

A Lasallian Reading of the Letter to the Hebrews

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Foreword

A number of years ago I was introduced to the writings of Brother Raymond Brisebois by a mutual friend of ours, Brother Jean-Guy Rodrigue.⁴ Brother Raymond, of the District of Montreal in Canada, was authoring a series of short study guides entitled *Invitation—Initiation aux Cahiers lasalliens*. These were published in Rome by the Lasallian Studies department at the Casa Generalizia of the Institute (1990-1995). Brisebois' intention was to help Lasallian Brothers and Partners better understand the extraordinary scholarship available in the important *Cahiers lasalliens* series.

It was toward the completion of this formidable project, and just before his death in 1996, that Brisebois wrote the unpublished manuscript that you are now perusing. The original text is written in the French language, and it has been sitting on the shelves of my bookcase for many years. Now that the Institute will focus our attention in 2025 on sharing Lasallian spirituality⁵ it seemed opportune to get it translated and make it available to English-speaking Lasallians.

Brisebois' approach is rather novel in that he has focused on only one book of the New Testament as a backdrop to the writings of John Baptist de La Salle. He has woven into a rich tapestry De La Salle's use of the Letter to the Hebrews and the spiritual writings⁶ prepared by the Founder for use by educators working in the service of helping young people realize their dignity as the children of God.

Another novelty of approach was the choice of Brisebois to assume the voice of the Founder.⁷ The author speaks directly, and in the first-person voice, to Jesus as though he were John Baptist de La Salle himself. This approach will be charming for some but perhaps off-putting for others. In a few spots, the reader will undoubtedly wonder to whom he or she is listening (Brisebois speaking as De La Salle or Brisebois speaking as Brisebois). However, one shouldn't be fooled into thinking that this is only a literary device. Both the *Explanation of the Method of Mental Prayer* and the *Meditations* associated with it were intended by De La Salle to foster and facilitate intimate conversation with Jesus. Hence, this novelty of approach is both a model for and an invitation to communion with God.

It also appears rather important to keep a few other things in mind when reading this manuscript. The first is the actual lived context of the first Brother teachers. Brother Maurice-Auguste

Hermans and Brother Michel Sauvage note that “De La Salle’s spiritual teaching was concerned in its entirety for their training and benefit.” Theirs was, more often than not, a precarious and fragile existence. De La Salle endeavored tirelessly to deepen their Christian faith, imbue them with pride in their vocation, and hearten them in the face of Church authorities who often misunderstood them and other educators who often viewed them as interlopers.

De La Salle is at one with the Brothers in their work and in their troubles, in the duties of their state, in their limitations, and in their weaknesses. He begins at their level, careful to get down to basics and to base their spiritual life on faith, on scripture, on the Mystery of Christ, on the action of the Spirit, on the life of charity, on zeal, and on real prayer. The ideal presented by the Founder to his disciples opens up to them a spiritual life which they are going to lead for the furthering of the education of youth.

His work for the “spiritualization” of these teachers does not distract from their tasks; on the contrary, it aims at leading them to perceive and to live their situation and their activities as their meeting point with the living God, where they encounter their life of faith and charity and their spiritual growth.⁸

A second thing to keep in mind in reading this manuscript is the way in which scripture is used by John Baptist de La Salle. Brother Miguel Campos, when writing about the manner in which the Founder used scripture, notes,

What I want to emphasize is that for De La Salle the Gospel which he so often cites is not a dead book but the good news of the present, living action of the Spirit of God made visible in the action and the interacting relationships of teachers and students. The Founder refers to scripture in order to refer the Brothers and their students to the transcendent totality of the history of salvation, to root them in their here and now, and to call them to live the Gospel in the here and now of their lives.⁹

Campos proposed “a classification of De La Salle’s recourse to scripture into three categories.” He noted that De La Salle cites scripture sometimes as a profession of faith,¹⁰ sometimes as citations of remembrance,¹¹ and sometimes as citations of “the call”;¹² and he remarks that this manner of citing scripture leads us to avoid an expression like, “De La Salle *uses* scripture,” for he does not use it for a rhetorical purpose or to apply some definitions of the obligations of the Brothers, or the meaning of the purpose of the Institute. In one sense scripture does not come to him from the outside, but the words which he cites come from a “gut level,” from the lived reality of the life he has lived and which he has contemplated in the light of faith.¹³

A third thing to keep in mind in reading this manuscript is the difficulty of translating the work now being read. Brisebois wrote in French and was able, in just about every instance, to access original French-language documents; but with the translation of his manuscript, it has been necessary to rely on the various English translations of these texts that were done over a number of years and by a number of different translators.

For example, the *Jerusalem Bible*, which was originally published in France (1966/1973), was chosen as the text of reference. Here Brisebois follows the example of Sauvage and Campos who

used the *Jerusalem Bible* when preparing their French-language commentary on and analysis of the *Explanation of the Method of Mental Prayer* (1989). Needless to say, the *Jerusalem Bible* would not have been available when De La Salle was working on his writings. When Brother Oswald Murdoch translated into English both the *Explanation* and the commentary on it by Sauvage and Campos (1995), he chose not to use the *Jerusalem Bible* and instead translated the scriptural citations himself. When Brother Donald Mouton translated the *Explanation of the Method of Interior Prayer* (1995), he used the New American Bible for translations into English of direct references to scripture. Brother Richard Arnandez did his own translation of scripture in the Founder's *Meditations* (1994).

A fourth thing to keep in mind in reading this manuscript is that Brisebois' approach in preparing his above-mentioned short study guides, of which this is obviously one, was to presume that readers would have at their disposal all the primary and secondary sources being referenced. Given the sheer number of sources that he cites this would be highly unlikely for English readers. Hence, an effort has been made in editing the manuscript to incorporate many of the passages referenced by Brisebois into the manuscript itself, or into footnotes, for easier reading.

A fifth thing to keep in mind in reading this manuscript is that it would be advantageous if the reader had at least some minimal understanding of the context and the content of the Letter to the Hebrews, and there is happily no dearth of material available about what scripture scholar Donald J. Harrington has called "the greatest Christian sermon ever preached or written."¹⁴

In the introductory commentary on the writings of Saint Paul in the *Jerusalem Bible*, concerning the Letter to the Hebrews, we read,

The letter clearly assumes not only that its readers are thoroughly familiar with the Old Covenant but that they are Jewish Christians, perhaps even Jewish priests. . . . Having become Christians, they seem to have left Jerusalem and gone for shelter to some coastal town like Caesarea or Antioch. They are tired of exile. . . . Their faith is not very strong; and they have not yet properly understood it; persecution discourages them and they are tempted to go back.¹⁵

Harrington, in his commentary on the Letter, observes,

If they [the people addressed in Hebrews] are to persevere in Christian faith, they need a spiritual renewal. At various points, the author addresses their situation directly with stern warnings and words of encouragement. Most of all, he hopes that his biblical-theological presentation of Christ's sacrifice and priesthood will give them the appropriate theological framework to put aside their doubts and spiritual sluggishness and to revitalize their Christian faith and practice. To this end the author portrays Christ as the pioneer [the one who has already gone before us] and the leader [perfecter] for those who follow him on the way to eternal life with God.¹⁶

And so, by way of conclusion, let me just say that these few introductory remarks about two novelties of this particular manuscript and about five things to keep in mind when reading it will, hopefully, help readers better understand the simple riches offered here by Brisebois and profit

more fully from the opportunity that is being provided them of approaching the topic of Lasallian spirituality, in this anniversary year, through a new and rather novel portal.

Brother William Mann

1. Introduction

At least in France, the middle of the seventeenth century saw a revival of interest in favor of the sacred scriptures,¹⁷ especially the New Testament. Translations multiplied,¹⁸ and even the critical study of scripture made a modest breakthrough.¹⁹ But, beyond the material or scientific aspects, it was piety and the life of faith that benefitted from this movement, after having provoked it.

No surprise therefore that John Baptist de La Salle took advantage of the situation, which was a grace, and made extensive use of the sacred scriptures, especially the New Testament, which he went so far as to give to his Brothers as their first and principal Rule. He also asked them to always carry it with them and to read some of it every day.

However, he goes much further. The words of scripture are not primarily boilerplate phrases of the spiritual life that are almost magic.²⁰ The holy books are truly for him “spirit and life.” He powerfully shares them, having imbued himself with the thought of God to make these books in every sense the light of his judgments on the world. It is the loving appropriation of scripture that leads to the spirit of faith by which he lives and which he makes the spirit of his Institute.

It is quite obvious that this mentality is reflected in his writings, in the *Explanation of the Method of Mental Prayer* and in his *Meditations for Sundays and Feasts*. But this is particularly true in his admirable *Meditations for the Time of Retreat*, which are the summit of his pedagogical theology. These texts are interwoven with passages of scripture, which almost form the structure, or at least support it in an essential way.²¹ For his part, Rodrigue notes that there are “one-hundred-sixty-seven explicit quotations” from the New Testament alone in the *Meditations for Feasts*.²²

We have no difficulty in believing this. De La Salle uses the New Testament much more than the Old Testament in his writings. And in the New Testament, the Gospels are his preference. Nevertheless, the use of Saint Paul is abundant. The Letter to the Hebrews, which John Baptist de La Salle always attributes to Saint Paul,²³ is one of his favorite holy books. He quotes it liberally.

Some verses and chapters of Hebrews were particularly close to the Founder’s heart. For example, Hebrews 4:12:

The word of God is something alive and active: it cuts like any double-edged sword, but more finely: it can slip through the place where the soul is divided from the spirit, or joints from the marrow; it can judge the secret emotions and thoughts.

The text is cited four times in just the *Meditations for Feasts*.²⁴ Let's also look at Hebrews 13:17:

Obeys your leaders and do as they tell you, because they must give an account of the way they look after your souls.²⁵

We find this text in three passages of the *Meditations for the Time of Retreat*, and in Meditation #37.1²⁶ and Meditation #186.3.²⁷

A word of caution is perhaps in order here. It is not so much the quantity of citations that matters, but the integration of a passage into the texture of being, into its union with God, as a symbol or as a reality. Everyone has their favorite quotations, which come quickly, almost automatically to the lips or to the pen, but which can leave you wondering about their actual role. They are not insignificant, because the mouth speaks from the abundance of the heart. It is simply a matter of moving from a sign to what it signifies. It's really the matter of a simple question of caution in interpretation.

Let us mention the most frequently cited chapters of Hebrews: the tenth (twelve times) and the fourth (eleven times). The chapter that seems to challenge the Founder most is chapter eleven. In this regard, it is appropriate to listen to Blain's testimony.

It was his spirit of faith that made him take a special delight in Saint Paul's magnificent eulogy, in the well-known chapter eleven of the Letter to the Hebrews, on the faith of the patriarchs and saints of the Old Testament. When this was read in the refectory, he listened with the closest attention and seemed like a man enraptured.²⁸

We will then understand why, despite my lack of faith, of prayer life, of biblical and Lasallian knowledge, all things that can nevertheless be considered indispensable, but with love and with a great desire, I have thought of everything that I lack, like the blind man on the road to Jericho crying out to Jesus,²⁹ as I proceed to the writing of "A Lasallian Reading of the Letter to the Hebrews" [the manuscript that you now hold in your hands]. My limits are imposed by the nature of this work, which can merely be an approach to mystery, only a beginning.

Obviously, only the Founder could have provided a text that adequately corresponds to the objective of these pages. But he did not do so, and neither did anyone else. It would have to have been done by someone who, like Elisha for Elijah,³⁰ completely possessed his spirit; and that's not me. Far from it.

However, I've had at least two reasons for undertaking this present work. The first was precisely to signal a possible Elisha [John Baptist de La Salle]. The other was more subjective. Might the rereading the Letter to the Hebrews in the company of the Founder give me more of the spiritual

taste of John Baptist de La Salle, of scripture, and ultimately of God? Might the increased veneration for my father in the Institute lead me to a more vital grasp of his spirit, which is indeed the spirit of faith and the spirit of zeal, which is the spirit of Jesus and of the Spirit?

And I can, also, add a third reason for undertaking this current work. If this manuscript was originally aimed primarily for the Brothers, I also have intended this work for Lasallian associates on all levels.³¹ Moreover, everyone can benefit from approaching John Baptist de La Salle, one of the persons, I believe, who brings great honor to all of humankind.

Let us be very precise about this project. The following pages cannot be understood as a “commentary” on the sacred book under consideration. John Baptist de La Salle did not write a text of this kind, and I want to be careful not to put one under his pen! But the Founder of the Brothers of the Christian Schools, fully imbued with the sacred scripture, letter and spirit, was truly steeped in the Word of God.³² So we should not be surprised that the Letter to the Hebrews was completely familiar to him. This was not a literary knowledge, as one could have known of Cicero,³³ but a living understanding that changed one’s behavior and led to union with God. The Letter to the Hebrews, so boldly Christocentric, must have touched him greatly. It surely gave a doctrinal and scriptural basis to his view of the mind and heart of Jesus.

So this is not a “commentary,” but a “rereading.” I will try to go through the sacred text of Hebrews as John Baptist de La Salle would have done, despite the audacity that this entails on my part. I will stop at the verses cited by the Founder himself, trying, as best as I can, to see how, beyond just that of a citation of remembrance, it is, at least sometimes, an expression of his thought, of his very soul. This approach will, at the same time, allow me to better know the extraordinary saint—one of greatness and originality—that was John Baptist de La Salle, still so little known.³⁴ And, at the same time, I will come to know the holy book of the Letter to the Hebrews itself.

I nevertheless believe that my approach is original, if that is of the slightest importance here. It is neither a question of lining up Lasallian quotations from the Letter to the Hebrews, nor of calling on this or that biblical text for help at one or another turning point in the life of John Baptist de La Salle. Rather, the Letter to the Hebrews constitutes the beginning, the middle, and the end of this essay, which is intended, on the occasion of rereading this Epistle, to be a vision of our father’s interiority, in his old age, a bit like what Campos achieved in another context in his *Evangelical Itinerary of Saint John Baptist de La Salle*.³⁵

I do not believe I have to defend myself for having sometimes given a too intimate and prayerful character to my “approach” from one Lasallian quotation to another.³⁶ I believed that it was appropriate, as best as possible, to reproduce the Founder’s state of mind, which, I repeat, is a rather bold and pretentious undertaking, one which I undertake only with fear and trembling.

I will give, section by section, normally at the beginning of each, the text of the Letter to the Hebrews according to the version of the Jerusalem Bible. Relative to texts used by the Founder,

using a text published in 1966/1973 is an anachronism that seems to me to be of little or no consequence. I do not have with me a copy of the French-language translation of the New Testament by Denis Amelote that De La Salle apparently used by preference.³⁷

There is a double remark that I must make in closing. First, it must be said that researchers, particularly in the *Cahiers lasalliens* series (Campos,³⁸ Rodrique,³⁹ and Sauvage⁴⁰) and also Varela in *Sacred Scripture in the Spirituality of Saint John Baptist de La Salle*,⁴¹ have examined the Lasallian writings in order to identify scriptural quotations, even minor or implicit allusions. But someone who wants to cite these texts sometimes finds them quite distant from the references given. This is one aspect of the question that arises here. One or other “Sherlock Holmes” of Lasallian writings has multiplied the clues [the allusions], but sometimes it takes a highly intense magnifying lens to find the actual citations.

Let us point out, then, an important remark by Campos, following along the lines of a remark made by Varela:

De La Salle does not do the work of an exegetical specialist. He is simply an ascetical writer who, as a pedagogue and father, distributes the best spiritual nourishment to his sons and disciples. He does so without pretense or subtlety; and one should not expect him to accommodate his conceptions to the theories of modern exegesis.⁴²

With the grace of God, may I, following this “rereading,” better understand and better imitate Saint John Baptist de La Salle in the final years of his life. To this end, I associate myself with two passages from the Letter to the Hebrews, one from the last chapter and the other from the first: “Receive these words of advice kindly” (Hebrews 13:22), and “In our own time, the last days” (Hebrews 1:2).

A Prayerful Pause before Beginning

O Jesus, in my cell—#20 at the Saint Yon estate in Rouen⁴³—where I, John Baptist de La Salle, live under the direction of Brother Barthélemy,⁴⁴ duly elected Superior General of the Institute of the Brothers of the Christian Schools, I humbly place myself in your presence and ask you to bless this initiative that I am undertaking in all obedience.⁴⁵ May it be to your glory!

Lord Jesus, under your gaze, I want to ponder once again, in a prayerful way, the admirable Letter to the Hebrews. This inspired book, first of all, cries out to show your greatness, but also your immense goodness on behalf of humankind. You recapitulate and accomplish the whole of the Old Testament and are the living expression of the New. May my prayerful rereading of this text draw me closer to you in “mind” and “heart”⁴⁶ as the years that pass bring me closer to the moment of seeing us—you and me—together in your eternal Kingdom.⁴⁷

This already long life of mine, you have invited me to live it as a gospel journey.⁴⁸ How many times has your challenging grace—you who are both the path and the guide—suggested to me

unforeseen detours. But it is clear that the work you asked me to accomplish, and which remains entirely yours,⁴⁹ was the establishment of Christian teachers⁵⁰ and particularly of the Brothers of the Christian Schools for the creation of schools guided by the study and learning of an authentic Christian life,⁵¹ of your very life among the people of this time in view of the salvation that you have brought about.

Also, in my prayerful rereading of the Letter to the Hebrews, I wish to recall, above all, the various passages where the text of the scriptures was powerfully inscribed in my approach toward you, texts that I suggested to my Brothers in my writings with a view to their own journey toward you in response to your call.⁵²

My rereading of this text, and these reminders, are not intended to formulate a commentary on the sacred text. In the past, in Paris and in Rheims, I followed the courses of good theologians⁵³ on the subject, and they helped me in my own preparation for the priesthood and in the rest of my life. I have often noted how my approach toward you was inspired by this or that verse of scripture, in general, and of the Letter to the Hebrews, in particular. More often still, the course of my conduct toward you quickly replicated what was to be discovered in its admirable and sacred pages. By the help of your grace, I have attempted to relive the Letter to the Hebrews, like the Gospels and other holy books, in my own life. And this life of faith, anchored in the scriptures, has become my guiding spirit, the one that I have attempted to transmit, as my best heritage, to the Brothers of the Christian Schools.⁵⁴ And if I said that I was going to recall, as if in passing, what I left in my writings relating to the Letter of the Hebrews, let the Brothers know well that the spirit of faith is much more important than all these particular words which, sometimes taken out of context, could never be as significant.

1. Hebrews: A Letter Addressed to a Jewish-Christian Community

1.1.Prologue (Hebrews 1:1-4)

The Greatness of the Incarnate Son of God

1 At various times in the past and in various different ways, God spoke to our ancestors through the prophets; but 2 in our own time, the last days, he has spoken to us through his Son, the Son that he has appointed to inherit everything and through whom he made everything there is. 3 He is the radiant light of God's glory and the perfect copy of his nature, sustaining the universe by his powerful command; and now that he has destroyed the defilement of sin, he has gone to take his place in heaven at the right hand of divine Majesty. 4 So he is now as far above the angels as the title which he has inherited is higher than their own name.

O Jesus, well beyond the majesty of these words that form the prologue of the Letter to the Hebrews, it is, above all, the truth of the discourse that strikes me and that is none other than the truth of yourself. Greater than the prophets and the angels, our salvation brings you glory.

You are everything to me; you are my life. Convinced by your grace of the greatness of your truth, I have wanted to make this known to the children in my schools as being the first object of their study. I have always by your grace and, if even at the beginning only reluctantly,⁵⁵ wanted to convince the Brothers of the Christian Schools, in the strongest sense possible, of the greatness of their mission as Christian educators. It has never been just about theoretically instilling your knowledge and love; this love needs to be expressed through an intense Christian life and a following of “gospel maxims.”

It has happened, on more than one occasion, that I have cited Hebrews 1:3 of this sacred book in my writings. Thus, in the *Explanation of the Method of Mental Prayer* at #191a,⁵⁶ as an example I gave of an act of faith in a mystery—in a presentation more theologically than exegetically accurate⁵⁷—I clearly allude to Hebrews 1:3 in the expression “the perfect copy of his nature.”⁵⁸

I came back to this a few times later in the *Explanation*, saying that you have made yourself “a human child” while truly being “from all eternity Son of God.”⁵⁹ This passage about your birth, you know, my Jesus, gives honor to Mary, your holy Mother.⁶⁰ I am happy that the holy name of your Mother has the opportunity to be present in this way from the opening pages of my rereading of Hebrews. May this name be blessed always and forever!

