

John Baptist de La Salle:  
Two Early Biographies

C U M D E O  
CONFLUITE PRIMATES REMI  
PARANYMPHUM

ÆQVIS ANIMIS (UT VESTRI MORIS EST) AUSCULTATURI

QUANTO JURE  
VIRI EGREGIE CORDATI

F. ac M. ANDREAS PICOTTE

D. ac M. JOANNES BAPT. DELASALLE

D. ac M. JOAN. BAPT DE-Y de SERAUCOURT.

D. ac M. NICOLAUS BERNARD.

F. ac M. SIMON AME

IN STUDIA THEOLOGICA

POTISSIMUM INCUBUERINT,

ORATIONE TRIPERTITA DEMONSTRABIT

PAULUS PICOT REMUS

ARTIUM DOCTOR, SACRÆ THEOLOGIÆ BACCALAUREUS ET PHILOSOPHIÆ PROFESSOR.

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*In Aula Patriciana Collegij Vniuersitatis Remensis. Die 26.  
Januarij an. Domini 1678. horâ de meridie primâ.*

Poster inviting the public to attend baccalaureate ceremonies at which five candidates, John Baptist de La Salle among them, would receive the licentiate in theology. January 26, 1678. Photo E. Rousset (ER, slide 45).

# John Baptist de La Salle: Two Early Biographies

by  
Dom François-Elie Maillefer, OSB  
and by  
Brother Bernard, FSC

Original translations by William J. Quinn, FSC

Revised translations with notes  
by Donald C. Mouton, FSC

Edited by Paul Grass, FSC

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*Two Early Biographies*

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Cover: John Baptist de La Salle vested as a canon; portrait in the convent of the Sisters of the Rue d'Ernemont (Rouen), a congregation founded by Canon Blain. *Photo E. Rousset (ER, plate 15, slide 81).*



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# Introduction to Maillefer's Manuscript

By Donald C. Mouton, FSC

François-Elie Maillefer, the biographer of John Baptist de La Salle, was born in Rouen on August 6, 1684, and baptized François-Hélye. His mother was John Baptist de La Salle's sister, Marie, married to Jean Maillefer, who came from an established and honorable family of Reims. Like his father before him, Jean also was a cloth merchant, the business of some of the best families in the city.<sup>1</sup>

His was a family of writers. His grandfather had begun composing the family history, which was continued by François-Elie's father.<sup>2</sup> The literary legacy of François-Elie himself is quite limited. Only one of his works survived a devastating fire that destroyed all but 150 of the 25,000 volumes in the library of the royal abbey of Saint Rémi in Reims on the night of January 15–16, 1774.

On April 4, 1711, at the age of twenty-six, François-Elie was ordained a Benedictine priest of the Congregation of Saint-Maur and entered the abbey of Saint Faron in Meaux, where he joined his older brother. Esteemed as a monk of great integrity and talent (he had a sonorous voice for preaching and singing, even unto old age), François-Elie Maillefer held a number of positions of responsibility in various monasteries. In 1723 he was appointed master librarian at the abbey of Saint Rémi. His discernment and good taste for first editions enriched the library with valuable holdings. He remained at the abbey until his death on October 31, 1761. Twelve years later, the library lay in ruins. Amidst the rubble was the one book of his that survived, *Vie de M. Jean-Baptiste de La Salle*, which he had deposited in unpublished form in the Saint Rémi library in 1740.

## Two manuscripts

The 1740 document is a reworked edition of one written earlier by François-Elie Maillefer in 1723 which he had reluctantly handed over in 1724 to the Superiors of the Institute of the Brothers of the Christian Schools at Saint Yon in Rouen. The Brothers no doubt were anxious to acquire this unauthorized biography which they had not commissioned.<sup>3</sup> In his Preface to the 1740 book, Maillefer complains about the violation of his good faith when the 1723 manuscript was not returned to him, but instead was handed over to an ecclesiastic, Canon Jean-Baptiste Blain, in Rouen, who plagiarized it for his own massive, two-volume biography of De La Salle.

