

THE KNOWN MANUSCRIPTS  
OF SAINT JOHN BAPTIST  
DE LA SALLE (3)

(C) DOCUMENTS WRITTEN BY THE SAINT BUT NOT SIGNED

The third category in the classification of our Founder's known manuscripts which we have proposed for this outline survey, comprises eight documents written throughout by him but not bearing his signature. Five of these are held in AMG, and of these the most important is the document known as the *Memoir on the Habit* - an apologia he wrote in defence of the distinctive garb the early Brothers had adopted when critics, notably M. Baudrand, parish priest of Saint-Sulpice, wished him to change it in favour of normal clerical dress. The manuscript is self-evidently the Founder's draft (with numerous corrections and alterations) of what presumably in its final form was presented (signed, no doubt) to M. Baudrand; unfortunately, this fair copy has not come down to us. Brother Maurice Hermans has discussed in CL 11 the importance of the draft we possess, assessing it as more than an exposition of the reasons in favour of retaining the habit as it was: it was also "a judicious reminder of the conditions of the Community's existence and of the status to which it believed itself able to aspire".

The first historian of the Institute to give due treatment to this important document was Frère Lucard in 1882, and since then it has been published in full four times: by Jean Guibert in his *Histoire de St. Jean Baptiste de La Salle*, published in celebration of the Saint's canonisation in 1900; by Georges Rigault in Tome I of his nine-volume *Histoire Générale* of the Institute (1937); by Brother Clair Battersby, who included it (in the original French as well as in his English translation of it) in his 1952 volume *De La Salle: Letters and Documents*; and by Brother Maurice Hermans who presented it as the first of his *pièces justificatives* in his doctoral thesis *L'Institut des Frères des Écoles Chrétiennes à la recherche de son statut canonique: des origines (1679) à la bulle de Benoît XIII (1725)*, published in 1962 as No. 11 in the *Cahiers Lasalliens* series. The Memoir has not so far been published in facsimile, though Brother Léon de Marie Aroz has included a photograph of its first page (there are eight in all, the eighth containing only a few lines) in CL 40 Vol. 1. Bro. Maurice has promised (in CL 11) a facsimile reproduction of the whole text in a volume of the *Cahiers* in preparation. (Readers of LASALLIANA will have perused with interest Bro. Maurice's paper on the Memoir in the last issue, 04-A-20).

Another unsigned manuscript in the Founder's hand, preserved in AMG, is a single, undated page traditionally referred to as a "preface to the *Collection of Different Short Treatises*", though, in fact, it did not appear in any of the known twenty-two editions of the *Collection* (since it had not appeared in the *princeps* of 1711) until the penultimate one of 1932. The mention in this brief text of "a small volume" and "this little book" no doubt led to its traditional identification, but Bro. Maurice Hermans, who published the text in CL 15, has there convincingly argued that the original destination of the two paragraphs, "at once doctrinal and exhortative", which make up the "preface", was either to introduce the book of *Rules* as a whole or, "more probably", to serve as an exordium to Chapter II of the *Rules*, "On the Spirit of this Institute". If the latter, it was discarded in favour of the "solemn and vigorous" introduction which made its appearance in the Founder's 1718 revision of the *Rules* and was maintained, textually unchanged, down to the final of the thirteen known published editions of the *Rules*, that of 1947 (Cf. CL 25).

The remaining three AMG pieces in this category are merely transcripts of brief texts, not composed by the Saint. Two of them provide the earliest known example of the Founder's handwriting (apart from three mere signatures). Both are dated 27th July 1671 (when he was just turned 20) and are transcriptions of the recognised Latin formulas then in use to testify to a student's "assiduity" in attending his theology courses at the Sorbonne on (in the present two cases) the Incarnation and the Blessed Trinity. Presumably students could prepare their own certificates in this way to save the time of their tutors, who simply validated them by appending their signatures (though John Baptist had already, the previous year, received similar testimonials of assiduity at the University of Rheims, written throughout and signed by two of his professors there, Michel de Blanzay and the Irish Dean of the Faculty, Daniel Egan). The third piece is a translation into French of the permission in Latin given to the Founder by the Archbishop of Paris, Louis Antoine de Noailles, for the celebration of Mass in the chapel of the novitiate at Vaugirard; it is dated 27 March 1697. The presence of such manuscripts as these last three in the central Archives of the Institute illustrates the appositeness of the remarks with which Bro. Aroz introduced his outline history of the Generalate Archives in CL 40 Vol. II: "The Archives of the Institute of the Brothers of the Christian Schools trace their origin to the foundation period of the Institute. It is possible, indeed, to affirm, quite objectively, that it was the Founder himself who gave them their start...".

The three written but unsigned manuscripts of the Founder not held by AMG are all in the Rheims Municipal Archives. They were discovered there by Bro. Aroz who published them in facsimile and in transcription, with notes, in CL 38: all three, in fact, relate to M. de La Salle's period as executor of Nicolas Roland's will. Two of the pieces, dated 30 March 1679 and 24 August 1680, are forms of contract leasing two properties belonging to Roland's Sisters of the Holy Child Jesus. The legally worded document, written (because presumably composed) by M. de La Salle, bear the signatures only of the respective lessees. The third document is a financial evaluation of the Sisters' properties, drawn up in August 1679 at a preparatory stage of the signed inventory of all their goods compiled and completed by October of the same year (cf. LASALLIANA 04-A-21).

