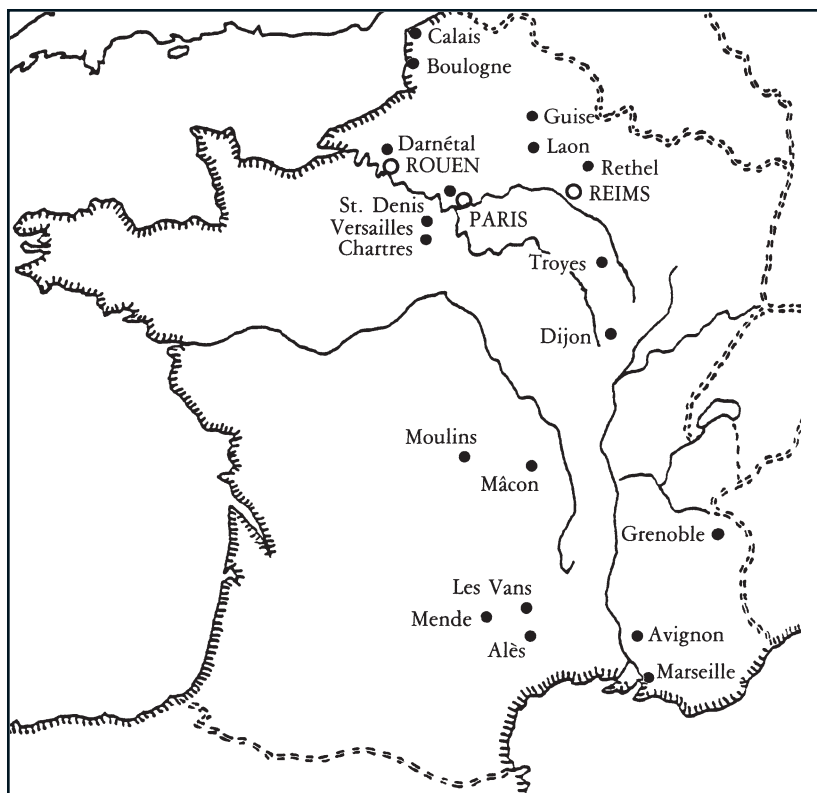
I

When Adrien Nyel arrived from Rouen to establish the first tuition-free school for boys in Reims in 1679, Canon John Baptist de La Salle of the Reims Cathedral gave him valuable assistance. De La Salle did not, however, have any thought of taking more than a passing interest in this good work. But as time went on and Nyel moved from Reims to promote schools elsewhere, De La Salle began to feel that if he did not take a closer interest in the venture, it would quickly come to nothing. Step by step, he became more and more involved and eventually became convinced that the direction of the work of schools in which poor boys could be given a thorough Christian education was to be for him the expression of God's will. He soon found himself the guide and superior of a small band of dedicated teachers. Under his direction this little community increased in numbers, developed existing schools, and opened new ones as their services were requested elsewhere.

By 1688 De La Salle decided that the Community of the Brothers of the Christian Schools, as the teachers now called themselves, should move beyond the boundaries of the archdiocese of Reims. That year he went to Paris with two of the Brothers at the invitation of Father de La Barmondière, the pastor of Saint Sulpice. In this parish De La Salle and the two Brothers took charge of the charity school for boys.

This move to Paris brought to De La Salle and the Brothers a host of problems, some of which beset De La Salle for most of the remaining years of his life. The Writing Masters and the Masters of the Little Schools of Paris had established associations to protect the interests of their members. They believed that De La Salle's schools robbed them of some of their students and thereby deprived them of a means of livelihood. These associations brought lawsuits against De La Salle and the Brothers, and these court battles plagued them for many years. In the meantime, the situation of the Brothers in Reims deteriorated. They were not ready to function without their Founder.

De La Salle had left behind him in Reims a flourishing Community of Brothers engaged in conducting a school for boys, a training school for teachers who were destined for schools in small rural centers, and a training house for young men who wished to join the new Community—in all, a Community of some 50 persons. By 1690 he had taken with him to Paris the boys, *les petits Frères*, who were preparing to enter the novitiate, but in the capital city they lost interest in the life of the Brothers and withdrew.



This map indicates the sites in 1719 in France of the communities and schools of the Institute of the Brothers of the Christian Schools.

Meanwhile, deprived of De La Salle's guiding hand, the training college for rural teachers soon closed. Eight of the sixteen Brothers in the Reims community and two of the four now in Paris left the struggling congregation. There were no replacements. Brother Henri L'Heureux, who was studying for the priesthood in view of succeeding De La Salle as Superior, suddenly died. At this critical juncture, De La Salle was confined to bed for six weeks. Several of the Brothers became physically ill, suffering from exhaustion because of their work in the overcrowded classrooms. Others, their initial enthusiasm waning, began to falter in their commitment.

Still, De La Salle did not waver in his conviction that it was God's will that Christian Schools were to be maintained for poor boys. As usual, he spent considerable time in prayer. He consulted the more experienced and dependable Brothers and then with characteristic vigor set about taking measures to restore the situation, for he feared that otherwise the Brothers' work in the schools would completely fail. One of the steps he took to stabilize the situation was the introduction of monthly correspondence with the Brothers. The Brothers were to write to him regularly each month, telling him of their community relationships, their efforts in the classroom, their progress in prayer, and their fidelity to their community practices. He hoped in this way that the Brothers would reflect on their progress as teaching Brothers and that he would be able to keep in touch with those Brothers whom he could not see and talk to personally, giving them encouragement, guidance, and advice. He continued this practice of monthly correspondence until he relinquished his position as superior in May 1717. By that time there were just over 100 Brothers in the Community, so that during the years of De La Salle's superiorship, there must have been thousands of letters written by the Brothers and thousands sent back in reply by De La Salle. The letters from the Brothers were received in confidence, and De La Salle would have destroyed them. Very few of De La Salle's replies have come down to us. We do not know with certainty what became of the great majority of these replies.

De La Salle's early biographers—Brother Bernard, Canon Blain, and Dom Maillefer—certainly had a number of De La Salle's letters at their disposal, for many letters are quoted either in full or in part during the course of their biographies. Blain also refers to a number of letters De La Salle wrote to Sister Louise, the hermitess of Parménie, whom De La Salle consulted when he visited her retreat near Grenoble. Brother Barthélemy tells of a number of letters written “in defense of the Constitution of Our Holy Father Pope Clement XI, which had considerable effect.” Yet, only one copy of one of these letters is known to exist. Furthermore, De La Salle himself remarks that several of his letters to Gabriel Drolin in Rome either went astray or were intercepted. But these

missing letters would add only a small number to those we already possess. After his death, a concerted effort was made to gather together De La Salle's correspondence, with a view to the publication of his biography. The recovery of some letters (for example, those addressed to Brother Mathias that were found in the attic of a house in a village near Avignon around 1850) possibly gives us a clue that the loss of many others occurred during the period of the French Revolution, when the Institute of the Brothers was all but destroyed.

In his *De La Salle: Letters and Documents*, Brother Battersby estimates the number of letters written by De La Salle to the Brothers at about 18,000. In *Lasalliana* (No. 02-4-08), "An X-Ray Photograph of Saint John Baptist de La Salle," Brother Saturnino Gallego gives the more conservative estimate of 7,000. In his essay in *Circulaires Instructives et Administratives* (No. 335), Brother Félix-Paul concludes that perhaps as many as 2,000 or 3,000 letters have been lost.

II

Soon after he became interested in Adrien Nyel's work in 1679, De La Salle also became convinced that if the schools were to be of any significant value to the poor boys of the city by giving them a solid foundation for Christian living, something would have to be done to give his teachers a good religious and pedagogic formation. De La Salle took advantage of the frequent absences of Nyel to try to supply this need. Despite his first tentative measures—bringing the teachers into his house after class hours, instructing them in the methods of prayer, and giving them some form of simple education, both secular and religious—the venture seemed doomed to failure. The first group of teachers simply wanted some form of employment that would provide them with a modest living. They had not bargained for what De La Salle was asking of them. Soon, they departed. New volunteers, who knew what De La Salle was trying to do, arrived, and before long the little band of teachers evolved into a kind of religious community.

De La Salle was aware of previous efforts in France to establish and to ensure tuition-free Christian schools for children. In the early seventeenth century, numerous congregations of women were founded for the education of poor girls, but the situation was different for poor boys. The aristocratic and rich provided amply for the quality education of their sons and daughters, and those who had a more modest degree of wealth could send their children to elementary tuition schools. But the really poor had no choice but to allow their children to roam the streets. Saint Peter Fourier had tried to interest the Augustinian Canons Regular in the diocese of Toul in providing schools for poor boys. He had suc-

ceeded in the reform of the canons at the request of the bishop, but he failed to win their support for tuition-free schools.

Charles D  mia, another educational reformer, had founded the Society of Saint Charles in Lyon in 1672 for the Christian instruction of poor children. The members of the society were either priests or young men training for the priesthood. D  mia died in 1689, and shortly thereafter the Society of Saint Charles ceased to exist. De La Salle's own friend and guide, Father Barr  , a religious of the Order of Minims, established two congregations in Rouen, the Sisters of Providence to teach in schools for girls and the Brothers of the Holy Child Jesus to conduct similar schools for boys. The Sisters of Providence flourished and came to Reims, where, under the direction of Canon Roland, they developed into the Congregation of the Sisters of the Child Jesus. Barr  , like D  mia, however, had little success with his congregation of Brothers.

De La Salle was convinced that the work of Christian education of poor children was an expression of God's plan of salvation. However, the first teachers, whom he had tried to prepare for the work, quickly abandoned him. He realized, therefore, the urgent need to gather men who would be dedicated and who would undertake this educational work for religious motives, since there was no prospect of earning a rewarding livelihood through it. He addressed himself totally to the task of building up such a group of men. Initially, he drew up a simple rule of life for the new group of teachers. They adopted a distinctive form of attire and took the name, "Brothers of the Christian Schools," to underscore their relationship with one another and with their students not only as teachers but also as Brothers.

The rule of life was adapted throughout De La Salle's lifetime and was finally completed after the General Chapter of the Brothers in 1717, when he handed over the superiorship of the Community to his successor, Brother Barth  lemy.

In the development of the Brothers' Rule, De La Salle used the rules of certain religious orders, but he adapted them to the needs of his Brothers. According to the Lateran Decree of 1215, the establishment of new religious orders within the Church was forbidden. Only four Rules were recognized—Saint Basil's, Saint Augustine's, Saint Benedict's, and Saint Francis's. Such disciplinary regulation did not allow for new forms of religious life in the Church to meet new needs emerging in society. But approval was requested and given during the sixteenth century for numerous new congregations of women and for at least nine groups of Clerks Regular. The most notable of the new Clerks Regular was the Society of Jesus. De La Salle had to demonstrate that a new congregation such as the Brothers of the Christian Schools responded to a contemporary need as yet unprovided for within the Church in France and also that its

Rule and Constitutions were based on the traditional principles of the religious life. Thus we find prominent in the Rule of 1718, in chapter 16, the following statement (*Rule and Foundational Documents*, 68):

It is necessary that the Brothers apply to themselves and take for the foundation and support of their regularity what Saint Augustine says at the beginning of his Rule: those who live in a Community ought before all else to love God and then their neighbor because these are the principal commandments given us by God and because any regularity whatever, if separated from the observance of these two commandments, is quite useless for salvation.

The members of religious life follow certain basic principles that are common to all orders and congregations at all times. The application of these principles and the means taken to put them into effect vary according to the needs which give rise to the foundation of the religious bodies. We find, then, that De La Salle studied the Rule of Saint Benedict, the prime model of all Rules of the religious and monastic life in the Western Church, and was also aware of the reforms and writings of Abbé Armand-Jean Le Bouthiller de Rancé, the Abbot of La Trappe, which were being widely discussed in France at that time. Paragraph 1 of Letter 106 refers to one of De Rancé's books. Also during the seventeenth century, the Benedictine Congregation of Saint Maur became established and spread throughout France. De La Salle was a close friend of Dom Claude de Bretagne, Prior of the Maurist monastery of Saint Remy in Reims. Moreover, François-Élie Maillefer and Simon-Louis Maillefer, two of De La Salle's nephews, sons of his sister Marie, were Maurist Benedictines, so De La Salle had ample opportunity to study the life and Rule of a Benedictine monastery at close hand.

Dom P. Salmon, OSB, in an article published in 1959, "*Ascèse Monastique et Exercices Spirituels dans les Constitutions (Saint Maur) de 1646*," wrote that the basic principles of the monastic life have always been separation from the world, silence, stability, poverty, celebration of the Divine Office, obedience, and the formation of young religious. The Divine Office, the *Opus Dei*, or Work of God, is the particular community duty of the Benedictine monastery, and except for the recitation of the Office, the remaining principles as enunciated by Dom Salmon had an influence on the Rule that was adopted by the Brothers of the Christian Schools at their General Chapter of 1717, after having been written by De La Salle himself at the request of that Chapter.

In his letters De La Salle never tired of reminding his Brothers of these principles of Benedictine spirituality. For the Brothers, however, their *Opus Dei* was the Christian education of the children in their classes.

Not being priests, they were under no obligation to say the Divine Office. Their daily schedule, moreover, made it impossible for them to recite the Office together in choir. De La Salle himself came to the decision that he would have to choose between devoting his time either to the responsibilities of being a canon or to those of being the Superior of the new body of religious teachers. He chose to resign from the canonry. He frequently stated that the Brothers were to make no distinction between the work of their own salvation and the work of the Christian education of the children in their classes.

Separation from secular affairs, strict silence within the community, the austerity of the life of poverty, and insistence on the importance of unquestioning obedience—these practices De La Salle mentioned again and again in his letters to his Brothers.

Noteworthy too is that when the Brothers made their first perpetual vows in 1694, they included the vow of stability in the formula. Under the original Benedictine Rule, stability was promised to the monastery into which the monk was received. In the Maurist Congregation, this vow was made to the congregation, not to the individual monastery. In like manner the Brothers vowed stability to their Society.

There were other influences on De La Salle which also affected the lives of the Brothers. In *Explication de la Méthode d'Oraison*, which he wrote for the Brothers' instruction, De La Salle followed closely the method of prayer he practiced during his days at the Seminary of Saint Sulpice. The school schedule of the Brothers required that formal community prayer be restricted to fixed times each day, but prayerfulness was to be cultivated throughout the day, both in and out of class, by frequently recalling the presence of God. The Brothers' practice of saying the rosary when walking through the streets also no doubt came from the Sulpician custom.

De La Salle, additionally, showed a marked appreciation for the Society of Jesus, whose Rule and Constitutions he knew well and whose loyalty to the Pope was much in line with his own. He was indebted to the Jesuits for the rule on modesty and the regulations for community recreation.

De La Salle makes frequent reference in his letters to the various spiritual and community exercises practiced throughout the day by the Brothers. The following is a summary of these practices:

- ♦ **4:30 A.M.** Rising and a quarter of an hour spent in preparation for prayer.
- ♦ **5:00 A.M.** Vocal prayer for about fifteen minutes. Interior prayer until Mass at 6:00 A.M.
- ♦ **After Mass until 7:15 A.M.** Either secular or religious studies, followed by breakfast, during which an instructive book was read publicly.

- ♦ **After morning classes.** Religious studies until 11:30 A.M., when the community assembled in the oratory for examination of conscience regarding a particular fault (called Particular Examen, employing the method developed by Saint Ignatius), followed by the midday meal.
- ♦ **After the meal.** Community recreation together for an hour.
- ♦ **Afternoon classes from 1:30 P.M. to 4:30 P.M.** Religious studies until 5:30 P.M., followed by spiritual reading and prayer until 6:30 P.M.; then the evening meal and community recreation for one hour.
- ♦ **8:30 P.M.** Religious studies for one-half hour, followed by community night prayer and retiring.

The monastic chapter of faults was divided into two parts. Every day before the evening meal, each Brother confessed to the Brother Director in the presence of the community any exterior faults he had committed during the day. On Fridays the Brothers assembled at the end of the evening recreation and in the presence of the Director pointed out to each other defects that had been apparent in the conduct of one another during the week. For many years these two practices were known among the English-speaking Brothers as the *accusation of faults* and the *advertisement of defects*. Both practices have been officially abandoned in recent years.

III

De La Salle's letters addressed to the Brothers have quite a different tone from those addressed to persons not belonging to the Institute. In the latter group there is generally a great deal of formality. This more formal tone is illustrated in De La Salle's letter to his own brother, Canon Jean-Louis. On the other hand, all correspondence with the Brothers begins without any formality at all, but in a familiar manner, with the words "My very dear Brother" occurring usually within the opening sentence. Similarly, these letters invariably close with *tout à vous*, which is rendered "Totally yours." The body of each of these letters reads like a conversation, while letters to people outside the Institute are often in a style almost impossible to translate into the more familiar style of contemporary times. De La Salle identifies himself completely with the Brothers, abandoning all claims to the social status he possessed in a century and a society where such claims were rigorously maintained.

From the letters we learn scarcely anything about the difficulties that De La Salle personally experienced or the opposition that dogged him throughout his life. His correspondence with Gabriel Drolin is the only exception to this pattern, for De La Salle liked to keep his disciple in Rome aware of what was happening to the Institute in France. But even in these letters, references to himself and his problems are few. The violence of the Writing Masters and the Masters of the Little Schools, their

physical attacks on the schools, the court cases they brought against De La Salle, the fines imposed, and the prohibition against teaching in Paris are but obliquely mentioned. Brother Nicolas Vuyart's betrayal of his responsibility and of the confidence placed in him as Director of the training school for rural teachers is only indirectly mentioned in a reply to Drolin's complaint about what Drolin considers to be De La Salle's lack of confidence in him.

De La Salle's replies to the Brothers are direct and precise. They give the impression that De La Salle had his correspondent's letter in front of him as he wrote his reply point by point with here a word of encouragement, there a reprimand, now a little irony, but mostly with advice for living in community and the management of classes. He makes no attempt to use the polished phrase. The replies seem to be those of a man with more work to do than he really has time for, a man in a hurry.

To many readers it might appear that De La Salle spends too much time dealing with trivialities, insisting on minor points of the Rule, like sounding the bell the correct number of times for the various spiritual exercises. But we have to take into consideration that the Brothers of those days were all beginners in the religious life. None of them had experience in this kind of lifestyle; there were no established traditions for them to follow. They were often living in houses in groups of two or three without the support of a community of experienced men. The original local superiors were men who had been members of the Society for only a few years.

De La Salle was not only the Superior of the Society of Brothers; he was also at their own insistence their spiritual director and confessor. Thus, in several of his letters we find him readily giving encouragement and help to Brothers with troubled consciences. He won a reputation outside his new Community too as a spiritual director, and people were recommended to his guidance. Often he found himself asked to direct men and women in their search for greater spiritual progress in their lives. It is interesting to note that the letters he wrote to these persons outside the Institute of the Brothers are much more detailed and more filled with spiritual guidance than the majority of those written to the Brothers themselves. At least, this is certainly the case of those letters that have come down to us from Canon Blain, one of De La Salle's first biographers.

In addition to the letters to the Brothers and to others who sought his guidance, this volume contains one letter De La Salle wrote to refute the claim that he was one of those who had appealed against the papal Bull *Unigenitus*, a document which condemned as unorthodox certain statements of opinion drawn from the *Moral Reflections* of Quesnel. There is also included a strongly worded letter, written very probably to

his nephew, Canon Jean-François Maillefer, who had appealed to the civil courts against a decision handed down by the bishop in a matter of ecclesiastical discipline. Jean-François was the brother of François-Élie, another early biographer of De La Salle. In these two letters De La Salle clearly manifested his position of adherence to the teaching authority of the Church, especially as embodied in the authoritative decrees of the Pope.

IV

The first English edition of the letters of John Baptist de La Salle was prepared and published in 1952 by Brother W. J. Battersby to commemorate the 300th anniversary of the birth of De La Salle. In the same year and as part of the same commemoration, number 335 of the *Circulaires Instructives et Administratives* for private distribution among the Brothers of the Christian Schools appeared under the title of *Les Lettres de Saint Jean-Baptiste de La Salle*. Like all such circulars until recent times, it was published in French. In the preparatory notice to this French edition, written by Brother Athanase-Émile, Superior General from 1946 to 1952, no mention is made of the man who prepared the letters for publication. The Superior did, however, thank the archivists of the Generalate for their meticulous work over a period of two years. A second edition in French, *Édition Critique* (1954), reveals that both Circular No. 335 and *Édition Critique* are the work of one man, Brother Félix-Paul.

Although Battersby's English edition of the letters and Félix-Paul's Circular No. 335 both appeared in 1952 and although both were introduced by Brother Athanase-Émile, there is no mention in either publication of the other. Brother Battersby would have used the same source material of the original autograph letters of De La Salle, the same authenticated copies, and the same letters contained in the so-called Manuscript 22, all kept in the archives of the Generalate in Rome. There is nothing to suggest that Battersby made use of Félix-Paul's modernized French version of the originals. This fact makes Battersby's contribution to the study of the spirit and work of De La Salle all the more remarkable. He most surely read the autograph letters in the original or their facsimile reproductions (which were made in view of the damage done to the originals over the course of two and one-half centuries) and brought his expertise to bear on the French of the seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries with its own orthography, style, and idiom as well as its numerous historical allusions.

Because of his accomplishment, we cannot speak highly enough of Battersby's pioneer work in making De La Salle's correspondence available to English-speaking readers. However, there has been much research

done on the life, the work, and the writings of De La Salle since the General Chapter of 1956. That Chapter decided to promote research into the publication of texts and documents capable of serving as a basis for a scientific study of the life and work of John Baptist de La Salle. As a result of this decision, more light has been shed on his writings; some earlier dubious renderings of the texts of these writings have been clarified, and letters and documents hitherto unknown have been discovered.

The results of all this study and research are published in *Cahiers lasaliens*, a series of over 62 volumes. This scholarly, extensive collection is the result of the competence of Brothers Louis-Marie Aroz, Miguel Campos, Maurice-Auguste Hermans, Yves Poutet, Michel Sauvage, and others.

This present volume is based mainly on the *Édition Critique* of Brother Félix-Paul, which had been prepared for publication by Georges Rigault, author of *Histoire générale de l'Institut des Frères des Écoles chrétiennes* (1936, hereafter, *Histoire générale*). It is Georges Rigault who notes that at the time Circular No. 335 was published, Félix-Paul was already well advanced with his preparations for *Édition Critique*. He had just completed his work for that edition when, in the first week of July 1952, he took ill. He died on July 17 of that year. Brother Athanase-Émile died shortly after. His place as Superior of the Institute was taken by Brother Denis, Vicar General, who requested Georges Rigault to prepare Félix-Paul's work for publication.

It is difficult to give an adequate appreciation for the work of Brother Félix-Paul. His *Édition Critique* is an excellent example of a scholarly study, providing the results of careful historical and sociological research into the background and details of all the letters. It is especially valuable for the extensive documentation of information about the Brothers to whom the letters were addressed and about Brothers and other persons mentioned in the letters, as well as about the events alluded to by De La Salle. Most of the commentary in this present English edition of the letters is based on the work of Brother Félix-Paul. Brother Battersby's observations have also provided useful information.

In Battersby's English translation, the letters of De La Salle are arranged in two principal groups: (1) autograph letters and (2) those letters preserved only as copies. These latter are in two categories according to their arrangement in the archives of the Generalate in Rome. Within each of the groups, the letters are arranged chronologically as far as possible. Battersby's edition has a special value in presenting, along with the English translation and commentary, the original French text with only minor accommodations to modern typesetting.

In Brother Félix-Paul's *Édition Critique*, the letters are arranged in the alphabetical order of the names of the recipients, from Brother Anastase to Brother Thomas. There then follow letters to unidentified recipients,

arranged according to their office (for example, Directors, other Brothers) and persons outside the Institute, even though some of these latter recipients are known. *Édition Critique* also includes excerpts of letters that are quoted in Blain's biography of De La Salle and that do not appear in Battersby's translation. Some of Blain's quotations from the letters are also known from other sources, including the other early biographies by Bernard and Maillefer. The most important of these other sources is Manuscript 22, a collection of copies of 36 letters of De La Salle, all written in the same hand, probably before the French Revolution. *Édition Critique* made use of these other sources to reconstitute the texts of Blain when it seemed appropriate. A comparison of Blain's version with these other sources is made in volume 10 of the *Cabiers lasalliens*, pages 137–150. In the present volume, this comparison is illustrated in the commentary following Letter 80.

In the present volume also an attempt is made to arrange the letters in chronological order, regardless of whether they are autographs or copies or whether the names of the recipients are known. At the same time, the letters addressed to the same correspondent are grouped together. It is hoped that this arrangement will give an appreciation for the gradual development of the Institute as well as insight into the various stages in the life of De La Salle. The exact dates of some letters, of course, are not known, but letters whose dates can be estimated by their contents have been inserted into approximate chronological order. Letters whose dates cannot be determined follow those De La Salle wrote during the period when he was carrying on an active correspondence with the Brothers and with people outside the Institute.

Throughout the text, John Baptist de La Salle is most often referred to as *De La Salle*, which is how he signed his letters, or simply as the Founder of the Brothers of the Christian Schools. At the beginning of each letter, the documentary sources are given, using the abbreviations listed on page xv. When the date of the letter or the place from which it was sent is not part of the letter itself but must be inferred, the information is placed in brackets at the head of the letter. Each letter is separated into numbered paragraphs, following the arrangement of *Édition Critique*. Further information about some Brothers to whom these letters were addressed can be found in *The First De La Salle Brothers, 1681–1719*, by Augustine Loes, FSC (Landover, MD: Lasallian Publications, 1999).

The Letters
of
John Baptist de La Salle

De La Salle

Letter 1: To the Mayor and Councilors of Château-Porcien

lithographic facsimile; AMG; BL I.1; ÉC 111; OC LA 111¹

This is the earliest letter of John Baptist de La Salle that we possess. It was written at a critical moment in the history of the Institute. De La Salle was 31 years old and living in his family home in Reims. He had just made the decision to leave his home on Rue Sainte-Marguerite to live with the teachers he was training in a house he had rented on rue Neuve. This is the house that Maillefer, in one of the earliest biographies of De La Salle, calls the “cradle of the Institute.”² The Saturday mentioned in paragraph 3 of the letter, when the two teachers were sent to Château-Porcien, was the very day when the new community moved into its own house.

This letter was discovered by Archbishop Thomas-Marie-Joseph Gousset of Reims in the episcopal library in 1843 during the investigation leading to the process of beatification of De La Salle. The original was lost during the beatification process but has been preserved in a lithograph facsimile. Battersby thought this facsimile was actually the original letter and placed it first in his presentation of the autograph letters.

Reims
June 20, 1682

Gentlemen,

- 1 Even were I to take but very little interest in what concerns the glory of God, I would have to be quite insensitive not to let myself be moved by the urgent pleas of your Dean and by the courteous manner in which you honored me by writing to me today.
- 2 I would be quite guilty, Gentlemen, not to send you schoolmasters from our Community, in view of the enthusiasm and the zeal that you show me for the Christian instruction and education of your children.
- 3 Please believe, therefore, that nothing will be dearer to my heart than to support your good intentions in this matter and that by next Saturday I will send you two schoolmasters, with whom I hope you will be satisfied, to open their school on the day after the feast of Saint Peter. I am extremely obliged

1. See Abbreviations, xv.

2. CL 6:45; *John Baptist de La Salle: Two Early Biographies*, 43.

to you for all your courtesies, and I ask you to believe me,
 with respect and in our Lord, Gentlemen,
 Your very humble and obedient servant,
 DE LA SALLE, priest, canon of Reims



Château-Porcien was the capital of a territory acquired in 1666 by the Duke of Mazarin. It is located about ten miles from Reims, where in March 1682 Adrien Nyel had opened a school. The school in Reims may have prompted the request from Château-Porcien. Also, in Reims, not far from De La Salle's house, lived a very pious priest, Jean Faubert, a native of Château-Porcien, according to the biographer Brother Bernard, to whom De La Salle would resign his canonry on August 16, 1683.³ This priest may have spoken approvingly to the people of Château-Porcien about De La Salle's work with teachers.

Adrien Nyel, who had been so instrumental in involving De La Salle in the work of the Christian education of poor children, may have been one of the two teachers mentioned in paragraph 3, or he may only have helped the other two get started, for he opened two other schools the same year, at Guise and Laon.

It is noteworthy that De La Salle uses the expression *schoolmasters*, not *Brothers*. This latter title was probably not adopted until the first Assembly of the teachers in 1686; nevertheless, even at this date in 1682, he does speak of "our Community."

The school in Château-Porcien probably lasted for only a short time. In his biography of De La Salle, Blain mentions that De La Salle's confessor opposed his move to Paris in 1683, because the new Society had only 15 members in Reims, Laon, Reims, and Guise. Blain does not mention Château-Porcien. In *Mémoire sur l'Habit*, written by De La Salle about 1690, mention is made of Château-Porcien as one of the places where the Brothers neglected their school work in order to take part in ecclesiastical functions.

It is possible that whatever information Blain knew about Château-Porcien was obtained from Brother Jean Jacot, Assistant Superior General, who was living at Saint Yon when Blain was writing his biography of De La Salle. Brother Jean was born in Château-Porcien in 1672 and entered the Institute as a junior novice in October 1686. He may well have been a student of the Brothers in his native town and therefore one of the first members of the Institute to have been a student of a Brothers' school.

3. CL 4:54; *John Baptist de La Salle: Two Early Biographies*, 312.

Messieurs les Maires
et Cheuins de Chateau Porcien

Messieurs

Reims le 20.^e Juin 1682

quand je ne prendrai qu'une pain d'indigne a ce point
regarde la gloire de dire il faut voir que de l'effort
bien indigne pour ne me pas l'indigne touché
par les instances prieres de monseigneur votre Doyen et
par la maniere obligeante avec laquelle vous me
faites l'honneur de m'en faire avis. J'aurai grand
vot meurtre de ne pas vous en faire et m'en faire
des vobis de notre Commune en l'empressement
et l'indigne que vous me feroient auoit l'indigne l'indigne
et l'indigne chretien ne de vos on feroit. J'ay donc
beaucoup plus de l'indigne que rien ne me feroit
accusé par de l'indigne en l'indigne vos on feroit l'indigne
et par de l'indigne par l'indigne de vous en l'indigne dans
maîtres d'école dont de l'indigne que vous de l'indigne
pour commencer l'indigne le lendemain de St Pierre
Je vous suis extrêmement obligé de tout vos l'indigne
et vous prie de m'en faire l'indigne respect M. B.

Messieurs

Votre tres humble et foy
obissant Roy
De la Salle
Château Porcien

Letter 1, to the Mayor and the Councilors of Château-Porcien, the earliest known letter of John Baptist de La Salle.

Even at this early date, De La Salle reveals his ideals, namely, his zeal for “the glory of God” and his interest in “the Christian instruction and education” of children. In fact, he says, “Nothing will be dearer to my heart.” This letter gives evidence that De La Salle’s zeal was often in response to the initiative of others. Responding to needs identified by others was De La Salle’s characteristic way of allowing Providence to guide his actions, and this mode of acting became characteristic of the development of the Institute during the whole life of De La Salle. He says explicitly to Gabriel Drolin in paragraphs 17 and 18 of Letter 18 that this is his usual way of proceeding.

Letter 2: To a Brother

AE; BL II.4; ÉC 102; OC LA 102

This is the earliest letter known to have been written by De La Salle to a Brother of the Christian Schools. The name of the Brother to whom it was addressed is unknown.

The original manuscript of this letter was used in the process of beatification of De La Salle in 1835. It was subsequently lost and was known only through copies that had been made on that occasion. These copies were used both in *Édition Critique*, by Brother Félix-Paul, and in *De La Salle: Letters and Documents*, by Battersby.

In 1955, however, the original manuscript of Letter 2 was rediscovered in England. In November of that year, Father Bernard Payne, librarian of Ushaw College, in Durham County, found the manuscript in a packet of autograph letters of various notable persons. There is no record of how the packet came into the possession of the college. Father Payne contacted the De La Salle Brothers of Hopwood Hall, Manchester, who verified that the manuscript is indeed an original letter written by De La Salle. The happy outcome of this discovery is that the president of Ushaw College obtained the permission of the bishop of Hexham and Newcastle to present the manuscript to the Brothers of the District of England with the understanding that it would not be taken from the country.

May 15, 1701

- 1 Be careful, my very dear Brother, not to direct yourself by your own mind. It is inappropriate, and God will not bless you if you act this way.
- 2 You ought not to have been annoyed because Brother Director tore up what you wrote, apparently because you

[illegible]

1710

The original of letter 2 was discovered in 1955 in the library of Ushaw College, Durham, England, and is preserved at Saint John's College, Kintbury. This letter is the earliest extant letter written by De La Salle to a Brother of the Christian Schools.

- wrote it without permission, something that must never be done. It is quite proper to destroy the work of self-will.
- 3 You did well to tell your Director about your annoyance. Be just as faithful to tell everything, and God will bless you.
 - 4 Take care not to let yourself be distracted, for distraction is extremely harmful and dries up the heart.
 - 5 Be faithful both to perform your penances exactly and to do nothing without permission, because God will bless you only insofar as you act through obedience.
 - 6 Be very pleased that they point out your defects to you, one of the greatest goods they can do for you; regard it as such.
 - 7 The presence of God will be a great advantage to you to help and to inspire you to do your actions well.
 - 8 I am delighted that you are devoting yourself readily to interior prayer, the exercise that attracts God's graces to the others.
 - 9 Pay special attention also to your spiritual reading, which is a great help to dispose you to make interior prayer well.
 - 10 You know that holy Mass is the principal exercise of religion; that is why you must give it all possible attention.
 - 11 Do not worry about what your Brothers do; it is for God, not you, to judge them.
 - 12 Watch yourself so that you do not give in to impatience in class, for far from assuring order, it creates an obstacle to it.
 - 13 I pray God to give you his Spirit, and I am, in our Lord, my very dear Brother,
Totally yours,
DE LA SALLE



This letter is a good example of the type of guidance De La Salle provided in response to the monthly letters of the Brothers. This practice of the Brothers' writing monthly letters to the Founder was called *reddition* and had been established as an Institute practice ten years earlier.⁴ De La Salle responds point by point to the letter this Brother had written: a comment on the failure of self-will, then observations on the other points of conduct that had been reported by the Brother. Most of the topics in this letter refer to the religious practices of the community, but there is also a

4. CL 7:315; Blain, *Life of John Baptist de La Salle*, Book Two, Chapter X, 293.

characteristic observation in paragraph 11 about personal relationships among the Brothers and another in paragraph 12 that deals with school matters.

As time went on, a directory (see Appendix A) was developed as a guide to the topics about which a Brother ought to write to the Superior in the monthly redditional letters. This directory is mentioned in chapter five of both the 1705 and the 1718 Rule.⁵ The first printed evidence of this list appeared sometime before 1725 as an appendix of 20 pages in De La Salle's *Recueil de différents petits traités à l'usage des Frères des Écoles chrétiennes* of 1711 (hereafter, *Recueil*).⁶

In paragraph 8 of this letter, De La Salle expresses his delight that the Brother is devoting himself readily to prayer. The French word here is *oraison*, which was traditionally translated *mental prayer*. However, that translation can give a false emphasis; the term *mental prayer* seems to imply that the only, or the most active, faculty of the person in prayer is the mind. De La Salle certainly encouraged the Brothers to engage their minds in prayer in the sense of using their powers to think, reason, and draw conclusions. But he also intended that they engage their entire selves in prayer with their intellect, will, memory, imagination, and feelings, and with their reflective, affective, and contemplative capacities as well. In a systematic and thorough way, and through numerous examples and options, De La Salle, in his primer on prayer, *Explication de la Méthode d'Oraison (Explanation of the Method of Interior Prayer)*, taught each Brother to develop his own style of prayer by bringing his whole person into the presence of God and by engaging in his own way all his capacities in prayer. In view of this understanding of De La Salle's teachings on prayer, *oraison* is translated throughout this volume not as *mental prayer* but as *interior prayer*.

Letters 3 to 5: To Brother Denis

Very little is known about Brother Denis. The name does not appear in the first register of the Brothers, called the *Catalogue*,⁷ which was probably drawn up in 1714. However, a Brother Denis is recorded as having made perpetual vows of obedience and stability at Vaugirard on December 9, 1697. In Letter 3 we find him in community with Brother Claude and two young Brothers at Rethel; in Letter 4 he appears to be at Darnétal. Letter

5. CL 25:90; CL 15:16–22; *Rule and Foundational Documents*, 27.

6. CL 15:122–130; *Collection of Various Short Treatises*, 1993, the English edition, does not include this appendix.

7. CL 3:24ff, *Les vœux des Frères des Écoles chrétiennes avant la Bulle de Benoît XIII*, II.

5 seems to place him at Darnétal in 1708, for De La Salle reproaches him in paragraph 4 of that letter for his unnecessary visits to nearby Saint Yon. No reference has been found concerning Brother Denis after 1708.

The instructions given to Brother Denis in paragraph 7 of Letter 3 may indicate that he was in charge of the community as well as the school at Rethel at that time. The previous Director had died on January 2, 1701.

Letter 3: To Brother Denis

AMG; BL I.2; ÉC 10; OC LA 10

[Rethel]
May 30, 1701

- 1 It seems to me, my very dear Brother, that you ought not to spend so much time on thoughts that come to you about your state of life, because the more you occupy yourself with them, the more trouble they will cause you.
- 2 Become as interiorly recollected as you can, because this in itself can sanctify your actions.
- 3 Also make sure that God's holy presence is often with you, for it is the principal fruit of interior prayer, but it will benefit you little if you take no pains to mortify yourself and if you seek your own comfort.
- 4 It is not enough to think about relating to God as perfectly as possible. We must actually do so, and we can only do it to the extent that we do violence to ourselves.
- 5 I am not surprised that you find many difficulties with the Rule. Your habit of hardly observing it causes you to find it so difficult. If you observe the Rule exactly, you will find ease, even pleasure, in it.
- 6 It is for the same reason that you feel distaste for Holy Communion.
- 7 Please, never be absent from the community recreations. It is without any doubt a serious matter that you spend the time of recreation with Brother Claude and leave the two young Brothers by themselves. This is very bad.
- 8 I am very glad about your abandonment to God's will and your indifference to whatever place you might be sent. This is also necessary in our Community.

3

f Denis

26 ce 3^e may 1701

il me semble montre de force que vous ne devez point
vous en occuper. Des penes qui vous viennent en l'esprit
votre état car plus vous vous en occupez plus vous
ferez elles de peine pour vous. vous le plus d'application
l'intérieur qui vous sera possible car c'est elle seule qui est la source
de la sanctification de vos actions. faites aussi en sorte que les plus
de bien vous soit fréquent car elle est la principale source de
l'union mais elle ne s'obtient de peu d'effort ne vous mettez
pas en peine de vous multiplier ce travail cherchez vos commodi-
tés. ce n'est pas assez d'avoir la pureté d'aller adieu le plus
parfaitement qu'il vous sera possible il faut le faire en effet
et comme les faits qu'il faut qu'on se fait de violences. Ne me
mettez pas pour vous faire de beaucoup de difficulté dans les
regles c'est la bonté que vous avez à les peu d'effort qui vous les
fait honorer elles se vous les obtenez exactement vous y trouvez
de la satisfaction et de la joie. ce n'est pas pour les choses spirituelles
que vous sentez l'indignité pour la dévotion. Ne vous en
de vous d'aimer à acquiescer aux vicieuses c'est une chose de vous
qu'on ne s'attend pas que vous puissiez vous en rendre avec flegme.
Mais que vous sentez le poids de la force en plus cela est fort mal
Je suis bien aise de votre abandon à Dieu et de votre indifférence
pour quelque bien que ce soit elle est aussi nécessaire dans vos
commodités de l'âme et de la santé de l'âme. Tout au long

De la Vallée

morceau de la couverture de son
nouveau testament.

Letter 3, to Brother Denis, has a piece of black cloth sewn into the paper at the lower left, and the words *morceau de la couverture de son nouveau testament* (a piece of his New Testament cover) have been added. Perhaps Brother Denis received the fragment of cloth as a relic after the Founder's death and thought it best to attach it to the letter for safekeeping.

I am, in our Lord, my very dear Brother,
 Totally yours,
 DE LA SALLE, priest



The “two young Brothers” mentioned in paragraph 7 were probably novices sent to community before they had completed more than a few months of religious formation. It was the practice at that time to put the young Brothers into class shortly after they had commenced their period of formation. After some teaching experience, they returned, if necessary, to the novitiate for further religious training.

The Brother Claude mentioned here was the Director of Rethel from 1704 to 1708, but no mention is made of him after that date in any of the extant letters.

This letter and Letter 132, addressed to the Director of Calais, are the only letters we possess addressed to Brothers that De La Salle signs with the title *priest*.

Letter 4: To Brother Denis

AMG; BL I.43; ÉC 11; OC LA 11

Seven years have elapsed between this letter (1708) and the previous one (1701) to Brother Denis. Much has happened that clarifies references in this letter. In 1705 De La Salle opened a community at Darnétal, where Denis was now stationed. (See Letters 33 and 34 about this foundation.) A few months after the establishment at Darnétal, the Brothers took over schools in the nearby city of Rouen.

De La Salle was able to staff several schools in and around Rouen in 1705 as a result of the problems he was experiencing in Paris from the Writing Masters and the Masters of the Little Schools. Because De La Salle’s Christian Schools had been giving the schools of the Masters serious competition, the Masters sued De La Salle on the grounds that he was not limiting his students to the poor. The Masters won their case, and the court forbade the Brothers to continue conducting schools in Paris. In May 1705 De La Salle transferred the Brothers from Paris to staff schools in Rouen.

When this letter was written, the Brothers were teaching in four schools of Rouen: Saint Godard, Saint Eloi, Saint Maclou, and Saint Vivien. Brothers also taught at the General Hospice. All the Brothers lived in a house in the parish of Saint Nicolas. The community at Darné-

tal was loosely connected with this community in Rouen, which was only about a mile distant.

July 8, [1708]

- 1 I am quite far from abandoning you, my very dear Brother. If I did not answer you the last time when I wrote to the Brothers at Rouen, it is because I did not have the time. Indeed, there were two more Brothers besides you to whom I could not reply.
- 2 There is no need to buy cloth for a robe; one was made for you here, and you will need nothing more.
- 3 I am very pleased that you eased your father's anxiety.
- 4 I am annoyed that Brother Thomas treats you as you say. I will see to it that he changes his conduct in this matter. It is not true that I wrote to Brother Thomas what you told me about your needs, for I complained to him that he was not taking care of the Brothers' needs.
- 5 You must take great care not to be lax in the exercises. This is not the way God blesses you. We have no virtue without doing violence to ourselves. It is not just a question of mere appearance; our virtue must be solid. We do not acquire virtue by taking our ease and seeking our comfort.
- 6 I am very pleased that you sometimes practice mortification of the mind and of the senses, but you must do so whenever occasions present themselves.
- 7 Be exact in observing silence for the love of God; it is one of the principal points of living by the Rule.
- 8 Applying ourselves to the presence of God is a most useful practice; be faithful to it.
- 9 Nothing will draw down on you as many of God's blessings as fidelity in small matters.
- 10 Take care, above all, to recite vocal prayers deliberately and to have them recited the same way in class, because the attention we give to vocal prayers makes them pleasing to God.
- 11 Guard against impatience with your Brother; always speak prudently with him.
- 12 Interior prayer is the mainstay of piety; therefore, pay great attention to it.

- 13 Be exact to leave everything and everyone as soon as the bell rings.
- 14 So as not to waste the students' time, finish in a few words with people who come to the school door.
- 15 Be exact in correcting the students, the slow ones even more than the others.
- 16 It is disgraceful to call them hurtful names. Be careful not to let human respect prevent you from doing good. It is really disgraceful to call your students by insulting names, and it also gives them bad example.
- 17 You know that we progress in virtue only insofar as we do ourselves violence; therefore, take care to do so.
- 18 Apply yourself frequently to the mortification of mind and senses that is an obligation for you in your state.
- 19 During the advertisement of defects, you must examine the good that comes to you from this exercise rather than the motives of others.
- 20 There is no doubt that the Rule can be observed even when there are only two of you. I am very happy that you try to be faithful to the Rule. Praise be to God for the good sentiments that he gives you in this matter.
- 21 Your frame of mind while making your exercises is good; stay with it.
- 22 To do spiritual reading out of curiosity is a great fault and not the way to profit from it.
- 23 Humble yourself when you find yourself dry during interior prayer.
- 24 You are right that particular friendships among the Brothers bring serious harm to a community.
- 25 I am very happy that you now have a good number of students. Be sure to look after them well.
- 26 Keep an eye on the Brother so that he does not strike students with his hand. This is most important.
- 27 I pray God to support you in your good frame of mind, and I am, in our Lord, my very dear Brother,
Totally yours,
DE LA SALLE

This letter is a good example of the range of De La Salle's guidance of his Brothers, especially those like Brother Denis who were responsible for a school or a community. At the very opening of the letter, De La Salle affirms his loyalty to the Brother personally. Apparently Brother Denis had concluded that the Founder had been neglecting him. Then there is mention of a matter of clothing and of the Brother's anxiety about his father and about a complaint against Brother Thomas, who was responsible for supplying the Brothers' needs. Next follow several exhortations about the spiritual life of the Brother, significantly intermingled with matters of school regulations. Notable is De La Salle's concern about the proper correction of students, a topic to which he gave a large section of *Conduite des Écoles chrétiennes* (*The Conduct of the Christian Schools*),⁸ as well as two entire *Meditations for the Time of Retreat*.⁹ The detailed instructions of *Conduite* are especially significant, imbued as they are with such moderation and wisdom, and they remain meaningful for teachers even today.

When the Brothers wrote their monthly letters to De La Salle, the letters were all enclosed with the Director's at a community gathering and sealed in the presence of everyone. This was intended, among other reasons, to save postage. The letters were likewise returned in one packet and distributed publicly; hence Brother Denis knew that others received answers when he did not.

In paragraph 2 De La Salle reminds Brother Denis of the custom at the time that all robes were supplied from a central source, under the direction of Brother Thomas.

The community of only two Brothers mentioned in paragraph 20 is the community at Darnétal, composed of Brothers Denis and Robert. Generally De La Salle opposed a community of only two. Evidently exceptions were made, especially when such a community could share some of the activities of a community nearby. For example, there is also mention in paragraph 19 of the exercise of the advertisement of defects, which probably was not practiced between Brothers Denis and Robert but in the central community of nearby Rouen, which numbered ten Brothers under the direction of Brother Joseph.

8. CL 24:140–179; *The Conduct of the Christian Schools*, 135–156.

9. CL 13:53–63, *Meditations by John Baptist de La Salle*, 193–208.

Letter 5 :To Brother Denis

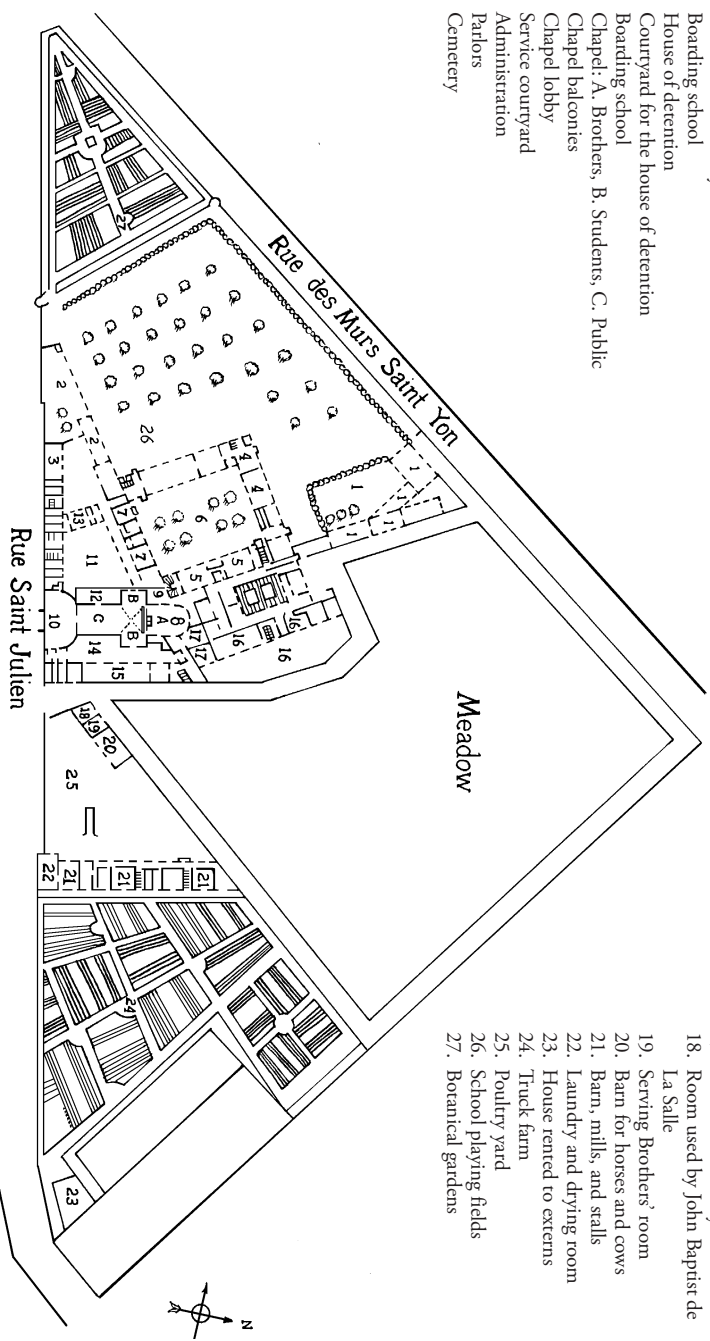
AMG; BL I.44; ÉC 12; OC LA 12

August 1, [1708]

- 1 I am quite distressed to hear of the illnesses you tell me you have, my very dear Brother. We must try to find some way to remedy them.
- 2 You ought to apply yourself to interior prayer as best you can, because this exercise ordinarily draws down graces on the others.
- 3 You know that it is disgraceful to speak angrily; refrain from it. Did not the watchmen have the right to see what you were carrying?
- 4 You ought not to go to Saint Yon except with the others on the weekly holiday. You have no business with Brother Hilaire or the other Brothers there.
- 5 Do not get angry with anyone; it is neither prudent nor Christian.
- 6 Be careful not to be frivolous when you go to recreation with the Rouen Brothers; it does them no good.
- 7 You realize that striving to die to yourself and to your inclinations is for your own good.
- 8 Watch over yourself to accept positively the humiliations that come to you in this way, with the view that God is sending them to you.
- 9 To be truly obedient, my very dear Brother, you must be ready to obey all superiors. The difficulty you find in this regard is because you do not see God in them.
- 10 It is a good thing that you apply yourself to your spiritual reading, which will be highly profitable for you, especially to help you make interior pray well.
- 11 Watch over yourself not to allow yourself to give in to distractions during interior prayer. They can occur by your being too external; be careful about this.
- 12 People are saying that some clerics who met you alone in Rouen reported that you are a secular, not a Brother, walking by yourself like that in the city. If such was the case, you certainly did wrong.

1. Vocational and technical shops
2. Boarders' infirmary and courtyard
3. Residence and courtyard for retired Brothers
4. Boarding school
5. House of detention
6. Courtyard for the house of detention
7. Boarding school
8. Chapel: A. Brothers, B. Students, C. Public
9. Chapel balconies
10. Chapel lobby
11. Service courtyard
12. Administration
13. Parlors
14. Cemetery

15. House of detention
16. Novitiate and courtyard
17. Brothers' infirmary
18. Room used by John Baptist de La Salle
19. Serving Brothers' room
20. Barn for horses and cows
21. Barn, mills, and stalls
22. Laundry and drying room
23. House rented to externs
24. Truck farm
25. Poultry yard
26. School playing fields
27. Botanical gardens



Ground plan of Saint Yon, from eighteenth-century sources and photo by E. Rousset (*Iconographie*, 1979, plate 114).

- 13 Outside the weekly holiday, please do not go to Rouen anymore. Go there with the Brother directly to Saint Nicolas, because you have nothing to do there beyond that.
- 14 I have again come across your letter of April 21.
- 15 You were wrong to leave class to go outside for such a thing as you suggested to me. I ask you not to let that happen again.
- 16 When the Brother says or does something inappropriate, let nothing on your part show any displeasure, and try to restrain yourself; then you can write to me about these things.
- 17 Here is the one principal thing you must work at: when the inspirations that come to you lead you to deny yourself, be faithful to them. This indeed is a sign that God sent them.
- 18 Because you experience occasions of humiliation when you are in the city with Brother Robert, let it appear at such times that you relish them. Do not follow, then, what human nature urges you to do to avoid them.
- 19 Always be faithful to do your spiritual reading and to go to bed on time. Please, never fail in this; nothing can dispense you in these matters. Let the rule of silence be well observed.
- 20 You need to enter into yourself often, which will prevent you from giving in to your faults.
- 21 You would do well to carry out the idea that came to you of living as if you were in a sort of novitiate to devote yourself to the interior life. This would do you a lot of good.
- 22 I am very pleased that you ardently desire that God's will be done in you in everything.
- 23 Make sure that you join in the recreations. Do not allow the children to interrupt this time. To keep silence well, we must take recreation at the prescribed time.
- 24 Your students must not say anything bad about the Brother.
- 25 Make sure that your students come to school on time and that they attend on Sundays and feast days.
- 26 Do not fail to carry out my earnest recommendations.
I am, in our Lord, my very dear Brother,
Totally yours,
DE LA SALLE



In paragraph 4 De La Salle refers to Saint Yon. This property, near Rouen in the suburb of Saint-Sever, was leased by De La Salle to serve, among other functions, as a novitiate. It was finally purchased by the Brothers during the superiorship of Brother Barthélemy.

Saint Yon was also used by the Brothers as a place of rest during their weekly holiday from classes and for retreats during the summer school vacations. Brothers Denis and Robert, who formed the little community at Darnétal, spent their weekly free day either with the Brothers in Rouen or at Saint Yon.

It seems that Denis was going to Saint Yon more often than he should, rather than to his central community of Saint Nicolas in Rouen. Saint Yon was an attractive estate. The property had a spacious building surrounded by fourteen acres of gardens and playgrounds for the resident communities of the novitiate and the boarding school. The boarders came from families in Rouen wishing to have special training for their sons. Saint Yon probably also included by this time a house of correction for youth. Later this was discontinued, but probably in 1715 a house of detention was opened for young men and adult males who were placed there by special order of the royal court.

Brother Hilaire, with whom Denis visited at Saint Yon, was at that time a serving Brother.

Brother Robert was Denis's community companion at Darnétal, the same Brother to whom De La Salle wrote Letters 38 to 48. He succeeded Denis as Director of the school at Darnétal in December 1708.

Letter 6: To a Brother

Ms. 22, 9; AMG; BL III.9; ÉC 93; OC LC 93

This letter is one of 36 letters of De La Salle that have been preserved in Ms. 22 and that he wrote to Brothers whose names are unknown. Ms. 22, transcribed from an earlier collection sometime before the French Revolution, was intended to give the Brothers an anthology of the Founder's letters, arranged under the headings of various virtues. This letter, for example, was under the heading "*Il ne faut pas avoir d'humeurs*" ("We must not have whims"). More than likely, some of the letters of Ms. 22 are only excerpts, but their authenticity has never been seriously challenged.

[1702]

- 1 You realize, my very dear Brother, that among us we ought not to have inclinations or whims. Please consider this, and make every effort to achieve it.

- 2 You know that to act by whim is to act more like an animal than like a human.
- 3 Because mortification¹⁰ is a frequent practice among us, you must regard it as an inseparable companion.
- 4 We ought to be disposed to welcome humiliations in a spirit of simplicity. Because we often have such opportunities, we must not regard them as unusual. We must become accustomed to them; they are always good for us.
- 5 Because penances are of little value unless performed with an interior spirit, apply yourself to perform them, and God will bless you by this means.
- 6 Every day in the refectory, be faithful to accuse yourself of your faults. God attaches many graces to this practice, and I ask God to fill you with these graces during this holy season. I am, in our Lord, my very dear Brother,
Totally yours,
DE LA SALLE



When De La Salle speaks of mortification and penance, as he does in paragraphs 3 and 5, he does not advocate severe corporal mortification among the Brothers. Although he practiced such bodily penance, and some of his earliest disciples followed his example, De La Salle soon realized that corporal penance, even when self-inflicted, prevented the Brothers from carrying out their school duties satisfactorily. So we find De La Salle recommending that the Brothers accept those opportunities for mortification of the mind and of the senses that present themselves naturally. The earliest Rule states, “There will be no corporal mortification of Rule in this Institute.”¹¹

The allusion to the refectory in paragraph 6 refers to a detail included in the Rule of 1705 and of 1718: “The Brothers will accuse themselves of their faults at least once a day, before meals.”¹² The daily regulation in the Rule of 1718 is more precise: “At 6:30 they will make the accusation of faults and then have supper.”¹³

10. Brother Félix-Paul (*Édition Critique*, 350) suggests that an adjective, *interior*, is missing and that the meaning is “interior mortification.”

11. CL 25:25; *Rule and Foundational Documents*, 25.

12. *Rule and Foundational Documents*, 26.

13. *Ibid.*, 103.

Letters 7 to 12: To Brother Hubert

Brother Hubert, Gilles Gérard, was born in Romagne in the archdiocese of Reims on December 7, 1683. He entered the Institute to make his novitiate in Paris on April 20, 1700. He became the Director of the community and school at Laon in 1706 and later at Guise in 1708. In October 1708 he took charge of the community of Brothers at Chartres. In December 1716 he signed the record of Brother Barthélemy's visit to that community to obtain the Brothers' agreement for the forthcoming Assembly of the Brothers, and he participated in the election in 1717 of Barthélemy as the first Superior General. He later took part in the election in 1720 of the second Superior General, Brother Timothée.

At the General Chapter of 1725, convoked to receive the Bull of Approbation granted by Pope Benedict XIII, Brother Hubert, as Director of Paris, pronounced his vows according to the terms of the Bull. The year 1716 found him the Director of Meaux in community with Brother Clément, the companion of his novitiate days (Letter 50). In 1745 he was stationed at Noyon and was a member of the General Chapter of that year. He took part in the General Chapter of 1751, at which Brother Timothée resigned and was succeeded by Brother Claude as Superior General. It is recorded in the minutes of the Chapter that "Brother Hubert, former Director of Angers, was unable to sign, as he had lost his sight." He died on June 29, 1759, near the age of 76, a Brother for 59 years.

Letters 7, 8, and 9 are addressed to Brother Hubert by name. Letters 10, 11, and 12, although his name does not appear on them, are almost certainly addressed to him. Letters 66 and 67 could also have been sent to him, but conclusive proof is lacking.

As with most of his letters to Directors of communities, De La Salle writes to Brother Hubert in more detail than usual. Although many of these details concern the spiritual life of the Brothers, the apostolic character of the spirituality that De La Salle fostered among the Brothers is evident in these letters, just as it is in the meditations De La Salle wrote for the time of retreat and for Sundays and feasts. In all his letters to the Brothers, De La Salle characteristically deals with the issues at hand: school matters, school and parish relationships, relationship of the Brothers with their students, personal, apostolic, and spiritual development of the Brothers, and relationships among Brothers in community.

The Sequence of Letters to Brother Hubert

- ♦ Letter 7 (1702): Brother Hubert, 19 years old, is at his first assignment.
- ♦ Letter 8 (1706): at age 23 he is already the Director of the school and community at Laon.
- ♦ Letter 9 (1708): at age 25 he is the Director of the school and community at Guise.
- ♦ Letter 10 (1708): this letter was written three or four months later.
- ♦ Letter 11 (1709): Brother Hubert is still a Director, probably at Chartres.
- ♦ Letter 12 (1710): it seems clear that he is at Chartres.

Letter 7: To Brother Hubert

AMG; BL I.3; ÉC 33; OC LA 33

May 5, 1702

- 1 One of your main concerns, my very dear Brother, must be to apply yourself to interior prayer and to the classroom, because these are your two principal occupations, the ones for which you will render God a detailed account.
- 2 My very dear Brother, you must allow yourself to be led as a child of obedience, who has no viewpoint other than to obey and to do God's will through obedience.
- 3 Take great care never to use terms such as "I want," "I will not," or "It must be." These expressions and ways of speaking are horrible and can only withdraw God's graces, which he offers only to those who have no will other than his. Self-will by itself leads to hell, as Saint Bernard says.
- 4 When your mind is troubled by worries, make them known to your Director. You will see that God will bless you and either give you the grace to bear them for love of him or relieve you of them.
- 5 Guard carefully against allowing yourself to act according to whim, because such behavior is a horror to God.
- 6 Obedience is the principal virtue you must develop.
- 7 In interior prayer abandon yourself often to God's guidance; frequently tell him that you want nothing but to accomplish his holy will.