1.2. The Son Is Greater Than the Angels (Hebrews 1:5-14)

Proof from the Scriptures

5 God has never said to any angel: You are my Son, today I have become your father; or: I will be a father to him and he a son to me. 6 Again, when he brings the First-born into the world, he says: Let all the angels of God worship him. 7 About the angels, he says: He makes his angels winds and his servants flames of fire, 8 but to his Son he says: God, your throne shall last for ever and ever; and: his royal scepter is the scepter of virtue; 9 virtue you love as much as you hate wickedness. This is why God, your God, has anointed you with the oil of gladness, above all your rivals. 10 And again: It is you, Lord, who laid earth's foundations in the beginning, the heavens are the work of your hands; 11 all will vanish, though you remain, all wear out like a garment; 12 you will roll them up like a cloak, and like a garment they will be changed. But yourself, you never change and your years are unending. 13 God has never said to any angel: Sit at my right hand and I will make your enemies a footstool for you. 14 The truth is they are all spirits whose work is service, sent to help those who will be the heirs of salvation.

Lord Jesus, I thank you for giving me the assistance of angels, especially my guardian angel. But I need no proof—as perhaps the first Christians did?—to know that you are far above these blessed spirits or of the separation that there is between the Creator and the creatures.

My teachings to children about angels was given them in my catechisms.⁶¹ As for the Brothers, this doctrine and the element of spiritual life which arises from it, all my descriptions, reflect this same teaching.⁶²

I have wanted to inspire in others a great practical devotion to Saint Michael the Archangel and the guardian angels, and I tried to show how the mission of the Brothers among young people was similar to that of the guardian angels.⁶³

Lord, in my writings I have alluded a few times to one or other verse in this section of chapter 1 of the Letter to the Hebrews; and these three allusions are all to be found in the *Explanation of the Method of Mental Prayer*.

Thus, I cited Hebrews 1:6 as a model that I gave in the *Explanation* of an act of adoration. While referencing Saint Luke about the presence of the angels announcing your birth (Luke 2:13-14),⁶⁴ I wrote there at #214 of the *Explanation*, “God ordered his angels to worship you at your coming on earth.”⁶⁵ Faced with this mystery of divine greatness manifested in the smallness of the child of Bethlehem, the act of adoration tends toward self-abasement.⁶⁶

Yet another time, I made use of Hebrews 1:11-12 when, in the *Explanation of the Method of Mental Prayer* at #193f., I exclaimed, “I can be for eternity a child of God and brother of God!”⁶⁷

Lord, I realize that these truncated citations do not do justice to the magnificent chapter 1 of this Letter to the Hebrews. With regard to an attitude of prayer, I look again to this passage in the first chapter of Hebrews which begins with “God has never said to any angel” (Hebrews 1:5). In fact, did God ever say, “You are my Son (Hebrews 1:5) . . . sent to help those who will be the heirs of salvation” (Hebrews 1:14) to any angel?

Without repeating all the verses in between, I would like, as I look again at this passage, to apply to myself the eleventh verse: “They wear out like a garment.” In this case, I have no further need for evidence of this than the knowledge that I am now getting older⁶⁸ and that my threadbare cassock is but a symbol of all this. But like you, who “remain” as it says in that same verse (Hebrews 1:11), I entrust myself to you so that you may, on the day of my entry into Paradise, make me new again. Like the wise figures of old, but at a purely modest level, and this is also the case for all of my Brothers, we have been charged with a ministry and sent into service for those who are “heirs of salvation” (Hebrews 1:14). As long as you keep me on earth, O my Jesus, I will remain available for the mission. After which, the happy day will come when I will join you who “never change for your years are unending” (Hebrews 1:12).

1.3.Redemption in Jesus (Hebrews 2:1-18)

An Exhortation

1 We ought, then, to turn our minds more attentively than before to what we have been taught, so that we do not drift away. 2 If a promise that was made through angels proved to be so true that every infringement and disobedience brought its own proper punishment, 3 then we shall certainly not go unpunished if we neglect this salvation that is promised to us. The promise was first announced by the Lord himself, and is guaranteed to us by those who heard him; 4 God himself confirmed their witness with signs and marvels and miracles of all kinds, and by freely giving the gifts of the Holy Spirit.

Redemption Brought by Christ, Not by Angels

5 He did not appoint angels to be rulers of the world to come, and that world is what we are talking about. 6 Somewhere there is a passage that shows us this. It runs: What is man that you should spare a thought for him, the son of man that you should care for him? 7 For a short while you made him lower than the angels; you crowned him with glory and splendor. 8 You have put him in command of everything. Well then, if he has put him in command of everything, he has left nothing which is not under his command. At present, it is true, we are not able to see that everything has been put under his command, 9 but we do see in Jesus one who was for a short while made lower than the angels and is now crowned with glory and splendor because he submitted to death; by God's grace he had to experience death for all mankind. 10 As it was his purpose to bring a great many of his sons into glory, it was appropriate that God, for whom everything exists and through whom everything exists, should make perfect, through suffering, the leader who would take them to their salvation. 11 For the one who sanctifies, and the ones who are sanctified, are of the same stock; that is why he openly calls them brothers 12 in the text: I shall announce your name to my brothers, praise you in full assembly; or the text: 13 In him I hope; or the text: Here I am with the children whom God has given me. 14 Since all the children share the same blood and flesh, he too shared equally in it, so that by his death he could take away all the power of the devil, who had power over death, 15 and set free all those who had been held in slavery all their lives by the fear of death. 16 For it was not the angels that he took to himself; he took to himself descent from Abraham. 17 It was essential that he should in this way become completely like his brothers so that he could be a compassionate and trustworthy high priest of God's religion, able to atone for human sins. 18 That is, because he has himself has been through temptation he is able to help others who are tempted.

As I ponder chapter 2 of the Letter to the Hebrews, I realize that I have never cited the first section of it in my writings. And yet the first verse asks us to pay more attention to the teachings we have been taught. I sincerely believe that my life, in its changing and increasingly engaging stages, has led me to become more attached to your teachings and especially to your person, O my Jesus! I also believe that I can credit myself with having also exhorted the Brothers to do this.

In a retrospective look without complacency—because I believe that I am only a poor instrument of your grace for our times—I realize that the establishment of the Christian schools is described

in the fourth verse: “God himself confirmed their witness with signs and marvels and miracles of all kinds, and by freely giving the gifts of the Holy Spirit” (Hebrews 2:4). O Jesus, for your blessing on this work and on this ministry, may your holy Name be blessed and glorified!

Everything, O Jesus; you who were put “in command of everything” (Hebrews 2:8) were crowned “with glory and splendor” (Hebrews 2:7). Praise be to your death, which merited this triumph for you at the same time as it procured our salvation!

By chance in my writings, I frequently cited, in the *Explanation of the Method of Mental Prayer*, verses 11 to 18 of this great chapter 2. I want to recall these passages, always charged with astonishing dynamism.

My main citation transcribes verses 11 to 18 almost in full. This transcription is found in my suggestion for making the act of faith in the *Explanation* at #193e.⁶⁹ This passage is accompanied by several other verses from scripture. Overall, many good things were said in these passages.⁷⁰ But it was you who inspired them and brought them to life for me. So much the better, if it is for your glory.

I have also cited, Lord, several other verses from this basic text of chapter 2. Thus, in the same pages of the *Explanation of the Method of Mental Prayer*, I introduced verses 11 and 12,⁷¹ 14,⁷² and finally 17 and 18.⁷³

I thought it useful in another section of the *Explanation of the Method of Mental Prayer*, to cite Hebrews 2:17 twice.⁷⁴ Thus, in the *Explanation* at #215b, regarding a model of an act of adoration, I wrote: “I recognize you as my God, my Redeemer and Savior, who comes in order to redeem me and deliver me from my sins.”⁷⁵ The second time I cited verse 17, with other passages from the Letter to the Hebrews, is in the *Explanation* at #218a.⁷⁶ As I will have to come back to this, I will not dwell on it here.

As the power of your salvation has always, through your grace, been an inspiration in my life, I have tried to convey this feeling to my Brothers, and through them, to the young people in their care. This assurance of redemption is what has helped me reject Jansenism, so widespread in our French Church, particularly in my diocese of origin, Rheims, and in my own family.

Is it not enough to reread this marvelous chapter 2 of Hebrews to be convinced of this in faith: “But we do see in Jesus one who was for a short while made lower than the angels and is now crowned with glory and splendor because he submitted to death; by God’s grace he had to experience death for all humankind” (Hebrews 2:9).

And it is for this reason, in its uninterrupted glorification, that everything was placed under your command (Hebrews 2:8),⁷⁷ or rather close to your heart, because your domination is not a manifestation of power, but of love.

Another verse which has powerfully inspired me, Lord, in the unfolding of my apostolic life, is verse 15 of chapter 2: “Set free all those who had been held in slavery all their lives.” Realizing, little by little, that ignorance has reduced humans, both materially and spiritually, to various types of slavery, I wanted to ensure that the poor could receive a minimum of education so that they would be able to be freed from their abject state of perpetual material concerns and, above all, that they would be able to understand the greatness of your love for them through a knowledge of your doctrine, of your Church, or of yourself, O Savior Jesus.

As a member of the Church and of yourself, I can never repeat this too often, should I not “become,” for these poor children, in every way “completely like my brothers” (Hebrews 2:17), the Brothers of the Christian Schools, a very weak imitation of your role of being an intermediary between God and humanity (Hebrews 2:17)? This is how, it seems to me, with the help of your grace, that I desire, if only from afar, to imitate you. Because you have suffered through “temptation, you are able to help others who are tempted” (Hebrews 2:18).⁷⁸

For your word, for your example, for your grace and for yourself, blessed are you and thanked, Lord Jesus! May I soon, with the angels and your holy Mother, see you crowned “with glory and splendor” (Hebrews 2:7).⁷⁹

1.4. Jesus the Faithful and Merciful High Priest (Hebrews 3, 4, and 5:1-10)

O my Jesus, you of whom the first lines of this new section of the Letter to the Hebrews speak, these lines are like a synthesis of the spirituality that I have shared with the Brothers of the Christian Schools: “That is why all of you who are holy brothers and have had the same heavenly call should turn your minds to Jesus, the apostle and high priest of our religion” (Hebrews 3:1). And I add here the following words which introduce the next verse: “He is faithful” (Hebrews 3:2).

Everything in our lives is based on the love on which this fidelity, and stability in fidelity, is the expression. Lord, penetrate me more and more with this spirit of faith, which is the spirit that I have recommended to the Institute. Otherwise, I would have, without this spirit, to consider myself a “dead member,” as I have said in our Rule.⁸⁰ As such, I would not be able to arrive, in the next life, at your house. I would be like a stranger both to you and to myself because, as this passage from scripture tells us: “we are his house, as long as we cling to our hope with the confidence that we glory in” (Hebrews 3:6). Lord, convert me; do not allow me to “harden my heart” (Hebrews 3:8).⁸¹ Convert me, for I cannot live without you.

Lord, this rereading of the Letter to the Hebrews, which I am undertaking, inspires me to speak once again about the spirit of faith during the next conference that I will have with the novices.⁸² All the more so since the Letter continues: “Every day, as long as this ‘today’ lasts, keep encouraging one another so that none of you is hardened by the lure of sin” (Hebrews 3:13). And I will always continue to encourage them: “We shall remain co-heirs with Christ only if we keep a grasp on our first confidence right to the end” (Hebrews 3:14).

Curiously, this text, which I have so often used for my own guidance and for that of the Brothers since the time of the Rue Neuve in Rheims to this day,⁸³ has almost never been used in any of my writings. Barely even an allusion was made to it in the *Duties of a Christian to God*,⁸⁴ a text to which I will return later on in this rereading of the Letter to the Hebrews.⁸⁵

As much as I've been stingy in citing from chapter 3, so much more did I cite abundantly chapter 4 of Hebrews. This fourth chapter is very challenging in its expressions (as in the "today" of God in Hebrews 4:7) and in its doctrine ("alive and active" is the word of God in Hebrews 4:12, which I have often used as an expression of this conviction), or even this sentence, which gives expression to our gospel faith ("We also received the Good News exactly as they did," in Hebrews 4:2). We wanted to share this gift with all people, particularly the young people who are the seed of tomorrow's living Christianity.

Lord, if I am not mistaken, I have cited texts from chapter 4 of the Letter to the Hebrews at least six times in the *Explanation of the Method of Mental Prayer*,⁸⁶ and perhaps as often in the *Meditations for Feasts*.⁸⁷

Let's begin, then, with the passages cited in the *Explanation*. In a model of the act of adoration, in the *Explanation* at #215b, already referenced above,⁸⁸ I proposed this phrase: "I abase myself at the foot of this throne of grace in order to pay your supreme majesty all the honor that I possibly can."⁸⁹ This was an allusion to Hebrews 4:16.⁹⁰ Another allusion I made,⁹¹ even clearer, higher up in the text, can be found in the *Explanation* at #82a.⁹²

I resumed with citing the same texts (verses 14 to 16)⁹³ in the *Explanation* at #167,⁹⁴ when I dealt with an example I gave of the act of union.⁹⁵ A little further on, in the *Explanation* at #169c, I said, "Do you yourself present my mental prayer, and present, I beg you, all my needs, to the eternal Father."⁹⁶ Another allusion to verses 14 to 16 can be found in the introduction to the example of the act of union in the *Explanation* at #164: "There is nothing which we should fail to do to ensure that God will let himself be influenced by our prayers, and will have the goodness to grant all that we ask."⁹⁷

The reference to Hebrews 4:16 in the *Explanation* at #82a is more explicit in the way it applies to the presence of Jesus Christ in the Blessed Sacrament: "I have only to approach you . . . who are there to fill us with every kind of grace that we need."⁹⁸ Much later in the *Explanation of the Method of Mental Prayer*, I returned to this sixteenth verse in the example I gave of the act of confidence: "I have even this confidence that out of consideration for you and in view of your infinite merits, he will give me all the graces I need."⁹⁹

The verse of the Letter to the Hebrews that I undoubtedly cited most often, because it corresponded to a conviction that you granted me, Lord Jesus, was this:

The word of God is something alive and active: it cuts like any double-edged sword but more finely; it can slip through the place where the soul is divided from the spirit, or the joints from the marrow; it can judge the secret emotions and thoughts (Hebrews 4:12).

It was in the *Meditations for Feasts* that I had most cited this text. I used this verse to reinforce with the Brothers the importance of the powerful use of the sacred scriptures in its radical nature. The Brothers will, hopefully, be firm in the conviction that the sacred scriptures are their main rule of life, both theoretically and practically, especially the New Testament. It is not simply a question of having these or those words on their lips for the various actions of the day, such as the examples I gave the Brothers in the *Collection*,¹⁰⁰ but even more importantly as an inspiration for the various movements of their life, especially in certain difficult stages. These “citations of the call” are obviously more useful and life-affirming than simple “citations of remembrance.”¹⁰¹

I will not repeat here all six occasions in the *Meditations for Feasts*¹⁰² where I have cited Hebrews 4:12. Yet, I will give a few specific examples.

Thus, in the first point of Meditation 159¹⁰³ for the Feast of Saint Bartholomew the Apostle, I wrote,

It is true that he had the abundant grace of the apostolate and that this was what worked in him and drew souls to God. But, as he was humble, he attributed the results of his preaching to the living and effective word of God, which he drew from Saint Matthew’s Gospel, much more than to anything he could say by himself. He knew that this divine word alone is able to make the division between flesh and spirit, so necessary to bring about the entire conversion of a soul.¹⁰⁴

In the Meditation for the Feast of Saint Matthew,¹⁰⁵ I wrote, “It is true that the word of Jesus Christ is efficacious in the calling of his first apostles,” considering his words, by a fair reversal of things, as already a passage of scripture.

About the Meditation for the Feast of Saint Hilarion, I again affirmed not without enthusiasm, “Ah! How powerful the word of God is to touch hearts. It is, says Saint Paul, living and effective; it enters and penetrates even to the secrets of the soul.”¹⁰⁶ And I continued, “How happy you would be if this divine word penetrated so deeply into your heart that you would no longer be attached to any creature! Yet you will not be worthy of your ministry except insofar as you have this disposition.”¹⁰⁷

I returned to the same theme on the day of the Feast of Saint Catherine of Alexandria in the *Meditations for Feasts*:

Following Saint Catherine’s example, make use of this means [meditation on the scriptures] to sanctify yourself. Often meditate on the words of sacred scripture to encourage yourself to do what is right and to be guided according to the spirit of your state. For the word of God contained in scripture has that effect, according to Saint Paul, because it is living and effective, and penetrates more deeply than a two-edged sword. It enters, continues the same apostle, and penetrates even to the most hidden depths of soul and spirit.¹⁰⁸

In short, what I felt, and what I wanted to communicate to the Brothers, is that the scripture was a privileged means of access to the thought of God, but that the means par excellence—which is

not separate from it and which is more than a means, but a cause—is Jesus himself, who, as the fifteenth verse proclaims: “For it is not as if we had a high priest who was incapable of feeling our weakness with us; but we have one who has been tempted in every way that we are, though he is without sin” (Hebrews 4:15).

Thus equipped with this high priest and his own Testament, we can open our hearts and say with Saint Paul: “Let us be confident, then, in approaching the throne of grace, that we shall have mercy from him and find grace when we are in need of help” (Hebrews 4:16).

Chapter 5 of the Letter to the Hebrews does not constitute a caesura; it is the continuation of the reasoning of chapter 4. And this is why, right from the start in Hebrews 4:1, we find the expression “be careful.”

I would be remiss, Lord Jesus, if I did not transcribe here a few verses of this remarkable chapter 5,¹⁰⁹ before returning to my original intention of citing the places in my writings where I have made use of it, by reproducing a few lines, splendid in faith and expression, from the end of the reference. Speaking of you, Lord Jesus, the sacred author in Hebrews 5:7-10 states,

7 During his life on earth, he offered up prayer and entreaty, with loud cries and with tears, to the one who had the power to save him from death, and, winning a hearing by his reverence, 8 he learned obedience, Son though he was, through his sufferings; 9 when he had been perfected, he became for all who obey him the source of eternal salvation 10 and was acclaimed by God with the title of high priest of the order of Melchizedek.

Fortunately, we will see the fulfillment of all of this in the glory that is to come in heaven.

It is again in the *Explanation of the Method of Mental Prayer* that I had the opportunity to cite this section of chapter 5, which is linked to the first section of the Letter to the Hebrews. Thus, concurrently with Hebrews 4:14-16,¹¹⁰ I used quite freely the section of verses from 1 to 10 of chapter 5.¹¹¹ Just a little further on in the *Explanation* at #169, I took up this section.¹¹² I don’t think I’ll have to come back to this again.

More interestingly, and closer to a citation, comes what I wrote in the *Explanation* at #79 on the way of placing oneself in the presence of the Blessed Sacrament: “His mediation is efficacious when he offers our requests to the eternal Father, and as he is always heard favorably by him, as Saint Paul says, because of the profound respect with which he prays to him for us.”¹¹³

I also allude to Hebrews 5:7-8 in the *Explanation* at #232c, about the example I gave of an act of union with Our Lord on the mystery of the birth of Jesus.¹¹⁴ I will not stop here on this point, but I will return later on to this text.

What’s more, I happened to allude to Hebrews 5:9 (“He became for all who obey him the source of eternal salvation”) in the Meditation for the Third Sunday of Advent: “It was as the Son of God that Jesus Christ became the author of our eternal salvation.”¹¹⁵

I do not remember having cited this admirable verse from chapter 5 of the Letter to the Hebrews elsewhere. This reading is not yet finished here, but the remainder comes from the third part of Hebrews, a part that I want to reread in front of you, O my Jesus!

