

De La Salle at Parménie: A Classroom Experience

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A De La Salle Christian Brother recently told me that "Lasallian" is something you do. He said this in the context of what he perceived as too much palaver about the term and too little actual practice. The explanation for this perception is not mysterious: it is much more difficult to do something that is Lasallian than to merely talk about it. This is especially true when it comes to teaching. In the introduction to the *Conduct of Christian Schools*, De La Salle wrote that "[n]othing has been added that has not been thoroughly deliberated and well tested."² One true aspect of Lasallian praxis, illustrated by this iconic resource, is this element of practicality, a respect for the results of trial and error. In the spirit of this pivotal pedagogical text, it is clear that something "Lasallian" involves something that is taught, something that is done in the classroom, and done with a zeal for a well-ordered schoolroom. This article focuses on an attempt to design just such an activity.

Brother Don Mouton has recently published in these pages two manuscripts that he edited by Brother Leo Burkhard on De La Salle's experience at Parménie.³ Coincidentally with Brother Don's work, I introduced a version of Brother Leo's work into the classroom. It was an attempt to apply something authentically "Lasallian," which I define, in this context, as directly pertaining to John Baptist de La Salle and the Brothers of the Christian Schools, in an effort to bring them and their experiences into the classroom on a very practical level. It was especially interesting to introduce students to varied interpretations by three Christian Brothers of a moment in the Founder's life.

If this classroom activity is something worth recounting here, I would like to proceed by laying out the curriculum and the course in which I used these Lasallian texts; a comparison of these texts to each other; the assignment that the students have to complete; and how they responded to becoming engaged with the experience of De La Salle on a very personal level. All of this is for the very useful purpose of exploring how we can connect the Lasallian identity and mission of our universities to practical classroom activities.

The Course

Saint Mary's University of Minnesota's general education program contains the Lasallian Core Traditions program. It consists of four courses organized so that students have to take one each year. The catalog description of the program reads:

The Lasallian Core Traditions Program is the required core for the majority of the students in the undergraduate college, and completion of the core curriculum partially fulfills the general education requirement. This core provides a common Lasallian educational experience for students and is grounded in the university mission and the Lasallian dispositions of faith, zeal, service, and community. These four commitments underscore the ultimate aim of the program: to awaken

and nurture the intellectual, spiritual, and personal development of learners in preparation for lives of service and commitment to social justice.⁴

In sum, the purpose of the program is to provide a common experience, informed by the university's mission, and particularly focused on the personal development of our students. LCT225 Perspectives on the Good Human Life, which I teach and in which I embedded this Lasallian unit, takes the “intellectual, spiritual, and personal development of learners” seriously within the concept of the good human life.

The catalog description of LCT225 reads:

Perspectives on the good human life, taken in the sophomore year, moves beyond the first year seminar focus of self-identity to explore various historical and contemporary perspectives on living life well. In the spirit of LaSalle's commitment to serving others and his recognition of the value of those less fortunate, this course challenges students to examine how their own pursuit of the good life fits into a larger social and historical picture. As a writing-intensive course, Perspectives allows students the opportunity to develop their writing skills from the initial stages of critical reading to drafting and revision.⁵

The course, therefore, has a historical component and we read texts from various times and places in Western history, and since the course is multidisciplinary as well, we also read texts representative of various disciplines, in my case philosophical, historical, literary, theological, and sociological ones. The unit on the encounter of De La Salle at Parménie I define as early modern and theological in the context of the course because it occurs in the early eighteenth century and is particularly God-centered.⁶

One of the challenges of teaching a course organized around the concept of the good human life, with the express purpose of developing students' intellectual, spiritual and personal lives, is how personal it should be. Is the goal of the course to evaluate who is good and who is bad? Is its goal to determine who will respond to an ethical issue well and who will not? Clearly the answer to both questions is no. The instructor's task is not to judge individual students nor is he or she competent to predict how a student might respond to an ethical dilemma on the way to the cafeteria from the classroom. So, what is the responsibility of the instructor? My own answer found clarity and security in a rubric developed by the American Association of Colleges and Universities (AACU) entitled the *Ethical Reasoning Value Rubric*. (See Appendix) The rubric contains defining and framing language and then divides the rubric itself into five outcomes. The AACU invites instructors and institutions to adapt their rubric to specific needs, so we adapted it to the language of the course in the following way:

Students will be able to:

- Understand various ethical perspectives on the Good Human Life;
- Evaluate those various ethical perspectives;
- Identify and recognize ethical issues presented by these perspectives;
- Apply ethical perspectives to an ethical issue; and
- Discuss one's own core beliefs and the origin of those beliefs.

The first four of these goals are intellectual. The instructor evaluates not the goodness of each student or the likelihood of the student to act ethically, but rather the capacity of each student to reason ethically through the various skills of understanding, evaluating, identifying, and applying. These culminate in the ability of the student to become more aware of his or her core beliefs and whether or not they have been arrived at through careful and systematic inquiry rather than happenstance or mere prejudice. This then is the context within which the texts on De La Salle's crisis are encountered.