8 It his holy love, I am, my very dear Brother,
Totally yours,
DE LA SALLE

Letter 8: To Brother Hubert

AMG; BL I.16; ÉC 34; OC LA 34

When he received this letter, Brother Hubert, 23 years of age, was already Director of the community and school at Laon, about 40 kilometers northwest of Reims. The school at Laon was one of those established by Adrien Nyel in 1682, when De La Salle was taking his first tentative steps toward total commitment to the Christian education of the children of poor families. The community there consisted of six Brothers who conducted two schools. Brother Clément, about a year younger than Hubert, was in charge of the second school. The position of Director must have been quite a heavy responsibility for so young a man as Hubert. This would account for the detailed advice De La Salle gives, advice of a personal nature as well as general recommendations for the guidance of the community and the management of the school.

Paris
June 1, 1706

- 1 I was greatly consoled to learn from your last letter, my very dear Brother, that your frame of mind is one of complete abandonment.
- 2 I do not know why you are unsure about your vocation.
- 3 With regard to the vows, it is not for me to decide for you about them; your decision must come from you. Because you ask me for my opinion, I would tell you that I see nothing about you that can pose an obstacle to it.
- 4 We must observe the Rule for the morning hours on Thursday, the day of afternoon recess.
- 5 We must never read¹⁴ during a holy Mass that we are attending with the students.
- 6 Do not be upset by temptations to impurity or by natural movements; try to think of something else.
- 7 When you feel yourself giving in to impatience in class, briefly remain poised and silent until the feeling has passed.

14. Supervising the students is the priority, not reading in a prayer book.

- 8 Always take great care to be serious in class; the good order of the school depends a great deal on that.
- 9 Be careful that the topics of conversation during recreation time are suitable and that useless matters are not introduced.
- 10 Always have some view of God in your actions; this is important for behaving in a Christian manner.
- 11 Be faithful to follow the method during interior prayer.
- 12 Make sure that Brother Clément is feeling well in every respect.
- 13 Please do not let anything more be done without permission, whether by way of payment or for anything else.
- 14 You did well not to do the errands that Brother Cassien gave you. Visits of that kind ought not to occur among us.
- 15 Unless the matter is extremely urgent, you must not write if only a few days remain before the usual monthly letter.
- 16 Brother Robert is not to return to Paris.
- 17 There must be no gardening during recreation time, except for scheduling a day for watering; besides, the serving Brother can do it. It is better that a gardener does the gardening.
- 18 You must leave nothing undone to ensure that classes go well, especially your own.
- 19 You must take great care that the Brothers do not converse with one another there.¹⁵
- 20 Rest assured that your soul is very dear to me and that I am concerned for it, but as for a general Confession, the reasons you give me are insufficient to require it of you. Indeed, you can do no better than to abandon yourself entirely into the hands of your superiors.
- 21 Apparently you are talking to the Brothers about Brother Charles, because those who do not know him are talking about him. That is very wrong.
- 22 You must not let the temptations against purity that you experience upset your mind. They must not prevent you from receiving Communion.
- 23 Tell me everything you judge relevant about your behavior, and I will try to help you with it.

15. "No Brother will speak to another in school except to the one whom the Brother Director has assigned in each school to be in charge" (*Rule and Foundational Documents*, 47–48).

- 24 We must never carry candles, whether at Saint Martin's or anywhere else. If it was done a year ago, no one has yet spoken or written to me about it. Tell me who the Director was at the time.
- 25 It is not true that serving Brothers do not make novenas. If Brother Isidore did not make one, see that he does so.
- 26 Follow the advice of the pastor of Saint Peter's to insist that the students be punctual, even if you were to have as few as four. Do the same for the other classes as for your own.
- 27 Please take care that recreation time is spent properly. You know that inconsiderate laughter is inappropriate for us. Recreation is one of the things you must supervise most carefully. You do well to see that the Rule is strictly observed.
- 28 In offering you advice about what you write to me, I ask for nothing better than to contribute to the ordering of your interior life.
- 29 They say that Brother Étienne's and Brother Isidore's classes are falling completely into disorder. Please take care of this.
- 30 See that the Brothers give an account of their conduct and of their conscience.
- 31 Brother Clément tells me that someone during the advertisement of defects is pointing out to him that he goes to the refectory at another time to eat there, that he drinks absinthe,¹⁶ and so on. Because these actions cannot be done without the Director's order, they are not matters to be mentioned during advertisements.
- 32 Work must not prevent Brother Isidore from studying his catechism, because it is more important for him to know the catechism than to work. It also seems to me inappropriate for him to work during the long recreation on Thursdays.
- 33 Take steps to have your community conduct itself entirely according to the Rule.
- I am, in our Lord, my very dear Brother,
Totally yours,
DE LA SALLE



16. A common European wormwood, *Artemisia absinthium*; a green liqueur flavored with wormwood or a substitute (*Merriam Webster's Collegiate Dictionary*, Tenth Edition).

The six Brothers of the Laon community at the time of this letter were Hubert, the Director, age 23; Clément, age 22, to whom Letter 50 was addressed three weeks later and who is also mentioned in paragraph 5 of Letter 64-a; Cassien, otherwise unknown; Robert, age 30, to whom Letters 38 to 48 were written; Étienne, about whom there is no certain information, and Isidore, whose age is unknown but who made perpetual vows on June 7, 1705. From the *Catalogue* we know that Brothers Hubert, Clément, and Robert persevered until death. It is probable that the other three Brothers left the community before 1714, the date when the *Catalogue* was begun.

Brother Charles, Michel Crest, mentioned in paragraph 21, was born on April 5, 1674, in the diocese of Grenoble and entered the Institute in 1700. He was at this time a member of the community of Rethel, teaching there in the school, the first one to be established by Adrien Nyel outside Reims, in March 1682. Previously Brother Charles belonged to the Laon community. The chronicle of that community indicates that one day he met in the street one of his students who had been absent from class. He tried to take hold of the boy and get him to return to the school; however, the young man escaped and, running away, fell under the wheel of a cart loaded with wheat. A wheel rolled over his stomach, apparently without doing him any damage. To encourage the Brothers to thank God for the “miracle,” Charles told them that several people had seen angels holding the wheels of the cart so that they would not harm the boy. Such a story was fuel for much gossip among the Brothers.

In paragraph 3 De La Salle refers to the decision that Brother Hubert must make regarding the vows. The first vows pronounced by any of the Brothers had been made on Trinity Sunday about ten years previously, probably in 1686. The exact year is not altogether clear from the accounts in the early biographers,¹⁷ nor is it perfectly clear what kinds of vows were made. The twelve principal Brothers gathered by De La Salle wanted to take perpetual vows of obedience, chastity, and perhaps also poverty, but De La Salle persuaded them to take only the vow of obedience, or possibly obedience and stability, and only for three years. It seems probable, however, that even though the commitment was for three years, the Brothers renewed these vows annually. It is not until 1694 that perpetual vows were made.

It is clear that some Brothers never did take vows but also that over the years De La Salle became more ready to permit the Brothers to take perpetual vows after a varied and sometimes brief period. For example, Brother Barthélemy entered the novitiate on February 10, 1703, at the age of 25, and pronounced perpetual vows two years later, on June 7, 1705.

17. CL 2:28–31, *Les vœux des Frères des Écoles chrétiennes avant la Bulle de Benoît XIII*, I.

To free the Brothers from having to spend time out of class preparing meals and shopping for supplies, De La Salle received into the Society young men who were not suited for teaching. They became known as serving Brothers and wore a special brown robe. De La Salle refers to these Brothers in paragraphs 17 and 25. As far as possible, there was one serving Brother in the larger communities. Brother Isidore, mentioned in paragraphs 25, 29, and 32, seems to have been one of these Brothers, but he also spent time in class. More is said about the serving Brothers in Letter 12 and the commentary following.

To ensure that the Brothers remained steadfast in their commitment to teaching in the Christian Schools, De La Salle collaborated with them in including certain restrictions in the Rule of the Community. The robe of the Brothers was to be different from the clerical soutane, and they were to perform no function in church except that of serving low Mass. They were also forbidden to study Latin or to make use of it if they had already learned it. De La Salle feared that close association of the Brothers with the clergy would gradually turn them away from their classroom duties. In *Mémoire sur l'habit*, written about 1690,¹⁸ De La Salle had mentioned specifically the school at Laon as a place where some slackness had crept into the Brothers' attention to their class duties because of too much freedom in this regard. De La Salle saw now the possibility of this happening once again at Laon if the Brothers were to take a prominent part in the eucharistic procession on the feast of Corpus Christi alluded to in paragraph 24.

The opposition of De La Salle to the Brothers' participation in this procession is all the more significant in light of the enthusiasm with which all the people of the town entered into the ceremony. It seems that almost everyone walked in the procession: waxmakers, fishmongers, greengrocers, butchers, bakers, coopers, vintners, cobblers, hosiers, tailors, tilers, weavers, drapers. All the pious associations followed these groups, then the doctors and lawyers; these, in turn, were followed by the Franciscans, the Minims, the Capuchins, the monks of Saint John and Saint Vincent, the pastors, the canons, and finally the bishop and the officers of the town and the town council. It is easy to see how the Brothers might have become involved.

18. "Memorandum on the Habit," in *Rule and Foundational Documents*, 147–197.

Letter 9: To Brother Hubert

AMG; BL I.26; ÉC 35; OC LA 35

Paris

January 30, 1708

- 1 I am surprised, my very dear Brother, that you wrote me a letter dated the 24th, for you had already written one on the 19th and are due to write at the beginning of the month. You can see that you are overanxious.
- 2 True, it is not very pleasant to stay in a community where the Rule is not observed, but you must try somehow to have it observed until I have the means to transfer the Brothers. You know that living by the Rule depends in great part on whoever is in charge.
- 3 It is true that Brother Alphonse is difficult at times, but we must try to get him to be more docile. Let me know his faults more precisely, and I will make him fulfill his duties.
- 4 It seems to me that you speak with too little prudence and humility; it is difficult to expect God to bless this way of behaving.
- 5 I am very pleased that you love to live by the Rule. I will help you as much as I can to have you observe it, but I am not in a position or in control of matters to be able to make a change before Easter. However, in the near future I will consider it before God.
- 6 If we want to make interior prayer well, it is quite wrong not to discipline ourselves in order to dismiss the unruly thoughts that wander through the mind.
- 7 I am surprised that after telling me in your first letter that you will stay where you are as long as I wish and that you are leaving yourself entirely in my hands to do with you all that I wish (the best frame of mind you could have), you would write me quite the opposite five days later.
- 8 You must have a very changeable mind. Because this is a temptation, you must try to recognize it and to humble yourself for such weakness. Let your knowledge of it make you resolve never to follow your mind's whims. This is extremely important for you.
- 9 Turn often to God, and you will find that he will help you as much for living the Rule as for obedience and the stability of

your mind—all the things you ought to try to obtain for yourself and often ask of God.

- 10 I must work with you, and you must try to live differently than before, especially to make interior prayer better and to be totally dedicated to your exercises, because this is what you must work hardest at and what you do not care enough about.
- 11 If someone must go out during the exercises, send a Brother, and remain at your place. Give me an account of how many times you have been absent and for what reason. Please do not fail to do so in the monthly letter, for the chief concern the person in charge must have is to be the first in everything.
- 12 Your going to the kitchen to chat with Brother Alphonse is what gives rise to familiarity and his lack of respect for you. You are not even telling me a fourth of the matter. If it is necessary to go to the kitchen, send a Brother there, and remain at the exercise.
- 13 You will have order in your class only insofar as you refrain from moving about and talking. Be very careful not to strike the students with your hand or with anything else.
- 14 It is also a very serious fault to laugh during meals. When you have committed such a fault that can give scandal, do you accuse yourself of it? You realize that according to the Rule, you must not fail to do so.
- 15 I do not know whether you say the vocal prayers as slowly as we do here. This is important if you want to pray with attention.
- 16 If Brother Antonin has no confidence in you, it is because you do not win it by your reserve, your seriousness, and your living by the Rule. You are neither prudent nor observant enough, and this draws down on you the disdain of the others.
- 17 Often pray for your community's observance of the Rule and for your Brothers when they do not behave as they ought or are troubled. Ask God for the light needed to guide you well on these occasions.
- 18 I ask God to give you the grace to edify them greatly, and I am, in our Lord, my very dear Brother,
Totally yours,
DE LA SALLE

Brother Hubert received this letter at Guise, having just been transferred there from Laon. The school at Guise was another of the school foundations made by Nyel in 1682. It is evident that the community there was not at all faithful to the Rule and that Hubert was very unhappy with the situation. His uneasiness is shown by the number of letters that he wrote. A young man of 25 years, he must have found it difficult to bring his community back to the faithful observance of the Rule.

Brother Alphonse, Pierre Marie, mentioned in paragraph 3 and born in the diocese of Chartres on November 5, 1677, entered the Institute on June 27, 1700. It seems he was a serving Brother at this time in Guise. In 1717 he was in the community of Rethel, where he signed the record of Brother Barthélemy's visit there on December 13, 1717. He died in Rethel on December 13, 1727.

There are allusions in this letter to the Rule that De La Salle had drawn up for Directors.¹⁹ De La Salle in paragraph 3 refers to the Director's responsibility to inform the Superior of the Brothers' faults. In paragraph 14 he reminds Brother Hubert that the Directors are not to laugh outside of the time of recreation, and if they do so, they are to ask a penance from the Superior.

Speaking of the speed with which the vocal prayers were said in community, De La Salle in paragraph 15 seems to indicate that the prayers in the novitiate, where he was staying, were said much more slowly. Brother Félix-Paul, in his commentary on this letter, remarks that although the prayers said by the novices were not as numerous, the prayers took the full quarter of an hour as required by the Rule.

Brother Antonin, Gervais Dubrecq, mentioned in paragraph 16, was born in Paris on March 18, 1685, and entered the Institute on May 17, 1705. He was in Rouen when Brother Barthélemy made his visit there on March 27, 1717. He was in Marseille in 1727, made perpetual vows in 1734, was Director of Laon in 1745, and died in Reims on November 14, 1756.

Letter 10: To Brother Hubert

AMG; BL I.52; ÉC 36; OC LA 36

April 18, [1708]

- 1 I am replying to your two letters, my very dear Brother, the last of which I have just received.

19. *Rule and Foundational Documents*, 207–216.

- 2 I thank God that he has given you the fidelity to let me know candidly the fault you committed by writing to your mother and to Monsieur Lalement. You realize that the fault is serious and that it gives a very bad example. You must try to die to the world, which must also be dead to you.
- 3 Once again, be exact to do nothing without permission and to acknowledge immediately and candidly the faults you have committed. It is not enough to tell me in general that you have committed faults at Guise that you did not commit elsewhere; you must tell me what these faults are.
- 4 If the confessor thinks it appropriate that you stay at Guise, you must remain there. It is less than three months until the summer vacation; we will settle everything then.
- 5 I am very pleased that you tell me what you are thinking and at the same time that you are totally obedient and submissive.
- 6 Tell me, then, in what respect and in what way you have never been so unfaithful to the Rule as you have been at Guise.
- 7 For the love of God, pay great attention to the sound of the bell; it is an important matter.
- 8 It seems to me that the Brothers ought not to go to the parish catechism on school days.
- 9 Please take care that silence is kept in your community.
- 10 I do not understand why you so neglect the Rule during recreation time. You must take great care to correct yourself in this regard. You know how important it is to spend the time of recreation properly and that living by the Rule attracts God's blessing to a community.
- 11 It seems to me that it is not your job but Brother Antonin's to do the cooking.
- 12 The exercises must not be omitted. You have few of them; the two of you and Brother Isidore can make them diligently.
- 13 When defects are hardly ever pointed out at the advertisements, it is often a sign that there is little fidelity to the Rule in the community.
- 14 You must be more exact in correcting the Brothers' faults.
- 15 Do not let the Brothers rationalize or reply when they are given an order.
- 16 You must also test their obedience and make them practice it faithfully.

- 17 You must encourage Brother Antonin to be frank and to say everything candidly.
- 18 I do not know what you mean by “stuffing,” whether it is something sold already prepared, like meat patties.
- 19 Encourage your Brothers, and insist that they do nothing through self-will.
- 20 See that spiritual reading is not omitted.
- 21 Take care that you apply yourself well to interior prayer. You know that the blessing God bestows on the other exercises depends on this one and that it draws down his graces on us.
- 22 Let me know in detail why your conscience is not at ease.
I am, in our Lord, my very dear Brother,
Totally yours,
DE LA SALLE



This letter and the two subsequent letters to Brother Hubert include numerous references to the account that each Brother was expected to give of his conduct and even of matters of conscience in his monthly redditional letter to the Superior.

In *Recueil* De La Salle includes a directory for the Brothers to give an account each week to the Brother Director of the community and a directory according to which each Brother was to give an account to the Brother Superior of the Institute. Both directories refer to matters of conduct and to matters of conscience. In his meditation for the Third Sunday of Lent, De La Salle speaks of the need for “openness of heart” to one’s superiors.²⁰ However, the Decree *Quemadmodum*, issued by Pope Leo XIII on December 17, 1890, forbids superiors to induce their inferiors directly or indirectly to make a manifestation of conscience, while it leaves to inferiors the liberty of doing so freely and spontaneously.

At the time these letters were written, manifestation of conscience was practiced in many religious congregations. The Brothers, in addition, had freely chosen De La Salle as their confessor and spiritual director.

The “parish catechism on school days” mentioned in paragraph 8 must refer to the lessons given under the direction of the clergy in church on certain feast days that were also days when school was in session. For some reason De La Salle was reluctant to have the Brothers participate in this program. He addresses a similar issue with Gabriel Drolin in Letter 18.

20. *Meditations by John Baptist de La Salle*, Meditation 19.2, p. 69.

Letter 11: To Brother Hubert*AMG; BL I.32; ÉC 37; OC LA 37*

July 20, [1709]

- 1 The bishop of Chartres told me personally what Monsieur Binet told Brother Hyacinthe about the bishop's plans. He wants to lodge us in the house at Saint Vincent's, which will be quite inconvenient, because it has neither a courtyard nor a garden, and where, it seems to me, you will be very uncomfortable. Brother Hyacinthe says the opposite.
- 2 We must, it seems to me, pray to God and have your students pray by continuing the litanies and by sending two Brothers, every Sunday, feast day, and Thursday recess, to receive Holy Communion in the chapel of the Blessed Virgin at Notre Dame for the intention that the bishop's plan not go into effect and that what is done be for the greatest good, not only for your housing but also for an increased number of classes and students. Allow no one from the community to interfere; leave the result to God.
- 3 It was not necessary for Brother Hyacinthe to write to me before you did or, in my opinion, for him to come here. A letter to me would have sufficed. I wrote the above before he arrived.
- 4 I spoke the day before yesterday to Father de Gergy, who promised me to write yesterday to the bishop of Chartres about the matter. If the bishop sends you a request, tell him that because he will be coming here soon and the business need not be settled until October, I will be honored to discuss it with him when he is here or at Saint Cyr.
- 5 You are wrong to request holy cards costing a considerable sum, particularly in a year like we are in now, when people have no bread. Please do not approach Brother Athanase for such things.
- 6 With regard to what the bishop of Chartres told you, that people in several places are asking me for Brothers, it is true, but they want to establish communities of two, which does not suit us. I will not have them; they would destroy our Community.

- 7 Please do not stop to talk to the Brothers so much. Unless you take care, you will miss your exercises to talk to them, and that must not happen.
- 8 I realize that we must have the Brothers give an account of their conscience and that we must strive to resolve their difficulties, but there is no need for these long interviews in which numerous external, even harmful, matters are often spoken of, frequently without our being aware of it. Watch out for this, for I will do the same; this article is more important than you think.
- 9 Never speak on the way to recreation, on the stairs, or while going about the house.
- 10 You and all the Brothers ought to be told your defects. For this purpose, carefully regulate the time for this exercise. You ought not to read, write, speak to anyone, or do anything else during this exercise. Here, as well as during the accusation of faults, you ought to be completely attentive to what is being said.
- 11 Either you or Brother René must choose Wednesday as the day for Communion. I do not know how you both expect to receive Communion on the same day and to leave the house together to go to Confession. He ought to go to Confession only when the others go, and you too ought to make it a point to go on the same day as the others. All these private devotions are inappropriate.
- 12 It seems that you seek bodily comfort a great deal; guard against this. Make no plans about external matters without proposing them to me beforehand; this is important. Do not so easily listen to what the Brothers propose to you; you are too easygoing on that score.
- 13 I ask God that your community be orderly and live by the Rule; work at this.
I am, in our Lord, my very dear Brother,
Totally yours,
DE LA SALLE



The original manuscript of this letter carries neither the name of the Brother to whom it was addressed nor the year in which it was written.

However, written at the top of the manuscript appears the heading, “Chartres, 1709.” Comparison with the handwriting of Brother Hubert on the formula of his profession in 1725 identifies these words as written by Brother Hubert. This affords reasonable certainty that the letter was addressed to him in 1709.

The three schools in Chartres were served by seven teaching Brothers and one serving Brother. The schools were Saint Hilaire, Saint Michel, and Saint Maurice.

The bishop of Chartres mentioned in paragraphs 1 and 6 is Paul Godet des Marais. He had been a student with De La Salle at the Seminary of Saint Sulpice. In spite of disagreements between them regarding the teaching of Latin²¹ in elementary classes and the austerity of the community life of the Brothers, the two remained good friends. On this occasion the bishop wished to transfer the Brothers from their community house to a former priory to which was attached a junior seminary. De La Salle mounted a campaign of prayer against the project and at the same time arranged a meeting to discuss the matter with the bishop. This meeting did not take place. Godet des Marais died in September of that year, and the transfer of the Brothers from their community to the seminary did not happen.

Brother Hyacinthe, Gentien Gastignon, mentioned in paragraph 1, was born on November 1, 1669, and entered the Institute on May 4, 1701, as a serving Brother. He was changed from Chartres shortly after this letter. It is possible that he found it difficult at his age of 40 to be under such a young Director. Brother Hubert was only 25 at the time. But Brother Hyacinthe persevered, becoming a teaching Brother in 1723, in charge of a school in Mende, and then Director of Saint-Denis in 1740. He died in Chartres on April 13, 1751.

The reference in paragraph 5 to people without bread refers to the famine of 1709, when the winter was so severe that winter crops froze and the ground was too hard for spring planting. The government commandeered whatever came to seed and set it aside for the next planting. A loaf of bread that ordinarily sold for 7 or 8 sols cost 35 sols. This was a difficult period for De La Salle, who brought his novitiate from Rouen back to Paris, where the distribution of food was less stringent.

Brother Athanase, Jean Richer, mentioned in paragraph 5, made perpetual vows in 1699 and became Director of Chartres in 1705. He probably became Procurator at Saint Yon in 1709. He is not listed in the *Catalogue* of 1714; perhaps he died or left the Institute before that date.

The *Règles communes des Frères des Écoles chrétiennes* of 1705 sheds some light on the community practices referred to in paragraph 11. The Rule

21. CL 7:375; Blain, *Life of John Baptist de La Salle*, Book Two, Chapter XV, 379.

states that all members of the community are to receive Holy Communion ordinarily twice a week, on Sundays and on Thursdays, or on the feast day that might occur during the week. On the other days of the week, one or more Brothers are to receive Communion in turn. From De La Salle's remark about Brother Hubert's and Brother René's having adopted the practice of receiving together on Wednesdays, it would appear that René was a kind of Sub-Director. De La Salle did not want the two to be absent from the community together, which would have happened when they would spend the obligatory half hour in thanksgiving after Communion.²²

Brother René was the first Director of the school in Vans, in 1711. He signed the record of Brother Barthélemy's visit to Laon on March 4, 1717, but is not listed in the *Catalogue* of 1714. Perhaps the compiler of that listing of Brothers wanted his name forgotten. The history of the house of Laon speaks of a certain erstwhile good religious who left the Institute in 1720 at the instigation of the mayor of that town. This religious had some brief training in medicine and may have aspired to practice as a doctor. According to the community history, he never did enter the medical profession, but he did try to become a hermit and was rejected by the clergy. He finally became some kind of guardian of property, and while fulfilling this job, he was killed by some shepherds.

Letter 12: To Brother Hubert

copy; AMG; BL II.5; ÉC 38; OC LA 38

October 2, 1710

- 1 I realize, my very dear Brother, the difficulties that arise when serving Brothers are entirely involved in temporal matters, but even more trouble occurs when the Director does so.
- 2 My very dear Brother, we have had only too much experience of this in the past. If a Director becomes exterior, his entire community is lost, but if a serving Brother is lost, he only loses himself.
- 3 They say, for example, that since you have been at Chartres, you have not made one half-hour of spiritual reading. What can your Brothers be doing at this time?
- 4 A Director must never be absent from his exercises. You have no business in the kitchen. Here, which is a large

22. CL 25:23; *Rule and Foundational Documents*, 23.

community, no one sets foot there except the one who takes care of the sick. For all the more reason, a Director in a community of four ought not to do so.

- 5 Your exercises and your classes: they are your total concern. If you involve yourself in anything else, you are acting in opposition to the designs of God.
- 6 A serving Brother must always speak politely and respectfully; you must oblige him to do so.
- 7 It is not useless to state your problems. We will try to resolve them, but it is often useless to say, “Do that for me.”
- 8 It is true that a person has only the one soul to save, but you will save it by obeying and by overcoming your dislikes.
- 9 You must not get upset about having to reprimand your Brothers; it is your obligation. You ought to have given a severe penance to those two Brothers who joined forces in that way.
- 10 To achieve good order in a community, the Director and the Sub-Director certainly must agree and be united. I will see to it that such is the case.
- 11 But these Brothers complain that since Brother Joseph left, you are acting only through whim. They say that it is because the serving Brother is managing the money. Rest assured that this will be the case in your community and everywhere else. If this is not so in some communities, which would be a small number, it will not last for long.
- 12 When the bursar goes out, it is unreasonable for him to take all the money he pleases without asking for it. He must not even say, “I want such an amount.” He must ask how much he is to take.
- 13 You ought to take great care to have the bell rung on time. This is something quite important, especially for rising. You do not mention whether you turned back your clock beyond the prescribed time.
- 14 Please see to it that no one speaks loudly and that the Rule is kept during recreation. It is your responsibility to see to this and to keep an eye on Brother Norbert during this time. You do not mention the reason why you failed to be present at the beginning of recreation.

- 15 You must never omit the community walk on holidays, unless it is raining. Cloudiness or other trifling reasons must not prevent it.
- 16 Brother Athanase was quite wrong to write to you and to others. He asked me whether he ought to withdraw what he said, and he stated that his great anger led him to write.
- 17 So, then, you want to let your Brothers be lost because you lack the courage to reprimand them, and you let Brother Quentin do as he pleases. By your nonchalance, you are putting him in a state to leave. Do not let him do anything without permission.
- 18 Also, do not let Brother Norbert speak contrary to the Rule during recreation. Something about him causes him not to instill piety in his students.
- 19 Brother Quentin is asking to teach only writing. He must not do so.
- 20 If Brother Quentin wishes to make vows, he must be allowed to do so; however, it will be good perhaps to test him a little more.
- 21 Someone has suggested to me that I send Brother Anselme to Paris, if this does not inconvenience you. I will go there with him.
- 22 Brother Norbert must be made to fulfill his duty.
- 23 Brother Quentin readily complains if we are willing to listen to him.
- 24 You must not miss Communion. You realize that this would give your Brothers a bad example.
- 25 There are not two masters, for in all religious communities, one person takes care of spiritual matters and general direction, and one takes care of temporal concerns.
- 26 People are quite happy with Brother Hyacinthe where he is. You realize that you are the one who is too difficult and that you want to do everything except your duty, which is only to direct the school and the exercises and to supervise the serving Brother.
- 27 Brother Quentin will never get along well with Brother Norbert, even were it only for a year.
- 28 Brother Norbert must not be allowed to do as he pleases.
- 29 You must not be away during the exercises. To be away, as you were in the past, is a serious fault in you.

- 30 You must not teach Brother Hilaire how to write.
- 31 When you saw that he was not performing his penance, you ought to have shown no sign but prayed to God for him, calmed yourself, and tried at another time to win him over and to induce him to acknowledge his fault and to perform a suitable penance.
- 32 You follow your natural inclinations too much on these occasions, which is why God does not bless what you do.
- 33 You expect patience in your Brothers; you must show it in yourself and not make it appear that you are acting by whim or by nature on occasions like these.
- 34 He says that when he happens to have some money, you expect him to give it to you to buy whatever you please. You are more demanding in this respect than I and others are; this is not wise.
- 35 He does not have to give you money, but he must buy everything needed; that is appropriate. You must give him the money. If he does not buy what is needed, let me know; I will certainly see that he does so.
- 36 Be sure to have your Brothers fulfill their duties. You must conduct yourself prudently with them.
- 37 If you write most of your letters in haste, is that wise? A little more prudence and love of God would better suit you.
- 38 I ask our Lord to give you his Spirit, and I am, in our Lord,
my very dear Brother,
Totally yours,
DE LA SALLE



The original manuscript of this letter has been lost. The copy in the archives of the Generalate was transcribed from the original by the secretary of Brother Agathon, Superior General at the time of the French Revolution. The copy does not state to whom the letter was addressed, but the fact that Chartres is mentioned, together with the names of the Brothers referred to in the letter, indicates that Brother Hubert was the recipient as the Director of the community at Chartres. It is interesting to know that in spite of all the defects De La Salle pointed out to him in each of his letters, Hubert continued to act as Director until he became blind, dying near the age of 76.



Engraving, by Froment, of a composition by Hanoteau, of the country house of Vaugirard. The Founder lived here from 1691 to 1698, a period of consolidation for the Society of the Christian Schools that included the writing of the Rule, the religious formation of novices and Brothers, and the first perpetual vows (Armand Ravelet, *Blessed Jean-Baptiste de La Salle, Founder of the Institute of the Brothers of the Christian Schools*, Paris: C. Poussielgue, 1888, opposite p. 184; photo by E. Rousset, J.-B. de La Salle; *Iconographie*, Boulogne: Limet, 1979, plate 109).

From a community of seven Brothers who served three schools in 1709, Chartres became a community of four serving only one school, Saint Hilaire, in 1710. This resulted from the limited financial resources of Bishop Merinville, successor to Bishop Godet, who was installed in May 1710. The four Brothers were Hubert, the Director; Norbert, the Sub-Director; Hilaire, the serving Brother, and Quentin.

Brother Norbert, André Desbouvès, born on December 6, 1677, in the diocese of Soissons, entered the Institute in 1700, the same year as Hubert. He was six years older than Hubert and had been in this community at Chartres for five years, so he may have felt uncomfortable under Hubert as Director. Later he became Director of the school in Calais and attended the General Chapter of 1717, but he is described in the *Catalogue* as being “dismissed” in 1720.²³

Brother Hilaire, Edmond Rivois, born on April 10, 1682, entered the Institute on July 10, 1704. He was a serving Brother at Saint Yon in 1708 and replaced Hyacinthe (see Letter 11) at Chartres. Later he returned to Saint Yon as doorkeeper and tailor, took perpetual vows in 1734, and died at Saint Yon on May 17, 1739.

Brother Quentin, known only from this letter, was obviously young and did not have vows. He was restricted to the first level, in which reading but not writing was taught. He wants to practice writing, or penmanship, but De La Salle insists that he does not need to be involved in that.

Brother Anselme, mentioned in paragraph 21, is not counted as a member of the community, for he was on his way to Paris. The *Catalogue* does not give his family name and mentions only that he joined the Brothers in 1706, made vows for three years, and then left the Institute.

After the near collapse of De La Salle’s young Society of Brothers in 1690–1691, there was an influx of novices in 1692. It was at this time that De La Salle decided to accept young men into the Society who did not show aptitude for teaching, and so he introduced two types of Brothers, those destined for class and those whose duty would be to provide for the temporal needs of the community. The latter were called *Frères servants* (serving Brothers) and wore a distinctive brown robe. These Brothers were always referred to as serving Brothers, never as lay Brothers, because all the Brothers were laymen in a canonical sense.

References in paragraphs 11 and 25 indicate that De La Salle had been introducing a new development into the direction of the communities. The Brother in charge of domestic affairs was taking on the position of bursar, or procurator, and the responsibilities in the community were separated. In the community of Chartres, at least, the Director, who had been in complete control, did not take kindly to the new

23. CL 3:35, *Les vœux des Frères des Écoles chrétiennes avant la Bulle de Benoît XIII*, II.

arrangement. Evidently this new division of authority did not succeed as De La Salle had hoped. It was modified and later discussed at the General Chapter of 1717.

Also during that Chapter the position of the serving Brothers was defined and incorporated into the Rule. Initially, there was meant to be no distinction between the two groups of Brothers other than employment. One group was destined for class; the other, for temporal work. A serving Brother could become a teaching Brother, as did Brother Hyacinthe of the Chartres community. In 1723 he was the Director of the community and school at Mende.

Unfortunately, the serving Brothers came to be regarded as an inferior class of Brothers. At the time of the restoration of the Institute after the French Revolution, an effort was made to eliminate this distinction. The Twelfth General Chapter (1810) decided that the serving Brothers would wear the same garb as the other Brothers (instead of the shorter brown robe they had previously worn) and be permitted to make the fifth vow of teaching poor children gratuitously (which previously they had not made). However, the Rule published in 1923 still contained a chapter entitled “The Manner in Which the Serving Brothers Are To Behave.” No reference to serving Brothers was made in the Rule published in 1947, but there is a Chapter XV of the Rule of 1947 entitled “The Manner in Which the Brothers Engaged in Temporal Affairs Must Conduct Themselves.” The prescriptions in this chapter are similar to those of the earlier editions of the Rule for the serving Brothers.

Letters 13 to 32: To Brother Gabriel Drolin

Although there is some doubt about the actual date, Brother Gabriel Drolin was most probably sent by De La Salle to Rome during the summer school vacation of 1702. Brother Gabriel was then 38 years old, and with him went Brother Gérard Drolin (very likely Gabriel’s natural brother), who, however, remained in Rome only a short time, returning to Paris during 1703. Brother Gabriel stayed on in Rome for twenty-six years, until 1728, when he was recalled by Brother Timothée, the second Superior General to succeed De La Salle.

Drolin was a native of Reims, baptized in the church of Saint Jacques on July 22, 1664, and so was a youth moving into manhood at the time De La Salle became involved in the schools for the poor children of that city. He joined De La Salle as early as 1684, and his is the first name in the *Catalogue* of 1714 listing all the Brothers at that time.

De La Salle soon discovered that if the schools were to be effectively Christian, there would have to be a change in the approach of the teachers to their work. At the outset, the teachers quite naturally looked upon their work as simply a means of gaining a livelihood, nothing more. In De La Salle's view, their way of life outside of school needed to reinforce their teaching in the classroom. He therefore took measures to remove the gap that existed between the aims of the schools and the behavior of the teachers by arranging that the teachers would stay with him in his own house, have their meals together, pray together, and study together. This was something the teachers had not bargained for; before long they withdrew, but others who looked on the work of the schools as an opportunity to do something for God soon joined De La Salle.

The new group of teachers began to realize that if the schools failed, they would be without work and support for a lifetime. De La Salle preached trust in Divine Providence, but his words fell on deaf ears. It was all very well, the teachers said, for De La Salle to preach abandonment to Providence when he had his private wealth to fall back on and his canonry at the Reims Cathedral to provide him with security. They had nothing. De La Salle finally decided to resign from his position as canon and to dispose of his wealth in favor of the poor, thus putting himself on the same level as the teachers. Many of his friends, and the teachers also, wished that he would use his wealth to give financial support to the schools for poor children. But, following the advice of the saintly Father Barré, he took the occasion of a famine in the northern part of France to give his money away for the relief of the starving.

Canon Blain, one of the earliest biographers of De La Salle, submits that after the withdrawal of the first teachers, new candidates were inspired by God to give up their prospects for the future in order to follow the example of De La Salle and devote their life to the Christian education of poor children. Certainly the action of De La Salle in resigning his canonry and divesting himself of his considerable fortune aroused plenty of interest and controversy among those of his social class in Reims. Gossip spread throughout the city describing De La Salle's quixotic action. It was while this was going on that Gabriel Drolin, at the age of 20, joined De La Salle to assist in his new work. Blain says that Drolin had studied for the priesthood before associating himself with De La Salle, and he might be one of those to whom Blain refers as "inspired to leave everything because of his example."

Some of them were university students who gave up their studies and came to join him in spite of the objections of their parents and the frantic appeals from worldly people who did all they could to

turn them away from him. . . . They generously gave up the idea of receiving Holy Orders and the worldly hopes they might have entertained in a more prestigious calling than that of schoolmaster.²⁴

So Drolin joined De La Salle in the first exciting days of the new foundations, when the teachers decided to wear a distinctive robe, to follow a way of life that included regular periods of prayer and spiritual reading, to plan methods of teaching their students effectively, and to adopt the name *Brother* to make clear their relationship toward one another and toward their students. He was also very close to De La Salle some five or six years later, when the infant Society was near ruin. De La Salle then chose Gabriel Drolin and one other, Nicolas Vuyart, to join with him in pronouncing on November 21, 1691, an irrevocable vow never “to withdraw from this obligation even if only we three remained in the said Society and if we were obliged to beg for alms and to live on bread alone.”²⁵ Vuyart was later to leave the Society under rather sad circumstances, but Drolin remained faithful to the Heroic Vow in spite of all the difficulties he encountered during his long, lonely years in Rome.

The correspondence of De La Salle with Gabriel Drolin that has been preserved tells us much about the sort of man Drolin was, the difficulties with which he had to contend in his efforts to establish himself in a school in Rome, and the character of De La Salle.²⁶ We get the idea that De La Salle did not fully understand the problems that Drolin had to face. The Founder was at times impatient with the lack of progress being made in the execution of his plans to have the Brothers established in the city of the Popes, even though Drolin tried to explain the difficulties he encountered, in the highly organized, clerically dominated, and closely guarded system of schools there, in his efforts to be accepted as a teacher who is also a layman.

Originally, the schools of Rome had been established to provide an education for prospective candidates for the priesthood and were, at first, under the direction of cathedral chapters. Later, they were controlled by the rector of La Sapienza University, who had authority over all advanced education. The university was also responsible for the establishment of an elementary school in each of the fourteen wards of the city. The teachers of these elementary schools, nominated by the rector and paid from the excise tax on wine, were bound to accept any poor children who presented themselves, but they could require fees from the rich parents to supplement their meager salaries. The result was that often the

24. CL 7:224; *Life of John Baptist de La Salle*, Blain, Book Two, Chapter I, 162.

25. *Rule and Foundational Documents*, 203.

26. See Appendix B, 279–287.

poor children were neglected, and their places were given to students whose families could pay. In addition to these schools, private elementary schools were also opened under the aegis of the rector of the university. These were, of course, schools where fees were charged, and so they were not available to poor children. Moreover, in the middle of the seventeenth century, the salaries of the teachers of the regional schools were suppressed. As a result, even these schools demanded fees. The teachers now came under the control of a regional supervisor. The schools had to accept some poor students, who were obliged to pay a nominal contribution each Saturday.

To teach in one of these schools, it was necessary to obtain a license from the rector of the university. No school could be opened within a specified distance from an already established school. By the beginning of the eighteenth century, the Cardinal-Vicar of Rome had taken steps to place more control of the schools in the hands of the parish clergy. It was into such a situation that Gabriel Drolin came in 1702. By 1704–1705 he had managed to be accepted as a teacher in the regional schools, but he could not maintain his position beyond August 1708.

A third type of school, the papal school, had come into existence during the course of the seventeenth century. Pope Alexander VII had established about thirty of these schools, taught by widows of good standing, whose salary was assured from private papal funds. These schools were under the jurisdiction of the papal almoner and were solely for girls until early in the eighteenth century, when boys were admitted. Drolin obtained his license to teach in one of these schools, provisionally in 1709 and permanently in 1712.

We might wonder what Drolin thought of De La Salle's frequent promises to send a second Brother to help him. From his letters to Drolin, De La Salle seems always to have been on the verge of sending a companion to him, but something always turned up to prevent his doing so. At one point the Founder named the Brother he proposed to send, but Drolin replied that he did not want that particular man. Even De La Salle's own proposed visit to Rome was canceled at the last minute.

Thus, Drolin was alone in Rome for twenty-six years, never having the companionship of another Brother. In spite of all the problems and the frustrations he encountered, he remained faithful to the vow he had taken with De La Salle never to abandon the Institute.

The Sequence of Letters to Brother Gabriel Drolin

Before 1704

It seems fairly certain that De La Salle wrote three or four letters to Drolin prior to 1704, but they have not been preserved.

From 1704 to 1707

Between August 13, 1704, and April 1, 1707, De La Salle wrote 14 letters to Drolin that have been preserved. It seems clear that during this period at least three additional letters were not delivered to Drolin. There is evidence, then, that during these 32 months, De La Salle wrote at least 17 letters in response to 16 letters written by Drolin.

From 1707 to 1710

Between April 1, 1707, and February 14, 1710, a period of 34 months, no letters of De La Salle to Drolin have been preserved. De La Salle might have written few letters to Drolin during this period, for various reasons:

- ♦ Father Divers, the Procurator General of the Vincentians in Rome, through whom De La Salle's letters were being delivered, was replaced. At this time Father Divers fell into disfavor with the Church authorities in Rome. He left Rome in April 1708. In fact, he arrived in Paris in July of that year and might have given De La Salle some assurance of Drolin's favorable situation in Rome.
- ♦ During the winter of 1708–1709, the communities in France were in great difficulty because of the scarcity of food. To cope with this situation, De La Salle might have had to spend a great deal of time and energy, thus reducing the number of letters he could write during this period.
- ♦ De La Salle did write two letters in 1709 to Drolin, one in August and one in November (see Letter 27), but these letters were never delivered, possibly through some fault of Brother Ponce, to whom De La Salle had entrusted the responsibility for their delivery.

From 1710 to 1712

From February 14, 1710, to December 16, 1712, five letters of De La Salle to Drolin have been preserved. Possibly eight others were never delivered; therefore, during a period of 34 months, De La Salle apparently wrote 13 letters, a number almost comparable to the period from 1704 to 1707.

From 1712 to 1718

The period 1713–1714 was a time of crisis in the life of De La Salle. He may have felt that his assistance to the Institute, especially in Paris, was

of little value or, possibly, that he was not even welcome among the Brothers. At this time De La Salle was turning over much of the administration of the Institute to Brother Barthélemy in anticipation of the General Chapter of 1717. Also, there is a hypothesis that Drolin destroyed some letters of a confidential nature concerning his role in Rome, for the Society of the Brothers of the Christian Schools had not yet been officially approved. In Letter 16, for example, De La Salle advises Drolin to burn the letter after he has read it.

In a letter dated December 5, 1716, De La Salle states that he had written Drolin several times without receiving an answer, indicating that he believed that his letters had been intercepted. He knew that such was the case with Drolin's letters to him.

Letter 13: To Brother Gabriel Drolin

AMG; BL II.1; ÉC 13; OC LC 13

Paris
August 13, 1704

- 1 It was only a week ago today, my very dear Brother, that I received your last letter, dated February 19.
- 2 On reading your letter, I could not understand how you could have put yourself into the position you say you are in, just teaching reading and writing to little girls²⁷ and assuming a worldly spirit.
- 3 We must not wish to save money by doing things totally contrary to our Institute.
- 4 You would have done better, and you will do so, if as soon as you receive this letter, you do what you told me in your last letter, for which you received permission. For I ask you to do nothing that is not in accord with your Institute, whatever the cost; otherwise, God will not bless you.
- 5 Investigate thoroughly whether this canon who spoke to you is a man we can trust and what he told you is nothing but hot air. If this gentleman wishes to write to me, I will see what is going on and whether he is to be trusted.

27. The two daughters of Monsieur Claude Villesèche de La Bussière were baptized at Saint Louis of the French church in Rome in 1694 and 1696 (Frère Gilles Beaudet, *Frère Gabriel Drolin, initiateur lasallien à Rome*, 39).

- 6 As for you, stay where you are, and do what you suggested to me.
- 7 It seems to me that this area of the city, where you can give instruction to poor children who lack it, is much better than being in a house, even if it were to instruct poor children who can find someone else to teach them.
- 8 I understand that Monsieur Théodon is remaining and that Madame,²⁸ his wife, is leaving at once. She is quite willing to buy material and to have a robe made for you.
- 9 I do not know the value of the forty écus that you tell me you received. Please send your accounts to me in French livres and sols so that I can understand them.
- 10 Madame Théodon says that she will bring along a vernacular New Testament. You can just as easily get one as she can.
- 11 If you do not have one but want one and if she does not leave right away, I will give her one for you. Please do not buy a Latin one or claim to know Latin.
- 12 I fear, as you do, that someone has opened my letters. Madame Théodon says that she mislaid one of them, which she had forgotten for three or four weeks.
- 13 Often ask God to do with you what he pleases.
- 14 You must abandon yourself completely to his guidance and to his holy will, and, especially, you must do nothing without seeking advice.
- 15 Perhaps Monsieur Langlois can assure the delivery of your letters to me and mine to you.
- 16 I ask you, above all, to do nothing contrary to your Institute.
- 17 Please get yourself settled at once if you have not already done so.
- I am, in our Lord, my very dear Brother,
Totally yours,
DE LA SALLE



This letter is preserved in a copy only. The original was given to a Father Baume on December 7, 1783, by Brother Agathon, Superior General,

28. *Mademoiselle*, the term used in the original French for a married woman whose husband has no noble title (Félix-Paul, *Édition Critique*, 62), is translated here as *Madame*.

and has been subsequently lost. It is strange that Brother Agathon gave this letter away, because in that same year he issued an instruction to the Brothers forbidding them to give away or allow to be given away without written permission anything whatever that had been associated with De La Salle.

There was considerable delay in the delivery of Drolin's letter mentioned in paragraph 1. It had been sent from Rome on February 19 and arrived in Paris only in the first week of August. Letters from Paris to Rome were confided to a courier, who took about two weeks to get to Rome. The return journey took about the same time. So the shortest time lapse between the sending of a letter and the arrival of a reply was about a month. The French postal service was run by businessmen, who profited from the payments made for each letter delivered. When the letters were sent to foreign countries, the organization of the service and the payments became more complicated, because agreements had to be arranged among the various countries. Overall, the papal service was cheaper than the French service. When the Brothers had established themselves in Avignon, a papal city, De La Salle was able to avail himself of the papal postal service by sending his mail from Paris first to Avignon and then arranging for the Brothers there to have it forwarded to Rome. Drolin made use of this service for his return mail to his Superior. On occasion, however, De La Salle and Drolin took advantage of the kindness of friends to have their mail delivered.

Ordinarily, it was the receiver of the letter who paid the cost of its delivery; however, on occasion De La Salle paid the cost of the postage in advance. When this was done, the word *franc* was written on the outside of the letter to show that the recipient was not to pay upon delivery.

The Adrian-Nicolas Langlois, mentioned in paragraph 15, was the director of the French postal service in Rome and would have been admirably placed to assist Drolin with sending mail to Paris and receiving it from that city. In the parish registers of Rome during this period, the name *Langlois* appears, along with the mention of his position in the French postal service.

De La Salle's insistence in paragraph 11 that Drolin must not purchase a Latin New Testament recalls the strict rule in force among the Brothers against the study of Latin or even the use of it other than in the responses at Mass. The prohibition against Latin was one of the means that De La Salle took to remove from the Brothers the temptation to abandon their difficult life as a teacher for the more comfortable life of a parish priest. De La Salle apparently was not aware that in the papal states at this time, vernacular editions of the Bible were forbidden.

In this letter we meet the first of the many French people who befriended Drolin during his first years in Rome, namely, Jean-François

Théodon and his wife. Théodon, a French sculptor, came to Rome in 1675 as a resident at the French Academy.²⁹ The Théodon couple lived in Paris in 1704 in the parish of Saint Hippolyte, where the teacher training school directed by Brother Nicolas Vuyart was located. Several of Théodon's works are in Saint Peter's Basilica and in the Gesù church in Rome. Madame Théodon, after the death of her husband, founded a religious congregation, the Sisters of Saint Martha. The Sisters of this congregation adhered to the Jansenist faction in the religious controversy of that period. Henri Daniel-Rops maintains, however, that their involvement with Jansenism was moderate: "They worked as peasants and sustained the spirit of the sect in their humble life of prayer."³⁰

In paragraph 9 De La Salle says that he does not know the value of the 40 écus that Drolin received. De La Salle's confusion arose from the fact that there was a twenty percent loss on French money in the rate of exchange in Rome. The écu was worth three francs in France but cost five francs in Rome. In his letters De La Salle uses franc and livre interchangeably, although it seems that franc was the French term and livre a Roman as well as a French term. De La Salle evidently sent Drolin 250 francs, which he calculated would be worth more than 83 écus, not the 40 écus (200 livres) that Drolin said he had received.

One way to understand the value of a livre in France in De La Salle's day is to recognize that the ordinary annual fee that the Brothers needed for their maintenance was 200 livres, excluding minimal housing but including food, perhaps some clothing, and household goods such as candles and kitchen fuel. This too was the amount De La Salle paid for the annual support of his sister, Marie, when she went to live with their grandmother in 1672. It was also the annual income De La Salle arranged for himself when he gave away his inheritance in 1684. If we estimate that \$2,000 is the minimum needed for comparable maintenance, the value of a livre is probably ten dollars.

In his search for appropriate employment in a school, Gabriel Drolin had been offered a post as teacher in an orphanage attached to the Hospice of San Michele. Because De La Salle envisaged the possibility that the Brothers of his Institute would eventually establish themselves in a number of schools in Rome, he did not want Drolin to restrict his freedom by accepting such a post. De La Salle also questioned the advisability of relying too much on the canon who made the offer, mentioned in paragraph 5, until Drolin found out more about him.

29. *Frère Gabriel Drolin, Initiateur lasallien à Rome*, Frère Gilles Beaudet, 32.

30. *The Church in the Seventeenth Century*, London: J. M. Dent, 1963, 402.

Letter 14: To Brother Gabriel Drolin*AMG; BL I.5; ÉC 14; OC LA 14*

[October 1704]

- 1 I received your three letters, my very dear Brother, one through Monsieur de La Bussière, one through the post, dated September 9, and the third, dated September 16, through the pastor of Saint Hippolyte.
- 2 Because I do not know the value of Roman currency, when you mention an amount in your letters, indicate its value in French currency.
- 3 I do not understand why you say that you put yourself where you are to reduce expenses. What saving can you make if you will probably have to act as though you were not living there anyway?
- 4 How has this helped you since you have been living there?
- 5 I do not know whether it is because you fear putting yourself entirely in the hands of Providence. Do not think that I will abandon you.
- 6 Some say that Monsieur Théodon will return soon; I do not know what the situation is.
- 7 I am sending you a note asking him to advance you 50 livres to get yourself settled and to provide for your needs once you are established.
- 8 Please, then, let it be soon, because the more you delay, the older you get, and after all that, nothing.
- 9 When you have been in a house such as you are in now for one or two years, what progress is there after all?
- 10 You must decide either to return or to undertake something where you are.
- 11 You will no doubt receive this letter a few days before the feast of the Dedication of Saint Peter's. Make a novena for that intention from the vigil through the octave, and then begin something.
- 12 Place more trust in God.
- 13 Until Providence provides, I will be responsible for the rent of whatever place you lease.
- 14 You have been in Rome for nearly two years; you must accomplish something and live according to your vocation.

- 15 It is not my intention to starve you or to let you starve to death.³¹
- 16 Monsieur Brodard of Rethel has left me an annuity of more than 2,000 livres. I do not have it yet, because it will come to me only after the death of Mademoiselle, his sister, who is 85 or 86 years old. Apparently there will not be a long time to wait.
- 17 We are extremely poor, because the pastor of Saint Sulpice is presently giving us very little.
- 18 Please be careful that these documents people ask you to provide do us no harm. This is quite risky.
- 19 The best thing would be if you could have a school where you are now teaching catechism.
- 20 The sooner you can get out of your present situation and be engaged according to your state, the better.
- 21 I ask you this for the love of God.
I am, in our Lord, my very dear Brother,
Totally yours,
DE LA SALLE



Judging from the copy of Letter 13 that has been preserved, the original was addressed to “My very dear Brother Gabriel, of the Society of the Christian Schools, Rome.” Letter 14, however, carries the address “Monsieur Gabriele Drolini, à Rome.” This change was probably done at Drolin’s request. If he had been known in Rome as a member of a religious community, he would have found himself in a very difficult situation. Ecclesiastical law in Rome at that time obliged all religious to live in their recognized religious houses, and there were stringent regulations about their residence in the Holy City. Not only did Drolin not have a recognized religious house to live in, but he was a member of a group that was not officially recognized by the Church, except for a few dioceses in France. Also, under penalty of the law, the Brothers were forbidden to constitute themselves as a Society in France until such time as they were officially registered to do so under *lettres patentes* (a royal license). This explains why, in paragraph 18, De La Salle warns Drolin about the documents (*mémoriaux*) that he no doubt had to present to the authorities of the regional schools, giving his status and his credentials for the position of teacher.

31. See Letter 23, paragraph 8.

From the opening words of Letter 13, we know that the delivery of Drolin's February letter had been delayed for some months. In this letter we see how Drolin dealt with the frustration of this delay. He took the precaution this time of sending three copies of his letter, one through the postal service, a second through the hands of Monsieur de La Bussière, and a third through the pastor of Saint Hippolyte in Paris.

Claude Villesèche de La Bussière, referred to in paragraph 1, a French merchant originally from the diocese of Puy-en-Valey, had been living in Rome at least since 1694. Another of Drolin's French friends in Rome, he had given him living accommodations in return for teaching his two daughters, an arrangement that De La Salle frowned on. De La Salle urges Drolin to make every effort to get employment in one of the regional schools. Because he promises to send money for the rental of a classroom, it is evident that some progress had been made.

Michel Lebreton, pastor of Saint Hippolyte in Paris, who died in April 1703, was replaced by Guillaume-Denis Ravissar. It was in this parish that the training school for country teachers was opened in 1699 under the direction of Brother Nicolas Vuyart.

Monsieur Brodard of Rethel, mentioned in paragraph 16, is one of those laymen who took a great interest in the project of the Christian Schools and provided for them generously. Rethel was the first town outside of Reims where De La Salle established a school. In February 1682 an agreement was reached in Rethel, through the efforts of Father Vincent Cercelot, whereby De La Salle bought a house of residence for his teachers and the township provided an annual stipend of 100 livres each.

Earlier in the year 1704, the Writing Masters had won their case against De La Salle and the Brothers of Paris. De La Salle had to pay a fine of 100 francs; the seventeen Brothers, 50 francs each. In addition to this difficulty, the pastor of Saint Sulpice, Father Joachim Trotti de La Chétardie, alluded to in paragraph 17, withdrew his support for the Founder and the Brothers and refused to pay them their stipend. For De La Salle, then, the prospect of the bequest of the 2,000 livres, which he mentions in paragraph 16, was very acceptable. When the bequest became due on the death of Brodard's sister, it was contested in court by relatives, so on January 26, 1707, De La Salle simply renounced his claim.

This letter was sealed with an image of Saint Joseph and the Child Jesus, which was the first seal of the Institute.

These seals of the Institute of the Brothers of the Christian Schools are preserved in the archives of the Generalate, Rome, Italy.



This is a copy (actual size) of a wax seal used by De La Salle on three “obediences” dated 1707, 1708, and 1709.



This is a copy (actual size) of a wax seal on an “obedience” dated 1711 and bearing the signature of De La Salle.



This is a copy (actual size) of a seal that appears on the first page of Institute publications after 1726 in varying shapes: rectangle, circle, oval, or ellipse.



The General Chapter of 1751 adopted this seal of the Institute: a shining silver star on a blue shield with the inscription *Signum Fidei* (Sign of Faith). This copy is from the first page of a circular written in 1787 by Brother Agathon, Superior.



This is a modern version of the 1751 seal.

Letter 15: To Brother Gabriel Drolin*AMG; BL I.4; ÉC 15; OC LA 15*

Paris

December 23, [1704]

- 1 In reply to your last letter, my very dear Brother, I would say that I do not know why, after all my letters, you hesitate so much. As for me, I cannot urge you any more than I have done.
- 2 You ought to be encouraging me, and if you have no great enthusiasm for this work, which you do not indicate to be the case, you will not succeed.
- 3 I am not expecting you to cost us nothing, but I am thinking and have thought that after working for six months, or a year at the most, which I much counted on, you would not be costing us anything.
- 4 I do not think you ought to involve yourself in Brother Gérard's dispensation from vows. He has one of the most fickle minds I know. He is unsuited for the world and would have been well suited for the Trappists.
- 5 I am very sorry that I did not leave him be. He never knows what he wants to do.
- 6 You have already explained to me the expenditures you will have to make. Do so whenever you need to.
- 7 I will help you in every way I can, but it seems to me that for the undertaking to succeed, it must come from you, not from me, and that I need to do nothing but back you up.
- 8 You know that I have already spent 400 francs on you, for which I do not yet see any results.
- 9 Please see that this situation does not continue.
I am, in our Lord, my very dear Brother,
Totally yours,
DE LA SALLE

Pray to God earnestly, and think about what you must do.



On the occasion of this letter, De La Salle reverts to addressing it to "Brother Gabriel Drolin." This suggests that it was carried to Rome by a

dependable person, perhaps Monsieur de La Bussière. There is no indication on the manuscript that any payment of postage was made.

From the tone of the letter, it can be seen that De La Salle is very disappointed that Drolin has not been successful in obtaining a teaching position in the regional schools, as Drolin had led De La Salle to believe. The Founder seems to be rather hard on his disciple, who, from what we can infer, has been making every effort to get such a post.

Brother Gérard, mentioned in paragraph 4, was probably Drolin's brother. The formula of perpetual profession of obedience and stability of a Brother Gérard Drolin, dated December 6, 1697, is housed in the archives of the Generalate. His name does not appear in the 1714 *Catalogue* of members of the Institute. In other letters De La Salle refers to Drolin's brother as having left the Institute.

Letter 16: To Brother Gabriel Drolin

AMG; BL I.8; ÉC 16; OC LA 16

Paris

February 11, 1705

- 1 It has been a long time, my very dear Brother, since I received any news from you.
- 2 I ask you to send us some and to write us through Avignon as follows: "To my very dear Brother Albert, at the Gratuitous Schools, near Saint Symphorien, at Avignon, for Monsieur de La Salle."
- 3 The schools are doing well there. We will have four Brothers there and a house to lodge 20 people.
- 4 I introduced three Brothers to the archbishop of Avignon, nuncio extraordinary to France, who received them very kindly and with much appreciation gave them his blessing before parting.
- 5 Please keep this a secret, and never speak about it to anyone; even burn this letter. You say too much.
- 6 I do not know whether you will ever do anything where you are.
- 7 The Spirit of God and great zeal must guide you. It seems to me that I do not see in you enough of the one or the other for such an undertaking.
- 8 May God be blessed and his will be done in this regard.

- 9 Tell me whether you are still in your same employ and not seeking anything more.
- 10 Be careful not to be so accustomed to the spirit and the manners of the world, which you ought to hate, that you will find it hard to renounce them later on.
- 11 I ask our Lord to fill you completely with his Spirit and to do with you as he pleases.
- 12 When you have to write to me, do so only through Avignon, so that all your letters may be safe and confidential.
- 13 I send my good wishes to Monsieur de La Bussière, and I am, in our Lord, my very dear Brother,
Totally yours,
DE LA SALLE

- 14 Please find out for yourself precisely what the Institute of the Fathers of the Pious Schools is; what are their rules, their school policies, and their government; whether they are widespread; whether they have a Superior General and what powers he has; whether all are priests; whether they collect fees. Find out all you can about them, and let me know in as much detail as you can.



Evidently De La Salle wrote this letter before he had received an answer to his previous one, three months earlier. As such, the tone of the letter is helpful for interpreting the tone of the previous one. It is significant that De La Salle shares news and even confidential information. There are three references to confidentiality in this letter. De La Salle is anxious not to have his work be known prematurely, especially by official channels in Rome.

This letter was sent through Monsieur de La Bussière to be delivered to Drolin under the name, Monsieur Santenot. No satisfactory explanation has been given for the use of the pseudonyms, Gabriele Drolini and Santenot, although the most acceptable one seems to be the need to avoid any investigation by the ecclesiastical authorities into Drolin's membership in a religious community not yet officially approved. The choice of Santenot as an alias has defied explanation, and there is no hint of an explanation given in any of De La Salle's correspondence. Letters 16 to 28 are all addressed in this name. Whatever the reasons might have been, Drolin was known in Rome by his real name,

often Italianized, as is shown in the register of the parish of San Lorenzo, where he lived, and in the list of teachers in the regional schools for the year 1706.

We find in paragraphs 2, 3, and 4 of this letter the first reference among all extant letters to the establishment of the Institute in Avignon, the city of the Popes. The inclusion of these references to Avignon suggests that Drolin already knew of the projected foundation for which Brother Gérard, Drolin's own brother and his original companion in the Roman venture, had paved the way on his return journey to Paris³² in the company of Bishop Joseph Francis Gualtieri of the diocese of Vaison.

The person who negotiated with De La Salle for opening a school in Avignon was Jean-Pierre Madon de Chateaublanc, the Pope's treasurer. Contrary to Blain's account, which was also accepted by Battersby, it was the wife of Lord de Chateaublanc who instigated the action of her husband to found a free school for poor children in the parish of Saint Symphorien. This foundation was accomplished, according to Blain, in 1703. In his references in paragraph 3, De La Salle speaks of several schools in Avignon and indicates that they are doing well. He gives Drolin more news about Avignon in his next letter.