Maillefer's original 1723 manuscript has not survived, but fortunately the text itself was saved from oblivion because of two copies which, though made independently of each other, are almost identical. One anonymous copy, dated 1766, eventually found its way to a book-stand on the quays of the Seine in Paris, where someone purchased it in February 1870 and a month later thoughtfully gave it to the Institute of the Brothers of the Christian Schools, whose headquarters at the time were in Paris. The other copy was made, probably around 1775, by a distant relative of De La Salle, Jacques Carbon, a Canon Regular of Sainte-Geneviève in Paris. Later it became, for reasons unknown, the property of Marquis Ruinart de Brimont, who also bequeathed it to the Institute. Maillefer's 1740 manuscript, in turn, survived not only the fateful fire at the abbey of Saint Rémi but also the liquidation of the monastic libraries in 1791 during the French Revolution. It became the possession of the library of the city of Reims, where it remains safely to this day.<sup>4</sup>

## Two versions

In his 1740 Preface, Maillefer proposes to write a biography that is succinct, in contrast to the effusive volumes of Blain, and yet sufficient, in contrast to the incompleteness of the biography by Brother Bernard. This is a task, he notes, that he took upon himself in 1723, not on his own initiative but at the request of several intelligent and religious-minded persons. These, no doubt, were relatives who urged the librarian to become the biographer of a saint in the family, a beloved brother, uncle, relative, and Founder. They were acquainted with the attempt by Brother Bernard to write the life of John Baptist de La Salle, but they needed a more acceptable counter-biography because of their family sensitivities and Jansenistic convictions.<sup>5</sup>



## Contribution of Maillefer

Although Maillefer had never met De La Salle,<sup>6</sup> his admiration and feeling for his uncle are evident. He knew the family, the social circle, and the significant events in De La Salle's life, and he gives a balanced presentation of the various people, events, and circumstances involved in the dramatic unfolding of his biography. He knew how to portray the truth of De La Salle's existence without falling into the moralizing excesses characteristic of some of the hagiography of the time, of which Blain's work is an eminent example.

To accomplish his stated purpose of edifying, Maillefer does not resort to as shallow a concept of Divine Providence as can occasionally be found in Brother Bernard's work. Maillefer's story is instead a spiritual, even theological one. He portrays De La Salle led by the hand of God down paths different from those De La Salle had expected, moving courageously from one commitment to another because of his deep faith and confidence in God.

Maillefer's narrative, concisely written in a flowing style which is elegant, sober, and classically polite, is satisfying to the modern reader. The writing is technically more accomplished than that in the other two source biographies.

## Insufficiencies of Maillefer

In his portrayal of the Founder-saint, Maillefer sometimes allows a certain passivity to characterize De La Salle when one would expect to see highlighted his initiative and courage in response to situations and opportunities. Interested in demonstrating De La Salle's abandonment to Divine Providence, Maillefer fails at times to give due credit to De La Salle's creativity in making important decisions at crucial moments.

Also, in the 1740 Preface Maillefer states that he has deliberately suppressed certain things in his narrative: the unfounded miraculous and spectacular elements in De La Salle's life, the alleged secret intrigues that arose out of personal bias and interest, and the pious reflections better left for the reader to make. He could have added that he intentionally passes over in silence, without warning, certain matters relating to the *affaires du temps* (controversies of the day). This refers principally to the disruption caused by Jansenism at the time and by the opposing positions taken on the Bull *Unigenitus* issued by Pope Clement XI on September 8, 1713. The pope condemned the doctrines of Jansenius, bishop of Ypres, whose book *Augustinus* was

published posthumously in 1640.<sup>7</sup> Though Blain does not hesitate to insert into his work his anti-Jansenistic fervor, Maillefer expresses his own Jansenistic feelings, paradoxically, by selective silence. Blain is eloquently polemical; Maillefer is discreet but no less effective by what he chooses not to say. While it is to his credit that he does not use his book to promote partisan views, in spite of his own strong positions, the otherwise commendable portrayal of De La Salle suffers from the deliberate suppression of an important trait, De La Salle's fidelity to the Church of Rome. For example, it is distorting the image somewhat to suggest that the Brothers desire Rome's approbation of the Institute without mentioning that De La Salle also shares the same desire,<sup>8</sup> or to excise the paragraph in the middle of his last testament of April 3, 1719, where he speaks of wanting Brothers stationed in Rome as a sign of submission to the Church.<sup>9</sup>