The Texts

The first text I use is *Encounters: De La Salle at Parménie* by Leo Burkhard, FSC, Ph.D., and Luke Salm, FSC, S.T.D.⁷ I use only the introduction, prologue, and chapters one through four. The text is a translation by Brother Luke of the original French written by Brother Leo. Brother Luke also edited, summarized and added supplementary material to the text, making it a truly joint publication. It focuses on the period from 1711 to 1714 when De La Salle left Paris in the wake of the Clément Affair where he was accused of suborning a minor, Jean-Charles Clément, who had pledged funds to open a training school for rural schoolmasters but then reneged on the pledge, while his father sued De La Salle who was ultimately condemned on May 31, 1712. In the midst of this legal drama De La Salle had traveled to the south to visit the still-new schools he had established there. He was generally ill-received by the Brothers and both civil and ecclesiastical leaders as someone who was disrupting the status quo. There are also certain cultural factors rooted in the significant difference between the north and south of France. In addition, communication between De La Salle and Brother Barthélemy gave the Founder a sense that Barthélemy had thrown in with his enemies. De La Salle then stopped answering letters from the Brothers and informing them of his whereabouts. These events threw De La Salle into a crisis in which he pondered the meaning of his life, his calling from God, and his relationship with the Brothers and the Institute.⁸ It should be noted that in his response to Miguel Campos and Jean-Louis Schneider, but not in the text I use in class, Brother Leo challenges much of this narrative and comes very close to denying that there ever really was a crisis. For example, he refers to a "myth of abandonment," by which he means the assertion that De La Salle contemplated leaving the Institute.⁹

In the introduction, Brother Leo reveals the very personal nature of his text as he describes his own encounter with Parménie. The fact that he does not introduce De La Salle until chapter three illustrates well his emphasis on the place of Parménie and the person of Sister Louise, who De La Salle encountered when he accepted the temporary position of spiritual director as he filled in for a colleague called away to conduct some business. Sister Louise was a poor shepherdess, illiterate, who was called by God to rebuild the ruins that was Parménie. As an uneducated woman in the privileged and stratified France of Louis XIV, who managed to raise funds, recruit a priest-director, and build a complex of chapel and residences, she was extraordinary. Brother Leo's thesis is straightforward: Sister Louise was instrumental in convincing De La Salle not to abandon the Institute and to return to Paris, and by so doing she saved the fledgling society. He also places a good deal of emphasis on the role of Providence, especially as understood to be operating through Sister Louise.¹⁰

Brother Luke inserts a good deal of information in chapter three on the situation in the south, in Marseilles, Mende, and Grenoble, describing the political situation both within the Institute and in each of those cities. In this way he redirects the narrative back to the Brothers from Parménie. Chapter four is entirely written by Brother Luke. While he supports Brother Leo's thesis by citing information from the early biographical sources, he also reconfigures the thesis in the form of two basic questions. The first is: Was De La Salle thinking seriously of leaving the Institute to spend his last days in retirement and solitude? The second is: Once he had decided to obey the command of the Brothers to resume direction of the Institute, why did it take him so long to return to Paris?¹¹ In this way he introduces his own thesis consisting of three parts. He very helpfully defines the crisis in terms of discernment: what was God telling the Founder to do? Citing the work of Brother Miguel Campos, he also defines the crisis as one of personal identity. Finally, he introduces the theme of abandonment, at one point asking who was abandoning whom, De La Salle by the Institute or the Institute by De La Salle?¹² All of these ideas function as useful teaching tools while providing an alternative explanation to Brother Leo's emphasis on Parménie and Sister Louise.¹³

Brother Jean-Louis Schneider's article "John Baptist de La Salle 1711-1714 or 'The Temptation of *Parménie*'" does not reference Brother Leo's and Luke's text, signaling quite a different approach.¹⁴ If Brother Leo's text is a personal appreciation of the role that Sister Louise and Providence played in De La Salle's life, and if Brother Luke's is historical in the sense of providing the context for understanding De La Salle's crisis, Brother Jean-Louis's article is a deeper psychological analysis much more closely connected to the Institute of the Brothers of the Christian Schools. He begins by greatly expanding the historical context, focusing on five key happenings. They are the War of the Spanish Succession; the revolt of the Camisards or rural Protestants; a fierce winter and famine in 1709; the end of the long reign of Louis XIV and the question of succession; and the condemnation of Jansenism by the papal bull *Unigenitus* in 1713. In this Brother Jean-Louis connects the tumult of De La Salle's life with the turmoil of his times. Moreover, the entire article is closely based on primary sources, especially the biography of Blain and the Brothers' letter of April 1, 1714.¹⁵ Through this approach Brother Jean-Louis signals a much more social scientific and textual approach than the more theological one of Brother Leo.