The archbishop of Avignon was Laurent Fieschi, who is mentioned again in Letters 17, 18, 19, and 24. It seems probable that De La Salle hoped to have his help in obtaining papal approval for the Institute.

Brother Albert, referred to in paragraph 2, had acted on De La Salle's behalf with regard to the opening of the schools in Avignon, Marseille, and Valréas. He is also mentioned in several other letters and was regarded by De La Salle as one of his most capable Brothers. Because his name does not appear in the *Catalogue* of 1714, we can infer that Brother Albert either died or withdrew from the Institute before that date.

The Institute of the Fathers of the Pious Schools (Piarist Fathers), founded in Italy by Saint Joseph Calasanza,³³ had met with considerable opposition from the teachers of established schools and from the regional schoolteachers. De La Salle had met similar opposition in Paris from the Writing Masters and the Masters of the Little Schools. De La Salle firmly wished his Institute to become well established in order to forestall any attempt to alter its structure and organization. He had experienced such efforts on the part of well-meaning people in Paris and other cities of France. There is no indication that he ever received from Drolin the information he requested about the Piarist Fathers.

32. CL 7:396; Blain, *Life of John Baptist de La Salle*, Book Two, Chapter XVII, 410.

33. In 1621 the community founded by Joseph Calasanza (Calasancius) was recognized as a religious order, Le Scuole Pie (The Pious Schools), also known as the Piarists, or Scolopini.

Letter 17: To Brother Gabriel Drolin

AMG; BL I.9; ÉC 17; OC LA 17

Paris

April 27, 1705

- 1 I am told that your letter arrived here on Easter Sunday, while I was in the country. I received it on the following Saturday, my very dear Brother.
- 2 It brought me great joy, not only because it has been a long time since I received any news from you but also because in it you told me that you are finally doing the work of your state in life.
- 3 It is no use examining how you have let opportunities slip by because you did not notice them.
- 4 You did well to locate yourself in a neighborhood far from the Pious Schools.
- 5 You did well to continue eating at Monsieur de La Bussière's house. Please give him my good wishes.
- 6 You also did well not to settle in there entirely.
- 7 If you need some school books, such as the book of school prayers (I do not know whether you have it; we had it reprinted recently), we can easily send them to you through Avignon.
- 8 With regard to what you tell me about that teacher in a papal school, follow the advice of Father Divers.
- 9 Perhaps it would be better to pray often to God and to wait for the most favorable opportunity to present itself.
- 10 We are far from putting you on trial. All I was impatiently waiting for was that you would be doing what you are doing.
- 11 I am surprised that you say that you never received much support on our part, for there is nothing I have not tried to do and am not still ready to do to please you.
- 12 I realize that you are quite far from doing what Brother Nicolas is doing; that is what made me confide so strongly in you.
- 13 The time has not yet arrived for you to press forward so urgently in Rome; it is enough that you have made a start there.

- 14 They have bought a large house for our Brothers in Avignon that can accommodate 20 Brothers. The vice-legat loves them and is sending his page to their school.
 - 15 I intended to send you the Brother who started it there; you did not want him.
 - 16 The archbishop of Avignon, special nuncio to France, who has known me ever since our establishment at Avignon, has been named archbishop of Genoa and is to leave immediately for Rome, where he will receive the cardinal's hat.
 - 17 He told me that he would protect and render service to the Institute of our Brothers in any way he could, and he gave them his blessing before they left.
 - 18 Please try to get rid of this worldly spirit, for which you have tendency enough, by devoting yourself to interior prayer and spiritual exercises and by rarely going out. By striving to have the spirit of our Institute as deeply as possible, you will attract God's graces to you in abundance.
- I am, in our Lord, my very dear Brother,
Totally yours,
DE LA SALLE



If De La Salle had felt despondent at the lack of progress that Brother Gabriel Drolin had been making, as exhibited in his previous letter, he now reveals his joy on hearing of his disciple's achievement. Drolin had recently gained the post of teacher in the school in the parish of San Lorenzo, in Campo Marzo, one of the poorest and most densely populated neighborhoods in Rome. This meant, in effect, that he was teaching a class annexed to the regional school of that area and under the auspices of the regional school supervisor. This school was entirely gratuitous as far as Drolin was concerned, although he had to collect a nominal weekly payment ("Saturday quadrini") from the students on behalf of the school authorities. De La Salle objects to this financial arrangement in his next letter.

With funds received from Paris, Drolin rented one room for his class and one for his own sleeping quarters, while still taking his meals at De La Bussière's home. In paragraphs 5 and 6, De La Salle expresses his approval of this arrangement.

Drolin must have felt that De La Salle had lost faith in him; he was somewhat annoyed by the remarks his Superior had made in his previous

De La Salle

f. Nicolas Vuyart

f. gabriel Drolin

Above are the signatures of the three who made the Heroic Vow of November 21, 1691, whereby they promised by a vow of association and union to establish the Society of the Christian Schools “even if we are the only three left in the Society and are obliged to beg for alms and to live on bread alone.”

letter. After several years of looking in vain for a teaching post, Drolin protested that he had no intention of deserting the Institute, as Brother Nicolas Vuyart had recently done. Vuyart had made a vow (together with De La Salle and Drolin) in 1691 to continue as a member of the struggling Institute of Brothers, no matter what would happen. Later, while Vuyart was the Director of a training school for rural teachers in the parish of Saint Hippolyte in Paris, the pastor had bequeathed the school to Vuyart, in order to assure its continuance. This arrangement had been made with De La Salle's approval; however, on the death of the priest, Vuyart, considering himself to be the proprietor of the school, refused De La Salle entrance to it. He continued to maintain the school, but he deserted the Institute. Because there is no mention of this incident in De La Salle's correspondence other than in paragraph 12, it is reasonable to assume that Drolin knew of Vuyart's actions from his communications with other Brothers in France, and perhaps even from some communications with Vuyart, who had been Drolin's confrere during the difficult times of 1691.

Father René Divers, mentioned in paragraph 8, was the Procurator General to the Holy See for the Vincentian Fathers (Lazarists) in Rome. He might have been Drolin's confessor. In any case, when Drolin was discouraged because of his difficulties in securing a teaching position and in supporting himself in Rome, Father Divers urged him not to give up his efforts. Father Divers also introduced him to friends who helped him until he eventually secured a teaching position. De La Salle sent Letters 21 through 27 to Drolin through Father Divers until the priest had to return to France in 1708.

De La Salle mentions in paragraph 15 that Drolin had rejected the Brother whom De La Salle had proposed to send to Rome to be with him. The reference is probably to Brother Albert, named in two other letters to Drolin (Letter 16, paragraph 2, and Letter 19, paragraph 20).

The archbishop of Avignon, Laurent Fieschi, of whom De La Salle speaks in paragraph 16, was nominated to succeed to the archdiocese of Genoa, which had become vacant in December 1704. De La Salle had knowledge of the appointment prior to the official announcement by the ecclesiastical tribunal on May 14, 1705. His reference to Fieschi's receiving the cardinal's hat was, however, premature. That event did not take place until May 1706. Fieschi and his former secretary, then a bishop in Rome, later promoted Drolin's efforts to gain a post in one of the papal schools.

Letter 18: To Brother Gabriel Drolin*AMG; BL I.10; ÉC 18; OC LA 18*

Paris

August 28, 1705

- 1 I was indeed surprised, my very dear Brother, not to receive news from you for so long.
- 2 Please write to me more often in the future; it seems appropriate to me that you do so every month.
- 3 Since I last received a letter from you, Brother Michel and Brother Jacques died of typhus, one after the other, at Chartres. Please pray to God for them.
- 4 I am very pleased that you are no longer frustrated by being at Monsieur de La Bussière's house, but how and on what do you live?
- 5 You say that you do not like to be in debt. It would be good to know whether you are in debt, for how much, to whom, and why. That is what you do not tell me.
- 6 I do not approve at all of your teaching Latin. You realize that it is contrary to our Institute.³⁴ We must always remain firm in what concerns our Institute; otherwise, we lose everything, and God will not give it his blessing.
- 7 I do not like these Saturday quadrini,³⁵ because this kind of money received from students, even though we do not profit from it, has a false ring about it in our schools.
- 8 If you need a book of prayers, last year we had some reprinted with all the necessary rubrics.
- 9 If you need some others, we can send them to you through Avignon. I think, moreover, that we can have our books printed in Avignon, where they receive approval, and then send them to you.
- 10 You must let me know how Christian doctrine is taught in Rome.
- 11 Like you, our Brothers in Avignon tell me that they are suffering much from the intense heat.

34. "No Brother will be allowed to teach Latin to any person whatever within or outside the house" (*Rule and Foundational Documents*, 96).

35. The quadrino was one-fifth of the Roman baioca; in Letter 24, paragraph 22, the baioca is equivalent to the French sol.

- 12 I am very pleased that you are now at rest,³⁶ with no visits or visiting.
- 13 Take care that you profit well from this time and from such a great opportunity. Strive earnestly to give up worldly ways; adopt a simple demeanor along with manners and conduct that reflect the Spirit of God.
- 14 With regard to catechism, it seems to me appropriate and important that you teach it in your school.
- 15 Is a schoolteacher forbidden to teach his students catechism in his school?
- 16 I do not like our Brothers to teach catechism in church; however, if it is forbidden to do so in school, it is better to do it in church than not to do it at all.
- 17 As for myself, I do not like to make the first move in anything, and I will not do so in Rome any more than elsewhere. Providence must take the first step, and then I am satisfied.
- 18 When it seems that I am acting only under the orders of Providence, I have no reason to reproach myself. If I make the first move, it is always I alone, and I do not expect good results, nor does God, who usually does not give it much of a blessing.
- 19 People have been saying that the archbishop of Avignon, now of Genoa, might be a cardinal soon.
- 20 The bishop of Vaison is asking for Brothers. You know him. I am, in our Lord, my very dear Brother,
Totally yours,
DE LA SALLE



After waiting for some months to hear from Gabriel Drolin, De La Salle suggests that he write to him monthly, the customary practice among the Brothers, introduced during the critical years 1690–1691 and later incorporated into the Rule.³⁷

As usual, the Founder includes news of the happenings in France, this time in paragraph 3, the sad news of deaths in the Chartres community during the typhoid epidemic that struck the city. Three members of the community died, together with the Brother who had been sent from

36. As in France, schools in Rome were in recess for the summer vacation.

37. *Rule and Foundational Documents*, 93.

Paris to act as infirmarian. The two who died in February 1705 were probably reported to Drolin, with a request for prayers, in an earlier letter, since lost. This letter is one of the very few examples we have of the death announcements sent to the Brothers by De La Salle. A second example is mentioned in Blain's life of De La Salle: "Pray for Brother Henry, who died in sentiments of quite extraordinary piety, July 1, 1699."³⁸

In Rome the teaching of catechism was reserved to the Archconfraternity of Christian Doctrine, established by Pope Pius V in 1571. The instruction was carried out in the churches and under the supervision of the parish clergy. For De La Salle and his Brothers, the teaching of catechism was an integral part of the daily school program and fundamental to their concept of the Christian School. De La Salle was uncomfortable with this Roman practice of separating religious instruction from the ordinary school situation, as he indicates in paragraphs 14, 15, and 16. He also expresses dissatisfaction in paragraph 7 with the collection of the weekly contribution of money from the poor students.

In this letter, as in Letter 17, De La Salle offers to send copies of the text he wrote, *Exercices de piété qui se font pendant le jour dans les Écoles chrétiennes*.³⁹ The first edition of this work received approbation on March 21, 1696. Subsequent requests for approbation were made and granted in 1697, on November 2, 1702, and on April 13, 1705. Permission was given in 1705 under Royal Privilege to print a number of works by De La Salle, including *Les Devoirs d'un Chrétien envers Dieu et les Moyens de pouvoir bien s'en acquitter, divisé en deux parties; Instructions et Prières pour la Sainte Messe, la Confession et la Communion, avec une Instruction méthodique par demandes et réponses pour apprendre à se bien confesser*⁴⁰ and *Cantiques spirituels, sur plusieurs points de la Religion & de la Morale chrétienne*.⁴¹ Several of the songs in *Cantiques spirituels* were sung to the common melodies of the day. The song *Charmante Gabrielle*, which is still popular today and to which was sung *Protestation d'un Chrétien à Jésus-Christ*, does not appear in the edition published in 1705 but is found in that of 1760.⁴²

38 CL 8: *Supplement*, 76.

39. *Religious Instructions and Exercises of Piety for the Christian Schools* (Landover, MD: Lasallian Publications, 2002).

40. *The Duties of a Christian to God* (Landover, MD: Lasallian Publications, 2002).

41. In *Religious Instructions and Exercises of Piety for the Christian Schools*.

42. CL 22 and CL 18:61, respectively.

Letter 19: To Brother Gabriel Drolin

AMG; BL I.11; ÉC 19; OC LA 19

Paris

September 4, 1705

- 1 My astonishment at not receiving any news from you for five months, my very dear Brother, obliged me to write to you while writing to Monsieur de La Bussière, for fear that you did not receive my previous letter.
- 2 I did not know when Monsieur Théodon would come, nor do I know whether he has arrived.
- 3 I did not know that you had left Monsieur de La Bussière's house, nor did I think you would have done so without writing to me first. If you have no other recourse these days than to me, you will embarrass me, because I am less in a position to help than I have ever been in the past: much less, because I am always very short of money.
- 4 I have located our novitiate in a suburb of Rouen, in a fine house that some Sisters had occupied. Our Brothers now have the schools of Rouen, where Brother Ponce is. All this makes me always short of money.
- 5 You ought not to have gone into debt without having my approval beforehand.
- 6 I told you that all you could expect from me for getting you established would be to help you for six months or, at most, a year. Since then, I have settled the Rouen matter, which left me dry.
- 7 All I can do is to get you 50 francs by way of Avignon through Monsieur de Chateaublanc, the papal treasurer, who established our Brothers there, who are now five and for whom he has bought a house.
- 8 You can find out at the archbishop of Avignon's residence where Monsieur de Chateaublanc pays the papal revenues in Rome and who his correspondent is there.
- 9 I will send you the money at once. It will again inconvenience me, because for the next three months, I cannot advance any money; on the contrary, I will be in arrears.
- 10 Please do not go into debt without my approval, because I would be totally ill at ease with debts. I want no more of

them, and I have never wanted or allowed them in any of our communities. I detest nothing more than debts; that is why you must never again count on me for debts, because I will never listen to the least proposal.

- 11 As for expenditures, I want to look at those ahead of me, not those behind me. Take no step, make no decision, without asking my advice beforehand. I will answer you immediately.
- 12 I just now received your letter; the Avignon route is convenient for us.
- 13 I do not know whether the archbishop of Avignon, now of Genoa, is a cardinal, as some told me he would be upon arriving in Rome.
- 14 I realize that it is best to live in greater hardship, withdrawn from the world, and I am delighted to see you with this frame of mind. Nevertheless, when we do that, we must either abandon ourselves entirely to Providence or, if we do not have enough virtue or faith for that, take the necessary steps before acting. To do otherwise is to act neither as a Christian nor wisely.
- 15 Be very careful not to give bills of exchange to someone without my instructions to you to do so, because I will not pay them. Nor am I in a position to pay any at present, because I must balance the account every day. You will receive your money with no exchange fee.
- 16 I do not know what you mean when you say that you will work to see whether you can do something for me in the near future. Please explain this to me, for I would very much like to have a clearer understanding of it.
- 17 I am very glad that you have recovered from the measles.
- 18 Brother Albert tells me in a letter of August 29 that the Father Censor approved and returned all our books to him. Once I know your address, I will tell him to let you have two copies of the prayers for school and for Mass.
- 19 We have had the school prayers reprinted, with complete rubrics, in a very useful format for teachers and students.
- 20 We are going to open an establishment in Marseille. Brother Albert will be there until after Easter; then I will be able to send him to you to further your projects a little, in case they are not doing well. He is totally suited for that; he would work wonders in the first six months.

- 21 From now until that time, pray often to God for this intention and that God will guide our projects in Rome and elsewhere according to his holy will.
- 22 I thought that around Christmas I had sufficiently explained myself to you.
- 23 We have Brothers at Dijon and at Brest; I do not know whether I told you.
- 24 Please go often to Saint Peter's as a sign of your complete submission to the Church.
- I am, in our Lord, my very dear Brother,
Totally yours,
DE LA SALLE



This letter was written only a week after Letter 18, which was a reply to one received from Drolin after a lapse of several months. In paragraph 4 of Letter 18, De La Salle expresses his satisfaction that Drolin is no longer living at De La Bussière's house. In Letter 19, however, De La Salle states, in paragraph 3, that he did not know that Drolin was no longer lodging with his benefactor and is worried that he will not be able to send Drolin enough money to support him. The apparent contradiction may be explained if, in the first instance, Drolin was still taking his meals with De La Bussière but now, in the second instance, is no longer doing so. (See paragraph 7 of Letter 21.)

The property of Saint Yon on the outskirts of Rouen, mentioned in paragraph 4, was to be used primarily as a novitiate. The lease of this property was at least in part responsible for De La Salle's present shortage of money. He had to pay 100 livres every three months.

Brother Ponce, mentioned in paragraph 4, was the Director of the community at Rouen and formerly the Director of the Brothers at Saint Sulpice in Paris. His excessive severity while at Saint Sulpice and his harsh treatment of a young Brother in that community had been, to a great extent, responsible for the hostility toward De La Salle and the Brothers shown by the pastor, Father de La Chétardie. Brother Ponce's name is also coupled with De La Salle's in the lawsuits brought against the Brothers of Paris in 1705. Later, Ponce was sent to Avignon and became De La Salle's representative in the southern France. Canon Blain writes scathingly of Ponce's eventual withdrawal from the Institute, which involved his theft of funds from the community where he was the Director.⁴³

43. Blain, *Life of John Baptist de La Salle*, Book Three, Chapter X, 618–619.



This building in rue Berbisey, in the parish of Saint Peter, Dijon, France, housed the school that John Baptist de La Salle and the early Brothers opened in 1705. Photo by E. Rousset (*J.-B. de La Salle; Iconographie*, Boulogne: Limet, 1979, plate 122).

After obtaining permission through Royal Privilege for the printing of several publications that he had prepared for school use, De La Salle submitted them for ecclesiastical approval to the Diocesan Censor in the papal city of Avignon. In doing so, De La Salle was conforming to the requirements of the Holy See. De La Salle mentions this ecclesiastical approval in paragraph 18.

As usual, De La Salle gives a few tidbits of news concerning the expansion of the Brothers' work. The school in Marseille did not open for several months, but the one in Dijon had opened in June 1705. (See Letter 35, addressed to Monsieur Rigoley, founder of that school.) Nothing is known of any foundation of the Brothers in Brest at this time, although De La Salle mentions in paragraph 23 that there are Brothers there.

De La Salle once again in paragraph 20 offers Drolin the services of Brother Albert to help in establishing himself in Rome, although he indicates in Letter 17 that he is aware that Drolin does not wish to accept the offer.

Letter 19 and other letters of De La Salle are examples of the advice given in *The Rules of Christian Decorum and Civility*: "If the letter you are writing is in reply to another one, you must, first, indicate the date of the letter previously received, reply item by item to all the points raised, and, finally, add anything new."⁴⁴

Letter 20: To Brother Gabriel Drolin

AMG; BL I.12; ÉC 20; OCL A 20

Paris

October 28, 1705

- 1 I do not know, my very dear Brother, whether you received the letter I wrote in reply to your previous one. I addressed it as you directed. Always write to me through Avignon.
- 2 To avoid making a mistake and for greater security, I am sending this one in care of Monsieur de La Bussière. Give me another address next time if this one is not suitable, or let me know where you are living.
- 3 You do well to await the order of Providence.
- 4 I told you not to make me run up debts, because I do not want to hear them even mentioned. You must not expect me

44. *The Rules of Christian Decorum and Civility* (Romeoville, IL: Lasallian Publications, 1990), "Letters," 41.

- to pay for any at all, whether by bill of exchange or otherwise. I have never wanted debts and will not have any at all.
- 5 When you need something, let me know in advance. You know what I told you in the past; please count on that.
 - 6 You ought not to have left Monsieur de La Bussière's house without consulting me and knowing where you would live.
 - 7 I told you what I could do; you must count on what I say.
 - 8 I want to be quite clear about what I am undertaking.
 - 9 God had placed you with Monsieur de La Bussière. You ought to have stayed there until you were employed where you could live independently.
 - 10 I told you that I could arrange to give you 50 francs that are at Avignon, apparently with no exchange to pay.
 - 11 I am going to send to Avignon some books of school prayers, with rubrics, that we had printed. Some can be sent to you from there.
 - 12 I have seen Monsieur Théodon only once. He has not been well.
 - 13 In your last letter, you tell me that you are sending Monsieur Théodon's receipt; however, I did not receive it, and it was not in your letter.
 - 14 It would be useless for you to draw bills of exchange against my account, because I could not pay them.
 - 15 I realize that it is advantageous to be withdrawn from the world, but we must have a livelihood, and we must know where to gain it before we leave the world.
 - 16 I addressed my last letter simply to Monsieur Santenot; find out whether it is lost.
 - 17 See whether God marks your work with approval and whether Providence assists you or appears willing to help you.
 - 18 I would very much like to know in what neighborhood you are living.
 - 19 Pray to God for us, and believe me, in our Lord, my very dear Brother,
- Totally yours,
DE LA SALLE



The postal service between Paris and Rome was often quite irregular and subject to unexpected delays, but De La Salle's letter, addressed directly to Monsieur Santenot, got through without problems, contrary to the fears De La Salle expresses in paragraph 1. The fact that he did not send it in care of his friend De La Bussière caused him some misgivings.

To understand the repetitions of concerns in De La Salle's successive letters, it is necessary to realize that his letters and Drolin's did not follow one after the other in perfect order; they often crisscrossed en route.

The sentence in paragraph 15—"I realize that it is advantageous to be withdrawn from the world, but we must have a livelihood, and we must know where to gain it before we leave the world"—was judged severely by the theologian who examined De La Salle's writings during the preliminary stages of the process of beatification leading to De La Salle's being declared Venerable in 1838. The theologian believed that this comment showed that De La Salle lacked complete confidence in Providence.

In response to this theologian, who played the role of "devil's advocate," the theologians who were promoting the cause of beatification, Rosatini and Mercurelli, resorted to an entirely different interpretation of De La Salle's use of the word "world." They proposed that De La Salle was advising Drolin to stay in the world of the De La Bussière home but not to become involved with the secular (worldly) activities there. Apparently this argument, more adroit than accurate, went unchallenged.

Letter 21: To Brother Gabriel Drolin

AMG; BL I.13; ÉC 21; OC LA 21

Paris

February 11, 1706

- 1 I realized, my very dear Brother, that you were not completely yourself when you wrote the letter previous to the one I am answering, but I tried not to give you cause for that reaction.
- 2 I am very pleased to learn from your last letter that you were not so upset. I believe that you did calm down completely when you received my last letter.
- 3 You will do well to cash as quickly as you can the 100 francs that I arranged for you to receive.
- 4 With regard to what you say I wrote to you, I did so at two different times: first, when you had nothing else to do at the time than to take care of Monsieur de La Bussière's children;

second, when you were trying to get a school position while still living at his house.

- 5 In the first instance, I was constantly urging you to leave that situation, for I did not regard it as conformable to your vocation.
- 6 The second time, I wrote that you ought to take into account that I could assist you only for six months or one year. I do not know whether I said one year or one and a half years, but that is all, if I went as far as that.
- 7 I later regarded it as a direction of Providence that Monsieur de La Bussière invited you to take your meals at his house, for I was not in much of a position to help you, and I am even less so now than ever.
- 8 You ought not to have left this providential arrangement without knowing whether I would approve and be in a position to provide you with everything, and for how long, and without our taking definite measures about it together.
- 9 Nevertheless, I will do all I can for you, although I am quite far from having money at the moment and owe nearly 900 livres.
- 10 I am distressed to see you living in such poverty; please tell me what I can do to remedy this situation.
- 11 You see the situation I am in; nevertheless, your position appears to be very embarrassing, and I feel it deeply.
- 12 I would be very pleased to know whether anything is improving for you.
- 13 Even if you must pay for currency exchange from Avignon to Rome, I prefer to have the 100 francs sent here and to pay here for Monsieur de La Bussière's bill of exchange, because it will thus cost us nothing for exchange, and you will get the entire 100 francs. Let me know what will need to be done.
- 14 I delayed answering you because I had not noticed the little note enclosed with your letter; I thought that my last letter would have reassured you.
- 15 We started school at Marseille two weeks ago.
- 16 You must not think of giving up until we have decided together what we will have to do.
- 17 If you cannot make any headway in the near future, we must turn only to God and leave to God the care, the direction,

and the arrangements. This summer I will take steps to see that our undertaking does not fail and to free you and me from a difficult situation.

- 18 From now until Pentecost, pray often to our Lord for this and all our concerns.
- 19 I have heard that Cardinal de Janson is returning to France and that Abbé d'Estrées is going to take his place.
- 20 Please do not write to all sorts of people as you are doing. This exchange of useless letters does not suit us.
- 21 I unite myself with you in our Lord, and I am, in his love, my very dear Brother,
Totally yours,
DE LA SALLE



This is the first of a series of letters (21 to 26) sent to Gabriel Drolin in care of Father Divers, Procurator General of the Congregation of the Mission in Rome. Father Divers had arranged accommodations for Drolin in a house of the Vincentian Fathers for young men preparing for the priesthood. Divers also helped him in some way to obtain a teaching post in a papal school and who, in addition, acted as his confidant and spiritual director, encouraging him when, as we see from paragraph 16 of this letter, he was on the point of giving up and leaving Rome.

We gather from the first several paragraphs that Drolin had reacted with some annoyance to De La Salle's criticism of his withdrawal from De La Bussière's house and to the fact that he had not received sufficient money to pay for the lease of his newly acquired school. Evidently, Drolin had told De La Salle that he had acted just as the Founder had so often advised him to do. De La Salle attempts to mollify him and indeed adopts a less critical tone in his reprimands from this point onward. We cannot help feeling sympathy for Drolin, who had been working so long with so little success and under such difficult circumstances alone in a foreign country. At the same time, we can understand De La Salle's problems with financial difficulties. Less than a week before he wrote this letter, the Court of Justice in Paris had reaffirmed the decision previously handed down in favor of the Masters of the Little Schools against De La Salle and the Brothers teaching in that city. On February 10, 1706, De La Salle was notified of the decision, which carried with it the imposition of a heavy fine, the 900 livres mentioned in paragraph 9. This fine, in addition to the commitment for the lease of the new house at Saint Yon in Rouen, made it increasingly hard for him to subsidize Drolin in Rome.

This letter, with De La Salle's careful explanation in paragraphs 4 to 7 of his understanding about Drolin's relations with De La Bussière, clarifies the situation of Drolin during his early years in Rome. From January to September 1704, Drolin was teaching the De La Bussière children (Letters 13 and 14), no doubt in compensation for his room and board. Beginning in October 1704, Drolin was negotiating with the regional authorities for a teaching position (Letters 15 and 16). Letter 17 of April 1705 indicates that Drolin had secured a position in late 1704 or early 1705 but that he was also considering a position in one of the papal schools. In any case, De La Salle considers that Drolin is now employed according to the purposes of the Institute. However, in paragraphs 8 to 12, De La Salle inquires about the security of Drolin's position as a teacher in the regional school. In fact, Drolin had to leave that employment in August 1708, but in October 1709 he was able to obtain the position in a papal school on a tentative basis, then permanently in 1712.

Letter 22: To Brother Gabriel Drolin

AMG; BL I.14; ÉC 22; OC LA 22

Paris

April 16, 1706

- 1 I received your last two letters, my very dear Brother, the one of February 23 and the other of March 2, but I received the first one through the French post, not through Monsieur de La Bussière.
- 2 I had the enclosure delivered to Monsieur Théodon.
- 3 I am delighted that you have enough confidence in Father Divers to tell him to whom you write and why.
- 4 I find it hard to believe that he knew about the letter to the governor of Calais and about its contents. Please avoid letters as useless as that one was.
- 5 You ought to have sent me immediately the copy of your teaching authorization without waiting for me to learn about it elsewhere. Thank you for sending it to me in your last letter.
- 6 I am not at all annoyed about the letters that you included with mine; that is not what I meant to speak to you about. I wanted to tell you not to write and to receive all those kinds of useless letters, which are inappropriate for us.

- 7 I have instructed Avignon to pay Monsieur de La Bussière's bill of exchange.
- 8 I will try to see that you are satisfied with me.
- 9 We have Brothers just beginning in Marseille; they have nearly 200 students in one school alone. There are schools in four neighborhoods; the Brothers will eventually have them all.
- 10 We must hope that as our Brothers come ever nearer to you, God will bless and in the end increase your school.
- 11 We will try to provide you the means for this, and we will soon see what can be done in this regard.
- 12 Pray often to God for us, who are in great need of it. We will also pray to him for you. We will try to help you and to bring you relief in every way we can. Have patience a little longer.
I am, in our Lord, my very dear Brother,
Totally yours,
DE LA SALLE



Drolin had become acquainted with the governor of Calais, the Duke de Béthune, when he was assigned to that city in 1700. Because the Duke spent most of his time at his town house in Paris, where De La Salle was a welcome visitor, De La Salle became aware of Drolin's letter, as he mentions in paragraph 4.

It is not difficult to imagine how De La Salle managed to hear, as he mentions in paragraph 5, of Drolin's success in at last getting authorization to teach in the regional schools in Rome. Drolin was no doubt so delighted in finally obtaining what had so long eluded him that he would have told all his acquaintances, who evidently got the news to De La Salle before Drolin sent his letter off to Paris. De La Salle seems not to have been lacking multiple sources of information.

In paragraph 9 De La Salle mentions the situation of the Brothers in Marseille. In March 1704 a deacon had been engaged to direct a school in the parish of Saint Laurent in Marseille. However, the report of the success of the Brothers in Avignon so impressed those responsible for this new parish school of Saint Laurent that they began negotiations in 1705 with De La Salle for the services of the Brothers. Brother Albert, as we learn from Letter 19, was delegated to act on De La Salle's behalf. In January 1706 the archbishop of Marseille gave such a favorable report on the Brothers that the deacon was dismissed, and the Brothers from Avignon were welcomed a few days later to take charge of the

school. The founders of the school officially thanked Brother Albert for his efforts on April 6, Easter Monday, 1706. De La Salle had intended to send Brother Albert to join Drolin after Easter that year, but once again his decision had to be delayed. (See Letter 19, paragraph 20.)

Letter 23: To Brother Gabriel Drolin

AMG; BL I.15; ÉC 23; OCL A 23

Paris
May 12, 1706

- 1 I received your letter only yesterday, my very dear Brother.
- 2 Three days ago, I gave a bill of exchange, drawn on the Brothers of Avignon, for the 100 livres you owe Monsieur de La Bussière. I am sending you the receipt for it, so that you can hand it to Monsieur de La Bussière and get his, which you will send to me.
- 3 I thought there would be no exchange to pay on these 100 livres; it is a great loss every time. Perhaps we could save ourselves this fee or, at the least, a good part of it. You ought to have warned me about it beforehand.
- 4 I am annoyed that you presented a written statement to the papal almoner; that might have been inappropriate.
- 5 You can be sure, as I wrote to you, that I had not abandoned you.
- 6 If you have received nothing, let me know at once; in that case you need only to tell Brother Albert at Avignon to see that you get ten écus. But you are not to do this in case you receive something, for he will have great difficulty paying you the money.
- 7 Had I received your letter four days earlier, I would not have sent that bill of exchange. I would have instructed Avignon to forward you the money.
- 8 Do you think I want to let you die of hunger?⁴⁵
- 9 We must see how you will manage between now and October, at which time I will bring about a change without fail.
- 10 You must make sure that the owners of your house do not seize your household goods.

45. See Letter 14, paragraph 15.

- 11 Still, it is not right that you appealed to your sister.
- 12 The post leaves every week. Why do you not write to me?
Why did you go five weeks without writing to me?
- 13 Please do not act like that any more; take no further steps,
except in case of an emergency when you cannot wait for my
reply.
- 14 I will pray and have frequent prayers offered to God for you
and your concerns.
I am, in our Lord, my very dear Brother,
Totally yours,
DE LA SALLE
- 15 You did not send me the date of your teaching authorization.
You merely put “Approved, and so on.” Please send me the
entire document, both the copy and the signatures.



In this letter we learn that Drolin is still without payment for his teaching in the class annexed to the regional school. He had his authorization to teach, but the only paid teachers were those of the papal schools or in charge of the regional schools. Others were expected to make a living by collecting fees from students able to pay. Because such a practice was totally foreign to the practices in the Christian Schools of the Brothers, Drolin was still in need of subsidy from France. To solve his difficulty, he had recourse to the papal almoner, who distributed funds. De La Salle alludes to this in paragraph 4. Drolin’s request would have required an explanation of who he is, what he is trying to do, and why he is in Rome. This situation did not please De La Salle at all. He still wanted to inform the Roman authorities himself when he was ready to do so officially.

Drolin’s situation was most unenviable. He was in danger of having his household goods confiscated to pay the rent, as indicated in paragraph 10. His appeal to his sister for help, mentioned in paragraph 11, also met with De La Salle’s disapproval. His sister must have assisted him, for in Letter 26, paragraph 5, written a year later, De La Salle confesses that he has not repaid the money owed to Drolin’s brother-in-law.

The postscript about the missing date of Drolin’s authorization to teach in the regional schools reveals the care that De La Salle, true son of a lawyer, gave to legal matters. He was concerned not only with the exact date but also with the signatures on the document. If he had been planning to prepare an appeal to the Holy See for the approval of the Institute, this information would have been useful.

Letter 24: To Brother Gabriel Drolin*AMG; BL I.17; ÉC 24; OC LA 24*

Paris

June 21, 1706

- 1 Since my letter of April 16, I believe you have received two other letters prior to this one, my very dear Brother.
- 2 In the first I mentioned that I had given a bill of exchange, drawn on the Avignon community, to Monsieur Marteau. He would take only one for 100 livres, although I pressed him to take one for 107 livres.
- 3 I sent you the receipt he gave me and asked you to give it to Monsieur de La Bussière and to get one from him by which he releases you from the debt, in view of the amount I had supplied to Monsieur Marteau.
- 4 I asked Monsieur de Chateaublanc to see that you got ten écus. Please let me know through whom and how.
- 5 I do not know what expenditures you undertook that you now regret. Rest assured that I will not let you lack what you need.
- 6 Run your school gently without getting further involved. I think that God will not bless you that way.
- 7 You see what use all your written statements are. Do not address His Holiness; you would ruin everything. We will have to take other measures for which God will give us the means.
- 8 Do not let the opportunities you might find slip away, but do not hurry things.
- 9 You told me that all you were asking me for is the rent for your classroom and your living quarters. What are you living on? Make sure that you do not give up.
- 10 I am very pleased that Monsignor Fieschi is a cardinal.
- 11 Is not Abbé de La Trémouille the Abbé de Noirmoutier, whom I knew as the vicar-general of Laon, the hunchback, who has been in Rome for some time now?
- 12 In five or six months, when the Brother from Avignon comes to Rome, there will be much more cause to seek an audience through the mediation of Monsignor Fieschi, who was its archbishop, not to mention that the vice-legat of Avignon is going to be or is already governor of Rome.

- 13 But I do not like all these human views; they are certainly not those the saints followed.
- 14 You speak to me as though I were quite insensitive and unwilling to give you anything. I do not know whether it is because you are not receiving my letters.
- 15 I arranged for the last one to be given to you through Monsieur de Chateaublanc of Avignon.
- 16 I did not think that your life was as hard as you reported.
- 17 Monsieur Leroy, who lives in this region and told me he had dined with you, said that you had a wine cellar, and good wine at that.
- 18 A Breton priest, who has obtained a parish and returned to his own province and who says that he spent several years at Saint Sulpice and lived near you, has let it be known in his region that when he left you, you were a deacon. I do not know what he means.
- 19 I do not understand what you mean when you say that you gave a bill of exchange for 107 livres to Monsieur de La Bussière and that you gave instructions that my note be paid without saying to whom it is to be made out. Tell me what you mean by that. You surely understand what I wrote at the beginning of this letter.
- 20 They tell me from Avignon that they paid the bill of exchange from Rome. Please make sure that there is no mix-up in all this.
- 21 I do not know why you tell me not to write to you by way of Marseille. I have never yet written to you by that route.
- 22 My letters to you through Avignon ought to cost only four sols, it seems to me, for they cost only that from Rome to Avignon. Write to me often.
- 23 I ask our Lord to fill you with his graces, and
I am, in our Lord, my very dear Brother,
Totally yours,
DE LA SALLE



In a previous letter, Drolin had told De La Salle of his written request to the papal almoner for financial assistance. This request had met with no success. Drolin then stated that he was thinking of seeking an audience

with the Pope, Clement XI, in office since 1700. This course of action De La Salle simply forbade, because from his experience in obtaining civil and ecclesiastical approval for the Sisters of the Child Jesus in Reims, he knew, as he suggests in paragraphs 7 and 12, the importance of having friends at court even in the most deserving cases. The news mentioned in paragraphs 10 and 12, that Monsignor Fieschi and Monsignor de La Trémouille, whom De La Salle knew from Avignon and Laon, had been created cardinals and that the vice-legate of Avignon was to be the governor of Rome, must have seemed providential to De La Salle. So he speaks once more of sending a second Brother to Rome, mentioning in paragraph 12 that his arrival will provide the suitable occasion for a papal audience.

We have no information about the Monsieur Leroy named in paragraph 17, but the Breton priest mentioned in paragraph 18 is Father Suïro. He had been in Rome to compete for one of the parishes in Brittany, nomination to which was reserved to the Holy See. Applicants for such benefices entered some form of competitive examination, the winner being awarded the position of pastor.

Brother Gabriel Drolin is named in the *Status Animarum* of San Lorenzo of 1705 as *Sigr. Gabriele de Rolini, subdiacono, Mro. [Maestro] di scuola*. The Breton priest mistakenly advanced him to the diaconate. Because Drolin by this time was wearing a long robe rather than the short one of the Brothers, he was no doubt presumed to be a cleric in Rome, where the schools were normally conducted by clerics. In later letters we will find that De La Salle is concerned that his disciple might actually be entering Orders and thereby acting in contradiction to the established practices of the Institute of the Brothers of the Christian Schools.

Letter 25: To Brother Gabriel Drolin

AMG; BL I.19; ÉC 25; OC LA 25

Paris
November 26, 1706

- 1 I received your letter of October 16, my very dear Brother.
- 2 It seems to me that I have received nothing from you since July 24; that is quite a long time.
- 3 I am very sorry about the accident that happened to you.
- 4 I am very pleased that you drew the bill of exchange on Avignon, because I told them repeatedly to send you that money. I do not know why they did not do so.

- 5 They told me, it is true, that they cannot easily find the right means and opportunity to transfer money to Rome. No doubt they will get the amount to you.
- 6 You did well to give up the negotiating you were doing to acquire something. I am happy that you still have a good number of students, but does no Italian say anything to you about the gratuity of your school? Does this feature not bring you any public attention? Does no one ask what you live on or who enables you to run the school free of charge like that?
- 7 I knew nothing about the lawsuit against the Lazarists.
- 8 It is true that we pay only four sols for postage from Rome to Avignon by the papal post. That is what is always marked on your letters that I receive. I am ordering this one to be sent through the papal post. You will tell me how it turns out.
- 9 Give Monsieur Leroy of Paris my regards.
- 10 I would very much like to know what that Breton did that brought such dishonor on him. I really would.
- 11 I know Cardinal de La Trémouille; he is a gentleman with no affectation.
- 12 I met here the former vice-legate of Avignon, who departed his post in August. I believe he returned to Rome. He is a tonsured cleric who had great affection for the schools in Avignon.
- 13 Thank you for letting me know in detail how you spend your time.
- 14 Pray for us in a special way as soon as you receive my letter. From Christmas until Sunday, the day after New Year's, make a novena at Saint Peter's for a special need that is urgent and important for the Community. If you receive my letter too late, which I do not think will happen, begin and end your novena later.
- 15 We have a community near where your brother lives and where I had him appointed sacristan, because he was not achieving his salvation in the world. He is too easygoing. Presently he is quite steady and prudent, and he comes to me for Confession.
- 16 I am ordinarily at this community, rue Saint Honoré, because we have the schools of Saint Roch parish.

I am, in our Lord, my very dear Brother,
 Totally yours,
 DE LA SALLE



From the information in the opening paragraphs of this letter, it would seem that some of the correspondence between De La Salle and Drolin through Avignon had been intercepted or had otherwise gone astray. This situation became noticeably worse later on. There is no indication, however, to show whether De La Salle wrote during the five months since the letter of June 21, 1706. If he did write, that correspondence has not been preserved.

The months of August and September 1706 immediately preceding the date of this letter were particularly painful for De La Salle because of the difficulties raised by the Writing Masters. Father de La Chétardie, the pastor of Saint Sulpice, did nothing on this occasion to oppose them, although in November of the previous year he had intervened on behalf of the Brothers in a similar dispute with the Writing Masters, but only after a long delay. At that time he had arranged that the Writing Masters return the classroom furniture that they had previously confiscated. This time, however, the Brothers prevailed on De La Salle to withdraw them from the schools in Saint Sulpice parish. They returned at the beginning of October, but with the understanding that only poor students could be admitted.⁴⁶

De La Salle's questions in paragraph 6 about the Italian reaction to Drolin's school's being free of charge make clear the special character of gratuity maintained by the Brothers' schools in France. It was precisely at this time, the fall of 1706, that this characteristic of the Christian Schools was a legal issue of critical significance. The Writing Masters, who charged a fee in their schools, lost several students who transferred to the Christian School in the parish of Saint Sulpice, largely because of the good reputation that the Brothers' schools had earned. The Writing Masters sued De La Salle for admitting students for a fee, contrary to the express purpose of the Christian Schools. He, in turn, challenged them to find a single instance in his schools of a student who paid any fee. Thus gratuity was not only the special characteristic of the Christian Schools but even the necessary condition on which they were allowed to exist. However, the situation for Drolin in Rome was quite different, and the Italians were not at all curious about his free school or his means of livelihood.

46. CL 8:43; *Life of John Baptist de La Salle*, Blain, Book Three, Chapter V, 546.

Although De La Salle had established his novitiate at Saint Yon, a suburb of Rouen, he desired to establish in or near Paris a house large enough to serve as the center of the Institute. According to Georges Rigault, the author of *Histoire générale*, a detailed history of the Institute, De La Salle commissioned Brother Thomas, the Institute's Procurator, to look for a suitable property. Brother Thomas had remained on close terms with Father de La Chétardie, even while that pastor carried out his vendetta against De La Salle. Brother Thomas found a property that De La Salle considered particularly suitable and also persuaded De La Chétardie to approve of it and to provide for its immediate lease. Probably this search for a community house for the Brothers is the special intention that De La Salle, in paragraph 14, recommends to Drolin's prayers. Another intention might be the bequest from Brodard, pending the death of his sister, who probably died at the end of 1706 or early in 1707, because the matter went to court for settlement when relatives contested it.⁴⁷

An interesting insight into De La Salle's character is derived from his reference in paragraph 15 to the help that he had arranged for Drolin's brother by providing him with needed employment in a place where he would receive some support from the Brothers. This former Brother was not managing well since he withdrew from the Institute; De La Salle recognized that he probably needed encouragement and personal support as much as he needed employment.

Letter 26: To Brother Gabriel Drolin

AMG; BL I.21; ÉC 26; OC LA 26

Paris

April 1, 1707

- 1 It is about a week since I received your letter, my very dear Brother.
- 2 I was quite upset to hear of your illness, and I am very glad that God has restored your health.
- 3 I too have been very unwell, not being able to walk for six weeks; I am feeling much better now.
- 4 I was quite surprised not to receive any news from you, which made me anxious.

47. See the commentary on page 65, which mentions that De La Salle renounced his claim on January 26, 1707.

- 5 As yet I have not repaid your brother-in-law the money you mentioned to me, but I will repay him as soon as possible.
- 6 We must still wait a little longer. What I want to do is to send a Brother toward the end of this summer, because I am very eager to provide you more rest and more ways to apply yourself to interior prayer.
- 7 Even so, I do not know what can prevent you from doing so.
- 8 I realize that most cities in Italy are neither large nor densely populated. Monsieur Bonhomme, who is here, tells me the reason for this.
- 9 Often pray that our Lord will bless this work of his.
- 10 Brother Albert has established another school, at Valréas in the Comtat, in the diocese of Vaison.
- 11⁴⁸ The bishop of Vaison,⁴⁹ whom you know, strongly supports our Brothers and has given them his house in Valréas to live in.
- 12 A short time ago, Brother Ponce opened a school in Mende, an episcopal city in France at the edge of Languedoc. He has fallen ill there.
- 13 Pray to God for us, and believe me, in our Lord, my very dear Brother,
Totally yours,
DE LA SALLE

Your last letter was not dated.



We have no indication what illness Drolin was suffering from, and we can assume only that it was the result of the accident referred to in Letter 25, paragraph 3. Certainly Drolin's continued worry over his difficult financial situation, his lack of the companionship of community, and his overwork would have contributed to whatever illness he had. He had told De La Salle that all this was undermining his spiritual health too.

In a rare moment of self-revelation, De La Salle confides in paragraph 3 that he too had been unwell for some six weeks, but he does not mention the cause of this illness. One of De La Salle's biographers, Canon Blain, however, gives some detail of the incident that confined

48. The numbering of the paragraphs of the Letters in this volume follows the numbering in *Édition Critique*, but in this letter, *ÉC* numbers the last three paragraphs 11, 11, 12.

49. Joseph François Gaultieri; see Letter 18, paragraph 20.

a Land w, w
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[illegible]

De La Salle to bed for so long. One evening, as De La Salle was returning to his community, he stumbled in the snow and fell on an iron stake fixed into the ground as a doorstep. The iron stake struck a large swelling already on De La Salle's bad knee. The pain was so great that De La Salle fell almost unconscious in the snow and mud, and he was quite unable to rise. Two passersby at first thought that he was drunk, but they helped him up and left him leaning against a wall. There he waited until he was able to continue his way. He finished the short distance to the community house in about an hour. On his arrival home, he was carried to bed, where he "was laid up for more than six weeks."⁵⁰

As usual, De La Salle gives Drolin news of developments in France. In paragraphs 10, 11, and 12, he writes about two foundations in the South of France, at Valréas and at Mende, under the direction of Brothers Albert and Ponce. The Brothers remained only eight months in Valréas, because the Municipal Council required them to teach Latin, which was contrary to the practices of the Institute. (For another reference to the foundation in Mende, see Letter 56 to Brother Mathias).

The Monsieur Bonhomme referred to in paragraph 8 has not been identified with any certainty. The name of a Father Bonhomme, "chaplain of the Church," appears in the 1712 register of the parish of Saint Louis of the French in Rome.

Letter 27: To Brother Gabriel Drolin

AMG; BL I.33; ÉC 27; OC LA 27

Paris

February 14, 1710

- 1 I was delighted a few days ago, my very dear Brother, to receive your letter of November 7, forwarded to me by your brother.
- 2 I wrote you two letters, one in August and the other near the end of November, which Brother Ponce tells me he personally handed to the courier. I addressed both of them to Monsieur de La Bussière to be handed on to you.
- 3 If I am not to send them in care of him, let me know. Give me a sure address, either to you directly or elsewhere, but please make sure that it cannot go astray.
- 4 I am delighted that you now have a papal school, which is what I was hoping for.

50. CL 8:456; Blain, Book Four, *The Mind and Heart of John Baptist de La Salle*, 469.



Facade of the building where the Brothers established a Christian School at Mende (Lozère, France). Photo by E. Rousset (*J.-B. de La Salle; Iconographie*, Boulogne: Limet, 1979, plate 124).

- 5 I have asked Brother Ponce to call on the bishop of Cavail-
lon for me if he is in residence and to offer him my thanks
for his kindnesses to you.
- 6 In the future we must see to it that finally there will be
another Brother to be with you.
- 7 I am very pleased that you have left Monsieur de La Bussière's
house. I am writing him to thank him for the kindness he
showed you and for the favor he granted you. I am also
telling him that I will not forget him and that I will pray and
have prayers offered to God for him and for his family.
- 8 I am very pleased that you have been on retreat to try to
regain with more abundance the spirit of your state and the
spirit of interior prayer. I will ask God to grant you this grace.
- 9 I am well aware that it is a great misery to be obliged to
communicate with the world and that it is much to your
advantage to have disengaged yourself from it to a great
extent. Make every effort also to disassociate from those
ordinands.
- 10 You can rest assured that I do not fail to pray to God for you.
- 11 I am delighted that you are now in perfect health.
- 12 I know that you have plenty to do where you are, and I
rejoice that you have a good number of students there.
- 13 I also know that corruption is rampant there and that you
must be especially careful and watchful over yourself to keep
out of it. I bless God that he has given you the grace to stay
free of it thus far.
- 14 We have Brothers in Grenoble, Alès, Mende, and Mâcon, I
think, since the last time I heard from you.
- 15 Ask God to bless our Institute, and believe in me, in our
Lord, my very dear Brother,
Totally yours,
DE LA SALLE



Letter 26 was the last of the letters addressed to Monsieur Santenot, in care of Father Divers, Procurator General of the Congregation of the Mission. Divers had become suspect in Rome, because of his ambiguous stance in the religious controversies current in France at that time. He left Rome on April 7, 1708. This situation could explain in part why we

have no record of letters to Drolin from De La Salle from April 1707 until early in 1710. From this Letter 27 we learn that De La Salle had written to Drolin at least in August and November 1709 in care of De La Bussière. Letter 27 was evidently sent by the same method. The letters of August and November 1709, which Brother Ponce forwarded through the papal postal service, were probably not collected by De La Bussière, because he would have used the French postal service.

During this long period of silence, Drolin had gone through a time of considerable difficulty. He had had no word from De La Salle; his financial difficulties continued to increase, apparently with no improvement in sight. To add to his problems, Drolin lost his position as a teacher in the regional school system, perhaps because of his association with Father Divers. He acquired temporary lodging, however, in a house belonging to the Priests of the Mission, in which aspirants to the priesthood lived and made their retreat in order to obtain certification of their suitability for ordination.

Contact with the young men preparing for ordination seems to have induced Drolin to consider receiving the subdiaconate. His name appears in the *Liber Ordinationum* of the vicariate of Rome, dated May 5, 1709. No doubt he took this step in the hope that he might more easily regain his post in the regional schools. As we learn in Letter 28, De La Salle became aware of Drolin's action from a third person whom he does not name. When he wrote this letter, De La Salle may well have had some awareness of what Drolin was doing, but because Drolin did not mention the matter in the letter delivered through his brother, Gérard, De La Salle does not refer to it directly. He may be doing so indirectly in his remark in paragraph 8 about Drolin's being on retreat.

Ironically, Drolin could have been on this retreat in preparation for the tonsure. De La Salle may have known this, but he speaks of the retreat as aimed at renewing "more abundantly the spirit of your state. . . . I will ask God to grant you this grace." In paragraphs 9 and 10, De La Salle adds, "Make every effort also to disassociate from those ordinands. You can rest assured that I do not fail to pray to God for you." His earlier remark in paragraph 6 about sending Drolin "another Brother to be with you" indicates De La Salle's continual concern to support Drolin, not only in his ministry but also in his vocation. Perhaps De La Salle intended that these comments would serve as a gentle reminder to Drolin of Drolin's commitment to remain a Brother. Such subtlety might not have been lost on Drolin, for in his next letter to De La Salle, he seems to accuse the Founder of not being completely frank with him. De La Salle denies this accusation in paragraph 25 of Letter 28 when he replies, "It is not true that I speak to you only halfway; I simply tell you things just as I think them to be."

Paragraphs 4 and 5 suggest that Drolin's appointment to a papal school was due to the help of the new bishop of Cavaillon, Guyons de Crochans, the former secretary of Cardinal de La Trémouille. He was named bishop while still only tonsured. To fulfill the requirements for ordination to the priesthood, the newly appointed bishop resided with the Priests of the Mission in the same house as Drolin, receiving successively minor orders, subdiaconate, diaconate, priesthood, and then ordination as bishop. De La Salle received news of Drolin's new appointment in a letter received from Drolin's brother, Gérard.

Negotiations for the opening of a school by the Brothers in Grenoble, mentioned in paragraph 14, got under way in March 1706. The opening was delayed because of the death of the bishop and did not take place until 1708, after the new bishop's installation. The school at Alès was opened in October 1707, and the school at Mende, mentioned in paragraph 12 of Letter 26, was opened in March of the same year. No information has come to light on the foundation at Mâcon. It is not mentioned in the list of 22 schools and communities in the deed of conveyance given by De La Salle to Brother Barthélemy, dated November 14, 1718.⁵¹

Letter 28: To Brother Gabriel Drolin

AMG; BL I.34; ÉC 28; OCL A 28

May 12, 1710

- 1 Your letter bore no date. I was much consoled on receiving your last letter, my very dear Brother.
- 2 You say that you received no letter from me except the one you received that was dated February 14; nevertheless, I would say that this was the third I have written to you since last August or September, for I am always very anxious for news from you.
- 3 I was very upset that the failure to receive my letters threw you off in your love for piety.
- 4 It would have been very unfortunate had you abandoned your school, because it has appeared up to now that God wills it.
- 5 Certainly, you must teach catechism to your students every day.

51. CL 26:313.

- 6 I do not understand why you say that because you are by yourself, it is difficult for you to take your students to Mass.
- 7 The best reason you give me for having a second Brother is that you are no longer young and that it is time to prepare another Brother for there in both the customs and the language of the country.
- 8 I understand your reasons to the contrary. It is difficult to find an easy solution in the first place, especially because the present rate of exchange in France is very high; we lose a great deal in exchange. Because conditions are miserable, it would be difficult to provide anything at all for this expense. Twelve pistoles would mean paying more than 24 pistoles here, but because this is only for one year, as you point out, there is not so much to consider.
- 9 I do not know what you mean by saying that until now you have appeared to be living the Rule only halfway. Have you changed something in your robe or in your external behavior? In what way? Let me know.
- 10 Of course, with two of you, both will need to be seen following the Rule. You would do well to discuss the matter with the cardinal vicar's secretary.
- 11 I do not know why you say that they pay you one pistole per month as an individual, not as a schoolteacher. It seems to me that you mentioned to your brother that the papal coat of arms is over the entrance to your school and that your school is one of the papal schools.
- 12 This is what I have thought since then, because the reason why you are living near the Capuchins is because your school is in that neighborhood.
- 13 It would be appropriate if you had such a school and the official certification.
- 14 I will try to send you a second Brother during the next school vacation; work to prepare for that.
- 15 I will send you two copies of the school prayers. Avignon has some; Brother Ponce could send them to you. I am quite happy that you write to him from time to time.
- 16 I have not yet thought about going to Rome. I could not do it now except with difficulty.
- 17 I do not fail to pray to God for you and for the success of your work.

- 18 I am upset that you must have so much contact with the world. I have no difficulty in understanding that your piety has been weakened because of this. Please resume the practice of interior prayer seriously.
- 19 Several of your letters and of mine have vanished somehow or other. I might try to write to one of the Capuchins to see whether you would get my letter more quickly.
- 20 It is already a week ago that I asked Father Divers, who came here, to write to let you know that I had written many letters to you and was worried about not receiving any news from you. He told me a week ago today that he would write and that I ought to write to you directly.
- 21 You did well not to go where they wanted to put you; that would have ruined everything. You are right in saying that the work of eight years would have proven useless.
- 22 I did not receive the letter that you tell me you wrote at the time.
- 23 What the Pope gives you, then, is only a kind of alms. Let me know what that is all about.
- 24 I am told that you had intended to be tonsured; tell me what that is all about. You realize that it is contrary to our Community practices.
- 25 It is not true that I speak to you only halfway; I simply tell you things just as I think them to be.
- 26 You must try to increase the number of your students.
- 27 I am very pleased that from time to time you go on retreat at the house of the Congregation of the Mission.
- 28 You told me in your previous letter that you had at least 60 students.
- 29 I am delighted that you have freed yourself of those ordinances of yours. Try as quickly as possible to do so with the rest.
- 30 I ask God to give you his Spirit, and I am, in our Lord, my very dear Brother,
Totally yours,
DE LA SALLE



Drolin evidently gave De La Salle two reasons in favor of sending a second Brother to Rome and two reasons against such a step. De La Salle's response, in paragraphs 6 and 7, addresses the first two reasons. He indicates that he does not understand why Drolin has difficulty taking his students to Mass by himself, and he agrees that Drolin is not getting any younger and will need time to train the Brother who might be sent. But he addresses, in paragraph 8, only the first reason against sending a Brother, that is, the expense of his upkeep. We do not know the second reason that Drolin advanced; perhaps it was the lack of a Brother with the right qualifications or the scarcity of Brothers altogether.

From De La Salle's remarks in paragraph 11, it is clear that Drolin has been accepted not as a permanent teacher in the papal school system but only provisionally and on half-stipend. Drolin was also having difficulty teaching catechism during school time, as indicated in paragraph 5. (It was the practice in Rome that members of the Archconfraternity of Christian Doctrine taught catechism in the parish church on Sundays, under the direction of the pastor.) Nor does it seem, according to paragraph 6, that Drolin was able to carry out the prescription of the Brothers' Rule that required the students to be taken to Mass each day during class hours. From the comments in paragraphs 9 and 18, it is clear that Drolin must have also confessed to De La Salle that he was less than faithful to the Rule, frequenting worldly society and failing to spend sufficient time at interior prayer. The wonder is that Drolin, lacking any form of community support for so many years, persevered in his vocation at all.

It would appear that Drolin made no mention that he had had his name placed in the *Liber Ordinationum* of the vicariate of Rome. In paragraphs 24 and 29, De La Salle invites him to give a clear statement of his position with regard to the receiving of Orders. He reminds him that such a course of action is contrary to Institute practice from its earliest years.⁵² In fact, Drolin's signature was attached to the document prepared by the Brothers at their General Assembly of 1694 in which, recording the election of De La Salle as Superior, the Brothers state that "after him [De La Salle] for the future and for all time, no one will be either received among us or chosen as Superior who is a priest or has received Holy Orders."⁵³ No doubt De La Salle's reminder brought back to Drolin memories of that noteworthy Assembly.

Paragraph 9 indicates that De La Salle was insistent on Drolin's wearing the religious garb of the Brothers as it was worn in France. (See

52. CL 11:52; "Those who make up this Community are all laymen," *Rule and Foundational Documents*, 183.

53. CL 7:348; *Life*, Blain, Book Two, Chapter XIII, 339; CL 3:10.

also paragraphs 5 and 6 of Letter 31.) De La Salle had defended this custom against those who had wished to interfere and to have the Brothers wear a clerical soutane. He wished his Institute to be established in Rome as an Institute of Brothers who were unmistakably not priests. However, he seemed to be unaware of the prevalent opinion in that city that all teachers ought to be at least in minor orders. He refers in paragraphs 10 and 14, as well as in paragraph 5 of Letter 29, to his promise of a second Brother as a means of persuading Drolin to resume wearing the Brothers' robe. (See the commentary on Letter 27 concerning De La Salle's remark in paragraph 25, "It is not true that I speak to you only halfway.")

Letter 29: To Brother Gabriel Drolin

AMG; BL I.37; ÉC 29; OC LA 29

Letter 29 was written from Marseille, where De La Salle stayed after his visit to the other schools of the Brothers in the South of France. He indicates in paragraph 12 that he was "returning to France"—actually Paris—where his presence was required by the impending lawsuit brought against him by the Clément family for allegedly taking illegal advantage of a minor, Abbé Jean-Charles Clément.

In 1708 Abbé Clément had approached De La Salle, expressing the desire to establish a training school for teachers for rural village schools. He wished it to be staffed by Brothers. After considerable hesitation, De La Salle was prevailed upon to arrange for the young Abbé the purchase of a suitable property at Saint-Denis, outside Paris. This was done partly with funds that De La Salle held on behalf of his Institute. De La Salle suggested that a newly formed community of priests be asked to staff the training school. Abbé Clément would have no one but the Brothers, and so they began to teach in the new school at Easter, 1709.

Abbé Clément's father endeavored to have his son annul the contract he had entered into, but he had no success at first. In early 1711 De La Salle set off for his visit to the South of France, but he was soon recalled to face charges leveled against him by Clément senior for having taken fraudulent advantage of the young Abbé, who was still a minor. The case was decided against De La Salle, who refused to defend himself and limited himself to writing an explanation of some papers and letters of the Abbé that had come to the notice of the judicial authorities. Leaving his defense in the hands of his lawyer and others he trusted, De La Salle set out for Languedoc and Provence. Legal judgment was finally pronounced against De La Salle.⁵⁴

54. CL 8:72–78; *Life*, Blain, Book Three, Chapter IX, 587–598.

For De La Salle this episode began a two-year, self-imposed exile, during which he saw the destruction of his work in Marseille. He returned to Paris when the Brothers of Paris, Saint-Denis, and Versailles recalled him there in a letter dated April 1, 1714.