## (D) ADDITIONS TO EXISTING DOCUMENTS

7 manuscripts are known, not written by the Founder but bearing additions in his hand; five of these are held in AMG and three of them also carry his signature, as do the other two documents held elsewhere.

A passing reference has already been made (cf. 04-A-21) to one of the AMG pieces, the Formula of Vows transcribed (from the Founder's master text) by Frère Michel-Barthélemy Jacquinot and completed by M. de La Salle with the insertion of his full name in the text and the addition of the concluding words: "... all my life, in testimony of which I have signed, done at Vaugirard this sixth day of June, feast day of the Most Blessed Trinity, of the year sixteen ninety four. De La Salle".

Among the other formulas of vows bound into the same booklet as this one of the Founder are those of two disciples who pronounced their vows later than the original twelve, Frère Paul (Pierre Raimbault) and Frère Grégoire (François Cortier): both of these pages have brief additions (unsigned, but unmistakably in the Founder's hand) recording the dates of the deaths of the two Brothers, 29th October 1695 and 29th July 1700 respectively.

The letter of authority, dated 4 December 1716, which Frère Barthélemy carried with him when he made his tour of all the houses in view of the forthcoming general assembly of 1717, carries this addition of the Founder, with his signature: "I am in agreement with what the Brothers have resolved above, and with the day, month and year there indicated". And the remaining AMG manuscript in this group provides us with the chronologically latest known writing of the Saint, being dated 17 February 1719, less than two months, therefore, before his death. It is a signed statement added to a transcript by F. Barthélemy of the Founder's document of 11 August 1718, already referred to in category (B) (cf. 04-A-21), ceding possession of his library to his successor. The brief addition merely authenticates Barthélemy's copy.

To the present category belongs one of the most striking of the discoveries of Lasallian documentation which we owe to the researches of Bro. Léon de Marie Aroz. The Founder's 1676 *Report of the Guardianship*, found by him in the *Archives départementales de la Marne (dépôt annexe de Reims)* on 24 September 1964 ("a lucky day for the researcher!" comments Aroz) and published in 1967 in four successive volumes (28-31) of the *Cahiers Lasalliens*, series, comprises 460 pages. The *Report* is presented in the stylised handwriting of a professional scribe, but Bro. Aroz has identified fifty-four pages on which corrections or marginal comments have been made by M. de La Salle personally (proof, observes Aroz, that he had "read, re-read, completed, corrected" the pages of the report before submitting them). His signature appears only once, namely on the penultimate page.

Finally, there exists another fairly extensive legal document of twelve pages, a report of financial transactions made by a certain Edme Lapinte on behalf of two sisters, Agatha and Marie Blondel, both members of Nicolas Roland's community. The date of this document, 16 September 1678, shows that it was drawn up within the period of M. de La Salle's executorship of Roland's will (dated 23 April 1678). Hence it is not surprising to find substantial marginal annotations in the Founder's handwriting on five pages of the report, together with a concluding signed statement that the report had been duly drawn up in his presence. The document is published in CL 38, in facsimile and transcription with notes by Br. Aroz.

## (E) SIGNATURES ONLY

Our final category consists of 27 documents bearing the signature of the Founder, but nothing more in his hand. Four of these are in AMG and, of the other twenty-three, eleven are in Paris (National Archives), eleven in Rheims (six in the municipal archives, four in the annexe of the Marne departmental archives, and one in private ownership) and one in Rouen (Seine-Maritime Archives). This and much other information about the documents concerned is conveniently available in CL 41, Vol. I, since the author, Brother Aroz, had the happy idea of appending to that work a chronological inventory of all the 99 known signatures of the Saint (97 of them on original documents, the other 2 on facsimile copies). He was prompted to do this, he tells us, by questions frequently put to him by "people eager to know even the least details of the particular circumstances of the Founder's life". The inventory is introduced with a two-page descriptive analysis of the evolving characteristics of the signatures at the successive stages of the Founder's life, and then a detailed description is given of each of the ninety-nine signatures, from the boyish, painstakingly-written "Jean baptiste dela Salle", appended to the baptismal certificate of his brother Pierre for whom John Baptist, then 15 year old, was godfather, to the final "De La Salle" of the 68 year-old Founder, referred to above.

Introducing his list, Bro. Aroz disclaims any intention of offering in his commentary a graphological interpretation of the signatures. But it may be mentioned, as a matter of interest, that a graphological analysis of the Founder's handwriting was, in fact, published in 1952 in an Italian work entitled *I Santi dalla Scrittura*. The author, Girolamo Moretti, a Franciscan priest and expert graphologist (his text book, *Treatise of Graphology*, had reached its 7th edition by 1952) presents an analytical commentary of a specimen page of manuscript of each of fifty-eight saints. The author was aware that the handwriting put before him was in every case that of a canonised saint, but the identity of the saint was not made known to him. The book reproduces each specimen passage in facsimile (that of our Founder comes from a 1706 letter to Brother Hubert) and each is followed by a study of the writer's psychology as evidenced simply by the handwriting shown. It is an interesting exercise, to say the least, to weigh what graphology has to say about the temperament and character of M. de La Salle against what one knows of him from his life and writings.

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