

## **The Memorandum on the Habit**

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We are here to bring ourselves closer to the person of the Founder<sup>3</sup> by studying the texts he himself has left us, for it is only by reading what he has written that we can rediscover him. Some of the texts we have are his, and up to now they have been perhaps too little known.<sup>4</sup> [One such text will be the focus of our present consideration: *Memorandum on the Habit*.]<sup>5</sup>

### **The first community**

June 24, 1682 marks a real turning point in the life of John Baptist de La Salle. He leaves his family residence, but in a very real way he also leaves the world to which he belongs, namely that upper middle class with all its privileges and material advantages; he goes to live in a house rented for an entire group, i.e. himself and his first teachers. This group, according to his first biographers, becomes the first house for the community, a community in the most religious, traditional and monastic sense of the word. Why? Because it literally becomes everyone's house. It is no longer John Baptist's house; it is the house of John Baptist and that of the teachers, John Baptist's teachers; it is the house of the Lasallian fraternity.

That is when the life we call "ours" really began, the life of a Brother of the Christian Schools. That is where De La Salle will decisively cast off the canonry and his personal fortune to be truly reduced as closely as possible to the status of his companions. John Baptist will describe his community some years later in a text which we are going "to read"<sup>6</sup> together this morning. It is the text which we often call briefly the *Memorandum on the Habit*.

You are familiar with this text, and you know approximately what the circumstances of its composition were. It is a text that until recently was not published with the exactitude it deserved. Now, if we want to get close to the Founder, it is absolutely necessary to make this effort to read what he wrote in a complete and faithful text. In one of the upcoming *Cahiers lasalliens*,<sup>7</sup> probably CL 43, we will publish a critical edition of this text because it is rather difficult to read, even in a material sense [the words on the page, etc.].

### **Material description of the *Memorandum***

The *Memorandum on the Habit* is in eight folios, more precisely eight pages, of which the last contains only a few lines. It is preserved in its entirety in the archives of the Generalate of the Brothers of the Christian Schools in Rome. It is more of an outline than a text; it is a rough draft revised and corrected. The Founder put in some indications of cross-references, and he deleted

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This a translation from French into English of a transcription of a series of conferences given by Brother Maurice-Auguste Hermans in Québec, Canada, in January 1979.

some words. There are overprints and paragraphs that overlap. So, from a material point of view, it is somewhat difficult to read, at least in spots. In addition, we are dealing with a text written in defense of a cause. What happened?

### **Circumstances in which the *Memorandum* was written**

We are in 1689 at the end of the year or in 1690 at the beginning of the year. How do we know? The text itself tells us, for De La Salle writes: “The Brothers of the Christian Schools have been teaching in Paris for nearly two years in this same habit . . .”<sup>8</sup>

And we know that the first two Brothers of the Christian Schools, with John Baptist accompanying them, arrived at the parish of Saint Sulpice on February 24, 1688. If we are told that “[t]he Brothers of the Christian Schools have been teaching in Paris for nearly two years in this same habit,” we can then immediately establish very exactly the date of the composition of the text: the beginning of 1690 or the end of 1689. So this is a text that gives us its own date.

What is the objective of this text? It is to defend the legitimacy of the wearing of a habit. The Brothers came to Paris wearing the habit they had worn elsewhere, for we are told that “[f]or the past five years, this habit has been worn in five different towns, both in the dioceses of Rheims and of Laon.”<sup>9</sup>

The habit was, therefore, adopted in 1684 or 1685. Generally, the biographers tell us that it was during the winter of 1684-1685. Besides, the habit was not adopted all at once. Improvements were made on it several times before it was finished. And this habit caused difficulties, at least for Monsieur Baudrand, the parish priest at Saint Sulpice: “The Brothers of the Christian Schools have been teaching in Paris for nearly two years in this same habit; and during that time no one has lodged any complaints about it except the parish priest of Saint Sulpice, who recently has spoken rather strongly on the matter.”<sup>10</sup>

The priest of Saint Sulpice was not happy to see the Brothers wearing this habit. Why did he wait so long to say it? Here is what our text seems to suggest as an explanation. When the Brothers arrived in Paris, they lived on the Rue Princesse and they taught school on the Rue Princesse. Consequently, they moved about relatively little, except to go to the parish church. But at the beginning of 1690, at the request of Monsieur Baudrand, they took charge of a second school. This one was on the Rue du Bac at the other end of the parish. So the two Brothers who taught at that school would leave the community house each morning and then at the beginning of each afternoon, they would walk back through the whole parish. This is what probably caused people to talk a bit, and it is what perhaps attracted the attention of some of those pretentious ladies who were always found hovering around priests in Paris in the seventeenth century. These ladies provided the priest a certain number of the material advantages he needed to administer his parish. It is then possible that the habit may have annoyed them.

And what did Monsieur Baudrand want? He wanted to impose on the Brothers the ecclesiastical habit, no more and no less. We are talking about the complete habit, no different from what the clerics wore. This is just what De La Salle did not want, and he explains why he does not want it. These are the circumstances in which the *Memorandum* was written.

## **Limitations of the *Memorandum***

There is evidently a bias in the *Memorandum* for it is a document in defense of a cause. The author will make every effort to find all the advantages of one side and all the disadvantages of the other side. He will find only the disadvantages of taking on the ecclesiastical habit and will find only the advantages of keeping the habit that we currently wear. Anyone who wants to defend a cause presents it in this way, to his own advantage, to the advantage of the cause he is defending. Consequently, the way in which he speaks of one or the other habit probably will have some bias to it. He will be quick to find the advantages of one side and just as quick to find the disadvantages of the other.

## **Content of the *Memorandum***

What interests me and what I believe ought to interest you in this text is perhaps not so much that it is about a habit but that it is, first of all, about the community of the Christian Schools. Secondly, the text is about this community presenting itself as a community, not to Monsieur Baudrand himself, but to the people around him. The biographers tell us that this *Memorandum* is not intended for the Brothers and it is not so much even intended for Baudrand. Rather, it is intended for those around him and for the churchmen who might be able to influence him and make him turn from his proscription against the habit. John Baptist de La Salle attaches great importance to maintaining his community and its own identity. This is the identity he is striving to define.

## **Use of the word “community”**

The first observation that we make is about the term “community.” It appears 40 times on these eight pages, and each time it is used it is almost always to speak of “the” community of the Christian Schools. Sometimes it is used to make reference to other communities that exist, but most of the time it is used to designate the community of the Brothers of the Christian Schools or generally communities like that of the Christian Schools. The text says: “This Community is commonly called the Community of the Christian Schools and at present rests upon – indeed, is rooted in – Providence alone.”<sup>11</sup>

That is a rather remarkable point of departure. The word “community” is one that the Founder uses by preference in all his spiritual writings. Re-read the *Meditations*, and see how many times the word “community” comes up, whereas the other words used to describe the Institute are much more rarely used in the *Memorandum*. In the *Meditations for Sundays and the Principal Feasts of the Year* we find the word “community” 82 times, the word “society” once and the word “institute” 8 times.

When the Founder speaks of “community,” he is talking about the entire community, never the local community. In the Founder’s language, the local community is the “house.” Re-read De La Salle’s *Letters*<sup>12</sup>; every time he speaks of the “house,” he means the local community. In his letter to Brother Hubert on July 20, 1709 he writes: “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 houses<sup>13</sup> of two, which does not suit us. I will not have them; they would destroy our Community.”<sup>14</sup>

Note the specific difference between “house” and “community.” Re-read the *Rule*.<sup>15</sup> You will notice the same thing. Thus, in the language of the Founder, the word “community” is really his preferred word, especially at the beginning of the Institute. Later, from 1694 on, he rather easily chooses the word “society.” Later still, from 1705 on, De La Salle will use the word “institute.” And finally it is the word “institute” that will prevail in common usage. But let us not forget that when we read the texts, especially those from the beginnings, the word “community” has the sense that we give to the word “institute.” It refers to the totality of all the members of the community and not only the few Brothers of a local community.