At this point Brother Jean-Louis introduces a generational argument which is also an essentially psychological one. In the first literal sense, De La Salle was the oldest member of the Institute and often a full generation older than the other Brothers. In the second, the Founder was a product of a triumphant, hierarchical, and absolutist Catholic Reformation and royal culture of Louis XIV, while most of the Brothers lacked the memory of the trials that the Founder and the first Brothers endured. He applies this analytical instrument to the Clément Affair where he concludes that "there was no longer an intuitive understanding" between De La Salle and the Brothers.¹⁶ This applies as well to the crisis in Marseilles where De La Salle expected obedience to his authority as superior, while the Brothers saw him as too strict and rigid and who was undermining their lives and work which he had come to "destroy."¹⁷ This is, for Brother Jean-Louis, the origin of an existential crisis.

We can pause at this point to examine more closely the nature of De La Salle's crisis. Brothers Leo, Luke, and Jean-Louis, define this crisis in somewhat different ways. For Brother Leo it is

essentially a theological crisis in the sense that De La Salle is struggling to discern God's will and it is resolved through the advice of Sister Louise to return to Paris and to resume governance of the Institute.¹⁸ For Brother Luke it is more a question of identity, as he puts it, "[t]he impact of these events would have been extremely dramatic since they touched De La Salle at the heart of his personal identity . . ." For Brother Jean-Louis it is a full existential crisis.

"God spoke to him no more," according to Blain. How did De La Salle respond as he sought absolute faith and trust in God, as Brother Jean-Louis puts it?¹⁹ The answer is prayer: by visiting the convent of Saint Maximin, the Grande Chartreuse, and the retreat house at Parménie, De La Salle embraced the monastic ethos of prayer, contemplation, and solitude, which is after all derived from the Greek *monos*, alone, to be alone with God.²⁰ It is this temptation to abandon the active life of superior which Brother Jean-Louis calls a "crisis." He contrasts this search for solitude with community, in association with the Brothers, for the purpose of maintaining gratuitous schools, as we shall see.²¹

This section of the text affords the opportunity to explore this existential crisis from a contemporary psychological perspective.²² One source suggests a process for dealing with this sort of crisis in a series of steps that include recognizing that the crisis exists, by choosing a meaning of life, by isolation or by anchoring or distraction. I ask the students if they can relate this process to De la Salle's life. They are able to make the connection between the Lasallian texts and modern psychological theory that De La Salle was indeed acutely aware that he was in crisis, since God spoke to him no more; that he responded to the crisis by a series of efforts to isolate himself in relation to God through monastic abandonment of the world and a life of prayer and contemplation; that he was securely anchored in ordering his life around the plan that God had for him; and that he attempted distraction by working on his writings for the Brothers while at Grenoble.²³ In this way the students grasp the state of De La Salle's mind in a way that is accessible to their own experience.

The final task is to explore the mechanism for the resolution of the crisis and once again the Brothers offer slightly different answers. For Brother Leo resolution comes from God through the mediation of Sister Louise. Brother Luke typically occupies a middle ground. While he does not discount the role of Sister Louise, he balances it with the impact of the letter from the Principal Brothers of April 1, 1714, both of which help De La Salle to decide that God wants him to return to Paris.²⁴ Brother Jean-Louis has an alternative explanation. This comes out of his careful analysis of the Brothers' letter (22-24) asking and ordering DLS to return to Paris.²⁵ While he agrees that resolution comes from God speaking to the Founder, the mechanism through whom God worked is the Brothers. Would the Brothers function as servants of the parish, as a series of many small entities, or, would they associate themselves to serve the universal mission of teaching the poor gratuitously? Who should the Brothers obey? Who possesses clear authority? Some Brothers left the society due to an inability to answer these questions definitively and a lack of personal commitment. These are the profound consequences of a second crisis, the crisis of the Institute.

The "principal Brothers," the oldest Brothers who recall the earlier disputes with secular and ecclesiastical authorities, use a communal language in the letter, "we," "our," "society," "body" to emphasize the bonds of association binding them together. They use the affectionate and

relational term “our very dear Father” to refer to the Founder. Yet they both respectfully “beg” but also “command” De La Salle to take responsibility to govern in obedience to his vows. They challenge him to be faithful to his special calling accorded to him by God to serve the glory of God and the good of the Church and society through his leadership. In a reversal of roles the teacher becomes the student and the community clarifies its purpose as an association dedicated to the universal mission of gratuitous education of the poor. Thus the letter becomes the means to resolve both the existential crisis of De La Salle and the Institute.

God led John Baptist de La Salle into the desert and Monsieur de La Salle discovered him again in the Promised Land of the Community, in Grenoble, and in the letter of the Brothers in Paris. The word of the Community shed light on his life. As a result of this, roles were somewhat reversed. Those who were enlightened by him in their lives now did the same in the life of the Founder. So well had they assimilated the plan of salvation they had lived with him that their word could become a sign.²⁶

Each Brother-author, in his own way, shares a conviction that the Institute had faced a crisis that threatened its very existence, and each sees the divine origins of the resolution and preservation of the society. For Brother Leo this manifests itself in something external and extraordinary in Parménie and the mediation of Sister Louise. For Brother Jean-Louis, it comes from something intrinsic to the Institute, from the Brothers who have absorbed the charism of the Founder and who ask and command him to obey his own vision for the society. One could say that the community that De La Salle struggled to establish from the moment he invited the very first teachers in Reims into his home, was the very cause of his crisis but also of its resolution.