1.5. The Authentic Priesthood of Jesus Christ (Hebrews 5:11-14 and 6:1-20)

Lord Jesus, I devoted myself to what the first lines of this long division say:

On this subject we have many things to say, and they are difficult to explain because you have grown so slow at understanding. Really, when you should by this time have become masters, you need someone to teach you all over again the elementary principles of interpreting God's oracles. (Hebrews 5:11-12)

This may be why, seeing my own spiritual limits, I did not dare to use the words of these lines in the writings I prepared for the Brothers.

The Author Explains His Intention (Hebrews 6:1-8)

1 Let us leave behind us then all the elementary teaching about Christ and concentrate on its completion, without going over the fundamental doctrines again: the turning away from dead actions and toward faith in God; 2 the teaching about baptisms and the laying-on of hands; the teaching about the resurrection of the dead and eternal judgement. 3 This, God willing, is what we propose to do. 4 As for those people who were once brought into the light, and tasted the gift from heaven, and received a share of the Holy Spirit, 5 and appreciated the good message of God and the powers of the world to come 6 and yet in spite of this have fallen away—it is impossible for them to be renewed a second time. They cannot be repentant if they have willfully crucified the Son of God and openly mocked him. 7 A field that has been well watered by frequent rain, and gives the crops that are wanted by the owners who grew them, is given God's blessing; 8 but one that grows brambles and thistles is abandoned, and practically cursed. It will end by being burnt.

It is not without fear and trembling that Saint Paul's intention can be read in this section. We are in danger of not believing in the repentance of the sinner. The goodness of God does not have these limits, for we are far from scripture's seventy-seven times.¹¹⁶ But this text has the happy purpose of asking us about ourselves. After the fall from grace, God, certainly, prepared to heal me and welcome me back; but I still have to want this. If the prodigal son had not returned to his father,¹¹⁷ what would have happened?

Lord, inspired by you, I have allowed myself to use the sixth verse of this text at least three times in my *Meditations*. The first extract was at the end of the Meditation for Good Friday. Here it is with its context: "If we will not stop sinning, it means we want him to continue suffering. Do we not know that every sin that we commit causes him new torments? We crucify him again, says Saint Paul, and make him die another death even more painful and cruel than the first one."¹¹⁸

The second allusion in my *Meditations* appeared in the Meditation for the Tenth Sunday of Pentecost: “You, who have crucified Jesus Christ by your sins, should imitate him by thoughts of humility.”¹¹⁹

The third time was in the Meditation for the Feast of the Holy Innocents. At the end of the third point of this meditation, I told the Brothers and myself, as one among them: “Sinners, says Saint Paul, crucify Jesus Christ anew. If then we do not want him to lose his life, we must do violence to ourselves so as not to fall into sin and not commit the slightest fault.”¹²⁰

Even today, Lord, despite the total gift of myself to the accomplishment of your will, such a text brings me back to an awareness of my own weakness and a sense of the sinfulness of which I am capable. And that is why I ask your assistance, helping me work against sin’s return, for the devil goes about us like a roaring lion, says Saint Peter.¹²¹ Also, I finished the Meditation for the Feast of the Holy Innocents by this exhortation: “Dying daily through continual mortification, you will give your life in order to avoid miserably crucifying and putting Jesus Christ to death within yourselves.”¹²²

Words of Hope and Encouragement (Hebrews 6:9-20)

Lord, the texts of Hebrews entitled “words of hope and encouragement,” which you invite me to ponder in this section, overwhelm me. Verses 9 to 11, which begin this section, are among the most encouraging there are.

9 But you, my dear people—in spite of what we have just said, we are sure you are in a better state and on the way to salvation. 10 God would not be so unjust as to forget all you have done, the love that you have for his name or the services you have done, and are still doing, for the saints. 11 Our one desire is that every one of you should go on showing the same earnestness to the end, to the perfect fulfilment of our hopes.

I have often repeated these words, in public and in private, but curiously, never in my writings, to encourage the Brothers in their work, on their spiritual journey, and with their perseverance.

When I think of what it took the Brothers to constantly strip themselves so as to hold firm in their vocation! Without a doubt, what they’ve done is great before your eyes. What a ministry is theirs! How self-effacing this vocation is before others! Lord, help them (the Brothers) grow in you, draw them into yourself, welcome them already now into life with you, before their final reception into the Kingdom. God, would it not be unjust to forget what the Brothers have done and the charity they have shown in your name, these men who have served and who are serving the saints, these children to whom they minister who are the perfume and the seed of the Church of tomorrow and forever.¹²³ And I will join myself again with the Apostle Paul: “Our one desire, (my brothers), is that every one of you should go on showing the same earnestness to the end, to the perfect fulfilment of our hopes” (Hebrews 6:11).

Some verses further on in this Letter to the Hebrews, this life of faith is again confirmed in the hope that is inseparable from it. “Here we have an anchor for our soul, as sure as it is firm, and

reaching right through beyond the veil where Jesus has entered before us and on our behalf” (Hebrews 6:19-20).

1.5.1. Christ’s Priesthood Higher Than the Levitical Priesthood (Hebrews 7:1-28)

Melchizedek (Hebrews 7:1-3) and Melchizedek Accepted Tithes from Abraham (Hebrews 7:4-10)

Lord, allow me once again to attach myself here to my thoughts about the Brothers. The reminder about Melchizedek, in this section, makes me admire and honor in you their vocation, which is so humble but also so exalted.

1 Melchizedek, king of Salem, a priest of God Most High, came to meet Abraham when he returned from defeating the kings, and blessed him; 2 and Abraham gave him a tenth of everything. By the interpretation of his name, he is, first, “king of saving justice” and also king of Salem, that is, “king of peace”; 3 he has no father, mother or ancestry, and his life has no beginning or ending; he is like the Son of God. He remains a priest forever.

Like Melchizedek, they (the Brothers) have no ancestors, not even by name (except, perhaps, my dear Brother Irénée¹²⁴ whom you sent me, Lord, in my old age).¹²⁵ If these men are “kings,” it was only of themselves by your grace and for the children whom they were leading to you, as honest persons and good citizens. Who receives and who gives? The Brothers are equal among themselves and before you. They do not care about the distinctions found in Hebrews 7:7 (“Now it is indisputable that a blessing is given by a superior to an inferior”). They sometimes have positions according to their possibilities and availability, but it is only for service and not for the title. Tomorrow their roles could be reversed. By your grace, I have had no difficulty in getting them to accept this.

From Levitical Priesthood to the Priesthood of Melchizedek (Hebrews 7:11-14) and the Abrogation of the Old Law (Hebrews 7:15-19)

Lord, this section of the Letter to the Hebrews was no stranger to my concerns in the establishment of the Community of the Brothers of the Christian Schools. Those (the Brothers) who cannot be priests and who cannot admit any into their ranks (except poor me) are empowered to a ministry of formators in the spirit of Christ, which is like a new priesthood. In front of their classes, they are “the high priests.”

And even among themselves—even if I have had to fight for this principle¹²⁶—they have no superior priest according to the order of the sacramental priesthood. Again, it is not a question of greater or not greater, but of mission. Brother Barthélemy, superior, is not greater than the least of the novices, if not for service; he would be the first to admit it. High Priest, “not by virtue of a law about physical descent, but by the power of an indestructible life” (Hebrews 7:16), certainly not, at the very least, of a life and of a fraternity that is not according to the flesh or even according to nature.

Christ’s Priesthood Is Unchanging (Hebrews 7:20-25) and the Perfection of the Heavenly High Priest (Hebrews 7:26-28)

Lord, I have always pondered these words of the Letter to the Hebrews in a spirit of grandeur and calm, of the present moment and eternity. It is of you, in fact, from whom this is a question; and you are for us the alpha and omega, the friend and the savior, the man who became sin “who is made perfect forever” (Hebrews 7:28).

With you, Lord, “it follows that it is a greater covenant for which Jesus has become our guarantee” (Hebrews 7:22). I have been talking about the Brothers of the Christian Schools just now. Here is the living alliance that they wear, not like a ring on their finger but, as one in their hearts. Their life, like mine, for I am in it with them, “will vanish” like “a garment that will wear out” (Hebrews 1:11), but you prepare for us a royal robe from your celestial trousseau for our arrival at the end of our lives in your house, which, we can hope, will one day be ours.

O Jesus, I happened to cite the last verses of chapter 7 a few times in my catechism, the *Duties of a Christian*, and in the *Explanation of the Method of Mental Prayer*.

In the *Duties of a Christian*, in the following two paragraphs that I transcribe here, I used successively verses 24 and 25.¹²⁷

We ought also to offer our prayers to our Lord Jesus Christ because he is both God and man. Being our mediator and intercessor before God, only he, as Saint Paul says, can give us access to the eternal Father. Only through him can we hope that our prayers will achieve their effect and be answered.

This wording does not imply that he needs to obtain or procure for us some new grace; but because he suffered and died to merit for us all the graces we need to be saved, he constantly offers his sufferings and his satisfactions to the Father, imploring him to apply to us the effects of his own Passion. Because he is God as well as man, he can grant us whatever we ask of him in prayer, provided it pleases him to do so.¹²⁸

The Meditation for the Feast of the Ascension of Our Lord also makes reference to verse 25, as well as other verses already referenced above. In his role as “mediator he presents your prayers and your good works to God his Father . . . to draw down God’s mercy on you and prevent God from turning his anger against you when you offend him.”¹²⁹

In the *Explanation of the Method of Mental Prayer* at #78, I ask you, O Jesus, “to present them [our prayers] on our behalf to the eternal Father, as our mediator and our intercessor with him.”¹³⁰

Lord, these are a few of the “citations of remembrance” from the Letter to the Hebrews—as from other sacred writings—to which I have alluded. With your grace, they are part of my culture, my religious thought, and my life; and they come naturally under my pen without me having always taken the trouble to cite them more precisely.

Lord, the only word I wish to possess and express fully, is you yourself, the Word made flesh.

1.5.2. The Superiority of the Worship, the Sanctuary, and the Mediation Provided by Christ the Priest (Hebrews 8:1-13)

Jesus, chapter 8 of the Letter to the Hebrews is of major importance and it is marvelous in what we hear spoken about you. This section of the text itself says that it deals with the major point of what is being spoken about in this portion of Hebrews (“The great point of all that we have said is that we have a high priest of exactly this kind. He has his place at the right of the throne of divine Majesty in the heavens”).¹³¹ And all that follows shows it.

Your superiority over Moses, over the sanctuary of the new covenant and over the covenant itself, is splendidly exposed and deserves an extended reflection. However, it is only in heaven that we will understand all of this, to the extent that you, God, desire it.

And there are these incidences again with connections to the Brothers of the Christian Schools, my Community. Without pushing the text too far in its foundations and in its meaning, it is said that Jesus on earth would not be a priest (“In fact, if he were on earth, he would not be a priest at all, since there are others who make the offerings laid down by the Law”).¹³² And why not see in our humble congregation a sanctuary where ministers of Christian education rise together toward you, O Jesus?

I have only had one opportunity to cite Hebrews 8:6 (“We have seen that he has been given a ministry of a far higher order, and to the same degree it is a better covenant of which he is the mediator, founded on better promises”), and this citation appears in my writings toward the end of the Meditation for the Ninth Sunday after Pentecost, which concerns “the spirit of prayer.” Here again, I alluded to the mediating role of our Savior.

Because Jesus Christ is your mediator and because you can go to God only through him, beg him that he will always be in your soul, to pray in it, and guide it to himself. Ask him to make his dwelling in your soul as in his temple throughout time, so that your soul may then make its home in him throughout all eternity.¹³³

Lord, referring to the tenth verse of chapter 8, I ask you that it become effective in me, in the Brothers, and in the children of our schools: “I will put my laws into their minds and write them on their hearts . . . and they shall be my people” (Hebrews 8:10).

1.5.3. Christ Enters the Heavenly Sanctuary and Christ Seals the New Covenant with His Blood (Hebrews 9:1-14 and Hebrews 9:15-28)

These two sections—Hebrews 9:1-14 and 9:15-28—linked together form chapter 9 of Hebrews. Lord, in your presence, I want to ponder these sections, emphasizing certain verses that today strike me more than others. I also want to recall the very many times—at least a dozen—where I have quoted from this chapter, especially in its latter part, in my writings.

This first section of chapter 9 consists particularly of the description of the sanctuary of the old covenant, which does not, except by juxtaposition, offer much interest. But for what concerns us,

you and me, Lord, relative to the schools, such a juxtaposition is not without importance beginning even with the first verse.

I find there a situation that is not without analogy with what I know, with my Brothers,¹³⁴ relative to the Christian schools. It reads, “The first covenant . . . had its laws . . . its sanctuary on this earth.”¹³⁵ When I contributed to the foundation, at Rheims, of the first school,¹³⁶ even before the constitution of my Community, and even before I had even thought the least bit about it, I absolutely did not pretend to have created the first school in France! These already existed a little everywhere. My first teacher, Adrian Nyel, didn’t he come from Rouen where he had already been a schoolmaster for a long time?¹³⁷ And in Paris—I didn’t know it yet, but this matters little—the city was divided into 192 neighborhoods, each with its own school or schools.¹³⁸ But they were schools that I would call “of this earth,” with as it were an Old Testament pedagogy, a prior sanctuary.

That which was, as they now say, the Lasallian school—which is a little pretentious because it is the spirit of the school that is Christian and not the school in itself—was something else entirely. O my Jesus, you made me understand that my schools had to be specifically Christian in their mind-set. It was not enough that there be children attentive to a catechism taught by Brothers in a habit under the presence of a crucifix for the school to be Christian. That was only a framework that could change. The soul of what the school was had really to be about an apprenticeship of your life, in your presence, the knowledge and the immediate application of Gospel maxims. I would attempt to give the best teaching there, and this is the reason for the foundation of the Brothers and of the seminaries for teachers for the countryside.¹³⁹ But I would “ordain”¹⁴⁰ baptized people who would there learn together, and in an integrated and not superficial way, your holy doctrine and the way to live it out in the daily routine of their existence.¹⁴¹

These juxtapositions could be multiplied when I read the Letter to the Hebrews by devoting my life to them. I could stop here and add the reflections in the *Meditations*, which I am currently revising.¹⁴² Until then, I must continue my prayerful pondering.

The first part of chapter 9 of Hebrews ends with an important verse (14). Following up on verse 13¹⁴³ we read: “How much more effectively the blood of Christ, who offered himself as the perfect sacrifice to God through the eternal Spirit, can purify our inner self from dead actions so that we do our service to the living God” (Hebrews 9:14).

In summary, O my Jesus, all of this amounts to reaffirming strongly that you are the only savior and only mediator between God and humanity.

Let us see, then, the few times that I have cited some verses from chapter 9 of the Letter to the Hebrews. They are to be found mainly, but not only, in the *Explanation of the Method of Mental Prayer*.

We see an allusion to the whole of the chapter in the following sentence in the *Explanation*, at #83a: “You offer continually to the eternal Father the merits of your sacred passion and death in satisfaction for my sins.”¹⁴⁴ This overall vision of chapter 9 is also noticeable in the *Explanation* at #136c.¹⁴⁵

I have also alluded to Hebrews 9:15 in “The External and Public Worship That Christians Are Obligated to Offer to God,” the third volume (in question-and-answer format) of the *Duties of a Christian*. To a question that I formulated (“How is Jesus Christ our mediator?”), I gave as answer that “according to Saint Paul, there are two reasons: (1) he has redeemed us by his death and (2) he constantly intercedes for us with his Father in heaven.”¹⁴⁶

Several verses further in chapter 9, encroaching on the subdivision in the text proposed above (Hebrews 9:11-15), serve as examples or demonstrations in some of my writings. If I count correctly, it was no less than eight times that I have used one or the other of these verses; or at least, I have been inspired by them.

11 But now Christ has come, as the high priest of all the blessings which were to come. He has passed through the greater, the more perfect tent, not made by human hands, that is, not of this created order; 12 and he has entered the sanctuary once and for all, taking with him not the blood of goats and bull calves, but his own blood, having won an eternal redemption. 13 The blood of goats and bulls and the ashes of a heifer, sprinkled on those who have incurred defilement, may restore their bodily purity. 14 How much more will the blood of Christ, who offered himself, blameless as he was, to God through the eternal Spirit, purify our conscience from dead actions so that we can worship the living God. 15 This makes him the mediator of a new covenant, so that, now that a death has occurred to redeem the sins committed under an earlier covenant, those who have been called to an eternal inheritance may receive the promise.

Two references are to be found in the *Meditations for Feasts*: the first for the Feast of the Circumcision (#93) and the other for the Feast of the Nativity of the Most Blessed Virgin (#163).

In the second point of the Meditation for the Feast of the Circumcision, I cite verses 11 and 14 inside my text.

Second, because Jesus Christ, appearing in this world as the high priest of future blessings, according to Saint Paul, offered himself to God in the temple on this day as a spotless victim to purify our consciences from dead works, so that in the name of all of us he might offer to the living and eternal God an act of true worship.¹⁴⁷

In the Meditation for the Feast of the Nativity of the Most Blessed Virgin, I am less explicit; but one can read a reference to verses 12 and 14 in the following passage here applied to the holy Virgin of God.

Even her body served as an instrument for the holy actions which took place within her and which helped to spiritualize her body as far as possible and make it a holy sanctuary where Jesus Christ some day would enter, and here offer himself interiorly to God as a victim without blemish to perfect the purification of the soul of this holy Virgin whom the Holy Spirit had possessed from her birth.¹⁴⁸

One can see by this text, as in many others, O my God, the liberty that I have taken with passages of the sacred writings to apply them to another context. It seems to me that this is indeed permissible and that it offers itself as proof of a unified Christian life.

These same texts from verses of Hebrews 9:11-15 also appear several times in the *Explanation of the Method of Mental Prayer*. The first one that presents itself, at #184, is an application to the mystery of the circumcision cited above. In this instance, I wrote:

The spirit of the mystery of the circumcision is humility and mortification, Our Lord having been willing to take onto himself, in allowing himself to be circumcised, the mark of a sinner and to shed his blood in suffering and pain.¹⁴⁹

I had used verses 1 to 13 of chapter 9 from the beginning of the *Explanation of Method of Mental Prayer* at #67, about a fifth way of putting oneself in the holy presence of God, that is to say, in a church. The end of this passage of the *Explanation* joins Hebrews 9:12-13 to a text taken from the Gospel of Saint Matthew.¹⁵⁰

Jesus Christ drove from the temple of the Jews those who were changing the money of the strangers who came there to buy, and those who were selling and who were buying the things necessary for the sacrifices, looking upon these sales and purchases as profaning the temple which he calls the temple of God, although only crude sacrifices were carried out there, which consisted in the slaughter of animals and, partly, in burning them.¹⁵¹

I continued with this same idea in the *Explanation* at #68, which gives it its meaning.

What respect, therefore, is there required in the churches of Christians, churches which are places in which is offered every day, and in many churches a great number of times, the same Jesus Christ . . . through the offering and immolation which he makes of his whole self in this sacrifice!¹⁵²

I also used Hebrews 9:14 (“How much more effectively the blood of Christ, who offered himself as the perfect sacrifice to God through the eternal Spirit, can purify our inner self from dead actions so that we do our service to the living God”) in the *Explanation of the Method of Mental Prayer* at #73c¹⁵³ and at #218a. In the latter text, I say,

It is very just, O my God, that, having shown so much goodness for me, as to become human . . . in order to sacrifice yourself by offering yourself to the justice of God, your Father, as a living victim, pure, holy, and pleasing to God for the expiation of my sins and my sanctification.¹⁵⁴

I readily acknowledge that this quotation goes beyond verse 14 and calls upon Hebrews 10:11-14¹⁵⁵ and 13:12.¹⁵⁶ I have no reasons to defend myself, Lord Jesus, for having assimilated these texts and for having merged them into a single view of you who is, in short, you yourself.¹⁵⁷

In the *Duties of a Christian*, I also drew upon Hebrews 9:14, but I did so within the context of verse 15.¹⁵⁸ Here they are, in context:

The principal purpose for the coming of Jesus Christ into this world was to suffer and to die for the sins of all humanity. For this reason, after spending all his life in suffering, he willed to be condemned to death, and as Saint Paul says, he even offered himself voluntarily in the following manner ... He went with his apostles to a garden on the Mount of Olives ... while he prayed to his Father to let this chalice pass ... Judas arrived leading a band of men armed with swords and clubs to arrest Jesus ... who told the soldiers accompanying Judas that he was the one whom they sought.¹⁵⁹

I also introduced this reference to Hebrews 9:15 in a passage of the *Explanation of the Method of Mental Prayer* at #78,¹⁶⁰ where I joined it with Hebrews 7:25¹⁶¹ and 12:28.¹⁶²

O my Jesus, if I have so often cited these major verses of chapter 9 of Hebrews, it was because the expressions of Saint Paul responded so well to my own conviction about your unique and essential role as savior. You wanted to shed your blood as a testimony of your love and in your mission as redeemer. You are truly the Lamb of God who, by an eternal Spirit, offered himself without stain to God to “purify our inner self” (Hebrews 9:14). And this is why, O my Savior Jesus, you are the mediator of the new covenant (Hebrews 9:15).