### **A community established and founded on providence**

So this community, “it is presently neither established nor founded except on providence alone.”<sup>16</sup> Establishing and founding, they are not the same thing. “To establish” is properly to confer an official status on the community. This is not the case. “To found” is to provide funds that assure true economic and sustainable survival of the community.<sup>17</sup> This is what the Founder affirms: “neither established nor founded except on providence alone.” Providence, what is it exactly? It is not his patrimony since he already has given it up, and it is not the generous contributions of Charles-Maurice Le Tellier.<sup>18</sup> Remember that the Archbishop of Rheims had wanted to found De La Salle’s community, but under one condition, namely to keep the Founder and the Brothers within the limits of the Archdiocese of Rheims, which the Founder refused. So he left for Paris as soon as possible precisely to avoid this interference by the Archdiocese of Rheims.

So, there is no establishment and no foundation. It must be said that that is the way it will be during the entire life of John Baptist de La Salle. He will obtain neither letters patent, nor episcopal approbation nor for that matter pontifical approbation. It is the Brothers who will be quick to obtain one or another of these approbations, and this they will do a little too soon after the Founder’s death. But Blain,<sup>19</sup> who very often wanted to back up the Superiors of the day and especially Brother Timothy among others, explains that De La Salle, pressed by the Brothers in 1714 to take steps to obtain letters patent, allegedly responded: “You can do that after my death.” Did he actually say that? We do not know, and we will never know. But it is not impossible that Blain over-interpreted what De La Salle said in order to show that the Brothers, by applying for Letters Patent and the Bull [of Approbation]<sup>20</sup> right after John Baptist de La Salle’s death, were only carrying out what the Founder said.

The fact remains that we are seeing here something very clear: the community of the Christian Schools is not protected by any official authority. This means that the existence of the community is relatively fragile. We cannot say the same thing about the “schools” of the community.

## **The schools are founded**

We have already indicated that certain schools were founded; the community was not. A school could be founded when a benefactor such as Madame de Croyères<sup>21</sup> was committed to giving funds for the support of one or two teachers who would teach in a certain place. In this way, the school could be founded, i.e. room and board could be allocated to the teachers and thus assure their livelihood. But the community as such was not founded. The day a teacher stopped teaching for any reason, his room and board were cut off; and he had nothing to claim from the community.

## **Rules of the community**

The text of the *Memorandum* tells us: “Those who live [in the community] follow a Rule and are dependent for everything, having no personal possessions, and treat one another as equals.”<sup>22</sup> They “follow a Rule.” This is what the text says and already at that time De La Salle can put it in writing. We are in 1689 or at the beginning of 1690. In fact, as we read the entire text, we see many points come up which afterward will become points of Rule. For example, the fact that all the members of the community are lay persons and no one can either put on a surplice or perform any function in church. That is already in the *Memorandum*, and it is a point that will become part of the Rule. And we find others, but the one we wish to emphasize here is “having no personal possessions.” This is what characterizes the community, and it is in this spirit of evangelical sharing that the Brothers will live. No one has anything of his own.

## **Having no personal possessions**

This is the true basic idea of a community at the heart of the monastic tradition and the religious life. Recall how all forms of the consecrated life are based on the image of the first Christian community at Jerusalem: “And all who believed were together and had all things in common; and they sold their possessions and goods and distributed them to all, as any had need.”<sup>23</sup>

We now know from the exegetes that this picture of the first Christian community should not be generalized for all times and all places. Rather, we know that it truly served as a model for all those – monks, mendicant religious, regular clerics and others – who have tried to follow Christ and to witness in a formal way that they were doing so. This is precisely the characteristic that John Baptist de La Salle maintains here to define his community. It is a community where all “live having no personal possessions.”

## **“They live in complete uniformity”<sup>24</sup>**

De La Salle adds that “they live in complete uniformity.” This you also recognize as a tradition in the monastic life and the religious life. There came a time when uniformity of life became the norm, which is to say that all were going to conduct themselves in the same way with regard to dress and every aspect of their entire life. This was an opportune solution that our predecessors in the monastic and religious life decided on, for life becomes much simpler when you say “the same behavior for all.”

And you are aware to what extent this was carried out in the monastic and religious life. The monks' food was decided for them; they were served by portions, i.e. each one found in his bowl exactly what he could or should eat, nothing more. If you have ever visited Eastern or Greek monasteries, you have seen that there are still vestiges of this custom and that they give to each one at his place at table exactly his own portion. This is incidentally the origin of the practice of "the pittance" in certain monasteries during the Middle Ages.

What is the pittance? It is giving a supplement. This is how it worked. The monastery would give a certain quantity of food to each monk; but as some monks didn't get enough, there were outside benefactors who would supply a supplement. This supplement was put on the table, not in individual portions, but in servings for two and three. Thus, we have the pittance, which was given "out of pity," over and above the normal ration which was shared fraternally according to each one's needs. It was a way of compensating for the slightly overdone austerity of uniformity.

Why does the Founder insist on this matter of uniformity? Because he wants to speak of the habit not only precisely as a distinctive mark of this community but also as a way of expressing that community and showing that among the Brothers all are as much as possible alike.

### **Teaching in tuition-free schools**

"The members of this Community devote themselves to teaching in tuition-free schools, in towns only, and to giving basic religious instruction every day, including Sundays and holidays."<sup>25</sup>

"Teaching in schools," not opening or creating schools. De La Salle did not do the latter. He formed teachers to teach in schools whose initiative was generally taken by others: Bishops, parish priests, charity agencies, donors, and benefactors. He himself was practically never the initiator of any of the schools. You will object: "What about Rome? At Rome it was De La Salle who took the initiative." He sent Gabriel Drolin<sup>26</sup> and a companion and asked them to open a school. And things did not go all that easily. You know the difficulties they encountered over there. And let us not forget this passage from a letter De La Salle sent to Gabriel Drolin. He tells him: "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."<sup>27</sup>

And so you can see the general mindset of De La Salle. He is called upon and he sends his teachers, but he himself is not going to impose himself one way or another. In a memorandum dated 1721, the Brothers will say: "When they are requested to go to a small city, they must be assured two hundred *livres*<sup>28</sup> per year for each Brother."<sup>29</sup>

There we have the practical side of the Brothers. When municipalities or charity agencies call for the Brothers, they must then provide them with a living. It is all well and good to be established and founded on providence, but you still have to live on something.

### **In towns only**

Very soon after, the Founder will write: "Provision is also made for training schoolmasters for rural districts."<sup>30</sup> The decision to prefer towns over rural districts, for the Brothers and for the

community, does not mean he wanted to ignore the rural districts, which were of great importance for France in the seventeenth century since they were poor and underprivileged. People we now call marginalized were not in the towns and cities; they were in the countryside. Their plight was such that if they tried to move to the city, they were driven back to the countryside. The real poverty-stricken in France, at the time, were found in the country. De La Salle makes a choice but not one devoid of options because he provided for the education of the poor in the rural districts through the schoolteachers formed in the community.

### **Living together**

The Founder tells us that restricting the community's apostolate to cities and towns is necessary to enable the Brothers to live together. The Brothers must not be isolated. We have evidence of this in a certain number of texts not necessarily written by the Founder but dictated by him, in a manner of speaking. Father Leschassier, superior of the Seminary of Saint-Sulpice, writes: "I spoke to Father De La Salle to get some schoolteachers. He promised he would provide them to Bishop Dupuis. He expects that there should be in each house three teachers for the school and one Brother for the housekeeping. Generally, he wishes there to be four Brothers teaching."