### Reading Maillefer today

If Chesterton is right when he says, "It is also true that he sees more of the things themselves when he sees more of their origin, for their origin is a part of them and indeed the most important part of them,"<sup>10</sup> the significance of Maillefer's contribution as a source biography is evident. While the autobiographical writings of De La Salle give a direct access to him and thus have a unique significance, the three source biographies also claim special consideration. Their proximity to the historical situation and to the people and events in De La Salle's life gives the source biographies a privileged place among the biographies written over the years, provided they are seen not simply as accounts about a figure of past history, but as privileged narratives of the faith and vision, of the drama, of the central figure. One's interpretation of the story stems, not from either a subjective or an objective reading, but from the dialectical movement between the story and the reader, which gradually transforms the biography into the autobiography, in some sense, of both the hero and the reader. The reader no longer simply admires a figure from the past but welcomes a new companion on his or her own life journey.

### The text

This present translation is based on the Reims manuscript of 1740. The principles that guided the translation are the same as those formulated by a translator of the *Catechism of the Council of Trent*:

Whilst, therefore, he has endeavored to preserve the spirit, he has been unwilling to lose sight of the letter; studious to avoid a servile exactness, he has not felt himself at liberty to indulge the freedom of paraphrase; anxious to transfer into the copy the spirit of the original, he has been no less anxious to render it an express image of the original.<sup>11</sup>

The French names of persons and places have been kept as in the original. Titles of persons are usually given in the English version, except for *Monsieur* (Mister), which was applied to both clerics and lay men and is abbreviated as *M.*, and *Madame* (Mrs.), which is abbreviated as *Mme*, without a period. In general, M. Jean-Baptiste de La Salle is translated as De La Salle, in consideration of a long tradition in English.<sup>12</sup> In certain circumstances where other family members are mentioned, John Baptist is used. Other French words and expressions are italicized and are translated in the notes.

The notes are intended to be a convenient reference to assist the reader in a better understanding of the narrative and to be useful for those who wish to explore certain matters further.

The original English translation by Brother William J. Quinn (Didymus John), FSC, in 1963 has made Maillefer's book accessible to many over the years and has served as the basis for this present revision.

Rome, March 1989

La Vie de M.  
Jean-Baptiste De La Salle, Prêtre,  
Docteur, ancien chanoine  
de la Cathédrale de Reims, et  
Instituteur des Frères des Ecoles  
Chrétiennes.

Monsieur Jean-Baptiste De La Salle  
vint au monde à Reims en Champagne, le 30<sup>e</sup>  
Avril 1651. Il fut baptisé le même jour à saint  
Eulaise, sa paroisse. Il eut pour Parrain Mess. Jean  
Moët de Brouillet, son aïeul maternel, et pour  
marraine M. Perrette l'Espagnol son épouse, qui lui  
donnèrent le nom de Jean-Baptiste.

Monsieur De La Salle son père, Conseiller au siège  
Présidial de cette ville, lui donna une éducation con-  
forme à sa naissance. Il était l'aîné de sept enfants,  
cinq garçons et deux filles. On remarqua dans son  
enfance un naturel porté à la vertu. Il se plut de bonne  
heure aux exercices sérieux, à la prière et à la lecture  
des bons livres. La semence de piété qu'on jetait adroi-  
tement

# The Life of Saint John Baptist de La Salle

Priest, Doctor of Theology,  
Former Canon  
of the Cathedral of Reims,  
and Founder  
of the  
Brothers of the Christian Schools

by  
Dom François-Elie Maillefer, OSB

## Author's Preface

The life of John Baptist de La Salle which I present here is by no means exhaustive, nor is it filled with astounding things likely to capture the admiration of the reader. He was a saintly priest led by God on paths which, though simple, were opposed to natural inclination. While forming him into a man of great virtue whose whole life would be based on doing good, God gave him the gift of inspiring others to do good also. It is from this point of view that I plan to show him establishing a Christian community which owes its birth solely to his great confidence in God.