From afar, but in a similar way, I would like the Brothers and all Christian teachers to be a little like mediators between their students and you. Bless them, I pray, as being your members, continuing to carry out your eternal role. For just as you made yourself sin to save all people, that you were in some way responsible for the faults of all, I have said to the Brothers several times that they are responsible for the salvation of their students and that they will have to give an account of this responsibility even before giving an account to God of their own souls.¹⁶³

I have seldom used the end of chapter 9 in my writings, despite the new and inspiring riches that I have always found there. I have always drawn inspiration from Hebrews 9:26 (“Or else he would have had to suffer over and over again since the world began. Instead of that, he has made his appearance once and for all, now at the end of the last age, to do away with sin by sacrificing himself”), as well as from several other passages of our Letter to the Hebrews, in a context that is the trajectory of my previous reflections:

Our confidence in prayer cannot expect to produce such startling effects unless it is based on the merits of Our Lord Jesus Christ, for it is only through him, as Saint Paul says, that we have access to the eternal Father. He made satisfaction for our sins and reconciled us with God when he made himself the victim for our sins and became sin himself, as Saint Paul again says, to destroy sin in us.¹⁶⁴

Lord Jesus, Hebrews 9:27, which follows the reference I have just cited in the *Duties of a Christian*, contains a truth that all humans must accept: “Since all only die once, and after that comes judgment, so Christ, too, offers himself only once to take the faults of many on himself, and when he appears a second time, it will not be to deal with sin but to reward with salvation those who are waiting for him.” Happy are they, moreover, because this is the means, after

having done their work on earth, to go and join you in heaven. Give, Lord, your salvation to all. Is it not for this that you came into the world? And if the good thief on the cross¹⁶⁵—and why not the other one too?—has gone up with you to heaven on Good Friday, welcome us also without delay! Without delay? According to your will. And if you believe that I can still be of service to someone or be useful in something, I am willing to wait, even if being with you would be by far the best, as Saint Paul has already said. Moreover, as I have indicated to the Brothers, our present state at your service is, in faith and hope, already like an anticipation of heaven.¹⁶⁶

1.5.4. Summary: Christ's Sacrifice Superior to the Sacrifices for the Mosaic Law (Hebrews 10:1-18)

The Old Sacrifices Ineffective

1 So, since the Law has no more than a reflection of these realities, and no finished picture of them, it is quite incapable of bringing the worshippers to perfection, with the same sacrifices repeatedly offered year after year. 2 Otherwise, the offering of them would have stopped, because the worshippers, when they had been purified once, would have no awareness of sins. 3 Instead of that, the sins are recalled year after year in the sacrifices. 4 Bulls' blood and goats' blood are useless for taking away sins, 5 and this is what he said, on coming into the world: You who wanted no sacrifice or oblation, prepared a body for me. 6 You took no pleasure in holocausts or sacrifices for sin; 7 then I said, just as I was commanded in the scroll of the book, "God, here I am! I am coming to obey your will." 8 Notice that he says first: You did not want what the Law lays down as the things to be offered, that is: the sacrifices, the oblations, the holocausts and the sacrifices for sin, and you took no pleasure in them; 9 and then he says: Here I am! I am coming to obey your will. He is abolishing the first sort to replace it with the second. 10 And this will was for us to be made holy by the offering of his body made once and for all by Jesus Christ.

The Efficacy of Christ's Sacrifice

11 All the priests stand at their duties every day, offering over and over again the same sacrifices which are quite incapable of taking sins away. 12 He, on the other hand, has offered one single sacrifice for sins, and then taken his place forever, at the right hand of God, 13 where he is now waiting until his enemies are made into a footstool for him. 14 By virtue of that one single offering, he has achieved the eternal perfection of all whom he is sanctifying. 15 The Holy Spirit assures us of this; for he says, first: 16 This is the covenant I will make with them when those days arrive; and the Lord then goes on to say: I will put my laws into their hearts and write them on their minds. 17 I will never call their sins to mind, or their offences. 18 When all sins have been forgiven, there can be no more sin offerings.

Lord, in my re-reading of the Letter to the Hebrews, I have finally come to this long and significant chapter 10. It provides a summary and conclusion to the major section of the whole Letter (Hebrews 10:1-18), and it serves as a lead-in to the following section on persevering faith (Hebrews 10:19-39).

My Jesus, what Saint Paul says in Hebrews 10:1 about Jewish Law is not only about that when he calls it “no more than a reflection of the good things which were still to come.” It is also about all the values of this world. These values can be varied, and we must join them or at least come to terms with them; but what are they compared to you and to the reality of the Kingdom not yet revealed? In short, we must relativize our whole earthly life—our vocation as earthlings for the moment is good in itself—with a view to the eternal future. Is this not the whole of our Christian life pushed, with the help of your grace, to its last entrenchments? This is the essence of the life of the Brother, for example, who has accepted celibacy for the sake of the Kingdom. This is also the life of many lay people, sometimes more heroic—if this word has a meaning in this area of grace and of generosity—than many priests and even many fervent religious.

By bringing these perspectives back to daily life, is this not also the essence of the life of faith, of the spirit of faith? Let me recall this text from the above referenced Hebrews 10:1 (“no more a reflection of these realities”) when I am attracted by beauty in all its forms. This beauty can be very great and must be appreciated as such, but it is only a shadow of the good that is to come.

Another virtue that I have tried to understand and make sure to share with the Brothers is obedience.¹⁶⁷ My conviction is based particularly on the words that your Apostle attributes to you in Hebrews 10:9: “Here I am! I am coming to obey your will.”¹⁶⁸

A little further on, the Letter shows you seated forever “at the right hand of God” (Hebrews 10:12). Faith and hope fade before love; and from obedience we move on to another “human condition” in you, at the right hand of the Father for eternity! May all humanity join me in a resounding, “Amen!” Lord, may what you say in Hebrews 10:16 be realized here below: “I will put my laws into their hearts and write them on their minds.” What an exhilarating section of the Letter!

Also, I explained that I have, with your inspiration, used it frequently in my writings, particularly in my *Meditations* and in the *Explanation of the Method of Mental Prayer*. During the present rereading of the Letter to the Hebrews, allow me to recall certain passages before you, O Jesus.¹⁶⁹

In the *Explanation of the Method of Mental Prayer*, it was by thinking of verses 1 to 18 in their entirety that I wrote #168. I take this text as an example of my global understanding of a text rather than a word-for-word understanding of it:

And they [the Brothers] should be persuaded that, if Our Lord has the goodness to unite himself with them in prayer and to pray in them, their prayer will be very acceptable to the eternal Father and will draw down upon them a great number of graces.¹⁷⁰

In the Meditation for the Wednesday of Holy Week, entitled “On the desire that Jesus Christ had to suffer and die,” I quoted in a more explicit way verses 4 and 7 of chapter 10 (see above), adding to them verse 10 of the same chapter. Here is the text:

Jesus offered himself to the eternal Father to suffer whatever would be in accord with his will in order to satisfy for our sins. For it was impossible, says Saint Paul, that sins should be blotted out by the blood of goats and bulls. For this reason, continues the same Saint Paul, Christ said to God: Holocausts and sin offerings have not pleased you; then said I, behold, I come to fulfill your will. It is this same will, affirms the same Apostle, that has sanctified us by the offering that Jesus Christ made once for all of his body.¹⁷¹

In the Meditation for the Feast of the Circumcision, to which I have already alluded above,¹⁷² I recall verses five to seven (see above): “Let us today admire the obedience and humility of our Savior in this mystery. He came into this world, as he himself says, not to abolish the Law, but to fulfill it.”¹⁷³

I returned elsewhere to this same passage, so much at the heart of the mystery of salvation that I should evoke it every day. At the beginning of the second point of the Meditation for the Feast of the Transfiguration, I wrote: “Although the purpose which the Son of God set before himself on coming into this world was to suffer for us. . . .”¹⁷⁴

I once again evoked this text in the *Explanation of the Method of Mental Prayer* at #232c, to which I referred above.¹⁷⁵ “I beg you earnestly to communicate to me the same sentiments . . . of submission and of obedience which you had toward your heavenly Father.”¹⁷⁶

Lord Jesus, I also referenced Hebrews 10:8-9 in the Meditation for the Feast of the Annunciation: “Seeing that the holocausts . . . were not sufficiently pleasing to God to take away our sins, he offers himself in sacrifice and says to his eternal Father, Today I come into the world to do your holy will.”¹⁷⁷

As for the following verse, the tenth of chapter 10, which is expressed thus—“And this will was for us to be made holy by the offering of his body made once and for all by Jesus Christ”—I’ve often used it in my conferences and in my writings. It is that this will is personified in you so that it is that which saves and sanctifies, and that the sacrifice of your body is only the consequence of it.

The use of this verse 10 also occurred in two consecutive Meditations, the one for the Wednesday of Holy Week and the other for Holy Thursday respectively. I previously referenced the Meditation for the Wednesday of Holy Week, where I cited verses 4 and 7 of chapter 10.¹⁷⁸

As for the Meditation for Holy Thursday, I gave it in the context of the institution of the Holy Eucharist. I wrote, “He [Jesus] knew that immediately afterward he would suffer and die for us, that this offering he would make of himself on the cross would occur only once.”¹⁷⁹ Finally, I introduced a not yet mentioned allusion from Hebrews 9:28.¹⁸⁰

Another allusion to Hebrews 10:10 will be found in the *Explanation of Method of Mental Prayer* at #68: “Through the offering and immolation which he makes of his whole self in this sacrifice.”¹⁸¹

The following verses, beginning with the eleventh, insist on the efficacy of your sacrifice, O Jesus, my Savior. Even today when I do not know how many years or days are left to me, poor sinner that I am, and that it is so for all of humanity. May all the Brothers of the Christian Schools and all those who work, or will work, with them for a school that is truly Christian attain salvation and shine like stars for eternity.¹⁸²

I have also cited Hebrews 10:11-14 in a passage of the *Explanation of the Method of Mental Prayer* at #218a,¹⁸³ around which several texts of the Letter to the Hebrews cluster,¹⁸⁴ and on which it is only ever useful to return.

Lord, your word is life; may, therefore, what is said in Hebrews 10:17 be realized: “I will never call their sins to mind, or their offenses.”

1.6. Persevering Faith

1.6.1. The Christian Opportunity, the Danger of Apostacy, and Motives for Perseverance (Hebrews 10:19-25, 10:26-31, and 10:32-39)

With verse 19 (“Brothers, through the blood of Jesus we have the right to enter the sanctuary”), chapter 10 begins the last part of the Letter to the Hebrews; and an appendix will follow, which will constitute chapter 13. Three large sub-divisions of chapter 10 share this extensive fourth part of the Letter: (a) the present position, (b) the example of the ancestors, and (c) the example of Jesus himself.

These pages, which develop the three sub-divisions, are among those that have supported me all along the journey of life, and which even still today encourage me. It was largely along the line of thinking proposed here that I have established the fundamental line of conduct for the Brothers—and I am happy to repeat it here—the spirit of faith, which makes one look with eyes of faith on all things and on all people. But, O Jesus, this has not always been easy. I believe, Lord, but increase my faith and increase the faith of my Brothers who work in the schools, now and in the future.

This last part of the Letter to the Hebrews has always encouraged me to keep going forward. It presented me with the model of the patriarchs of the Old Testament and, above all, with your own example, O my Jesus. It contains the doctrinal encouragements and its own weight of revelation to anchor me in these feelings of faith, sometimes apparently contrary to reason, but which are already being strengthened into eternity.

Here is one of these sacred passages that anchor us in supernatural reality: “So as we go in, let us be sincere in heart and filled with faith, our minds sprinkled and free from any trace of bad conscience and our bodies washed with pure water” (Hebrews 10:22). In this single verse, what perspectives toward prayer, grace, and the sacraments! I will have to come back to this again as it contains so many Christian riches, your riches, O Jesus, my Savior!

I must also extend this text by drawing upon verses 23 and 24, which launch me on other paths of reflection that are no less exhilarating: “Let us keep firm in the hope we profess, because the

one who made the promise is faithful. Let us be concerned for each other, to stir a response in love and good works.” What a magnificent vision and synthesis of our religion! And the following verse (Hebrews 10:25) speaks of the Church, Christ continuing on earth (“Do not stay away from the meetings of the community, as some do, but encourage each other to go”).

I had intended to make no further comment here. However, I do not apologize for the preceding sentences, which I consider to be a spiritual consultation, a prayer. All the more so since the concluding phrase of verse 25 could be addressed to me personally in my old age and in my illnesses: “The more so as you see the Day drawing near.” O Jesus, may that blessed day come when with Mary I will be able to praise you in eternity without end. Faith will no longer exist then, but the things for which I have hoped will burst forth into your eternal glory.

Lord, in my prayerful rereading of the Letter to the Hebrews, I will return to the last two verses of this splendid chapter 10; but, before doing that, I want to recall a few more places in my writings where I have called upon the compelling verses in chapter 10 of Hebrews that I have just recalled.

I used Hebrews 10:19-21 (“Brothers, through the blood of Jesus we have the right to enter the sanctuary, by a new way which he has opened for us, a living opening through the curtain, that is to say, his flesh. And we have the high priest over all the sanctuary of God”) in a passage of the *Explanation of the Method of Mental Prayer*, at #82, which I have already had the opportunity to point out.¹⁸⁵ Here, at #82b, I also reference these verses when writing, “You are my only refuge in my difficulties.”¹⁸⁶

In this same book of the *Explanation*, at #79, I cited more explicitly verses 19 and following with certain passages from the Gospel of John:

We must maintain our assurance that, if Our Lord Jesus Christ is willing to take our cause in hand, he will undoubtedly obtain for us all that we shall ask through him and what he will ask for us from the eternal Father.¹⁸⁷

The title of this fourth section of the Letter to the Hebrews is “persevering faith.” Beginning with Hebrews 10:32, our sacred book points out to us “motives for perseverance.” It is along this line that the inspiring verse “The righteous man will live by faith” (Hebrews 10:38), which was already used more than once in the Old Testament,¹⁸⁸ takes on a new light. The following verse, 39, extends it into a most engaging text: “You and I are not the sort of people who draw back, and are lost by it; we are the sort who keep faithful until our souls are saved.”

I also had the opportunity to draw upon these verses in the Meditation for the Feast of All Saints. Here is the text:

They endured great combats, says Saint Paul, in the various kinds of afflictions that they suffered. They served as a spectacle to the world because of insults and ill-treatment; with joy they saw themselves despoiled of all their goods, knowing that they had more excellent goods that would never perish.¹⁸⁹

Lord, one cannot follow you without carrying your cross, and “the various kinds of afflictions” of which your apostle speaks, or without knowing a whole rainbow of trials. (I use this comparison while thinking, at the same time, that every trial has its rainbow of hope.) You have honored me with many trials, Lord Jesus, from the day I accepted the first schoolmasters at my table, until the day of the Clément Affair and all its consequences.¹⁹⁰ I accept them, Lord Jesus, as well as all those you may still wish to send me, whether they come as my sometimes unbearable rheumatism,¹⁹¹ or from Brother Norbert, on whom I counted so much but who seems to be getting bogged down in Jansenism,¹⁹² just like Jean-Louis, my brother and “alter ego” in the family,¹⁹³ or even the actions taken against me by Archbishop d’Aubigné, of Rouen, who had, previous to our acquaintance, been prejudiced against me.¹⁹⁴

Thus prepared in faith, I will be able, with the saints of whom Saint Paul speaks, to accompany the heavenly Lamb in his glory when all will now bow down before him.

1.6.2. Exemplary Faith of Ancestors (Hebrews 11:1-40)

O my Lord Jesus, I approach, in this rereading that I am doing, one of the chapters of the Letter to the Hebrews of which, all my life, I have been most aware. I never tried to hide this; and while I did not do it on purpose, I was rather happy that the Brothers realized it. Even the good Canon Blain spoke of it to me; he told me that I exulted with joy when, in the refectory, this chapter of the Letter to the Hebrews was read.¹⁹⁵ I wonder which Brother could have told him this. But, in fact, it was quite true. And even today, in the present rereading of the text, my spirit exalts.

How could it not be so when reading words like those that open chapter 11: “Only faith can guarantee the blessings that we hope for, or prove the existence of the realities that at present remain unseen” (Hebrews 11:1). What holy audacity to affirm that faith, which is not reason, is nevertheless a proof! O my Jesus, that has always been beyond my comprehension, but you have always helped me to believe. Confirm and strengthen this faith in me by the example of the patriarchs of the Old Testament, from Abel to John the Baptist, passing by way of Abraham, Moses, and so many others who had their eyes fixed on the promise.¹⁹⁶

My Lord, although I have a great desire to do so, I will not pause any further here to comment on all the verses of this admirable text; but nothing will prevent me from using them as a starting point in my prayers during the coming days.

For the moment, however, according to the plan I had laid out for this present rereading of the Letter to the Hebrews, I will limit myself to recalling only a few of the places—I am surprised not to have done so more often—where I have drawn upon chapter 11 of Hebrews in my writings.

I quoted conjointly verse 6 (“Now it is impossible to please God without faith, since anyone who comes to him must”) and then verse 1 (“Only faith can guarantee the blessings that we hope for, or prove the existence of the realities that at present remain unseen”) in the seventh of the *Meditations for the Time of Retreat*. I entitled this meditation “That the care of instructing youth is one of the most necessary works in the Church.”¹⁹⁷ In beginning the reading of the text of this

meditation, a line or two above the citation of the Letter to the Hebrews is included to put it in its context. It says,

This means that you are called to lay the foundation for the building of the Church¹⁹⁸ when you instruct children in the mystery of the most Holy Trinity and the mysteries accomplished by Jesus Christ when he was on earth. For, according to Saint Paul, without faith it is impossible to please God and consequently be saved and enter the homeland of heaven, because faith is the foundation of the hope that we have.¹⁹⁹

I also cited a few verses of chapter 11 in the Meditation on the Feast of All Saints,²⁰⁰ which already contains quotations from chapter 10. Here it is a textual reference that I give, and in the following order: verses 36 to 38,²⁰¹ and then verse 35.²⁰² It is, therefore, useless to transcribe them.²⁰³ However, I will ponder them anyway, always with the same ardor. Not having had the opportunity to suffer martyrdom, I always have the opportunity, O my Jesus, to offer you my life, with its joys and its sorrows, in love.

1.6.3. The Example of Jesus (Hebrews 12:1-29)

After offering the saints of the Old Testament as models, here is offered in chapter 12 the model par excellence for the two alliances (Old and New), the Savior Jesus. With Saint Paul and the first Christians, then, “Let us not lose sight of Jesus, who leads us in our faith and brings it to perfection” (Hebrews 12:2) and thus be able to progress toward the Kingdom. This new and essential section of the fourth and last part of my rereading of chapter 11 of Hebrews merges with chapter 12 of this canonical book.

Many passages of this reading have for me a very great spiritual and salutary flavor. Thus, serving as a hinge between chapters 11 and 12, the last verse of one and the first of the other form the progress that connects all of humanity since the time of Abel (Hebrews 11:4).²⁰⁴ It is said, “God had made provision for us to have something better, and they [these heroes of faith] were not to reach perfection without us” (Hebrews 11:40). So that’s why, “with so many witnesses in a great cloud on every side of us, we too, then, should throw off everything that hinders us, especially the sin that clings so easily” (Hebrews 12:1). And further on the author continues, “You have not yet had to keep fighting sin to the point of death” (Hebrews 12:4), or even, “Always be wanting peace with all people, and the holiness without which no one can ever see the Lord” (Hebrews 12:14).