In another letter written by Father Boulais, we read:

Father De La Salle, the superior, had met me at a meeting with the Cardinal and told me that he had been asked for two teachers only. He said he right away refused to agree to that and he could not agree to it without violating the rules of their society which require that they will not move into any place that does not have room for four plus one Brother, as a fifth ought to be able to live in the community.

Thus, De La Salle's intentions were made absolutely clear, and they agree with what we see here. They had to be several in number for the Brothers to live in community. The Founder was asking for four or five Brothers per community. But in reality when the Founder died in 1719, there would still be eight communities of two Brothers each. There were some communities of three or four Brothers, two communities of five, and some of six Brothers. And let us not forget that Gabriel Drolin was all alone in Rome, and that he stayed there alone for a long time.

There was what De La Salle wished to do, and then there was what he was able to do. Especially at the beginning, we see that a vision like the one we have been describing could not be carried out everywhere. What we need to see is how absolutely clear De La Salle's ideas about his work were from the very first years.

### **Formation of teachers for the rural districts**

This is what the Founder says when speaking of the teachers:

Provision is also made for training schoolmasters for rural districts in a house, separate from the Community, that we call a normal school. Those who are

trained there remain for only a few years, until they are well prepared in religious spirit as well as for their work.<sup>31</sup>

They dress just like ordinary secular people except for the black, or at least dark brown, color of their clothing; and they cannot be distinguished from them except by the split white collar they wear and their close-cropped hair.<sup>32</sup>

They are taught to become proficient in singing, reading, and writing. Their room, board, and laundry are all free. In due course, they are placed in a hamlet or a village as a parish assistant. Having secured a position, they maintain no further contact with the Community except for what is appropriate and courteous. However, they are welcomed back for a periodic retreat.<sup>33</sup>

Two different situations are notable right away. On one hand, we have the Brothers as members of the community of the Christian Schools; and on the other hand, we have the teachers for rural districts. These teachers for the rural districts are meant to go live alone. Why? The Founder says because in the majority of rural parishes there is enough work for only one teacher, not two. They are thus meant to go work alone, and they are also meant to get involved in at least some activities of the clergy. We must not think right away that these persons are preparing for the priesthood. From the start, they are considered in the parish as being among the ranks of the clergy; and I should say, they are tonsured even if they are married. Can we be sure of this?

As soon as they get the tonsure, they are considered clergy. When they bring their students to church, the students stay in the nave but they take their place in the sanctuary. They wear the surplice, and they participate in the ceremonies to the extent that the priest wishes. This is what De La Salle does not want for the Brothers.

### **Distinction between the teachers for rural districts and the Brothers of the Christian Schools**

De La Salle makes an extremely clear distinction between the teachers for rural districts and the Brothers of the Christian Schools. In his training school, he prepares “clerics” for the villages; but as he will say a little later in the *Memorandum*, in his community, he wants Brothers who will be entirely involved in the exercises of their community and in the work of their school.<sup>34</sup> And he wants Brothers who will all remain laymen.<sup>35</sup> None will receive the tonsure and none will be ordained.<sup>36</sup> So De La Salle maintains an absolutely clear idea of the separation of the two types of teachers.

You will say that the community that De La Salle is describing is not just the community at Paris. Right, it is the entire community of the Christian Schools. Whether the teacher training school is in Rheims or in Paris, it makes no difference. It is the community as a whole that takes charge of this training school. We know that it will not last too long in Rheims, and it appears that it will go downhill starting in 1691. We also know that De La Salle will take it up again in Paris and afterwards in Saint-Denis; that he will be approached several times in Rethel, and notably in Villiers-en-Brie; and that each time after a while, sometimes a very short time (as in the case in Saint-Denis), the project will fade away. And in reading our *Rule* written in 1705 and



then revised in 1718, we are very surprised to see how little attention the Founder gives to school teachers who would like to learn how to teach school: “They may also allow a teacher to enter who wishes to learn how the schools are conducted.”<sup>37</sup>

We know that when the Founder called the Brothers to Vaugirard for retraining – i.e. Brothers who had been teaching for some time – he sent as their replacement young men who had been formed in the training school for teachers. We know that he used these schoolteachers several times. A priest in Paris writes that in the parish he came from three young teachers formed by De La Salle taught school admirably well. So this training school was a real success but a relatively short one. And it was a work that would not interfere with the future of De La Salle’s essential work, namely his community.

### **Presence of young children in the community**

In this Community we also provide training for young boys who possess basic intelligence and some religious disposition. When we judge them suitable and they themselves apply for admission, we accept them into the Community from the age of fourteen and over.<sup>38</sup>

Early on there were young children right along with the Brothers and student teachers. What should we understand by “young children?” De La Salle writes: “from the age of fourteen and over.”<sup>39</sup> That is not so young after all. You also know that that is typical of monasticism and the religious life. Young children were always found around monks. Read the Rule of Saint Basil, and you will find several allusions to children in the monastery. And even when you read certain maxims of the Desert Fathers, the first hermits, you will see several allusions to the presence of those very young children who are already trying out the hermit’s life, the monk’s life, the religious life. This practice was so prevalent that in the Founder’s time pontifical decrees prohibited monasteries from admitting children under the age of fifteen to the novitiate. One could begin the novitiate only at the age of fifteen, but there were even younger ones who were waiting to begin their novitiate, as has been our practice.

When the biographers describe this community, they describe it not like “a juniorate”<sup>40</sup> but like a novitiate, even if they call it the juniorate. “It served as a novitiate,” say the biographers.<sup>41</sup> This is precisely the novitiate that De La Salle took up in Paris, then in Rouen where he engaged in the formation of young novices. The text of the *Memorandum* continues:

The young men who are formed and trained in this Community live in a separate house with their own oratory, schedule, meals, and recreation periods. Their religious observances are different and adapted to their level of mental development and to the needs of their future work.<sup>42</sup>

It is all about moderating and tempering the lifestyle and the obligations proper to the state of a Brother of the Christian Schools in order to adapt them to the level of the young men who are there.

We sometimes lost sight of this when in 1835, for example, the juniorates were brought back in France [after the French Revolution]. They wanted to bring back De La Salle's idea, but without reading the *Memorandum on the Habit* that they didn't know existed and, if they did, they never quoted. They wanted to espouse the idea that these junior novices were supposed to share in the life of the Brothers. Some of you have perhaps heard about older Brothers who, from the time of their entrance into the juniorate, were truly overwhelmed by all the obligations of [the life of] the Brothers. The Brothers did not abide by what appears an essential rule of John Baptist de La Salle, namely to temper and moderate things and adapt them to the level of these young people.

### **Description of the habit of the Brother of the Christian Schools**

The Brothers had [, at the time of the writing of the *Memorandum*,] been wearing a distinctive habit for five years in five different cities in the dioceses of Rheims and Laon. They had been wearing it for two years in Paris. What were these cities in the dioceses of Rheims and Laon? They were Rheims, Rethel and Chateau-Porcien in the diocese of Rheims; Laon and Guise in the diocese of Laon. The Founder explains how he quite accidentally came to choose this habit. It was for the convenience of the Brothers. At the beginning, the Brothers were wearing a fitted jacket, a suit we might now say but "without pockets," said the Founder.<sup>43</sup> And since several of the Brothers came from the countryside, they did not have city attire; and so the Founder gave it to them. And he explains that occasionally some had absconded with the clothing they were given.<sup>44</sup>

### **The cloak or overcoat**

In winter the fitted jacket was not enough to protect against the cold. This is why De La Salle adopted the cloak or overcoat.<sup>45</sup> The cloak served as a coat in the street and as a housecoat in the house and in school.<sup>46</sup> Unlike the French mantle, it had sleeves. At the time, the French mantle was simply draped over the shoulders. So, the cloak or overcoat could be used as a mantle because it could be thrown over the shoulders without slipping the arms through the sleeves. Still, one could use the sleeves either in school or in the house to get protection from the cold. The biographers, Blain among them, tell us that the mayor of Rheims, when he met De La Salle one day, told him that his teachers were suffering from the cold and that he should give them more protection.<sup>47</sup> The *Memorandum* does not mention this, but it does tell us that "[t]he cloaks or overcoats that the Brothers of the Christian Schools wear were given to them to guard against the cold."<sup>48</sup> De La Salle explains why: It is because the Brothers "go to schools in distant districts for the convenience of their students"<sup>49</sup> in order to teach school.