He possessed all the qualities necessary for this holy undertaking. He was a strong person of ardent zeal, gentle and compassionate charity, agreeable manners, and above all, boundless love for penance. He was led into this work by the designs of Providence, and he succeeded in it the same way. Lacking necessary resources, he was deprived of everything. He encountered much opposition, unable to count on any support. Deprived of the encouragement that comes with success, he was often faced with severe disappointments, but these, though troublesome, were never able to disturb his peace of soul.

His only arm of defense against his enemies was his patience. He opposed their efforts only with those words which became so familiar to him, "God be blessed." This was his motto. In this attitude he imitated Saint John Chrysostom, who in the various troubles of his life consoled himself by these words, "Glory to God in all things." In the story of his life we shall see proof of his great virtue.

I agreed to write this life only out of regard for certain persons of piety whose request I could not refuse.<sup>13</sup>

The notes which were furnished to me and on which I have based this life were not always complete enough for strict accuracy at all times. This will explain some omissions which could be corrected in a more developed account. In keeping with the mood of our times, which is not receptive to accounts of the miraculous, I have omitted

several which might have raised some doubts in the minds of my readers. Those which I have included are based on solid evidence.

I have considered it a duty to safeguard the reputations of several esteemed persons and to pass over certain secret intrigues in which purely personal interests were at stake. Some of these persons, for reasons I did not want to investigate, caused De La Salle considerable difficulty.<sup>14</sup>

As far as possible, I have followed a chronological order.<sup>15</sup> This seems to me to be a simple and accurate procedure. Because this life will not be too long, I have not divided it into chapters but have indicated headings and years in the margin.<sup>16</sup>

I have refrained from making many reflections, for this would have interrupted the flow of the story. Nevertheless, I have not entirely omitted them when they could be introduced quite naturally. Frequently the reader wishes to decide personally which reflections are in order but sometimes prefers the author to suggest thoughts. I have tried to walk the middle path of suggesting occasional reflections without multiplying them excessively.

The idea of writing this life came from several learned persons who wished to see a succinct biography of De La Salle but one which would be sufficiently developed to give an idea of his sanctity. They appeared pleased with my work when I presented it to them in 1723, and they planned to publish it. However, the sudden death of the one who was to bear the expense of the printing made this impossible.<sup>17</sup> Since then I have made no effort to have it printed.

In the year 1724, the Brothers of the Christian Schools found out that I was the author of a life of their Founder. They made many attempts to obtain a copy. One of their number, a certain Brother Thomas,<sup>18</sup> was so insistent and annoying that I finally gave him my manuscript on condition that if the Brothers decided to publish it, they would not change anything without my consent. They have not kept their word. The manuscript was sent to Saint Yon in Rouen and given to the Superior General, who ordinarily resides there. He in turn gave it to an ecclesiastic of Rouen to use in writing a new life, which appeared in two volumes.<sup>19</sup>

Anyone who reads that work will be struck by the poor taste and little discernment possessed by its author. The greater portion of facts he relates in his work is drowned, so to speak, in a confused mass of poorly arranged pious reflections. His style is careless, and although he has not hesitated to copy me word for word in several places, he does not acknowledge his source.<sup>20</sup>

People of good taste have only contempt for his book. Among other things that are objectionable is the fact that he has not used discretion in writing about a number of respectable persons and about Orders and communities which have always edified the Church by their piety, learning, and doctrine. He has attacked them unbecomingly from the first pages of his book with far-fetched commentaries he thought would embellish his work. In general, it may be said that his book is a confused collection of rambling spiritual reflections which make the reading boring and disagreeable.

The lack of success of his book has renewed interest in having my work published, but several considerations have prevented it. I limit myself here to making a fair copy to compensate for the one I lost through a violation of my good faith.<sup>21</sup> In this copy I have made several corrections and additions to my first draft which I have thought necessary because of subsequent clarifications received on particular points.<sup>22</sup>

Among these are certain small details which I could not neglect, for they often characterize people better than the most striking actions. I have done so particularly when these details have been of a nature to inspire a love of virtue.

Finally, because I have had no other motive in composing this life of De La Salle than to edify, I hope that those who read it with the same understanding will draw from it the benefit I intended.