To the end Brother Jean-Louis treats De La Salle in remarkably honest, human terms. For example, the Founder learns to step aside, perhaps presaged by his departure from Paris for the south in which he both tried to flee while still asserting his authority over the Brothers.

In the course of those three years John Baptist learnt to “let go.” He became aware of the discrepancy in ways of thinking, between himself and several Brothers. He had to learn that the Institute was not “his thing,” to learn to live without it and in peace. He came through the trial having learned the place and style of relationships with himself, with others and with the Other, which would enable him to bring to its conclusion the work of God that had been entrusted to him.²⁷

Here Brother Jean-Louis connects the resolution to his generational argument, which is essentially also a relational one. He also introduces the idea of how difficult is it for us to relinquish control of something we have created and feel is ours. This is something students can relate to through their own experience. Perhaps De La Salle came to realize that as Founder and priest he no longer fit into the very society he created which had determined that there would never be clerical control of the Institute. And Brother Jean-Louis suggests that the wounds created by the crisis never fully healed, indicated by De La Salle’s refusal to explain his thinking and actions of the whole episode.²⁸ Perhaps it was just too painful. All in all, the Brother-authors provide diverse but complimentary and accessible yet analytical explorations of the crisis in the Founder’s life.²⁹

The Assignment

At the point in the semester where the students read these Lasallian texts, they have already written three papers. All three paper assignments are similarly organized in five parts, linked to the *Ethical Reasoning Value Rubric*: 1) identify the good human life portrayed in the text in terms of virtues and vices; 2) provide three examples illustrating specific ethical issues; 3) provide an evaluation of the ethical system described in 1 and 2; 4) apply an identified ethical perspective issue to a contemporary one; 5) discuss how all of the above has or has not affected your core values. The course is also coded “writing-intensive” and so there is considerable emphasis placed on how to write an academic essay, practiced through writing six papers.

The paper prompt on De La Salle at Parménie seeks to connect De La Salle’s experience to the good human life by means of the concept of crisis examined by all three Brother-authors. The prompt suggests that we can also consider the crisis an ethical one because it involved choices about right and wrong behavior and choices. Students are asked to consider the origin, nature, resolution, and effects of the crisis. They are required to examine the explanations provided by Brothers Leo, Luke, and Jean-Louis and to provide evidence for their preferred choice. Then they are asked to relate De La Salle’s experience to their own lives. Have they faced a crisis, a tough time in their lives, perhaps the product of a misunderstanding that threatened a close relationship? How can the example of De La Salle’s crisis help us to deal with crises in our own lives? The students respond to these questions in various ways.

The Students’ Response

At a Lasallian university the impact of learning on students’ lives is paramount. The influence of the “De La Salle at Parménie” unit varies, as in every other assignment. In truth, its impact for many students is minimal.³⁰ The reasons for this are probably many, but foremost among them is a failure to engage with the texts, with the idea of crisis, and an inability to identify the ethical issues confronting De La Salle. When a student fails to engage on this level he or she finds little or no basis for associating with him. Such it is in the classroom. Fortunately, the classroom also provides moments of exhilaration when students provide excellent insights into the issue at hand. The following are some of the best responses to the invitation to associate their personal experience with De La Salle’s. (Grammatical and spelling errors have been judiciously corrected and I have suggested a descriptive title for each excerpt.)

God and Us:

De La Salle also helped me understand what kind of an impact a person can have on others. Because he followed God’s will, he was able to affect the lives of many, including current students of the Lasallian school system.

Providence:

The life of De La Salle was full of struggles and obstacles around every corner. De La Salle was a man who was not afraid to stand up for what he believed even if it caused a little trouble. Without his dedication, the Brothers of the Christian schools never would have been started or survived. De La Salle’s view of the good human life taught me a lot about my own views. De La Salle believed that

God guided him in everything he did. He made all his decisions based off what he thought God wanted him to do: "It was in this sense that he was willing to entertain the possibility that perhaps God no longer wished him to remain among the Brothers" (Burkhard & Salm, 63). De La Salle was a man of great faith who believed that God has a plan for us all. When reading the texts about De La Salle, one question kept popping into mind. It said over and over that De La Salle "thought" God wanted him to do this or that. However, what was never talked about was what De La Salle wanted to do himself. What the De La Salle texts made me realize is that I do not think God created us to be his puppets and do whatever he wants. God created us with the intention of letting us live, learn, and make our own mistakes.

Community:

The next story we read was De La Salle at Parmenie. The Christian Perspective did not involve bloodshed and focused on finding strength in God to endure hardships. I agreed with this perspective because it was about sacrificing an individual's need for the greater good of society. The ethical issue found here was individual versus community, which was somewhat similar to the Roman's issue. De La Salle had to choose between what he wanted for himself and what was best for the community. It is similar to the Romans because in both cases someone had to give up what they wanted for the greater good of more individuals.