### **Neighborhood schools**

We all know about neighborhood schools, or perhaps we have experienced teaching in them. There could have been Brothers who taught in a school connected to the residence, but there were others who went every day to two, three or even more other neighborhoods to teach. Well then, says De La Salle, this habit is absolutely necessary to protect them from the cold.<sup>50</sup> Since houses were not heated, neither was the community house nor the school. You will say that the *Rule of 1718* provides that the Brothers "will also warm themselves together by the stove in the common room."<sup>51</sup> There was nothing like this in 1705. It was exactly at that time that the use of

the stove began to be introduced in France. Before that there was only an open fire, and there was no question of having that in the classrooms. And there was probably not any in the community house either. Only later, when the use of the stove gained acceptance, was it permitted to install one in the common room. But there was not any stove in the other rooms of the community and certainly not in the schools.

### **The short cassock**

Once the overcoat was adopted, the Brothers began wearing a short cassock. They first wore the cloak and under that, instead of the jerkin worn tight to the body, they wore a short cassock that reached to the calf and sometimes a little lower. The short cassock was worn by priests as they were traveling, even though bishops issued relatively severe rules against wearing it in the city. The Founder continues:

The habit of this Community is a kind of shortened cassock that reaches to the calf of the leg. It is without buttons and is fastened on the inside with little black hooks from the collar to just below the waist. From there downward, it is sewn. The sleeves reach to the wrists, and the tips are fastened with concealed hooks. We call this habit a robe to distinguish it from a clerical cassock, from which it differs slightly in shape.<sup>52</sup>

### **A distinctive habit**

So there we have a design that is original in the best sense of the word, that is to say a design that is borrowed from no other religious order. Dressed like that, the Brother of the Christian Schools could not be confused with a Benedictine Oblate, or a Franciscan or any religious order priest. And he no longer looked secular. There is a clear distinctiveness about this habit that makes the man who wears it immediately recognizable. He is looked upon as someone who is “separated and withdrawn from worldly concerns,” and it is appropriate that he be looked upon as such, says the Founder.<sup>53</sup> This habit was also recognized for the way it invited a certain respect and esteem. In the five cities of the dioceses of Rheims and Laon, “it is regarded as a decent and appropriate habit designed both to keep the teachers true to the diligence and reserve proper to their state and profession and to invite the respect of their students and the esteem of other people, far more than the jacket they formerly wore.”<sup>54</sup>

### **The people’s reaction to this habit, according to Blain**

This is not quite like the situation as it is told by Blain.<sup>55</sup> He describes the choice of the Brothers’ habit as De La Salle’s desire to shock and invite scorn. In any case, he explains with his typical gusto and knack for amplification what happened when the Brothers were seen in their habit:

Hardly had they set foot outside their house, when critical and ill-intentioned eyes fastened upon them with derision. Evil tongues launched poisoned darts to wound them; and everybody on the street, from inside and outside the houses, came forth to meet them or waited until they passed, in order to cover them with contempt and derision. People pointed the finger of scorn at them. They were escorted with

raucous cries amidst scenes of near riot. They were mimicked in public, and whoever invented some new outrage upon them thought he had done something very clever indeed. Jeers and hoots accompanied them wherever they went. Passersby stopped in the streets to take part in the taunts hurled at them. Artisans left their tasks unfinished in their shops to join in the merriment. Street urchins made up a new game: following the Brothers and yelling after them. The mob found pleasure in covering them with abuse; everybody enjoyed playing tricks on them and laughing at their expense. The same farce began anew every day. When the Brothers walked to and from school, they were accompanied there and back with vilification. They were lucky when they got off so easily.<sup>56</sup>

Blain gives the impression that the habit is a laughing stock. De La Salle's text gives quite a different view.

It is entirely possible that the habit was a little shocking. In Champagne, it must have not been so shocking. If you look at some engravings of the period (scenes from the market or of people walking around, for example), you see people wearing a cloak and hat not unlike the one you see on the head of a Brother of the Christian Schools. Around the years 1708 or 1709, Father Hippolyte Hélyot<sup>57</sup> began a history of all the religious orders. He published eight big volumes in which he claimed to be providing engravings of the clothing of each of the orders. Since some religious dressed two or three different ways according to whether they were in town, in community or in choir for their religious ceremonies, they were thought to have two or three outfits. There is a plate for the Brothers of the Christian and Charity Schools. This is the one that is sometimes used to represent the look of the Brother during John Baptist de La Salle's lifetime. It is not inaccurate, and it corresponds very nearly to what we read in the *Memorandum on the Habit*: the short cassock, cloak, wide brimmed hat, and evidently the rabato<sup>58</sup> since it was worn by many persons.

In some engravings of the period, we see persons dressed in a way that is not so different, even if it is with a fitted jacket and cloak and not the short cassock and cloak. So, the habit shocked, yes, but not all that much. De La Salle tells us in his text very early on that it is a habit that invites some esteem.<sup>59</sup>

### **Disadvantages of wearing the ecclesiastical habit**

The Founder says that the habit is the “hallmark of a Community”<sup>60</sup>; it is a habit that can clearly serve to identify this community whereas wearing the ecclesiastical habit . . . And here he makes a case against wearing an ecclesiastical habit.

### **The short mantle**

First, there is the problem of the mantle. The Founder says that the ecclesiastical mantle does not have any sleeves and, thus, cannot protect against the cold.<sup>61</sup> In addition, he tells us there were two ecclesiastical mantles: a short mantle that is banned except when worn at court. The Founder uses a word that is based on Latin. He speaks of priests who are *incurtis*. This was a word frequently used, even in French. *Incurtis* meant priests “at court,” those who frequented the court

or regularly resided there. This is the word that Rigault says is illegible, crossed out and replaced with an equally illegible word.<sup>62</sup> And this is somewhat true. In 1956, I proposed this reading; and it seems that this is what it is. The word in question (*incurtis*) was indeed used in ecclesiastical language to indicate worldly priests. So, writes De La Salle, giving the Brothers a short mantle would be going against the will of the bishops<sup>63</sup> or else it would mean letting them pass for court clergy,<sup>64</sup> which would evidently be a very serious temptation to worldliness.

### **The long mantle**

As for the long ecclesiastical mantle, it was enormous and so De La Salle says this mantle will be very cumbersome for the Brothers. Listen to what he writes about this:

The long mantle would get in the way of their work. With this garb, they could not easily move among their students, line them up, or keep them in order when they escort them to the parish church and remain with them there. People have mentioned that with this mantle there is a danger of knocking over most of the small children on one side or the other while trying to place them in order.<sup>65</sup>

“People have mentioned . . .”<sup>66</sup> Who are these people? Probably John Baptist de La Salle himself, for we know that he taught class very early on in the parish of Saint-Jacques in Rheims and he adopted the habit of the Brothers for at least some time in his classes. Maybe he tried to teach first with his long ecclesiastical mantle. He doubtlessly understood that this long mantle was not only cumbersome but that it was also dangerous. Those who have travelled in Italy or Spain have seen priests who in winter drape themselves in an enormous mantle that covers them completely and that they pull over their shoulders. Doing this, one could tend to be unaware of the presence of children and even rough them up. “People have mentioned . . .” This is a practical issue learned from lived experience. So, as far as the long mantle is concerned, it doesn’t work out.