Marseille
August 24, [1711]

- 1 I am writing to you, my very dear Brother, through Count Miaczinski, son of the Grand Treasurer of Poland, who with a valet is going to Rome to study theology there.
- 2 Although he is the oldest in his family, he wants to renounce the world and to study theology.
- 3 On the day he arrives, please find an inn for him where he will be comfortable. He is a most religious gentleman with whom I maintain a special contact. He will be able to help you a great deal.
- 4 I wrote to you from Avignon; I presume that you will have received my letter and answered it.
- 5 We will soon be able to send you a second Brother, but please do not give up our Brothers' robe.
- 6 Pay no attention to what the Vincentians say to you. The ones in Paris would be quite ready to destroy our Community. I am very pleased that I can write this to you reliably.
- 7 Please write to me from time to time, and do what you can to realize all possible good for our Community. The count will be able to be a great help to you in this regard.
- 8⁵⁵ Let me know exactly how your projects are coming along. Now that the Pope has six schools in Rome, it would be highly desirable that they all be in the hands and under the direction of our Brothers.
- 9 Do all you can for Count Miaczinski. He will be useful to you and also to us.
- 10 We have just opened schools at Versailles, Boulogne-sur-Mer, and Moulins. Ask God to spread them more and more widely.
- 11 I ask our Lord to fill you with his graces, and I am, in our Lord, my very dear Brother,

55. The numbering of paragraphs of the letters in this volume follows the numbering in *Édition Critique*; in this case, however, *ÉC* numbers these four paragraphs 8, 10, 11, 11.

Totally yours,
DE LA SALLE

- 12 I am returning to France.
13 Tell me how you were received by Cardinal de La Trémouille.
14 I had dinner with the bishop of Cavaillon, whom I thanked for his kindness to you.



Count Miaczinski, mentioned in paragraph 1, son of the Grand Treasurer of Poland, sought refuge in France after his father took part in an uprising against King Augustus II of Poland. When a victorious rival seized the throne in 1709, the family fled to France. The young count received the tonsure on August 28, 1712, and the first two minor orders on July 26, 1713, but his name appears in neither the *Liber Ordinationum* nor the 1714 parish register of Santa Susanna. General Joseph Miaczinski, possibly his relative, was guillotined during the French Revolution, on May 25, 1793.

During the fifteen months that had elapsed between this letter and Letter 28, one other letter had been sent to Drolin. What happened to it we do not know, except that it was sent by way of Avignon, nor do we know when it was written. In his previous letters, however, De La Salle had urged Drolin to adhere to the Institute practice of monthly letters to the Superior, but now we find him suggesting that Drolin merely write from time to time. It is not immediately clear why De La Salle relaxes in his desire to hear from Drolin on a monthly basis, except that he might now have more confidence in Drolin.

De La Salle might have entrusted more responsibility to Drolin in whatever preliminary steps the Founder had planned for an official approach to the Pope for approval of the Institute. Having in mind such a plan might be why he repeats in paragraphs 3, 7, and 9 that Count Miaczinski can be of service to Drolin. These steps might also be implied in De La Salle's request in paragraph 7 to "do what you can to realize all possible good for our Community." There are similar implications in earlier letters, as in Letter 19, paragraphs 16, 20, and 21, and in Letter 24, paragraphs 7, 8, 10, and 12. François-Élie Maillefer, in his biography of his uncle, De La Salle, states that at the insistence of the Brothers, De La Salle consented to try to gain papal approbation for the Institute and that his intention of sending two Brothers to Rome had the appeal for papal approbation as its eventual purpose. Maillefer goes on to say that Drolin forgot about this assignment.⁵⁶ Nevertheless, Drolin was still in Rome

56. *John Baptist de La Salle: Two Early Biographies*, 105–106.

and was the only Brother there in 1725 when Pope Benedict XIII granted the Bull of Approbation.

Although De La Salle was very concerned that Drolin might have worn a clerical soutane instead of the Brothers' much shorter robe, which reached only to the middle of the leg, the Bull of Approbation specifically mentions, in Article XVIII, the long religious robe that reaches to the ankles. Drolin might have had something to do with that!

The references to Cardinal de La Trémouille and to the bishop of Cavaillon, Guyons de Crochans, in paragraphs 13 and 14, suggest that De La Salle not only was thanking the bishop for his help to Drolin but also might have been arranging a meeting with the cardinal, who was the ambassador of France to the Holy See. The bishop had been the cardinal's secretary, and it is significant that De La Salle had dinner with him, although there was no Brothers' school in his diocese. Apparently, De La Salle maintained good relationships with members of various associations of a pious and political nature, which gave his foundations a certain amount of protection and supplied him with information not generally made public. *Édition critique* suggests the hypothesis that Drolin's pseudonym, Santenot, was a secret identity in one such association, whose mailing address could be used for De La Salle's letters to him. This arrangement could have been made by De La Salle to send Drolin information of a confidential nature about Drolin's role in the project of securing papal approbation for the Institute. It might have been letters of this nature that Drolin burned, as he was instructed to do in paragraph 5 of Letter 16, the first letter that De La Salle wrote to him under the name Santenot.⁵⁷

De La Salle's remark, in paragraph 6, that the Vincentians were working for the downfall of the Brothers' Institute is difficult to understand. It could have been that these particular Vincentians, like some of the Sulpicians, disagreed with De La Salle's concept of the organization and government of the Institute. In actual fact, however, members of the Congregation of the Mission played a prominent part in the foundation of the schools in Versailles and in Boulogne-sur-Mer. There was some difference of opinion between the pastor at Versailles and De La Salle about the transfer of one of the Brothers, but aside from this one incident, De La Salle's remark in this letter remains unexplained, as does his reference in paragraph 7 of Letter 25 to the lawsuit against the Vincentians.

57. For the contrary opinion that De La Salle did not want Drolin to secure papal approbation, see CL 11:92ff.

Letter 30: To Brother Gabriel Drolin*AMG; BL I.38; ÉC 30; OC LA 30*

[Marseille]

[July 1712]

- 1 I would have wished, my very dear Brother, to come to visit you, and I was ready to do so with a certain Father Ricordeau, canon of a collegial church in Troyes, who went to Rome a month ago. However, an urgent matter arose here at the time and delayed the trip, but it did not succeed.
- 2 It will be difficult for me to send you a Brother before I have begun a novitiate in this area, which I am going to establish there immediately, because we need men from this region on account of the difference between the language here and that of France.
- 3 You are right in not accompanying the count all the time.
- 4 I am very pleased that the count has paid you in full.
- 5 Let me know whether I can bring him some books when I come to see you, and at what price, for I do not want to have to wait afterward for payment.
- 6 As soon as the novitiate is established, I will go to see you and talk things over with you.
- 7 I replied immediately to all your letters and to those about your baptismal certificate. I mentioned that I was told what was needed to get it, namely, the year and the date of birth, at least the year.
- 8 That is what I replied to you; you ought to have received my letter. If you give me the date, I will have the certificate sent to you at once, because only the court clerk of the bailiwick⁵⁸ keeps this register.
- 9 I am sending you all the holy pictures we found in the house.
- 10 I am, in our Lord, my very dear Brother,
Totally yours,
DE LA SALLE
- 11 This Father Ricordeau is under interdict; I do not know why. Perhaps that is why he went to Rome. He did not tell me this,

58. The French expression is *greffier du bailliage*.

- but I asked you to help him only because he asked me to do so. If he is still in Rome, do nothing for him except prudently.
- 12 I gave him letters for no one but you, even though he urged me, because I did not want to cause trouble for myself, for I know neither his business nor his plans.



The previous letter, Letter 29, closed with De La Salle's announcement of his return to Paris, where he was required to face charges in the Clément affair. He was now back in Marseille, but he makes no mention to Drolin of his unhappy experience with the court case. Blain tells us that De La Salle, feeling himself surrounded by people who desired his defeat, left Paris when he was informed that the decision of the court was against him and that a warrant for his arrest was forthcoming.⁵⁹

After De La Salle had left, the Brothers in Paris received two writs issued against him, outlining the penalties imposed by the court. They were made out to him as "Priest of the Diocese of Reims and Superior of the Community of that City." According to Blain, the omission in these writs of any reference to the communities of Paris was to make it appear that De La Salle was not acceptable to the Brothers there and to enable Father de La Chétardie, the one to whom Blain refers as "the great enemy," to gain control of these Brothers.

The urgent matter mentioned in paragraph 1 that prevented De La Salle's going to Rome was the prospect of founding a second school in Marseille, in Saint Martin parish. After negotiations had begun, the pastor changed his mind, and the school was not established. As De La Salle mentions in paragraphs 2 and 6, he was also detained in Marseille by the work of establishing the novitiate, which was to open shortly.

Drolin, no doubt, needed his baptismal certificate, referred to in paragraphs 7 and 8, to qualify for a full license to teach in a papal school.

Fabien Ricordeau de Clarence, mentioned in paragraphs 1 and 11, was born in 1645 in the diocese of Mans and was ordained to the priesthood in 1691. He became a canon of the collegial church of Saint Étienne in Troyes on November 1, 1698. His name disappeared from the registers of the chapter between April 26, 1712, and March 14, 1713. No mention has been found in the archives of the diocese of Troyes of his being suspended. One possibility is that he might have been the scapegoat for the cathedral chapter in its opposition to the bishop, Denis-François de Bouthillier de Chavigny, who wanted to reduce the revenues of the canons in order to increase his own.

59. CL 8:79; Blain, *Life*, Book Three, Chapter IX, 598.

There is no indication in the original manuscript of the date or the place of origin of this letter; however, paragraph 3 of Letter 31 tells us that it was given to the assistant pastor of Saint Martial parish, in Paris, to take with him on his journey from Marseille to Rome. We are also told in the opening paragraph of Letter 30 that Father Ricordeau had already been gone a month from Marseille. A letter found in the French embassy in Rome reads, “The favorable opportunity of the departure of Father Ricordeau, canon of the church of Saint Stephen in Troyes, Champagne, gives me the honor of sending you this letter. . . .” It is dated June 8, 1712. Hence the presumed date of Letter 30 is July 1712.

Letter 31: To Brother Gabriel Drolin

AMG; BL I.39; ÉC 31; OCL A 31

Marseille
December 16, 1712

- 1 It seems to me, my very dear Brother, that you ought not to have loaned and advanced so much money to the count. That is inappropriate, especially for us. You ought not to have loaned him anything.
- 2 I can only say to you about it that the deed is done; it is up to you to consult before doing things, not after they are done. Had you asked me beforehand, I would have said not to loan him anything.
- 3 Look, it is only the third letter since Father Ricordeau left, and I have answered them all: the first, through the assistant pastor of Saint Martial, Paris; the second, through the post, and here is the reply to the third. I have answered all your letters since I have been in this area.
- 4 I am thinking seriously of sending you a second Brother, but it cannot be until after Easter.
- 5 Is it true that you wear a long robe and a long mantle, as reported to me by Father Ricordeau, who has returned on the papal galleys?
- 6 If that is so, what do you want a second Brother with you to wear? The two of you must dress alike and wear the habit of the Community.
- 7 I am told that you wear a very small hat. The Vincentian Fathers do not wear a different hat in Italy.

- 8 I would be very pleased if a second Brother were to help you withdraw from frequent contact with the world and if the papal stipend went to him also.
- 9 I consider what has begun in Rome to be important, but we must wait until the novitiate that I began here four months ago is well established. Then I can either come to visit you or send someone who is a native of this region.
- 10 I think that you ought not to break off your association with the count too easily.
- 11 Father Ricordeau told me that he sold you, for six testons, a gold sash that cost him more than one louis d'or.⁶⁰
- 12 He is not a man on whom we ought to depend much. He was suspended. Was he reinstated in Rome? I believe that is why he went there.
- 13 I would not have liked to get involved on his behalf. He was even upset that I was not prepared to obtain letters here for him, but I was careful not to, because he was unwilling to tell me why he was going to Rome. I knew that he had been suspended by his bishop, whom I highly respect and esteem. It seems to me that someone told me that he had said holy Mass here.
- 14 There is also a priest for whom I found a place, who lived with us for a time, who was suspended for having gone off to war since being a priest. He is now 54 or 55 years old.
- 15 If he were to ask to be reinstated, whether through a banker or on his own, please let it be known in the appropriate quarters not to grant this without first hearing my thoughts.
- 16 He is from the diocese of Rouen. It is neither to his advantage nor to the Church's that he be reinstated. His name, it seems to me, is Celisier. He is from Rouen itself. He changed his name and kept his wartime one, De Saint-Georges.
- 17 Father Ricordeau told me that a schoolmaster in one of the papal schools is quite old, that a Brother could easily take charge of his school, and that only three papal schools exist in Rome. Is this true?

60. The Roman teston was worth 30 baïoques; the sash was sold for 180 baïoques, equivalent to 9 French livres. The louis d'or (theoretically 5 livres) represented, in practice, the "double" (or 11 livres).

- 18 He also says that you do not have as many as 30 students and that you are not devoted to your school.
- 19 It was good that you were going over to teach catechism to the poor Frenchmen in the two hospices that you told me about. It would be appropriate to continue this practice.
- 20 It was quite wrong of Father Ricordeau to speak about the Brothers in Troyes having almost come to blows.
- 21 He says that you had him to dinner only once, although you said seven or eight times. I had him to a meal only once on his way and not at all on his return. He would, however, have liked to come here often for that purpose.
- 22 How is it, then, that people spoke about me to the Queen of Poland?
- 23 My coming to Rome will be deferred for a long time.
- 24 Please pray to God for us, and I am, in our Lord, my very dear Brother,
Totally yours,
DE LA SALLE
- 25 The count is asking me for books and other things worth 200 francs. I can neither bring nor send him anything unless I can be sure of receiving payment for them on arrival.



The distress caused by the unhappy circumstances surrounding the lawsuits connected with Abbé Clément and the training school for rural teachers must have been relieved by the welcome given to the Founder on his way south to Marseille. He must have been especially delighted by his reception in that city, probably at the end of May 1712. The Brothers had already been teaching in the parish of Saint Laurent since 1706. Now they were asked to establish a school in the parish of Saint Martin. De La Salle's proposal (Letter 30) to set up a novitiate so that young men from Provence could be trained as Brothers was greeted with enthusiasm.

De La Salle had been thinking for some time about making a journey to Rome to visit Gabriel Drolin. He was about to embark on this trip when the archbishop of Marseille met him and persuaded him to stay and discuss the possibility of taking over a third school, that of Our Lady of Accoules.

The spontaneous acceptance in Marseille of De La Salle and the Brothers was contrary to his experience. His biographers, Blain and

Maillefer, both tell us that he was uneasy with the enthusiasm with which his plans were received and the facility with which they were put into practice. He would soon find out how appropriate his forebodings were and how much he would suffer in the south. At the time he wrote this letter, however, everything and everyone smiled on him and his Brothers.

The first letter De La Salle wrote “since Father Ricordeau left,” as he says in paragraph 3, was Letter 30, July 1712; the third is this Letter 31. The second might never have reached Drolin; in any case, it is not among those known to be extant. When De La Salle remarks in paragraph 3 that this is “only the third letter” he has written during the period, it could be that Drolin had written others to the Founder that were not answered, probably because De La Salle never received them.

Obviously, Drolin’s financial situation has improved to the point that he can lend money to the count, as De La Salle writes in paragraph 1. The devil’s advocate at the process for the beatification of De La Salle accused him in this incident of lacking Christian charity in the way he wrote to Drolin about lending money to the count. The advocate for the cause defended De La Salle for two reasons: that De La Salle and his communities in France were very poor and that Drolin, as a religious, could not act independently of his Superior; as the local superior of a “community of one,” he was bound to dispose of the community’s goods with prudence.

The way Drolin dressed was a constant concern to De La Salle, and he raises the topic in paragraphs 5, 6, and 7. The length of the robe is discussed in the commentary on Letter 28. As for the hat, the dimensions of the Brothers’ hat are described in the 1718 *Règle du Frère Directeur d’une Maison de l’Institut*: “six inches wide and four and a half inches high.”⁶¹ The General Chapter of 1720 reduced the width to five and a half inches. The turned-up, wide brim is the origin of the tricornered hat that became part of the Brothers’ garb at the end of the eighteenth century.

Father Celisier, mentioned in paragraphs 14, 15, and 16, may be the soldier-priest whom Blain describes as being converted by De La Salle and as having then lived for two years in one of the communities of the Institute.⁶² Blain praises the charity of De La Salle in helping this priest, but the devil’s advocate during the process of beatification questioned De La Salle’s charity in opposing the move to have the priest reinstated. The advocate for the cause defended De La Salle, saying that he was inspired by his great zeal for the holiness of the ministers of the Lord.

There is no record from the history of the Troyes community of the altercation among the Brothers mentioned in paragraph 20; however, De La Salle does not deny that it happened.

61. *Rule and Foundational Documents*, 215.

62. CL 8:341; Blain, Book Four, *The Mind and Heart of John Baptist de La Salle*, 278.

No doubt it was Count Miaczinski who spoke to the Queen of Poland about De La Salle, a question he raises in paragraph 22. She was living comfortably as an exile in Rome. Later she went to live in France, where she died in 1716.

Letter 32: To Brother Gabriel Drolin

AMG; BL I.41; ÉC 32; OCL A 32

Saint Yon, Suburb of Rouen
December 5, 1716

- 1 It was against my own wishes, my very dear Brother, that I did not write anything to you for so long. I wrote to you several times without receiving a reply from you. I believe it is because someone intercepted my letters, just as I knew someone had done with yours to me.
- 2 I have had many unfortunate matters during this time. At present I am living in a community in a suburb of Rouen called Saint Yon, where the novitiate is.
- 3 I assure you that I have great tenderness and affection for you and often pray to God for you.
- 4 You can write to me whenever you want. I hope that the Brother who is now at Avignon will be faithful in forwarding your letters to me, for he is very discreet. I will reply to you from there.
- 5 For nearly ten months now, I have been ill in this community in which I have been living for a year.
- 6 The business about the archbishop of Paris is causing concern among the bishops. I do not know what people in Rome think of this.
- 7 I was greatly encouraged by your last letter; your continuing affection and warmheartedness have given me much joy.
- 8 Please let us know how you are getting along.
- 9 I was thinking of sending you during these holidays a Brother who has been to Rome, knows some Italian, and is quite prudent and a good teacher, but we employed him elsewhere in the belief that his usefulness there was critically important.
- 10 The Brothers are preparing to hold an assembly from Ascension to Pentecost to settle many matters concerning the Rule and the government of the Institute.

*Monsieur
frère
Monsieur Gabriel Drolin
proche les Capucins
à Rome*



Letter 32, to Brother Gabriel Drolin. The sheet is folded, somewhat like a modern aerogram, and sealed with wax. The outside address appears above. The body of the letter is on the facing page. The final sentences are written on the reverse side of the sheet but displayed here below the rest of the letter.

Ça est bien malgré moy, mon très cher frere, que de vous
vous ay point écrit depuis si longtemps Je vous ay écrit
plusieurs fois sans avoir reçu de réponse
que c'est qu'on a intercepté mes lettres comme J'ay sceu
qu'on en a intercepté des vôtres a moy. J'ay eu beaucoup
d'affaires facheuses depuis ces temps et de leur proposément
en une maison d'un faubourg de Paris d'un nomme
Styon ou est les nouvelles. Je vous assure que J'ay bien
de la tristesse et de l'affliction pour vous et que de presence de
Dieu pour vous. Mais pour de nouvelles que J'ay sceu
de pres que les fins qui est a aujourdhuy est une et si si
courageux et lettré car il est fort sage et de vous y respond
depuis pres de dix ans J'ay été infirme dans une maison
dans laquelle de pres depuis on en a les affaires de mes
affaires que de pres causent du trouble parmi les Eueques
de nos J'ay esquivé en partie a Rome. J'ay été bien content
de votre dernière et la continuation de votre affection et de
votre bon coeur me fait bien du plaisir. Faites nous sçavoir
de vous prie comment vont vos affaires Je pensais que vous
a vous emmenez en France qui a été a Rome et qui s'est en
penitence et qui est fort sage et bon maître mais nous l'avons
enjoyé de bien plus que nous que l'été d'ant il s'est dans ce lieu
est d'un grand des conséquences. Les freres se disposent pour
faire une assemblée de pres la semaine. Sur que la par la suite pour
les beaucoup de choses touchant les règles et la conduite
de l'Institut Je vous prie de nous en informer et pour ce
ce qui sera aussi dans cette assemblée par la suite au jourd'hui

Société. Je vous prie de continuer toujours en ces lieux
faites moy de vous prie sçavoir comment s'y adient
votre venue et de vous me disant quel vous est
finis et qu'il a été et vous sçavez que vous attente de pres
comme il est sage de la remède pour y penser et de la
n'y point dire de nouvelles depuis. Je suis en la s'mon
tricher frere. Tout avec de la s'alle

a Lyon faubourg de Roian
le 2. Decembre 1716.

- 11 Please give your consent to everything that will be decided in this assembly by the principal Brothers of the Society.
- 12 I believe that you are still teaching your classes. Please let me know how many students you have.
- 13 Your nephew came to see me. He said that he would like to be a Brother, that he had been to see you, and that you were going to be a priest. Because he is light-headed, I sent him away to think it over, and I have heard nothing from him since.

I am, in our Lord, my very dear Brother,
Totally yours,
DE LA SALLE



This letter is the last letter of De La Salle to Drolin that has been preserved in Drolin's collection and almost certainly the last that he actually wrote to him. On Trinity Sunday, May 23, 1717, the Assembly of the Brothers elected Brother Barthélemy as Superior General, and from that day De La Salle considered that he no longer had the right to address letters to Drolin as he had been doing up to that time. The next letter to Drolin came, in fact, from Brother Barthélemy.

There appear to be various reasons for the lack of communication between De La Salle and Drolin over the four years between Letter 31 of December 1712 and this letter of December 1716. During almost the entire year of 1716, De La Salle had been ill and confined to the house at Saint Yon. Several letters that he wrote by way of Avignon had been intercepted, as had been some of Drolin's to him. During 1713 and well into 1714, De La Salle felt, quite mistakenly, that the Brothers of Paris, and in particular Brother Barthélemy, no longer wanted him as Superior after the painful lawsuits instigated by the father of Abbé Clément. His feeling of inadequacy as Superior was strengthened by the debacle that followed his efforts to establish the Brothers firmly in Marseille.

Blain and Maillefer tell much the same story of the hostility that arose against the Founder in Marseille, although the motivation to which each attributes it is different. In Maillefer's view, the hostility was due to the opposition of influential people to what they considered De La Salle's inflexibility with regard to the Brothers' Rule, which in their judgment was too severe. When the Founder showed himself unprepared to accede to their insistent demands that he mitigate the Rule, a vicious libel was spread about him, "filled with calumnies and designed to make

him despicable in all eyes.”⁶³ The offer of the second school there was withdrawn, and not only was support also withdrawn from the novitiate, but a deliberate campaign was mounted to empty it of novices. In addition, there was personal opposition to him on the part of some Brothers. There seemed now no chance of the Brothers’ taking charge of the third school, that of Our Lady of Accoules. Blain tells much the same story, but he attributes the withdrawal of support for De La Salle to the hostility of the Jansenist clergy of Marseille, aroused by De La Salle’s refusal to have any part in their opposition to the orthodox Catholic position.

In the face of increasing hostility that seemed about to destroy his work and thinking that his presence was causing all the trouble, De La Salle decided to withdraw from Marseille to a retreat center outside the city. There he spent forty days in seclusion, uncertain of what God was demanding of him. When news reached him of trouble among the Brothers in Mende, he left Provence early in 1713 and traveled west.

The first community that De La Salle called on was that of Mende in Languedoc. Here, according to Blain, he was rebuffed at the door of the community house by two Brothers who had been most opposed to him earlier in Marseille. According to Blain, the Brothers refused him admittance, saying that if he wished to stay, he would have to pay board and lodging. Sent away by his own Brothers, De La Salle was given hospitality by the Capuchin Fathers. He was also looked after by a community of women who were devoted to the Christian education of girls in the district of Mende.

The historian Georges Rigault suggests, however, that the Brothers of Mende were hard pressed for accommodations, that they informed De La Salle of this, and that he then found a place with the Capuchins. The fact that he stayed in Mende for about two months would lead us to believe that Blain’s version is incorrect. If Blain’s account were true, De La Salle’s presence over two months would have been a constant source of embarrassment to him and to the Brothers. After his stay in Mende, De La Salle went to Grenoble, riding a horse that was a gift from the superior of the community of women.

While in retirement in Grenoble, where he was made most welcome by the Brothers, he learned the good news that the situation in Marseille had improved and all was at peace again. Fearing that his return to Marseille might only inflame hostilities anew, he remained in contact with the Brothers there by letter and through some trusted ones to whom he delegated his authority.

His time in Grenoble was spent mainly in prayer and retreat, but he did send one of the Brothers to Paris to report to him on the situation in

63. CL 6:209; *John Baptist de La Salle: Two Early Biographies*, 153.

that city. He also devoted considerable time to the composition of works of piety for the Brothers and their students and to the revision of the catechism for the Christian Schools.

He eagerly accepted an invitation to replace temporarily the resident chaplain and spiritual director at Parménie, a nearby hermitage presided over by a devout visionary known as Sister Louise. The peace and quiet that he enjoyed there came to a sudden end when, in April 1714, he received a letter from the Brothers in Paris ordering him to return and to resume the general direction of the Institute. Hesitant at first, he heeded the advice of Sister Louise to accept this expression of God's will, and he made plans to return to Paris.

For some time De La Salle had suspected that the mail between Drolin and him was being interfered with. In paragraph 1, he states that letters from Rome had been intercepted. The culprit seems to have been Brother Ponce, Director of the Avignon community and De La Salle's representative in the South of France. Blain writes that Ponce took advantage of the unrest in Marseille to leave the Institute after appropriating community funds for himself. In paragraph 4, De La Salle assures Drolin that it is now safe to write by way of Avignon, because the new Director is trustworthy. He is none other than the Brother who later succeeded Brother Barthélemy as Superior General, Brother Timothée.

Archbishop Louis de Noailles of Paris, mentioned in paragraph 6, was known for his vacillating position about the Bull *Unigenitus*, issued by Pope Clement XI in 1713 to condemn Jansenist teachings contained in *Le Nouveau Testament en Français avec des réflexions morales sur chaque verset*, written in 1699 by Pasquier Quesnel. His wavering resulted in the appeal to a General Council against the Pope's action. The Pope's answer to this appeal was another Bull, *Pastoralis Officii*, condemning the "appellants" and also excommunicating them. At one period things came to such an impasse that the establishment of a Gallican Church, independent of Rome and with De Noailles as its head, was openly discussed. In October 1715, when about to leave Paris to take up residence in Saint Yon, near Rouen, De La Salle refused to pay a visit to the archbishop. His fidelity with regard to the Pope became even more clearly defined when his name was confused with that of his younger brother, Canon Jean-Louis de La Salle, on the list of appellants.⁶⁴

In paragraph 2 of this letter to Drolin, De La Salle sums up all these troubles of 1712 to 1714 in the simple statement, "I have had many unfortunate matters during this time."

The Brother whom De La Salle, in paragraph 9, is thinking of sending to Rome at this time is probably Brother Irénée. The position of crit-

64. CL 8:222–223; *The Mind and Heart of John Baptist de La Salle*, 64–65; see Letter 132.

ical importance that this Brother eventually assumed was Director of Novices. (See Letter 119 for more information about Brother Irénée.)

On the day before De La Salle wrote this letter, he had called a meeting of five Brothers to sign an agreement to send Brother Barthélemy to visit the houses of the Institute to secure approval for holding a General Chapter regarding the Rule and the government of the Institute. Reference is made to this assembly in paragraphs 10 and 11. The five Brothers were François, Director of the boarding school at Saint Yon; Dosithée, Director of the schools in Rouen; Ambroise, Director of the house of detention at Saint Yon, and Charles and Étienne, both teachers at Saint Yon. This signed agreement of delegation was taken by Barthélemy on his visits to the communities of Chartres, Moulins, Mende, Les Vans, Alès, and then Avignon, where he stayed from January 8 to 10, 1717.

Letters 32-a and 32-b: From Brother Barthélemy to Brother Gabriel Drolin

The following two letters were written to Drolin by Brother Barthélemy, De La Salle's successor, who was elected during the assembly referred to in paragraph 10 of Letter 32. Letter 32-a was evidently written at the request of the Founder. Letter 32-b is a personal announcement to Drolin of the death of De La Salle.

Letter 32-a: From Brother Barthélemy to Brother Gabriel Drolin

AMG; BL IV.Ap.2; ÉC 32-a

Paris
February 18, 1718

My very dear Brother,

- 1 May the grace and peace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with us. It is with great pleasure that I write this letter to you, having heard from our dear Brother Joseph that you had written to him, being anxious about Monsieur de La Salle, our dear Father, and having received only one of his letters for a year. That is what our dear Brother Joseph told us on your behalf.

- 2 I must tell you, my dear Brother, that Monsieur de La Salle is very distressed that you did not answer his last letter, which I personally mailed at Avignon and for which I paid four sols postage, following our dear Father's instructions.
- 3 He had hoped that you would send him your consent to what was to be decided by the assembly that took place last May, in which our dear assembled Brothers thought it appropriate to entrust me with the general direction of our Institute. Together, by secret ballot, we also chose our dear Brothers Jean and Joseph as Assistants.
- 4 Because our dear Father judged it advisable to resign and believed it necessary for the good of our Institute that our Brothers take charge of its general direction while he was still alive and could help them by his wise advice and counsel, our dear Brothers did not think that they ought to press him further to resume the general direction that he had laid aside several years ago.
- 5 He instructed me to greet you on his behalf with much affection and to ask you to let us know whether you want us, at the next vacation period, to send you a Brother to assist you. We will try to choose a good and competent one to help you and to continue the work after you.
- 6 The Institute's projects are doing well. We have bought a house for 15,000 livres for the novitiate in Rouen. It seems very likely that we will soon have an establishment in Canada, for which we hope to have authorization from the Prince Regent. He has already had the goodness to grant an annuity of 3,000 livres for the support of the schoolteachers and for the new teachers whom we intend to send and whom we request to be able to train both in France and in Canada. If the project succeeds, it could contribute much to our being solidly established in France.
- 7 We ask you, my dear Brother, to be good enough to visit the church and the tomb of Saint Peter and of Saint Paul, to receive Holy Communion there, to recommend to the care of these two great Apostles the concerns of our Institute, and to pray especially for the true conversion of him who is, with all possible esteem and affection, in Jesus and Mary, my very dear Brother,

Your very humble and very devoted servant,
BROTHER BARTHÉLEMY

- 8 I do not forget you in my little daily prayers; please do the same for me.
- 9 Our dear Brother Jean Jacot humbly greets you and recommends himself to your holy prayers.



This letter was evidently written by the newly elected Superior General at the request of De La Salle, who was anxious about Drolin's apparent failure to give his consent to the decisions of the General Assembly of the previous May, as De La Salle had requested. Meanwhile, Drolin, concerned about De La Salle, had written by way of Reims to inquire what the situation was. Knowing from the last letter of De La Salle about the General Assembly, Drolin would have realized that the Founder would no longer be Superior, but he would not have known to whom to write as the new Superior or where De La Salle was now living.

Like De La Salle, Brother Barthélemy was not to carry out the promise mentioned in paragraph 5 to send a Brother to Rome to help Drolin. This was left to the next Superior General, for Barthélemy died a year after the Founder, on June 8, 1720.

The possibility of establishing a community of Brothers in Canada arose from the attempts of a certain Father Charron to obtain the services of four Brothers (paragraph 6). He had come to France in the hope of uniting the small congregation he had founded in Canada to an already flourishing congregation, possibly De La Salle's Institute. He failed to arrange the unification, but he did succeed in getting authorization to introduce six schoolteachers into the colony.

According to Blain, Brother Barthélemy, with the approval of De La Salle and the consent of the Assistants, agreed to Charron's request and selected four Brothers for this mission. Two days later, De La Salle was heard to say to one of the Assistants, "Good heavens, what are you doing? Such an action will cause you no end of trouble. The consequences will be disastrous." Barthélemy overheard the remark but replied that it was too late; all arrangements had been made and the fares paid for the voyage. De La Salle repeated, "But what are you doing?" The Superior and his Assistants, impressed by De La Salle's repeated questioning, broke off the negotiations. It later surfaced that Charron had intended to separate the Brothers and to have them teach singly in country schools, a practice that De La Salle would have never countenanced.⁶⁵

65. CL 8:153; Blain, Book Three, Chapter XVI, 708.

Brother Barthélemy was not known personally by Drolin, who had set out for Rome before the new Superior had even entered the Institute. Probably to let Drolin know that he has, as it were, a friend at court, Brother Barthélemy mentions to him in paragraph 9 that Brother Jean Jacot, one of Drolin's confreres from the first days of the Institute, is now one of the Assistants and sends him his greetings. (For more information about Brother Jean, see the commentary on Letter 1.)

Letter 32-b: From Brother Barthélemy to Brother Gabriel Drolin

AMG; ÉC 32-b

Rouen
April 13, 1719

My very dear Brother,

- 1 May the grace and the peace of our Lord be always with us. It is with great sorrow that I write you this second letter, to advise you of the death of our very dear Father, which occurred on Good Friday at about four o'clock in the morning, after he had received the sacraments of the Church while greatly inspiring those who were present. He had been ill all through Lent.
- 2 All Rouen misses him and regards him as a saint. Crowds viewed his remains on Friday and on Saturday before his burial. I hope that you will take the trouble to write in reply to our last letter.
- 3 The archbishop of Rouen and the First President are graciously offering us their support. I commend myself to your holy prayers, and I am, with all my heart, in Jesus and Mary, my very dear Brother,
Your very humble and very devoted servant,
BROTHER BARTHÉLEMY
- 4 P. S. I consider it my duty to send you the first article of our very dear Father's will, which concerns all the Brothers of our Society as being the last instruction and the final directive he gave us.
- 5 "I commend to God, first of all, my soul, and next, all the Brothers of the Society of the Christian Schools to whom he

has united me. I recommend them, above all things, always to be completely obedient to the Church, especially in these distressing times, and to demonstrate this, never to be at variance with our Holy Father the Pope and the Church of Rome, always remembering that I sent two Brothers to Rome to beg of God the grace that their Society always be entirely obedient to the Church.

- 6 “I also recommend them to have a great devotion to our Lord, much love for Holy Communion and the exercise of interior prayer, and a special devotion to the Most Blessed Virgin and to Saint Joseph, the patron and protector of their Society; to acquit themselves of their work with zeal and unselfish generosity; to maintain an intimate union among themselves and an unquestioning obedience to their superiors, the foundation and the support of all perfection in a community.”
- 7 Our very dear Father wrote a number of letters in defense of the Constitution⁶⁶ of our Holy Father, Pope Clement XI, which did a great deal of good.



There is no record that Brother Barthélemy wrote to Drolin again after this notice of De La Salle's death. The extract from the Founder's will quoted in paragraphs 5 and 6 contains his dying recommendations to his disciples, written just four days before his death.

The First President mentioned in paragraph 3, Nicolas Pierre Camus Le Pontcarré, of the Parliament of Normandy, had been a friend of De La Salle and was associated with the Lasallian foundations in Rouen. He was on such good terms with the Brothers that he considered it his privilege to withdraw to the gardens of Saint Yon for a quiet walk whenever he wished.

The small school directed by Gabriel Drolin developed very slowly, despite the good work of his successors. There were many financial problems and numerous difficulties arising from the fact that it was located so far from the country of its originators. It was not until 1727 that another Brother was finally sent to be a companion for Drolin. Brother Timothée, Superior General, sent Brother Fiacre, Jacques Nonnez, to spend a year with Drolin to work with him and eventually to replace him in 1728. Brother Thomas, the Procurator, also came with Brother Fiacre,

66. *Unigenitus*.

but only on a temporary mission, probably as a representative of the Superior.

Brother Fiacre was soon joined by Brother Silvestre, François Regnauldin, but the school did not flourish. In fact, at an audience on May 2, 1736, Pope Clement XII stated that it was not necessary that there be any increase in the number of Brothers in Rome, because the children of the papal city were well cared for by the Piarist Fathers. In 1743, however, the school was settled on Via della Purificazione, with financial help from the boarding school in Marseille, and from then on became quite successful. Thus the Brothers in Italy today can trace their history uninterruptedly to the initial heroic work of Brother Gabriel Drolin.

Letters 33 and 34: To Father des Hayes

Father des Hayes was a member of a group of men called the Congregation of the Jesuit College, a name derived from the location where they held their meetings and exercises of piety. One of their charitable activities was the upkeep of the school at Darnétal, with which Adrien Nyel is thought to have been connected in 1670.

Letter 33: To Father des Hayes

AMG; BL I.6; ÉC 112; OC LA 112

Rue Charonne, Faubourg Saint Antoine, Paris
September 26, 1704

Dear Father,

- 1 I learned from Father Chardon this morning that you had written to him to ask for some of our Brothers for Rouen and that you would request two of them and would like to know what is necessary.
- 2 I am quite ready to send two there.
- 3 As for the cost, you know that we are not hard to please and that we cannot send only one Brother.
- 4 If you would kindly let me know for what neighborhood they are requested and what stipend you are hoping to give them, you will oblige me considerably.
- 5 I think that we will readily come to terms and that people will be pleased with the Brothers I will send.

I am, respectfully, Father,
 Your very humble and very obedient servant,
 DE LA SALLE



Because the Brothers conducted schools only under the aegis of the pastors where their schools were located, Father des Hayes' first approach was made to Father Chardon, not to De La Salle.

Battersby maintains that Father des Hayes was a seminary companion of De La Salle at Saint Sulpice. Brother Félix-Paul, however, states that Des Hayes was born in 1660 and, therefore, would have been too young, only 12, when De La Salle was at Saint Sulpice.

Letter 34: To Father des Hayes

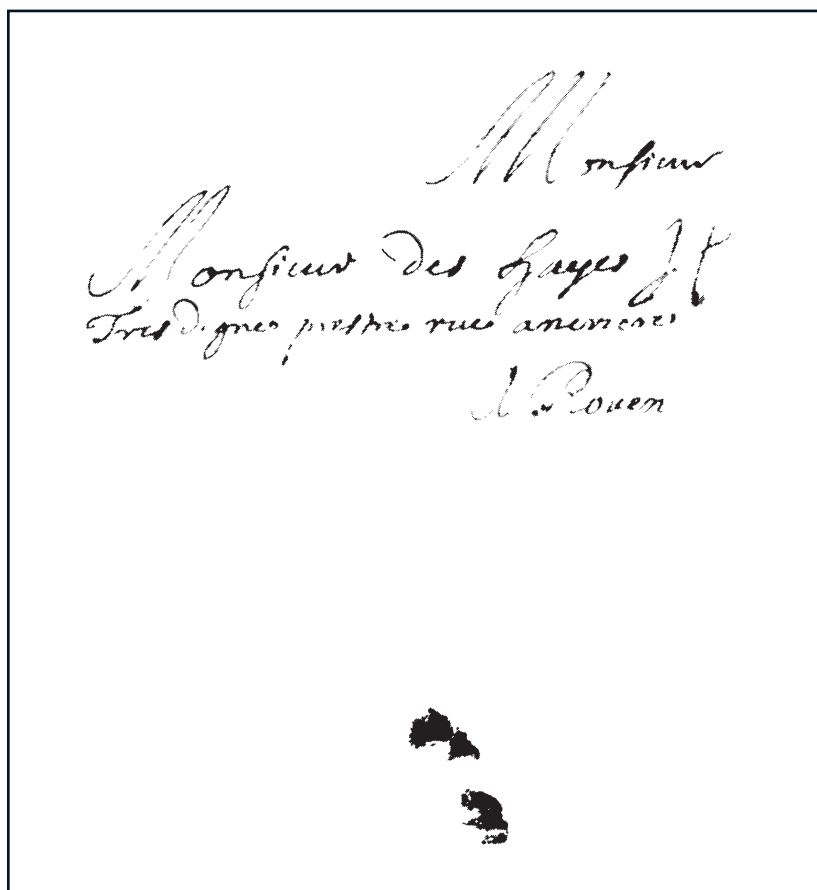
AMG; BL I.7; ÉC 113; OC LA 113

Paris
 November 18, 1704

Dear Father,

- 1 Yesterday I received the letter that you did me the honor to write.
- 2 Please allow me to ask you for a clarification of one matter you did not explain, which is whether the requested schoolmaster will be obliged to be the cantor in church and to assist the pastor in his functions, for you realize that our Brothers do neither the one nor the other.
- 3 Also, be so good as to tell me approximately how many communicants⁶⁷ there are in the two parishes in this place and whether each parish has its own schoolteacher.
- 4 I have been to Darnétal; I thought it was farther from Rouen.
- 5 I am much obliged to you for your kindness, and I am,
 respectfully, Father,
 Your very humble and very obedient servant,
 DE LA SALLE

67. *Édition Critique* has "*combien il y a à peu près de communions*" (about how many communions there are). Brother Maurice Hermans suggests a more accurate reading: "*combien il y a à peu près de communicants*" (about how many communicants there are), how many in the two parishes of Darnétal are 12 years and over, old enough to receive Communion.



Letter 33, to Father des Hayes, appears on the facing page. The wax that sealed the letter is visible below the outside address, above, which was written on the upper fold.

Monsieur

J'ai appris de m^r Chardon ce matin que vous lui
aviez écrit pour apprendre des nos freres pour rien et que
vous en demandiez deux et l'autre de descaus et que
l'autre. Je suis fort disposé à en donner deux pour la suite
du prix avec lequel que nous ne sommes pas difficile^{ment}
et que nous ne pouvons pas enlever un seul. Si vous voulez
donner une somme pour que le quartier ait les demandes
et ce qu'on l'autre de leur donner vous n'oubliez pas
de nous que nous commençons à l'écouter et qu'on ne
de ceux que l'autre mangera. Je suis avec respect

Monsieur

à Paris rue Charonne
chez M^r L'abbé
ce 6 Sept 1784

Obéissant humble et
obéissant serviteur
Desaulles



In his previous letter, De La Salle was under the impression that the Brothers were going to be teaching in Rouen, whereas it is clear in this letter that the establishment is intended for Darnétal, a large village about a mile from the city of Rouen. He learned that the school would serve two parishes, Saint Pierre of Carville and Saint Ouen of Longpaon. He also learned that the stipend for each teacher was only half of what he ordinarily requested, but he does not seem to make this an issue. He is concerned, however, that the Brothers not become involved in any of the clerical functions of the parish. This firm position has been explained in the commentary on Letter 8. The Brothers took charge of the school in Darnétal early in 1705, some months before they took over the schools in Rouen.

Letter 35: To Monsieur Rigoley

Copy; AMG; BL II.2; ÉC 114; OC LC 114

Monsieur Claude Rigoley, Secretary and Auditor General for the Province of Burgundy, had undertaken the project of the establishment of a free school to be conducted by the Brothers in Dijon. According to Blain, he was supported in this by his wife and family. In fact, his wife's brother, Father Lanquet de Gergy, assistant to Father de La Chétardie at Saint Sulpice in Paris, was a good friend of De La Salle (Letter 11, paragraph 4). Blain states that Rigoley was a very devout man who even at that time received Communion daily. He arranged to provide a house and a stipend of 400 francs for two Brothers. Unfortunately, the house was not ready when the Brothers arrived in Dijon in June 1705, and Rigoley had to accommodate them in his own home. The inconvenience this caused was accentuated by Brother Antoine's zeal in asking De La Salle for books and furniture for the new community house and school, all of which had to be stored by the Rigoley family. Judging by the list of needs drawn up by Brother Antoine, it is no wonder that the Rigoley family was disturbed.

Paris
July 10, 1705

Monsieur,

- 1 I received your last letter on my return from the country.

- 2 I deeply regret the inconvenience that our Brothers are causing you by staying in your house so long. At the same time, I am most obliged to you for your charity and kindness to them.
- 3 I realize that the opening of this establishment has caused and still is causing many problems for you. Your undertaking this enterprise and assuring its completion, in spite of the trouble it caused you, are the result of your zeal for the instruction of children.
- 4 As for the textbooks that I had sent for the classes, I would not have thought of doing so if Brother Antoine had not asked me for them.
- 5 I am sorry that this displeased you.
- 6 Please permit them to remain at Dijon until they can be sent elsewhere if anyone needs them.
- 7 I do not know, Monsieur, if you have noticed whether the house you rented has two adjoining rooms for holding classes. This is an indispensable matter for our Brothers.
- 8 If you have not thought of this precaution, I would ask you to assure it by renting adjoining rooms between now and the time our Brothers occupy this house.
- 9 I am, with all possible respect and gratitude, Monsieur,
Your very humble and very obedient servant,
DE LA SALLE



In paragraph 1 De La Salle alludes to the fact that he recently traveled from Paris to Rouen, in Normandy, to inspect the property of Saint Yon, leased by him from the Marchioness of Louvois for a novitiate. On July 11, 1705, the day after he wrote this letter, he signed the lease at the city residence of the Marchioness in Paris. The lease document bears the words, “The lessee declares that having visited and inspected the property, he signs the lease with full knowledge and understanding.”

In writing his letter to pacify Rigoley and to apologize for the inconvenience caused by the Brothers’ living arrangements and Brother Antoine’s enthusiasm, De La Salle in paragraph 7 takes the opportunity to tell the benefactor that the Brothers’ Rule requires their classes to be in adjoining rooms.⁶⁸

⁶⁸ CL 25:43; *Rule and Foundational Documents*, 47.

Letter 36: To Brother Paulin*AMG; BL I.51; ÉC 52; OC LA 52*

There is doubt about the identity of Brother Paulin. The fact that the manuscript of this letter was found with letters addressed to Brother Mathias in Pernes, near Avignon, suggests that Brother Paulin was one of the Brothers who formed the first community in Marseille, in 1706. The injunction in paragraph 4 that he be ready to take triennial vows when the Founder comes to Rouen indicates that Paulin was a member of the Rouen community of 1705, which was lodged at the Hospice for Poor People of that city. The work that the Brothers were asked to do in addition to their classroom teaching in Rouen wore down their health. Fortunately for Paulin, he was transferred to Marseille, where conditions at that time were much more agreeable. It is not known whether Paulin was still in Marseille when trouble broke out there in 1712. There is no record of him after 1710.

October 25, [1705]

- 1 Alas, my dear Brother, why do you worry about your relatives? I believe they hardly ever think of you. Why do you get yourself so worked up about them? Let them do their work, and you yours.
- 2 Say to yourself what our Lord said, that he who looks back is unworthy of him.⁶⁹
- 3 I am delighted that you are now resigned to God's will with regard to your class. Because of your spirit of obedience, in spite of your former repugnance, God will bless you there.
- 4 I very much want you to make vows for three years, my very dear Brother. Prepare yourself to do so by the time I come to Rouen.
- 5 You must expect to have some difficulties throughout your life in whatever place and state you might be. Dispose yourself, therefore, to bear calmly all those that God will send you in the state of life in which he has placed you.
- 6 Please take care to be most exact with silence. It is one of the most important means to keep a community faithful to the Rule.

69. Mt 10, 37; Lk 9, 62.

- 7 Be especially wary of Brother Martinien, because he is quite the chatterbox. Do not remain alone with him.
 - 8 Please suppress your desires when they tend only to satisfy you. Have no desire other than to please God, which is why you are in this world and in your state of life.
 - 9 You ask to go live with Brother Barnabé because you know him. How can you make such a request? Do you not realize that this is to obey nature totally? A request that will be much better for you is to ask God to do his will in you and through you.
- I am, in our Lord, my very dear Brother,
Totally yours,
DE LA SALLE



Brother Martinien, the “chatterbox” (*bien causeur*) mentioned in paragraph 7, did not persevere. Because another Brother took the same name in June 1711, we can conclude that this Brother Martinien left the Institute before then.

Brother Barnabé, Jean Jannin, mentioned in paragraph 9, did persevere. Born on November 30, 1683, in the diocese of Reims, he entered the Institute in July 1700. He was in Dijon at its foundation in 1705 and was Director there in 1717 when Brother Barthélemy made his visit to that community. He founded the community of Auxonne in 1723 and made perpetual vows at Saint Yon on September 22, 1727. He participated in the General Chapter of 1734 and died at Auxonne on September 18, 1740.

Although in paragraph 3 the Founder urges Paulin to accept his position in the school at Rouen as the manifestation of God’s will, it is hard to blame Paulin for wanting to be transferred elsewhere. Blain reveals the drudgery imposed on the Brothers by the administrators of the Hospice for Poor People, where the Brothers lodged:

The Brothers were assiduous in getting the paupers up and having them say their morning prayers. About eight o’clock, four of them went off to their classes. They came back at noon, served the paupers at table, and kept watch to make them observe order during the meal. Then they themselves ate, after which they went back to school. Returning to the hospice around six in the evening, they took the paupers to the refectory and ended the day with them, as

they had begun it, by having them say their prayers. A fifth Brother stayed in the hospice and taught the poor children there.⁷⁰

Each of the two Brothers at Saint Maclou has over 100 students to teach; so does the one at Saint Eloi. The fourth has over 150, and the fifth, at the Hospice for Poor People, has even more. They endure this overwork as well as they can from May 1705 to June 1707. When one of them succumbs to illness or exhaustion, De La Salle sends a more vigorous Brother to replace him, but this cannot go on indefinitely.⁷¹

Letter 37: To Brother Thomas

ÉC 64; OC LI 64; CL 8:264; MH 13:140–141

Brother Thomas has been referred to in many of De La Salle's letters as the Procurator of the expanding Institute of the Brothers. Usually the references have been in answer to complaints made about the difficulties that Thomas caused. Yet, in his letter to Brother Barthélemy (Letter 125) in 1718, De La Salle indicates that Brother Thomas is still the bursar of Saint Yon and that he handles the financial business of the Institute in conjunction with the Superior General.

Brother Thomas, Charles Frappet, was one of the earliest followers of the Founder. He was born in Danthune, in the diocese of Reims, on October 18, 1670, and entered the Society in August 1690. This was the time when De La Salle introduced serving Brothers into the Society. Thomas was admitted as one of these Brothers and eventually found his career in the management of the Institute's financial and business affairs. He organized the newly acquired property of Saint Yon in 1705. While De La Salle was absent in the South of France and again after his return to Paris, Thomas signed, in the Founder's name, investment policies on behalf of the Society. Other documents show him at Calais in 1717, at Rouen again in 1718, at Troyes in 1720, and back in Paris in 1722. Maillefer mentions in the introduction to the second version of his biography of the Founder, written in 1740, that Thomas had badgered him until he got possession of Maillefer's first manuscript, written in 1723.⁷²

In 1725, after the reception of the Bull of Approbation of the Institute, Thomas pronounced his perpetual vows as a teaching Brother. Blain attributes to him an important role in obtaining the Bull of Ap-

70. CL 8:23; Blain, Book Three, Chapter III, 517.

71. CL 8:24; Blain, Book Three, Chapter III, 518.

72. CL 6:17; *John Baptist de La Salle: Two Early Biographies*, 19.

probation and *lettres patentes*. Rigault, however, in *Histoire générale*, corrects some of Blain's assertions.

On his return from Rome, Brother Thomas was stationed at Paris, where he became Director in 1734, dying there on February 24, 1742.

The following two passages, constituting Letter 37, are preserved only by Blain, who refers to them as reminiscences of a Brother identified as Thomas. In paragraph 1 Blain presents Brother Thomas as directly quoting De La Salle. Paragraph 2 appears in Blain's text as an indirect quotation but is used as a direct quotation in Lucard's *Vie du vénérable Jean-Baptiste de La Salle*, 1874.

No date is given to these extracts. They probably both belong to the period when the Brothers were beginning their work at Saint Yon, that is, from 1705 to 1707.

[1705–1707]

- 1 You complain that the extreme poverty of the house is causing you much suffering. To provide for your subsistence, God wants you to take in boarding pupils at low cost and to give them a sound education and a good upbringing.
- 2 By doing this, you will gain the affection and esteem of the people of that town, where so far you have not been shown any. You may still have to suffer a little, but it will not last long. Meanwhile, be sure that God will always give you what is necessary to live if you serve him well.



The city of Rouen was very much opposed to the establishment within its boundaries of more religious orders, for this usually meant that the city tax rates had to be increased and borne by the business people. However, the establishment of a boarding school for children who could pay would remove this fear from the municipal council and provide a service for parents who could afford the fees.

Paragraph 2 of this letter was later used in a protest against the refusal by the French Minister of Education to allow the extension of the boarding facilities at Passy in 1883. The argument seems to have been that Lasallian boarding schools, as schools with a long-standing tradition, ought not to be victimized by unwarranted attacks from lay associations of teachers in boarding schools.

Letters 38 to 48: To Brother Robert

Brother Robert, Denis Maubert, entered the Institute in 1700 at the age of 24. From the remarks made in these letters, it seems that he carried out the functions of both a serving and a teaching Brother. In 1704 his name appears on the list of those affected by the court order forbidding the Brothers to teach in Paris. He evidently was able to return to Paris shortly thereafter, for he was indicted in another suit by the Writing Masters in 1706 and went to Laon with Brother Hubert (Letter 8) for a short period. Judging from Letter 38, probably written in 1705, it is possible that he was assigned under Brother Ponce to open the school and the community at Darnétal. Later he took over the direction of that school under the supervision of Brother Joseph, Director of the Rouen community. This seems apparent in Letter 40, written in 1708.

Robert was still at Darnétal in 1717 when Brother Barthélemy visited to obtain the community's adherence to the General Chapter of that year.

There are references to Robert in Letters 4 and 5, written to Brother Denis, who was also at Darnétal at the time. Brother Robert died at Meaux in 1734.

Six of these letters bear the name of Brother Robert. Another four appear in Ms. 22 and in Blain; part of Letter 38 is also in Maillefer. That all of these letters were addressed to Robert can be ascertained from internal evidence, according to *Édition critique*.

Letter 38: To Brother Robert

Ms. 22, 26; AMG; BL III.26; ÉC 53; OC LI 53; MH 28:326, 31:374–375; CL 8:369, 400

[1705]

- 1 I have received your letter, my very dear Brother, and am very happy that you have great peace of mind. I pray that God may keep you in that state.
- 2 I am also delighted that you say you are determined to persevere in the Institute to the end of your life, and my joy is much greater because of your desire to return to the novitiate.
- 3 This is a sign that you have a great desire to advance in virtue. This gives me great pleasure.

- 4 You must love poverty, my very dear Brother. Although our Lord could have been rich, he was very poor, so you must imitate this divine model.
 - 5 But it seems to me that you want nothing to be lacking that will give you pleasure. Hey!⁷³ Who would not be poor under those conditions? Would not the great and powerful ones of the world give up all their riches to enjoy an advantage that would make them happier than the princes and kings of the earth?
 - 6 Please remember that you did not join the Institute to enjoy every comfort and satisfaction but to embrace poverty and its consequences. I say its consequences, because there is no point in loving virtue unless you love all that comes with it and gives you the means to practice it.
 - 7 You say that you are poor; how much pleasure it gives me to hear you say that! For to say you are poor is to say that you are happy. “Happy are you who are poor,” our Lord said to his Apostles.⁷⁴ I say the same to you.
 - 8 How fortunate you are! You say that you have never been so poor; so much the better. You have never had so many opportunities to practice this virtue as you do now.
 - 9 In this regard I could say to you what a great Pope once replied to a Jesuit who was explaining the great poverty of his community, which, he said, had never been so poor. “So much the better for you,” he replied. “The poorer you are, the better off you will be.”
 - 10 Take care not to let yourself become distracted while the community is being set up.
- I am, in our Lord, my very dear Brother,
Totally yours,
DE LA SALLE



This letter appears as Letter 26 in Ms. 22, under the heading, “Poverty is to be loved.” The letter is quoted almost in its entirety by Blain,⁷⁵ and

73. De La Salle uses the expression *Hé!* six times in his letters to Brothers: 38:5; 67:7; 68:2; 80:2; 97:1, and 98:4.

74. Lk 6:20.

75. CL 8:369, 400; Blain, *The Mind and Heart of John Baptist de La Salle*, 326, 374–375.

Maillefer also quotes some sections.⁷⁶ Both biographers use citations from the letter to illustrate De La Salle's love of poverty.

At the time he received this letter, Robert had been appointed to join Brother Ponce, the Director, in establishing the community of Darnétal and opening the school there. According to Blain, these events took place in February 1705. The community was indeed very poor; their allowance was only 150 francs, whereas the amount was usually fixed at 200 francs per Brother.

Letter 39: To Brother Robert

AMG; BL I.45; ÉC 54; OC LA 54

May 1, [1708]

- 1 Be faithful, my very dear Brother, to leave everything at the first sound of the bell and to see that they are precise in ringing it to the final stroke.
- 2 It is imprudent to shout at the mothers and to chase after the children. You must be more prudent.
- 3 Please observe silence in your community.
- 4 Be particularly careful not to talk to the children out of curiosity.
- 5 Do not get upset about what people say in the streets; be recollected there. You are obliged to edify people.
- 6 The reason you are so dry and distracted during interior prayer is that you are too external and talkative.
- 7 Guard against reading out of curiosity. Spiritual reading is not meant for that; it ought to prepare you for interior prayer.
- 8 We gain nothing by allowing ourselves to give in to discouragement.
- 9 See to it that your students attend regularly; this is very important.
- 10 It is shameful to slap the students. Guard against impatience.
- 11 I know the pastor well and that he is incapable of anything but good advice.
- 12 Please get on well with your Brother; see to it that wise conduct prevails in your community.

76. CL 6:68–71; *John Baptist de La Salle: Two Early Biographies*, 59–60.

13 I am, in our Lord, my very dear Brother,
Totally yours,
DE LA SALLE



This letter and Letter 40 are dated by Félix-Paul as having been written in 1708. In Letters 4 and 5 addressed to Brother Denis, both dated 1708, reference is made to the second member of the Darnétal community, who slaps his students and by his rough manners in the streets is an embarrassment to Denis. Letter 4 identifies this Brother as Robert. Both Denis and Robert were at that time under the supervision of the Director of the Rouen community, Brother Joseph. Brother Denis, who was in charge of the school, was ill at the time of this letter, so De La Salle gives some advice to Brother Robert on the management of the school.

Letter 40: To Brother Robert

AMG; BL I.47; ÉC 55; OCL A 55

May 21, [1708]

- 1 You must not get annoyed with your Brother; try to live peacefully with him.
- 2 If something is not going well, it suffices to mention it to Brother Joseph when he is in Rouen or, in his absence, to Brother Barthélemy, so that they can rectify it.
- 3 For the rest, be faithful to obedience, because it is a virtue you ought to take much to heart, for it is the primary virtue we ought to practice in community.
- 4 Be exact in ringing the bell to the final stroke, always on time. This is an important matter.
- 5 Please have the school door answered promptly; this is the student doorkeeper's duty.⁷⁷
- 6 Be careful not to neglect rising on time, for this fault is most displeasing to God.
- 7 Do not allow yourself to walk with, much less talk to, any Brothers you meet in the street.
- 8 Moreover, do not let yourself give in to curiosity, which is a great obstacle to virtue.

⁷⁷. *The Conduct of the Christian Schools*, 176–177.

- 9 When you go to Rouen, report to Brother Joseph or, in his absence, to Brother Barthélemy.
- 10 It is most important that you perform the penances in the refectory, for they will help you considerably to correct your faults.
- 11 For the love of God, be especially faithful to obedience.
- 12 Time is quite precious; God will require you to account for what you will have lost.
- 13 Apply yourself often to spiritual reading, which will be quite useful to prepare you to make interior prayer well.
- 14 Your dry periods in interior prayer and during Holy Communion occur because you do not apply yourself and do not think of spiritual matters outside the time for prayer.
- 15 Do not stay away from Communion; you need it.
- 16 Supervise the children carefully, for we will have no order in school except insofar as we watch over the students, which is what assures their progress.
- 17 Their improvement will be realized not by your impatience but by your vigilance and good direction.⁷⁸
- 18 Please take care that they are well behaved and devout in church and during prayer, one of the primary things you ought to do for them.
- 19 I do not know why you say that if you become ill, you will be shown the door. We will take care of you.⁷⁹
- 20 You must be careful about what you write. Your letters cannot be read, because you do not write three words coherently and you omit some of them. Please be careful of this in the future.

I am, in our Lord, my very dear Brother,
Totally yours,
DE LA SALLE

- 21 I am surprised that you were so indiscreet as to tell Brother Denis that I instructed you to write to me about his conduct. That is very wrong.
- 22 Please do not let such a thing as your speaking like that happen again. You realize that this can only cause trouble in

78. *Rule and Foundational Documents*, 19.

79. *Ibid.*, 83.

his mind, between the two of you, and between him and me.
This is more important than you think.



From paragraph 18 of Letter 5 to Brother Denis, it is clear that Brother Robert was a source of annoyance because of his behavior while walking in the town. In this Letter 40, De La Salle attempts to correct him and urges him to give an account of his behavior on these occasions to Brother Joseph or to Brother Barthélemy.

Brother Joseph's place as Director of the community of Rouen and Darnétal was taken by Brother Barthélemy when Joseph was away on visitation. On the weekly day free from class, the Brothers from Darnétal went to Rouen to give their account of conduct. Barthélemy was the Director of the novitiate at Saint Yon, near Rouen.

As in Letter 5, Brother Denis, the man in charge at Darnétal, is not in good health, so De La Salle transfers him during the school holidays. Until that time, life in the community of Darnétal must have been difficult for the rough-mannered Robert and the impetuous, frivolous Denis.