Identity Crisis:

De La Salle's crisis of identity reminded me recently of my own identity crisis. De La Salle's identity crisis was that he thought the Brothers no longer wanted him as their superior. The identity crisis that I encountered just a few years ago, and am still battling, deals with my ability in making decisions. Before my father passed away, I consulted him on any decision that I ever made. He was my best friend and we looked to each other for advice all the time. When he passed away, I felt abandoned and really struggled with who I was because I literally felt that a part of me was missing. I was not able to make a decisive decision about anything, whether it involved important decisions like what I wanted to major in or where I wanted to go school, to who I should invite to my graduation or what I should wear to a family dinner. I had to learn how to make decisions for myself, and in a way, recreate my own identity without help from anybody. The similar identity crisis that I share with John Baptiste de La Salle helped me to reconfirm and recognize by core beliefs in the good human life with being loyal to my family and friends, following through on commitments I make in regards to keeping promises, trusting others, as well as myself and being honest with myself and others.

Ethical Reasoning:

The reading about De La Salle from this semester was by far the topic that made me use my ethical reasoning and consider my core beliefs, and made me think about who I am as a person. I believe that this reading was the most significant in

regards to my liberal arts education because it made me realize how I could reason through a piece of ethically, challenging writing, and relate it to my own life by applying an ethical perspective to an ethical issue.

The Impact of a Lasallian School:

An experience that I had growing up that was similar to De La Salle's crisis was figuring out the groups of people I wanted to be around growing up. By fifth grade a lot of my friends were in gangs already and they were the ones that I grew up with. I had transferred to a new middle school which coincidentally was a Lasallian school. It was still in a bad neighborhood but I was around new people. One of the school's focuses was to help keep kids at risk like me out of the streets. Every day, they would keep us in the school until five o'clock and that's if we did not play sports because if you did, you had practice until 7 or later if you were an older kid. I admit I was not the most well-mannered kid or the easiest to get along with growing up but there was people around me who for once seemed to care about my life outside of school. At first I was resistant to the school's rules of being there basically all day because I wanted to be with my other friends. Of course, my old friends and I grew apart because I was at school all day and began to say things to negatively reinforce me to hang with them and not listen to the school rules and there were days where I did. By eighth grade, two of my old friends were dead because of gun violence and one was in jail for murder. I realized that the school was protecting me from being in the streets after school by having me in there all day. The challenge came when I graduated from the middle school and went on to high school. I had some time after school but still not a lot. I would hang out with my friends here and there but by the end of sophomore year two more of them were dead and one had been in a coma for 3 months and was in jail for possession of fire arms when it hit me. I realized that [if] I have to follow them and [I could] possibly end up dead someday. There are bigger things than this block in the world and I began to focus on school and ways to stay out of my neighborhood and to excel. I got new friends in high school and a very reliable girlfriend who pushed me like nobody else had in my life to get good grades and focus on the good things in life. I made the honor roll and started doing good in school and it has changed my life since then.

Crisis:

De La Salle went through this major crisis in his life and through this we can learn how to deal with crises in our own life. We have all had crises in our life some bigger than others, some people more than others but learning to deal with them is essential to getting through them. Personally, I think that De La Salle should have faced the crisis head on instead of running away from it. I believe that standing your ground instead running away is better. When you run away, you are just putting off the problem till later and usually it just makes it worse. I can remember times when I had a small crisis on my hands and I ran away from it and in the end it just made it worse. On the other hand, getting away from the crisis can sometimes help you solve the problem. It can give you time to think and breathe and plan out how you are going to overcome this crisis. The problem with

this is if there are other people involved in the crisis and you do not tell them what you are doing, they will think that you are abandoning them. This was the case with De La Salle and the brothers thought he had abandoned them. Dealing with a crisis is not an easy thing but it can be done well with the right planning.

Alienation and Community:

De La Salle and I grew up under totally different circumstances but I can relate to many of the struggles he faced. I was born on the West Side of Chicago in the Austin Community (one of the worst in the city). I grew up surrounded by poverty and crime and often prayed for a savior like De La Salle to come into the picture; however, this was never a reality. After the passing of my father, when I was 12 years old, I was forced to grow up quickly. In my neighborhood, only the strong survive. If you display any weakness it often does not end well and can even cost one his/her life. So, when I came to SMU that mentality was, and in some ways still is, instilled within me. Unfortunately, this causes many people to view me as a threat. I constantly hear rumors on how I'm a bad person, or a drug dealer, or just another ignorant black from the hood that does not belong here. I feel like De La Salle did at times; that my adversaries are constantly trying to set me up for failure (bring me down). People tend to be very prejudiced towards me as if I am this horrible person, when in actuality I am no different from anyone else on this campus.

I let the rumors and the discrimination that I heard, and felt, from my fellow classmates almost push me to the brink of dropping out of SMU and returning to Chicago. Just as De La Salle travelled to Parménie in search of peace of mind and solitude; I too was looking for such a place. Unfortunately for me, there is no place like that, especially not in Chicago. Reading about De La Salle and the way he dealt with the crisis which arose in his life helped me try to deal with the issues in my own life.