### **Arguments against wearing the ecclesiastical habit**

What about the whole idea of the ecclesiastical garb? Now with that, says the Founder, there would be some very serious confusion. We have to read what he writes about this. Sometimes it is blunt and can seem a little surprising. He says that the Brothers are “persons who have not undertaken any studies.”<sup>67</sup> The Brothers of the Christian Schools do not study. In any case, if they have studied before entering, once they have entered they will not study any more.<sup>68</sup> This really refers only to ecclesiastical studies that prepare one for the priesthood. De La Salle uses just the word “studies.” For our purposes, we understand this word as one used by clerics who, speaking among themselves in the seventeenth century, would use it to designate the studies leading to Holy Orders. The Brothers will not pursue such studies. It is true, says De La Salle, that occasionally someone who had pursued these studies and received the tonsure has asked to be admitted but Providence has seen to it that they did not remain in the congregation.<sup>69</sup> Is this what Blain was talking about when he wrote that in the beginnings of the community at Rheims there were some young men who had begun “studies” but gave up any pretensions to an ecclesiastical career to join De La Salle?<sup>70</sup> We simply do not know.

## **The case of Henri Lheureux**

There is the case of Henri Lheureux,<sup>71</sup> but it is a difficult problem to solve. The text of the *Memorandum* dates from the beginning of 1690. Now this is the time period when Henri Lheureux was in Paris to prepare for the priesthood and then died suddenly. We do not know the date of his death since the parish records, which would have the date of his burial, were destroyed by fire. Henri Lheureux's death and the writing of the *Memorandum* (where De La Salle speaks of those young men who sought admission after being tonsured and then did not stay) must both have taken place at the same time. Why does De La Salle not speak of the case of Henri Lheureux? There are several possible explanations. The fact that De La Salle had called Henri Lheureux to Paris to prepare him for the priesthood certainly must have been known to M. Baudrand and his circle. Baudrand's death must also have been widely known. All of this really shows us a distinct way of thinking in De La Salle's mind. The case of Henri Lheureux was an exception that De La Salle perhaps had difficulty allowing.

## **The Brothers cannot wear the ecclesiastical habit**

This is the general rule that the Founder will state and repeat in two or three different places in the *Memorandum*. He says that "[i]t does not seem right to give a purely clerical garb to laymen . . . who have not pursued a classical education – and never will . . ." <sup>72</sup> And the bishops would not want it either. <sup>73</sup> And as for getting the tonsure, the Founder writes: "It is certainly difficult to believe that our lord bishops would agree to tonsure men who have never begun, and never will begin, classical studies and who never will exercise any function in the church." <sup>74</sup>

" . . . nor even wear a surplice in church." <sup>75</sup> This was a very strong statement at the time because wearing the surplice did not imply performing an ecclesiastical function any more than it implies that today, but it was the first mark of pretention or way of siding somewhat [in the direction of being identified as or] with the clergy. That is something John Baptist de La Salle absolutely did not want. He says that if the Brothers appear in the least way as priests, they are going to think they are part of the clergy and they will want to align themselves more and more with the reverend clergy who would want to make use of them in religious services. <sup>76</sup> De La Salle adds: "This situation would happen frequently because there are few priests in most urban parishes; often there is only the pastor and, at most, one assistant." <sup>77</sup>

It is surprising to read that, but at the time if the parish priest were caught short and he needed help, he would want to get it from the Brothers. Once again, this is something that De La Salle does not want. The Founder goes on to finish by saying: "The observations contained herein are all based on experience at Saint-Jacques, Laon, and Château-Porcien." <sup>78</sup>

In three different places, De La Salle notes this tendency of the clergy to ask for the Brothers to help with several functions in church. He is opposed to this type of service. His reasoning is that the Brothers do not go to church with their students to help the parish priest but to accompany the children and to stay with them. <sup>79</sup>

## Praise for a “distinctive” garb

De La Salle also praises the garb he calls “distinctive”<sup>80</sup> in the best sense of that word. We are talking about the seventeenth century. We mustn’t be too quick to attribute to the word “distinctive” the sense of “odd,” in the pejorative sense of the word as in “odd and in bad taste.” “Distinctive” here means special, a habit that is not like any one commonly worn and whose shape sets it apart from others. So the Founder will defend this distinctive habit and will show how it played an indispensable role in the history of his community:

Before the adoption of this *special*<sup>81</sup> habit, whenever the obligation to observe the Rule was brought up, several said that they had no more reason to do so than ordinary people because they appeared to be no different from them. Since the adoption of this *distinctive* garb, it does not seem that anyone has raised any trouble on this score, for all regard themselves as belonging to a Community.<sup>82</sup>

The essential thing to keep in mind here is that the very act of the Brothers making up their minds with De La Salle to wear the same habit was a conscious act to form a community. They had been together since 1682 and formed a community. The fact of having lived together through this growth of their community project and of having arrived at this conviction to express it, to profess it externally, to proclaim it before their students and the public, gave them a new sense of truly belonging to a community. Let us not forget that we are talking [here] of a community that is still safeguarded only by its own internal cohesiveness.

“Before the adoption of this special habit, those applying for admission to this Community regarded it merely as an *opportunity to live with a man who housed schoolteachers like domestics* and they had no idea of joining a religious community.”<sup>83</sup> Thus, [these early teachers] came and shared the household as domestics do. This is not to say like obsequious servants but rather like household help. They had no idea of forming community with him. That is how De La Salle lived with the first schoolmasters, the first companions of Adrien Nyel<sup>84</sup> who came to his house.

Several came to be trained so that they could earn a living afterward. Some asked for a salary, and others thought we ought to be grateful for their conforming to our way of life and manner of dress. Since the adoption of this habit, no one has applied for admission with any thought other than of joining a Community and remaining in it for the rest of his life. Salaries are unheard of, and acceptance is regarded as a great honor. The habit alone produces these results.<sup>85</sup>

## Meaning of the Habit

De La Salle implies that the habit should be left as it is. It has a meaning, not only for persons outside the community but first and foremost for those who wear it. For them the habit means they really belong to and form a community with everything that it entails:<sup>86</sup> certain entitlements, a particular lifestyle and way of doing things, all of this with some autonomy. The Founder says that the one responsible for the community (for the time being it is he) must be accountable for what he does. Any change must be able to be justified.<sup>87</sup> In the present case of the habit, change

is not justified. The change proposed by M. Baudrand is really contrary to what is essential, namely to lawfully maintain in the community this habit that is its distinctive and defining feature. The community is neither an association of priests nor a third order of a major religious order. Nor is it a simple association of the faithful who are lay. It is an association of persons in community.

### **What kind of community?**

The Founder is not specific about what he means by community. He reiterates a little later that it is a community where the members possess nothing and everything is held in common.<sup>88</sup> This is a type of evangelical community where the members completely live out the act of sharing, holding everything in common in an atmosphere of charity and renouncement and where clothing is but the external expression of this deeper reality. We are speaking of a habit that shows a certain detachment, a certain religious character and especially one that quite specifically defines a community that is totally unlike any other.