Letter 41: To Brother Robert

AMG; BL I.46; ÉC 56; OC LA 56

December 7, [1708]

- 1 You do not tell me, my very dear Brother, why you have not been receiving Holy Communion. You ought to have told me the reason.⁸⁰
- 2 Be careful not to let yourself give in either to impatience or to angry outbursts.
- 3 There must be solid union between the two of you, great courtesy toward laypeople, and considerable patience with students.
- 4 Be exact to attend the exercises and to go nowhere without permission.
- 5 We must omit some spiritual exercise rather than take class time to complete a necessary errand, for we must not lose a minute of class.

80. "They will also have a very special love for Holy Communion. They will never abstain from it on ordinary days without necessity and without the advice of the Brother Director or the order of their confessor" (*Rule and Foundational Documents*, 22).

- 6 Be very careful to speak softly in the house when you must speak, and let it be only in a genuine necessity. We must never speak from a distance or from a window.
- 7 Do not dwell on thoughts about school during the time for interior prayer. Everything has its time.
- 8 Take care not to reduce the number of your students by your scolding; teach them well so that they will not drop out.
- 9 Do not promote them to a lesson for which they are unprepared. Be careful about this; otherwise, they will learn nothing.
- 10 You must see about buying books, provided they are good ones and I know what they are.
- 11 You must have shirts and other linen articles made if need be, but you must send me a note about what linen items you have and what you need.
- 12 We must not accept the least thing from the students' parents or from the students.
- 13 See to it that both of you live by the Rule and are closely united and that you are as respectful to your Brother as to people in general.

I am, in our Lord, my very dear Brother,
Totally yours,
DE LA SALLE



Brother Robert was now in charge of the school, and we find that De La Salle gives advice about the administration of both the community and the school. It is significant that in paragraph 5, De La Salle asks him to omit some part of his spiritual exercises rather than miss class to run a necessary errand. The Founder considered classroom duties as important for the sanctification of the Brothers as spiritual exercises. He gives Robert advice to this effect, because Robert seems to have needed encouragement to overcome his natural weakness in the face of his school work. In fact, in 1729 Robert took vows as a serving Brother.

The books mentioned in paragraph 10 are the first readers, or primers, on three grade levels, which would be purchased from local bookstores. It was only later on that De La Salle's *Les Règles de la Bienséance et de la Civilité chrétienne* would be used as the reader.⁸¹

81. CL 19; *The Rules of Christian Decorum and Civility*.

De La Salle considered the gratuity of the Christian Schools one of the most important features of the Institute. In Darnétal the poverty of the community would have been a serious temptation for the two Brothers to receive gifts from parents and students; De La Salle forbids this practice in paragraph 12.

Letter 42: To Brother Robert

AMG; BL I.49; ÉC 57; OCL A 57

February 26, [1709]

- 1 You realize, my very dear Brother, that speaking so angrily to this neighbor could have greatly scandalized her. Your conversation must always be prudent, especially when you are with outsiders.
- 2 Act also with great charity for your Brother. When you have something to report, mention it to Brother Joseph so that he can set it right.
- 3 You will do well to send away people who come to speak to the Brother during spiritual reading and interior prayer.
- 4 Guard against eating outside mealtime; this is intolerable. The hunger you seem to have at such times is a temptation.
- 5 Be exact to ring the bell to the final stroke; this is important in a community.
- 6 Take care never to tell a lie; it is certainly a great fault. Do not give in to curiosity, which does great harm.
- 7 Perhaps it is because you have done so that you find it difficult to apply yourself to interior prayer and the other exercises.
- 8 Your entire concern during the students' Mass must be to supervise them.
- 9 Do not let yourself go so far as to strike them; it is a serious fault that you cannot guard against too much.
- 10 You are doing well to try to have your students make progress, both to increase their number and to fulfill your duty.
- 11 We must be pleased to have school start on time.
- 12 Take care that the school always runs well and also that the community observes the Rule.

I am, in our Lord, my very dear Brother,
Totally yours,
DE LA SALLE



In the 1706 manuscript copy of *Conduite des Écoles chrétiennes*, we find the following instructions for the Brothers when they take their students to daily Mass: “They are there only in order to watch over their students. . . . they will be content with a simple attention to the sacrifice.”⁸² De La Salle alludes to this point in paragraph 8.

In one of his letters to Gabriel Drolin, De La Salle expresses his amazement that Drolin finds it difficult to take his students to Mass during school time. The Rule of 1705 specifically states that the Brothers are to take their students to Mass in the nearest church each day, unless the Superior of the Institute judges it impossible for them to do so.⁸³ In Letter 8, addressed to Brother Hubert, the Founder draws attention to this point of Rule and to the part to be played by the Brothers during the student Mass.

Letter 43: To Brother Robert

Copy; AMG; BL II.6; ÉC 69; OC LC 69

[March 1709]

- 1 You ought to be greatly concerned to correct your thoughtless behavior, my very dear Brother. Because it is so harmful to you, it is a fault that you especially ought to guard against.
- 2 Take great care not to act routinely. Develop more views of faith in your actions than you appear to have.
- 3 Overcome resentment at suffering from humiliations, which will do you much good if you accept them graciously.
- 4 Try to squelch your feelings that arise from whatever comes to mind; never let yourself resort to arguing about what you are made to do.
- 5 Be faithful to leave everything at the first sound of the bell, which is as important as attending to your spiritual reading, which will serve you well in interior prayer.

82. CL 24:91–92; *The Conduct of the Christian Schools*, 101.

83. CL 25:35; *Rule and Foundational Documents*, 37.

- 6 The daily particular examination of faults is also very necessary for you.
 - 7 Your distraction during interior prayer stems from your thoughtless behavior, so please overcome this.
 - 8 Do not be anxious about your confessions; act with simplicity in this matter. The anxiety you experience in this regard, as well as with your Communions, is a temptation from the devil.
 - 9 Take care that your students pray to God devoutly.
 - 10 Do not leave your place in class; listen to no excuse for that.
 - 11 Exercise restraint when administering punishment; do not do it when you feel moved to impatience.
 - 12 Speak with Brother Joseph about what you propose for reading during breakfast.
 - 13 It is a good idea to enter into yourself to reflect on your failings and to humble yourself for them.
 - 14 The more repugnance you feel for something, the more willingly you ought to do it.
 - 15 It is good to do what you are told in spite of the dislike you feel for it.
 - 16 Guard against communicating by signals in the community; it is a serious fault.
 - 17 Follow our customary method of assisting at holy Mass.
 - 18 The more that silence is observed in your school, the more order there will be; therefore, see that silence is kept there.
 - 19 I certainly want you to make vows for three years on Trinity Sunday.
- I am, in our Lord, my very dear Brother,
Totally yours,
DE LA SALLE



The original of this letter, extant in 1835 at the time of the process of beatification of John Baptist de La Salle, has since been lost, but a copy made at that time has been preserved.

This letter provides a good example of the critical work of Brother Félix-Paul in his research for internal evidence to determine the name of the recipient and to estimate the date of the letter when there is no explicit evidence. To establish the approximate date, Félix-Paul used the reference in paragraph 12 to Brother Joseph as being Director of the

community. It is known that Brother Joseph was Director of the schools of Rouen, which would have included Darnétal, between 1706 and 1710, as indicated in Letters 40 and 42 to Brother Robert. To determine the recipient of the letter, Félix-Paul used the evidence that Brother Robert had received similar advice in other letters from De La Salle. The allusion to the triennial vows in paragraph 19 eliminates Brother Denis as the Brother to whom the letter was written, even though he also lived in the community of Darnétal, for Denis had made his perpetual profession in 1697. Furthermore, vows were to be made in May of 1709, and decisions regarding them made a few months earlier. Because Letter 44 was written to Robert on April 26, and with fair certainty in 1709, Brother Félix-Paul suggests that the date for this letter is March 1709.

Letter 44: To Brother Robert

AMG; BL I.50; ÉC 58; OC LA 58

April 26, [1709]

- 1 You certainly made a big mistake, my very dear Brother, to have quarreled at Saint Yon. That must never happen and is disgraceful for Brothers. I am very happy that you performed a penance for it.
- 2 Speak softly when you request something at Saint Yon, and ask for it prudently.
- 3 Be faithful to your exercises and to leave everything at the first sound of the bell.
- 4 Accustom yourself always to speak softly and from nearby, not from afar, to answer the door promptly, and to ring the bell precisely to the final stroke.
- 5 Apply yourself often to recollection. Realize how much you need it.
- 6 Be very careful not to strike the children in any way; it is a serious fault.
- 7 I am very pleased that your community is living totally by the Rule.
- 8 Be faithful to obedience and to do nothing without permission, which will attract God's blessings to you.
- 9 Be careful lest the spirit of the world enter your community, and endure for love of God the trouble that people outside the community cause you.

- 10 What need have you to write to your sister?
 - 11 Be exact to leave everything to attend the exercises.
 - 12 The Brother must not worry about the garden. If something needs to be done, you or a gardener must do it.
 - 13 Be exact with spiritual reading.
 - 14 I am very pleased that the Brother does not go out; keep him to this practice.
 - 15 Make sure that you are always the same in class and that you do not let yourself give in to impatience there. It is imprudent to throw the ferule at students, but it is disgraceful to slap them, especially in church.
 - 16 I am very pleased that you have a large number of students. Be sure to make them progress well.
 - 17 Brother Thomas ought to give you what you need without so much arguing. It is not true that he was ordered to mortify you, but you must behave prudently.
 - 18 It is not customary for us to measure out bread according to what the Brothers ought to eat. They eat what they need. You are to get what salt you need.
 - 19 You do well to adapt yourself to the weather and to suffer willingly.
 - 20 I am very pleased that your school is doing well and that you have a sufficient number of students. Take care to teach them well.
 - 21 What Brother gave money to a child to get him some snuff? Which child was it?
 - 22 When you learn of something contrary to the Rule, you must let me know.
 - 23 I do not understand what you mean when you say that the Brother buys books in order to go to Rouen.
 - 24 Tell Brother Thomas that the Brothers do not have to present a written order to request what they need and that he must give them what is wanted.
- I am, in our Lord, my very dear Brother,
Totally yours,
DE LA SALLE



The translation of the word *monde* in paragraph 9, rendered as “spirit of the world,” is subject to debate. Battersby translates it as “worldliness.” Brother Félix-Paul believes that De La Salle is referring to people begging for food or alms during the famine of 1709 and insulting the Brothers when they were outside the community house.

The Brother mentioned in paragraph 12 who ought not to work in the garden might have been Brother Jean-Chrysostome, Pierre Blin, a young man 19 years old at the time, whom De La Salle knew to be in poor health and did not want fatigued by such work. He entered the Institute on October 23, 1707, so this might have been his first year in community. He died in Calais on October 20, 1719, at the age of 29. Blain says that between 1681 and 1719, 42 of the 60 Brothers who died were under 30 years of age.⁸⁴

The ferule, mentioned in paragraph 15, was made of padded leather about ten inches long and two inches wide. It was used as a punishment for misdemeanors; the Brother was to strike the palm of a student no more than twice.⁸⁵

The word translated in paragraph 21 as “snuff” (*prises*) is unclear in the original manuscript and has been variously interpreted as *cerises*, meaning “cherries,” or *devises*, a term limited to heraldry in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. The interpretation “cherries” would obviously be incorrect, because of the time of year, and *devises* would make little sense in the context. Consequently, the French word *prises* is the most probable reading. This can be translated as “a pinch of tobacco” or “snuff.” De La Salle was opposed to the use of tobacco; furthermore, giving money to one of the children to make a purchase would have violated the point of Rule that states that the Brothers must not ask their students to run errands for them or to deliver messages.⁸⁶ From the fact that De La Salle reminds Robert in paragraph 22 that he ought to report irregularities that he comes to know about, we can assume that the Brother in question was not his young companion in Darnétal but a member of the Rouen community. De La Salle wants to know whether the child who got the snuff for the Brother is one of the students, which would be a greater fault, or someone else.

From previous letters we have learned that Brother Robert was a rough-and-ready man, given to impatience both in and out of class, shouting angrily at the neighbor woman and chasing students in the streets. Paragraph 17 indicates that Robert had no patience with Brother Thomas, one of whose duties as Procurator was to provide the Brothers

84. CL 7:250; Blain, *Life*, Book Two, Chapter IV, 199.

85. CL 24:169; *The Conduct of the Christian Schools*, 151.

86. *Rule and Foundational Documents*, 39.

with their needs, nor did Robert hesitate to accuse De La Salle of instructing Thomas to humble him by seeming to refuse his requests. In spite of all these human failings, Robert persevered in the Institute until his death in Meaux in 1734.

Letter 45: To Brother Robert

Ms. 22, 4; AMG; BL III.4: ÉC 59; OC LI 59

[1709]

- 1 It seems to me, my very dear Brother, that you ought to be more obedient and submissive than you are.
- 2 We did not enter community life to bargain with whomever. We ought not to demand conditions; obedience ought to be the rule of our conduct.
- 3 Rest assured that God will bless you only insofar as you follow this practice.
- 4 For the love of God, never make statements like you made in your last letter, because they are inappropriate for an obedient person.
- 5 It is true that we must trust in God's grace, but in a community we receive graces only to the extent that we are obedient.
- 6 Ask God, then, for blind obedience; nothing is more necessary for you.
- 7 Listen to inspirations and not so much to your dislikes and difficulties. It is not when we feel no repugnance that we show that we are obedient, because everyone obeys easily on such occasions, but only when we overcome our repugnance.
- 8 I am delighted that you feel drawn to virtue. Obedience is the principal one you ought to practice.
I am, in our Lord, my very dear Brother,
Totally yours,
DE LA SALLE

Letter 46: To Brother Robert

Ms. 22, 3; AMG; BL III.3; ÉC 60; OC LI 60; MH 27:325–326, 36:446; CL 8:369, 444

[1709]

- 1 I am delighted, my very dear Brother, that you have recovered from the wretched state you were in for so long and that you acknowledge the change that God has brought about in you.
- 2 I assure you that I feel no greater joy than when I know that those whom I direct walk courageously in the path of virtue.
- 3 I pray God to continue what he has begun in you, my very dear Brother, and I thank him for having given you a love for the holy virtue of mortification.
- 4 Now that you recognize your faults, for example, your failure to be obedient and to observe your Rule, and so on, I beg of you, consider before God how you are going to correct them.
- 5 Because you remark that your lack of mortification and your weak obedience were the cause, take steps to become more mortified and obedient.
- 6 I am quite pleased with your self-renunciation, which leads you to do whatever is required of you.
- 7 Because you are prepared to obey in all things, never say, “I want,” for that does not bear the stamp of obedience.
- 8 I have no difficulty believing that you find obedience repugnant. All that is required is that you overcome this dislike.
- 9 Remember that obedience sanctifies the actions of a member of a religious community.



Because this letter does not have the signature of De La Salle, Brother Félix-Paul considers it as an incomplete letter reconstituted from Ms. 22 and from two separate quotations from Blain.

Letter 47: To Brother Robert

Ms. 22, 2; AMG; BL III.2; ÉC 61; OC LI 61; MH 36:445; CL 8:443

[1709]

- 1 I am not at all upset by the trouble that you think you have caused me, my very dear Brother. The only thing that concerns me is that you do not know what is good for you.
- 2 Be assured that what is best for you is what obedience brings you.
- 3 That is why you ought to pay attention to your behavior in what concerns both yourself and others. For it is impossible to please God if you do not live amicably with others, nor will you have peace of soul unless you show consideration for those for whom you ought to be a source of edification.
- 4 Pray to God, I beg you, that he may touch your heart and make you docile to his will.
- 5 Take pains to please him in all you do. For my part, I will also pray for this intention for you.
- 6 Please do not let the troubles you are experiencing prevent you from making your retreat and learning from them to be completely obedient. Make your retreat because I ask it of you.

I am, in our Lord, my very dear Brother,
Totally yours,
DE LA SALLE



A comparison of the sources of Letters 45, 46, and 47 helps us to see in them a unity. Ms. 22 gives them as fourth, third, and second in a series, while Blain records them in a single chapter of his biography of De La Salle, where three out of four of Blain's extracts appear consecutively.⁸⁷ Because Letter 46 bears the date 1709 (only on the copy in Ms. 22 and so is listed as conjectural) and because all three letters seem to have succeeded one another at short intervals, they are all dated that same year.

87. CL 8:443, 444; *The Mind and Heart of John Baptist de La Salle*, 444–446.

Letter 48: To Brother Robert*AMG; BL I.48; ÉC 62; OC LA 62*

November 3, [1710]

- 1 Please be prudent, my very dear Brother; do not do anything rash.
 - 2 We will take the best possible measures for your community.
 - 3 Please go to Rouen to tell the Brother Director to give you Brother Louis to join you.
 - 4 He is a prudent Brother with whom I believe you will be happy.
- I am, in our Lord, my very dear Brother,
Totally yours,
DE LA SALLE

I will write you more in a little while; the post is ready.



From the tone of this short letter, it would seem that some crisis had arisen in the community. Perhaps trouble developed between the young Brother and Brother Robert. Knowing Robert's hasty temper, De La Salle warns him against imprudent action and replaces the second member of the community with Brother Louis from Rouen.

Brother Louis, Jean Robin, was born on March 18, 1688, in the diocese of Dijon and entered the novitiate at Saint Yon on March 17, 1709, but he completed his novitiate in Paris when the novices moved there during the famine. He began his teaching career in Rouen in October 1710. Later he was in Rethel as Director and signed the record of Brother Barthélemy's visit there in 1717. He assisted at the General Chapter of that year and also at the Chapters of 1720 and 1725. He made perpetual vows on August 15, 1725, in accordance with the Bull of Approbation. Brother Louis died a saintly death in 1728, after many years of ill health. Blain includes a short life of Brother Louis among those whom he considers most closely followed De La Salle as his exemplary disciples.⁸⁸

88. CL 8, Supplement, 80–84.

Letter 49: To Brother Ponce*Ms. 22, 16; AMG; BL III.16; ÉC 70; OC LI 70; MH 40:509; CL 8:481*

Brother Ponce, Poncelet Thiseux, is not listed in the *Catalogue* of 1714, but he is included in *Livret des premiers vœux*, which lists Brothers who took vows between 1694 and 1705. He is named as having made perpetual vows on September 26, 1696.

Blain speaks of Brother Ponce's harsh treatment of the young Brothers when he was Director in Paris in 1702. This resulted in the enmity of Father de La Chétardie toward De La Salle. (See the commentary on Letter 19.) We learn from the opening lines of Letter 49 that Brother Ponce still has a problem dealing kindly with others.

In Letter 19, dated September 4, 1705, De La Salle mentions to Gabriel Drolin that Brother Ponce is in charge of the schools in Rouen. Later, in September 1706, Ponce was sent to Avignon, then to Mende in 1707, and back to Avignon in 1708. He exercised the role of representative of De La Salle in the South of France, probably as early as 1707. In 1711 he organized the school in Vans, which opened in November. That is the last reference to him, and it is probable that he left the Institute around that time, which was a period of considerable trouble for De La Salle in Marseille. (See the commentary on Letter 19 for the suspicion surrounding Brother Ponce's departure. See also Letters 64 and 64-a for further references to Brother Ponce.)

[January 1706]

- 1 You ought to be most careful, my very dear Brother, not to speak so haughtily, as you tell me you sometimes do. The Spirit of God does not allow that sort of talk.
- 2 Thus, let humility and gentleness be always evident in what you say. "A soft answer," says the Wise Man, "breaks down the hardest nature."⁸⁹ Nothing will make you more pleasing to God and to people than these two virtues.
- 3 But if you ought to speak to your Brothers with humility and gentleness, you must be no less careful to act in the same way toward people outside the community. Saint Paul requires this of all Christians.⁹⁰
- 4 Never rebuff anyone, therefore; that gives very bad example. On the contrary, speak politely, which is altogether in keeping with the Spirit of God.

89. Prov 25, 15.

90. Eph 4, 29.

- 5 You must also guard against speaking too freely with your students, which takes away all respect.
 - 6 You ought to avoid completely any frivolity in class, because it does much harm there.
 - 7 Teaching catechism in a church is contrary to our Rule.
 - 8 Women are not to be admitted to it.
 - 9 We must not give students anything to drink.
 - 10 We must not only assist at Mass on the feast of Saint Nicolas but also offer a stipend for it.
- I am, in our Lord, my very dear Brother,
Totally yours,
DE LA SALLE



Some letters in Ms. 22 bear the complete date on which they were written, but Letter 49 has simply “1706. R.” The assumption is that it was addressed to a Brother in Reims, Rethel, or Rouen. Of these, the schools in Reims and Rethel date back to the first years of De La Salle’s founding of the Institute of the Brothers of the Christian Schools. In both places, the methods and practices he had established for teaching were well known and accepted. The schools in Rouen, however, were founded more recently, in 1705. The Brothers there were already having problems with the administration of the Hospice for Poor People, to which they were at first attached. They had to put up with opposition both to De La Salle’s concept of the Christian School and to teaching catechism in the school. The supposition that this letter had been sent to Rouen would make understandable De La Salle’s insistence, in paragraph 7, that the Brothers teach catechism in school, not in church. Catechism is an essential component of the Christian Schools. We see this same emphasis in his remarks to Brother Gabriel Drolin in Letter 18, August 28, 1705.

The prohibition against teaching catechism in church is probably an interpretation of the Rule of 1705, chapter 1, article 2: “They [the Brothers] cannot be priests or aspire to the ecclesiastical state, or even sing, wear a surplice, or exercise any function in church.”⁹¹

The prohibition of women (*personne d’autre sexe*), mentioned in paragraph 8, is not completely clear. The Rule of 1705 states, “They will not allow either girls or women to enter for any reason whatever, unless it is to visit poor children and they are accompanied by the pastor of the parish.”⁹² *The Conduct of the Christian Schools*, 1706, does not specifically re-

91. *Rule and Foundational Documents*, 14.

92. *Ibid.*, 49.

fer to girls or women when it states, “Outsiders may be admitted to the catechism lessons on Sundays and feast. This is permissible even though they do not attend the Christian Schools regularly on other days.”⁹³ We do not know whether this practice was authorized before 1706, but if so, it certainly would have been followed on an experimental basis before being so precisely authorized in 1706. The lessons were evidently a tribute to the reputation of the Brothers as catechists at that time.

The Conduct of the Christian Schools spells out the custom alluded to in paragraph 9 to be observed while the students are eating their breakfast and afternoon snack in school,⁹⁴ but it makes no mention of any kind of drink being given to the students.

The feast of Saint Nicolas, “patron of pupils,” was a full holiday instead of the usual Thursday holiday. The students, however, were required to attend catechism in school and then a Mass for the feast. De La Salle’s mention of a Mass stipend in paragraph 10 refers to the Rule of 1705: “They must ask the priests of the parish where they teach to say or to have said a Mass, if possible, a High Mass.”⁹⁵

Letter 50: To Brother Clément

AMG; BL II.3; ÉC 9; OC LC 9

Brother Clément, Jacques Gatelet, was born on September 28, 1684, at Romagne, in the diocese of Reims. He entered the novitiate on April 20, 1700, and made his novitiate in Paris. He made his perpetual vows in accordance with the Bull of Approbation in the year 1725. In 1745 he was Director of the community of Meaux. He died at the age of 69 at Meaux in 1753.

June 26, 1706

- 1 I am greatly consoled, my very dear Brother, that your rheumatism is cured. Please take care to be very prudent and to conform yourself in everything to God’s will, especially with obedience that is not only external but also from the heart.

93. CL 24: 232–233; *The Conduct of the Christian Schools*, 237.

94. CL 24: 9; *The Conduct of the Christian Schools*, 52–53.

95. *Rule and Foundational Documents*, 114. This item is not in the Rule of 1718.

- 2 Be very careful not to strike a student with your hand. You know that the Rule forbids it.
- 3 I am very glad that you have a good confessor and that he gives you such good advice. Try to take advantage of this as long as you have him.
- 4 If you wish to become interior, a matter of great importance for you is to control your mind and your eyes. Without this kind of mortification, it is almost impossible to make much progress in virtue.
- 5 Motivate yourself well to be indifferent in matters of obedience, one thing above all else that will draw down God's graces on you.
- 6 It is a good practice to read the Rule often in order to be completely faithful to it. You know that observing the Rule will obtain your sanctification.
- 7 Your attention to God during the exercises will contribute most to making them well. God not only requires the exterior side of your actions but also wants you to act with interior motivation.
- 8 Select just one defect at a time and for several days in a row for your daily examination of conscience.
- 9 If you know what I can do to save our Brothers' schools from ruin, please let me know, because we must take the means to sustain them.
- 10 It seems to me that we must dismiss students who do not attend regularly or are tardy, for to tolerate either the one or the other brings about disorder in the school.
- 11 During vacation time we will see what we can do about finding a Director for you. In matters of conscience, do the best you can until then.
- 12 You do not have to conform with the Brothers with regard to food unless you are feeling completely well.
I am, in our Lord, my very dear Brother,
Totally yours,
DE LA SALLE



This letter is preserved only in a copy that was probably made in 1784 or 1785. At the time that it was written to Brother Clément, he was a member of the community of Laon under the directorship of Brother Hubert (Letters 7 to 12). From the recommendations in paragraph 10 concerning school policy, it appears that Clément was in charge of one of the schools attached to the community. De La Salle shows himself solicitous for Brother Clément's health and welfare, urging him in paragraph 12 to excuse himself from the regulations concerning the type and quantity of food to be served to the Brothers. Brother Clément is also mentioned in Letter 64-a.

Letter 51: To Brother Séverin

AMG; BL I.18; ÉC 63; OCL A 63

Nothing at all is known of Brother Séverin except what can be learned from this letter. The manuscript of this letter bears the heading "Paris, July 13, 1706," and on the reverse is written, also in the Founder's handwriting, "Brother Séverin, Saint Yon." This manuscript was found together with manuscripts of letters to Brother Mathias and to Brother Paulin in Pernes, near Avignon.

Paris
July 13, 1706

- 1 There is no reason, my very dear Brother, for you to upset your mind for having slandered, as you said, a woman who has died.
- 2 To repair the calumny, it is neither necessary nor appropriate to go to the place where you uttered it.
- 3 For that you only need to follow the confessor's advice, which is to write to the pastor of this parish to ask him to tell this woman's husband that what was said to him about his deceased wife is untrue and that the person who reported it to him retracts it as being a falsehood.
- 4 By means of this, I absolve you of everything before God, so do not worry any more about it.
I am, in our Lord, my very dear Brother,
Totally yours,
DE LA SALLE



This letter is probably in answer to a plea for advice from a young man who recently entered the novitiate and whose conscience was assailed by guilt for an earlier fault, grossly exaggerated by the novice's sensitivity. De La Salle, out of his vast experience as a confessor and a director of souls, suggests a solution to the young man's problem and reduces his fears to appropriate proportions.

Letters 52 to 54: To Brother Joseph

Brother Joseph, Jean Leroux, was born on February 18, 1678, and entered the novitiate of the Brothers at Vaugirard, Paris, in 1697. Brother Joseph began teaching in Paris, but after De La Salle and the Brothers lost the court cases brought against them by the Writing Masters in 1704 and 1706, which forced the closing of the Christian Schools there, Joseph moved to Rouen. There he was in charge of the community and the schools attached to it, with authority that also extended to the Brothers at Darnétal. Joseph was later appointed the representative of De La Salle to the communities and schools in the area of Reims in 1708 and subsequently to the communities farther afield in the northern part of France. (See Letters 52-a, 52-b, and 52-c.)

At the 1717 General Chapter, Joseph was elected as one of the Assistants to Brother Barthélemy. In August 1725 he was Director-General of the communities at Saint Yon, where he died on February 18, 1729.

Blain eulogizes Brother Joseph briefly in his biographical sketch of Brother Barthélemy, which is at the end of Book Four of his biography of De La Salle.⁹⁶

Letter 52: To Brother Joseph

Ms. 22, 28; AMG; BL III.28; ÉC 75; OCLC 75

[December 1706]

- 1 You realize, my very dear Brother, that you must not get upset so easily about being transferred.
- 2 Surely you can see that the work where you are now suits you much more than what you were doing before.
- 3 I am completely hindered from making changes.
- 4 I am convinced that you could easily prevent both the disorder that Brother's students create in church and their lack of

96. CL 8: Supplement, 28.

order in school. This is why I ask you to do things as we always do.

- 5 You realize that there would be mistakes and that people could be annoyed if I made changes easily.
- 6 I am upset, my very dear Brother, at departing without saying good-bye. I sent for you several times, but because you did not come, I assumed that you were not in the house.
- 7 Please see that everyone behaves properly in the community. If something does not go well, I will be pleased if you let me know.
- 8 Make sure that your schools do well. I will do my best to support that effort.
- 9 I send greetings to Brother M., and I am, in our Lord, my very dear Brother,
Totally yours,
DE LA SALLE



There is no direct evidence to indicate the date or the recipient of this letter. The name, “Brother M.,” in paragraph 9, might refer to Brother Martinien, a member of the community at Rouen at the same time as Brother Paulin, that is, from October 1705. Brother Joseph was named Director of the four schools at Rouen in October 1706; responsibility for these schools would explain his absence from the community, in paragraph 6. De La Salle probably visited the community in November 1706 and wrote this letter to Joseph, as Director, in December. For this reason, we include it with other letters addressed to Joseph, although *Édition critique* classifies it among the anonymous letters.

Letter 52-a: To Brother Joseph

AMG; BL IV.4; ÉC 41-a; OC LA 135

July 15, 1708

I, the undersigned, Priest, Doctor of Theology, Superior of the Brothers of the Christian Schools, send our Brother Joseph to visit the communities of Rethel, Guise, Laon, and Reims. Therefore, I order the Directors of the said communities to receive the said Brother in the said capacity and to inform him of all that is taking place in their community.

Given at Paris, this fifteenth day of July seventeen hundred eight.

DE LA SALLE

Letter 52-b: To Brother Joseph

AMG; BL IV.4; ÉC 41-b; OCL A 136

July 30, 1709

I, the undersigned, Priest, Doctor of Theology, Superior of the Brothers of the Christian Schools, send our very dear Brother Joseph to the communities of Guise, Laon, Reims, Rethel, and Troyes to make the visit there.

In testimony of this, we have signed this document.

Given at Paris, this thirtieth day of July seventeen hundred nine.

DE LA SALLE

Letter 52-c: To Brother Joseph

AMG; BL IV.4; ÉC 41-c; OCL A 137

November 16, 1711

We, the undersigned, Priest, Doctor of Theology, Superior of the Brothers of the Christian Schools, declare to all whom it will concern that we are sending our very dear Brother Joseph of the said Society to visit the communities of Moulins, Dijon, Troyes, Reims, Rethel, Laon, Guise, Calais, Boulogne, Rouen, Saint Yon, Darnétal, Chartres, Versailles, and Saint-Denis, which are dependent on the said Society of the Christian Schools.

In testimony of this, we have signed this document.

Given at Paris, this sixteenth day of November seventeen hundred eleven.

DE LA SALLE



The above three documents, given in legal form called “obediences,” delegate to Brother Joseph the power of the Superior. They indicate the

growth of administration in the expanding Society of the Brothers of the Christian Schools. Brother Ponce held a similar position with regard to the communities in the South of France.

Letter 53: To Brother Joseph

AMG; BL I.35; ÉC 40; OCL A 40

December 23, [1710]

- 1 I received your letter at midday today, my very dear Brother.
- 2 On Saturday I will leave for Troyes. Do not depart; wait for me there. I will be there on Monday, and together we will discuss all the matters concerning that town and your proposals about the properties at Reims.
- 3 Do not tell anyone, not even Brother Albert, that I have to go there.
- 4 I will try to make everything end well and to keep everyone happy.
I am, in our Lord, my very dear Brother,
Totally yours,
DE LA SALLE
- 5 Take no action with regard to closing the school before I arrive.
- 6 Please pay Monsieur Bourgoing the postage for this letter.



Mention of Troyes in paragraph 2 determines the date of this letter as 1710. The Brothers there had been given the use of the rectory for their living accommodations by the pastor, who was also the superior of the seminary, where he lived. On his death, the new pastor, not being the superior of the seminary, requested that the Brothers' use of the rectory be terminated. By December 1710, the situation had become delicate and threatened the closure of the school. Brother Joseph was present on visitation in the community of Troyes at that time, but evidently De La Salle thought that his own presence was warranted. His visit was successful, and the school continued. Troyes is one of the communities listed in the deed of conveyance drawn up by De La Salle on November 14, 1718.⁹⁷

97. CL 26:313.

De La Salle had refused to establish the first Christian Schools of the Brothers with his personal fortune. Instead, he distributed his inheritance to poor families during the severe winter famine of 1683–1684, preferring, as he said, to found his schools on Providence. His position of dependence on Divine Providence did not prevent him from doing his utmost to see that the Institute that he had founded was able to continue its work unhindered by problems of finance. He formed a group of trustworthy men, including his brother, Canon Jean-Louis, to purchase properties that could provide revenue to supplement the meager income of the Brothers in charge of the schools and to help support the novitiate. In paragraph 2 of this letter, we learn that Brother Joseph had some ideas regarding this revenue that he wished to discuss with De La Salle.

Brother Albert, mentioned in paragraph 3, was Director of the community and school at Troyes. He is the Brother often mentioned to Gabriel Drolin as the one who would be able to put things right in a matter of six months or so. Drolin was not keen to have Albert with him in Rome. In paragraph 20 of Letter 31, dated December 16, 1712, and addressed to Drolin, De La Salle refers to the remark made by Father Ricordeau about dissension in the community of Troyes.

On the back of this Letter 53, written in Brother Joseph's hand, is a prayer that illustrates his religious spirit: "My God, I promise you to keep my resolutions with the help of your grace. I desire always to do everything I can to be obedient in all my actions with a view to please you. I will endeavor to speak softly. I will not allow myself to be carried away by natural impulse but will have great kindness toward our dear Brothers on occasions that arise, keep careful watch over my tongue when I am obliged to speak with people outside the community, and be completely guided by you on all occasions. It is, O my God, under the protection of the Most Blessed Virgin, Saint Joseph, and my guardian angel that I place my resolutions, O my lovable Savior."

On the back of Letter 54, Brother Joseph wrote again, this time his uncomplimentary description of Brother Bernard, the early biographer of De La Salle.⁹⁸

98. CL 4:xiii, note 1.

Letter 54: To Brother Joseph

AMG; BL I.40; ÉC 41; OCL A 41

February 6, [1711]

To my dear Brother Joseph at the Christian Schools of Reims.

- 1 Yesterday I received your three letters together, my very dear Brother; I am answering the most urgent one.
- 2 It seems advisable to have Brother Placide go to Guise.
- 3 I am having Brother Fabien set out with the young Brother from Mende who is to take Brother Placide's place. In two or three years, he will be in a better condition to profit from the novitiate than presently, and he will do well in class.
- 4 You will give the horse to Brother Fabien to travel back here; he will be at Reims Tuesday evening.
- 5 Brother Dosithée would not have written to you had you not written to him first, nor would the Brothers of Guise.
- 6 I do not know why you write this way to the Brothers just as it pleases you. That is not prudent. There must be no such correspondence from one community to another; it is inappropriate for us. If you wish to prevent it, you must not do it yourself.
- 7 It would be desirable if Monsieur Bourgeois learned how to sew and how to shave and cut hair well. This is important.
- 8 I do not know whether a young man, a stonemason, has been to see you since my departure. If he is still seeking admission, you must delay him until after Easter, but they must not enter together.
- 9 Please see that Brother Remi is given what he needs. He tells Brother Thomas that he needs wool to have stockings, of which he has none, and an undershirt made.
I am, in our Lord, my very dear Brother,
Totally yours,
DE LA SALLE



The autograph manuscript of this letter does not tell us the year, but the internal evidence indicates that it is 1711.

Brother Placide, Thomas Gayot, mentioned in paragraph 2, was born on July 25, 1691, in the diocese of Laon and entered the novitiate

in Paris on April 29, 1710. He died on December 20, 1714, at the age of 23, in Rethel, where he was in charge of the school.

The young Brother from Mende mentioned in paragraph 3 is no doubt the first vocation to come from the recently founded school in that town. Mende, in the district of the Cévennes, was a stronghold of the Camisards (the White Shirts) and of Protestantism. In spite of the violent civil war that was waged against the Camisards from 1702 to 1705, the Protestant Church of the region was far from vanquished. The bishop, as part of his campaign to win over the Protestants, asked the Brothers to take charge of the free school in the town. As with other young aspirants (two are mentioned in Letter 3, as well as the Brother Irénée addressed in Letter 119), the young Brother from Mende was given a probationary period of some years in class before he entered the novitiate.

The young Brother's name was Brother Benedict, Robert Esbrayat. He was born on October 21, 1694, in Mende and has been characterized as the first vocation for the Institute from mission territory, in that the region of the Cévennes was mostly Protestant at the time. He entered the Institute on September 15, 1711, apparently having made such a favorable impression on De La Salle that he did not have to wait the two or three years of probation mentioned in paragraph 3. He signed the record of Brother Barthélemy's visit to the community of Laon on March 4, 1717. He made perpetual vows at Saint Yon in 1728, participated in the General Chapter of 1734 as a professed Brother, and was Director of the school in Dieppe in 1744. He died there in 1750.

Although Brother Joseph was De La Salle's representative in the northern region, in paragraph 6 he is clearly reprimanded for his unnecessary correspondence. As with useless talk, De La Salle was very strict with regard to useless correspondence. There are numerous references to this stricture in his letters to Gabriel Drolin. It is also mentioned specifically in the Rule of 1705. "The Brothers will not write letters out of friendship or kindness, or to relatives, and they will not write any without an evident necessity and without permission."⁹⁹

Brother Dosithée, Joseph's correspondent, mentioned in paragraph 5, was a mature man of 37 when he entered the novitiate at Saint Yon. He had been a well-to-do owner of a vineyard and had followed an extensive course of classical studies. He successively became the Director of Rouen, prefect of the young men committed to the house of detention of Saint Yon, Procurator of the Institute in Paris, and, in 1729, Assistant to the Superior General, Brother Timothée, as a replacement for Brother Joseph. He died in 1737, surrounded by the attentive care of his

99. CL 25:91; *Rule and Foundational Documents*, 94

associate in the Assistancy, Brother Irénée. The obituary notice of the eighteenth century record that his death took place “in the perfect love of God and detachment from all things.”

Monsieur Bourgeois, mentioned in paragraph 7, was born in 1696 in the diocese of Laon. He applied to the Institute as a serving Brother, intending to be a tailor and a barber. He entered the novitiate at the age of 15 on May 13, 1711, and took the name Brother Pascal. According to *Édition critique*, he died in the Institute prior to 1716, and in March of that year, another Brother took the name Pascal.

Of Brother Remi, mentioned in paragraph 9, little is known. He apparently was in the community of Rethel in 1706 and in Reims in 1711. He might have died before 1716, for another Brother Remi is listed that year in the register of names.

Letters 55 to 64: To Brother Mathias

No definite information has come to light about the identity of Brother Mathias. His name does not appear in the *Catalogue* of 1714. It is probable that he left the Institute sometime before July 1, 1710, for another Mathias, Laurent de Douay, received the habit on that day. Battersby attributes these letters to this second Brother Mathias; however, this attribution is not possible. The latter entered after these letters had been written.

The ten letters addressed to Brother Mathias were found in the attic of a house in Pernes, near Avignon, about 1850, and were deposited in the Institute Archives in 1864. They were all written within a span of a year and a half, from December 3, 1706, to May 16, 1708, while Mathias was first in a Reims community, then transferred to Paris at his request early in 1707, then transferred again at his request to Mende in June 1707. At Mende he was eager to be sent back to Paris. In Letter 64-a, written by Brother Ponce, Brother Mathias is being transferred again, this time to Avignon in June 1708. He probably left the Institute from Avignon to reside in nearby Pernes, where the letters were found.

De LaSalle's letters to him reveal Mathias as a man of changeable temperament and of irascible disposition, but as a capable teacher in spite of his deplorable handwriting and spelling and his apparent inability to compose a readable letter.

Letter 55: To Brother Mathias*AMG; BL I.20; ÉC 42; OC LA 42*

December 3, [1706]

- 1 You are the first to whom I am writing this month, my very dear Brother.
- 2 I want nothing more than to comfort you in your troubles, but you realize that I cannot comfort you if I do not know your troubles. I do not see clearly what they are.
- 3 You tell me only that you are not well. I do not know whether this is the only reason why you are asking to come to Paris or to have me send you elsewhere. Let me know what is causing this.
- 4 You tell me almost nothing in your letters. You repeat over and over the same thing that needs saying only once.
- 5 Let me know all your problems. If they arise because I do not write to you, from now on I will write to you every time I write to the Brothers, but please make sure that your letters are written more legibly, for I can hardly read them.
- 6 Continue to occupy yourself in interior prayer with the preparatory acts. You are doing well to apply yourself particularly to recollect yourself interiorly and to avoid distractions.
- 7 The only reason you give me for transferring you is that you are uncomfortable in Reims. You realize that with us we ought to adapt ourselves wherever we will be sent by our Superiors. Obedience is the Brothers' principal rule and greatest happiness.
- 8 I do not understand what you mean by saying that you are disgusted with the way you are being treated. Explain this to me, and I will try to remedy what troubles you.
- 9 Rest assured, my very dear Brother, that I want only your good and peace for your soul and that I am, in our Lord,
Totally yours,
DE LA SALLE



The line in paragraph 5, “from now on I will write to you every time I write to the Brothers,” was originally written by De La Salle as “from now on, I will write to you every time that the Brothers write to me.”

The original line was then crossed out, and the present wording was written between the lines. This change made by De La Salle himself seems to indicate that he would answer only those letters from the Brothers that required an answer, that he did not answer every letter, but that for Mathias he would not fail to answer all his letters. If it is true that De La Salle did not answer all the letters from the Brothers, this would be one reason why there are fewer letters of De La Salle extant than would be expected. (See also Letter 4, paragraph 1, where De La Salle says that he was unable to answer two letters because he did not have time.)

Letter 56: To Brother Mathias

AMG; BL I.23; ÉC 43; OC LA 43

Paris

November 18, 1707

- 1 I received your first letter the day before yesterday, my very dear Brother, and the other one today, forwarded to me from Rouen. You must always address your letters to Paris, no matter where I might be. I am replying on the day you say you are expecting an answer to your first one.
- 2 Who told you that God does not want you to do what you are doing?
- 3 You are happy, at peace, and tranquil there as long as you have support. I realize, my very dear Brother, that you need support, but you will do well once you have it.
- 4 I know how you were in Paris.
- 5 I think that your suffering is more mental than physical.
- 6 Inasmuch as you are obedient, God will support you.
- 7 I am sorry that you are distressed, and I will do all I can to resolve it for you.
- 8 You ask me to let you come to Paris; you realize that winter is not the right time for that.
- 9 It is a good idea you propose to me, to make a novena to ask God to make you do his holy will. Abandon yourself completely to it; get on well with the Brother, and God will bless you.
- 10 I do not know in what respect and on whose part you were treated inhumanely.

- 11 I fail to see that what Brother Ponce did to you is as annoying as you claim. You trouble your mind too much, which harms you greatly.
- 12 Rest assured that I will do all I possibly can for you and that I am, my very dear Brother, in our Lord,
Totally yours,
DE LA SALLE



A letter dated March 22, 1707, written by Father Boulet from Paris, was discovered in the departmental archives of Lozère, the department where Mende is situated. The letter brings to light the aims that the archbishop of Mende, François de Piencourt, hoped to achieve as a result of the establishment of the Brothers in his diocese. He envisaged a cluster of small schools in the area, those for girls to be managed by the Sisters of the Infant Jesus, founded by Father Barré, and those for boys to be managed by teachers trained by the Brothers in a teacher-training program similar to the one De La Salle established in Reims in 1687 and in Paris in 1699. Brothers Mathias and Sébastien arrived from Paris to form the new community under the direction of Brother Ponce. That De La Salle chose Mathias to be a member of the community that would open such a school attests to the Brother's capability as a teacher. In fact, the municipal council wrote a letter of thanks to the archbishop, assuring him that "the three Brothers of Father de La Salle's Society have begun their classes with wonderful success." But Mathias did not get along with Ponce, and he requested an early transfer back to Paris.

Unfortunately, Bishop Piencourt had not long to live, and even though he provided generously for the Brothers in his will, the plan to have a teacher-training program for his diocese was never realized by the Brothers.

Brother Sébastien, Jean-Baptiste Terrion, was born on March 5, 1682, in the diocese of Reims, and entered the Institute on May 22, 1701. He was in Paris in 1706 when the Brothers were indicted there. He was Mathias' companion in Mende until 1708, when he participated in the foundation in Grenoble. He was in Chartres when Brother Barthélemy visited there in 1716, and he made his perpetual profession at Saint Yon in 1725. Later he was Director of the community in Calais, and he attended the General Chapter of 1734 as the former Director of Calais. He died in Guise on June 20, 1745.

Brother Ponce is undoubtedly the same Brother mentioned in Letters 19, 49, and 64-a. (See the commentaries on these letters.)

Letter 57: To Brother Mathias

AMG; BL I.24; ÉC 44; OC LA 44

December 30, [1707]

- 1 I do not know, my very dear Brother, why you write to me so impolitely and so contrary to the truth.
- 2 Until now I have given you no cause for this. I did nothing but for your own good, and I sent you where you are only after you begged me insistently for a very long time.
- 3 Instead of telling your problems to outsiders, tell them to Brother Ponce, or write to him if he is not at Mende.
- 4 I have delegated him to do in that province everything appropriate for the Brothers' welfare.
- 5 You ought not to have urged me so much to send you so far away, only for you to want to return so soon. You realize that before Easter we cannot have Brothers either return from or go so far away and that we must not travel just to avoid the Lenten fast.
- 6 Rest assured, my very dear Brother, that depending on what Brother Ponce will tell me, I will do all that is best for you. So, let him know all your troubles and thoughts, and you will see that God will bless you by this path.
I am, in our Lord, my very dear Brother,
Totally yours,
DE LA SALLE



This letter gives the earliest direct indication from De La Salle that Brother Ponce had been commissioned by him not only as Director of the community of Mende but also as the representative of De La Salle for the communities of Avignon, Marseille, and Alès.

Letter 58: To Brother Mathias

AMG; BL I.25; ÉC 45; OCL A 45

January 13, [1708]

- 1 It seems to me, my very dear Brother, that you are making your exercises with very little attention and affection. You will not attract God's graces to you, however, except by making them with love and as best you can.
- 2 You write to me in an angry manner, which is not good. I gave you no reason to do so.
- 3 If I sent you where you are, it was only after you begged me for three months to send you far away.
- 4 As for your problems, as long as you wish to write to me in confidence, I will try to remedy them.
- 5 I will see that you are led to God with kindness, not harshness. There is nothing I will not do to obtain your welfare and salvation, but on your part, then, act more graciously, not through whim and passion.
- 6 Do you make interior prayer and receive Communion? In your current frame of mind, that is quite difficult.
- 7 Make interior prayer, my very dear Brother, and ask God to accomplish his holy will in you. That is what I will often ask of him also.
- 8 You must turn to God, my very dear Brother, and work hard to save yourself. Do not misuse the means God gives you for this purpose.
- 9 Two of your brothers came here on Sunday and told me to write that you ought to remain peacefully in the situation you are in and that you could not be better off.
- 10 The people you have seen do not know you well.
- 11 I will often pray to God for you. I wish you a happy and holy New Year, and I am, in our Lord, my very dear Brother,
Totally yours,¹⁰⁰
- 12 You ask me for permission to write to your relatives, and you already wrote to them. That is not good.¹⁰¹

100. The signature of this letter was cut off, probably along with a line of the text.

101. This sentence is written at the top of the letter, before the date.

Letter 59: To Brother Mathias

AMG; BL I.27; ÉC 46; OC LA 46

February 8, [1708]

- 1 I am very upset, my very dear Brother, that my letters annoy you. I write nothing to you, however, that gives you cause for it. I write as cordially as I can and nothing but for your own good, so I think you ought to take it well.
 - 2 I am very pleased that you are carrying out your duties well, as you report. I do not know this, although you say that I do.
 - 3 I would have been careful not to give you permission to write to your relatives, in view of the fact that before I answered your letter, your two brothers came to tell me that you had written twice to your mother, who had died, and that your letter was forwarded to them. You realize that this writing before asking permission to do so is very wrong.
 - 4 I am quite distressed that you are not feeling well. Be careful, however, that your illness is not imaginary, because you seemed to be feeling better in Paris than you said you were.
 - 5 I was quite far from thinking to have you come to Paris. I did not agree to your making such a long journey only to have you return so soon.
 - 6 Please do not make such a fuss over trifles as you do.
 - 7 I think I mentioned to you that your brothers asked me to tell you to stay where you are, that it is good for you and the best thing you could do. I am very pleased that you feel the same way and are quite willing to stay where you are.
 - 8 Please do not give in to whims anymore; do not follow the first idea that comes into your head.
 - 9 I will see to it that you are satisfied with those you will be with.
 - 10 I will also try after Easter to send you somewhere other than Mende, because that is your wish.
- I am, in our Lord, my very dear Brother,
Totally yours,
DE LA SALLE



This letter, sent almost a month after the previous one, seems for the most part to repeat the earlier letter. The original of this letter was kept by Brother Léandris, Assistant, until his death in 1915 and was then placed in the archives of the Generalate of the Brothers of the Christian Schools in Rome.

Letter 60: To Brother Mathias

AMG; BL I.22; ÉC 47; OCL A 47

March 23, [1708]

- 1 I think you are as well off as you could be, my very dear Brother, and that you ought to be content with the Brother who now is to direct you.
- 2 Try, then, to fulfill your duties well and to apply yourself to your exercises, for they will sanctify you and lead you to God.
- 3 Resolve to become well recollected and to take every possible means to do so.
- 4 Work to increase the number of your students as much as you can.
- 5 I am quite convinced that the Brother who is with you is not at all annoying and that you are happy with him.
- 6 “Such a handsome young man to be in such a state of life!” Have you no shame in saying this of yourself?
- 7 You are blessed to be in the state you are in, a holy and sanctifying state that does you honor both in this life and for your salvation.
- 8 “You are a wonderfully handsome young man!” How can you talk about yourself that way? Are these proper terms for a religious?
- 9 If I am not pleased with the letters you write, it is because you sometimes write offensively. Take care to write more discreetly and courteously.
- 10 You realize that it is very wrong both to get angry and to harbor resentment.
- 11 You also realize that it is very bad to lose your temper and to follow your feelings, which seems more like an animal than like a wise person.
- 12 Be very careful not to let yourself become impatient in class, because that is no way to establish order or silence there.

- 13 Answering back does great harm to the obedience you ought to practice.
- 14 It is very wrong to let yourself be led by whatever comes to mind, for many such thoughts are wrong.
- 15 Let yourself be guided by obedience, and you will see that God will bless you.
- 16 I ask him to fill you with his graces, and I am, in our Lord,
my very dear Brother,
Totally yours,
DE LA SALLE



We learn from paragraph 1 that Brother Mathias is now under a new Director. We know from other documents that Brother Antoine is now the Director of the community at Mende. Brother Ponce was transferred to direct the house at Avignon, while Brother Albert, of whose organizing ability De La Salle speaks so highly, moved on from Avignon to take over the direction of the schools in Rouen. Brother Antoine's handwriting is to be found on the majority of the vow formulas from 1694 to 1705; possibly he acted as De La Salle's secretary during that period.

Brother Antoine, Jean Partois, was born on October 20, 1666, in Reims. He was one of the earliest followers of De La Salle, having entered the Institute in September 1686. He is listed second in the *Catalogue* of 1714, after Gabriel Drolin. He was one of the 12 who pronounced the first perpetual vows in 1694. He was Director of the community in Laon, 1701–1702, founded the school in Dijon in 1705, and after two years as Director in Mende, went to Paris with a document authorizing safe conduct, written by the bishop. He was in Dijon again in 1717 and Director there in 1725, when he made his profession in accordance with the Bull of Approbation. He was Sub-Director at Saint Yon in 1734 and died there on April 1, 1743.

Letter 61: To Brother Mathias

AMG; BL I.28; ÉC 48; OCL A 48

April 4, [1708]

- 1 I am extremely happy, my very dear Brother, with your present good intention to remain in your state, which is very sanctifying for you, and to fulfill your duties in it well.

- 2 I am not thinking of placing you with Brother Cyprien. Brother Albert is not the type for you. You often do not realize what you are asking.
- 3 I would be pleased indeed to know whether something is now preventing you from staying in your present community.
- 4 I think you have reason to be content with the Brother who is directing you, so I think that God wants you to keep your peace by remaining with him. Because you tell me to do everything for your welfare, that seems best to me.
- 5 Why is it that the sooner I transfer you, the better it is for you? I do not think it is. You are with a good Brother who will give you good example.
- 6 You are right to ask my pardon for your letters, for they were sometimes not only very tactless but also quite offensive. I do not know how anyone can write that way.
- 7 I have tried, nevertheless, not to take offense and not to get annoyed in what relates to me.
- 8 You ask me to be with good Brothers, and so you are. What is your complaint? Please be consistent, steady, and obedient; otherwise, God will not bless you.
- 9 I recommend myself to your prayers during this holy season, and I am, in our Lord, my very dear Brother,
Totally yours,
DE LA SALLE



Little is known of the Brother Cyprien mentioned in paragraph 2. He is on none of the lists of names kept for this period, except in the history of the community of Rethel, where he is listed as having been Director and having died there in 1713. Another Brother taking the name Cyprien is listed as entering the Institute on May 12, 1713, which confirms the death of the first Cyprien before that date.

Brother Albert, mentioned in paragraph 2, is also named in Letter 16. He was evidently a good administrator, for he founded the schools in Avignon, Marseille, and Valréas. De La Salle speaks favorably of this ability in Letter 19. Brother Félix-Paul, in *Édition critique*, suggests that Brother Albert had a natural inclination to deal with the public and a lack of deep religious spirit. It was for these reasons that De La Salle did not think he was the right Director for Mathias.

Letter 62: To Brother Mathias

AMG; BL I.29; ÉC 49; OCL A 49

April 13, [1708]

- 1 I am very pleased, my very dear Brother, with your good disposition to remain willingly in the Community. I will try to help you as much as I can with your difficulties in doing so.
- 2 I will see to it that you do not stay much longer where you are, but you must still be patient.
- 3 I will take care that you will not be troubled, but you must follow your Rule, the same Rule as everywhere else. You realize that there must be no difference from one community to another.
- 4 I am told that everyone is very free in your community. Perhaps you are given too much freedom. We must return you to the same footing of living by the Rule as you experienced back in Paris.
- 5 They say that you go out to eat. You realize that this is completely contrary to the Rule and that you must never visit anyone, no matter who.
- 6 You must fulfill your duties not only in school but also in your other exercises, because school work without the exercises does not go well.
- 7 Once you have made your exercises regularly for a short time, you will have no more difficulty with them. You must be hard on yourself for a time out of love for God.
- 8 Tell me whether Brother Antoine follows a different custom than the ordinary one in the Community and what the difference is with that of Brother Ponce, but write to me only when Brother Antoine does.
- 9 They say that Brother Sébastien's shoes are too small for him and that they fit you; take them for yourself. Never wait to be told something twice.
- 10 We must have trousers made for you if you need them. I will take care that they provide you everything you need.
- 11 Be faithful, then, to observe your Rule well, and God will bless you and fill you with his graces.
- 12 Ask him to keep you constantly in your present disposition always to go wherever it pleases me.

- 13 But please be always totally obedient to your Director also.
 I am, in our Lord, my very dear Brother,
 Totally yours,
 DE LA SALLE



According to *Édition critique*, De La Salle uses the word “Community” in the first sentence of this letter to refer to the Institute, not to the local community. This supposition is based on Mathias’s earlier indications of uncertainty about persevering as a Brother. That De La Salle uses the word in this way reflects his earlier use of it to speak of his project of the Christian Schools, as in *Mémoire sur l’habit*. It was also a general term used to speak of religious congregations. The use of the word *Société* appears in the formula of vows in 1694. The word *Institut* is used in the preface to the *Recueil* (*Collection of Various Short Treatises*), written in De La Salle’s own hand (but not signed). The *Recueil* was first printed in 1711, and the preface uses the word *communauté*, but in the general sense applicable to all congregations.

Letter 63: To Brother Mathias

AMG; BL I.30; ÉC 50; OCL 50

[1708]

- 1 I do not know why you write so many letters to me at one time. We cannot afford so much postage. Write along with the Brother who is directing you and never without his permission; that is enough. You realize that we must do things in an orderly way.
- 2 I will arrange to transfer you soon.
- 3 Live by the Rule, then; be circumspect and completely obedient, for God will not bless you unless you are.
- 4 Why do you want to eat breakfast on Sundays and feast days?
- 5 In your letters you often sound like someone who is rarely obedient. For the love of God, make an effort to acquire total obedience, for this is most necessary for you.
- 6 I realize that you dearly love having your freedom, but believe me, it will seriously harm you.
- 7 You must be faithful to the Rule and obedient. Does Brother Antoine ask anything of you other than what you would be

- required to do if you were here? If that is so, let me know, and I will put things right.
- 8 Brother Antoine is correct not to allow running here and there around town. You realize that this is inappropriate for Brothers. Perhaps you were too free in the past. You realize that you must correct yourself in this regard.
- 9 I ask God to give you his Spirit, and I am, in our Lord, my very dear Brother,
Totally yours,
DE LA SALLE



There is no date on the manuscript of this letter. Because it fits in naturally between Letters 62 and 64, it can be dated late April or early May 1708. In paragraph 1, De La Salle points out a practical objection to frequent letter writing. Because the person to whom the letter is addressed has to pay the postage, it was the custom was for all the monthly letters from the community to be collected and sent off in one packet. De La Salle suffered from a chronic shortage of ready cash, so every sol counted. He mentions in paragraph 15 of Letter 19 to Gabriel Drolin that he must settle his accounts every day to determine where he stands.

The manuscript Rule of 1705 specifies that the Brothers take breakfast in the refectory at 7:15 A.M. on ordinary days, but there is no mention of this meal on Sundays and feast days. Paragraph 4 of this letter refers to this custom. The Rule simply states that after Mass on Sundays and feasts, “there will be public reading of the New Testament. . . . At 8:00 the Brothers will gather in the oratory. . . .”¹⁰² This oversight was corrected in the Rule of 1718.

Letter 64: To Brother Mathias

AMG; BL I.31; ÉC 51; OCL A 51

May 16, [1708]

- 1 In reply to your two letters, I must tell you that I wrote Brother Ponce to go to Mende and to put everything in order. I think he will be able to transfer you and to place you in his community.

102. CL 25; *Rule and Foundational Documents*, 104.

- 2 I am very pleased to see you disposed to go where I wish to place you. I am not prepared right now to bring you closer to Paris or to place you there.
- 3 I am very pleased that you are happy in the region you are in and that in the future you want to give me as much happiness as you have given me displeasure.
- 4 As you request, I will see to it that you have many students and that you are willing to fulfill your duties, but please be as concerned about your exercises as about your school work.
- 5 I am very happy that you want to try to be ready for anything and that when you write to me, it is to give me an account of your conscience. Please be exact in this.
- 6 I will not neglect to ask God, as you requested, to make you persevere to the end of your days.
- 7 Brother Ponce will provide what you need. Show the trousers to Brother Antoine. You must do everything he tells you.
- 8 Rest assured that God will bless you only inasmuch as you are obedient.
- 9 It is quite shameful to oppose the Brother who is directing you and to get angry with him.
- 10 Be careful that your distractions during vocal and interior prayer do not arise because you are too unfocused and exterior.
- 11 Try to devote yourself to recollection and to obedience, as you tell me you are doing, and which, as you say, are most necessary. These are the principal virtues you must try to acquire.
- 12 You realize that you must make your exercises in community and not go running around town. There is a walk every free day.
- 13 I am convinced that in the future you will be exact and faithful to do nothing without permission and that you truly want to live by the Rule because you want to fulfill your duty, which consists in such fidelity.
I am, in our Lord, my very dear Brother,
Totally yours,
DE LA SALLE
- 14 Your family asked me to tell you to keep calm and to write no more letters to them uselessly and through the post as you have done.

**Letter 64-a: From Brother Ponce to Brother Mathias***AMG; ÉC 51-a*

The following is a letter written by Brother Ponce, who at this time was Director of Avignon and De La Salle's representative in the South of France. The former Director of Mathias at Mende wrote to give him detailed instructions about his journey to join the community in Avignon.

Avignon
June 4, 1708

My very dear Brother,

- 1 Perhaps you think I have forgotten you. No, I did not do that, but I was waiting for the providential moment.
- 2 This letter is to notify you to depart early on the morning of Saturday, June 9, to reach Villefort that same day. Go to the "White Horse," at the edge of the town of Villefort, where you will meet a Brother who is to join you.
- 3 You must leave Mende at daybreak;¹⁰³ it is seven leagues to your destination. You will cover them quite easily because the days are long.
- 4 Bring to Villefort the small packet with all my letters and other Community documents that I left with Brother Antoine.
- 5 Also bring with you the rule for school, the one written very small, for there are two versions. The one I am telling you to bring is a letter, written very small, by Brother Clément. Brother Antoine will know which one it is.
- 6 Also ask Father Martineau for the plans I drew of the bishop's residence and of the cathedral on three or four sheets; in a word, bring all the papers I gave him. Tie them, without unwrapping it, to the packet I left with Brother Antoine.
- 7 Add these papers that Father Martineau has to this packet, and bring it with you.
- 8 Madame de La Farge will once again kindly give you some old linen cloth in which to wrap everything.