Lord, you are our peace. Continue giving yourself to us so that we can overcome all the disagreements too often inevitable in this life. Direct us by the way that you are, toward your heavenly dwelling. Since “we have been given possession of an unshakeable kingdom, let us therefore hold on to the grace that we have been given and use it to worship God in the way that he finds acceptable, in reverence and fear. For our God is a consuming fire” (Hebrews 12:28-29). The fire of heaven cannot be less great than that of hell! And besides, what does fire mean here? The Holy Spirit, who first showed himself to the apostles in the form of tongues of fire, can also direct us toward “wanting peace with all people” and “wanting holiness.”

I have cited or alluded to chapter 12 at least six times in my writings, especially in the *Meditations for Feasts*. The first instance to be offered, since it cites verse 1, is again from the Meditation for the Feast of All Saints. In fact, after having previously referenced Hebrews 10:32-34,²⁰⁵ 11:36-38,²⁰⁶ and 11:35,²⁰⁷ I referenced this first verse of chapter 12 (“With so many witnesses in a great cloud on every side of us, we too, then, should throw off everything that hinders us, especially the sin that clings so easily, and keep running steadily in the race we have started”).

Since, then, as Saint Paul says, we are surrounded on every side by a great cloud of witnesses, let us detach ourselves from everything that weighs us down and prevents us from raising ourselves to heaven. Let us run with patience in this race which is open before us, and which is the only way we will reach the happiness of the saints.²⁰⁸

Hebrews 12:2 (“Let us not lose sight of Jesus, who leads us in our faith and brings it to perfection: for the sake of the joy which was still in the future, he endured the cross, disregarding the shamefulness of it, and from now on has taken his place at the right of God’s throne”) found its place in the Meditation for the Feast of the Apostle Saint Thomas. Speaking of sufferings in this meditation, I said, attributing the text to Saint Paul, “He bore his cross and yearned to be attached to it.”²⁰⁹ I took up this same verse (Hebrews 12:2) in the Meditation for the Feast of the Exaltation of the Holy Cross. Beginning with a citation from Galatians 6 (“As for me, the only thing I can boast about is the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom the world is crucified to me, and I to the world”), I continued with our verse:

We should glory in the cross of Jesus Christ. It is indeed in this cross that we should place all our glory, says the same Apostle; casting our eyes on Jesus Christ, our divine Master, who placed all his glory and all his happiness in suffering and dying on this cross, despising the shame and ignominy which accompanied the cross.²¹⁰

Further on, in verse 6 (“for the Lord trains those he loves, and chastises every son he accepts”), which is itself only a reminder of Proverbs 3:11-12 (“My child, do not scorn correction from Yahweh, do not resent his reproof; for Yahweh reproves those he loves, as a father the child whom he loves”), appears in the Meditation for the Feast of Saint Teresa of Avila. I end the second point of that meditation thus: “because, as the Wise Man says, God chastises the children whom he loves tenderly.”²¹¹

Lord Jesus, I have not had the opportunity to cite the verses between the sixth and twenty-fourth of chapter 12 of Hebrews. Perhaps they lend themselves less well to religious or pedagogical applications, or perhaps I have not had a spiritual sense refined enough to realize their scope. In any case, I did use verse 24 (“and to Jesus, the mediator of a new covenant, and to purifying blood which pleads more insistently than Abel’s”) in *Religious Instructions and Exercises of Piety*, one of my writings, in three places,²¹² on the subject of *Supra quae* which, in the canon of the Mass follows the eucharistic consecration: “Here the priest asks God to accept the sacrifice presented to him as he was pleased to accept those of Abel, Abraham, and Melchizedek, which were only prefigures of this one.”²¹³

I have also alluded to verse 28 (“We have been given possession of an unshakeable kingdom. Let us therefore be grateful and use our gratitude to worship God in the way that pleases him, in reverence and fear”) in the *Explanation of the Method of Mental Prayer* at #78, which I have already cited above,²¹⁴ and which ends thus: “so that our prayers are agreeable to God.”²¹⁵ This verse seems to end the admirable work of the Letter to the Hebrews.²¹⁶ The remainder, chapter 13, is only what the author of Hebrews calls an “appendix,” but an appendix of an exceptional book, a true treatise on theology, the only one in the New Testament, and perhaps in the whole of the Bible.

Lord, before tackling the conclusion to this rereading of the Letter to the Hebrews, I come this evening to thank you for this instructive text, obviously, but a text that is above all inspiring and of a nature to help unite me with you. And it is more than inspiring, it is *living*, as is specified in Hebrews 4:12, a text that I have quoted very often because of how strongly I believe in it:

The word of God is something alive and active: it cuts like any double-edged sword but more finely: it can slip through the place where the soul is divided from the spirit, or joints from the marrow; it can judge the secret emotions and thoughts.

Scripture is *living*, and it must be lived from the inside by a deep adhesion and from the outside as having to be one with our concrete existence and with the problems of the present moment.²¹⁷ It is alive and, because of this, it is able to become a superior force in the rules of one’s conscience and in the rules of the actions one takes in face of the practical problems that arise. I will return later to these reflections on the scope of your word in my life. For the moment, however, I will continue on with my re-reading of the Letter to the Hebrews.

1.7. Appendix (Hebrews 13:1-25)

In saying that chapter 13 is an “appendix,” I do not want to minimize the content or the spiritual scope of this text.²¹⁸ It even happens that the recommendations found in Hebrews 13 are more immediately practical than the great theological text that precedes them. Focusing on just the very first verses of this chapter, it is almost a new “decatalogue” or a new “sermon on the mount”: persevere in brotherly love (verse 1),²¹⁹ do not forget hospitality (verse 2),²²⁰ remember prisoners (verse 3),²²¹ honor marriage (verse 4),²²² and let your conduct be free from avarice (verse 5).²²³ The rest of what is being proposed is yet to unfold, but I will soon be getting around to that.

For the moment, I will point out that I have used this “appendix” to the Letter to the Hebrews a good ten times in my writings. The first verse quoted in the *Duties of a Christian* being verse 8, I insist on the relevance of the institution of the sacrifice of the Mass. Here is the first reason given by the Council of Trent for the institution of the holy sacrifice of the Mass: “Because Jesus Christ is the eternal priest, as Saint Paul calls him, his sacrifice should not end with his death but should continue through his ministers until the end of time.”²²⁴ Have I distorted too much the well-struck sentence of your apostle that reads, “Jesus Christ is the same today as he was yesterday and as he will be for ever” (Hebrews 13:8)?

I have already mentioned above²²⁵ the use of verse 12 (“Jesus too suffered outside the gate to sanctify the people with his own blood”) in conjunction with other passages of the Letter to the

Hebrews. I believe it is unnecessary to return to this here, and so I will move on without further delay to Hebrews 13:13 (“Let us go to him, then, outside the camp, and share his degradation”) and to Hebrews 13:14-16 (“For there is no eternal city for us in this life but we look for one in the life to come. Through him, let us offer God an unending sacrifice of praise, a verbal sacrifice that is offered every time we acknowledge his name. Keep doing good works and sharing your resources, for these are sacrifices that please God”). Although I reference Philippians 3:19,²²⁶ one can also find an allusion to Hebrews 13:13ff. in the *Collection*²²⁷ and also in the *Duties of a Christian*.²²⁸

Given the great importance of the virtue of obedience that you have always inspired in me, Lord Jesus, it seems natural to me to have used Hebrews 13:17 (“Obey your leaders and do as they tell you, because they must give an account of the way they look after your souls; make this a joy for them to do, and not a grief—you yourselves would be the losers”) in my writings as in my conversations with the Brothers.²²⁹ In fact, it is not from the angle of obedience that I made reference to this verse, but from that which Christian teachers have in answering for the souls of their disciples (students). Thus, in the Meditation for Rogation Monday, I write, “It is God himself who has led them [the children] to you; it is God himself who makes you responsible for their salvation.”²³⁰ And in the Meditation for the Feast of Saint Marcellinus, I said, “You are obliged to keep watch over all those who belong to it [the flock God has entrusted to you], because, as Saint Paul says, you have to give an account to God for their souls.”²³¹

The same passage of Hebrews 13:17, see above, comes back three times in the *Meditations for the Time of Retreat*, always with this sense of the responsibility of the Christian teacher in relation to their disciples (students). And so in the eleventh of the *Meditations for the Time of Retreat*, I said, “You will render an account to God for the faults they commit just as if you yourselves had committed them.”²³² Or again, in the thirteenth of the *Meditations for the Time of Retreat*, where I put even more emphasis. The title of this meditation reveals it well: “That as a teacher you must give an account to God on the way you have done your work.”²³³ Even if the textual citation of Hebrews 13:17 only arrives toward the end of the following passage, I began to reference it from the beginning of the second point:

Consider that the account that you will have to give to God on the way you have done your work will not be inconsequential, because it concerns the salvation of the souls of children whom God has entrusted to your care, for on the day of judgment, you will answer for them as much as for yourself. You must be convinced of this, that God will begin by making you give an account of their souls before making you give an account of your own. For when you took responsibility for them, you committed yourself at the same time to procure their salvation with as much diligence as your own, for you engaged yourself to work entirely for the salvation of their souls.

This is what Saint Paul brings to your attention, when he says that those who have been put in charge of others must render an account of them to God. He does not say that they will render an account of their own souls, but of the souls of those for whom they are responsible, and it is over those souls that they must watch because they are obliged to render an account to God for them.²³⁴

I returned to this subject one last time in the fourteenth meditation (#206) of the *Meditations for the Time of Retreat* where I said:

When you appear before God, it will not be sufficient for you to have instructed the children entrusted to you, but you will be found guilty if you have not watched over their conduct. For it is your duty to watch over them exactly, as you are obliged to give an account to God for their souls.²³⁵

I know, Lord, that some have found this insistence very heavy; some have even thought that such an approach becomes an unbearable burden for their conscience. But all I wanted to highlight, and repeat, was the importance and seriousness of the ministry of the Christian teachers. This is what distinguishes them from mercenaries for whom teaching is merely a means of earning a living.²³⁶ This obligation of which I speak is, moreover, accompanied by a grace that makes one find the responsibility less heavy and thereby increases the spiritual life of the subject.

My last recourse to a text of the Letter to the Hebrews was Hebrews 13:20-21 (“I pray that the God of peace, who brought our Lord Jesus back from the dead to become the great Shepherd of the sheep by the blood that sealed an eternal covenant, may make you ready to do his will in any kind of good action; and turn us all into whatever is acceptable to himself through Jesus Christ, to whom be glory for ever and ever, Amen”) where I drew upon the wishes and greetings that Saint Paul addressed to his readers. I had occasion to cite this text in the *Explanation of the Method of Mental Prayer* at #218c. It was to you, O my loving Savior, that I addressed myself in this passage, “begging you to bless them [all the thoughts, words, and actions that I offer you] and make them pleasing in your eyes, by uniting them to your own.”²³⁷

This reference, given in the *Explanation*, was connected to an example for the Brothers of an act of thanksgiving. I feel led now to renew this act of thanksgiving at the moment when, after a lively rereading that I had imposed on myself of the splendid Letter to the Hebrews, I am going to close this book of the scriptures.

2. Conclusion

This rereading has allowed me to take stock of the use that I have made of this text of the scriptures in my writings. I may not have always had the lucidity²³⁸ required to proceed to such a return to the past; but I have now finished it in your presence, Lord, with my heart wide open, and I believe that I have received new graces from doing it. Bring my attempt at this Lasallian rereading of the Letter to the Hebrews now to an end.

Lord, I believe that I brought to the course of my rereading of this sacred text the memory of my own personal journey: my different situations, the people involved in these situations, the choices that were made, the words that were used, the commitments that I assumed. And as I conclude, I take on board as my own the following text from Campos, which testifies that this whole exercise of rereading was done as a prayer, an intense prayer of exaltation, if ever there was one, and a prayer that leads to true celebration.²³⁹

My whole “story,” read in light of [the Letter to the Hebrews],²⁴⁰ can bring me to prayer, a prayer that is inseparable from my ministry . . . a prayer that is a joyous contemplation and celebration:

Celebration of a life lived in openness to the total Mystery of God, and is developing, even by means of my most simple activities. . . .

Celebration of gratitude for the goodness of God, for his Providence, for his call, for the charismatic gift which reveals his saving action, his glory; for the mystery of Christ, who reveals himself in the saving of the young. . . .

Celebration of the joyful poverty of the minister, a poverty that comes from the very problems of the minister and his ministry, an awareness that it is God who saves, that he alone can touch hearts through the ministry of weak humans, fragile ministers; a poverty that becomes a confident beggar, asking to be filled with his Spirit in order to be the “good news” for others. . . .

Celebration of the confidence of the minister, based on the fidelity of God who chooses, calls, sends. . . .

Celebration of hope, as the very origin of his commitment. . . .

Celebration, then, of my own “story,” seen as a Paschal way of life, with its heights and its depths, as the recreating, enlightening, redeeming, freeing action of God; an action that is visible and effective in me to the degree that I am a person filled with the Spirit of God for others; it is a challenge, then, to live my way of life as a continual incarnation in the flesh and blood world of my students, dying to myself, a *kenosis* even to the end of my life, so that the young may have life to the full and come to the glory which is their destiny.

Lord, this lyricism is not my style, but it reflects my thoughts well. In a sense, it is mine.²⁴¹ May I still strive today to accomplish it. O Mary, my good Mother, patroness and protector of the Christian schools and of my very dear Brothers, pray for me! My good guardian angel, protect me!

And in these few minutes that remain to me before evening prayer, I [John Baptist de La Salle] call to mind, as a kind of summary, these phrases, which were the subject of my rereading of the Letter to the Hebrews:

God has spoken to us through his Son (Hebrews 1:2), whom he crowned with glory and splendor (Hebrews 2:7). Therefore, today, do not harden your hearts (Hebrews 3:7). Alive and active, indeed, is the word of God (Hebrews 4:12). And Jesus, although he was Son, he learned obedience; he became for all who obey him the source of eternal salvation (Hebrews 5:8-9).

God would not be so unjust as to forget all you have done, the love that you have for his name (Hebrews 6:10). The power of Jesus to save is utterly certain, since he is living for ever to intercede for all who come to God through him (Hebrews 7:25).

He is the high priest who has his place at the right hand of the throne of divine Majesty in the heavens (Hebrews 8:1). This is why he brings a new covenant, as a mediator (Hebrews 9:15). And this will²⁴² was for us to be made holy by the offering made, once for all, of his body (Hebrews 10:10). Faith is the guarantee of the blessings that we hope for, the proof of the existence of the realities that at present remain unseen (Hebrews 11:1).

Always be wanting peace with all people, and the holiness without which no one can ever see the Lord (Hebrews 12:14). Continue to love one another like brothers and sisters (Hebrews 13:1). Amen!

¹ Brother Raymond Brisebois (1916-1996) was a member of the District of Montreal of the Brothers of the Christian Schools. He finished this manuscript in 1996, after having spent a number of years collaborating with his friend Brother Jean-Guy Rodrigue on the preparation of a number of small booklets of introduction for the various volumes in the Cahiers lasalliens series (*Invitation—Initiation aux Cahiers lasalliens*).

² Brother William Mann is president emeritus of Saint Mary's University of Minnesota and editor-in-chief of *AXIS: Journal of Lasallian Higher Education*. He is a former vicar general of the Brothers of the Christian Schools (2000-2007) and the immediate past president of the International Association of La Salle Universities (2015-2018). He earned his doctorate in ministry at Colgate Rochester Divinity School.

³ Brother John Guasconi, who for some years has been a translator for the Institute, is a member of the District of Eastern North America of the Brothers of the Christian Schools.

⁴ Jean-Guy Rodrigue, FSC, *Contribution à l'étude des sources des "Méditations sur les principales Fêtes de l'année,"* Cahiers lasalliens 47 (Rome: Brothers of the Christian Schools, 1988); and "Religious Life in France during the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries," translated by Augustine Loes, FSC, in *Spirituality in the Time of John Baptist de La Salle*, edited by Robert C. Berger, FSC, (Landover, MD: Lasallian Publications, 1999), pages 3-79.

⁵ *Circular 478: Documents of the 46th General Chapter* (Rome: Brothers of the Christian Schools, 2022), page 26: "We are committed to dedicate the year 2025 to deepen and share Lasallian spirituality in the Church and the world, on the occasion of the celebration of the 300th anniversary of the Bull of Approbation."

⁶ *Collection of Various Short Treatises, Duties of a Christian to God, Explanation of the Method of Mental [Interior] Prayer, Meditations, and Religious Instructions and Exercises of Piety*. Also referenced are selections from Canon Jean-Baptiste Blain's *Life of John Baptist de La Salle* and from the commentary of Michel Sauvage, FSC, and Miguel Campos, FSC, on the *Explanation*.

⁷ While other Lasallians have used this first-person approach, it has usually been in writing a biography of the Founder. For example, see Leo Burkhard, FSC, *Master of Mischief Makers* (1952), Leo Kirby, FSC, *I, John Baptist de La Salle* (1980), Leo Burkhard, FSC, *Beyond the Boundaries: A Story of John Baptist de La Salle* (1994), and more recently Hernán Santos, FSC, *A Tapestry of Voices Approaching De La Salle* (2024).

⁸ Maurice-Auguste Hermans, FSC, and Michel Sauvage, FSC, “Founder of the Brothers of the Christian Schools,” translated by Philip Smith, FSC, in *Spirituality in the Time of John Baptist de La Salle*, edited by Robert C. Berger, FSC, (Landover, MD: Lasallian Publications, 1999), page 201.

⁹ Miguel Campos, FSC, “Introduction,” in *Meditations for the Time of Retreat* (Christian Brothers Conference, 1975), page 30.

¹⁰ Concerning a profession of faith: De La Salle opening “the eyes of his disciples [the Brothers] so that they can see what is really at play in their humble tasks: the realization of the plan of God.”

¹¹ Concerning citations of remembrance: De La Salle inviting the Brothers “to see in themselves more and more clearly the action of the living Spirit of Jesus Christ.”

¹² Concerning citations of “the call”: De La Salle inviting the Brothers “to renew within themselves ceaselessly the vitality of their faith and zeal, to evaluate their activities, and to verify the authenticity of their educational relationships in the light of the Gospel.”

¹³ Campos, “Introduction,” pages 31-32.

¹⁴ Daniel J. Harrington, “The Letter to the Hebrews,” in *The New Collegeville Bible Commentary: New Testament* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2006), 11:5.

¹⁵ “Introduction to Saint Paul” in *The Jerusalem Bible* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday & Company, 1966), page 265.

¹⁶ Harrington, “The Letter to the Hebrews,” page 8.

¹⁷ Charles Huré says that at this time scruples about handling holy books and reading the Word of God disappear (quoted in Michel Sauvage, FSC, *Cahiers lasalliens* 1 (Rome, 1959), p. xiv). This is analogous with our years 1950-1970.

¹⁸ On this subject, the most immediate reference is undoubtedly in *Cahiers lasalliens* 1, pages vii-f. Sauvage speaks there of Oratorian Denis Amelote, of which twenty-seven editions of the French version of the New Testament are recorded for the period 1666-1719. Also indicated are the versions of Mons (Port-Royal), Louvain, Trévoux (Simon), and the particular translations of Corbin, Villeloin, Godeau, Bouhours, Huré, and Martianay. Consult particularly pages xiv-xv, not neglecting the notes.

¹⁹ The best-known name in critical work at the time was certainly that of Richard Simon, very daring for his time.

²⁰ We may have “abused,” for a time, the “words of faith.” Not in themselves, obviously, and not in the idea of our formators. We have too easily trivialized them by using them in a mechanical way and not as carriers and supports of the spiritual life.

²¹ We will easily be convinced of this by consulting Sauvage, *Cahiers lasalliens* 1. Its author entitled it *New Testament Quotations in the Meditations for the Time of Retreat*. Refer also to Miguel Campos, FSC, *Cahiers lasalliens* 46 (Rome, 1974).