### **John Baptist de La Salle and the habit of the Brothers**

John Baptist de La Salle himself wore the habit of the Brothers. Blain is quite clear about this, and we also have occasional external evidence of this. However, it is said that De La Salle never abandoned his priest's habit. How then could he wear the Brothers' habit? Here is an account from Father Léonard of Sainte-Catherine. He was an Augustinian priest living in Paris at the time, who was visited by very many people who confided in him. He took note of everything he was told. Thus, he was familiar, by hearsay, with the majority of people in Paris who had any notoriety. He writes about many subjects, especially the canons in Paris and other people in church circles. He wrote four pages on De La Salle.

Father Léonard describes what goes on at De La Salle's house at Vaugirard. At the time, it wasn't referred to as "the Brothers' house," but rather as "De La Salle's house." So when the archbishop of Paris gave De La Salle permission to have a chapel, he says "in your house."<sup>89</sup> Father Léonard then describes the rather numerous group of young men living with De La Salle. The majority were wearing the fitted jacket, and some were wearing the short cassock. This information matches what is confirmed from other sources, including Blain. The taking of the habit was not done at the beginning of the novitiate. The novitiate was of two years' duration: one year in the novitiate house and one year teaching in the schools. The "habit taking" took place when they went from the first year to the second. This Father Léonard of Sainte-Catherine tells us that De La Salle would celebrate Mass for these young men in a chapel next to his house. He doesn't call them Brothers. De La Salle would inspect these young men before entering the chapel. The Brothers – let us call them that – would line up in two rows and he would pass between them and then all would go to the chapel for Mass. When De La Salle got to the chapel door, he would turn around and invite them to enter "with a type of whistling sound," writes Father Léonard. He adds: "De La Salle wears three habits; he removes two to say Mass." He says nothing more. He doesn't give any indication of the length of the cloak or the mantle, but it is not impossible that in some circumstances the Founder wore the two habits, one on top of the other, with the cloak under the imposing ecclesiastical mantle. After removing the ecclesiastical mantle, there the



cloak remained, which he also would remove to celebrate Mass so that all that was left was his cassock.

How is it that we still have these papers of Father Léonard of Sainte-Catherine? When he died, the Paris police got hold of them because they contained stories about many events of interest to them. Thus these papers were very valuable to them. At the current time, some of these papers are kept in the national archives and some in the Bibliothèque Nationale in Paris.

## **Conclusion**

So there we have the text of the *Memorandum on the Habit* which is so important because it describes a community and shows its internal cohesiveness. It also shows a consciousness that became progressively evident to John Baptist de La Salle starting from that 24<sup>th</sup> of June 1682 until the time he finally adopted an identifying habit. In other words, even if we cannot follow the internal evolution of the community as it progressed, there are times when we can see it as it unfolds in the concrete events that are documented and clearly described.

## **The work of Providence**

De La Salle never intended to copy anyone at all. He simply was attentive to what God was doing in and around him, and he tried to carry it out for the greater good of the community to which his life was bound from then on. The Founder would endeavor to record only what he lived and this he would do in this text, in the Rules, and in all his writings. But his lived experience was always under the eye of God, under the guidance of God, always with attention to what God seemed to ask of him through life's events.

## **The cloak**

What can we make of that meeting with the mayor of the city of Rheims? On reflection, it was good advice that, once the usage was introduced, turned out to be truly providential. Why drop the cloak when it had really defined the Brother for some years and had been a way to give witness to a state that was unique and incomparable to any other? And wearing the short cassock turned out as a way for the Brothers who were wearing a fitted jacket not to be seen as simple seculars. The short cassock put the finishing touches on the Brother's profile.

## **The hat**

You will say, "What about the hat?" It's the one everyone wore. Was it a three-cornered hat?<sup>90</sup> Most likely not. The three-cornered hat at that time was not in use. It was a wide brimmed hat. Little by little, the custom was to scale back a bit the brim, but that came only later. At the time De La Salle adopted it, it was an ordinary hat, one that everyone wore.

Blain says that, at that time, wide brimmed hats were worn and that the Founder, wanting to make the Brothers appear different from the ways of the world, gave them hats with an even broader brim.<sup>91</sup> I don't believe that De La Salle would pay a hat maker to produce extravagant hats for the Brothers. Up until a little while ago, the archives in the Generalate have housed

three-cornered hats from the last century. It was enormous! Why? Because toward the end of his life, De La Salle wrote a rule, *On the Habits of the Christian Schools*. These habits are the ones described here but with incredible attention to detail. He gives the exact length and width of the rabato, and he does the same for the dome of the hat and the width of its brim. There was a time in the Institute during the Restoration when they wanted to recapture the texts of the Founder and follow them to the letter. This resulted in going to extremes, even with regard to hats. I don't believe De La Salle went that far. He followed common usage, that of respectable society, but not that of the upper bourgeoisie and even less of the nobility.

### **A distinctive habit: definition of the community**

What is captivating throughout the text of the *Memorandum* is to see how this development, which I would characterize as informal, benefitted from circumstances to continue to affirm the community. This became for De La Salle and for the Brothers living with him an opportunity for conscious decision making. We can say that from that moment on there is no doubt in anyone's mind that De La Salle and his Brothers were a community living in renunciation and separated from the world with a well-defined apostolic goal, namely to establish gratuitous schools in the cities.

### **Meaning of the words “crude” and “mediocre”**

When you re-read the text, you will perhaps be surprised to note the Founder's constant use of certain individual words. Such is the case with the word “crude” used several times and also the word “mediocre.” We must understand these words as they are used in the language of the seventeenth century. “Crude” meant somewhat unrefined or ordinary. In the same way, “mediocre” simply meant “average.” When the Founder says that the mind of the Brothers is mediocre, he means average or not highly cultivated. He uses these words to prove to M. Baudrand and his circle that you cannot make priests or churchmen out of the Brothers of the Christian Schools.

You will soon have a critical edition of this *Memorandum on the Habit in Cahiers lasalliens* (CL). In the meantime, in CL 11, on pages 349 to 354, you have a reading that presents the text in as careful a way as is possible at the current time.

## **Appendix**

### **Introductory Remarks about the *Cahiers lasalliens* and the Concordance of Words used by De La Salle<sup>92</sup>**

#### ***Cahiers lasalliens* (CL)**

This collection was conceived twenty years ago, in 1959 exactly, to bring together documents and texts or, as much as possible, studies dedicated to the work of Saint John Baptist de La Salle, his person and the origins of the Institute. In principle, we limited the time frame to a century (1651 to 1751), from the birth of the Founder to the resignation of Brother Timothy, the second Superior General.<sup>93</sup>

The initial focus of the *Cahiers lasalliens* was to present the biographies of the Founder that, among other documents [from the time of the Lasallian origins], had remained in manuscript form until the present time. These biographies are the notes of Brother Bernard<sup>94</sup> from 1721 as transcribed by Brother Romain (the content of CL 4) as well as the two versions of Maillefer, who was the nephew of John Baptist de La Salle and a learned librarian in the Benedictine congregation of Saint-Maur. In 1723, he wrote the biography of his uncle.<sup>95</sup> He made the mistake of giving his text to Brother Thomas, Charles Frappet, who was one of the first companions of John Baptist de La Salle and one of those to whom De La Salle entrusted several responsibilities, among others that of econome or procurator of the community. Brother Thomas had decided that the manuscript would not be published, but it was handed over to Canon Blain who, ten years later in 1733, published the two volumes with which you are now familiar.<sup>96</sup> Maillefer was not happy with this, and rightly so, because he found that Blain plagiarized a little too much. Later, Maillefer the Benedictine took some comfort by recopying his own manuscript, which he finished in 1740 and which he placed in the library of the monastery of Saint-Rémy in Rheims.

CL 6 reproduces the two Maillefer volumes, the one from 1723 – but drawn from a copy because we do not have the original – and an original copy of 1740 from the author himself. On the other hand, CL 7 and CL 8 contain the two volumes of Blain in the first printed edition, i.e. the Rouen edition of 1733.