103. *De bon matin, sitôt que les portes de la ville seront ouvertes* (early in the morning, as soon as the city gates will be open).

- 9 I think that the Brothers will surely be able to arrive on the feast of Corpus Christi; thus, you will prepare everything on Friday.
- 10 If you can, greet Monsieur Durant and Madame de Pouillac for me. You will be expected without fail on Saturday, June 9, at the place I mentioned above.
- 11 Also, if you can, greet Monsieur and Madame Laurent for me, and assure them of my most humble regards.
- 12 Show this letter to no one except Father Martineau, if you judge it advisable. There is no need even to say that you are traveling.
- 13 You will go from Mende to the village of Crematte, from there to Cubières, from Cubières to Laprade; from there to Villefort is no more than a league. It is a rather long journey. Brother Antoine must give you enough money for your travel.
- 14 As I await your arrival, I close by assuring you that I am, my very dear Brother,
Your very humble and very obedient servant,
BROTHER PONCE
- 15 Leave your mantle for Brother Irénée. I am letting Brother Antoine know that we would be pleased if he would agree to give you ten or twelve pounds of bacon, which costs five francs a pound here. You will carry it easily as far as Villefort, for the Brother waiting for you has a horse.
- 16 If by chance the Brother is not at Villefort on Saturday evening, try to assist at Mass on Sunday; then take the road to Les Vans, from Les Vans to Barjac, from Barjac to Bagnols, and from Bagnols to Avignon. Perhaps you will meet him en route.



Because one lieue equals four kilometers, or about 2.5 miles, the seven leagues noted in paragraph 3 from Mende to Villefort are approximately 17.5 miles. The journey altogether from Mende to Avignon was over 75 miles as the crow flies, but it was up and down hill for Mathias. He had to walk during the first part of the journey; at Villefort he was to join a Brother on horseback.

The Brother Irénée mentioned in paragraph 15 is a predecessor of Brother Irénée of Letter 118.

Madame de La Farge, the sister of Father Martineau, mentioned in paragraph 8, was one of the charitable women who kept an eye on the needs of the Brothers' communities.

"The Brothers" in paragraph 9 is a tentative translation of a difficult reading of the manuscript. If the text is correct, they are probably Brothers Irénée and Joachim, who were in Mende in 1709.

Brother Clément, mentioned in paragraph 5, is the one to whom Letter 50 is addressed; he is also mentioned in Letter 8.

Monsieur Durant and Madame de Pouillac, mentioned in paragraph 10, are otherwise unknown. It is possible that they were among the people Brothers Mathias and Ponce visited contrary to the Brothers' Rule. In paragraph 5 of Letter 62, paragraph 8 of Letter 63, and paragraph 12 of Letter 64, De La Salle addresses the issue of visiting.

This letter is the last direct contact we have with Brother Ponce. He is, however, mentioned in the minutes of a meeting of the municipal council of Les Vans as representing De La Salle when Ponce went to that town to organize the school there in 1711.

In Letter 32, dated December 5, 1716, in paragraph 4, De La Salle explains to Gabriel Drolin that the letters sent through Avignon would be safe, saying, "I hope that the Brother who is now at Avignon will be faithful in forwarding your letters to me, for he is very discreet." This man was Brother Timothée, future Superior General, who succeeded Brother Ponce as Director of Avignon. De La Salle hinted to Gabriel Drolin on other occasions that his letters and those of Drolin were being intercepted, and the blame seems to fall on Ponce. Blain, certainly, has not a good word to say of him.

Letters 65 to 70: To various unnamed Brothers

The recipients of these letters, all Brothers, are not known. Letters 65 to 70 are grouped together, because various indications date all of them in 1709. Letters 66 and 67 most probably were addressed to Directors; one of them might have been addressed to Brother Hubert. Because the evidence is inconclusive, both letters are included here.

Letter 65: To a Brother

Ms. 22, 8; AMG; BL III.8; ÉC 92; OC LC 92

[Reims]

[September 14, 1709]

- 1 For sure, my very dear Brother, a little humility would do you a lot of good. You are too proud; it is a serious fault in you.
- 2 Unless you apply yourself to mortification of the mind and the senses, you will fall from virtue unawares.
- 3 Rest assured that the less obedient you are, the less affection you will notice in you for the work of your state.
- 4 I am not surprised if you tell me that you rarely think of God. How could it be otherwise? You loathe all the virtues, and you practice none of them.
- 5 We think of God only insofar as we love him. It seems that your love is quite weak. If you do not remedy this situation, you are going to be lost.
- 6 You urgently need humiliations. Consider this fact in particular, and welcome them graciously and gratefully.
- 7 You will gain many graces and will dominate your natural inclinations by overcoming your repugnance for humiliations.
- 8 I ask God to give you the grace to do this.
I am, in our Lord, my very dear Brother,
Totally yours,
DE LA SALLE

Letter 66: To a Brother [Director]

Ms. 22, 14; AMG; BL III.14; ÉC 71; OC LI 71; MH 30:358; CL 8:389

[September 14, 1709]

- 1 You are well aware, my very dear Brother, that we must have great love for one another. For that purpose, we must bear with one another in the mistakes into which we often fall through human weakness.
- 2 It is in this way especially that you fulfill the precept of charity, which ought to be highly developed in you.
- 3 We must love our Brothers to correct them with gentleness and affection; otherwise, a reprimand normally bears no fruit.

- 4 The Brothers have to overcome themselves to correct their faults. You too must do the same to correct yours and to give them good example.
- 5 You will usually correct them more effectively in that way than by all the harsh reprimands that you can give.
- 6 You must not be alarmed over those who fall into faults, but you have to draw attention to them with winning cordiality, particularly by doing so in a few words. This is very important.
- 7 Please try to have an engaging manner, and make it one of your chief occupations to bring about union among your Brothers.
- 8 I pray that God will also grant you this union.
I am, in our Lord, my very dear Brother,
Totally yours,
DE LA SALLE



Letter 66 can be regarded as a rather complete summary of the ideals of De La Salle for the Director's relationship with the Brothers of his community, particularly in regard to the Director's role in spiritual direction.

Letter 67: To a Brother [Director]

Ms. 22, 20; AMG; BL III.20; ÉC 72; OC LI 72; MH 23:257–258; CL 8:328

Reims
[September 15, 1709]

- 1 Be careful, my very dear Brother, not to make your spiritual reading out of curiosity, for that is a serious fault.
- 2 I am very pleased that your reading encourages you. Do it with as much attention as you can.
- 3 It will greatly help you in interior prayer, to which you must try to devote yourself.
- 4 Your spiritual reading will also contribute much to your becoming profoundly interior and to your progress in virtue.
- 5 I am delighted that you take pleasure in observing your Rule. The great love you show for its observance is a sure sign of your vocation.

- 6 You are right to be concerned that the Rule is not observed; however, the concern that you feel will not remedy the situation. Instead, it will be the good example that you give, because you must be, as it were, the prime mover and bring about the Rule's observance by your prudent action.
- 7 Hey!¹⁰⁴ Does that look so difficult? I would like you to let me know if it does.
- 8 Make every effort, then, to be devout, modest, and devoted to the observance of the Rule. By doing so, you will give good example to your Brothers.
- 9 I pray that God will give you the grace to do this.
I am, in our Lord, my very dear Brother,
Totally yours,
DE LA SALLE

Letter 68: To a Brother

Ms. 22, 23; AMG; BL III.23; ÉC 88; OCLI 88; MH 18:192, 19:200; CL 8:292, 297

[September 1709]

- 1 Whenever you have something to do, remember, my very dear Brother, that we are not happy in this life except when we do things with God in view, for the love of him, and only to please him.
- 2 It would appear that your love for him is very weak; I am not surprised, because you say that you rarely think of God. Hey!¹⁰⁵ What chance do you have of making progress in the virtue of holy love if you never think of the One who ought to be the sole object of your thoughts?
- 3 You must know that as long as you are in this frame of mind, you will continue to feel dislike for all the virtues.
- 4 You see that you are not practicing even one in the apathy you are presently experiencing.
- 5 Humble yourself often, then, before God. Tell him that you are as content as if you were enjoying consolations and that it is he whom you seek, not consolation.

104, 105. De La Salle uses the expression *Hé!* six times in his letters to Brothers: 38:5; 67:7; 68:2; 80:2; 97:1, and 98:4.

- 6 When you find yourself distressed by apathy during prayer, have recourse to God, and tell him that since he is your refuge, he must also be your consolation.
- 7 Apply yourself to your spiritual exercises in such a way that you will not have to say that although you began under the inspiration of the Spirit, you finish under the impulse of the flesh, that is, in a purely natural manner.¹⁰⁶
- 8 We must practice mortification if we are to have God in view in all we do.
I am, in his holy love, my very dear Brother,
Totally yours,
DE LA SALLE

Letter 69: To a Brother

Ms. 22, 6; AMG; BL III.6; ÉC 91; OCLC 91

[Paris]
1709

- 1 I am quite far from abandoning you, my very dear Brother. I was awaiting an answer from Monsieur . . . regarding your needs. We must have a little patience.
- 2 We must help the Brothers everywhere in a year as costly as this one.
- 3 You realize that Providence is assisting you. Rest assured that it will not fail you provided that you serve God well.
- 4 People are against you; it seems that everything is going to fail you at the same time. Then God raises up someone else to speak on your behalf and arranges to give you what you need.
- 5 I do not think it would be necessary to eliminate breakfast; you can choose to do without. Here we eat some brown bread, whatever is put on the table. Similarly, at Reims they apportion a half pound at each meal and four ounces at breakfast.
- 6 They tell me from Avignon that all inhabitants are reduced to a pound of bread; the pound there weighs only fourteen ounces. They give the Brothers four ounces at breakfast and five ounces at dinner.

106. Gal 3:3.

- 7 I cannot send you any holy picture cards. I do not have enough money to buy bread for the forty of us.
I am, in our Lord, my very dear Brother,
Totally yours,
DE LA SALLE



The information contained in this letter indicates that it was probably written from Paris in 1709, a time of famine when the novices had to move from Saint Yon to the capital city, where they lived in the Brothers' house. "The residence, which was reasonably spacious for the Brothers in Paris, became too small to accommodate them and the new arrivals. There were about forty persons living there, which meant that they were in each other's way, day and night."¹⁰⁷

Letter 70: To a Brother

Ms. 22, 36; AMG; BL III.36; ÉC 101; OC LC 101

[Reims]

[September 21, 1709]

- 1 I am greatly consoled, my very dear Brother, to know of your goodwill. I will ask God to increase it more and more in you.
- 2 You ought not to be surprised if you experience difficulties; the devil has no desire to leave you in peace.
- 3 The remedy you will discover for this will be to turn to God in interior prayer and to make your troubles known to your Director and to me in all simplicity. By this means you will see that God will enable you to bear them.
- 4 Live completely by the Rule, and be obedient; rest assured that God will give you many graces by this means.
- 5 You ought not to upset yourself or to be anxious about your temptations. When they happen to you, abandon yourself to God as to your good father. Convinced that you cannot do it yourself, ask him to help you.
- 6 Approach the sacraments eagerly; in them you will find the strength you need to overcome your difficulties.
- 7 Suppress all the thoughts that come to you during your prayers.

107. CL 8:59; Blain, *Life*, Book Three, Chapter VII, 569.

- 8 From God's guidance in your regard and from your long-standing desires, it seems to me that God is calling you to be in the state you are in.
- 9 All that you now ought to devote yourself to is to respond faithfully to your vocation, not to question it.
- 10 You ought not to have entered your state unless you were disposed to have difficulties in it. Then when you experience them after you have entered, you will not feel mistaken.
- 11 Offer yourself daily to God with everything you will undergo that he may arrange all according to his good pleasure.
- 12 I ask God to bless you by not letting you fall into inconstancy, wanting now one thing, now another.
- 13 When we give ourselves to God, we must be more steadfast and seek God alone. Inconstancy is a sign that we often are paying a great deal of attention to our own thoughts.
- 14 I ask God to give you the spirit of your state.
I am, in our Lord, my very dear Brother,
Totally yours,
DE LA SALLE

Letter 71: To Brother Charles

Ms. 22, 18; AMG; BL III.18; ÉC 73; OC LC 73

Rethel, mentioned in Ms. 22 at the head of this letter, no doubt refers to the community of the Brother Director to whom it was addressed. This reference would then indicate that the letter was addressed to Brother Charles, whom the community chronicle of Rethel for those years describes as “a very simple Brother” and lists as head of the community. This is apparently the same Brother Charles mentioned as the topic of gossip in Letter 8, to Brother Hubert, June 1, 1706. The mention in paragraph 7 of Brother Joseph, who was again in Paris, suggests that the letter was written around 1710 or 1711. During that time, Brother Joseph used his community in Paris as the base from which he made visitations to the communities of northern and western France.

[1710–1711]

- 1 I do not know why, my very dear Brother, there is so little order in your community.

- 2 Is it not because you do not keep silence? Examine yourself about this. Some complain that you speak too loudly.
 - 3 Take care, then, to keep strict silence. You realize that silence and recollection are two ways to become profoundly interior.
 - 4 Be very careful not to talk in the streets.
 - 5 Always be sure to walk with dignity. Say the rosary with great devotion. It is the way to guard your eyes, to focus your mind, and especially to attract God's graces for conducting your school well.
 - 6 You know that people are always complaining that you walk much too fast.
 - 7 You would have been more prudent not to reply at all to this cleric who spoke to you in the street after you told him that Brother Joseph had returned from . . . to Paris.
 - 8 Be careful never to argue with anyone, for that can disrupt the charity that ought to be strong among you.
- I am, in our Lord, my very dear Brother,
Totally yours,
DE LA SALLE



The reference in paragraph 7 to the cleric who asked for the whereabouts of Brother Joseph recalls the point laid down in the Rule of 1705 that the Brothers are not to tell people outside the community where the Brothers are stationed, even if asked.¹⁰⁸ No doubt De La Salle wanted to preserve the autonomy of the Institute (and of his own administration) from any interference by outsiders, especially by the clergy, who often tried to take it over and to replace De La Salle.

Letter 72: To Brother Anastase

AMG; BL I.36; ÉC 1; OCL A 1

Brother Anastase, Antoine Paradis, was born in the diocese of Laon on February 28, 1689, and entered the novitiate at Paris on July 23, 1709. He was 22 years old and in his second year in the Institute when he received this letter. He was later in Boulogne when Brother Barthélemy made his visit there in 1717 and in Paris on November 11 of that year to sign his

108. CL 25:58; *Rule and Foundational Documents*, 63.

acceptance of the new Superior General. He participated in the General Chapter of 1720 as Director of Calais and made his perpetual profession according to the Bull of Approbation at the General Chapter of 1725, being then the Sub-Director of the community in Paris. He was the Director of Grenoble in 1730 and took part in the General Chapter of 1734. He was the first Director of the community of Maréville, in 1749, and remained there until his death, at the age of 85, on April 8, 1774. He had been the oldest Brother in the Institute since 1767.

January 28, 1711

- 1 To perform your actions well, my very dear Brother, apply yourself, above all, to have motives of faith.
- 2 I am very happy that your entire outlook and intention are to do God's will.
- 3 To achieve this result, strive, above all, to be totally obedient and to observe your Rule carefully, because this in particular is how you will accomplish God's will.
- 4 Turn often to interior prayer, and try to do everything in a prayerful spirit. The more faithful you are in this, the more God will bless you.
- 5 To renew and to strengthen your awareness of God's presence, often focus on your inner self. The more you try to achieve this, the easier you will find it to perform your actions and to carry out your duties well.
- 6 I am very happy about the frame of mind you report: to do everything I will ask of you.
- 7 I ask God to give you the spirit of your state in good measure, and I am, in our Lord, my very dear Brother,
Totally yours,
DE LA SALLE

Letters 73 to 79: To various unnamed Directors

The following seven letters are grouped together because all are addressed to Directors. Neither the names of these Brothers nor the dates of the letters are known. The first three are found in both Ms. 22 and Blain's biography of De La Salle. In quoting them, Blain says that these particular letters were addressed to the same Brother, but he quotes Letter 74 before Letter 73. In this series of letters and elsewhere, Ms. 22 and

Blain differ slightly, because each uses the letters to illustrate different points and because the slight changes accommodate their individual purposes. An example of how they differ in a particular letter is given in the commentary on Letter 80.

Letter 73: To a Brother Director

Ms. 22, 1; AMG; BL III.1; ÉC 66; OC LI 66; MH 27:324–325; CL 8:368

- 1 I am very pleased, my very dear Brother, with your intentions to work hard to remedy your faults and to deny yourself.
- 2 When the occasion for impatience arises, turn often to God. For your part, to overcome the temptation, remain silent, and take no action until the occasion has passed.
- 3 Humble yourself at the sight of your weaknesses when you fall into faults.
- 4 Faithfully admit them, and be assured that the shame you feel in doing this, together with the penance you are given, will be of great help to you in correcting your faults.
- 5 You are right in saying that the thoughts you indulge in from time to time about the difficulties of your vocation are nothing but a deception of the devil, who seeks only to discourage you and to prevent you from lovingly bearing the hardships that are part of it.
- 6 Be convinced that your happiness as a Christian consists in overcoming yourself and bearing all the difficulties God sends you.
- 7 I pray that he will give you the grace to do this.
I am, in our Lord, my very dear Brother,
Totally yours,
DE LA SALLE

Letter 74: To the Same Brother Director

Ms. 22, 11; AMG; BL III.11; ÉC 67; OC LI 67; MH 27:324; CL 8:368

- 1 I am delighted to know of your good dispositions, my very dear Brother.
- 2 I am very happy that you have a high esteem for your vocation.

- 3 Try to preserve this grace, and take the means to see that there is among you a great love for seeking the salvation of your neighbor and that all is done with kindness and propriety, as among Brothers who ought to have a mutual love for one another and to bear with one another's faults.
- 4 This is what will draw down on you the graces and blessings of God. For that to happen, you must bear with one another.
- 5 Often ask God for this peace and union.
- 6 As you say, it is true that you have a great need for charity to keep yourself in peace, but be assured that you have no less a need for the excellent virtue of obedience, that noble achievement of charity.¹⁰⁹ Moreover, God will always bless your community to the extent that it possesses the spirit of obedience.
- 7 I am as eager as you are to keep the peace. Try to preserve it, and the God of peace will be with you.
- 8 I realize, as you point out, that not much order exists in your community. We must try to remedy this.
- 9 I am very pleased that you dislike being in charge. Always maintain this frame of mind; God will bless you by this means. I am, in our Lord, my very dear Brother,
Totally yours,
DE LA SALLE

Letter 75: To the Same Brother Director

Ms. 22, 15; AMG; BL III.15; ÉC 68; OC LI 68; MH 27:325, 39:496; CL 8:369, 472

- 1 I cannot understand why, my very dear Brother, you did not tell me earlier about the temptation you experienced. Do you not know that an illness is already half cured when you tell the doctor about it?
- 2 You see how weak you are, even after renewing your protestation that you belong completely to God.
- 3 It is not true that in your vocation suffering goes unrewarded. Every state of life has its own difficulties. You must not be

109. De La Salle gives charity the priority.

surprised at having to suffer. This is part of the plan of God, who wishes us to gain merit in this way.

- 4 Now, my very dear Brother, if you had patiently borne the pain that Brother had caused you, how many of God's graces you would have merited! Make sure, then, that in the future you bear your sufferings with patience.
- 5 If you wish to be pleasing to God, offer him your sufferings in union with those of our Lord Jesus Christ.
- 6 The anxiety you have concerning your faults cannot do you any good. The only thing to do is to consider before God what means you can use to overcome them.
- 7 A little patience, and God will take care of everything.
- 8 You worry too much.
- 9 Be very careful not to let others see that you are troubled. I am, in our Lord, my very dear Brother,
Totally yours,
DE LA SALLE

Letter 76: To a Brother Director

Ms. 22, 25; AMG; BL III.25; ÉC 74; OC LC 74

- 1 Make sure that you are most attentive during holy Mass, my very dear Brother.
- 2 The distractions we dwell on prevent us from hearing Mass.
- 3 Be attentive at Mass by using the method prescribed in the Society, that is to say, in an interior manner. That is best for you. Follow it humbly.
- 4 Do not forget to thank God for all the graces he bestows on you, because ingratitude for favors is most displeasing to him.
- 5 It is true that the diocese of Reims observes the feast of the Visitation on the 8th.¹¹⁰ As to the date, we follow the diocese, but we use the Roman Office. If you only have diocesan books, do what you can.
- 6 You are right to say that classroom altars bother you.

110. Reims celebrated the feast on July 8 instead of July 2; the Visitation, although not a public holiday, was a full holiday from school in place of the usual Thursday half-day (*Rule and Foundational Documents*, 51; *The Conduct of the Christian Schools*, 166).

- 7 You ought to take great care not to be so preoccupied with external matters.
- 8 You know that I do not tolerate all these altars in the classroom. That is why I am asking you to give the students the things that Brother left in the classroom.
- 9 However, you can keep the small chalice to teach them how to serve Mass.

I am, in our Lord, my very dear Brother,
Totally yours,
DE LA SALLE



In 1698 De La Salle prepared for publication *Instructions et Prières pour la Sainte Messe*.¹¹¹ Permission was given for its publication for a period of five years. A copy of this edition, dating from 1734 but with the indication that it was given approbation in January 1703, is kept in the archives of the Generalate in Rome. There also exist copies of *Recueil de différents petits traités à l'usage des Frères des Écoles chrétiennes*, compiled by De La Salle, dated 1711, which contains *Méthode pour bien entendre la Sainte Messe*, referred to in paragraph 3.¹¹²

The word *altars* in paragraphs 6 and 8 is given as the translation of the French *chapelles*. De La Salle is not referring here to the pious shrines that were popular during the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries and often erected in classrooms, for example, during May and June. In paragraphs 8 and 9, he is referring to the collection of articles used in the sacrifice of the Mass and placed in the classroom as aids in teaching the children how to assist at and to serve Mass. De La Salle was against too elaborate a preparation for this aspect of the catechism lesson.

Letter 77: To a Brother Director

Ms. 22, 29; AMG; BL III.29; ÉC 76; OCLC 76

- 1 It is indeed a most serious fault, my very dear Brother, to eat and drink away from the community.¹¹³

111. *Religious Instructions and Exercises of Piety for the Christian Schools*, 2002.

112. CL 15:70; "A Method of Hearing Holy Mass Well," in *Collection of Various Short Treatises*, 57–61.

113. "It will never be permitted to eat outside of the house" (*Rule and Foundational Documents*, 20).

- 2 I bless God for bringing you to realize this and for placing you in the disposition not to commit this fault again.
- 3 You realize that all this is scandalous, the result of either gluttony or weak complacency.
- 4 To make up for this fault through love for God, try to live completely by the Rule.
- 5 I am greatly consoled that in Reims you are a bit more skilled and prudent than you were in Paris.
- 6 I thank God that you are also having less trouble with your eyes than before. I will see to it that we take care of your ailment.
- 7 You do not tell me who was sick.
- 8 Watch over yourself a little to restrain your impetuosity, and try not to be so exterior.
- 9 I ask God to give you the grace for this and to make you behave a little less impulsively. Impulsiveness is inappropriate. I am, in our Lord, my very dear Brother,
Totally yours,
DE LA SALLE

Letter 78: To a Brother Director

Ms. 22, 31; AMG; BL III.31; ÉC 77; OC LC 77

- 1 You realize, my very dear Brother, that one of the most important things in the community is to ring the bell precisely on time, especially for rising.
- 2 Be exact to stop what you are doing at the first signal, the first sound, of the bell. You know that it is an important matter in a community.
- 3 To begin as soon as the bell stops ringing, we must leave everything at the first sound. God ordinarily attaches many graces to such fidelity.
- 4 The time for interior prayer and for spiritual reading ought never to be spent on anything else. For the love of God, let us be exact in this; let all the exercises be done precisely on time.
- 5 Also, we must do everything according to the principle of living by the Rule. God will bless what you do only insofar as

you practice this fidelity. When we are rarely faithful to the Rule, we deprive ourselves of many graces.

- 6 Often ask God, then, for this fidelity. I will also ask it of God for you.

I am, in our Lord and in his holy love, my very dear
 Brother,
 Totally yours,
 DE LA SALLE

Letter 79: To a Brother Director

Ms. 22, 35; AMG; BL III.35; ÉC 78; OCLC 78

[August 23]

- 1 I am most displeased at the trouble these two Brothers caused you, my very dear Brother. They must certainly not be very obedient.
- 2 I realize that as long as the Brothers are not submissive, there will be no order at all in your community.
- 3 When the Brothers choose not to eat something on a given day, we must not allow them to avoid eating it on the following day.¹¹⁴
- 4 The first day, it would be by impulsiveness; the next day, it will be a penance for their capriciousness. By no means are you to beg them to eat.
- 5 You did quite right to tell him to come to dinner with the others.
- 6 You also did quite right not to let him have anything to eat that evening. That is what you must do every time one of them will not obey.
- 7 That is why I am ordering you to tell Brother that every time he follows his own will and disobeys, I have instructed you not to let him eat.
- 8 We must never resort to force in a community. That is imprudent, but when all else fails, we must cut out the meals.

114. Blain mentions an incident when the community was served absinthe, an unpalatable dish that everyone but De La Salle rejected as tasteless, even poisonous. Blain also describes the spirit of penance at Vaugirard, where the Brothers left some meals untouched (CL 7:228, 328; Blain, *Life*, Book Two, Chapter I, 167; Chapter X, 301).

- 9 If you are drinking water, so are we. You ought not to have bought beer.
- 10 Be very careful not to let these two Brothers act as they please or fail to perform their penance.
- 11 I do not know why they are saying that no one gives an account of his conscience.¹¹⁵
- 12 Do not allow the Brothers to read books that are not devout. That is not wise, nor is it to be permitted.¹¹⁶
- 13 Please see to it that living by the Rule is a characteristic of your community.
- 14 On the octave of Corpus Christi, we do the same in the morning as on a feast day; the afternoon is like a free day but with no walk.
- 15 Watch carefully over yourself not to let yourself fall into negligence, because God gives few graces to those who are lax. They rarely succeed in what they do.
- 16 I ask God to fill you with his graces.
I am, in our Lord, my very dear Brother,
Totally yours,
DE LA SALLE



Ms. 22 introduces this letter with the title, “Penances to be imposed on those who suffer from epilepsy.” The idea that penances ought to be given to those who are epileptic was considered normal in the eighteenth century, when this illness was looked on as a special punishment from God. This letter makes no reference to epilepsy, however. Paragraphs 2 to 8 deal with the obstinate refusal of Brothers to take their meals with the rest of the community or to eat what is served. A misreading of the text probably led the compiler of Ms. 22 to believe that this reference had to do with epilepsy. In any case, the Founder’s severity comes as something of a shock. There seems to be confusion in the French text as to whether there were two or only one of the Brothers guilty of the fault.

The years 1709 and 1710 were years of famine in the northern part of France, hence the restriction mentioned in paragraph 9 on the use of beer at meals.

115. “See that the Brothers give an account of their conduct and of their conscience” (Letter 8, paragraph 30, to Brother Hubert).

116. “They will not read any book or paper . . . without the permission of the Brother Director” (*Rule and Foundational Documents*, 76).

The Rule of 1705 makes no reference to special practices for the feast of Corpus Christi and its octave. The daily schedule (*Contumier*) of 1713 and the Rule of 1718, however, provide for a quarter of an hour's adoration before the Blessed Sacrament on that feast day and during the octave. The Rule of 1718 also requires the Brothers to assist at Benediction of the Blessed Sacrament during these days.¹¹⁷ Evidently, the octave day of Corpus Christi was a special feast day in some dioceses, and so in paragraph 14 De La Salle gives a directive to the Director to cover this circumstance.

Letters 80 to 104: To various unnamed Brothers

De La Salle wrote Letters 80 to 104 over a number of years to various Brothers. The exact dates of these letters are not known, nor are the names of the recipients. Letters 80 to 87 have been preserved both in Ms. 22 and in Blain, and for that reason they are grouped together here. Both of these sources use the letters to illustrate various teachings or virtues of De La Salle. Letters 88 to 94 have been preserved in Ms. 22 only, and Letters 95 to 104 have been preserved by Blain only.

It is of interest to compare the different ways in which Blain and Ms. 22 present the letters:

Neither Blain nor Ms. 22 gives adequate proof of authenticity. The texts are clearly adapted and sometimes excerpted. No doubt the Brothers, for their edification, made collections of De La Salle's letters, going so far as to compose some of them from excerpts of different documents. Several of these collections were passed around; Blain could have used one; Ms. 22, another.¹¹⁸

It is notable also that not one of the autographed letters quoted in Blain's biography or in the other early biographies of De La Salle has been preserved in the original, while in turn these same biographies contain no quotations from the preserved autographed letters.

In *Édition critique*, Brother Félix-Paul takes Blain's version of a letter as the primary source, but the final version is a reconstruction that includes or adapts elements that are also in the Ms. 22 version of the letter. The commentary following Letter 80 presents an illustration of this method of reconstruction.

117. CL 25:133; *Rule and Foundational Documents*, 133.

118. CL 10:138.

Letter 80: To a Brother

Ms. 22, 7; AMG; BL III.7; ÉC 82; OC LI 82; MH 33:408–409; CL 8:420

- 1 I am sure, my very dear Brother, that you have no doubt that the one virtue most necessary for you is humility.
- 2 As you can see, you are not entirely obedient out of conviction. Hey!¹¹⁹ My dear Brother, make an effort to acquire this virtue, I beg you, and realize that you can be happy in this world only insofar as you practice humility, obedience, and patience. These three are inseparable, and you have equal need of all three.
- 3 So do your best to acquire them, and you will see that you will experience peace of mind and contentment in your vocation to the degree that you possess them.
- 4 There is nothing I will leave undone to relieve your anxiety, my very dear Brother, but believe me, the best way to overcome it is to make an effort to acquire the virtues I have just proposed to you.
- 5 However, it seems to me from reading your last letter that you do not try hard enough to acquire them. Take good care to do this, I implore you, for without them you will never do anything that is good and agreeable in God's sight. Moreover, you will never do much of anything, either exteriorly or interiorly, without them.
- 6 You surely realize that your lack of this virtue prevented you from receiving Communion on the feast of the Epiphany.
- 7 For the love of God, my very dear Brother, change your ways. I am, in our Lord, my very dear Brother,
Totally yours,
DE LA SALLE



Although the name of the recipient of this letter is not known, according to Blain this letter and Letters 81 and 82 were written to the same Brother.

It is possible that the Brother addressed here was forbidden by his Brother Director to receive Communion, because of some considerable

¹¹⁹ De La Salle uses the expression *He!* six times in his letters to Brothers: 38:5; 67:7; 68:2; 80:2; 97:1, and 98:4.

failing against one of the virtues mentioned by De La Salle. The Rule of 1705 advises that “The Brother Director may deprive them of it for what appears to be a considerable exterior fault.”¹²⁰

To illustrate the differences between the reconstituted Letter 80 of *Édition critique* (which is used in this volume also) and the versions of Blain and Ms. 22, the following translation is given. The parts common to both Blain and Ms. 22 are in regular type. The parts found only in Ms. 22 are in *italics*, and the parts found only in Blain are in CAPITALS.

- 1 I am sure, my very dear Brother, that you have no doubt that the one virtue most necessary for you is humility.
- 2 As you can see, you are not entirely obedient out of conviction; *nevertheless, you must* [HEY! MY DEAR BROTHER,] make an effort to acquire this virtue, I BEG YOU, AND REALIZE THAT you can be happy in this world only insofar as you practice humility, obedience, and patience. THESE THREE ARE INSEPARABLE, AND YOU HAVE EQUAL NEED OF ALL THREE.
- 3 So do your best to *have these three virtues* [ACQUIRE THEM], and you will see that you will experience peace of mind and contentment in your vocation to the degree that you *do* POSSESS them.
- 4 There is nothing I will leave undone to relieve your anxiety, my very dear Brother, but believe me, the best way TO OVERCOME IT is to make an effort to acquire *these* [THE] virtues I have JUST proposed to you.
- 5 However, it seems to me from reading your last letter that you do not *practice* [TRY HARD] enough to acquire them. TAKE GOOD CARE TO DO THIS, I IMPORE YOU, FOR WITHOUT THEM YOU WILL NEVER DO ANYTHING THAT IS GOOD AND AGREEABLE IN GOD’S SIGHT. *Moreover, you will never do much of anything, either exteriorly or interiorly, without them.*
- 6 *You surely realize that your lack of this virtue prevented you from receiving Communion on the feast of the Epiphany.*
- 7 *For the love of God, my very dear Brother, change your ways. I am, in our Lord, my very dear Brother,*
Totally yours,
DE LA SALLE

120. *Rule and Foundational Documents*, 22.

Letter 81: To the same Brother

Ms. 22, 12; AMG; BL III.12; ÉC 83; OCLI 83; MH 33:409–410; CL 8:421

- 1 Instead of being upset when your long-standing faults are pointed out to you, my very dear Brother, you ought, on the contrary, to thank God constantly for it. Try once again to turn this to your advantage.
- 2 Take to heart everything said to you during the advertisement of defects. This exercise will be very useful to you if you know how to profit from it.
- 3 Indeed, what sort of humility have you if you cannot bear something that causes you a little confusion?
- 4 Now I see quite clearly what you want, my very dear Brother. You very much like to profess that you are a great lover of humility and that you have great esteem for it, just as long as you can avoid humiliations as much as possible. What good will it be for you to love the virtue and to refuse to practice it?
- 5 What! You complain that others do not have enough charity, but you do not complain that you do not have enough humility. What good is that great desire you have for this virtue, if it does not help you to be more aware that you are culpable before God?
- 6 Do not give way, then, to any more complaints about the advertisements you are given, and do not think that your Director is in any way annoyed with you.
- 7 If he is strict in reproving you and in giving you penances, although he does not treat others in the same way, it is because he sees that you are well disposed and because he is more interested in your progress in virtue.
- 8 Show by your frame of mind that this is true, and let your only wish in the future be to welcome joyfully the reproofs and the penances you get and to correct your faults.
- 9 It is on such occasions that the means to do so are found. So watch over yourself, and do not get upset about something that can be only for your own good.
- 10 I pray God to give you this grace, and I am, in our Lord, my very dear Brother,
Totally yours,
DE LA SALLE



Blain suggests that Letter 81 was written to the same Brother as Letter 82 but that it was written after Letter 82.

Letter 82: To the same Brother

Ms. 22, 13; BL III.13; ÉC 84; OC LI 84; MH 33:409; CL 8:420

- 1 Take great care, my very dear Brother, not to take offense when your defects are pointed out to you.
- 2 No matter how you are told them, our Lord had worse said to him, and you claim to be his disciple.
- 3 If you really are, you will be glad to be treated like your master, who patiently bore all the insults that were offered him; so did the saints, his servants.
- 4 So when your faults are pointed out to you in a way that shocks you and seems to show contempt for you, remember to adore God's justice in the one who does this.
- 5 My dear Brother, you must have great love for this exercise and look on it as a means given you by God to rid yourself of your defects. Even if there were no other good in it but humiliation, you ought still to cherish and to love it.
- 6 Be especially on your guard not to be upset by your faults on account of the penances you might be given to make up for them. This would be a sign that you are seeking your own peace of mind and the satisfaction of your senses rather than God and that you are serving him like a slave.
- 7 One of the things most likely to draw down God's graces on you is to perform willingly the penances imposed on you. Please do them with love.

I am, in our Lord, my very dear Brother,

Totally yours,

DE LA SALLE

Letter 83: To a Brother

Ms. 22, 5; AMG; BL III.5; ÉC 85; OC LI 85; MH 13:149; CL 8:268

- 1 If God, through his divine and adorable Providence, wishes
you to remain in your present state, my very dear Brother,
you ought to will what he wills and give yourself up entirely
to his guidance.
- 2 We are committed to this by our religious profession, and we
ought continually to adore the plans that Providence has for us.
- 3 If you wish to leave this state you are in to seek consola-
tions, it is to be feared that you are seeking your own conso-
lation rather than the God of consolations.
- 4 Surely you know that obedience is the virtue of a religious.
- 5 Thus, if you were to have even more difficulty, you must
submit for the love of God.
- 6 You realize, my very dear Brother, that the difficulties you
encounter arise from a lack of obedience.
- 7 What you must do on these occasions, if you wish to over-
come the difficulty, is to blindfold your mind and say to
yourself, "I will do it by obedience in spite of my reasoning
and my dislike."
- 8 If you act thus, you will soon be free of difficulty.
- 9 I am very glad that you write to me with great simplicity.
- 10 I will try to help you as much as I can, but it is not enough to
tell me in general that you are not living by the Rule; you must
tell me in what way, so that I can apply the remedy for it.
- 11 I surely want you to devise a method.¹²²
I am, in our Lord, my very dear Brother,
Totally yours,
DE LA SALLE

121. The reference is to the method for hearing Mass, as mentioned in the directo-
ry for the Brothers' reddition (Félix-Paul, *Édition Critique*, 338).

Letter 84: To a Brother

Ms. 22, 21; AMG; BL III.21; ÉC 86; OC LI 86; MH 17:184–185; CL 8:287–288

- 1 My very dear Brother, I do not know why you say that you have an hour and a quarter of interior prayer instead of one hour. I think that interior prayer is carried out in the same way everywhere and ends at the same time.
- 2 You are disturbed that the time for interior prayer is too long. That is a sign that you do not have much love for it.
- 3 Ah, my very dear Brother, it is the mainstay of our spiritual life; would you want to neglect it?
- 4 If you cannot keep your attention on one act, move on to another. In times of apathy, occupy your mind with reflections.
- 5 At the thought of your faults, remain humbly before God.
- 6 Your thoughtless behavior is the cause of the difficulty you experience in applying yourself to interior prayer and is both the sign and the result of the unsettled state of your soul. This is the reason why you must take strong measures to overcome this fault.
- 7 Above all, make sure that you have a thorough knowledge of the method of interior prayer as it is practiced in the Society, and follow it. I am not surprised that since you do not follow it, you have difficulty in applying yourself to interior prayer.
- 8 At the present time, you have the opportunity to think of God and often to enter into yourself. Do this, I beg of you. I am, in our Lord, my very dear Brother,
Totally yours,
DE LA SALLE

Letter 85: To a Brother

Ms. 22, 17; AMG; BL III.17; ÉC 87; OC LI 87; MH 14:162; CL 8:276

- 1 I am greatly consoled, my very dear Brother, that you passionately love your state of life. I bless God for it.
- 2 You ask me to treat you as the least of your Brothers. We will see from now on whether we can grant your request.

- 3 You say that often you do not know how to keep silence. You must try to learn how. Knowing how to be silent when appropriate is a great skill.
- 4 You say that you fear not being patient enough to bear everything you have to suffer. This ought to be your daily effort. Silence and self-control will enable you to obtain it.
- 5 Be very exact with regard to silence. It is one of the principal points of fidelity to the Rule, and without it a community soon falls into disorder.
- 6 You will tell me perhaps that you very much want to observe it but that the situation in which you continually find yourself of having to answer those who ask you questions does not allow you to do so.
- 7 What a trifling excuse! Do you not know the occasions when you should reply and those when you should remain silent?
- 8 It is only for the sake of charity that you should reply; on all other occasions you should remain silent.
- 9 If someone else speaks to you, be silent.
- 10 Always speak respectfully to your Director, regarding him as the person who for you represents God.
- 11 Be very careful not to argue during recreation. We must never offer an opinion contrary to our Brothers.
- 12 Always have this frame of mind.
I am, in our Lord, my very dear Brother,
Totally yours,
DE LA SALLE

Letter 86: To a Brother

Ms. 22, 19; AMG; BL III.19; ÉC 89; OC LI 89; MH 19:200; CL 8:296

- 1 You realize, my very dear Brother, how important it is to follow the inspirations that come to you from God.
- 2 They are precious, and it is to them that God ordinarily attaches his graces. He does not mean them to be given to you for no purpose. He knows how to punish those who are not faithful to them.
- 3 So those inspirations that God gives us are to be valued, and he grants his graces only insofar as we are faithful in following them.

- 4 God gave you a special grace, which is a sign that God wants you to be in your state of life.
- 5 The sure means that you ought to use to avoid the evil you have been considering are obedience and the daily accusation of faults.
- 6 Rest assured that these two practices will prevent you from yielding to the temptation.
- 7 Make a great effort to reject all thoughts contrary to your state.
- 8 Listen to the Holy Spirit, who speaks to you in the depths of your heart.
- 9 I ask God to give you the grace to do this.
I am, in our Lord, my very dear Brother,
Totally yours,
DE LA SALLE

Letter 87: To a Brother

Ms. 22, 22; AMG; BL III.22; ÉC 90; OC LI 90; MH 21:232–233; CL 8:314

- 1 Apply yourself often to remember the presence of God, my very dear Brother. Look upon this practice as your greatest happiness.
- 2 Your recollection and self-control ought to be great enough for you to achieve this.
- 3 They will be a means for you to deny yourself in times of temptation, and they will prevent you from acting from natural motives, by inspiring you to keep constantly in mind the will of God, which ought to be your sole aim.
- 4 You are certainly right in saying that you are too thoughtless, my very dear Brother, for that is just what you are, since you so rarely think of God's presence even during the holiest of your exercises.
- 5 Try, please, to perform all your actions with the thought of God's presence in mind and through sentiments of faith, for that is the spirit of your state.
- 6 I am very sorry for you in the situation in which you find yourself and sympathize with you for the distress you feel, endlessly having to reject the useless thoughts that assail you.

- 7 But let me tell you this: they overwhelm you like this only because you do not make your spiritual exercises with sufficient fervor and because you occupy your time with a host of trivialities.
- 8 I beg you, then, in the name of Jesus Christ, make an effort to overcome this negligence of yours, for there is nothing that can do you so much harm in God's service as that. I am, in his holy love, my very dear Brother,
DE LA SALLE

Letter 88: To a Brother

Ms. 22, 10; BL III.10; ÉC 94; OC LC 94

- 1 The mortifications that others cause you to practice are excellent for helping you make progress in virtue, my very dear Brother.
- 2 Therefore, appreciate them for the love of God, especially because they concern the mind only and cause no bodily harm.
- 3 On these occasions say to yourself, "Your mind and senses always curb." Say afterward, "My God, give me the grace to love everything that helps to mortify my mind." At each separate instance say, "My God, I love and appreciate this opportunity because it mortifies me."
- 4 I am very happy that in your last letter you were faithful to tell me all the faults you had committed.
- 5 For your penance you will twice take twenty strokes of the discipline, and from now until the feast of the Assumption, every time you walk by the Brother, you will kiss his feet and ask his pardon, provided it is not during a public exercise. I am, in our Lord, my very dear Brother,
Totally yours,
DE LA SALLE



Each edition of the Rule of the Brothers from 1718 until recent years contains, in the chapter on fidelity to the Rule, what are called the "ten commandments proper to the Brothers of the Christian Schools." The

seventh of these reads, “Often mortify your mind and senses.” The same “commandments” are to be found in De La Salle’s *Recueil*.¹²²

The penances imposed by De La Salle in this letter seem to be at variance with the item of the Rule quoted in the commentary following Letter 6.

Letter 89: To a Brother

Ms. 22, 14; BL III.24; ÉC 95; OC LC 95

- 1 You realize, my very dear Brother, that to receive the sacraments with all the necessary conditions, we must have profound faith and fervor.
 - 2 Before you confess your sins, be sure to make an act of contrition.
 - 3 Be very careful not to omit going to Confession.¹²³
 - 4 Confession and Communion will support you in your difficulties; you ought to regard frequent Communion as a great happiness.
 - 5 You ought to take steps to correct your faults, but it would be even worse not to receive Communion.
 - 6 You must not receive Communion after being disobedient.
 - 7 But you must not stay away when you fail through weakness.
 - 8 It often happens at night that the devil causes these natural impurities in order to prevent Communion; therefore, I believe that you must neither exempt yourself from Communion nor fast for this reason.
 - 9 If you were receiving Communion daily, you might do so, but because the day of Communion is for the community, I do not think it need be changed.
- I am, in our Lord, my very dear Brother,
Totally yours,
DE LA SALLE

122. “Ten Commandments That the Brothers of the Christian Schools Ought Always To Have in Mind” (CL 15:5; *Collection of Various Short Treatises*, 5); “Your mind and senses always curb, and let them not your peace disturb” (*Rule and Foundational Documents*, 70).

123. “The Brothers will ordinarily go to Confession every week, at a time that will not, as far as possible, encroach on the time of school or the exercise of interior prayer” (*Rule and Foundational Documents*, 24).

Letter 90: To a Brother

Ms. 22, 27; BL III.27; ÉC 96; OC LC 96

- 1 You must take care not to be discouraged by your difficulties, my very dear Brother. On the contrary, you ought to humble yourself in view of your weakness and turn to God, in whom and by whom you can do everything.
- 2 Firm courage and a little generosity will enable you to overcome all your difficulties. Use times of fervor to inspire you. The more you conquer your dislikes by mortification, the more God will bless you.
- 3 For the love of God, do not let yourself fall into despondency, which would signify that you are still very weak.
- 4 Take care, then, not to upset yourself over nothing. It is neither wise nor reasonable to confuse the mind over a minor matter.
- 5 I have just received your last letter, according to which, it seems to me, your frame of mind has completely changed. You allow yourself to fall into despondency at the first difficulty that comes to mind.
- 6 Do not give in so readily to your impulsiveness. Be a little patient, and God will solve everything. He wants to reward you through your trials.
- 7 Do nothing without permission.
- 8 Watch over yourself to control your impetuosity.
I am, in our Lord, my very dear Brother,
Totally yours,
DE LA SALLE

Letter 91: To a Brother

Ms. 22, 30; AMG; BL III.30; ÉC 97; OC LC 97

- 1 I do not and will not fail to pray to God for you, my very dear Brother, that he will give you steadfastness in your vocation. Indeed, you need him to sustain you in it.
- 2 You will give me great pleasure by praying to him for me. The affection with which you write to me touches me immensely, my very dear Brother.

- 3 I am most grateful for your concern about my health. I ask God to give you full and complete health and to make you very holy.
- 4 For that you must frequently practice mortification.
- 5 Be very faithful to give an account of your conscience, which will keep you in peace and in the spirit of your state.
- 6 Be careful not to speak too familiarly with your Brother Director; adore God in his person.
- 7 You know that it is very wrong to go out alone and to do something without permission.
- 8 Apply yourself, above all else, to be very prudent and to live by the Rule. In this way you will give your Brothers a good example.
- 9 I ask God to give you the grace to do so.
I am, in our Lord, my very dear Brother,
Totally yours,
DE LA SALLE

Letter 92: To a Brother

Ms. 22, 32; AMG; BL III.32; ÉC 98; OC LC 98

- 1 Be careful in class, my very dear Brother, not to let yourself give in to impatience, a very important matter capable of bringing down God's disapproval on your school.
- 2 It is a fault into which we often have occasion to fall. We must watch ourselves constantly not to let ourselves do so.
- 3 For the love of God, do not resort to striking with the hand. It is not by force of blows that we attract people to the good or to God.
- 4 Nor let it ever be with the pointer. As for birch rods, use them only when necessary. Put them away after you use them, so that you will not have occasion to use them in your impatient moments.
- 5 In class, then, constantly watch over yourself not to let yourself give in to impatience.
- 6 You must be exact to make all exercises in class on time, because to have order there, everything must be regulated.
- 7 You must do everything, then, according to the principle of living by the Rule; God will bless everything you do if you

are faithful to this. Frequently ask God for this fidelity; I too will ask it for you.

I am, in our Lord and in his holy love, my very dear Brother,

Totally yours,

DE LA SALLE

Letter 93: To a Brother

Ms. 22, 33; AMG; BL III.33; ÉC 99; OC LC 99

- 1 Because you realize, my very dear Brother, how harmful frivolity is in class, you must not only avoid this fault but also be faithful to accuse yourself of it.
- 2 Also, because you often fall into it, you ought to accuse yourself of it even more.
- 3 Constantly avoid such frivolity in class, then, and promptly correct it, because this practice will destroy order.
- 4 Take care there to make your students learn well.
- 5 I am very pleased that the Rule is better observed in the school and in the community than it used to be.
- 6 Do nothing in class without permission.¹²⁴
- 7 Be very careful not to accept anything from the students.¹²⁵ Such a fault is very significant.
- 8 Also, do not permit shouting in school. Do not give the students or their mothers any cause to complain.
- 9 You must take prudent means in this situation, because if you send students home because they are shouting, others will also shout in order to be dismissed.
- 10 You know what happened to you and the harmful effects it produced.

I am, in our Lord, my very dear Brother,

Totally yours,

DE LA SALLE

124. "They will teach all their pupils according to the method prescribed for them and universally practiced in the Institute, and they will neither change anything therein nor introduce anything new (*Rule and Foundational Documents*, 36).

125. "They will not receive from the pupils or their parents any money or presents, however small, on any day or occasion whatsoever" (*Ibid.*, 38).

Letter 94: To a Brother

Ms. 22, 34; AMG; BL III.34; ÉC 100; OC LC 100

- 1 You will do well to work hard on presenting religious instructions, my very dear Brother. To give them well, you must begin courageously to give them poorly, for no one does anything well the first time.
 - 2 I think that you trouble yourself too much over what is merely external and not the principal purpose of your state but simply a means. This is the concern of your superiors rather than yours. You must leave yourself in their hands.
 - 3 As long as you teach your students to the best of your ability, you can have a clear conscience in the matter.
 - 4 Why are you not as eager to study your catechism well, which is the main purpose of your state, as you are to learn writing, which is merely a means to this end?
 - 5 You know how necessary it is for the Brothers to study religion, and yet this is one of the things most neglected.
 - 6 Writing is necessary, but catechism is surely more in keeping with your profession.
 - 7 It must be your primary daily occupation, for your first care is to instill a Christian spirit in your students.
 - 8 Do not spend so much time and effort on writing and arithmetic; the four rules¹²⁶ are all you need. It does not take much time to learn them.
- I am, in our Lord, my very dear Brother,
Totally yours,
DE LA SALLE

Letter 95: To a Brother [Director]

ÉC 79; OC LI 79; MH 39:496; CL 8:472–473

A Director should be a man of such great patience and such proven virtue that he should look upon himself as a receptacle for all the rubbish of the community. By this I mean he must be ready to put up with everything without showing any annoyance or displeasure.

126. Addition, subtraction, multiplication, and division.

This passage, preserved as an indirect quotation from De La Salle, was apparently reconstructed by Blain. There is no evidence that it formed part of a letter. Blain might have based it simply on a remembrance of a Brother.

Letter 96: To a Brother [Director]

ÉC 80; OC LI 80; MH 21:229; CL 8:312

It is your fault. Why do you not take the trouble to acquire that evenness of temper that is so necessary for you? Your Brothers complain that they never see you in a good mood, and they all say that you look like a prison door.

As with the previous passage, this is probably a remembrance of a Brother, preserved by Blain. It is a remark that Blain attributes to De La Salle when a Director complained that his Brothers did not have confidence in him as a Director. There is no evidence, however, that the quotation was taken from a letter.

Letter 97: To a Brother

ÉC 81; OC LI 81; MH 33:391; CL 8:410

Hey!¹²⁷ My very dear Brother, so you still want me to be your spiritual guide. I will be glad to act in this capacity on one condition, however: that you tell me my faults without any flattery. It is fitting that you should do so, since you are the oldest of our Brothers.

Brother Gabriel Drolin, born in 1664, was probably the oldest Brother at the time, so De La Salle was perhaps thinking only of the Brothers in France, among whom Brother Antoine, born in 1666, was the oldest.

127. De La Salle uses the expression *Hé!* six times in his letters to Brothers: 38:5; 67:7; 68:2; 80:2; 97:1, and 98:4.

Letter 98: To a Brother

ÉC 103; OCLI 103; MH 21:232; CL 8:313–314

- 1 Thoughtless behavior and curiosity are grave impediments to the service of God. So, my very dear Brother, you must make an effort to become interiorly recollected once more. As you are well aware, recollection is fundamental and will lead you surely to God.
- 2 Your eyes are your two worst enemies. That is why you must keep continual guard over them and let them see only what is necessary.
- 3 The greatest good you can procure for yourself is recollection, and when you have achieved it, you can say what Solomon said of Wisdom, that all good things have come to you with it.¹²⁸
- 4 Curiosity is one of the greatest obstacles to growth in piety. Therefore, you must be on your guard against it and above all else try to be recollected and aware of the presence of God, for in this we have the surest means of becoming interior. Hey!¹²⁹ For the love of God, make the effort.
- 5 You know the harm that thoughtless behavior does you. So, control your eyes and your tongue for this reason. There is nothing so important for you as this.
- 6 In this way you will make your spiritual exercises with God in mind and will learn to make them well both interiorly and exteriorly. God, you see, not only wants your actions done well outwardly; he wants them also to be carried out with the right interior dispositions.
- 7 You complain that you have to fight against a whole host of useless thoughts. If you try to keep your attention fixed on God, you will not find it so easy to keep useless thoughts in your mind.

128. Wisdom 7:11.

129. De La Salle uses the expression *He!* six times in his letters to Brothers: 38:5; 67:7; 68:2; 80:2; 97:1, and 98:4.

Letter 99: To a Brother

ÉC 104; OCL I 104; MH 39:496; CL 8:472

- 1 Take great care not to give way to impatience in carrying out your ministry; otherwise, it will be quite unproductive.
- 2 When you feel moved to impatience, control yourself, and wait until the impulse has passed before you act. When you allow yourself to be carried away by impatience, as you say in your last letter you have done, ask your Director to reprimand you and give you a good penance. This will be an effective way of bringing you to correct yourself of this serious failing.

Letter 100: To a Brother

ÉC 105; OCL I 105; MH 7:81; CL 8:232

The spirit of faith is a sharing in the Spirit of God, who dwells in us, which leads us to regulate our conduct in all things by the sentiments and truths that faith teaches us. You should, therefore, be wholly occupied in acquiring it, so that it may be for you a shield against the fiery darts of the devil.¹³⁰

Letter 101: To a Brother

ÉC 106; OCL I 106; MH 13:148; CL 8:268

Do not have any anxiety about the future. Leave everything in God's hands, for he will take care of you.¹³¹

Letter 102: To the same Brother

ÉC 107; OCL I 107; MH 13:149; CL 8:268

- 1 Make sure, I beg you, that in spite of your illness, you leave yourself entirely in God's hands, for it is his right to dispose of you as he wishes.

130. Eph 6:16.

131. 1 Pet 5:7.

- 2 Take care not to let yourself be discouraged by anxieties and ailments; life is full of them.
- 3 While you are young, you ought to prepare yourself to accept them courageously and, as you have already been doing, make use of the maxims of the Gospel to welcome them and draw profit from them.

Letter 103: To a Brother

ÉC 108; OCL I 108; MH 23:258; CL 8:329

- 1 Have a great love for the observance of your Rule, I beg you, for our Lord will bless you only insofar as you make an effort to observe it exactly.
- 2 But if you ask me for an easy way to observe it as you should, I would say that you should look on it as the expression of God's will for you, and then you will find no difficulty in it at all.
- 3 In the entire Rule, the point you ought to observe most carefully is to be exact in doing nothing without permission. This is of utmost importance.

Letter 104: To a Brother

ÉC 109; OCL I 109; MH 10:108; CL 8:247

- 1 You ask me, my very dear Brother, to settle a difficult question for you.
- 2 In this matter, the only answer I can give is that since the bishops are our leaders and I am only a simple priest, I cannot be the judge. It is to the Pope and the bishops that such questions should be addressed to find out their opinion and decision on what you ask me.

Letters 105 to 114: To members of religious communities

These ten letters were written to members of religious communities seeking spiritual direction from De La Salle. The first was written to a man; the others, to women. They appear in Canon Blain's biography, and Brother Bernard quotes sections of two of them. It is possible that Blain adapted the actual wording of these letters for his own purposes, combining parts of various letters that deal with the same topic into what he presents as a single letter. He may also have combined and grouped verbal testimony to form some of these passages. However, from material available to him, Brother Félix-Paul made a study of Blain's use of documents and found that Blain's quotations are faithful to his source.¹³²

There is good evidence that De La Salle was much esteemed as a spiritual director, although Blain says that he considered that this ministry took too much time from his work as Superior and confessor for the Brothers. This conclusion may be only Blain's projection of what a *saint* and a *founder* should do. It is of interest to note the differences in both substance and tone in De La Salle's letters to these religious in comparison with his letters to the Brothers, even when he is dealing with the same basic principles of the spiritual life.

Letter 105: To a member of a religious community of men¹³³

ÉC 119; OCLI 119; MH 30:358–360; CL 8:390

- 1 Dislike for our neighbor and resentment for wrongs done to us prevent our prayers from reaching God. If our hearts are torn by anger or hatred, it is impossible for us to maintain union with Jesus Christ; so, ceasing to be members of his mystical body, we cannot expect the Father to hear our prayers, since he does not recognize the Spirit of his Son in us.
- 2 Adapt yourself with gracious and charitable compliance to all your neighbor's weaknesses, and in particular make it a rule to hide your feelings in many matters of an indifferent nature.

132. Circular No. 335, p. 195.

133. Paragraph 6 shows that the letter was written to a religious. Circular No. 335, p. 265, suggests the hypothesis that the recipient is Jacques-Joseph de La Salle, the Founder's brother, who in 1678 entered the community of the Canons Regular of Sainte-Geneviève, but Georges Rigault's edition of Félix-Paul's work does not include this item.

- 3 Give up all bitterness toward your neighbor, no matter what, and be convinced that your neighbor is in everything better than you are. This will not be difficult for you if you keep even a little aware of yourself, and it will give you the ability to overcome your feelings of resentment.
- 4 Each day look for every possible opportunity to do a kindness for those for whom you feel dislike. After examining yourself on this matter every morning, form your resolutions, and be faithful to keep them with kindness and humility.
- 5 Be especially careful to anticipate the needs of those who are weak, in spite of the natural aversion you may feel. However, all must be kept within the limits of good order and the regular observances practiced in your community. If you have to refuse some request, make sure that your refusal does not cause unhappiness.
- 6 Be sure to be warmly affable toward everyone, to speak to and to answer everyone with a very great gentleness and deference, keeping in mind the way our Lord spoke and replied to others, even when he was most harshly treated.
- 7 Never comment on the faults or the behavior of your confreres. When others speak of them, put a good interpretation on their actions, and if you cannot, say nothing at all.
- 8 Never let another take the blame in order to conceal your own guilt. Even if it was he who did the wrong and you were in no way guilty, through a spirit of charity and humility you should be quite content to let others believe it was you. Make it a habit never to defend yourself, much less conceal your guilt at the expense of others.
- 9 Unless necessity obliges you, do not ever complain about others in any matter at all, and should you be obliged to do so, do not make it a formal complaint.
- 10 However unreasonable the opinions and wishes of others may seem, if you cannot yield to them and at the same time keep your Rule, try to satisfy them with words spoken with gentleness and humility.
- 11 Should you happen to contradict someone or openly disagree with another's opinion, as soon as you realize what you are doing, if you are still speaking, stop; and if asked why, say that you had no right to speak like that. You commit plenty

- of more serious faults, which you will have to account for, without putting a wrong interpretation on what others do.
- 12 You are full of zeal, but it is not well regulated, because you want others to be reprimanded for their faults but do not wish to be reproved for your own. Put up with the faults of others, and be generous in the interpretation you put on them.
 - 13 In short, take as your rule never to speak of the failings of others or to reprimand them, no matter how serious they seem to you. Whenever you see someone fall into some fault, call to mind what is said in the Gospel, “You can see the splinter in your brother’s eye, but you cannot see the beam in your own.”¹³⁴

Letter 106: To a fervent religious woman

ÉC 121; OCL I 121; BR 329; CL 4:77; MH 24:262–263; CL 8:331

- 1 You should be guided in what you do by your Rule, not by the example of those who transgress it. If you have read thoroughly the work of the Abbot of La Trappe, you surely have realized that it is not singularity to observe your Rule in a community in which several others do not do so. Let people think what they wish of you, and do not be troubled, provided that you are doing what you ought to do.
- 2 Be zealous against your faults and for your own advancement, and if you wish to show zeal for others, let it be simply by giving them good example.
- 3 Look upon yourself as a novice, and act as a fervent novice in the matter of faithful observance of the Rule. How carefully and with what loving ardor she follows the Rule in the smallest detail and watches over herself so as not to omit even one article. This is what you should be like and perhaps you are not. Think about this, I beg you.
- 4 Slackness and rationalizing will lead you into many faults. From now on, look on your Rule as an explanation and an application of what is contained in the Gospel. Observe it as such. The spirit of faith will lead you to give practical application to this frame of mind.