Prayer:

I really think the two texts that strengthened my core beliefs and ideas of God were the reading on De La Salle and *America's Four Gods*. I think these two were the most important because they contained experiences that I could relate to unlike our first texts. For example, De La Salle experienced a crisis in his life which I and I believe everyone has done at some point in their life. I noticed that at first De La Salle wanted to be selfish and hide from his feelings which I think is everyone's first instinct when faced with something hard, as I explained in my life example in the De La Salle paper, but in the end he remembered what he believed in by praying and thinking of his good human life which I believe consisted strongly of helping others without repayment. This is where I also see my ideas of God's engagement strengthened. It's nice seeing and hearing about other people using God through prayer and seeing them come out with a solution which I believe was partially through God's help.

De La Salle then showed yet another perspective on how to live the Good Human Life. He did what I never would have considered doing during an extremely difficult time in his life, he went off by himself and prayed and thought to himself. And through his seclusion, he did come to an answer as to how he should handle the situation. That definitely shows that God works through prayer, and is concerned with my personal well-being and involved in my personal affairs, which ended up changing my score on the God Test by 2 points.

Conclusion

Should a Lasallian university have a Lasallian component in its curriculum? Should students at a Lasallian university study the life and work of John Baptist de La Salle? These questions are really beyond the scope of this article. But since Saint Mary's University of Minnesota does have such a curriculum and since in fact the *University Catalogue* specifically requires LCT225 Perspectives on the Good Human Life to include the study of texts from the "life and work of Saint John Baptist de La Salle" these are questions that not only can but need to be answered.³¹

Students have difficulty relating to John Baptist de La Salle. They respect him for giving up his fortune and social status to found schools for poor French boys, but there are many obstacles that otherwise stand in the way. Most obviously, he lived more than three hundred years ago and was a priest, celibate, and a saint. He was French. One of the things that puzzled me about De La Salle and my students as well is why he "ran away" in the aftermath of the Clément Affair. This is often the term that they use. There may be something American about aggressively litigating, especially if an injustice is perceived. My own interpretation is that De La Salle as a savvy member of the elite understood only too well the legal system of the *Ancien Régime* and knew that a verdict against him in the Clément Affair was a foregone conclusion.

Choosing a Lasallian text is, therefore, a challenge. Probably the text most often used by Saint Mary's faculty is Brother Agathon's *Twelve Virtues of a Good Teacher*, a wonderful text but one, after all, written for the Brothers as teachers. And so it is with most texts authored by the Founder. I have used *The Rules of Christian Decorum and Civility*, another marvelous text, especially its Preface, where De La Salle reveals an altogether Aristotelian notion of virtue, thoroughly Christianized, and with an acute sense of the social mores of the *Ancien Régime*. But such niceties are well beyond the appreciation of the average student who also wonders why she is reading about wearing a sword and eating soup.

The "Encounters of De La Salle at Parménie," to use Brother Leo's term, presents the Founder at perhaps the most vulnerable time in his life. Here is a man who gave up so much and who had endured so many trials because he felt called by God. And now as Blain puts it "God spoke to him no more" and the Brothers seem to have abandoned him. This is less the familiar De La Salle as saint and Founder than one caught up in a profoundly human condition. While his solace found in Carthusian spirituality might be confusing for the students, they can relate to his search for life's purpose as they are in the very process of declaring a major, confronting all of the questions that this raises about career and life-choices. And with freshman year still a fresh memory, coming to a new place, Winona, Minnesota; meeting a new roommate; trying to fit into a new institution; all resonate powerfully with the centrality of vowed relationships and

brotherhood to the Institute, that Brother Jean-Louis so beautifully describes. And so Parménie, as Brother Leo suggests, that remote hill in rural France, rebuilt by an illiterate shepherdess, can function as a valuable tool in realizing the mission of the Lasallian university.

Notes

1. Richard Tristano, Ph.D. is Professor of History at Saint Mary's University of Minnesota, where he has taught since 1991. He teaches most of the pre-modern history courses in the department. These include courses on the Middle Ages, Renaissance, Reformation and Early Modern Europe. His research interests have included American religious history, but have focused recently on late medieval and early modern Ferrara, Italy. He is currently working on the sixteenth-century Precedence Controversy, a dispute between Ferrara and Florence; the Est and the Medici. Another significant interest is the thought of Saint John Baptist de La Salle, founder of the Brothers of the Christian Schools, who operate Saint Mary's University; the Lasallian university; and Lasallian pedagogy. In this regard he is engaged in a study of De La Salle and the Council of Trent.

2. John Baptist de La Salle, *Conduct of the Christian Schools*, trans. F. de La Fontainerie and Richard Arandez, FSC, ed. William Mann, FSC, Landover, Maryland, Lasallian Publications, 1996, 45.

3. Leo Burkhard, "The Crisis of 1712-1714 for John Baptist de La Salle and His Society," eds. Donald Mouton and Paul Walsh, *AXIS: Journal of Lasallian Higher Education* 5, no. 2 (Institute for Lasallian Studies at Saint Mary's University of Minnesota, 2014). I received a copy of this article after completing a draft of this study. Since the purpose of my study is to describe a classroom experience and not to analyze the literature on the "crisis," I will mostly refrain from discussing at length this important addition to the literature, but will make references to it as needed, since the text appears in the same issue as this study.