# **The Life of Saint John Baptist de La Salle**

## **1651. His birth.**

John Baptist de La Salle came into the world in Reims in Champagne on April 30, 1651. He was baptized the same day at his parish church, Saint Hilaire.<sup>23</sup> He had as godparents Jean Moët de Brouillet, his maternal grandfather, and his wife Perrette Lespagnol, and they gave him the name John Baptist.

## **His education.**

Monsieur de La Salle, his father, councillor at the presidial court of the city,<sup>24</sup> gave him an education in keeping with the dignity of the family.<sup>25</sup> John Baptist was the eldest of seven children, five boys and two girls.<sup>26</sup> He was noted from his infancy for a natural disposition to piety. From his early days he enjoyed serious occupations, prayer, and the reading of good books. The seeds of piety carefully sown in his heart readily produced their fruit. Grace was already at work, and it needed only to be encouraged. This is what his father set himself to do. He kept his son under his own care until the boy was at an age to begin his studies.

## **He receives the tonsure.**

He began his studies at the college of the University of Reims,<sup>27</sup> and from the age of twelve, being inclined to good, he felt a desire to consecrate himself to God in the priesthood. He counted on the religious spirit of his parents to put no obstacle in his way, although he

was the oldest of his brothers. Indeed, they consented to his desire to receive the tonsure.<sup>28</sup>

This new commitment developed in him a strong motive for loving the Church. He became more devoted than before, and his love for ecclesiastical duties grew each day. God brought about the opportunity for him to satisfy his zeal, and soon he was doing by duty what he had done previously by inclination.

### **1666. He is offered a canonry at the cathedral of Reims.**

He was offered the position of canon of the Cathedral of Reims on July 9, 1666, on the occasion of the resignation of M. Dozet, Archdeacon of Champagne and Chancellor of the University of the city. He took possession of the canonry on the following January 7; he was then only sixteen years old.<sup>29</sup> This responsibility, which could form a stumbling block for a young man just beginning to breathe the air of freedom, changed nothing of his good dispositions. He regarded himself from that time on as a person consecrated by his state in life to public prayer. He understood his obligations and applied himself to fulfill them as much as his age and studies would allow.<sup>30</sup> It is true that he was then following paths which at the time he did not fully understand, for it would require additional years to make his piety completely mature. God was gradually strengthening him in his development.

### **He obtains a Master of Arts degree and goes to study at the Sorbonne.**

After he had finished his course in philosophy, he pursued, as was the custom, his Master of Arts degree, being then about eighteen years old.<sup>31</sup> He then left for Paris to enter the Sorbonne to study those subjects suitable for a person in the ecclesiastical state and to prepare there his licentiate and doctorate.<sup>32</sup>

### **1670. He enters the seminary of Saint Sulpice.**

Monsieur de La Salle, his father, always anxious to give him as excellent a training for the priesthood as he could, arranged for him to stay at the seminary of Saint Sulpice. He arrived there in the month of October, 1670, when nineteen years of age. Accustomed as he was to a



Cathedral of Notre-Dame, Reims, begun in 1212 and completed in the 14th century. *Photo J. J. Tichit (ER, plate 89, slide 8).*

regular life, he found no difficulty in adjusting to the daily regulations of the seminary. His superiors were pleased to note that nothing seemed too difficult for him and that he sometimes pushed his observance beyond what was called for in the regulations.

### **1671. Death of his mother.**

He profited from his stay at Saint Sulpice to reflect seriously on the irrevocable step he was about to take in accepting the subdiaconate which he was preparing to receive. While awaiting ordination, he learned on July 20, 1671, of his mother's death. However painful this blow was, it did not interrupt the course of his studies, though it did for some time keep him undecided about the future. God permitted that he should be the prey to severe uncertainty to teach him early on to preserve an interior calm amid the trials he would subsequently have to pass through in life as a purification of his virtue. We shall see ample evidence of this later on.

### **1672. Death of his father.**

His sorrow was still acute when he received the sad news of the death of his father, so soon after the passing of his mother. In fact, there were only nine months between their deaths, for his father died on April 9, 1672.<sup>34</sup> It is easy to imagine the sorrow that filled his heart. The more Christian one is, the more one is touched by such events.