134. Luke 6:41.

- 5 Just as you must not easily follow all your impulses to do something good or lightly take them to be inspirations from God, so you must have a great aversion for those that lead to laxity. For those you should even have a holy abhorrence, and with regard to impulses of both kinds, you must take advice before coming to any decision. But if you do not have the time or the opportunity for this and it is a question of something to be done or not done on the spur of the moment, you must ask God's help. Then with resolution, courage, and singleness of heart, do what you think would be in accordance with the advice you would get under similar circumstances. Natural repugnance for a course of action should induce you to follow it, rather than abandon it.
- 6 In all matters concerning the observance of your Rule, I advise you to act as being in the presence of God and not to please others, because you know that to take pains that others have nothing to reproach you with and not to be concerned about God is to act as a Pharisee, a hypocrite, and not as a Christian.
- 7 In a word, dear Sister, keep to your Rule and your daily regulations. Look upon both as being of primary importance for you. That will be better for you than working miracles. Above all, out of love for God, be all the more exact in carrying out what is most opposed to human nature and causes you most pain rather than what pleases you most.
- 8 I am glad that your health permits you to follow the community exercises. That is what you must cling to and what I most want of you, because it is an excellent means of making yourself pleasing to God, in whose love I am. . . .



In his short biography of De La Salle, Brother Bernard informs us that this letter and Letter 107 were written to the same person.¹³⁵

Armand-Jean Le Bouthillier de Rancé, Abbots of La Trappe, mentioned in paragraph 1, was the reformer of that monastery. He wrote *La Règle de Saint-Benoît nouvellement traduite et expliquée selon son véritable esprit* (The Rule of Saint Benedict, Newly Translated and Explained in Accordance with His True Spirit), Paris: Muguet, 1689. Letter 106 alludes to

135. *John Baptist de La Salle: Two Early Biographies*, 329.

chapter VII, on the 8th degree of humility. De Rancé's reform seems to have influenced De La Salle, especially with regard to the strict observance of the Rule of the Community, particularly the rule of silence.

Letter 107: To the same woman religious

ÉC 124; OC LI 124; BR 328–329; CL 4:76; MH 36:446–447; CL 8:44

- 1 It is only through obedience and total submission for the love of God that you will draw down on yourself the graces of our Lord.
- 2 In order to seek God's will, practice obedience with interior submission to the Spirit of our Lord, who dwells in those who take his place. Often adore the Spirit, by whose inspiration you must allow yourself to be led in all you do.
- 3 Be faithful to ask permission for the slightest exemptions without listening to the arguments of self-will. Human nature craves nothing more insistently than to shake off the yoke of obedience. Be faithful to this practice, I beg of you.
- 4 It is natural to find no difficulty in doing what we like to do, but doing only what agrees with our inclinations is not obedience. To carry out commands indiscriminately, no matter how opposed they are to our feelings and inclinations, that is the sort of obedience God wants of us.
- 5 For our obedience to be pure, we must act through the spirit of faith. We must not examine the reasons or the purposes behind the commands we are given but surmount all questioning and all objections. Simply follow out the commands you are given; that is how you must act from now on.
- 6 You are to carry out all the instructions you are given, always with unquestioning obedience. Whatever difficulty you find in doing what you are told, let nothing appear in your behavior that could call for an order contrary to the first one, unless you are convinced that it is a question of the glory of God. In this case you may express your opinion without, however, requiring that it be followed.
- 7 Never come to decisions on your own, for such a course of action is contrary to the obedience and dependence that members of a religious community should have. In all you have to do, you must follow the orders of your superiors.

When they give you any instructions, directions, or orders, accept them, and carry them out without reply. Do this no matter how foolish what you are told to do or what is said to you may seem. Be assured that once you take reason as the basis for your compliance, you are no longer acting through obedience. A fine sort of religious perfection that would be, to be ready to do only what pleases you! Do not act like that, I beg you. Let there be no argument about what you are told to do or about who gives you the orders. In the sight of God, everything is good when seasoned by obedience.

8 I pray that God will bring you to this frame of mind.

Letter 108: To a woman religious he has been directing

ÉC 122; OCL I 122; MH 39:497–498; CL 8:473–474

- 1 Throw yourself into the arms of God and of his holy Mother, and you will be supported in your great weakness, not by means of sensible consolations but as God wills it and you yourself merit it. The violence that you have to do to yourself will not always be so great, nor will it last so long, for on his part God will bring you relief, and on your part you will not have so long to live. But even if it should go on and on, do not your sins deserve it, and does not the example of Jesus Christ demand it, and are not the love of God and the possession of eternal happiness worth it?
- 2 Confide all your failings to Jesus Christ, and trust in his goodness. He will not let you be overcome by your distress if you do not give him cause through your infidelity. So be patient and wait; consolation will come in good time.
- 3 All the trouble and anxiety you experience afford you good opportunities for making satisfaction to God for your past life. Be faithful in this, and remember that you will give an exact account of the use you have made of these opportunities. Always cling, I beg you, to the cross of Jesus Christ, and never separate yourself from it. In the face of all the threats of the devil, boldly say that you will never leave it, nor will anything separate you from it. If you make this generous resolve, our Lord will at once come to your help and support you in his hands.

- 4 Let us accept our wretchedness joyfully, since our God is always in his eternal happiness. That should calm our anxieties. Let us live through our wretched life as long as it pleases God, without complaining to anyone, not even to him who can free us from it. Let us seek only his will. I admit that the continual violence you have to do to yourself is most disagreeable to human nature, but ought we not suffer to win back the paradise we have lost and to avoid the hell we deserve? Everything must be seen in relation to these two great eternal truths. Let God be your sole recourse in your struggles against human nature and your dejection, and let your visits to the Blessed Sacrament be your only remedy for your distress.
- 5 If your present state of mind is a martyrdom, it is the best thing you could wish for, because it is most profitable for your sanctification. Even if your submission to God's will in your sufferings is only minimal, it is enough. What you must avoid is revealing your feelings to others, except those who direct you. Be careful of that.
- 6 I realize, my dear Sister, that you are in great suffering, and I deeply share in your difficulties, but you should not, it seems to me, grieve so much. Your feelings of abandonment touch only the exterior. The profound darkness which you experience is the means that God gives to draw you more surely to himself. You know quite well that the more darkness and doubt you experience in your life, the more you will live by faith, and you know that it is faith alone which should motivate the lives and actions of those who belong to God. Often say to yourself from the depths of your desolation, "Even if I become a reprobate, I will do all that I can for God." And if out of twenty actions, there is only one that is good or even only partly good, still it will be so much done for love of God. Humble thoughts are sometimes good in your present state, but courage and confidence in God will serve you better. Once again I say, turn to God in prayer. Could doing this annoy him? Cast such a thought from your mind, dear Sister. I assure you that prayer always draws down some grace from God, even on the most hardened sinners. It is almost their only resort. And were you simply to remain in God's presence, that would still be a great help to you,

supporting you in your troubles and helping you to bear them patiently. As often as possible, make your prayer in the presence of the Most Blessed Sacrament. This will help very much to bring peace of mind and tranquility to the depths of your soul.

- 7 Never let yourself be wrongly persuaded that God has abandoned you. On the contrary, be sure that God is more ready than ever to welcome you into his arms and that as your distress increases, so does his mercy toward you increase and abound. He knows just how weak you are and how needed his grace is to establish and strengthen in you what your weakness and laxity put you in danger of losing at every moment.

Letter 109: To a fervent woman religious

ÉC 123; OCL I 123; MH 33:410–412; CL 8:421

- 1 You must be convinced that your vocation demands of you quite a different degree of humility and quite a different renunciation of the world and its spirit, and even of yourself, so that what would be tolerated in another person should not seem tolerable to you at all.
- 2 Looking on yourself as the lowest of creatures, you should place yourself beneath everyone else and be astounded that anyone can put up with you and that the earth is willing to bear you on it.
- 3 See how far you are from having such sentiments, and be ashamed that you know yourself so little. Ask our Lord to engrave this humility deep in your heart.
- 4 You cannot go too far in humbling yourself in self-contempt and self-abasement, for this is the only way to salvation that is left to you.
- 5 If you wish to make great progress in the practice of this virtue, carry out the following directions.
- 6 No matter what the source of the humiliation, accept it as what you deserve.
- 7 Wait for humiliations to come, unless God gives you a special inclination to seek them out and the occasion presents itself naturally.

- 8 Dear Sister, look on everything that happens as good, especially when it humbles you and is most opposed to your natural inclinations. There is no better way of destroying your deep-seated pride than the acceptance each day of humiliations. If you want them and love them because you wish to be completely united with our Lord, he will provide you with ample opportunity in addition to those already furnished by your self-will and your poor disposition. If you have such a hunger for humiliations and separation from the world, with the grace of our Lord you will succeed.
- 9 Your opinion of yourself should always be a lowly one. Humble yourself in everything and in regard to everyone. Humble yourself when you cause suffering to others, considering that this is all you are capable of; when you find others criticizing what you do, be convinced that they are right.
- 10 It is good for you to be discredited in the eyes of others so that you may become more withdrawn from the world, opposed to its ways, and more closely united to God.
- 11 When reproved for some fault you have not committed or when rebuffed, thank those who do this with the same gentleness and humility as if they were doing you a favor. At the same time, show that you are willing to correct yourself. You are well aware that you deserve no respect, no deference, not even any approval at all. You do not deserve that anyone should even listen to you. Let that be your frame of mind.
- 12 Always take the lowest and most inconvenient place, in spite of any repugnance you may feel, for this repugnance springs from your pride. It will always be much to your profit to be treated as the servant of the others. You should eagerly desire this, first, to destroy your pride; second, to overcome your laxity, and third, to acknowledge that your sins are so many and so great and should place you at the feet of everyone, especially of your Sisters. When you come to realize that you deserve nothing but contempt in the eyes of God and to look on all created things as the instruments that in his mercy and justice he uses now to raise you up, now to humble you, and that Divine Providence makes use of them only for your salvation and his glory, you will be little affected by the harsh treatment that may be dealt you.

- 13 Keep yourself always in your proper place, that is to say, beneath the feet of the demons themselves, for that is where you have so often deserved to be and where perhaps you could still be forever. In this frame of mind, take your place beneath your Sisters without expecting others to show you any consideration or to treat you with any respect. You must be convinced that there is none who is not more virtuous and more spiritual than you. They could hardly be less so without putting at risk their eternal salvation as you have so often done. If, my dear Sister, you can engrave these sentiments on your heart and live by them, loving abjection, contempt, and the rebuffs of others, seeking them and embracing them as being what you deserve, I think that you will have found an efficacious means, perhaps the only means, of drawing down God's mercy on yourself.

Letter 110: To a woman religious who has repented

ÉC 125; OCL 125; MH 25:297–298; CL 8:353

- 1 Always remember that all you have to do is try to save your soul, since you are in this world only for that purpose. Remember too that the Savior, who knew all your weaknesses beforehand, died only to win for you the graces and the means to help you work effectively at your salvation.
- 2 You must, then, overcome this wretched human respect, for a sinner like you should no longer be concerned about her good name and reputation. They have been lost in the sight of God and of the saints, so she ought to have no other desire than to be known for what she is—that is, an object of disgust to heaven and earth.
- 3 It is most important that you learn to know yourself better than you do, because, I tell you honestly, you have not the slightest understanding of the sinfulness of your life. As long as you persist in this blindness, you will be living a lie and therefore alienated from God, who is truth.
- 4 I pray that God will make you humble, chaste, and penitent. You have equal need of all three. With tears and moans, ask him for these virtues every day. Above all, distrust yourself, and put all your hope in him who can lift the poor man from

squalor and, as the Prophet says, seat him with the princes of his kingdom.¹³⁶

- 5 Although you have little natural liking for virtue, yet God wishes to imbue you with it through the power of his love.
- 6 You will not find it very difficult to give yourself to God if you have a little generosity. I hope he will give it to you. Take courage, my dear Sister; just begin to want suffering, and all will be smooth and easy for you.
- 7 Realize that your vocation comes from God, and it would therefore be acting against his will to grow weary of it. Bless him daily for having called you to share in the various aspects of his Passion, and be really ashamed that through your infidelity you have not done so.
- 8 Is it not an honor, a very great honor, for you to give yourself entirely to God? This, I think, is the one thought that should occupy your mind.
- 9 If you seek God and not consolation, you will find peace of mind.
- 10 Sometimes it seems that our Lord is asleep, but then he awakens and sets us on our way. We must not go faster or at a different pace from what he wants of us, and we must rest when he wishes it.
- 11 My dear Sister, do you have to experience consolations to remain in God's service? Are you not prepared to be his simply out of love for him? Throw yourself into his arms; he is your Father, and he will carry you when the road is rough,¹³⁷ that is, in time of temptation.
- 12 It is not from men that you must expect your salvation when you ask for their help; it comes from God alone. Perhaps it is because of the lack of this spirit of faith that God does not give you the help you need.
- 13 In short, I pray that God will open your eyes more and more, so that you will realize, on the one hand, the depth of the abyss from which you have been saved and, on the other, the infinite love that has lifted you from it. May this twofold realization lead you to repay him with a love and fidelity that are in proportion to your sinfulness and his mercy. Amen.

136. Ps 113:7.

137. Ps 91:12.



Blain introduces this letter by saying quaintly that De La Sale wrote it to a Sister “who was as blameworthy in her life as her calling required her to be holy. By all appearances she owed her conversion to him.”¹³⁸

Letter 111: To a woman religious

ÉC 126; OCL I 126; MH 17:187–188; CL 8:289

- 1 Frequently spend time in prayer, and during periods of aridity try to find your consolation in it, for it is there that you will find God most surely. In periods of dryness and darkness when you feel no attraction, remain constantly faithful to prayer. This is a good frame of mind to be in and a very sanctifying one.
- 2 Prayer, made the way I have taught you to make it, will lead you in a short time and effortlessly to live mindful of the presence of God.
- 3 Prayer is to be preferred to everything. After the Divine Office you should consider it an essential point of Rule.
- 4 Prayer of suffering is best of all, and when God lets you experience it, you must look upon it as most fortunate for you. Do not use a book during such times; you do not need one.
- 5 Do not be surprised if God seems to withdraw from you and if you experience aridity during prayer; you alone are the cause of this. Renounce your self-will; do violence to yourself; be faithful to whatever demands grace makes of you. Then, however unworthy you may otherwise be of the caresses and favors of the Spouse of souls, he will overwhelm you with them.
- 6 Be all the more faithful to prayer as you feel, on the one hand, God deep in your heart drawing you to it and, on the other, the devil making every effort to dissuade you from it.
- 7 Prayer should be your main support; therefore, you must never miss it except when you are ill. It is prayer that will dispel the darkness of ignorance from your soul. Live by the spirit of faith. You are in God's presence; that is more than

138. Blain, Book Four, *The Mind and Heart of John Baptist de La Salle*, 297.

enough for you. Do not give way to self-pity, but rather fear that, and distrust it.

- 8 Your prayer is good just as you are making it; continue to make it that way. God is in your prayer, making it for you. All you have to do is from time to time disown with peace and tranquility of heart all the repugnance and the distractions that you experience, and put yourself completely in the hands of our Lord, so that he may come and live in you and himself master your inclination to evil.
- 9 You ought to welcome the state in which you find yourself during prayer as a penance God wants you to do for your sins. It will be quite some time before you recover from it. You must bear it patiently, even joyfully. Is it not enough for a wretched soul to know that she is in God's presence? That is the reflection you should make from time to time during the day and also during your prayer in order to win for yourself some degree of interior and exterior recollection.
- 10 Your present state of prayer, as you describe it to me, is not the dangerous form of idleness that you think. Provided you hold on to the thought of God and make progress toward him, why should you be upset? He has no need of all your efforts. Idleness is to be avoided, but at the same time you must not hamper yourself with a great number of acts in prayer. All you need and all God wants of you is that you remain in his presence.
- 11 In a word, turn once again to prayer for help, and remain in a position of abasement before God, divesting yourself of all that is not God. In simplicity of heart, ask him to help you out of your present wretchedness. If you cannot pray, tell God that you cannot, and then remain at peace. He will not ask you to do the impossible. Or say to him, as the Apostles did, "Lord, teach me to pray."¹³⁹ Then remain humbly before him as one who is incapable of doing anything, and that will be your prayer.

139. Luke 11:1.

Letter 112: To a woman religious

ÉC 127; OCL I 127; MH 14:163; CL 8:276

- 1 It is this sort of silence that ought to be the portion of every soul that really loves solitude and has withdrawn herself from the love of the world.
- 2 She ought to remain composed and silent, because in this way she will always be able to rise above herself. There is nothing more dangerous for her than to allow herself to be torn away from conversation with God and to stoop toward conversation with men.

Letter 113: To the same woman religious

ÉC 128; OCL I 128; MH 14:164; CL 8:276

- 1 Now is the time for little speech and much action. Let your aim be to become very silent and very humble and to apply yourself very much to prayer, for this is what God wants of you.
- 2 To do this you need little thinking, little desiring, and little understanding, yet it is the way to live at peace.
- 3 You will find silence a very useful, even a very necessary, virtue if you are to adore God, serve him in spirit and in truth, resist temptations, and save yourself from falling into sin.
- 4 You must learn how to be silent, to conceal your feelings, and to speak only when necessary. So that you may not fall into the habit of excessive talking, try to observe strictly the following rules.
- 5 Do not speak at all outside of recreation time unless the need is urgent, and even during recreation speak but little. The present state of your soul demands that you be faithful to this. And you must not make even a single comment about what goes on, remembering, however, that your silence is not to spring from pride.
- 6 Take care never to justify yourself, but, on the contrary, admit that you were wrong, without of course telling an untruth. If you cannot speak without justifying yourself, remain completely

silent. I do not see that you ever have any reason to justify yourself.

- 7 You are not to talk of what happens in the community or of the disorders that you think exist in it. Under such circumstances be satisfied with offering a prayer to God. When matters of importance, and even unimportant ones, are spoken of, never offer your opinion, being convinced that you have little understanding or sense of judgment.
- 8 Always remain silent when others annoy you, and let God alone be the witness of your innocence.
- 9 Lastly, if after you have held yourself in check, you do in the end speak of what you have with difficulty concealed, and even of the graces that God has granted you, you will lose what your silence has won for you, and you must set yourself a penance for your failure.

Letter 114: To a religious he has been directing

ÉC 129; OCLI 129; MH 19:199; CL 8:296

You may be sure that you will not make progress in the way of love except insofar as you are faithful not to harden your heart to the inspirations of grace. You know what the Holy Spirit says by the mouth of the Prophet, “If today you hear his voice, take care not to harden your heart,”¹⁴⁰ for this could bring about his withdrawal from you, perhaps forever.

Letters 115 to 118: To a laywoman he has been directing

The following extracts are taken from letters of spiritual direction written to a laywoman of some social standing. They are found only in Blain. It is of interest to compare De La Salle’s remarks to this woman about the spirit of faith with his instructions to the Brothers on the same topic.

140. Ps 95:7–8.

Letter 115: To a laywoman he has been directing

ÉC 130; OCLI 130; MH 7:82; CL 8:232

- 1 Faith is the way by which God wishes to lead you to himself, and by following this way, you will please him most. Perhaps human nature will feel repugnance, but what does that matter? Is it not enough for you to know God alone? Surely this is of more value than all the other knowledge of the most learned men.
- 2 Not only is the way of faith which God wants you to follow most advantageous for you; it is also very necessary, for you are well aware that other ways almost led you astray and caused you to lose God, once you abandoned the way of faith.

Letter 116: To the same laywoman

ÉC 131; OCLI 131; MH 7:82; CL 8:233

The Most Blessed Virgin lived her whole life by the spirit of faith, and it is this spirit that God wants you to have. That is why you would derive much benefit from asking her in prayer to lead you to our Lord along this way, which is the one most pleasing to him.

Letter 117: To the same laywoman

ÉC 132; OCLI 132; MH 7:82; CL 8:233

- 1 Look on everything with the eyes of faith. You must never fail to do this, no matter what the reason.
- 2 Viewing things with the eyes of faith will earn for you in one day more good, more interior application, closer union with God, and greater vigilance over yourself than a month of those penances and austerities to which you are attracted.
- 3 Believe me, you will see its effect, although perhaps for the present you will not understand it.
- 4 Let me repeat; the more uncomplicated your view of faith, the more surely you will be disposed to simplicity of action and conduct, which is the disposition God wants of you.

Letter 118: To the same laywoman*ÉC 133; OCL I 133; MH 7:83; CL 8:233*

- 1 I am very pleased to know, Madame, that your life is more peaceful now and more in keeping with the spirit of faith.
- 2 You are right in saying that in the light of faith, you see things quite differently from when they are looked at in themselves without going beyond the natural view.

Letter 119: To Brother Irénée*ÉC 39; OCL I 39*

Brother Irénée, Claude François du Lac de Montisambert, was born in Tigney, in the diocese of Orléans, on October 30, 1691. He became an officer in the French army at the age of 14 and was wounded at the battle of Malplaquet in 1709. In 1713 he left the army and for some years led a life of penance while trying to discern what God wanted of him. He tried to join the Capuchins and then the Carthusians but was not accepted by either order. After a pilgrimage to Rome and to Loreto,¹⁴¹ he returned to France and spent some time in retreat at Parménie, near Grenoble. There he met De La Salle, who, after the trying times he had experienced at Marseille, was also at Parménie on retreat to consult Sister Louise, a hermitess. In June 1714, shortly before De La Salle returned to Paris, he received the young man as a novice.

Claude de Montisambert made his novitiate under the guidance of the Director of the community of Grenoble. While still a novice, he taught class at Avignon and was then sent to Paris to complete his novitiate under the care of De La Salle himself and later under Brother Barthélemy. Initially, Brother Irénée was not a success as a teacher. It was probably Irénée whom De La Salle promised to send to Gabriel Drolin in Rome, identifying him as the Brother who was somewhat knowledgeable of Italian. Instead, Irénée became the Director of Novices and was referred to by De La Salle when he wrote in Letter 126: "The new master of novices, having received no training for his work, scarcely knows what he should do or what the novices should do."

Eventually Irénée became a very capable Director of Novices, retaining the position until the General Chapter of 1725. At that Chapter, which also received the Bull of Approbation, he was elected Assistant to

141. The shrine of the Holy House of the Blessed Virgin, near Ancona, Italy.

the Superior General, Brother Timothée, remaining in that post until his death in 1747.

In 1733 Brother Timothée, Superior General, sent Irénée, as Assistant, to visit the communities of the Institute, directing him also to stop in at his own family castle to visit his mother and younger brother. Sometime after the death of Irénée's mother, his young brother was in an accident that caused a temporary mental breakdown, and the young man was cared for by the Brothers in their boarding school at Saint Yon.

The following letter is an extract taken from *Vie du Frère Irénée*, by Abbé de Latour, published in Avignon in 1774. De Latour claims that De La Salle wrote this letter in response to one of the monthly letters in which Irénée gave his usual account of conscience and conduct. De Latour states that like all beginners in the religious life, Irénée was violently tempted to give up his vocation, because of the prohibition against maintaining family ties, because of the wealth he had renounced, and because of the lowliness of the state he had embraced. In a particular way he was tempted to abandon his vocation because of his limited success in class and because one of his students, better looking than the rest, reminded him continually of someone he had loved prior to his entry into religious life. This daily reminder increased his feelings of regret at having given up his freedom for the life of a Brother. In the biography De Latour uses this extract to demonstrate the importance of a frank manifestation of conscience in giving an account of conduct to the superior.

[1716]

- 1 When impure thoughts come to mind, if you are in class, try to concentrate on what you are doing.
- 2 These thoughts are the devil's most subtle temptations; you must think about the present without worrying about the future. This idea of returning to the world to devote yourself to good works has been the downfall of many religious.
- 3 Penances are a great help to correct defects and to make progress in virtue.
- 4 Whatever your frame of mind might be, you must force yourself to accept reprimands and corrections. Even though you find it difficult to take them to heart, accept them by your words.
- 5 Do not torture yourself with frequent acts of penance; they could injure your health. A simple view of God from time to time suffices.

- 6 Why are you afraid of the days for Confession? Instead, you ought to look forward to them.
- 7 Refrain from talking in class. Habituate yourself to use the ordinary signals that are customary with us.
- 8 When you feel tempted by impatience, restrain yourself; do nothing until the impulse has passed.
- 9 I am, in our Lord,
Totally yours.

Letter 120: To his nephew, Jean-François Maillefer

ÉC 118; OCLI 118; MH 10:109–110; CL 8:247

On June 17, 1715, the archbishop of Reims excommunicated and placed under interdict three canons and three pastors of Reims for refusing his official instruction that the Bull *Unigenitus* be accepted by all within the archdiocese. The Bull had been proclaimed by the Holy See in September 1713 and had been acknowledged and accepted by the assembly of the hierarchy of France on January 23, 1714. One of these recalcitrant canons was a nephew of De La Salle, and it is to him, Jean-François Maillefer, that De La Salle writes this letter.

Only Blain preserves this letter and uses it to demonstrate De La Salle's respect for ecclesiastical superiors. De La Salle, Blain says, addressed in this letter a close personal friend who was a priest to express his shock that he did not submit but had appealed to civil magistrates against the suspension imposed by his ecclesiastical superior. Blain might not have known that the priest was De La Salle's nephew, or he might have avoided naming him so as not to offend the priest's brother, François-Élie Maillefer, whose biography of De La Salle Blain used for his work.

[Early 1717]

- 1 This is the third time that I have taken up my pen to do myself the honor of writing to you since the beginning of the year. I hope that it will be a good and happy one for you.
- 2 May I mention the sorrow you cause me by what you are doing? It arises from the fact that you have involved yourself in the suspension imposed on your colleagues and that you have taken the case before civil magistrates. By implication you consider these magistrates your superiors in ecclesiastical matters.

- 3 I am surprised that you have not arranged that the chalice and the surplice be restored to you with appropriate ceremony by some officer of the court, as if recognizing in him as much right to restore to you your priestly faculties as your bishop had in bestowing them in the first place.
- 4 How can you recognize laymen as your judges in a matter that is as surely the province of the Church as ever there was? Indeed, how could you, who have a deep understanding of your vocation and are not indifferent to what concerns it, have recourse to a purely lay and secular jurisdiction?
- 5 Perhaps you will reply that many others have followed the same course. Are you then acting through human respect?
- 6 And then you will add, I suppose, that you did it because your colleagues laid this responsibility on you. But surely you realize that they have no right to require you to betray the rights of the Church and submit to the judgment of a secular court in a matter outside its competence.
- 7 I know that Saint Peter and Saint Paul require us to submit to temporal authorities, but they never claimed that this should extend to spiritual matters. Furthermore, when an appeal is made to higher authority and jurisdiction, it must be a case *in eodem genere*, that is, solely for matters that fall within the province of that higher jurisdiction and not outside it. In this case the right to the chalice and surplice is outside secular jurisdiction.
- 8 You could apply to this situation, although not in quite the same sense, what Saint Paul says in the sixth chapter of his First Letter to the Corinthians: “Dare any of you, having a quarrel with a fellow Christian, bring your case to be judged by the unjust,” that is, the Gentiles, “and not by the saints,”¹⁴² that is, by Christians?
- 9 As for me, I am quite prepared to say of any cleric who brings legal proceedings against his ecclesiastical superior, “Does he dare to submit himself to civil rather than to ecclesiastical judges, who are his rightful judges in such matters?” “Do you not know,” adds the holy Apostle, “that the saints will be appointed judges of this world?”¹⁴³ And

142. 1 Cor 6:1.

143. 1 Cor 6:2.

you, are you not aware that the bishops of the Church have been appointed as the judges you must turn to in such matters as these?



The six clerics under suspension appealed to the court of Paris against the archbishop. The case opened on April 29, 1716, and the decision was given in favor of the six clerics, the action of the archbishop of Paris being declared contrary to the laws of France and therefore invalid. Such a decision was not surprising, because France was then under the regency of Philippe of Orléans, who favored Gallicanism and the Jansenists. The magistrates of the Paris court followed the course set by their ruler.

Among the six who rebelled against the archbishop's instruction was Jean-François Maillefer, canon of the collegial church of Saint Symphorien, Reims, and nephew of De La Salle. He was one of the three sons of Marie, De La Salle's sister, and her husband, Jean Maillefer, to reach adulthood. In a marginal note to his *Mémoire et Journal*, Jean Maillefer writes, "My good wife would have died a thousand deaths if she had been alive when her beloved son was persecuted for the Constitution [*Unigenitus*], as I have described in another place."¹⁴⁴

The appeal to a General Council against the Bull *Unigenitus* was later suppressed in action taken by the Chapter of Saint Symphorien. Canon Maillefer maintained his agreement with the appeal and his original opposition against the Bull and opposed this new action by his Chapter. He was excommunicated in August 1721. He died in October 1723.

The other sons of Jean Maillefer and Marie de La Salle, Simon-Louis and François-Élie, were Benedictines of Saint Maur; it was François-Élie who wrote the biography of his uncle, John Baptist.

Letter 121: To Monsieur Gense of Calais

ÉC 115; OCL 115; MH 6:72; CL 8:228

This extract is found only in Blain, who devotes three pages to his eulogy of Gense, a layman of Calais whom Blain praised for his steadfast attachment to the Church, his strong opposition to the appellants in the Jansenist controversy, and preferring "to remain in the ranks of ordinary Christians" when Church benefits were much sought after and so easily acquired.¹⁴⁵

144. W. J. Battersby, *De La Salle: Saint and Spiritual Writer*, 93, note 1.

145. CL 7: 386–88; Blain, Book Two, Chapter XVI, 396.

[After April 1717]

- 1 It gives me great pleasure to hear of the zeal you show for the defense of the Catholic religion, which is at present a prey to so many disorders in this country.
- 2 You would like me to join you in this issue to which, with the aid of God's grace, I have up to now been devoting my attention.
- 3 I will not fail to pray earnestly that God may bless your zeal with success which will counteract all the efforts of the devil to destroy the peace of the Church at this present time.



According to Blain, it was to Gense and his friend, De La Cochérie of Boulogne, that De La Salle opened his heart to tell them of the difficulties he had experienced in the establishment of the Institute of the Brothers of the Christian Schools: "I will tell you this, gentlemen: if God had told me what sufferings and crosses were to accompany the establishing of this Institute at the same time as he was showing me the good it would do, my courage would have failed me. I would not have dared to touch it with the tip of my fingers."¹⁴⁶

The allusion in Blain's biography to "appellants" indicates that the letter was written after April 1717.

Letters 122 and 123: To laymen who know the Brothers

Both of these letters were written after the General Chapter of 1717 and, therefore, after Brother Barthélemy had replaced De La Salle as Superior.

Letter 122: To a layman, a benefactor of the Brothers

ÉC 116; OCL I 116; MH 33:398; CL 8:413–14

[After the 1717 General Chapter]

- 1 Though I am but a poor priest of Saint Yon, Sir, may I be so bold as to enclose this note in the letter from Brother Barthélemy, Superior of the Brothers, and beg you in your

146. CL 8:358; Blain, Book Four, *The Mind and Heart of John Baptist de La Salle*, 305.

kindness to do on their behalf what he takes the liberty of proposing to you.

- 2 I am so convinced of your zeal and affection for the Brothers that I am sure my poor request is unnecessary; his own letter would be sufficient, for I know your generosity so well.
- 3 However, it does give me the opportunity of reassuring you that I always have for you the highest esteem and regard. This is so important to me that I beg you to let my note at least serve to tell you of my sentiments and to assure you that I am, Sir, with the greatest respect,
Your very humble and obedient servant,
DE LA SALLE, a poor priest



This letter was written after the General Chapter of 1717, when De La Salle officially laid aside the position of Superior of the Brothers. The ceremonious style, reminiscent of Letter 1, suggests that the recipient is a person of some social standing. This letter was enclosed with a letter from Brother Barthélemy; there is no indication of the name of the person to whom it was addressed. Brother Félix-Paul suggests that it might have been addressed to Monsieur de Château-Blanc, Jean-Paul Madon.¹⁴⁷

Letter 123: To a notable person at Saint-Denis

ÉC 117; OC LI 117; MH 33:398; CL 8:413

[After the 1717 General Chapter]

- 1 May I say, Sir, that you were apparently misinformed when you were told that I am doing so much good in the Church and that I send schoolteachers to towns and villages to teach the young.
- 2 It is true that I began training Brothers to conduct schools gratuitously, but I was relieved of their direction a long time ago.
- 3 It is one of the Brothers, Brother Barthélemy by name, who is now in charge. He lives in this house, and the Brothers, including those of Saint-Denis, acknowledge him as their Superior.

¹⁴⁷ *Édition critique*, 379; Letter 19, paragraph 8, and Letter 24, paragraph 4, both to Gabriel Drolin; CL 7:395–398; Blain, *Life*, Book Two, Chapter XVII, 409–413.

Letters 124 to 130: To Brother Barthélemy

Brother Barthélemy, Joseph Truffet, was born on February 11, 1678, in the diocese of Cambrai and entered the Institute at Paris on February 10, 1703. After a very short novitiate, he was sent to teach at Chartres; however, he fell ill there and from then on was attached to the novitiate. In August 1705 he took charge of the novitiate. He was elected first Superior General of the Institute on May 18, 1717. He died shortly after De La Salle, on June 8, 1720.

Letter 124: To Brother Barthélemy

ÉC 2; OCLI 2; MH 21:231; CL 8:313

[Between August 1705 and July 1709]

- 1 At Saint Yon I noticed you swinging your arms carelessly when you walked. This is a disgraceful habit in a master of novices, who ought in all things to be a model for those whom he instructs.
- 2 You must walk in a dignified manner, keeping your arms folded, and you must not let your novices do otherwise.



This extract, addressed to Barthélemy when he was Director of Novices, reflects the chapter on modesty in the 1718 Rule, with its rather stringent regulations regarding posture, gestures, and manner of walking.¹⁴⁸

Letter 125: To Brother Barthélemy, Superior General

AMG; BLI.42; ÉC 3; OCLA 3

Seminary of Saint Nicolas du Chardonnet
January 17, 1718

- 1 Brother Thomas told me that he would be setting out today, my very dear Brother.
- 2 He had me give him a receipt for your dividends, stating that they now belong to the heirs of Madame de Louvois, and also, a few days earlier, a simple receipt.

148. *Rule and Foundational Documents*, 81–82.

- 3 Please do not attach any worth to either of these two receipts, except insofar as it suits you. I made the statement that you required of me during your last journey, about the time of the feast of the Conception of the Most Blessed Virgin, in which I declared last December 11 that your four dividend certificates on the town dues of the city of Rouen do not belong to me. I stated that I had simply allowed my name to be listed, that they belong to the Brothers of the Christian Schools of the community of Saint Yon in the suburb of Saint-Sever in that city, and that the money was provided by Charles Frappet, called Brother Thomas, then bursar of that community. Afterward I deposited the declaration, signed by me, with Father Berton, procurator of this seminary, who is responsible for it.
- 4 Regarding whether and how you purchase the house of Saint Yon, about which you ask for my advice, pay no regard to what Brother Thomas might tell you or give you to understand from me or about me. Instead, rely only on what I tell you in this letter, which is that I can give no advice in this regard and that you ought to consult people more enlightened than I am in such an important matter.
- 5 Think about it seriously, because the matter is not yet settled.
- 6 I do not advise you to borrow money to make the purchase; however, I do not say absolutely not to do so. You can consult others on the matter.
- 7 I think that what you will do in this regard will always be well done. It is inappropriate for me to have any part in all these matters, for I am of no importance. You, the Superior, are the one responsible.
- 8 As for the people you tell me to see, if you wish, I will visit them. If this be the case, please be good enough to send me word that you, as my Superior and that of the Brothers, order me. I will go at once, or on the first free day, and tell them that you directed me to visit them.
- 9 I wish you and all the Brothers, whom I also greet, a prosperous and happy New Year.
- 10 I am, my very dear Brother, respectfully,
Your very humble and very obedient servant,
DE LA SALLE



De La Salle had rented the property of Saint Yon from the Marchioness of Louvois in 1705. The lease had been renewed for a further nine years in 1711, but by the date of this letter, January 17, 1718, the heirs of the Marchioness had informed the Brothers that they wished to sell the property and that the Brothers must either buy it or vacate it.

The above letter is De La Salle's answer to Barthélemy's request for clarification regarding some financial transactions made in the past.

After De La Salle handed over his superiorship to Brother Barthélemy, he lived at the Seminary of Saint Nicolas du Chardonnet in Paris for some months in order to make matters easier for the new Superior.

Brother Thomas, the Institute's Bursar, or Procurator, had been directed by Brother Barthélemy to gather together the financial resources of the young Institute in view of the purchase of Saint Yon.

Letter 126: To Brother Barthélemy, Superior General

ÉC 4; OC LI 4; MH 23:257; CL 8:328

[March 1718]

- 1 I am writing to you, my very dear Brother, because I am astounded to see the sorry state of your novitiate: the two or three novices are receiving no formation at all and observe the Rule no better than they did when they first entered the house.
- 2 Moreover, there are five aspirants who are full of defects and who see almost no good example.
- 3 The new master of novices, having received no training for his work, scarcely knows what he should do or what the novices should do. He says he has no rule to follow and neither do the novices.
- 4 I do not think that I have seen, at least for a good many years, a novitiate like this in the Community, and yet, with such a situation, you hope to establish new foundations!
- 5 There are even complaints that the novices at Rouen do not show much evidence of the spirit of their state and pay no attention to detail.
- 6 I beg you, take steps to remedy this situation as soon as possible, for you know that the strength of the Institute

depends on the formation of the novices in fidelity to the Rule.

- 7 I am now well enough to take part in the principal exercises with the other Brothers, to sleep in the common dormitory, and to take my meals like the others in the refectory. Please do not raise any objections to this.
- 8 We look forward to your return, for your presence is needed in this house.
- 9 I am, in our Lord, my very dear Brother,
Your very humble and very obedient servant,
DE LA SALLE



Brother Irénée was at first unskilled as Director of Novices. In this letter to his Superior General, De La Salle shows the zeal he continued to have for the welfare of the Institute, although he was no longer in charge. He feels that the future of the Institute is in serious jeopardy. He might have been mindful of the vow he had taken with Gabriel Drolin and Nicolas Vuyart to uphold the Society and might have felt obliged to write to his Superior in the strongest possible terms.

Five postulants entered the novitiate at Saint Yon in 1717 and are named in the *Catalogue*. Brother Félicien, 13 years old, is listed as “sent away”; Brother Gérard, 28 years old, entered a second time in August and is listed as “left.” Brothers Marcel and Sixte, each 23 years old, and Brother Stanislas, 19 years old, benefited from De La Salle’s complaints and persevered. Marcel died at Saint Yon (no date listed); Stanislas died in 1731; Sixte lived until 1788, the last Brother to survive who had lived as a Brother during the lifetime of De La Salle.

Only three Brothers took the habit in 1718: Brother Victor, 29 years old; Brother Eusèbe, 21 years old, and Brother Albert, whose age is not recorded. The first two persevered and died in the Institute in 1759 and 1782, respectively.

The “novices at Rouen” mentioned in paragraph 5 are young Brothers in their first year of teaching. No doubt they made their novitiate in 1716 and were losing their first fervor amid all the activities of school. Thirteen novices took the habit in 1716, only six of whom persevered: Brothers Spiridion, Maurice, Joachim, Denis, Quentin, and Pascal.

De La Salle’s request in paragraph 7, to sleep in the common dormitory, was not honored; however, his room was not exactly the best in the house. The property plan of Saint Yon indicates that his bedroom was one of two rooms on the ground floor at the corner of the barnyard

where the chickens were kept; the other room was that of a serving Brother. De La Salle was later moved to the infirmary, “in a room near the chapel,” as he wrote in his last will.

Letter 127: To Brother Barthélemy, Superior General

ÉC 5; OC LI 6; MH 14:160; CL 8:275

[1717–1718]

- 1 I seriously think that since I have given but little time to prayer for so long, it is right that I should now spend more time in prayer to learn what God wishes of me.
- 2 To my mind, what I must ask of God in prayer is that he tell me what he wants me to do and that he inspire me with the dispositions he wants me to have.

Letter 128: To Brother Barthélemy, Superior General

ÉC 6; OC LI 6; MH 1:30; CL 8:203

[After 1717]

It is hardly right to have dealings with people of this sort, much less to be dependent on them.



De La Salle is no doubt referring to a situation such as the one that arose in Calais. Brother Barthélemy indicated to the Brother Director of the community at Calais that he must defend the orthodox position of the Brothers who would not receive the Sacrament of Reconciliation from clergy who had aligned themselves with the Jansenists. Later, just a few months before his death, De La Salle wrote Letter 132 to the Director of Calais, refuting the allegation made by the Dean of Calais that De La Salle was one of the appellants against the Bull *Unigenitus*.

Letter 129: To Brother Barthélemy, Superior General*ÉC 7; OC LI 7; MH 36:457; CL 8:450*

[After May 1717]

You know that I am always ready to obey you in everything since I am now subject to your authority, and I did not vow obedience to do what I like.

Letter 130: To Brother Barthélemy, Superior General*ÉC 8; OC LI 8; MH 36:457; CL 8:450*

[After May 1717]

If I am to be considered a member of the Brothers of the Christian Schools, it seems to me that my present position ought to be one of simple submission and that I should make no move in what concerns them except through obedience.



In Letters 129 and 130, De La Salle recalls the vows of obedience and association that he had pronounced in 1691 and 1694. He renewed these vows in 1718 on the feast of the Holy Trinity, the traditional day for the renewal of vows in the Institute of the Brothers. It is only under obedience, De La Salle says, that he ought to concern himself with matters that affect the Institute.

Letter 131: To his niece, Jeanne-Remiette de La Salle*ÉC 120; OC LI 120; MH 14:161–162; CL 8:275*

Jeanne-Remiette de La Salle, whose religious name was Sister Françoise of Saint Agnes, was the daughter of Pierre, De La Salle's brother. After being a boarding student with the Sisters of the Congregation of Notre Dame, founded by Saint Peter Fourier, Jeanne-Remiette entered their novitiate at the age of 17 in May 1716 and made her religious profession on June 13, 1718. One of her own sisters was also with Jeanne-Remiette in the same congregation. At this time a total of seven relatives of the Founder were members of the Sisters of Notre Dame, a congregation devoted to teaching poor children.

[1718]

My very dear Niece,

- 1 On Ascension Thursday I answered the letter that you kindly sent me, but as it may not have reached you, I am writing a second time.
- 2 I am very grateful to you for letting me know the date of your religious profession and share with you your joy and your ardent desire to consecrate yourself entirely to God. It will win for you in this life a foretaste of life eternal.
- 3 How fortunate I think you are in separating yourself from the cares and anxieties of the world!
- 4 I will not fail to unite myself with you in prayer to ask God to give you the grace to make this sacrifice wholeheartedly.
- 5 I would very much like to be present at your profession, but I am prevented for two reasons. The first is that I am the only priest here to hear the confessions of fifty people, and it is difficult to get another for this community, which is far from the town. So, I cannot abandon them just now. The second is that since I have a Superior, I am not my own master.
- 6 So, I ask you, please be satisfied that I join with you in this holy action in the same dispositions as those with which, by God's grace, you will make your profession.
- 7 With my best regards and all my affection.



This letter was written between Ascension Thursday, May 26, 1718, and June 13, 1718, the day of the profession. Since 1716, De La Salle had delegated his authority as Superior to Brother Barthélemy to prepare the Brothers and others for the time when the Superior General of the Institute of the Brothers of the Christian Schools would not be a priest but one of the Brothers. Thus, when Barthélemy was formally elected in 1717, he had already been exercising this authority for some time.

When De La Salle says, in paragraph 5, that he is the only priest at Saint Yon, it may be that he had arranged it this way to avoid a precedent that could create some difficulty for the new Superior General, a lay religious. During De La Salle's lifetime, however, there were always priests staying in the communities of Reims, Vaugirard, and Paris who helped out while spending time in retreat.

The 50 people at Saint Yon include Brothers and various types of boarders.

Letter 132: To Brother Director of the community at Calais

Copy; AMG; BL IV.Ap.1; ÉC 65; OC LI 65; MH 5:66; CL 8:224

There are two sources for this letter. One is a copy of the original letter, made during the superiorship of Brother Agathon, 1777–1798, and kept at the Generalate of the Brothers in Rome; the other is from Blain. Neither source mentions the name of the Brother to whom the letter was addressed. Blain even suppresses the name “Calais,” but a little later he states that the Dean “could not have forgotten the just reprimand the saintly man had courteously addressed to him on the subject of the Assumption of the Most Blessed Virgin.”¹⁴⁹ On the occasion of a visit of De La Salle to Calais, the Dean had asked him to celebrate the Mass in honor of the Assumption. To De La Salle’s surprise, the Dean did not mention the day’s feast in his homily.

The Director of the community of Calais is thought to have been the Brother Norbert referred to in Letter 12. He was the Director in 1717 at Calais, but shortly thereafter he was transferred to Saint Yon. His successor was Brother Anastase, addressed in Letter 72; he and his community would feel the brunt of the Dean’s anger in 1720.

Rouen
January 28, 1719

- 1 I do not think, my very dear Brother, that I have given the Very Reverend Dean of Calais any reason for saying that I am one of the appellants.
- 2 It has never been my intention to appeal, any more than it has been to embrace the doctrines of those who appeal to a future council.
- 3 I have too much respect for our Holy Father the Pope and too great a submission to the decisions of the Holy See not to give my assent to them.
- 4 In this matter I wish to follow the example of Saint Jerome, who was caught up in the difficult situation brought about in the Church by the Arians. When they insisted that he acknowledge three hypostases in God, he considered it his duty to consult the chair of Saint Peter, on which, he said, he knew

149. Blain, Book Four, *The Mind and Heart of John Baptist de La Salle*, 67.

the Church was founded. Addressing Pope Damasus, he declared that if His Holiness ordered him to admit three hypostases in God, notwithstanding the difficulty he would find in so doing, he would have no fear in acknowledging three hypostases. This is why he closed his letter by begging His Holiness in the name of Jesus Christ, the Savior of the world, and in that of the Holy Trinity of divine Persons in one same nature, to be pleased to write to him, authorizing him either to affirm or to deny that there are three hypostases in God.

- 5 Neither the Dean nor anyone else ought to be surprised if following the example of this great saint who was so enlightened in matters of religion, I consider it sufficient for myself that he who is today seated in the chair of Saint Peter has declared by a Bull that is accepted by almost all the bishops of the world his condemnation of the 101 propositions taken from Père Quesnel's book. After such an authentic decision by the Church, I say with Saint Augustine that the case is closed.
- 6 Such are my sentiments, and such are my dispositions, which have never been different and which I will never change.
- 7 I am, in our Lord, my very dear Brother,
Your very humble and very obedient servant,
DE LA SALLE, Priest

[As a postscript to his letter, De La Salle added the following Latin text:]

- 1 Mihi cathedram Petri censui consulendam. . . . Super illam petram aedificatam Ecclesiam scio.
[I decided that I must consult the chair of Peter. . . . I know that the Church was built on that rock.]
- 2 Discernite, si placet, obsecro, non timebo dicere tres hypostases, si jubetis.
[Please make a decision, I beg you; I will not be afraid to say three hypostases if you order it.]
- 3 Obtestor beatitudinem tuam per crucifixum mundi salutem, per homousion trinitatem, ut mihi epistolis tuis sive tacendarum sive dicendarum hypotaseôn detur auctoritas.

[I beg your Holiness, by the crucified Savior of the world and by the Trinity of Divine Persons, to authorize me by your letter either to deny or to affirm the hypostases in God.]



The declaration that De La Salle presents as a unified argument in this letter is to be found in various parts of a letter attributed to Saint Jerome. The text of that letter is in volume IV of Jerome's writings, published between 1693 and 1705 in Paris, possibly the edition from which De La Salle took his argument. The three propositions from Saint Jerome's letter in Latin, after De La Salle's signature, together with the formal ending of the letter, so different from his usual manner of closing letters to the Brothers, indicate that he was not writing for the Director of Calais alone but for the letter to be used as his public refutation of any association with the appeal against the Pope to a General Council. By it he also gave his assent to the condemnation of the propositions drawn from Quesnel's *Réflexions Morales*.

On March 5, 1717, four bishops of France, among whom was Pierre de Langle, bishop of Boulogne, the diocese of which Calais was a part, appealed against the Bull *Unigenitus* to a future General Council. They declared the Bull to be contrary to Catholic doctrine. Their appeal was supported by the Sorbonne and by twelve other bishops, one of whom was the archbishop of Paris, De Noailles. From this date the name *appellants* was given to these bishops and to members of the clergy who also signed the appeal. The appellants were condemned by a decree from the Holy Office and also by a further Bull, *Pastoralis Officii*. The appellants were ultimately excommunicated.

Among the appellants was Jean-Louis de La Salle, canon of the cathedral chapter of Reims and brother of John Baptist de La Salle. His name is shown on the copy of the baptismal entry as Jean-Louis, but in the copy of his epitaph, inscribed by his nephew, his name is given as Jean-Baptiste Louis de La Salle.¹⁵⁰ It seems that Jean-Louis also called himself Jean-Baptiste Louis. The Dean of Calais easily confused the Founder of the Institute of the Brothers, a former canon of Reims, with his brother, a canon at the time.

De La Salle, however, leaves no doubt whatever in the Dean's mind. His letter states unequivocally his position in favor of the papacy and the decisions of the Holy See. He disassociates himself completely from the appellants, who claimed the *Augustinus* of Jansenius as the authority for their doctrinal position. With some irony De La Salle closes his argu-

150. CL 27:65, 73.

Monsieur mon frere.

Pourquoi n'est pas venu par votre Demande qu'une seule de mes lettres suffisoit pour
indiquer mes intentions touchant ce qui me reste de bien entre mes mains.

Je dois donc par le 14 que je cite et abandonner des biens aux enfans
de et avec le Sr. Marguerite Jean Henry de la Salle mon frere par compassion
que les deux tiers de valeurs ou les sont réduits une rente en principal de deux
milliers cent cinquante sur le Régie du Diocèse de Reims me restant la faculté ou
cette a qui j'en ai déjà le droit de reprendre et retirer laditte rente quand j'en ay
ou aux a qui je ai déjà le droit de donner ou a propos en payant la somme de
deux mil francs deux tiers fait un fond au profit desdits enfans de leur vie et
abandonner auxd. les deux tiers deux autres rentes de six par la lie nommant les
donateurs de la même ville de Reims etant au principal de quatre cent cent francs
pour le total au denier vingt cinq, lesd. les deux tiers faisant pour deux mille huit
cents de rente, plus la moitié d'une cense sur le tenoir de Thillies près Reims
dont l'autre moitié appartient audit Sr. Jean Henry de la Salle mon frere;
plus le droit avoué appartenant sur une maison seigneuriale au village de trois saints
près Reims provenant de la succession du nommé Mathieu Manu desquelles
rentes et fruits l'usufruit a appartenu et appartient audit Sr. Jean Henry de la Salle mon frere
par vous Monsieur De la Salle Chanciere de l'eglise de Reims mon frere
et par son cession distribue par vous et a votre Discretion sans que vous soyez
obligés de lui en rendre aucun compte en quelque temps et pour quelque cause
que ce puisse etre. Je suis avec beaucoup de respect

Monsieur mon frere
de la Salle
le 2 Mars 1758.

Votre tres humble et tres
affectionné frere
De la Salle

ment, in paragraph 5, with the words attributed to Saint Augustine in his debate with the Pelagians during the fifth century.

Letter 133: To his brother, Canon Jean-Louis de La Salle

OC LA 134; CL 39:26; CL 41-1:293

Written by De La Salle to his brother, Canon Jean-Louis, this letter has only recently come to light as a result of the indefatigable research of Brother Léon de Marie Aroz, who found it in the 1718 files of Monsieur Thiénot, a lawyer of Reims. According to the terms of the Reims Agreement of 1969, the document remains the property of Monsieur Thiénot. However, he generously consented to display it in the museum of the Hotel de La Salle in Reims. The files in Thiénot's possession also contain, in addition to documents referring to De La Salle's immediate family, others dating back to the sixteenth century relating to the ancestors of De La Salle.

This letter was first published by Brother Léon de Marie Aroz in *Cahiers lasalliens* 39, under the title, "*Jean-Baptiste de La Salle: Une Lettre Inédite.*" It appears also in CL 41-1, together with evidence that Jean-Louis took the necessary steps to see that all the provisions made in this letter and all the conditions laid down by De La Salle became legally binding.

There are no paragraph separations in the original letter, except in the middle of the first sentence, before the words, "I hereby declare."

Seminary of Saint Nicolas du Chardonnet, Paris
March 2, 1718

Monsieur, My Brother,

- 1 Because you tell me in your last letter that just one letter from me is sufficient to declare my intentions concerning what remains in your hands of my property, I hereby declare, then, that as of this day, I transfer and cede in favor of the present and future children of Monsieur Jean-Remy de La Salle, my brother, because of my compassion for the wretched condition to which they are reduced, an annual income from the principal of 2,000 livres invested in the Clergy Fund of the diocese of Reims. I reserve the right for me, or for those to whom I will transfer it, to take back and to withdraw said income, when either I or those to whom I will cede this right find it advisable, and to pay the sum of

- 2,000 livres, from which a fund will be established for the benefit of said children.
- 2 I also transfer and cede to them two-thirds of another annual income, payable by the Association of Locksmiths of the same city of Reims, from a principal of 1,400 livres invested at four percent, of which the said two-thirds brings me 38 livres of income annually; plus half the annual income from the rural land at Thillois, near Reims, of which the other half belongs to the said Monsieur Jean-Remy de La Salle, my brother; plus my rights to a house located in the village of Trois Puits, near Reims, which comes from the estate of Mathieu Menu.
- 3 The income from these investments and funds, from this day forward, shall belong to the said children and shall be received by you, Monsieur de La Salle, canon of the church of Reims, my brother, and shall also be distributed to them by you, at your discretion, without your being obliged to give them any account at any time or for any reason whatsoever. I am, with much respect, Monsieur, my brother,
Your very humble and very obedient servant,
DE LA SALLE



On the reverse of this letter is written: Monsieur de La Salle, Doctor of the Sorbonne, Canon of the Church of Reims, Reims.

Jean-Remy, the youngest brother of De La Salle, was born on July 12, 1670, shortly after De La Salle's nineteenth birthday. Their mother died 12 months later, on July 19, 1671, and their father died within a year, on April 9, 1672. De La Salle, then three weeks before his twenty-first birthday, was named guardian of the family in his father's will. He withdrew from his studies at the Sorbonne in Paris and returned to his family home on April 23, 1672, to care for his two sisters and four brothers.

After an initial career in the army, Jean-Remy became an official in the Royal Mint in Reims, gaining the post of superintendent in 1698, at the age of 28. On May 5, 1711, he married Madeleine Bertin de Rocheret at Epernay, about 19 miles south of Reims. Not one person from his immediate family was present either at the signing of the marriage contract, April 29, 1711, or at the marriage ceremony six days later, on May 5.

Madeleine's brother, Valentin-Philippe, recorded that "De La Salle, the Founder, came to visit Bertin de Rocheret at the time of the grape

harvest of 1711,” that is, some months after the marriage.¹⁵¹ During the year 1711, from the end of February, De La Salle spent several months visiting the communities of the Brothers in the South of France. On August 24, he informed Drolin, in Letter 29, of his intention to return to Paris, where he had been recalled to answer the charges brought against him by the father of Abbé Clément. On his way to Paris, he visited once more the Brothers of Avignon, Alès, Les Vans, and Mende. Possibly he considered his visit to Epernay en route to the capital city as an act of courtesy to the family of Bertin de Rocheret because he had not been able to attend the wedding.

Four children were born to Jean-Remy and Madeleine. One of them died in infancy, and the family was soon to feel the effects of more tragedy. In 1715 Jean-Remy, suffering from a mental disorder, had to retire from his post in the Royal Mint. Three of his brothers, John Baptist, Jean-Louis, and Pierre, together with their brother-in-law, Jean Maillefer, the widower of their sister, Marie, drew up a deed on November 28, 1716, whereby each would provide a quarter of the cost of the maintenance of Jean-Remy and the three children. Under the terms of the marriage contract, Madeleine had retained her own private means. Jean-Remy's mental derangement worsened, and on February 15, 1717, he was deprived of all civil rights. His property was seized, and he was permanently confined to a mental institution, where he died in 1732. This tragedy was the reason for a number of letters from Jean-Louis to De La Salle, and it prompted the Founder's decision in 1718 to make over to Jean-Remy's children the income from the properties that he owned.

It is not clear what property De La Salle retained after distributing his inherited wealth to help feed poor families in the winter famine of 1684-1685. Acting on the advice of his spiritual director, as Brother Bernard, his earliest biographer, tells us, he kept for himself an annual income of 200 livres “so as not to tempt Providence.”¹⁵² We are also told that this income was used to pay for his travel, to build up his library for his and the Brothers' use, and to purchase vessels and vestments for the celebration of Mass. The sum of 200 livres was also the annual stipend that De La Salle required for the upkeep of each Brother when a new Christian School was established. He had had personal experience of this need when the first schools were established at Saint Maurice and Saint Jacques in Reims. When a fifth teacher was needed because of the increase in the number of students, he provided from his personal income an extra 200 livres to be added to the 800 already guaranteed by the

151. CL 41-1:258, note 5.

152. CL 4:61; *John Baptist de La Salle: Two Early Biographies*, 316.

benefactors.¹⁵³ The retention of enough of his personal wealth to provide an annual income of 200 livres can be viewed as De La Salle's declaration that he is on an equal footing with the Brothers and is not a drain on their income.

At the time he wrote this letter, March 2, 1718, De La Salle had already committed himself to pay one-quarter of the maintenance of his ill brother, Jean-Remy. He now makes a settlement on behalf of Jean-Remy's children, thus disposing of the rest of his personal property:

- ♦ the 2,000 francs invested with the Clergy Fund of Reims (no further information is available about this investment; perhaps it was a type of pension guarantee for clergy retirement);
- ♦ his share of the income from investments with the Association of Locksmiths of Reims;
- ♦ his share of the income from rural land in Thillois;
- ♦ his rights to the income from a house in Trois Puits.

Letter 133-a: From Canon Jean-Louis de La Salle to his brother, John Baptist

AMG; CL 26:D 20; CL 41-1:304

This is probably the last letter that Jean-Louis wrote to his brother, John Baptist de La Salle. It is included here because of its close relationship with the previous Letter 133. The first two separations by paragraph are not in the original.

Reims
January 3, 1719

My very dear Brother,

Although it would appear that you are determined to forget this part of the country completely and that you have decided to cut off all communication with us for a year or even several years—so that I have only with great difficulty been able to get a reply from you in matters of great importance—I do not consider myself freed from my obligations. So I take it upon myself to write to you once more, not only to pay my respects to you at the beginning of this new year and to wish

153. CL 4:35; *John Baptist de La Salle: Two Early Biographies*, 295.

you a very happy one, insofar as there can be a happy one in this life, but mainly to remind you once more of some matters of importance to your Institute, which I have already had the honor to speak and to write to you about on several occasions.

You know that the ownership of the house in Reims is still not settled and that there are only two legal owners when there ought to be four. I have proposed several names to you, but I am still opposed to including Father Fremyn as one of the number. If your Brothers in Reims were to tell you how he acts here in his capacity as their superior, you would know for yourself that it is very desirable that he have no say in what concerns the Institute. I have several times offered the name of Father Maillefer, my nephew; there is no one whom I could name who is better disposed toward your work and more dependable in what concerns its continuance. I do not know why you hesitate to name him out of the very small number of good priests that we have today. I have proposed Father de La Salle de l'Étang, but he is now professor of theology at Rosoy. I do not see anyone else worth considering, unless it be Father Legrand, at present canon at Saint Balsamie, or Father Horquette, pastor of Saint André in the suburbs, unless you wish to choose someone from outside Reims, for example, Father Guyart of Laon.

I must not fail to remind you that you own several houses at Rethel and some properties in Reims bought in your name. It is important that you dispose of them by will, after taking legal advice, so that after your death, my brother's children, who are still minors, or those who act on their behalf may not be able to make any claims with regard to them on account of their father's illness and that there may be no misunderstanding about their ownership.

At Rethel the declaration made by Father Favart and Monsieur Bajot concerning the Queutelot's house and the one that once belonged to Ludet states that upon your death, they will belong to those who have the management of the schools in Reims. This could give rise to some misunderstanding, as it is not clear whether it means the Superior of the Brothers or a

cleric named by the archbishop as the local superior. It is to be hoped that this can be rectified and that Father Favart, by a new declaration explaining the previous one, can clarify the meaning in a way that is both appropriate and not liable to misinterpretation. This will be difficult, however, because Father Favart's declaration was used as a guide for the one made by Monsieur Bajot, who quotes it.

Nevertheless, I think it would be even better to have the first one explained in such a way by a new declaration, made by Father Favart, that after your death, the Queutelot house shall belong to the owners of the house in Reims. That will be less confusing than to leave things as they are. As for the Étienne house, I do not know what clauses are included in the title deeds, for I have never seen the contract of sale. With regard to the Charlet house, it is solely in your name; therefore, it is yours to dispose of. With regard to the one left by Madame and Monsieur Bonvarlet, you are not, strictly speaking, the owner. In Reims you have the house left to you by Father Pasté for the use of the schools. I do not know whether there are any other properties. I will make inquiries. All this might have been simplified with some discussion between us, but anyway, what I can do is to remind you of it and to beg you to make the necessary arrangements.