It was necessary to add indexes to these biographies. A first index of Bernard was published in CL 4; a first index of the two Maillefer texts compared with each other appeared in CL 6; then in CL 9 was added an index of proper nouns taken from the three biographies, Bernard, Maillefer and Blain. In a few months, or at the latest in a year, CL 10 will come out, which will present the thematic index of the three biographers. Why? Because when taking on the story of John Baptist de La Salle and the origins of the Institute, it is absolutely indispensable and necessary to have recourse to the first biographers and not to one or another of the authors who have come afterward and who generally have only gone back to Blain and reworked him. Therefore, it is indispensable not only to return to the sources but to compare and contrast them, for if we want one day to arrive at a somewhat more critical idea of the transactions and agreements made by the Founder, then we must make judgments by comparing the statements of each of the first biographers.

This will not be sufficient, however, because now we can access many of the documents the first biographers did not have at hand. These are the documents to be found in CL 26 and the following ones which make available an entire collection of interesting documents which situate John Baptist de La Salle in his milieu and enable us to better know his circle and even the transactions he had to make with regard to his family, the ecclesiastical authorities and the academic administrators at the time he was studying.

The series of *Cahiers lasalliens* is not finished; it is about to be finished.<sup>97</sup> In the meantime, we have published the works of the Founder, all his written works. You know that there has been much discussion previously about the authenticity of the works of John Baptist de La Salle. In other words, should we really have attributed them to him? The question was asked a little over a hundred twenty years ago in Rome during the proceedings on the heroicity of his virtues and, therefore, on the authorship of his writings.<sup>98</sup> A very difficult problem to solve! At that time, the

majority of the editions of the writings attributed to John Baptist de La Salle and presented to the Sacred Congregation of Rites were editions published decades after his death. Clearly, some of these writings had been altered. These posthumous writings were, then, not able to be attributed with absolute certainty to John Baptist de La Salle.

Since then, in the book records still extant in Paris and principally in the department of printed works of the Bibliothèque Nationale, we have found texts that validate John Baptist de La Salle as author of all that we can call the pedagogical writings. In fact, we can state that it was he who in 1702 filed for permission to get printed the manuscripts that constituted a first edition for two of his works. We find written in the text “composed by Monsieur de la Salle, privilege accorded to the superior of the Christian schools.”

So there does exist material evidence of the authenticity of the first editions. It was a process of finding as many of the first editions as possible and making them available to all the Brothers. That is what we have done in the *Cahiers lasalliens* starting from CL 12 up to CL 25.

There is, however, a slight distinction to make between the spiritual works and the pedagogical works. In fact, the pedagogical works were printed to be accessible to the public, and thus they had to obtain the permission of the book trade association. The spiritual works were printed for the private use of the Brothers of the Christian Schools, and so it was not necessary for them to get authorization from the association. However, for two of them, the *Conduct of Schools*<sup>99</sup> and the *Collection of Small Treatises*,<sup>100</sup> which were printed in Avignon, approval from the Grand Inquisitor was necessary.

The other works, namely the *Meditations for Sundays and Feasts* and the *Meditations for Time of Retreat*,<sup>101</sup> did not get approval. We know from the preface of Brother Timothy that the manuscripts that were presented were not faithful on all points and that they had to be submitted to a censor, a theologian, who took it upon himself to review them and put them in better shape. We still have one difficulty with the *Meditations for Sundays and Feasts* and the *Meditations for Time of Retreat*: it is difficult to be sure that they are John Baptist de La Salle’s word for word.

### **Concordance of De La Salle’s Word Usage**

This is one of the reasons why we began twenty years ago in Rome to gather together systematically all the words used by John Baptist de La Salle. As some of you have seen, we have a file cabinet in our office in Rome which contains about 300,000 index cards and on each of the cards is one word used by the Founder along with the brief context in which he used it and the exact reference to the passage from which it is cited. Using these 300,000 cards, we are now busy typing up the contents of the cabinet to create what is a true concordance of De La Salle’s works.<sup>102</sup> As soon as we get a word of the Founder, we immediately go to the place where he uses this word within the entire collection of his writings. As soon as we get an idea of a context, we find the precise reference where the Founder cites the passage with which we are working. In addition, we see some very rare words coming up, words appearing once or twice in the Founder’s language. This leads us to suspect that there was someone working a change, another hand which probably inserted into a writing of the Founder a word that was not his. This is especially true in the *Meditations*.

Yet, this is a work just about started, just beginning to take shape. We will still have to continue it for some years and conduct systematic studies of these files to be able to perhaps define in a scientific way the vocabulary used by John Baptist de La Salle.

So you can see that we really have to rediscover the Founder. This instrument is accessible to everyone. But it is only an instrument, and we still need to know how to use it. It is not a ready-made reading of the Founder already digested for us, but it does make the task of understanding him easier, more careful and more certain.

I remember that more than twenty years ago Brother Michel Sauvage<sup>103</sup> and I began a brief collaboration to study certain texts of the Founder. The greatest difficulty was that we did not know where to go to find definitive editions; sometimes we had to go to the archives of the Generalate of the Brothers of the Christian Schools or to the Bibliothèque Nationale in Paris. In some instances, we wound up looking at each other unable to arrive at a conclusion. For example, we found in the archives at Rome four copies of Maillefer and no one had yet established exactly where they came from. It's done now, and we can confidently say that you can read Maillefer in CL 6.

So that was our first goal: to put instruments for research in the hands of anyone who wished to get a stronger contact with what the Founder wrote, with what he has left us. And the work has not ended; we will still need several generations of researchers before we can draw from it what can truly be presented in all certainty as the Lasallian message.

### Notes

1. Brother Maurice-Auguste Hermans, FSC (1911-1987), was former Assistant Superior General and former Procurator General of the Institute of the Brothers of the Christian Schools. He served as the first international director of the office of Lasallian Studies in the Generalate of the Brothers in Rome and is recognized as the architect of the monumental series *Cahiers lasalliens*. He held a Doctor of Canon Law degree.

2. Brother Leonard Marsh, FSC, is associate professor of Foreign Languages at La Salle University in Philadelphia, PA. He earned his Ph.D. in French Literature from Boston College, and he specializes in sixteenth- and seventeenth-century French literature.

3. Saint John Baptist de La Salle (1651-1719) is the founder of the Brothers of the Christian Schools and the person who, with his first Brother-teachers, launched what we now know as an international movement of Lasallian education.

4. Here at this point in the conference, Brother Maurice-Auguste goes into a rather long introductory explanation of two key sources that have been prepared, under his able direction, to assist in the work of Lasallian scholarship: a) the *Cahiers lasalliens* collection and b) the compilation of a concordance of the words used by John Baptist de La Salle in his writings. These two sources constitute the principal work of twenty to thirty years of Brother Maurice-Auguste's life. This introductory explanation has been moved to the Appendix which can be found at the conclusion of this article.

5. See *Rule and Foundational Documents by John Baptist de La Salle*, translated and edited by Augustine Loes, FSC, and Ronald Isetti (Landover, MD: Lasallian Publications, 2002), pp. 181-191.

6. By the expression “to read” a text is meant: analyzing or interpreting the text, deciphering what the author is saying, putting the text into its social and historical context, and situating it within the corpus of the author’s other writings.

7. A collection published in Rome about the life of John Baptist de La Salle and the origins of the Institute of the Brothers of the Christian Schools. For more information, see the Appendix at the end of this article.

8. *Memorandum on the Habit* (MH) 3. Unless otherwise noted, translations from the *Memorandum on the Habit* are from the Loes and Isetti translation. See note 5.