4. *Saint Mary's University of Minnesota Winona Undergraduate Catalog, 2013-2015*, 101.

5. Ibid.

6. Obviously this is not a textbook definition of the discipline of theology, we might say it is theologically-informed because at the heart of the story is De La Salle's discernment of God's will.

7. Leo Burkhard and Luke Salm, *Encounters: De La Salle at Parménie* (Romeoville, IL: Christian Brothers National Office, 1983).

8. For a cogent treatment of these events, see Luke Salm, *The Work Is Yours: The Life of Saint John Baptist de La Salle*, 2nd ed. (Landover, MD: Christian Brothers Publications, 1996), 145-163.

9. Burkhard, "The Crisis of 1712-1714." Much of the evidence that Brother Leo offers in his article are references to other works by De La Salle that record his dedication to the charism. These seem to have been written before 1712-1714 and Brother Leo never accounts for dating. So, the question is, were these ideas still operational in De La Salle's mind during the time he spent in the south?

10. References to Providence are even more numerous in Burkhard, "The Crisis of 1712-1714." See for example pages 16, 18, and 21.

11. Burkhard and Salm, *Parménie*, 57.

12. *Ibid.*, 64.

13. As noted, Brother Leo denies that there ever was a crisis of De La Salle's charism, but accepts Blain's description of De La Salle feeling abandoned by God. He never addresses why this feeling of divine abandonment did not impact his sense of charism. "The Crisis of 1712-1714," 19.

14. Dated 28 November 2006, trans. Brother J. Watson, Australia, http://www.lasalle2.org/English/Resources/EtudesLasalliennes/english/003_JBS_1711_ENG.pdf Accessed 11 July 2012.

15. Of the seventy footnotes only ten are not references to primary or secondary sources. Of those sixty, the vast majority are based on Blain's biography. See Jean Baptist Blain, *The Life of John Baptist De La Salle, Founder of the Institute of the Brothers of the Christian Schools: A Biography in Three Books*, ed. Luke Salm, trans. Richard Arnandez, (Landover, MD: Lasallian Publications, 1997). In quite the opposite direction, Brother Leo often questions the accuracy of Blain's accounts. See Burkhard, "The Crisis of 1712-1714," 3, 12, 15, 16, and *passim*.

16. Jean-Louis Schneider, "John Baptis de La Salle 1711 – 1714 or 'The Temptation of *Parménie*,'" 11.

17. *Ibid.*, 13-14.

18. See Note. 9. Brother Leo also invokes the theme of De La Salle's suffering. See "The Crisis of 1712-1714," 12, 15, 18 and 19.

19. Schneider, "Temptation," 14.

20. In "The Crisis of 1712-1714," 19, Brother Leo mentions De La Salle's visit to Maximin but offers no motivation for him doing so.

21. Schneider, "Temptation," 17.

22. I found this source to be particularly helpful: <http://www.wikihow.com/Deal-with-an-Existential-Crisis>.

23. Burkhard and Salm, *Parménie*, 60-61.

24. Ibid., 64-68.

25. The fact that Brother Jean-Louis performs an exemplary model of textual analysis is a real bonus, because the entire course is organized around six papers that require exactly this type of study.

26. Schneider, "Temptation," 26.

27. Ibid., 27.


28. Ibid.

29. This complementarity is notably absent in Burkhard, "The Crisis of 1712-1714," where Brother Leo refutes Brother Jean-Louis point by point.

30. According to a self-assessment instrument I devised, the two Lasallian texts were the least popular of the five required readings. On a scale of 1 to 5, five being the highest, the two sections of the course recorded a 2.03 score for the texts. The highest score was 4.13, while the next lowest was 2.66.

31. "In the second-year course, students hone their writing skills through the study of important texts on the virtuous life from within the Western tradition, including selections from the life and work of Saint John Baptist de La Salle," *Saint Mary's University of Minnesota Winona Undergraduate Catalog, 2013-2015*, 101. A casual survey of instructors in the Lasallian Core Traditions program suggests that most use a Lasallian text, but that definitions of what constitutes a Lasallian text vary widely.

Appendix

<p style="text-align: center;">ETHICAL REASONING VALUE RUBRIC <i>for more information, please contact value@aacu.org</i></p>	
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This rubric has been adapted from the Ethical Reasoning Value Rubric developed by the American Association of Colleges and Universities and accessible here:

<http://www.aacu.org/value/rubrics/ethicalreasoning.cfm>

Definition

Ethical Reasoning is reasoning about right and wrong human conduct. It requires students to be able to assess their own ethical values and the social context of problems, recognize ethical issues in a variety of settings, think about how different ethical perspectives might be applied to ethical dilemmas and consider the ramifications of alternative actions. Students' ethical self identity evolves as they practice ethical decision-making skills and learn how to describe and analyze positions on ethical issues.

Framing Language

This rubric is intended to help faculty evaluate work samples and collections of work that demonstrate student learning about ethics. Although the goal of a liberal education should be to help students turn what they've learned in the classroom into action, pragmatically it would be difficult, if not impossible, to judge whether or not students would act ethically when faced with real ethical situations. What can be evaluated using a rubric is whether students have the intellectual tools to make ethical choices.