No doubt you have heard of the death of Monsieur Maillefer, my brother-in-law, on December 7. On November 10 we lost Father Godard, our diocesan penitentiary. His loss is widely felt because he was almost the sole support of the honorable people of this city and of the upright priests of the diocese. Our confrere, Father Jobart, died on June 27. So our Lord is gradually taking from us the men of honor, and we see them replaced by men of a quite different caliber. May the Lord look on us with mercy.

With deepest affection and all the respect I owe you,
I am, my very dear brother,
Your very humble and very obedient servant,
JEAN-LOUIS DE LA SALLE

You have in Reims still other properties acquired in your name: the old cottage adjoining the Brothers' house, a farm

at Acy, and a house in rue des Anges, left to you by Father Pasté.



John Baptist, at 13, was godfather of Jean-Louis at his baptism on Christmas Day, 1664. When their father died in April 1672, John Baptist became the guardian of his two sisters and four brothers. The older sister, Marie, who was 18 at the time, moved out of the home in June, with her youngest brother, Jean-Remy, only 23 months old, to live with their grandmother. The other sister, Rose-Marie, at 16 had already entered the convent, probably in February 1672. Thus, in June 1672, the De La Salle household consisted of John Baptist, 21, and his three brothers, Jacques-Joseph, 14; Jean-Louis, 8, and Pierre, 6. Jacques-Joseph was the first to leave, entering the novitiate of the canons of Saint Genevieve in 1676. Jean-Louis enrolled in Saint Sulpice in Paris in 1679, and that same year Jean-Remy came back from his grandmother's to live with John Baptist.

In 1681, when John Baptist de La Salle invited the teachers to live in the family home with him, his uncle took Pierre and Jean-Remy out of the house to live with their sister, Marie, who had married Jean Maillefer in 1679. Jean-Louis showed his special affection for John Baptist by refusing to leave him.

Brother Léon de Marie Aroz has described the close relationship between John Baptist de La Salle and his brother, Jean-Louis:

An intimate affection united these two brothers, godfather and godson, blood brothers and also brother priests of the Lord, both students at the Sorbonne, both doctors of theology, canons of Reims, living parallel lives characterized by the same love and service of the Church: John Baptist in the ministry of the school, Jean-Louis in the ministry of the word and the sacraments—the same end with different means. Learned and holy, they were inseparable until 1714, when the promulgation of the Bull *Unigenitus* provoked a schism among the clergy of France.

Those who were appealing to a general council over the head of the Pope were locked in a bitter battle with those loyal to the Pope. John Baptist kept himself out of the polemics, except at Marseille when he was openly attacked and forced to take part. For him Rome had spoken; the case was closed. For Jean-Louis, on the other hand, it was a matter of a sincere appeal to the General Council without, however, becoming belligerent. Yet this was enough to wound their personal friendship and to end their correspondence, with only two exceptions. Nevertheless, Jean-Louis remained a person trusted by

his older brother and was his legal representative in Reims for the project of the schools he had founded.

When, at the approach of his death, John Baptist needed to choose an executor of his last will, it was Jean-Louis whom he named as his heir, bequeathing to him his personal possessions willed to his nephews, the sons of John-Remy, giving Jean-Louis full power to dispose of them any way he saw fit in case of any controversy from whatever source. So, at the hour of truth, when everything human begins to disappear in the face of death and when even doctrinal quarrels are diminished in the light of eternity, love itself reclaims its rights—John Baptist and Jean-Louis, blood brothers and brother priests of God, it must be said again, loved each other.¹⁵⁴

In 1700 De La Salle formed a group of trustees (*société civile*) made up of himself, his brother, Jean-Louis, Canon Claude Pepin, and Father Pierre de La Val. These four, as trustees, were to act as coproprietors and administrators of properties bought on behalf of the Brothers in Reims, for the Society did not at that time constitute a legal entity. By 1710 De La Val and Pepin had died, and John Baptist had moved on to Paris and Rouen. Jean-Louis had been left to assume the entire responsibility for the trusteeship.

It is easy to understand why Jean-Louis was troubled about the state of his brother's health and wanted to restore the number of trustees to four. However, because the names suggested by Jean-Louis were those of people who had aligned themselves with the Jansenist faction, they were not acceptable to his brother. Jean-Louis clearly draws a distinction between those whom he considers to be upright priests, with their Jansenist leanings, and the rest, who are "of a quite different caliber."

The problems raised by Jean-Louis were solved by the terms of De La Salle's will. Jean-Louis continued to look after the interests of the Institute of the Brothers of the Christian Schools until his death in 1724. A letter written in 1723 by Brother Jean, Assistant to the Superior General, to Canon Jean-Louis de La Salle reveals the affection with which he was held by the Brothers: "In you we have found another Father to take the place of the one who has left us to go to enjoy the glory of heaven."¹⁵⁵

After his death Jean-Louis' role of tending to the interests of the Institute was continued by his brother, Pierre.

154. CL 41-1:21-22.

155. CL 41-1:319, note 3.

Letter 134: To a Brother

ÉC 110; *OC LI* 110; *Blain, Book 3*, XVIII:732; *CL* 8:170;

According to the historian Jean-Claude Garreau, who published *Vie de Messire Jean-Baptiste de La Salle* in 1760, Letter 134 is the last letter written by De La Salle, probably in February or March 1719. Blain quotes it as a section of a letter “to one of the pioneer Brothers.”

[February or March 1719]

- 1 I beg of you, for the love of God, my dear Brother, in the future, do not think of addressing yourself to me in any way.
- 2 You have your superiors whom you should consult about your spiritual and temporal concerns.
- 3 Henceforth, I wish only to prepare myself for death, which must soon separate me from all that is created.



This assertion of De La Salle must be put in context with other facts of his life at this time: his effort to bolster the authority of Brother Barthélemy, on the one hand, and his concluding the many details of his own will, on the other. He was also very involved with the life of the Institute that flowed around him at Saint Yon.

De La Salle died on Good Friday, April 7, 1719.

Postscript

In his introduction to Battersby's translation of the letters in *De La Salle: Letters and Documents*, Brother Athanase-Émile, Superior General, writes that anyone who wishes to form an accurate idea of the personality of De La Salle must read his letters as they were written, chronologically from beginning to end. This documentary evidence, he maintains, is able to correct the bias of the biographers, who almost inevitably introduce subjective elements into their portrayal.

Another value in reading all the letters is the opportunity to witness the development of the personality of De La Salle over the years from 1682 to 1719. We see the same idealism from beginning to end, but we also see a maturing on the part of the Founder in his sharing these ideals with the various Brothers as he and they confront the vicissitudes of the project of the Christian Schools. We see also his realistic, shrewd, and forceful management of affairs and personalities, balanced against his tender, compassionate, and patient dealings with relatives, Brothers, and others throughout these forty years.

In the end, we recognize John Baptist de La Salle for the noble person he is: not only as a saint (beatified in 1888 and canonized on May 24, 1900) but also as a unique, struggling, generous human being responding faithfully in the best way he can to the demands of everyday life, which, he trusts, is God's crucible for sanctifying him and for founding the Institute of the Brothers of the Christian Schools to serve the Church.

Appendix A

Directories

The following five *Mémoires* are directories to guide the Brother Director in giving his account to the Brother Superior General. The *Mémoires* appear in the prescriptions of the General Chapter of 1745. They seem to be based on *Règle du Frère Directeur d'une Maison de l'Institut*, a manuscript of 1718, which Brother Barthélemy signed and sent to the Director of the Saint-Denis community. In the note over his signature, Barthélemy states that the document is for the Directors of the Brothers of the Society and that it was agreed upon by the Directors of the Society and him at the General Chapter of 1717. It is significant that he does not say that it was written by De La Salle, although the Founder's influence can be considered certain.

Part of the fifth *Mémoire*, or an appendix to it, is a copy of the directory that every Brother was asked to use as a guide for his letters to the Superior. It is found as an appendix to the 1711 printing of *Recueil*. There is evidence that it was added to *Recueil* sometime after 1711 and before 1725. It is probable that De La Salle either composed it or had considerable influence on its composition.

The Rule of 1705 requires the Brothers to write to the Superior at the beginning of each month, or if the community is too distant, to write to a Director of another community that is closer, as designated by the Superior, but there is no mention of a directory to guide the writing of such letters. It is only in the Rule of 1718 that mention is made of such a directory, at which time the letters are prescribed to be written every other month.

All of these directories are included as part of the appendix to the edition of the Letters in Circular 335. They are, of course, relevant to the letters that the Brothers wrote to De La Salle, but the idea of a directory for those letters seems to have developed only gradually and did not take a printed form until sometime after 1711.

First Mémoire

Matters on which the Brother Director of the houses of the Society will give an account to the Brother Superior of the Institute at the beginning of November, January, March, May, July, and September.

On Their Conduct as Director

- 1 If he has conducted himself differently than what is also expected of his Brothers; if he has practiced any special prayer or mortification or has permitted any of the Brothers to do so; if he has introduced some new practice into the community.
- 2 If he and the Brothers have endeavored to acquire the spirit of faith; if he expects obedience of the Brothers and gives them occasions to practice the virtues; if he has been careful to be recollected; if he has been vigilant to see that his Brothers are everywhere recollected and what he has done to accomplish this result.
- 3 If he has given good example to his Brothers in all things, remembering his obligation to be for them a model, following the advice given by Saint Paul through his disciple Titus to those responsible for guiding others: "In all things be yourself the example of good deeds by instruction, by purity of conduct, and by seriousness."¹⁵⁶
- 4 If his love for all the Brothers is impartial, especially if he has the required zeal for their progress in virtue and has had any trouble with any of them and in what way.
- 5 If he has been exact in the observance of the Rule and has required the observance of the smallest details of the Rule; if he has had an esteem for this; if he has allowed any relaxation of the Rule; if he has been exact to reprove even the least faults contrary to modesty, good order, and fidelity to the Rule.
- 6 If he has given any special permission to any Brother and what it was; if he and his Brothers always retire and rise at the appointed time.
- 7 If he or any of the Brothers has missed any spiritual exercise; what it was and why; if he has failed to attend recreation; how recreation has been conducted; if the conversation has always been about God; if they speak at this time of themselves or of their Brothers.
- 8 If he has taken care to be present at the beginning of all the spiritual exercises; if he has stopped everything at the first

156. Titus 2:7.

sound of the bell; if some lights have been on in the house after 9:15 P. M.; if all the keys have been given to him after night prayer and if he has checked or had someone else check the main doors of the house to see that they have been locked.

- 9 If he has maintained silence; if he has spoken too loudly when it was necessary to speak; if he has asked about things out of curiosity and spoken without necessity or with familiarity to any of the Brothers.
- 10 If he has had the Brothers give an account of their conduct every week and if he has spoken of other things than what is in the directory.
- 11 If he has become friendly with outsiders; if he has visited them or spoken with them too often; if he has taken food or drink outside the house; if these outsiders have come into the house or been allowed to talk with any of the Brothers; if he has asked them to do any errand and what it was.
- 12 If he has had any outsiders take meals or reside in the community; if he has had any visitors and who they were; if he has sent any Brother to speak for him when it was not necessary that he go himself.
- 13 If the Brother Director or another Brother with his permission has gone out often; why and how often; if the Brother Director or another Brother has gone out alone; if every time he has gone out, he has advised the Brother Sub-Director of his leaving; which Brother he takes with him; if he always takes the same Brother or even if he takes the Brother Sub-Director to go out with him, something he must not do.
- 14 If he or another Brother has gone out of town; where he has been, why, and how often; if he or another Brother has written letters; to whom and why.
- 15 If he has engaged one or several Brothers to do some work and for what; if he has made some change in the house; if he has had haircuts done according to the Rule; if he has seen that the house has been kept clean; if he has had something new made for the house, such as furniture, linen, and so forth; if all this has been according to the Institute practices.
- 16 If he has bought something or been engaged in any external matter; what it is and how many times.

- 17 If he or the Brother Procurator has had money outside the money box with the two keys and in what amount.
- 18 If he has given the Brother cook in writing the schedule for his use of time and whether he has taken care to see that he has used his time properly.

(The Brother Director will omit the articles on which he has nothing to report.)

Second Mémoire

Matters on which the Brother Director will give an account to the Brother Superior of the Institute concerning details of the last two months:

On Income and Expense of the House

- 1 After the Brother Director has given an account of conduct according to the preceding directory, he will present or have someone else present to the Brother Superior the income and expense of the two preceding months. After listing the receipts of these two months at the top of the report, he will add the money that was left in the house at the end of the two other preceding months, and at the bottom of the report he will record the balance of the money at the end of the month just ending, after all expenses have been paid.
- 2 He will then record in detail the ordinary expenses and after that the extraordinary, if there are any; for example, for sickness, repairs, purchase of linen, and the like.
- 3 If anyone has given anything to the house, either food or any other thing whatsoever; if this person has or had children in the Brothers' school.
- 4 If something has been loaned or borrowed, money or materials, what day, to whom, what amount; why it had to be borrowed or why it had to be loaned.
- 5 If something was borrowed or loaned previously; if the matter has been settled.
- 6 What is served in the dining room on meat days and fast days and on each day in Lent; how many pounds of meat have been served at each meal, each day, each week.

- 7 If the food has always been according to regulations or if something extraordinary has been served; how many times and what it was.

Third Mémoire

Matters on which the Brother Director will give an account to the Brother Superior of the Institute for the same months of November, January, March, May, July, and September:

On School Matters

- 1 If the Brother Director has left school for some reason, for example, to make some change or for some other reason; how many times and for what reason. If when returning to the house from the school, he was always accompanied by a companion and if they have always been exact to say the rosary alternately while walking along the street.
- 2 If he observes and sees that others observe exactly all that is required in *Conduite des Écoles chrétiennes*; if he has made the examination and the changes of the students toward the end or the beginning of each month; what the number of students is in each class; if they are truant or generally come late to school.
- 3 What he has observed of note in each class; if he or some other Brother has spoken too long at the door of the school; if he has come to speak to some Brother for something other than about the students; if he has seen to it that he and the other Brothers do not speak to parents of students, except during the hours of 8:30 A.M. to 2:00 P.M.

Fourth Mémoire

The personal conduct of the Brother Director (see the Directory).

He Will Then Give an Account of Each Brother

- 1 The state of the Brother's health; if he is or has been ill and what remedy he has applied.
- 2 If the Brother is faithful to the Rule, negligent, or fervent; in what way he has observed this; if the Brother tries to be interior; if he loves prayer and interior or exterior mortification and in what way this is apparent; if he gives an exact account of his conduct and if he does so with simplicity.
- 3 How the Brother applies himself to prayer; what advice he has given the Brother regarding his conduct; if the Brother has been negligent and in what way; if he is making progress in perfection and how he shows this; what means he is using to help the Brother progress; what his ordinary defects are and the other defects that might not be usual; if the Brother has endeavored to correct them; if he has done some penance that has been given to him; how he has done so.
- 4 If the Brother has been exact in doing his work in school; if silence and order are kept there; if the students are attentive; if they are making progress in reading and writing as well as in catechism; if he inspires in them a religious spirit; if this is observed in them.

Fifth Mémoire

Matters on which each Brother will give an account to the Brother Superior of the Institute at the beginning of October, December, February, April, June, and August:

Regarding Fidelity to the Rule

- 1 If he has rung the bell for the spiritual exercises exactly at the time prescribed; if there is a clock in the house; if care is taken to have it keep accurate time; if some of the daily spiritual exercises have been omitted or shortened; which ones and how many times.

- 2 If the Brothers have always taken their holiday walks together and to what place; if the advertisement of defects is held every week; if any Brother has been advised of some considerable defect and how this was taken; if this was done with charity.
- 3 If the Brother Director has given some serious penance during the accusation of faults; to which Brother, why, and how he received it.
- 4 If all the Brothers have received Holy Communion on the days prescribed; how many times; if the Brothers go to Confession every week to the same confessor; if he encourages the Brothers.
- 5 If all the Brothers are fervent, recollected, silent; who are negligent in this matter.
- 6 If anyone has been ill, the nature of the illness, how long, and what remedy was provided for him.

Directory according to which each Brother will give an account of his conduct to the Brother Superior of the Institute at the beginning of the months of February, April, June, August, October and December:¹⁵⁷

- 1 How his health is; if he is or has been ill; the nature of the illness; when and for how long.
- 2 If he has any spiritual troubles or temptations; what they have been and what has been the cause; how he has coped with them; what good or evil they have produced; how long they have lasted; if they have stopped; if he has given or is giving occasion for these troubles and has brought them on through his own fault.
- 3 What faults he has committed since the last time he wrote; if it was with awareness or even deliberately that he has done wrong; what have been the most usual offenses; if he has

157. This *Directory* of 31 articles appears as a printed appendix at the end of the edition of *Recueil* that has the date 1711 on the title page. It is not clear when, after 1711, this appendix was added; successive printings kept the same title page with slight alterations and retained the same date. However, one copy has been established as the oldest, because it makes no reference, as the others do, to the Bull of Approbation. From this can be established the fact that this *Directory* was formulated prior to 1725 (CL 15:vii, 122–130).

tried to correct himself of some; what means he has used for this purpose.

- 4 If he has made progress on the way of perfection, in the practice of virtue, or if he has become careless; in what way he has noted this; what virtues he has tried to practice since the last letter; if he has had any inspirations; what they have been and if he has been faithful to them.
- 5 To what does he feel inclined; if he has acted sometimes out of whim, inclination, through bad mood, or even passion.
- 6 If he has a love for mortification, especially of the mind and senses; how he has noticed this or the opposite; if he has practiced any unusual mortifications; what they have been and if they were with permission.
- 7 How he has taken the penances that have been given to him; if he has performed them exactly; if he has omitted any and how often; if it was through forgetfulness, negligence, or some other reason; what the ones were that he omitted; if they have been fulfilled; with what motive, fervor, or negligence; if this has edified or given little edification.
- 8 If he loves humiliations, rebuffs, and even contempt, or if he has difficulty accepting them, and how he has shown this; if he at least has accepted them willingly and with a docile spirit since the last letter; in what interior and exterior disposition he has received them since that time.
- 9 How he has received the advertisement of his defects and the reprimands given for them; if in a different disposition, how many times in one kind, how many in another; if he has tried to benefit from them and in what way he has done so.
- 10 If he accuses himself of his faults each day; if of all of them; if with simplicity as before God; if with another disposition; what this was, if good or bad; if he has some repugnance for this action; if it is voluntary; if he has given in to this feeling often or rarely; how often, approximately, since the last letter.
- 11 What love he has for obedience; if he is indifferent to any order and disposed to obey any Director whoever and in whatever he orders without questioning, no matter how much repugnance or difficulty he feels about it; if he feels resistance toward any Director or anything in particular; if all the time or only sometimes and under certain circumstances.

- 12 If he has esteem and affection for the Brother Director and why or why not; if he has some problem in his regard and for what reason; if he has always obeyed the Brother Director in everything he has ordered; if he has disobeyed; if it was often or rarely, on what occasion, how often one way or another, and why; for what motives he has obeyed or lacked obedience.
- 13 If he has been exact to do nothing without permission; if he has done the least thing on his own; if he has been very careful about this; if he has lost some of his care in this matter; if this is true always, often, rarely, and for what reasons.
- 14 If he has an esteem for the Rule of the Institute; if he observes the Rule exactly or has been negligent regarding some rules, and if so, which ones; if this happened often or rarely and how often since the last letter; how he observes the Rule, with fervor or negligence; if this happens often or rarely and on what occasions; if he finds difficulty in keeping the Rule; if this is true for all the regulations, only some, which ones, and why.
- 15 If he keeps silence inside and outside the house; if he has spoken to any Brother in particular; if this has been about good things, indifferent matters, harmful, or even bad things; if this has been often or rarely.
- 16 If he has been recollected inside and outside the house; if this has been often or rarely; if he has remembered the holy presence of God; if this has been frequent, even continual, or rarely; if he is mindful of his actions; if he recollects himself often or rarely; if he has acted so as to perform every action without attention to himself but to God and having God in view; if he has acted differently often or rarely.
- 17 If he has been assiduous at all his spiritual exercises; at which ones he has been negligent; how many times at each and for what reason; if he has made all of them, even the exterior ones, with an interior disposition; what this is; if this is true always, often, or rarely; if he has made his spiritual exercises with the sole view of pleasing God and of doing his holy will always, often, or rarely.
- 18 What book he has been reading for spiritual reading; if he has read much or a little each time; if he has made reflections

- from time to time on what he has read; with what attention he has done so; if and in what way he has benefited from it.
- 19 To what defect he has applied himself during the particular examination; if he has worked to correct himself of it and what means he has used for this purpose; if he has in fact corrected himself and how he has observed this.
- 20 To what he has applied himself during his interior prayer; if, in what way, and for how much time he has given time during his prayer to the presence of God; if this has been easy for him; if he has applied himself to the acts of the first part; in what way he has applied himself to the subject of his interior prayer; if this has been easy or difficult for him and why; if he has had distractions, often or rarely, and why; if they have continued for a long time; if he has had some fervor or aridity at prayer; if this has been often, rarely, or continuing for a long time; what resolutions he has made; if he has been faithful to carry them out, often or rarely, and why; what benefit he has received and how he has noticed this.
- 21 If he has always gone to Confession with the other Brothers; if and why he has been satisfied with the confessor; if the confessor has been exact not to allow him to be negligent; if the confessor has encouraged him to have the spirit of his vocation, both interiorly and exteriorly; if he has urged him to fidelity to the Rule; if he has had any trouble with the confessor; why he has or has not; if he benefits from his Confession and how he has noticed this.
- 22 If he has a love for Holy Communion; if he always receives gladly and fervently, or with lukewarmness or negligence; if he has omitted Communion at times with permission, how often, and for what reasons; what benefit he has derived from his Communions and how he has noticed this.
- 23 How he has assisted at holy Mass; if every day; in the same disposition, with a varying disposition, and what it was; what attention he has had at Mass; if it is always the same; if he has applied himself at Mass according to the method or in some other way; if so, what it was.
- 24 If he has love for his Brothers; if it is equal toward all; if his affection for them is natural or in view of God; what this view is; if he has or has had any difficulty with one or several Brothers; if it has lasted for a long time; what the cause was.

- 25 If there is some Brother for whom he feels a particular affection and if he has spoken to any in particular.
- 26 If he has a love for his work and zeal for the instruction and salvation of children; how he notices this and what he does in this spirit, or if he is somewhat indifferent in this matter.
- 27 How he conducts himself in school; if he observes all the regulations or only some; which ones he neglects; if he has wasted time often or rarely; how much each time; what he was doing then; if he has always followed the lessons and been exact to correct all the mistakes; if he has left his place; if he has spoken in class; if he has talked to one student privately without necessity; how often, how long, and why; if he has made any changes in his class, even of the grade, and if he has introduced anything new.
- 28 If he has taken care in school to help the students make progress in reading and writing; if they are benefiting from his efforts; if some or many have not advanced and for what reason; if they have been promoted according to schedule, many of them or only a few, approximately how many of each; if order and silence exist in the school; if not, what the reason is.
- 29 If he has taken at least as much care to have his students develop a religious spirit as he has had for progress in their lessons; if he has taken special care that they have this spirit and recollection during holy Mass and at prayers; if he has had vigilance over them especially during these times.
- 30 If he has taken care that his students attend and attentively follow the catechism lessons; if he has pay good attention to this; if many or few are not learning and why; if he teaches catechism according to the practices of the Institute and takes care to question the students according to their abilities.
- 31 How he has conducted himself with regard to his students; if he has been too rough with them, too easy, or too familiar; if he has become impatient often or rarely toward all of them or some in particular; when, with what spirit, and in what disposition he has corrected them; if he has been too quick and indiscriminate, particularly toward one student or several, or acted emotionally, even in anger; what benefit or bad effect his corrections have had.

Appendix B

Studies Contained in Circular 335

In Circular 335 (1952), Brother Athanase-Émile, Superior General, added to the collection of De La Salle's letters two studies by Brother Félix-Paul (without naming him), each of approximately 40 pages. One, entitled "Historical Study," examines in three separate chapters, 1) the authenticity of the collection, 2) the preservation of the letters through the centuries, and 3) a consideration of the letters that have been lost. Much of the material contained in these three chapters, called Part Two of the circular, has been included in the various introductions and commentaries of the letters in the present volume.

Part Three of the same circular includes two other chapters on the content of the letters; one deals with the wealth of information about the origins and early development of the Institute, and the other studies the nature of De La Salle's spiritual direction as revealed in the letters. Because these two chapters of Part Three of the Circular 335 are good examples of the scholarship of Brother Félix-Paul and because they enhance our appreciation of De La Salle's work as a Founder, a résumé of them is presented here. The numerous quotations from the letters cited by Brother Félix-Paul have been omitted to keep this appendix within appropriate limits, but where it is thought helpful, references are given to the present volume to indicate where these quotations can be found.

1. The Beginnings of the Institute

Often the letters give information about the early foundations of schools that corroborates or adds to statements of the early biographers, and in some instances the letters are the only source of information about certain early developments of the Institute. For example, Letter 1, to the Mayor and Councilors of Château-Porcien, adds considerably to a simple remark by Blain about the founding of the school in that town.¹⁵⁸ This letter establishes the exact date of the opening of the school in 1682, the number of teachers sent to open the school, and the fact that

158. CL 7:183; Blain, *Ljfe*, Book One, Chapter XI, 99.

as yet they were not called Brothers, although De La Salle does refer to his small group as “our Community.” Also, some of De La Salle’s expressions in this letter seem to indicate that he is at this early date beginning to have an awareness of his vocation as Founder.

The two letters to Father des Hayes (Letters 33 and 34) supplement Blain’s account¹⁵⁹ of the foundation at Darnétal in 1704. The style is more businesslike than that of the much earlier letter to Château-Porcien, and it reveals that although De La Salle was not very rigid about the stipend given for the maintenance of the Brothers, he was very firm in his commitment to keep the Brothers out of any kind of clerical activity. These two letters also show his desire to have the two Brothers work together rather than in separate parishes.

Another administrative letter, written to Monsieur Claude Rigoley (Letter 35) about the foundation of the school in Dijon in 1705, illustrates De La Salle’s very sensitive diplomacy in dealing with the socially prominent people who were negotiating with him for the foundation of schools. At the same time, the letter again shows his firmness in the policy of having two Brothers working together in a school and in adjacent classrooms.

Letter 11, to Brother Hubert, reveals how De La Salle responded to a problem that concerned the residence of the Brothers at Chartres in 1709. He employed human and divine strategies to keep the Brothers in their own community rather than have them share a residence with the junior seminarians, as his friend, Bishop Godet des Marais, was planning.

In Letter 53 De La Salle’s administrative discretion is further manifested by the way he involved himself with his representative in the north of France, Brother Joseph, in a problem of the Troyes community. In 1710 the Brothers were asked by the new pastor to leave the residence that had been provided for them by the previous pastor. The closing of the school was threatened. De La Salle answered Brother Joseph’s letter the same day he received it, telling Joseph to wait for his arrival before settling and advising him not to let anyone know that he was coming, “not even Brother Albert.”

Ordinarily De La Salle did not write about Institute matters in his letters to the Brothers. This reticence was, in fact, a point of Rule that he and the Brothers had established. He limited his comments to responses to matters in the letters that the Brothers had written to him. Fortunately, he made an exception to this practice in his letters to Brother Gabriel Drolin, a good indication of the special relationship he had with this trusted Brother. The result is a wealth of information about the early foundations in the 20 letters that Drolin saved. One after the other, these

159. CL 8:15; Blain, *Life*, Book Three, Chapter II, 505–507.

foundations are mentioned in letters to Drolin: Avignon (Letter 16), Marseille (Letter 19), Saint Roch, Paris (Letter 25), Valréas and Mende (Letter 26), Grenoble, Alès, and Mâcon (Letter 27), and Versailles, Boulogne, and Moulins (Letter 29).

De La Salle also writes to Drolin about some of the Brothers. He praises Brother Albert for his administrative ability in establishing the schools at Avignon, Marseille, and Valréas. He mentions Brother Ponce, who opened the school at Mende, and notes his being in charge of the schools in the South of France. These letters to Drolin also show that Avignon was singled out to be the second capital of the Institute. De La Salle has his books approved by the pontifical censor in Avignon; here is where he has his mail sent on the way to and from Rome; here he sets up the residence for his representative in the South. These details and their precise dates are found only in De La Salle's letters to Drolin.

Of course, it is especially significant that these letters provide us with much information about the difficulties of Drolin's mission in Rome, for none of the early biographers had access to such information.

The letters to Drolin also reveal a great deal about the personality of De La Salle, especially his reticence about his own problems. Only brief hints are given of the role of De La Chétardie (Letter 14, paragraph 17) and of Clément in De La Salle's financial straits, of his distress over the defection of one of his principal Brothers (Letter 17, paragraph 12), of the unexpected death of very good Brothers (Letter 18, paragraph 3), or of his own illnesses (Letter 26, paragraph 3; Letter 32, paragraph 5).

Generally speaking, the letters of De La Salle also throw light on the Brothers who were otherwise undistinguished except for their close relationship with the Founder. For the most part, they are representative of the ordinary, goodwilled, but little-educated Brothers with whom De La Salle worked in founding the Institute. Blain speaks quite disparagingly of them.¹⁶⁰ He makes them a foil for displaying De La Salle's personal qualities enhanced by grace and his patient, kind, and loving commitment to those whom he knew God had sent him for his project in the Church.

Of the 47 Brothers to whom extant letters were sent or who are mentioned in these letters, 28 are known for certain to have persevered in their vocation until death. Another 12 can be considered as probably persevering (although we have no documentary proof), and only 7 are known to have withdrawn from the Community. This probable eighty-five percent perseverance rate is a testimony to the goodness and the docility of these Brothers and also to the strong influence that De La Salle had on these ordinary men living extraordinarily heroic lives.

160. CL 8:387; Blain, Book Four, *The Mind and Heart of John Baptist de La Salle*, 353.

Although De La Salle's letters do not throw much light on the secular affairs of his time, they do give some highlights of the ecclesiastical life that De La Salle experienced. Although he evidently wrote several letters dealing with questions of orthodox Catholicism, only two have been preserved (Letters 120 and 132).

His letters to Drolin contain precise allusions to outstanding persons in the Church—a papal legate, an ambassador for France, and other dignitaries—demonstrating that he was not uninterested in the ecclesial life of his times. He kept in touch with those who might become cardinals (Letter 17), knew in advance some nominations (Letter 18) but was wrong about them at times (Letter 21), asked his correspondent for the Vatican position on an important Church question (Letter 32), spoke of some bishops as his special friends (Letter 29), and described one such bishop in a very frank manner (Letters 24 and 25).

De La Salle's zeal for the morality of the clergy of his day is also revealed in his letters to Drolin. He mentions a canon of Troyes whom Drolin is advised not to trust (Letter 30), a Breton priest returning from Rome after staying with Drolin for a time (Letter 24), and a priest of the diocese of Rouen whom De La Salle, for personal reasons, did not want restored to the exercise of his priesthood (Letter 31).

In addition to all this, the letters of De La Salle give a certain amount of information about the postal service of his day, the exchange of money between France and Italy, the food, clothing, and gardening of the Brothers, and certain liturgical practices, such as the procession for Corpus Christi and the celebration of the feast of Saint Nicolas. They are simple details, but they add to an appreciation of the quality of De La Salle's involvement with the first Brothers of the Institute.

II. Spiritual Direction by De La Salle

Because much in De La Salle's letters is explicitly intended to promote the spiritual growth of the early Brothers, the letters provide accurate information about his relationship with them as a spiritual director. This correspondence supplements De La Salle's ascetical and educational books and Blain's writing on the spirit and the virtues of the Founder. The paternal concern De La Salle had for the Brothers is revealed, showing how he adapted his advice to the unique needs of each individual Brother in the Institute.

The following observations are divided into three parts: 1) De La Salle's letters to various Brother Directors, 2) his letters to other Brothers, and 3) his letters to Brother Gabriel Drolin, which deserve separate attention because of the special relationship that De La Salle had with

him. An additional note about his letters of spiritual direction to persons outside the Institute is also included.

A. Letters to the Brother Director

The framework for De La Salle's relationship with the Brother Director is *Règle du Frère Directeur d'une Maison de l'Institut*. The earliest extant copy, in manuscript, is one sent by Brother Barthélemy to the Director of Saint-Denis in 1718. Because Brother Barthélemy mentions in a postscript that the document was drawn up by the General Chapter of 1717, undoubtedly De La Salle had a great deal to do with its contents. It represents the practices he had worked out with the Brothers over the previous decades of their community life.

This *Règle* mentions the directories to guide the Brother Director in the reports he is required to make each month to the Brother Superior. Appendix A of this present edition of the letters includes five of these directories in the form of *Mémoires*. They were printed in the Rule after the General Chapter of 1745, with some changes by Brother Timothée, Superior General, and described expressly as "composed by Monsieur J. B. de La Salle, Founder of the Religious [*sic*] Brothers of the Christian Schools." They reflect a reliance on a rather precise code, a tendency, according to Brother Félix-Paul, that De La Salle inherited from his father, a magistrate of a court of law.

It is probable that these directories evolved with time and that the model for them is the list of 20 articles in *Recueil* used to guide a Brother in his weekly account to the Brother Director of his community. These 20 articles were printed in the 1711 edition of *Recueil* but probably existed in manuscript form as early as 1700. The appendix to the 1711 edition of *Recueil*, added sometime before 1725, is the earliest copy of a directory for a Brother's account to the Brother Superior and borrows most of its articles from those of the weekly account of the Brother to his Director.

The Brother Director did not have to follow the directories in a servile manner. The first *Mémoire* concludes with the statement, "The Brother Director will omit the articles on which he has nothing to report." It was also clear that he could record for any given month any other topic he wanted that was not in the directory.

An examination of the letters to the Directors reveals many of the topics that De La Salle valued in his spiritual direction but that were frequently neglected by some Directors. These topics, as arranged by Brother Félix-Paul, include silence (nine occurrences), fidelity to the Rule (seven), punctuality (seven), and being present with the Brothers (five). Other topics include charity, spiritual direction by the Director, spirit of

faith, uniformity in community life, obedience, good example, being sure that a Brother does not go out alone, working with the Brother in charge of purchasing, cleanliness of the house, and scheduling the cook's day.

The quotations cited by Brother Félix-Paul to illustrate these topics are too numerous to give in this Appendix. It would be sufficient to read the letters to the Directors, as grouped together in this present edition, to appreciate his selection of these topics as illustrative of De La Salle's focus in the spiritual direction of these Directors.

In the management of his school, the Director is strongly advised against accepting pay or gifts from the students or their parents. There are also indications that De La Salle is concerned about the number of students in each class, that they be taught well and treated with respect and kindness in order to encourage them to stay in school and to attract other students to enroll. Part of this concern is probably De La Salle's desire to have a school with enough students to require a community of three or more Brothers rather than just two.

Other directives regarding the role of the Director in school include the importance of his presence there and of his speaking but briefly with people who visit the school.

In summary, for De La Salle the Director is to be the vigilant guardian of the community's fidelity to the Rule, responsible before God for the Brothers in the same way that each Brother is responsible for his students. He is to be a leader for all his Brothers in this fidelity, an exemplar of all the religious virtues expected of the others. This characteristic guarantees the perseverance of the Brothers and their effective work in the schools.

B. Letters to the Brothers

There is a kind of abrupt quality to all the letters that De La Salle wrote to the Brothers. Directives follow one after the other without logical connections. Imperatives, such as "you must," "you ought to," and "take care to"—most often without explanation or comment—can seem on the surface to lack paternal kindness.

It must be realized, however, that the context of this correspondence did not lend itself to a leisurely, much less a literary, style. The letters written by a Brother were monthly reports to his Superior about the Brother's observance of the Rule and about any problems the Brother was facing. De La Salle, usually responding item by item to the Brother's letter, was forced to be brief and to the point because of his many other responsibilities, his lack of time, and the need to answer promptly. The Brothers knew, of course, exactly why he stressed certain matters; they knew too the reasons for his brevity.

It is probable that all the Brothers had the same freedom as the Directors to omit the articles in the directory of topics for their monthly letter when they had nothing to report on them. It is also possible that the Brothers sometimes reported on just a few items that were of concern to them and that De La Salle would limit his response to only one of these. For example, some of the letters preserved in Ms. 22 (Letters 88 to 94) are entirely devoted to one theme, such as prayer, self-denial, or obedience, in contrast to the many topics that are dealt with in the autograph letters. Perhaps some of these letters are only excerpts taken from one or more letters to illustrate a theme, similar to the way that Blain uses the letters in Book Four, *The Mind and Heart of John Baptist de La Salle*.

Despite the insistence on small points of the Rule such as the immediate response to the first sound of the bell or the repetition of the same advice often in almost identical words, the letters in which De La Salle gives spiritual direction to his Brothers reveal his love and his compassion for them, his great desire to see them be fervent in the service of God and of the children under their care.

Brother Félix-Paul, following the directory of the 31 articles proposed for the monthly letters, selects eight recurring themes in De La Salle's responses. These eight, in turn, can be summarized under three main headings:

1) The difficulties of health, of conscience, or of temptations experienced by the Brothers. In dealing with this honest sharing of the problems of his Brothers, De La Salle shows himself to be very gentle and encouraging, as well as realistic, about the challenges of the spiritual life and about fidelity to God's inspirations in order to meet these challenges successfully.

2) Fidelity to the requirements of community life: obedience, fidelity to the Rule, frequent reception of the sacraments, attentive assistance at holy Mass, silence and interior recollection, spiritual reading, particular examination, interior prayer, love for mortification and humiliation, and fraternal charity.

3) Fidelity to the regulations of school life, especially as detailed in *Conduite des Écoles chrétiennes*.

In all this advice, De La Salle endeavors to apply to individual Brothers the help that each one needs to achieve a balance between fidelity to spiritual exercises properly so-called and to school work in all its aspects. He also expresses the concern to balance a Brother's commitment to the teaching of secular subjects and the teaching of religion and to balance kindness and firmness in the discipline of the students. De La Salle warns, in particular, against slapping any of the children.

C. Letters to Brother Gabriel Drolin

The correspondence of De La Salle with Gabriel Drolin is special because of the unique relationship that the Founder had with this Brother, who was sent on a very important mission and left alone almost from the beginning, a Brother probably selected for this assignment because of his very particular union with De La Salle from the time of the Heroic Vow, which they made together in 1691. The 20 letters that Drolin fortunately preserved out of love for his spiritual director are also special because of Gabriel's unique position: without community life and so distant from De La Salle for such a long period of time, from 1702 until the Founder's death in 1719.

De La Salle mentions 12 times in these 20 letters his desire and plan to send a companion to be with Drolin: Letters 17 and 19 of 1705, Letters 21 to 24 of 1706, Letter 26 of 1707, Letters 27 and 28 of 1710, Letter 29 of 1711, Letter 31 of 1712, and Letter 32 of 1716. Such was the Founder's desire to normalize as far as possible the religious life of his trusted friend. To balance this unfulfilled desire, De La Salle had his usual recourse to trust in God's Providence, which he discerned in the events of his life. Perhaps as much as anywhere else in his writings, De La Salle reveals his own reliance on God's Providence in his letters to Drolin. It is in Letter 18, in particular, that he speaks so personally about his own approach toward this aspect of his life:

As for myself, I do not like to make the first move in anything, and I will not do so in Rome any more than elsewhere. Providence must take the first step, and then I am satisfied. When it seems that I am acting only under its orders, I have no reason to reproach myself. If I make the first move, it is always I alone, and I do not expect good results, nor does God, who usually does not give it much of a blessing.¹⁶¹

A major topic stressed in De La Salle's letters to Drolin is the importance of Drolin's fidelity to the duties of his vocation as a Brother: teaching poor children without charge, wearing the garb of the Brothers, not using a Latin New Testament, and keeping up the personal contact of regular correspondence. De La Salle likewise makes delicate references to the possibility of Drolin's assuming Holy Orders.

In response to Drolin's own admission of failure, De La Salle frequently encourages him to avoid socializing so that he can be more at-

161. Letter 18, paragraphs 17 and 18.

tentive to prayer and to the interior life. Similarly, he reproves Drolin for writing “useless letters” (Letter 21).

De La Salle was rewarded for his trust in and fidelity to Drolin over the troubled years by the responding fidelity and perseverance of his friend, even in isolation and even for years after the Founder’s death. Fortunately, in the last letter De La Salle wrote to him, Drolin could preserve with special affection these words:

I assure you that I have great tenderness and affection for you and often pray to God for you. . . . I was greatly encouraged by your last letter; your continuing affection and warmheartedness have given me much joy. . . . Please let us know how you are getting along.¹⁶²

Perhaps this is the letter, as Blain informs us, that Drolin always kept with him in his pocket.

D. Letters to People Who Are Not Brothers

There are ten letters in the collection that were written to members of religious communities who sought spiritual direction from De La Salle. One (Letter 105) is written to a man; Blain, who is the source of this letter, does not indicate to whom it was addressed.¹⁶³ The others were probably written to certain Daughters of the Cross, Dominicans, in Paris, whom De La Salle might have been directing as early as 1703.

The style of these letters is quite different than the style of his letters to the Brothers. To the other religious De La Salle takes more care to explain his advice in logically developed paragraphs. With the Brothers he has no need for this. He is confident that they understand the reasons for his directions, for he has guided them in the novitiate and on retreats as well as in personal encounters.

The topics of these letters include the practice of fraternal charity (Letter 105), fidelity to the Rule (Letter 106), obedience and the spirit of faith (Letter 107), trust in God (Letter 108), and the practice of silence and interior prayer (Letters 111 and 113). In all these matters, the doctrine is undoubtedly Lasallian, although the style of presentation is more formal than his familiar style in writing to the Brothers.

The formal style is also shown in the four short excerpts from the letters to a laywoman (Letters 115 to 118), although these are almost too brief to note anything else except that their content is focused on the spirit of faith, a topic of special concern to De La Salle.

162. Letter 32, paragraphs 3, 7, and 8.

163. CL 8:390; Blain, Book Four, *The Mind and Heart of John Baptist de La Salle*, 358.

Appendix C

Numbering of the Letters

Below is a comparative listing of the numbering of the letters in this present volume (**LP**, Lasallian Publications) with those in **BL** (*De La Salle: Letters and Documents*, edited by W. J. Battersby), **ÉC** (*Les Lettres de Saint J.-B. de La Salle: Édition Critique*, edited by Brother Félix-Paul), and **OC** (*Œuvres Complètes*, Études Lasalliennes, Rome). *Œuvres Complètes* (OC) presents the letters in three groups: *Lettres autographes* (LA), in De La Salle's handwriting, pages 511–551; *Lettres copiées* (LC), copies of De La Salle's letters written in someone else's hand, pages 555–567; *Lettres imprimées* (LI), letters of De La Salle cited by his early biographers (Bernard, Blain, and Maillefer), pages 571–594.

LP	BL	ÉC	OC	LP	BL	ÉC	OC
1	I.1	111	LA 111	26	I.21	26	LA 26
2	II.4	102	LA 102	27	I.33	27	LA 27
3	I.2	10	LA 10	28	I.34	28	LA 28
4	I.43	11	LA 11	29	I.37	29	LA 29
5	I.44	12	LA 12	30	I.38	30	LA 30
6	III.9	93	LC 93	31	I.39	31	LA 31
7	I.3	33	LA 33	32	I.41	32	LA 32
8	I.16	34	LA 34	32-a	IV.Ap.2	32-a	
9	I.26	35	LA 35	32-b		32-b	
10	I.52	36	LA 36	33	I.6	112	LA 112
11	I.32	37	LA 37	34	I.7	113	LA 113
12	II.5	38	LA 38	35	II.2	114	LC 114
13	II.1	13	LC 13	36	I.51	52	LA 52
14	I.5	14	LA 14	37		64	LI 64
15	I.4	15	LA 15	38	III.26	53	LI 53
16	I.8	16	LA 16	39	I.45	54	LA 54
17	I.9	17	LA 17	40	I.47	55	LA 55
18	I.10	18	LA 18	41	I.46	56	LA 56
19	I.11	19	LA 19	42	I.49	57	LA 57
20	I.12	20	LA 20	43	II.6	69	LC 69
21	I.13	21	LA 21	44	I.50	58	LA 58
22	I.14	22	LA 22	45	III.4	59	LI 59
23	I.15	23	LA 23	46	III.3	60	LI 60
24	I.17	24	LA 24	47	III.2	61	LI 61
25	I.19	25	LA 25	48	I.48	62	LA 62

LP	BL	ÉC	OC	LP	BL	ÉC	OC
49	III.16	70	LI 70	80	III.7	82	LI 82
50	II.3	9	LC 9	81	III.12	83	LI 83
51	I.18	63	LA 63	82	III.13	84	LI 84
52	III.28	75	LC 75	83	III.5	85	LI 85
52-a	IV.4	41-a	LA 135	84	III.21	86	LI 86
52-b	IV.4	41-b	LA 136	85	III.17	87	LI 87
52-c	IV.4	41-c	LA 137	86	III.19	89	LI 89
53	I.35	40	LA 40	87	III.22	90	LI 90
54	I.40	41	LA 41	88	III.10	94	LC 94
55	I.20	42	LA 42	89	III.24	95	LC 95
52-a	IV.4	41-a	LA 135	90	III.27	96	LC 96
52-b	IV.4	41-b	LA 136	91	III.30	97	LC 97
52-c	IV.4	41-c	LA 137	92	III.32	98	LC 98
53	I.35	40	LA 40	93	III.33	99	LC 99
54	I.40	41	LA 41	94	III.34	100	LC 100
55	I.20	42	LA 42	95		79	LI 79
56	I.23	43	LA 43	96		80	LI 80
57	I.24	44	LA 44	97		81	LI 81
58	I.25	45	LA 45	98		103	LI 103
59	I.27	46	LA 46	99		104	LI 104
60	I.22	47	LA 47	100		105	LI 105
61	I.28	48	LA 48	101		106	LI 106
62	I.29	49	LA 49	102		107	LI 107
63	I.30	50	LA 50	103		108	LI 108
64	I.31	51	LA 51	104		109	LI 109
64-a		51-a		105		119	LI 119
65	III.8	92	LC 92	106		121	LI 121
66	III.14	71	LI 71	107		124	LI 124
67	III.20	72	LI 72	108		122	LI 122
68	III.23	88	LI 88	109		123	LI 123
69	III.6	91	LC 91	110		125	LI 125
70	III.36	101	LC 101	111		126	LI 126
71	III.18	73	LC 73	112		127	LI 127
72	I.36	1	LA 1	113		128	LI 128
73	III.1	66	LI 66	114		129	LI 129
74	III.11	67	LI 67	115		130	LI 130
75	III.15	68	LI 68	116		131	LI 131
76	III.25	74	LC 74	117		132	LI 132
77	III.29	76	LC 76	118		133	LI 133
78	III.31	77	LC 77	119		39	LI 39
79	III.35	78	LC 78	120		118	LI 118

LP	BL	ÉC	OC
121		115	LI 115
122		116	LI 116
123		117	LI 117
124		2	LI 2
125	I.42	3	LA 3
126		4	LI 4
127		5	LI 5
128		6	LI 6
129		7	LI 7
130		8	LI 8
131		120	LI 120
132	IV.Ap.1	65	LI 65
133			LA 134
133-a			
134		110	LI 110

Canon Jean-Baptiste Blain cites the following letters of John Baptist de La Salle in Book Four of his biography of the Founder, entitled in the English edition, *The Mind and Heart of John Baptist de La Salle*:

Letter	Page	Letter	Page	Letter	Page
38	326, 374	96	229	114	199
46	325, 446	97	391	115	82
47	445	98	232	116	82
49	509	99	496	117	82
66	358	100	81	118	83
67	257	101	148	120	109
68	192, 200	102	149	121	72
73	325	103	258	122	398
74	324	104	108	123	398
75	325, 496	105	358, 359	124	231
80	408	106	262	126	257
82	409	107	446	127	160
83	149	108	497	128	30
84	84	109	410	129	457
85	162	110	297	130	457
86	200	111	187	131	161
87	232	112	163	132	66
95	496	113	164		

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Index

A

accusation of faults, 8, 32, 46
advertisement of defects, 8, 43, 46; appreciation of, 20, 26, 205–06
assignments to community: indifference to, 22, 40, 135, 161, 169
Avignon: as “second capital” of Institute, 281; success of schools in, 68, 70, 72

B

Barthélemy, Brother (Superior General), 38, 244; letters to, from De La Salle, 244–49; as Director of Novices at Saint Yon, 143, 244; deputed to visit communities concerning proposed General Chapter (1717), 123; succeeds De La Salle as Superior General, 120, 123, 125; letters of, to Gabriel Drolin, 123–27; cancels negotiations for foundation in Canada, 125; notifies Drolin of De La Salle’s death, 126–27; death of, 125
Battersby, W. J.: edition of De La Salle’s letters (1952), 10, 11, 12
Blain, Canon Jean-Baptiste: letters of De La Salle in biography by, 3, 12
Brothers of the Christian Schools; evolution of the Institute of. *See under* La Salle, John Baptist de

C

charity, fraternal: and bearing confreres’ defects, 187, 221–23; and cordial relationships, 141, 154, 187–88, 196
Chartres: foundations in, 45–47, 51, 53–54, 280; deaths of Brothers in, during epidemic, 75, 76
Château-Porcien: foundation in, 15–17, 279, 280
church, functions in: prohibited to Brothers by De La Salle, 35, 37, 39, 129, 132, 157
class, conduct of the Brothers in: *fêrule*, use of, 150, 151; impatience, 20, 35, 148, 150, 214, 219, 239; name calling, 26; order, 41; seriousness, 36, 157, 215; signal, use of, 239; silence, 148, 239; supervision of students, 142
Clément, Abbé: and lawsuit against De La Salle, 107, 112, 115, 120
Communion, Holy: anxiety about receiving, 148; benefits of, 212; days for receiving, according to the Rule, 46, 48; not to be omitted, 50, 142, 212
corporal punishment of students: prohibition of, 26–27, 140, 146, 149, 159, 214

D

Darnétal: foundation in, 31, 128–29, 132, 138, 140, 143, 280
Dijon: foundation in, 81, 132–33, 280
discouragement, 213, 220
Divers, Father René (Procurator of the Vincentians, Rome): befriends Gabriel Drolin, 58, 71, 74, 86, 87, 101, 102, 105

Drolin, Brother Gabriel, 54–122; Heroic Vow with De La Salle and Nicolas Vuyart, 56, 72, 74; school authorized, 86; financial difficulties, 90, 92–93; letters to, from De La Salle, 54–122, 280, 281, 282, 286–87; letters to, from Brother Barthélemy, 123–27; aspires to clerical state, 92, 93, 102, 105, 106–07, 120; reminded to wear the Brothers’ robe, 104, 106, 108, 110, 113, 116; cautioned against worldliness, 69, 72, 76, 101, 105, 106, 114. *See also under* Divers, Father René; La Bussière, Claude de; Theodon, Monsieur and Madame

Drolin, Brother Gérard (brother of Gabriel), 54, 99, 102, 103; befriended by De La Salle after leaving Institute, 94, 96

F

faith, spirit of, 219, 236, 237

famine

—of 1683–84: De La Salle disposes of his wealth during, 55, 165

—of 1708–09: hardships of Brothers during, 45, 47, 58, 151, 155, 190, 191, 201

Félix-Paul, Brother: editions of letters of De La Salle, 10, 11, 12, 279–87

Fiacre, Brother: assists and then replaces Gabriel Drolin in Rome, 127

finances, management of community, 49, 50, 51, 78, 79

free schools in seventeenth-century France, 4–5

G

General Chapter (1717): preparations for, 117, 123; elects Brother Barthélemy as Superior General, 120, 123, 125

gratuity in teaching, 72, 90, 94, 95; De La Salle’s insistence on, 75, 95, 146, 215

Guise: foundation in, 42, 43

H

Heroic Vow, 56, 73, 74, 247

holiday, weekly school: community walk on, 50

Hubert, Brother: Director at Laon, 35, 38; at Guise, 42, 43; at Chartres, 45, 47, 51, 53; in General Chapters (1717, 1720, 1745, 1751), 33; difficulties of, with community, 40, 42, 45, 46, 49, 50; anxious to be changed, 40, 43; letters from De La Salle to, 33–51; blindness and death of, 51

humiliations, acceptance of, 228–29

Hyacinthe, Brother, 45, 47, 50; changes from serving Brother to teaching Brother, 47, 54; as Director at Mende, then at Saint-Denis, 47

I

Irénée, Brother: as former soldier, 237; as possible assistant to Gabriel Drolin in Rome, 117, 122–23; struggles with his vocation, 237–38; as Director of Novices, 237; as Assistant Superior General, 238

J

- Jansenism, 9, 122, 239, 241, 248, 252, 253; Jean-François Maillefer's adherence to, 9, 238–40; Jean-Louis de La Salle's adherence to, 122, 253, 261–62; John Baptist de La Salle upholds Church's condemnation of, 9, 10, 122, 127, 239, 248, 252, 253, 261
- Joseph, Brother: as Director at Rouen, 161, 162; De La Salle's letters to, 161–68, 280; authorized to make visitations of communities, 161–63

L

- La Bussière, Claude de: forwards De La Salle's letters to Gabriel Drolin in Rome, 63, 69, 82, 99, 102; lets Drolin live in his house, 65, 71, 85, 101; Drolin leaves house of, 72, 75, 78, 80, 83, 86, 87
- La Chétardie, Joachim de (pastor of Saint Sulpice): hostility of, toward De La Salle, 64, 65, 80, 95, 96, 112
- Laon: foundation in, 35, 38, 39, 48
- La Salle, Jean-Louis de (brother of John Baptist): as adherent of Jansenism, 122, 253, 261; John Baptist's regard for, 262; letter of John Baptist to, on family financial matters, 255–58; letter of, to John Baptist on family financial matters, 258–62
- La Salle, Jean-Remy de (brother of John Baptist), 255, 256, 257, 258
- La Salle, John Baptist de: evolution of Institute of, 1–8; difficulties of, in establishing Institute, 242; disposes of wealth during famine, 55, 165; Heroic Vow of, 56, 73, 74, 247; financial problems of, 65, 78, 80, 83, 85, 86; fall in snow, 96, 99; hostility of Joachim de La Chétardie toward, 64, 65, 80, 94, 95, 112; hostility toward, in Marseille, 120–21; hostility toward, in Mende, 121; upholds Church's condemnation of Jansenism, 9, 10, 122, 127, 239–41, 248, 251, 252, 253, 255, 261; retreat at Parménie, 3, 237; ill at Saint Yon, 117, 120; resigns as Superior of the Institute, 124–25; retires at Saint Yon, 247–48; last will and testament of, 126–27; death of, 126–27, 263. *See also* Letters of De La Salle
- Latin: De La Salle's opposition to, 39, 60–61, 75, 99
- Letters of De La Salle: in Blain's biography of De La Salle, 3, 12; editions of, 10–12, 31, 279; evolution of, 3, 9; how to read, 265; important information about Institute revealed in, 279–82; missing, 3–4; number of, 4; spiritual direction revealed in, 282–87, style of, 8–9, 287; subject matter of, 8–9, 33, 284, 285, 287
- L'Heureux, Brother Henri: sudden death of, while preparing for priesthood, 3

M

- Maillefer, Canon Jean-François (priest, nephew of De La Salle): as adherent of Jansenism, 10, 239, 240, 241; De La Salle's letter of appeal to, 239–41; respected by Jean-Louis de La Salle, 259

manifestation of conscience. *See under* reddition

Marseille: foundations in, 79, 88; hostility toward De La Salle in, 120–21

Mass: attention during, 197; daily, for students, 146–47; De La Salle's method for hearing, 148, 197–98; importance of, 20; supervision of students during, 146–147

Masters of the Little Schools, 1, 8, 24, 70, 86

Mathias, Brother: an effective teacher, 168, 171; requests frequent changes of community, 168, 169, 170, 171, 172, 173, 174, 179, 180, 182–83, 184; letters to, from De La Salle, 168–83; letter to, from Brother Ponce, 184–86; abandons Institute, 168

Mende: foundation in, 97, 100, 121, 166–167, 171, 172

mortification of mind and senses, 22, 25, 26, 32, 153, 159, 187, 211–12

N

Norbert, Brother (Director in Calais), 50, 53

Nyel, Adrien: foundations of, 1, 16, 35, 42; absences from schools, 1, 4

O

obedience: advantages of, 34, 152, 153, 154, 196, 225, 226; De La Salle's, 249; indifference to the objects of, 152, 159, 225, 226; motive for, 28, 236

P

Paris: foundations in, 1, 95, 96, 161, 191

patience, 30, 134, 140, 195, 197; in a Director, 51, 216; when administering punishment to students, 148

Penance: acts of, 32, 142; sacrament of, 148, 212

Ponce, Brother

–as Director: at Darnétal, 138–40; at Saint Sulpice, 80; at Rouen, 78, 80; at Avignon, 101, 122; at Mende, 97, 99, 171, 172; at Les Vans, 186

–harsh treatment by, of young Brothers, 80, 156

–forwards De La Salle's letters to Gabriel Drolin in Rome, 58, 102, 104, 122

–De La Salle's letter to, 156–57

–letter of, to Brother Mathias, 184–86

–abandons Institute, 80, 122, 156

poverty: love of, 139; of Brothers during famine of 1708–1709, 47, 58, 190, 191, 201

prayer, 21, 25, 34, 41, 44, 232–33; De La Salle's method of interior, 21, 36, 208; distractions in, 40, 183, 191, 208; obstacles to, 28, 140, 145, 148, 183, 208, 221; and spiritual reading, 20, 140, 188; vocal, 25, 41, 42

prayers: composed by De La Salle for school and for Mass, 71, 77, 79, 82, 83

presence of God, 20, 22, 25, 189, 194, 210, 218

Providence, abandonment to, 60, 63, 79, 82, 190, 219, 226–28; De La Salle's, 55, 63, 76, 84, 85, 165, 190, 286

purity: temptations against, 35, 36, 238

R

reading, spiritual: as preparation for prayer, 20, 140, 188

recollection, interior, 22, 30, 140, 193, 194, 218

recreation: avoiding frivolity at, 28, 37, 49; importance of, 22, 30, 43; no work during, 36; topics of conversation during, 36

reddition: directories of topics for, 20, 44, 267–77; made to Brother Director, 37, 44, 46, 142, 143; manifestation of conscience in, 44, 46, 183, 214, 238; monthly letters of, to De La Salle, 3, 9, 20–21, 27, 33, 44, 76, 109, 183, 238, 267, 283–84

Règle du Frère Directeur d'une Maison de l'Institut, 267, 282, 283

Reims: foundations in, 1, 3

religion: priority of, in studies and in teaching, 216

reprimands: necessity for Director to give, 49, 50, 51; manner of giving, 188

Rigault, Georges: and Brother Félix-Paul's *Édition critique* of De La Salle's letters, 10–12

Rigoley, M. Claude: initiates foundation in Dijon, 132–33

Rome: Gabriel Drolin's mission in, 54–59; types of schools in, 57

Rouen: foundations in, 24, 25, 27, 78, 137, 161, 162; Brothers overburdened with work in, 134, 135–36

Rule of the Brothers of the Christian Schools: evolution of, 5–8; fidelity to, 22, 40, 41, 123, 159, 188, 214, 223; influences on De La Salle's composition of, 5–7, 224–25; motive for observing, 220, 223, 224

S

Saint Yon: acquisition of property at, 29, 31, 80, 133, 136, 245, 246; novitiate at, 31, 117, 247; boarding school, retreat house, and house for delinquents at, 31; community of, 135, 136, 247; novices transferred from, during famine, 191; De La Salle's room in retirement at 247–48

serving Brothers: introduction of, in Institute, 39, 53, 54, 136; work of, 36, 39, 43, 48, 49, 50, 53, 54, 136, 168; robe of, 39, 53; change from, to teaching Brothers, 47, 54; change from teaching Brothers to, 145; concept abandoned, 54

silence, 46, 209; advantages of, 134, 193, 209, 234, 235; and speaking softly, 145, 149, 156, 193

spiritual exercises: be as concerned with as with class work, 180, 183; Director's absence from, 41, 43, 48, 49; fidelity to, 50, 180, 190; idle talk during, 46; omit rather than take class time, 143, 145; promptness in obeying bell for, 49, 149, 199

spiritual reading. *See* reading, spiritual

T

teaching, gratuity in. *See* gratuity in teaching

Théodon, Monsieur and Madame: befriend Gabriel Drolin in Rome, 60, 61, 62, 63, 78, 83, 87

Thomas, Brother (Institute Bursar), 136, 137, 244, 245, 246

time, value of, 142

tobacco: De La Salle's prohibition of use of, 151

Troyes: foundation in, 164, 165, 280

V

vocation, doubts about, 22, 35, 238

Vow, Heroic: by De La Salle, Gabriel Drolin, and Nicolas Vuyart, 56, 73, 74, 247

vows of the Brothers, 35, 38; renewal of, 249

Vuyart, Brother Nicolas: Heroic Vow of, with De La Salle and Gabriel Drolin, 56, 73, 74, 247; Director in Paris, 74; abandons Institute, 56, 73, 74

W

whims: acting on, 31, 32, 34, 40, 49, 51, 173, 174, 177, 274

worries: making known to Director, 34

Writing Masters: opposition of, to free schools, 1, 8, 24, 70, 95, 138; win legal suit against De La Salle, 65, 86, 161

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