9. MH 28.

10. MH 31.

11. MH 2.

12. See *The Letters of John Baptist de La Salle* (Landover, MD: Lasallian Publications, 1988).

13. The Loes and Isetti English translation uses the word “communities” here. The translators were either unaware of Brother Maurice-Auguste’s key distinction or, if they were aware, they chose to ignore it. In addition, either Brother Maurice-Auguste or those who transcribed his conferences cited this letter wrongly. I have corrected it to letter 11 and for clarity indicated the letter’s addressee as Brother Hubert. This translation is mine since the Loes and Isetti English translation uses neither the verbs “establish” nor “found,” which is the very distinction Br. Maurice-Auguste wishes to make.

14. *Letters* 11, §6.

15. See *Rule and Foundational Documents by John Baptist de La Salle*, translated and edited by Augustine Loes, FSC, and Ronald Isetti (Landover, MD: Lasallian Publications, 2002), pp. 13-146.

16. MH 2. This translation is mine since the Loes and Isetti English translation uses neither the verbs “establish” nor “found,” which is the very distinction Brother Maurice-Auguste wishes to make.

17. In this sense, “to found” means “to fund,” i.e. “to provide financial resources.”

18. Charles Maurice Le Tellier (1642-1710) was Archbishop of Rheims.

19. Canon Jean-Baptiste Blain was one of the first biographers of John Baptist de La Salle.

20. For some understanding of the *Letters Patent* and the *Bull of Approbation*, see *An Introduction to the History of the Institute of the Brothers of the Christian Schools: The Origins, 1651-1726* by Henri Bédel (Rome: Brothers of the Christian Schools, 1996), pp. 202-204.

21. Concerning Madame de Croyères, see *An Introduction to the History of the Institute of the Brothers of the Christian Schools: The Origins, 1651-1726* by Henri Bédel (Rome: Brothers of the Christian Schools, 1996), p. 29.

22. MH 2.

23. *Acts of the Apostles* 2:44-45.

24. This translation is mine. The Loes and Isetti translation has: “They treat one another as equals.” The French is more specific: “On y vit . . . dans une entière uniformité.” (“They live in complete uniformity.”) Brother Maurice-Auguste dwells here on the objective uniformity of the Brothers’ life detailed in the *Memorandum* rather than on the interrelationship among the Brothers that is implied in the twentieth-century English translation.

25. MH 3.

26. See *Gabriel Drolin: De La Salle Brother, 1664-1733* by Alfred Calcutt, FSC (Oxford: Lasallian Publications, 2002).

27. *Letters* 18, §17.

28. The *livre* was the currency used in France from 781 AD to 1795 AD.

29. CL 11, p. 129.

30. MH 4.

31. MH 4.

32. MH 5.

33. MH 6.

34. MH 8.

35. MH 9.

36. MH 10.

37. *Rule* 9, §19.

38. MH 7.

39. MH 7.

40. Juniorate is the term used by the Brothers of the Christian Schools for teenagers who, while attending a residential secondary school and discerning a vocation, are preparing to enter the novitiate.

41. CL 7, p. 280; CL 6, Ca, p. 45; Re, pp. 67-68.

42. MH 8.

43. MH 14.

44. MH 17.

45. MH 14.

46. MH 15.

47. CL 7, p. 238.

48. MH 14.

49. MH 15.

50. MH 14-15.

51. *Rule* 5 §1.

52. MH 11-12.

53. MH 40.

54. MH 29.

55. See *The Life of John Baptist de La Salle, Founder of the Institute of the Brothers of the Christian Schools: A Biography in Three Books* by Jean-Baptiste Blain. Translated by Richard Arnandez, FSC (Landover, MD: Lasallian Publications, 2000).

56. Blain II, pp. iii, 187.

57. Hippolyte Hélyot (1660-1716).

58. The rabato, or rabat, is the white bib-like garment worn as part of the habit of the Brothers of the Christian Schools.



59. MH 29.

60. MH 37.

61. MH 17.

62. *Rule and Foundational Documents* 162.

63. MH 48.

64. MH 17.

65. MH 60-62.

66. MH 62.

67. MH 47. This translation is mine. The Loes and Isetti English translation has “who have not pursued a classical education.” I have used the word “studies” because Brother Maurice-Auguste dwells here on the French word for studies and its derivatives, *études* and *étudier*.

68. MH 10.

69. MH 9.

70. CL 7, p. 224.

71. Concerning Henri Lheureux, see *The Work Is Yours: The Life of Saint John Baptist de La Salle* by Luke Salm (Romeoville, IL: Christian Brothers Publications, 1989), pp. 71-73.

72. MH 47.

73. MH 48.

74. MH 50.

75. MH 47.

76. MH 53, 59.

77. MH 54.

78. MH 57.

79. MH 56.

80. MH 33.

81. In French the word in question here is “singulier.” The Loes and Isetti translation renders it here as “special,” but later in item 42 it renders it as “distinctive.” [translator’s italics]

82. MH 41-42.

83. MH 43. The portion in italics is my translation since the Loes and Isetti translation wrongly implies that they considered De La Salle’s house as an employment agency for domestic servants: “regarded it merely as an employment agency for schoolteachers or servants.”

84. Concerning Adrien Nyel, see *The Work Is Yours: The Life of Saint John Baptist de La Salle* by Luke Salm (Romeville, IL: Christian Brothers Publications, 1989), pp. 33-39.

85. MH 43-44.

86. MH 42.

87. MH 21-24.

88. MH 34.

89. CL 7, p. 350.

90. The tricorn was a style of hat popular in the eighteenth century.

91. CL 7, p. 241.

92. See endnote #4.

93. The leader of the Brothers of the Christian Schools and the successor of John Baptist de La Salle is known as the Superior General. Brother Timothée (1682-1752) was Superior General from 1720 to 1751. See *An Introduction to the History of the Institute of the Brothers of the Christian Schools: The Eighteenth Century, 1726-1804* by Henri Bédel (Rome: Brothers of the Christian Schools, 1998), page xiii.

94. For an English-language translation, see “John Baptist de La Salle” by Brother Bernard in *John Baptist de La Salle: Two Early Biographies (Maillefer and Bernard)*, edited by Paul Grass and translated by William J. Quinn and Donald Mouton (Landover, MD: Lasallian Publications, 1996), pp. 255-353.

95. For an English-language translation, see “The Life of Saint John Baptist de La Salle” by Dom François Elie Maillefer in *John Baptist de La Salle: Two Early Biographies (Maillefer and Bernard)*, edited by Paul Grass and translated by William J. Quinn and Donald Mouton (Landover, MD: Lasallian Publications, 1996), pp. 17-254.

96. For an English-language translation, see *The Life of John Baptist de La Salle: A Biography in Three Books* by Jean-Baptiste Blain, edited by Luke Salm and translated by Richard Arandez (Landover: Lasallian Publications, 2000).

97. Obviously, the author's prediction has not been realized as the *Cahiers lasalliens* series continues into the present to be published.

98. Being referenced here is the documentation for the Vatican of the cause of canonization of John Baptist de La Salle, who was subsequently beatified in 1888 and canonized in 1900.

99. See *The Conduct of Christian Schools* by John Baptist de La Salle (Landover, MD: Lasallian Publications, 1996).

100. See *Collection of Various Short Treatises* by John Baptist de La Salle (Landover, MD: Lasallian Publications, 1993).

101. See *Meditations by John Baptist de La Salle* (Landover, MD: Lasallian Publications, 1994).

102. There was subsequently a limited six-volume print edition of these cards published as *Vocabulaire lasallien*.

103. Brother Michel Sauvage, also a former Assistant Superior General of the Brothers of the Christian Schools, succeeded the author as the second international director of the office of Lasallian Studies in the Generalate of the Brothers in Rome.

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