²² Rodrigue, *Cahiers lasalliens* 47, page 16.

²³ The question of authorship has been difficult since the beginnings of the Church. Until around the year 400, the Church refused to attribute it to Paul (cf. Jerusalem Bible, page 1489 in the 1956 French-language edition). Then, over time, the custom prevailed of making it the fourteenth letter of the Pauline collection. In the modern period, Protestant biblical scholars rejected the possibility that Saint Paul was the author of the Letter to the Hebrews. The Catholic Church, out of loyalty to a certain tradition, continued to attribute it to Paul. But, the evidence being overwhelming, we came to distinguish between author (Paul) and editor (Apollos). Since around 1965, the Letter to the Hebrews has not been included in the Pauline Letters.

²⁴ See Meditation #159.1 (“As he was humble, he attributed the results of his preaching to the living and effective word of God. . . . He knew that this living word alone is able to make the division between the flesh and spirit, so necessary to bring about the entire conversion of a soul”); Meditation #167.1 (“It is true that the word of Jesus Christ is efficacious in calling the first apostles”); Meditation #180.2 (“It [the word of God] is, says Saint Paul, living and effective; it pierces the heart better than a two-edged sword; it enters and penetrates even to the secrets of the soul”); and Meditation #190.2 (“The word of God contained in scripture has that effect, according to Saint Paul, because it is living and effective, and penetrates more deeply than a two-edged sword. It enters, continues the same Apostle, and penetrates even to the most hidden depths of soul and spirit”).

²⁵ It is not the beginning of this verse (“obey”) but the end (“give an account of it”) that interests the Founder and that he applies to the Brothers in relation to their students.

²⁶ “Such is the plight of those whom Providence calls upon you to teach. . . . It is God himself who has led them to you; it is God who makes you responsible for their salvation.”

²⁷ “You are obliged to keep watch over all those who belong to [the flock of God], because, as Saint Paul says, you have to give an account to God for their souls.”

²⁸ Jean-Baptiste Blain, *The Mind and Heart of John Baptist de La Salle*, edited by Augustine Loes, FSC, translated and annotated by Edwin Bannon, FSC, (Landover, MD: Lasallian Publications, 2002), 4:77.

²⁹ “As Jesus left Jericho with his disciples and a great crowd, Bartimaeus—that is, the son of Timaeus—a blind beggar, was sitting at the side of the road. When he heard that it was Jesus of Nazareth, he began to shout and cry out, ‘Son of David, Jesus, have pity on me’” (Mark 10:46-47).

³⁰ Elisha, a Jewish wonder-worker and prophet, was intensely loyal to the great prophet Elijah, who was his mentor (cf. 1 Kings and 2 Kings).

³¹ And this is why I have sometimes noted insights that are familiar to the Brothers of the Christian Schools, but which others may still ignore.

³² In the Rule, De La Salle asked the Brothers to have a deep respect for holy scripture, stipulating that the New Testament should be their main Rule, that they should always carry it with them and do some reading of it every day. Cf. “Rule of 1718,” in John Baptist De La Salle, *Rule and Foundational Documents by John Baptist de La Salle*, Cahiers lasalliens 25, edited and translated by Augustine Loes, FSC, and Ronald Isetti (Landover, MD: Lasallian Publications, 2002), #2.3, page 4.

³³ Marcus Tullius Cicero (106 BC-43 BC) was a great Roman statesman, scholar, and philosopher.

³⁴ We are often content to say that John Baptist de La Salle was born in Rheims (1651) and died in Rouen (1719) after having established primary schools, normal schools, and the Community

of the Brothers of the Christian Schools. It is true, but it is like defining the riches of the Louvre by its exterior architecture alone.

³⁵ Miguel Campos, FSC, *Evangelical Itinerary of Saint John Baptist de La Salle*, Cahiers lasalliens 45 (Rome, 1974) and Cahiers lasalliens 46. For a sense of the Gospel journey of De La Salle as presented by Campos in Cahiers lasalliens 15, see Edwin Bannon, FSC, *De La Salle: A Founder as Pilgrim* (London: De La Salle Provincialate, 1988).

³⁶ I am thinking here of the Russian composer Modest Mussorgsky (an ambulatory leitmotiv to be sure) passing from one room to another in his visit to the paintings of an exhibition.

³⁷ Sauvage, Cahiers lasalliens 1, page xv. Also see Rodrigue, Cahiers lasalliens 47, pages 16ff. for another opinion. About Oratorian Denis Amelote, see Cahiers lasalliens 1, pages iiiiff.

³⁸ Particularly in Campos, Cahiers lasalliens 46 and Miguel Campos, FSC, and Michel Sauvage, FSC, Cahiers lasalliens 50 (Rome, 1989). For Cahiers lasalliens 50, see Miguel Campos, FSC, and Michel Sauvage, FSC, *Encountering God in the Depths of the Mind and Heart: A Commentary on John Baptist de La Salle's Explanation of the Method of Mental Prayer*, edited by William Mann, FSC, Gerard Rummery, FSC, Emmanuel Sciberras, FSC, and Julian Watson, FSC, translated by Oswald Murdoch, FSC (Rome, 1995).

³⁹ Rodrigue, Cahiers lasalliens 47.

⁴⁰ Above all in Sauvage, Cahiers lasalliens 1 and Campos and Sauvage,.

⁴¹ Luis Varela Martínez, FSC, *Sacred Scripture in the Spirituality of Saint John Baptist de La Salle*, edited by Donald C. Mouton, FSC, translated by Francis Vesel, FSC, (Landover, MD: Lasallian Publications, 2000).

⁴² Campos, Cahiers lasalliens 46, page 21.

⁴³ The Saint Yon Estate, near Rouen (today in the city), had been rented by the Brothers in 1705, and then acquired in 1717. Concerning the history of Saint Yon see, among others, Circular #137 (Rome, 1905), pages 42-48; or Othmar Wurth, FSC, *La Pédagogie de Saint Jean-Baptiste de La Salle* (Rome, 1972).

⁴⁴ Brother Barthélemy had been elected Superior General in May 1717 during a General Chapter, following the opinion requested from all the Brothers on the relevance of such a Chapter.

⁴⁵ On page 457 of Blain, *The Mind and Heart*, Canon Jean-Baptiste Blain notes that the saint obeyed his successor with great respect.

⁴⁶ The Founder constantly brings “spirit” and “heart” together. On this subject, see the District of Montreal's *Reflets DLS* (September 1995), page 18.

⁴⁷ “Lord, it is time to see each other.” These were to be the last words of Saint Teresa of Avila.

⁴⁸ Brother Charles Lapierre published a life of the Founder entitled *Marche en ma présence* (Caluire et Cuire, 1982), where the idea of a path traveled constitutes the common thread. In another study, which was published in 1974 as Cahiers lasalliens 45 and Cahiers lasalliens 46, Brother Miguel Campos titled his doctoral thesis *The Evangelical Itinerary of Saint John Baptist de La Salle*.

⁴⁹ This is a constant idea with De La Salle. See Maurice-Auguste Hermans, FSC, ed., Cahiers lasalliens 9 (Rome, 1974), pages 172-174, for references to the first biographers on the abandonment of the saint to Providence.

⁵⁰ Pope Pius XII, on August 15, 1950, proclaimed Saint John Baptist de La Salle patron saint of all Christian teachers.

⁵¹ The spirit of Christianity is the essential goal of teaching for De La Salle. To the Brothers, he constantly recommends joining practice to doctrine in the training of young people. In particular, this is a constant in the *Meditations for the Time of Retreat*.

⁵² We will see the list of writings of John Baptist de La Salle in the introduction to the *Œuvres Complètes* (Rome: Brothers of the Christian Schools, 1993), pages xxi-xxii. From this list, here are the books which will be cited in the following pages: *Common Rules*, *Collection of Various Short Treatises*, *Explanation of the Method of Mental Prayer*, *Meditations for Sundays and Feasts*, *Meditations for the Time of Retreat*, additional *Meditations*, the *Duties of a Christian I and II*, and *Instructions and Prayers*.

⁵³ Several of the Founder's professors of theology are known by name. Thus, at Rheims: Daniel Egan and Michel de Blanzzy; at Paris: Guillaume de Lestocq and Jacques Despériers. The course in sacred scripture is mentioned by name in Léon de Marie Aroz, FSC, *Cahiers lasalliens* 41.2 (Rome, 1979), page 221. On this whole subject, see the abundant and interesting pages about "the beginning years" in *ibid.*, pages 217-266, 302-374.

⁵⁴ John Baptist de La Salle makes the spirit of faith the spirit of his Institute (see particularly the "Rule of 1718" in De La Salle, *Rule and Foundational Documents*, #2,1, page 16. See also John Baptist de La Salle, *Collection of Various Short Treatises*, *Cahiers lasalliens* 15, edited by Daniel Burke, FSC, translated by William J. Battersby, FSC (Landover, MD: Lasallian Publications, 1993), pages 32-33.

⁵⁵ In the beginning, De La Salle never thought of getting involved in the schools. See Jean-Baptiste Blain, *The Life of John Baptist de La Salle* (Landover, MD: Lasallian Publications, 2000), page 77. As for the first teachers, he was loath to live with them: *ibid.*, page 80.

⁵⁶ Another anachronism: Because John Baptist de La Salle never numbered the paragraphs of his *Explanation of the Method of Mental Prayer*, we must be grateful to Brother Michel Sauvage and Brother Miguel Campos who—first in *Cahiers lasalliens* 50—were kind enough to indicate these practical reference points to refer to the passages in this book. We will use them throughout these pages, even going as far as introducing them into the thoughts of the Founder. Isn't it he who pursues his sons?

⁵⁷ This is a remark of Campos and Sauvage in *Encountering God*, page 230. See also page 3 of the "introductory comments" of this work.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, #191a, page 229: "My Lord, Jesus Christ, I firmly believe that you, who are the only Son of God the Father Almighty, and the same eternal God with him [the perfect copy of his nature], wanted to become human."

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, #194e, page 242: "It is through you, O incomparable Virgin, that this God of love and mercy has come to us to save us. It is in you that he became a human child as truly as he is from all eternity Son of God."

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, #194a, page 240: "We can also converse with the most Blessed Virgin concerning this [act of faith in a] mystery somewhat as follows: 'Most holy Virgin, I firmly believe that Jesus Christ Our Lord, the only Son of God the Father, was conceived in your womb by the operation of the Holy Spirit.'"

⁶¹ Mainly in the *Duties of a Christian I* (in continuous text), II (by questions and answers), III (of external and public worship), the Grand Abregé (Summary), and the Petit Abregé (Summary). Cf. John Baptist de La Salle, *The Duties of a Christian to God*, *Cahiers lasalliens* 20, edited by Alexis James Doval, translated by Richard Arnandez, FSC, (Landover, MD: Lasallian Publications, 2002).

⁶² Consult Maurice-Auguste Hemans, FSC, *Vocabulaire lasallien*, 6 vols. (Rome, 1989), which is approximately 1000 pages long, for the words “angels,” “Michel,” etc. For an overview of the subject, see my unpublished seventy-two-page manuscript study: “Angels in the Life and Writings of Saint John Baptist de La Salle.” See also Giampiero Fornaresio, FSC, “Guardian Angels” in *Lasallian Themes I* (Rome: Brothers of the Christian Schools, 1992), pages 237-245.

⁶³ See particularly *Meditations* #172 (“God sends the holy angels to be near us always, to help us, and to serve us in every kind of situation”), #197 (“those chosen by Providence for the education of children must fulfill the functions of guardian angels for them”), and #198 (“how in the education of youth the function of the guardian angels is fulfilled”): John Baptist de La Salle, *Meditations by John Baptist de La Salle*, edited by Augustine Loes, FSC, and Francis Huether, FSC, translated by Richard Arandez, FSC, and Augustine Loes, FSC, (Landover, MD: Lasallian Publications, 1994).

⁶⁴ “And all at once with the angel there was a great throng of the hosts of heaven, praising God with the words: Glory to God in the highest heaven, and on earth peace for those he favors” (Luke 2:13-14).

⁶⁵ Campos and Sauvage, *Encountering God*, #214d, page 257.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, pages 257-258. Campos and Sauvage write, “This is usual with De La Salle, and a characteristic of the school of Bérulle. But it is, without doubt, necessary to recall that the ‘Hymn to the Philippians’ speaks of the self-abasement (*kenosis*) of the Incarnation. Remember also in the Meditation for Christmas (#86), how the Brother translates in his own ministry this mystery of the self-abasement of the Incarnate Word, the self-humiliation of Jesus linked to his mission for the salvation of the world.”

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, #193f., page 235: “How great this happiness is! How prodigious! How excellent is my nobility; how raised above all others! Is it possible that I can be eternally a child of God and brother of God! O what dignity, what an advantage, and what a benefit! My soul, can we really grasp this advantage?”

⁶⁸ John Baptist de La Salle died twenty-three days before his sixty-eighth birthday (April 30, 1651—April 7, 1719). This age was estimated in the idea of time, when people generally died much earlier. That did not mean there were not any older aged men. Thus, out of the hundred Brothers who were alive when De La Salle died, we have precise data for eighty-one of them. However, only twelve exceeded eighty years (See the District of Montreal’s *Reflets DLS* (June 1994), pages 43-48, and (September 1994), pages 25-33).

⁶⁹ Campos and Sauvage, *Encountering God*, #193e, page 235: “O infinite charity of the eternal Son of God, you became my brother by making yourself a human child in such a way that you were not ashamed, says your apostle in his Letter to the Hebrews, to call us your brothers, saying to your Father: I will proclaim your name to my brethren; in the midst of the church I will praise you. Here am I with the children God has given me. Since these children, adds Saint Paul, share in flesh and blood, he himself likewise partook of the same nature. Therefore, he had to be made in every respect like his brethren so that, as a High Priest, merciful and faithful to God, he might make expiation for the sins of his people. For having himself suffered and been tempted, he is able to help those who are also tempted.”

⁷⁰ Read the commentary by Campos and Sauvage about #193 in the *Explanation in Encountering God*, page 236: “The recognition of this gift of filial adoption, thanks to the mystery of the human birth of Jesus, bursts forth in a kind of lyrical hymn woven from scripture texts, and

notably from Hebrews 2:11-18. As with the hymn to Philipians, quoting this text of the Letter to the Hebrews widens our contemplation by leading it not only to its transcendent origin, but also to its heavenly conclusion. This small child has become, from now on, the sole mediator between God and humanity.”

⁷¹ Ibid., #193e, page 235: “He himself likewise partook of the same nature. Therefore, he had to be made in every respect like his brethren so that, as a High Priest, merciful and faithful to God, he might make expiation for the sins of his people. For having himself suffered and been tempted, he is able to help those who are tempted.”

⁷² Ibid., #191a, page 229: “My Lord, Jesus Christ, I firmly believe that you, who are the only Son of God the Father Almighty, and the same eternal God with him, wanted to become human, clothing yourself in our flesh.”

⁷³ Ibid., #195, pages 242-243: “As Saint Paul said to the Philipians (2:7), ‘He has annihilated himself by taking the form of a slave’ and making himself a child in order to destroy sin by his sufferings.”

⁷⁴ “It was essential that he should in this way become completely like his brothers so that he could be a compassionate and trustworthy high priest of God’s religion, able to atone for human sins” (Hebrews 2:17).

⁷⁵ Campos and Sauvage, *Encountering God*, #215b, page 259: “I recognize you as my God, my Redeemer and Savior, who comes in order to redeem me and deliver me from my sins.”

⁷⁶ Ibid., #218a, page 263: “It is very just, O my God, that, having shown so much goodness for me, as to become human and be born as a child, in order to sacrifice yourself by offering yourself to the justice of God, your Father, as a living victim, pure, holy, and pleasing to God for the expiation of my sins and my sanctification. . . .”

⁷⁷ “You have put him in command of everything. Well then, if he has put him in command of everything, he has left nothing which is not under his command. At present, it is true, we are not able to see that everything has been put under his command” (Hebrews 2:8).

⁷⁸ “Because he has himself been through temptation, he is able to help others who are tempted” (Hebrews 2:18).

⁷⁹ “For a short while you made him lower than the angels; you crowned him with glory and splendor” (Hebrews 2:7).

⁸⁰ “Rule of 1718,” in De La Salle, *Rule and Foundational Documents*, #2.1, page 16: “For it is this spirit [faith] that ought to animate all their actions and be the motive of their whole conduct. Those who do not possess it and those who have lost it ought to be looked upon as dead members, and they ought to look upon themselves as such.”

⁸¹ “Do not harden your hearts, as happened in the Rebellion, on the Day of Temptation in the wilderness” (Hebrews 3:8).

⁸² “De La Salle spoke to the novices every day on that noble subject [interior prayer] in order to give them a liking for the divine food that offers a delightful manna to those who have had the courage to persevere while enduring its initial bitterness and aridity. It was after the interior prayer they made before dinner, a prayer of which he asked them to give an account, that he entered into instructive and interesting details. At first, he opened their minds to the mistakes they had committed in it, whether out of negligence or from lack of understanding; then he enlightened them as to the manner in which they should have proceeded. He then read them some pages of his book [*Explanation of the Method of Interior Prayer*] and taught them how to spend the time of interior prayer usefully.” In Blain, *The Life of John Baptist de La Salle*, page 723.

⁸³ On June 24, 1682, John Baptist de La Salle left the family home to move with the first Brothers to the Rue Neuve.

⁸⁴ De La Salle, *The Duties of a Christian to God*, page 210: “Our confidence in prayer cannot expect to produce such startling effects unless it is based on the merits of our Lord Jesus Christ, for it is only through him, as Saint Paul says, that we have access to the eternal Father. He made satisfaction for our sins and reconciled us with God when he made himself the victim for our sins and became sin itself, as Saint Paul again says, to destroy sin in us.”

⁸⁵ Concerning Hebrews 9:26: “Or else he would have had to suffer over and over again since the world began. Instead of that, he has made his appearance once and for all, now at the end of the last age, to do away with sin by sacrificing himself.”

⁸⁶ In relation to the *Explanation*, see Campos and Sauvage, *Encountering God*, #82a, page 117; #164, page 202; #167, pages 204-205; #169c, page 207; #201a, on pages 246-247; and #215b, page 259.

⁸⁷ See #159.1, #167.1, #168.3*, #180.2, #181.3*, and #192.2 in De La Salle, *Meditations by John Baptist de La Salle*. The two meditations marked with an asterisk are, however, from the group whose Lasallian authenticity is doubtful.

⁸⁸ See footnote 72 for the *Explanation* at #215b.

⁸⁹ Campos and Sauvage, *Encountering God*, #215b, page 259.

⁹⁰ “Let us be confident, then, in approaching the throne of grace, that we shall have mercy from him and find grace when we are in need of help” (Hebrews 4:16).

⁹¹ Campos and Sauvage, *Encountering God*, #82a, page 117: “I have only to approach you, divine Jesus, dwelling in the Most Blessed Sacrament of the altar; it is there where truly I can have you always present before me. You are there as on your throne in order to receive our respect and adoration. You are there to fill us with every kind of grace that we may need.”

⁹² Ibid., #82a, page 117. With reference to #82a, Sauvage and Campos say: “The reference to these texts is not explicit, but the Lasallian language takes up again here once more themes of the Epistle to the Hebrews. Jesus Christ, heavenly mediator, intercedes for us and fills us with grace.”

⁹³ “Since in Jesus, the Son of God, we have the supreme high priest who has gone through to the highest heaven, we must never let go of the faith that we have professed. For it is not as if we had a high priest who was incapable of feeling our weaknesses with us; but we have one who has been tempted in every way that we are, though he is without sin. Let us be confident, then, in approaching the throne of grace, that we shall have mercy from him and find grace when we are in need of help” (Hebrews 4:14-16).

⁹⁴ Campos and Sauvage, *Encountering God*, #167, pages 204-205. For this text, the authors of *Cahiers lasalliens* 50 point out, “De La Salle’s reasoning is a little laborious, even difficult to follow.”

⁹⁵ Campos and Sauvage, *Encountering God*, #167, page 204: “This is why it is only right that we should not be content with making an act of application of the merits of Our Lord, but we must also make an act of union with Our Lord, uniting ourselves to the interior dispositions which he had when he was making mental prayer, and by begging him to make mental prayer in us himself and to present our needs to his Father, by considering us as belonging to him, and as his own members who do not and cannot have interior life, movement, and action except in him.”