The rubric focuses on five elements: Ethical Self Awareness, Ethical Issue Recognition, Understanding Different Ethical Perspectives/Concepts, Application of Ethical Principles, and Evaluation of Different Ethical Perspectives/Concepts. Students' Ethical Self Identity evolves as they practice ethical decision-making skills and learn how to describe and analyze positions on ethical issues. Presumably, they will choose ethical actions when faced with ethical issues.

Glossary

The definitions that follow were developed to clarify terms and concepts used in this rubric only.

- Core Beliefs: Those fundamental principles that consciously or unconsciously influence one's ethical conduct and ethical thinking. Even when unacknowledged, core beliefs shape one's responses. Core beliefs can reflect one's environment, religion, culture or training. A person may or may not choose to act on their core beliefs.
- Ethical Perspectives/concepts: The various ethical perspectives on the good human life over time, culture, and society.
- Complex, multi-layered (gray) context: The sub-parts or situational conditions of a scenario that bring two or more ethical dilemmas (issues) into the mix/problem/context/for student's identification.
- Cross-relationships among the issues: Obvious or subtle connections between/among the sub-parts or situational conditions of the issues present in a scenario (e.g., relationship of issues presented between one text/context and another).
- The good life is taken to be the life of functioning well as person. According to the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* the good life consists of "...firm attitudes, stable dispositions, habitual perfections of intellect and will that govern our actions, order our passions, and guide our conduct according to reason and faith. They make possible ease, self-mastery, and joy in leading a morally good life. The virtuous [person] is [one] who freely practices the good." (par. 1804) The good human life is connected to the idea of the examined life, a life lived with purpose and self-reflection.

ETHICAL REASONING RUBRIC LCT 225 PERSPECTIVES ON THE GOOD HUMAN LIFE (REVISED 2/20/13)



Definition

Ethical Reasoning is reasoning about right and wrong human conduct. It requires students to be able to assess their own ethical values and the historical, cultural, and social context of problems, recognize ethical issues in a variety of settings, think about how different ethical perspectives might be applied to ethical dilemmas, and consider the ramifications of alternative actions. Students' ethical self-identity evolves as they practice ethical decision-making skills and learn how to describe and analyze positions on ethical issues.

Evaluators are encouraged to assign a zero to any work sample or collection of work that does not meet benchmark (cell one) level performance.

	Capstone 4	Milestones		Benchmark 1
		3	2	
1. Ethical Self-Awareness	Student discusses in detail/analyzes both their own core beliefs and the origins of those core beliefs and can place their core beliefs in a larger social and historical context.	Student discusses in detail/analyzes both their own core beliefs and the origins of the core beliefs.	Student states both their core beliefs and the origins of the core beliefs.	Student states either their core beliefs or articulates the origins of the core beliefs but not both.
2. Understanding Different Ethical Perspectives on the Good Human Life	Student articulates various ethical perspectives on the good human life over time, culture, and society and accurately explains the details of those various perspectives.	Student can articulate various ethical perspectives on the good human life over time, culture, and society, can present the gist of said perspectives, and attempts to explain the details of the perspectives used, but has some inaccuracies.	Student can articulate a perspective she/he uses, and is only able to present the gist of that perspective.	Student only articulates the perspective she/he uses.
3. Ethical Issue Recognition	Student can recognize ethical issues when presented in a complex, multilayered (gray) context AND can recognize cross-relationships among the issues.	Student can recognize ethical issues when issues are presented in a complex, multilayered (gray) context OR can grasp cross-relationships among the issues.	Student can recognize basic and obvious ethical issues and grasp (incompletely) the complexities or interrelationships among the issues.	Student can recognize basic and obvious ethical issues but fails to grasp complexity or interrelationships.
4. Application of Ethical Perspectives/Concepts (Reasoning)	Student can independently apply ethical perspectives/concepts to an ethical question, accurately, and is able to consider full implications of the application.	Student can independently apply ethical perspectives/concepts to an ethical question, accurately, but does not consider the specific implications of the application.	Student can apply ethical perspectives/concepts to an ethical question, independently (to a new example) but the application is inaccurate.	Student can apply ethical perspectives/concepts to an ethical question with support (using examples, in a class, in a group, or a fixed-choice setting) but is unable to apply ethical perspectives/concepts independently (to a new example).
5. Evaluation of Different Ethical Perspectives on the Good Human Life	Student states a position and can state the objections to, assumptions and implications of and can reasonably defend against the objections to, assumptions and implications of different ethical perspectives on the good human life, and the student's defense is adequate and effective.	Student states a position and can state the objections to, and assumptions and implications of, and respond to the objections to, assumptions and implications of different ethical perspectives on the good human life, but the student's response is inadequate.	Student states a position and can state the objections to, and assumptions and implications of different ethical perspectives on the good human life, but does not respond to them (and ultimately objections, assumptions, and implications are compartmentalized by student and do not affect student's position.)	Student states a position but cannot state the objections to and assumptions and limitations of different perspectives on the good human life.