

**TWENTY-SIX YEARS
EXILE IN ROME
COURAGEOUS GABRIEL DROLIN
(2/2)**

Brother Jose Luis Hermosilla

The correspondence between Drolin and De La Salle was constant, though there were periods quieter than others, which is surprising. There is a gap between 1712 and 1716; maybe some letters have been lost. Whatever the case, from the letters we actually possess, we can learn a great deal, like who were the important people in the Church at the time, the Lasallian foundations in various places, which we would not know of except through these letters. De La Salle often told Brother Drolin that he was sending him another Brother to help; he even mentioned Brother Albert as Drolin's assistant, who he thought was an excellent man. Moreover, on two occasions De La Salle was about to go to Rome himself, but God seems to have decided otherwise.

In his letters to Brother Drolin, De La Salle opens up and talks freely. He even says that he is not amused by the term "tough" or insensitive which Drolin used in one of his letters. He has a lot of confidence in Drolin, and knows that he will not play a bad turn as his other companion Nicolas Vuyart had done. De La Salle reminds him of the rules and regulations of the society, that he cannot become a priest. He used expressions like "I have heard that...", "It is going around that...", concerning Drolin's rumoured moves to be ordained. Brother Drolin was certainly never ordained, since he made final vows in 1728, on his return from Rome, by which time Brother Timothy was Superior General.

De La Salle much appreciated Brother Drolin's work and praised the efforts he presumably needed to overcome loneliness. He praises Drolin's statements that he trusted absolutely in God and that he went on retreat from time to time in Montecitorio, the residence of the Missionary Fathers. He often asks him to go to St. Peter's and commend the Institute to the Holy Apostle. He tells him he would like to help him out financially more than he is doing, but that he has no money. We all know that de La Salle had a hard time between 1703 and 1707 with the parish priest of St. Sulpice, Father de La Chetardie, with the local

school masters and with the writing masters. He also had a lot of worries before arranging the purchase of the St. Yon estate in Rouen in 1705.

On one occasion, Brother Drolin fell ill and De La Salle thought it was on account of all the financial difficulties he was encountering. The Founder was interested in the Escolapians and asked Drolin about them. He warns him to be careful in his relationships with them, because it was not accidentally that they were in the same teachers' union.

The last two letters which Brother Drolin received in Rome are signed by Brother Bartholomew, the first successor to De La Salle as superior general. These letters tell him of the changes that have taken place in the past few years. He informs him of the passing of his beloved father John Baptist de La Salle, whom he says: *"everyone considered a saint when he died"*. Brother Drolin must have read with deep emotion the following lines of De La Salle's will: *"always remember that I sent two Brothers to Rome so that..."*

In 1727 Brother Timothy, Superior General sent two Brothers to Rome to take over Brother Drolin's place as he had wanted for so long. They were the 57-year-old Brother Thomas and Brother Fiacre aged 44. In the days which followed Brother Drolin must have been busy showing them all around Rome, which he knew so well. He must have introduced them to the benefactors and spoken to them of the school children and their families and of how customs in Italy were different from those in France. He even fixed a papal audience for them, and the Pope showed great interest in the Christian Schools and in how the institute was getting on in France. The pope gave them some relics for the St. Yon Mother House and gave an indulgence to all the Brothers of the Institute "in articulo mortis".

As the community by now had some money in reserve, the two Brothers made comfortable arrangements for Brother Drolin's return to France. He took a papal galley, which first stopped at Genoa and then at Marseilles. Drolin then went on to Avignon, where he followed the annual retreat. It was there that he had the happiness of making his final vows, before Our Lord and before the Brothers of his community.

He was then transferred to his final community of Auxone in Burgundy, where he died in 1733.

Brother Gabriel Drolin was of that remarkable band of selfless and admirable Brothers whom the Lord sent to the Institute in its early days: men like Brothers Nicolas Bourlette, Maurice, Henri L'Heureux, Stanislas... His affection for the Institute and for De La Salle was amply demonstrated throughout his life.

"An admirable soldier, who waited for the 'changing of the guard' for 26 years, and who did his duty in order to hand over the post faithfully to those who took over the guard after him". Those are the words of the historian of the Institute, Georges Rigault.