⁹⁶ Ibid., #169c, page 207. It must be said that not all these quotations, or these allusions, are equally convincing.

⁹⁷ Ibid., #164, page 202. Campos and Sauvage say that Hebrews 4:14-16 is a possible reference here, but that one could also suggest John 15:16 or John 16:24-27.

⁹⁸ Ibid., #82a, page 117.

⁹⁹ Ibid., #201a, pages 246-247. Sauvage and Campos affirm, “The biblical texts quoted in this act of confidence are very forceful and touch on the center of Christian Revelation.”

¹⁰⁰ De La Salle, *Collection of Various Short Treatises*, pages 38-44. For example: (a) when putting on the religious garb [“Clothe yourselves as one holy and beloved of God” (Colossians 3:12)], (b) when washing [“My God, create in me a new heart, and do not take your Holy Spirit from me” (Psalm 51:12-13)], and (c) when at lunch or dinner [“Whether you drink or whether you eat, do all for the glory of God” (1 Corinthians 10:31)].

¹⁰¹ On these kinds of citations, see Campos, *Cahiers lasalliens* 46 and especially the annex to the introduction, pages 36ff. See, also, “the manner in which the Founder uses scripture” on page 2 of the foreword of this book.

¹⁰² Note that these meditations were only printed in 1730 or 1732, but the Brothers had handwritten copies.

¹⁰³ Obviously, it is a practical anachronism to attribute this numbering to the Founder. The meditations only received a serial number for the first time in the edition of Brother Irlide in 1882. Cf. Rodrigue, *Cahiers lasalliens* 47, page 7.

¹⁰⁴ De La Salle, *Meditations by John Baptist de La Salle*, #159.1.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid., #167.1.

¹⁰⁶ Ibid., #180.2.

¹⁰⁷ Ibid.

¹⁰⁸ Ibid., #192.2.

¹⁰⁹ For the opening lines of chapter 5: “Every high priest is taken from among human beings and is appointed to act on their behalf in relationships with God, to offer gifts and sacrifices for sins; he can sympathize with those who are ignorant or who have gone astray, because he too is subject to the limitations of weakness. That is why he has to make sin offerings for himself as well as for the people. No one takes this honor on himself; it needs a call from God, as in Aaron's case. And so it was not Christ who gave himself the glory of becoming high priest, but the one who said to him: You are my Son, today I have fathered you, and in another text: You are a priest forever, of the order of Melchizedek” (Hebrews 5:1-6).

¹¹⁰ “Since in Jesus, the Son of God, we have the supreme high priest who has gone through to the highest heaven, we must never let go of the faith that we have professed. For it is not as if we had a high priest who was incapable of feeling our weaknesses with us; but we have one who has been tempted in every way that we are, though he is without sin. Let us be confident, then, in approaching the throne of grace, that we shall have mercy from him and find grace when we are in need of help” (Hebrews 4:14-16).

¹¹¹ Campos and Sauvage comment concerning #167 of the *Explanation in Encountering God*, page 205:

De La Salle's reasoning is a little laborious, even difficult to follow. At the beginning, it seems to place the emphasis on the satisfaction of the *damage* due to sin, which persists after the *fault* has been pardoned. Then, the texts of Hebrews 4:14-18 and 5:1-10, 1 Corinthians 12:27, and Acts 17:27 place the emphasis on the realism of God's indwelling

in humanity, on the baptized person's belonging to the body of Christ, on the movement of the Holy Spirit who animates prayer from within the action of the person.

What is again brought into relief is that the Christian prays to God "through Jesus Christ" and even "in Jesus Christ," the only one who really worships the Father in spirit and in truth. This, however, is not a matter of some sort of "dilution" of the prayer and of the activity of the person. "In the depths of the heart," the Covenant which is operative by the gift of the Spirit has the result that *the life, the movement, and the action* which come from God are truly "in the person," and when Our Lord "prays" in us, it is really "our prayer" which "becomes very acceptable to the eternal Father."

¹¹² Campos and Sauvage, *Encountering God*, #169c, page 207: "Do you yourself present my mental prayer, and present, I beg you, all my needs to the eternal Father."

¹¹³ Ibid., #79, page 110.

¹¹⁴ Ibid., #232c, page 283: "I beg you earnestly to communicate to me the sentiments and affections of humility, of docility, of submission, and of obedience, which you had toward your heavenly Father, your holy Mother, and your foster father, the great Saint Joseph."

¹¹⁵ De La Salle, *Meditations by John Baptist de La Salle*, #3.3.

¹¹⁶ "Then Peter went up to him and said, 'Lord, how often must I forgive my brother if he wrongs me? As often as seven times?' Jesus answered, 'Not seven, I tell you, but seventy-seven times'" (Matthew 18:21-22).

¹¹⁷ "Coming to his senses [the prodigal son] thought, 'How many of my father's hired workers have more than enough food to eat, but here am I, dying from hunger. I shall get up and go to my father and I shall say to him, Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you. I no longer deserve to be called your son; treat me as you would treat one of your hired workers.' So he got up and went back to his father. While he was still a long way off, his father caught sight of him, and was filled with compassion. He ran to his son, embraced him and kissed him" (Luke 15:17-20).

¹¹⁸ De La Salle, *Meditations by John Baptist de La Salle*, #27.3.

¹¹⁹ Ibid., #63.3.

¹²⁰ Ibid., #89.3.

¹²¹ "Keep sober and alert, because your enemy the devil is on the prowl like a roaring lion, looking for someone to devour" (1 Peter 5:8:).

¹²² De La Salle, *Meditations by John Baptist de La Salle*, #89.3.

¹²³ "God would not be so unjust as to forget all you have done, the love that you have for his name or the services you have done, and are still doing, for the saints" (Hebrews 6:10).

¹²⁴ Brother Irenée, who was born Claude-François Dulac de Montisambert, was received into the Institute in 1714 by John Baptist de La Salle himself at the holy hill of Parmenie. On all this subject, see Cahiers lasalliens 57, pages 262-278.

¹²⁵ Brother Irenée might well be considered a late-life gift of God in the same way in which the young Benjamin (Genesis 44:18-34) is understood as the well-beloved child of his father Jacob's old age.

¹²⁶ And this from the beginning. During the great Assembly of 1686, after first pronouncing vows, De La Salle allowed the Brothers to elect one of their own, Brother Henri L'Heureux, as superior. In high places in the Church of France, they did not understand this; and the resolution was reversed. Later, a sufficiently ambiguous concept of ecclesiastical superiors was introduced. Fortunately, De La Salle was able to die in peace on this point, because in 1717, the religious authorities did not oppose Brother Barthelemy being elected superior of the Brothers.

¹²⁷ “But this one, because he remains forever, can never lose his priesthood. It follows, then, that his power to save is utterly certain, since he is living for ever to intercede for all who come to God through him” (Hebrews 7:24-25).

¹²⁸ De La Salle, *The Duties of a Christian to God*, page 221.

¹²⁹ De La Salle, *Meditations by John Baptist de La Salle*, #40.3.

¹³⁰ Campos and Sauvage, *Encountering God*, #78, page 109.

¹³¹ Hebrews 8:1.

¹³² Hebrews 8:4.

¹³³ De La Salle, *Meditations by John Baptist de La Salle*, #62.3.

¹³⁴ We know that the Founder consulted with the principal Brothers regarding the government of the Institute. This was particularly true for the establishment of the *Rules* and for the drafting of the *Conduct of the Christian Schools*. See Blain, *The Life of John Baptist de La Salle*, pages 327-328.

¹³⁵ “The first covenant also had its laws governing worship, and its sanctuary, a sanctuary on this earth” (Hebrews 9:1).

¹³⁶ For all the details of the Rheims foundation, see especially Léon de Marie Aroz, FSC, *Cahiers lasalliens* 37 (Rome, 1973), pages 21ff.

¹³⁷ Concerning Adren Nyel, see Yves Poutet, FSC, *Cahiers lasalliens* 48 (Rome, 1988), pages 20-32.

¹³⁸ From 1672, at least in principle, Paris had been divided into 176 school districts, each having its school for boys and its school for girls following the statutes and regulations of the Little Schools under the jurisdiction of the school supervisor Claude Joly. See Yves Poutet, *Le XVII^e Siècle et les origines lasalliennes: L’expansion (1688-1719)* (Rennes, 1970), page 28.

¹³⁹ These “seminaries for masters for the countryside” are, neither more nor less, than the first normal [teacher training] schools. They were a constant preoccupation for the Founder, from 1682, jointly then with the Duke de Mazarin. These seminaries caused De La Salle, despite himself, many major problems. Think, for example, of the departure of Brother Nicolas Vuyart and of the Clément Affair.

¹⁴⁰ The meaning here, although obviously a play on words, is that of “establishing” or “appointing.”

¹⁴¹ This is the Lasallian school in its entirety.

¹⁴² Several dates are given for the writing of the *Meditations*. It is likely that De La Salle revised them in the last years of his life. We know that they were not printed until 1729-1731.

¹⁴³ “The blood of goats and bulls and the ashes of a heifer are sprinkled on those who have incurred defilement and they restore the holiness of their outward lives” (Hebrews 9:13).

¹⁴⁴ Read the commentary by Campos and Sauvage about #83a of the *Explanation* in *Encountering God*, pages 119-120:

Hebrews 9:1-28—The author compares the former worship to the new worship. The sacrifices of the Law offered in the earthly temple cannot “pass” [through into the Holy of Holies (cf. Hebrews 9:11)] and reach God: “None of the gifts and sacrifices offered under these regulations can possibly bring any worshipper to perfection” (Hebrews 9:1-10). Jesus Christ, new and sole high priest, “has entered the sanctuary once and for all, taking with him not the blood of goats and bull calves, but his own blood.” And this offering “can purify our inner self from dead actions so that we do our service to the

living God” (Hebrews 9:11-14). That is why, glorified, “He brings a new covenant, as the mediator . . . and appears in the actual presence of God on our behalf. And he does not have to offer himself again and again . . . he has made his appearance once and for all to do away with sin by sacrificing himself” (Hebrews 9:15-27). None of these texts are given in reference. But the Lasallian language here returns to that of the Letter of the Hebrews.

¹⁴⁵ Campos and Sauvage, *Encountering God*, page 167: “Although you may be veiled from my eyes, yet you are there as great, as powerful, as adorable, as lovable, as you are in heaven because you are the one same God and because you are equally present in both places.” Also see the commentary on the whole of #136 in *Encountering God*, 168.

¹⁴⁶ De La Salle, *The Duties of a Christian to God*, page 450. On “Exterior and Public Worship,” which constitutes the third volume of De La Salle’s catechism, it’s a pity that it did not have the lasting distribution of the first volume, which, despite its own indisputable value, is deprived of a part of Christian doctrine as presented by the Founder.

¹⁴⁷ De La Salle, *Meditations by John Baptist de La Salle*, #93.2.

¹⁴⁸ Ibid., #163.2.

¹⁴⁹ Campos and Sauvage, *Encountering God*, page 225.

¹⁵⁰ “He said to them, ‘According to scripture, my house will be called a house of prayer; but you are turning it into a bandits’ den’” (Matthew 21:13).

¹⁵¹ Campos and Sauvage, *Encountering God*, pages 96-97.

¹⁵² Campos and Sauvage, *Encountering God*, page 97. Read the eloquent commentary on pages 97-98 by Campos and Sauvage concerning Hebrews 9:12-13:

The reference to this text is implicit but clear. The author of Hebrews contrasts the previous covenant with that of Jesus Christ, sole high priest of the New Covenant. This is what De La Salle also does in the context of #67 and #68 (in #69 he recalls Hebrews 10:10).

This recourse to the teaching of the Letter to the Hebrews clearly situates the scope and meaning of this fifth manner of placing oneself in the presence of God (in the church). The Christian edifice is a sign of the invisible presence of Christ the mediator, who offers eternally to his Father the unique sacrifice: the sacrifice which he makes “of himself,” once and for all, in consecrating himself in human flesh for the accomplishment of the will of his Father. Therefore, to come into a church, either alone or in assembly, is to signify that one wishes to “communicate” in this unique offering. It is Eucharistic communion (cf. sixth manner). It is also “spiritual” communion, by making pass into Christ, the only truly holy one, the offering of a life of holiness.

The matter of the spiritual sacrifice of the Christian is the whole of one’s existence, in the very fabric of concrete life, and the veritable worship of the New Covenant is that of this “spiritual sacrifice.” One significance of the buildings erected by Christians is to remind us that it is by the unique sacrifice of Christ that the offering of the believers can become pleasing to the Father.

Let us point out here that the Letter to the Hebrews will often be used in the *Explanation of the Method of Mental Prayer*. This is especially the case in the sixth manner of placing ourselves in the presence of God, where De La Salle takes up again texts close to those which he uses here (cf. #78, #79, #82a, #82b, and #83a). See also #168 and #218a.

¹⁵³ Campos and Sauvage, *Encountering God*, pages 100-101: “Give me this sanctity, O my God, which is the surest mark of attachment in you and to your service. Purify, for this end, my soul, and make it, by this means, worthy of the graces which you pour out abundantly in the church on

those who appear before you with a pure heart and completely free from the least sins. Since they cause you horror, grant that there may be none in me when I enter the place where you have wished to be adored.”

¹⁵⁴ Ibid., #218a, page 263.

¹⁵⁵ “All the priests stand at their duties every day, offering over and over again the same sacrifices which are quite incapable of taking sins away. He, on the other hand, has offered one single sacrifice for sins, and then taken his place forever, at the right hand of God, where he is now waiting until his enemies are made into a footstool for him. By virtue of that one single offering, he has achieved the eternal perfection of all whom he is sanctifying” (Hebrews 10:11-14).

¹⁵⁶ “Jesus too suffered outside the gate to sanctify the people with his own blood” (Hebrews 13:12).

¹⁵⁷ Read the very rich commentary on #218a in Campos and Sauvage, *Encountering God*, pages 264-265.

¹⁵⁸ “He brings a new covenant, as the mediator, only so that the people who were called to an eternal inheritance may actually receive what was promised” (Hebrews 9:15).

¹⁵⁹ De La Salle, *The Duties of a Christian to God*, page 42.

¹⁶⁰ Campos and Sauvage, *Encountering God*, page 109. Read the commentary on page 109: “None of these verses from Hebrews is indicated as a reference by the *Explanation*, and none is cited textually. De La Salle’s vocabulary, however, evokes that of these texts: mediator, intercessor, pleasing prayers. And above all in the *Explanation*, as in Hebrews, it is the mediatory function of Christ which is underlined: a mediatory function which he exercises in heaven, and of which the Eucharist constitutes the efficacious sign.”

¹⁶¹ “It follows, then, that his power to save is utterly certain, since he is living for ever to intercede for all who come to God through him” (Hebrews 7:25).

¹⁶² “We have been given possession of an unshakeable kingdom. Let us therefore hold on to the grace that we have been given and use it to worship God in the way that he finds acceptable, in reverence and fear” (Hebrews 12:28).

¹⁶³ In De La Salle, *Meditations by John Baptist de La Salle*, #61.3: “Because you are responsible for the good of their souls, God will ask you for an account of how you took care to impart a spirit of piety to your disciples”; #205.2: “You must be convinced of this, that God will begin by making you give an account of their souls before making you give an account of your own”; and #205.3: “Put yourself, then, in the position to be able, when God questions you, to tell him that you have acquitted yourself well of all the duties you had to instruct children, to form them in piety, and to make them holy.”

¹⁶⁴ De La Salle, *The Duties of a Christian to God*, page 210. This citation also contains an allusion to Hebrews 3:18: “Those that he swore would never reach the place of rest he had for them were those who had been disobedient.”

¹⁶⁵ “One of the criminals hanging there abused him: ‘Are you not the Christ? Save yourself and us as well.’ But the other spoke up and rebuked him. ‘Have you no fear of God at all?’ he said. ‘You got the same sentence as he did, but in our case we deserved it: we are paying for what we did. But this man has done nothing wrong.’ Then he said, ‘Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom.’ He answered him, ‘In truth I tell you, today you will be with me in paradise’” (Luke 23:39-43).

¹⁶⁶ De La Salle, *Meditations by John Baptist de La Salle*, #179.3: “Try to apply yourselves well to prayer in the same way that this saint [Saint Peter of Alcantara] did by the practice of interior recollection. If you persevere in this, it will make the practice of the presence of God easy. There is nothing you should, or could, procure with more care, because it is happiness anticipated in this life, and it is also of great use to you in your work, because this work concerns God and aims at winning souls for him.”

¹⁶⁷ In particular, see the series of meditations for the Sundays after the Epiphany (Meditations #7 to #15), or even the nine qualities of obedience in De La Salle, *Collection of Various Short Treatises*, pages 18-23.

¹⁶⁸ Refer also, and perhaps eventually, to Hebrews 2:8 in its context: “You have put him in command of everything. Well then, if he has put him in command of everything, he has left nothing which is not under his command. At present, it is true, we are not able to see that everything has been put under his command.”

¹⁶⁹ Before detailing these texts, it seems interesting to refer to the commentary by Campos and Sauvage in *Encountering God*, #218 a-b, page 264:

Let us point out finally the frequency of the quotation, or the reference, to Hebrews 10:1-18 in the *Meditations* about the mystery of Christ: circumcision (#93.1): “He took upon himself the burden of our sins when he came into the world . . . to make satisfaction for them”; annunciation (#112.2): “Seeing that the holocausts which were the most excellent sacrifices of the Old Law were not sufficiently pleasing to God to take away our sins, he offers himself in sacrifice and says to his eternal Father, Today I come into the world to do your holy will”; transfiguration (#152.2): “The purpose which the Son of God set before himself on coming into this world was to suffer”; Wednesday of Holy Week (#25.1): “It is this same will that has sanctified us by the offering that Jesus Christ made once for all of his body”; and Holy Thursday (#26.3): “He knew that this offering he would make of himself on the cross would occur only once.”

¹⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, page 205.

¹⁷¹ De La Salle, *Meditations by John Baptist de La Salle*, #25.1.

¹⁷² For prior references to the Meditation for the Feast of the Circumcision (*ibid.*, #93), see footnote 147 and footnote 169.

¹⁷³ *Ibid.*, #93.1.

¹⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, #152.2.

¹⁷⁵ For a prior reference to #232c of the *Explanation*, see footnote 114.

¹⁷⁶ Campos and Sauvage, *Encountering God*, #232, page 283.

¹⁷⁷ De La Salle, *Meditations by John Baptist de La Salle*, #112.2. On page 173 in *Cahiers lasalliens* 47, Jean-Guy Rodrigue, FSC, indicates that, for this second point alone, the Founder successively cites Philippians 2:6-7; Matthew 1:21, 3:15; Isaiah 53:4; and Romans 6:6.

¹⁷⁸ See footnote 171.

¹⁷⁹ De La Salle, *Meditations by John Baptist de La Salle*, #26.3.

¹⁸⁰ Hebrews 9:28—“So Christ, too, offers himself only once to take the faults of many on himself, and when he appears a second time, it will not be to deal with sin but to reward with salvation those who are waiting for him”—is being suggested here as being connected to De La Salle, *Meditations by John Baptist de La Salle*, #26.3: “He knew that after his ascension into heaven he would no longer appear among us. That was why, to give us a sign of his tender love and goodness before dying, he left to the apostles and to the whole Church, in their persons, his

body and blood, to be for us in the ages to come a precious proof of the tender love he feels for us.”

¹⁸¹ Campos and Sauvage, *Encountering God*, page 97.

¹⁸² Daniel 12:3 (“Those who are wise will shine as brightly as the expanse of the heavens, and those who have instructed many in uprightness, as bright as stars for all eternity”), which is a scripture passage cited in Meditation #208.3: “This will happen to those who have instructed many persons about the truths of religion, as an angel said to the prophet Daniel: Those who instruct many persons in Christian justice will shine like stars throughout eternity.”

¹⁸³ Campos and Sauvage, *Encountering God*, #218a, page 263: “It is very just, O my God, that, having shown so much goodness for me, as to become human and be born as a child, in order to sacrifice yourself by offering yourself to the justice of God, your Father, as a living victim, pure, holy, and pleasing to God for the expiation of my sins and my sanctification.”

¹⁸⁴ In the *Explanation*, at #218a, the following passages of the Letter to the Hebrews are referenced: Hebrews 2:17; 10:11-14; 9:14; and 13:12.

¹⁸⁵ See footnotes 91 and 9.

¹⁸⁶ Campos and Sauvage, *Encountering God*, #82b, page 118. See the short commentary by Campos and Sauvage on #82b on the same page: “We have already cited above Hebrews 10:19-21. The risen Jesus, seated in glory beside his Father, gives us the assurance of being helped in our needs. References to the Psalms are given as examples. God is a hiding place who saves from distress.” For example, “You are a refuge for me, you guard me in trouble, with songs of deliverance you surround me” (Psalms 32:7). Cf. Psalms 46:2: “God is both refuge and strength for us, a help always ready in trouble.”

¹⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, page 110. Don’t fail to read the second point of the commentary on #79 by Campos and Sauvage on page 111:

Hebrews 10:19-25: On the other hand, that Jesus Mediator intercedes permanently for humanity and that his prayer is heard constitutes really such a teaching of the Letter to the Hebrews. See, for example, Hebrews 10:19-25 (to which we refer you here): “Through the blood of Jesus we have the right to enter the sanctuary, by a new way. . . . We have the supreme high priest over all the house of God. So as we go in, let us be sincere in heart and filled with faith. . . . Let us keep firm in the hope we profess, because the one who made the promise is faithful.”

¹⁸⁸ For example, see: Isaiah 26:20 (“Go, my people, enter into thy closets, shut thy door, hide thyself for a little season, until the anger of the Lord has passed away”) and Habakkuk 2:4 (“If he should draw back, my soul has no pleasure in him: but the just shall live by my faith”).

¹⁸⁹ De La Salle, *Meditations by John Baptist de La Salle*, #183.2. See Rodrigue, *Cahiers lasalliens* 47, page 483, where it is said that the version of the Bible cited is that of the Mons edition (1688).

¹⁹⁰ The young Abbé Clement had presented himself one day to John Baptist de La Salle. His zeal for the preparation of teachers for Christian schools seemed very sincere. An agreement was reached for a new seminary for the training of teachers for the countryside, and John Baptist de La Salle committed a considerable sum. Shortly afterwards, Abbé Clement reversed his position. A hateful trial was brought against our saint accusing him of having suborned a minor. De La Salle lost his reputation and the sums committed, and the seminary for teachers for the countryside project came to an end. It was undoubtedly the greatest test of De La Salle’s life. He distanced himself from his Brothers, without however ever having abandoned them

completely. For a brief account of this event, see Cahiers lasalliens 57 by Leo Burkhard, FSC, with the collaboration of Michel Sauvage, FSC, (Rome, 1994), pages 34-38.

¹⁹¹ Blain, *The Life of John Baptist de La Salle*, pages 733-734: “While not entertaining any hope of curing his patient, the doctor tried by every possible means to give him some relief from his sufferings. Although the saintly man knew that these remedies were quite useless, he did not refuse them. . . . Everything that they tried to do to relieve his pains were unsuccessful. The illness gathered strength and grew considerably. . . . De La Salle’s condition was such that anyone else would have remained in bed. To all appearances, he should not have been able to get up, and his incapacity for doing anything should have forced him to stay in bed. But he did not pay any attention, and everyone was amazed at seeing him up and about.”

¹⁹² Brother Norbert (André des Bouves), who entered the Institute in 1700, was director of the school in Calais. He attended the General Chapter of the election of Brother Barthelemy in May 1717, but he was dismissed by the General Chapter of 1720, apparently suspected of complacency toward Jansenism. According to Institute historian Georges Rigault, there is perhaps another cause, unknown, for this departure. Cf. Georges Rigault, *Histoire générale de l’Institut des Frères des écoles chrétiennes, Tome II, Les disciples de saint Jean-Baptiste de La Salle dans la société du XVIIIe siècle, 1719-1789* (Paris: Librairie Plon, 1938), page 28.

¹⁹³ Jean-Louis de La Salle (1684-1724), brother and godson of John Baptist de La Salle, pious priest, doctor of theology from the Sorbonne, but drawn into the Jansenist movement of the family and the city of Rheims. John Baptist de La Salle had thought it right to break off all relations with him. Cf. Blain, *The Mind and Heart*, pages 72-74; Léon de Marie Aroz, FSC, Cahiers lasalliens 27 (Rome, 1966), pages 65-110; and Léon de Marie Aroz, FSC, Cahiers lasalliens 26 (Rome, 1966), pages 260ff.

¹⁹⁴ Aroz, Cahiers lasalliens 41.2, pages 528-530. See also Blain, *The Life of John Baptist de La Salle*, page 567:

Despairing of finding relief elsewhere [during the famine of 1709], they had finally gone to the archbishop, as to their last resort, hoping that they would find in the prelate, who had just succeeded Archbishop Colbert, the same compassion the latter displayed toward the other paupers of the city. Unfortunately, Archbishop d’Aubigné was prejudiced against De La Salle and his Brothers. The Founder’s enemy, who wielded such influence over the greatest prelates and entertained such close relationships with them, had succeeded in poisoning the new archbishop’s mind against the servant of God and in giving him an unfavorable impression of the new Institute.

¹⁹⁵ Blain, *The Mind and Heart*, page 77: “The spirit of faith made him take a special delight in Saint Paul’s magnificent eulogy in the well-known chapter eleven of the Letter to the Hebrews on the faith of the patriarchs and saints of the Old Testament. When this was read in the refectory, he listened with the closest attention and seemed like a man enraptured.”

¹⁹⁶ “He considered that the insults offered to the Anointed were something more precious than all the treasures of Egypt, because he had his eyes fixed on the reward” (Hebrews 11:26).

¹⁹⁷ De La Salle, *Meditations by John Baptist de La Salle*, #199.

¹⁹⁸ “As every structure is aligned on him, all grow into one holy temple in the Lord; and you too, in him, are being built into a house where God lives, in the Spirit” (Ephesians 2:22).

¹⁹⁹ De La Salle, *Meditations by John Baptist de La Salle*, #199.1. On this subject, in Cahiers lasalliens 46 Campos indicates the following:

Note also that these biblical truths of the Letter to the Hebrews are not abstract truths. De La Salle speaks of a faith that leads to salvation, to the heavenly Homeland. He makes a very striking parallel between “the foundation of the Church” and the faith that is “the foundation of hope.” It may be interesting to note that the *Meditations for the Teaching Sisters* by Father Giry, which were believed [cf. Rigault, *Histoire générale*, 2:493], to a certain extent, to be the source of the Lasallian text, have no citation of the Letter to the Hebrews. De La Salle certainly knew the *Meditations* by Father Giry, which were published in 1687. [Cf. Sauvage, *Cahiers lasalliens* 1, pages 100-101].

²⁰⁰ De La Salle, *Meditations by John Baptist de La Salle*, #183.2:

Elsewhere Saint Paul says that those working to become a saint themselves endured mockeries, scourging, chains, and prisons; some were stoned, others sawed in two; some were put to death by the sword; others wandered about garbed in sheepskins and goatskins, being abandoned, tormented, and persecuted; others, finally, of whom the world was not worthy, passed their lives wandering in deserts, and in mountains, living in dens and caves of the earth. All these saints, tormented in various ways, were unwilling to rescue their present life, in order to find a better one in the resurrection.

²⁰¹ “Some had to bear being pilloried and flogged, or even chained up in prison. They were stoned, or sawn in half, or beheaded; they were homeless, and dressed in the skins of sheep and goats; they were penniless and were given nothing but ill-treatment. They were too good for the world and they went out to live in deserts and mountains and in caves and ravines” (Hebrews 11:36-38).

²⁰² “Some came back to their wives from the dead, by resurrection; and others submitted to torture, refusing release so that they would rise again to a better life” (Hebrews 11:35).

²⁰³ According to Jean-Guy Rodrigue, FSC, the Founder here used the 1668 edition of the Mons Bible (cf. *Cahiers lasalliens* 47, page 485). The problem of determining from which New Testament a particular quotation was taken is not always easy. One could doubt the use of the Mons Bible by De La Salle, when one knows that the work came from the Jansenist milieu of Port-Royal. After a period of some considerable popularity, the Mons Bible was condemned. Cf. Sauvage, *Cahiers lasalliens* 1, page x, note 1.

²⁰⁴ “It was because of his faith that Abel offered God a better sacrifice than Cain, and for that he was declared to be righteous when God made acknowledgement of his offerings. Though he is dead, he still speaks by faith” (Hebrews 11:4).

²⁰⁵ “Remember all the sufferings that you had to meet after you received the light, in earlier days; sometimes by being yourselves publicly exposed to insults and violence, and sometimes as associates of others who were treated in the same way. For you not only shared in the sufferings of those who were in prison, but you happily accepted being stripped of your belongings, knowing that you owned something that was better and lasting” (Hebrews 10:32-34).

²⁰⁶ “Some had to bear being pilloried and flogged, or even chained up in prison. They were stoned, or sawn in half, or beheaded; they were homeless, and dressed in the skins of sheep and goats; they were penniless and were given nothing but ill-treatment. They were too good for the world and they went out to live in deserts and mountains and in caves and ravines” (Hebrews 11:36-38).

²⁰⁷ “Some came back to their wives from the dead, by resurrection; and others submitted to torture, refusing release so that they would rise again to a better life,” (Hebrews 11:35).

²⁰⁸ De La Salle, *Meditations by John Baptist de La Salle*, #183.2.

²⁰⁹ Ibid., #84.2. One could also indicate Luke 12:50 (“There is a baptism I must still receive, and how great is my distress until it is over”) as reference, but the Founder attributes it to Saint Paul in Hebrews 12.

²¹⁰ De La Salle, *Meditations by John Baptist de La Salle*, #165.1.

²¹¹ Ibid., #177.2.

²¹² John Baptist de La Salle, *Religious Instructions and Exercises of Piety for the Christian Schools* by edited by Eugene Lappin, FSC, translated by Richard Arnandez, FSC (Landover, MD: Lasallian Publications, 2002), page 50 (“Here the priest asks God to accept the sacrifice presented to him as he was pleased to accept those of Abel, Abraham, and Melchizedek”); page 66 (“This sacred host is infinitely more excellent than the gift offered by the just man Abel, the sacrifice of the Patriarch Abraham, and what the High Priest Melchizedek presented to you”); and pages 79-80 (“I hope, O my Savior, that you will grant me this grace by means of the sacrifice you offer by the hands of the priest, for it is infinitely holier than that of Abel, infinitely more perfect than the one immolated by the Patriarch Abraham, and infinitely more agreeable to God than the one made by the High Priest Melchizedek”).

²¹³ Ibid., page 50.

²¹⁴ For other references to the *Explanation of the Method of Mental Prayer* at #78, see footnotes 130, 160, and 215.

²¹⁵ Campos and Sauvage, *Encountering God*, page 109.

²¹⁶ This is what note “g” states in the 1966 edition of the *Jerusalem Bible* concerning Hebrews 12:28: “This is the real conclusion, and an apt one for a letter that lays such emphasis on the liturgy. The ‘unshakable’ kingdom summarizes verses twenty-two to twenty-four. God reigns over both his angels and his saints in the kingdom of heaven, the eternal and spiritual Jerusalem. From now on Christians are able to enter this kingdom and live there a life that is a eucharist liturgy.”

²¹⁷ Campos, *Cahiers lasalliens* 45 and *Cahiers lasalliens* 46 for the application of this attitude by John Baptist de La Salle all throughout his Gospel journey.

²¹⁸ Referring to it as an “appendix” is analogous to referring to the final chapter of the Gospel of John (John 21) an “appendix.”

²¹⁹ “Continue to love each other like brothers” (Hebrews 13:1).

²²⁰ “Remember always to welcome strangers, for by doing this, some people have entertained angels without knowing it” (Hebrews 13:2).

²²¹ “Keep in mind those who are in prison, as though you were in prison with them; and those who are being badly treated, since you too are in the one body” (Hebrews 13:3).

²²² “Marriage is to be honored by all, and marriages are to be kept undefiled, because fornicators and adulterers will come under God’s judgment” (Hebrews 13:4).

²²³ “Put greed out of your lives and be content with whatever you have; God himself has said: I will not fail you or desert you” (Hebrews 13:5).

²²⁴ De La Salle, *The Duties of a Christian to God*, page 141.

²²⁵ See footnote 156 and footnote 184.

²²⁶ “They are destined to be lost. They make foods into their god and they are proudest of something they ought to think shameful; the things they think important are earthly things” (Philippians 3:19).

²²⁷ De La Salle, *Collection of Various Short Treatises*, page 33: “Looking upon things with the eyes of faith is, thus, as Saint Paul says in Philippians 3:19, we should regard those given to excessive eating as being similar to idolaters, who make a god of their belly and who glory in

their shame. Similarly, we are to regard poverty as a blessing because our Lord said in the Gospel that the poor are blessed.”

²²⁸ De La Salle, *The Duties of a Christian to God*, page 141: “Because there has never been a religion without sacrifice, it is most reasonable that the Christian religion should have its own, one proportionate to its dignity and excellence.”

²²⁹ The Founder quotes Hebrews 13:17 at least five times in his *Meditations*; however, we neither find a citation in *Meditations* #7 to #15, which almost form a treatise on obedience, nor do we find it within “the nine qualities of obedience” in the *Collection*. See De La Salle, *Collection of Various Short Treatises*, pages 18-23.

²³⁰ De La Salle, *Meditations by John Baptist de La Salle*, #37.1.

²³¹ Ibid., #186.3. In Rogrigue, *Cahiers lasalliens* 47, page 494, the reference is indicated as Hebrews 13:21 (“that God may make you ready to do his will in any kind of good action, and turn us all into whatever is acceptable to himself through Jesus Christ”); but it seems really to be about Hebrews 13:17.

²³² De La Salle, *Meditations by John Baptist de La Salle*, #203.3. See the commentary by Campos in *Cahiers lasalliens* 46, page 273.

²³³ De La Salle, *Meditations by John Baptist de La Salle*, #205.

²³⁴ Ibid., #205.2. I *Cahiers lasalliens* 46, page 291, Campos makes a profound remark on this subject. De La Salle does not demonstrate with scriptural texts that the Brother will have to account for “the souls of those for whom they are responsible”; he simply notes that the matter of judgment is nothing other than “the gift of the ministry,” what one will have done as a minister of God. See all the development of this thinking that follows on pages 291-307 of the same text.

²³⁵ De La Salle, *Meditations by John Baptist de La Salle*, #206.2. Read the copious and pertinent commentary of Campos in *Cahiers lasalliens* 46, pages 307-321 and particularly in section B (“Accounting for ‘Vigilance,’ That Is, the Evangelical Attention That Ought to Be Brought to the Whole Life of Children”) on pages 314-316, where the reference to Hebrews 13:17 is made explicit. Campos writes here,

He [De La Salle] cites Hebrews 13:17 directly to evoke the obligation of the Brothers to watch over their students. The same text had been used in Meditation #203.2 to speak of the obligation to correct their students, in their role as those called by God to take the place of fathers, mothers and pastors, which implied a fairly explicit reminder of *Meditations* #193 and #194; it had been taken up again in Meditation #205.2 as a warning from Saint Paul to those who must watch over others because they will have to account for them. It is, in the same sense, that the text is evoked here but as ‘subject’ of the judgment. . . . The very matter of this quotation from the Letter to the Hebrews already indicates that the understanding of this point should not be reduced to that of the “things” relating to “vigilance.” Rather, it is above all a question of the zeal with which the Brother carries out this function. Moreover, the whole theme of vigilance is associated in Lasallian reflection with the vigilance of Providence which takes care of its creatures, abandoned children (*Meditations* #193 and #194), by giving them enlightened persons who know its secret [the plan or will of God] so as to be able to make it understood by children and to be able to guide their steps, like visible angels, toward a life of filial adoption (*Meditations* #197 and #198). . . . Vigilance, and everything related to it, is,

therefore, considered here from the point of view of educational relationships. De La Salle does not insist much here on the purpose of vigilance, since it has already been treated at length in the whole of the *Meditations for the Time of Retreat*. Here he is focused on the very material of the spiritual experience of the Brother, which for him will be a subject of judgment. It is not only the institution of the school. . . . The vigilance, of which De La Salle speaks here, involves attention to the whole life of the children, the effort to incarnate oneself in concrete situations, to join them where they are, to walk with them and to help them to live everywhere according to their filial adoption. This point, thus, bursts the structures of the school, not by denying them but by overflowing out beyond them.

²³⁶ The allusion here is to the parable of the Good Shepherd, which De La Salle cites in the Meditation for the Second Sunday after Easter (#33). “This is because he is only a hired man [unlike the good shepherd] and has no concern for the sheep” (John 10:11-16).

²³⁷ Campos and Sauvage, *Encountering God*, #218e, page 265. As this Lasallian rereading of the Letter of the Hebrews comes to an end, and on the occasion of the last instance of an extract from the Letter in the *Explanation of the Method of Mental Prayer*, let us pause for a moment to consider the numerous citations (in the broad sense) scattered throughout this work of De La Salle. There are around forty of them. We have made a deep and conscientious study of these passages in the notes on pages 12 to 368 in *Encountering God*. But it is also appropriate to see what Campos and Sauvage say in “A View of the Whole,” which extends from pages 369 to 440 of this same book. We can also reflect on what Campos and Sauvage say in section “c” on pages 415-416 about the use of the Letter to the Hebrews in the *Explanation*:

Another text about which we are thinking is that of the Letter to the Hebrews. It is frequently cited in the *Explanation of the Method of Mental Prayer*, and it seems to us that the passages that De La Salle utilizes here constitute a rather faithful recapturing of the dynamism with which the Letter translates the various aspects, or “moments,” of the unique mystery of Jesus Christ: (a) the abasement of the Son in sinful flesh (cf. Hebrews 2:14 & #191a); (b) his obedience to the Father (cf. Hebrews 3:1-10 & #167, #169c, and #232c; Hebrews 10:1-14 & #168); (c) through the suffering and trial of death (cf. Hebrews 2:14 & #191a and Hebrews 2:17-18 & #193c and #195); (d) to the victory over death and exaltation in glory (cf. Hebrews 9:1-28 & #83a, #218a, and #184); and (e) where he remains the unique and efficacious mediator between God and humanity (cf. Hebrews 4:16 & #82a, #167, #169c, #201a, and #215b and Hebrews 6:18-19 & #82b and Hebrews 7:25 & #79 and #83a).

We will also want to do the activities proposed by Sauvage and Campos on page 408 concerning the Letter to the Hebrews:

(a) Identify the quotations from the Letter to the Hebrews made in the *Explanation of the Method of Mental Prayer*; (b) what attitudes toward prayer and what major emphasis on prayer does De La Salle find in the Letter?; (c) enter into the prayer of Jesus (his relationship with God and his relationship with mission); and (d) note the resonance or dissonance which exists between the Letter to the Hebrews and the *Explanation of the Method of Mental Prayer*.

²³⁸ It is rather the one now holding the pen, not John Baptist de La Salle, who has not always had the desired clarity or the spiritual vigor and holiness needed in this enterprise.

²³⁹ The following paragraphs are an appropriation and an adaptation of a text of great vigor and great scope that was written with reference to the *Meditations for the Time of Retreat*. The application to the Letter to the Hebrews is, I believe, valid because it is not so much only one writing, or another, of the Founder's that counts. Rather it is *life* inserting itself into God's plan that is the central point here. Cf. "Introduction," in John Baptist de La Salle, *Meditations for the Time of Retreat*, edited by Miguel Campos, FSC,, translated by Augustine Loes, FSC, (Christian Brothers Conference, 1975), pages 41-43.

²⁴⁰ In place of the words "the Letter to the Hebrews," the text of Campos reads "these meditations."

²⁴¹ Every Brother is, in a way, a "John Baptist de La Salle" who continues the work of the Founder. This is especially true for someone like Campos, who has so well understood and expressed the Founder's thinking.

²⁴² "And then he says: Here I am! I am coming to obey your will" (Hebrews 10:9).