### **He returns to Reims.**

He resolved then to leave Paris, after being there for only eighteen months, to return to Reims. His presence was needed at home in these sad circumstances.<sup>35</sup> He was only twenty-one years old when he thus took charge of the family affairs and of the education of his orphaned young brothers. He also had to manage domestic matters, which necessarily become more complicated under such circumstances. In all of this his thought was of the will of God, which orders all things, and he submitted himself to it.

The many activities that demanded his attention at this time did not prevent him from thinking of the resolution he had formed at Saint Sulpice in Paris to receive sacred orders. He was old enough for



Blessed Nicolas Roland (1642-1678), detail of the portrait at the Hôtel de La Salle, Reims. *Photo E. Rousset (ER, plate 65, slide 55).*

ordination, but in a matter of such importance he did not wish to act without the advice of enlightened persons. With this in mind, he consulted Nicolas Roland, canon and theologian of Reims.<sup>36</sup>

### **Praise of M. Roland, theological preacher of Reims.**

Roland was a man of tender piety, learned and respected in the town for the talents God had bestowed upon him and which he used in preaching the truths of salvation to persons of all classes of society. His memory is revered particularly in the community of Sisters he founded under the patronage of the Child Jesus. Their vocation consists chiefly in taking care of young orphaned girls and in teaching, free of charge, reading and writing to young girls who come to schools which they set up in their communities as well as in the parishes of the city. They also have schools in several towns and villages, where they edify all by their pious and frugal lives.

It was thus under the direction of such an excellent master that De La Salle was strengthened in his love for piety. M. Roland was a person who possessed the qualities which would give him great influence over the mind of his disciple. It was due to this holy priest that De La Salle acquired the zeal for the education of youth which he later displayed. This was the special virtue of M. Roland. He taught it imperceptibly to his friend in the many talks they had together. He regarded De La Salle as the one destined to complete the work of his own zeal and to care for and develop the institution he had created. The future would show the wisdom of his choice.

### **1672. He becomes a subdeacon.**

De La Salle, guided by this wise director, decided to follow his advice and overcome his own reluctance. He was counselled to receive Holy Orders without further delay. As these were not given at Reims, he left in June 1672 for Laon. Because ordinations were not being held there either, he went to Noyon and from there to Cambrai, where on the feast of Pentecost he received the four minor orders and the subdiaconate.<sup>37</sup>

**1673. He enrolls in Reims.**

Up to this time he had not changed his mind about completing his studies in Paris, but the care of his household necessitated his return to Reims, so that he gave up the idea of returning to Paris. He enrolled instead in the University of Reims during the year 1673.<sup>38</sup> It is true that he gave up the distinction attached to being a Doctor of the Sorbonne, but because his main purpose was to study theology, he was content to remain in his own city. He followed the usual course of studies, which was the same as at Paris, taking two years to earn his licentiate.<sup>39</sup> In the time not given to study, he fortified himself by prayer and good works, always acting under the spiritual direction of Canon Roland, who kept a watchful eye over him.

**1677. He becomes a deacon.**

At this time he left for Paris, where he received the diaconate.<sup>40</sup> The chief reason he went there was to arrange the exchange of his canonry for the pastorship of Saint Pierre in Reims.<sup>41</sup> In this he thought he was following the advice of Roland, who several times had told him that in the service of the Church he should not seek a comfortable security in his canonry but should be willing to look for a more difficult ministry. From this came the thought that God was calling him to take a benefice to which the care of souls was attached.

**1677. He considers changing his canonry for the pastorate of Saint Pierre in Reims.**

He felt that he had found the opportunity to do this by giving his canonry to the pastor of Saint Pierre in Reims. This was the reason for his first trip to Paris that year. Perhaps he had not considered sufficiently the burden this would be, for the pastorate of a parish of that size required someone older and more experienced than he.<sup>42</sup> Besides, it would have been necessary to give over the care of his domestic affairs to others, when he alone was in a position to be in charge.

### **The archbishop of Reims refuses his consent.**

Those of his family circle who were most concerned about him and who feared the consequences of his detachment were alarmed at his resolution. It seemed to them to be poorly thought out. In any case, because the change of positions would require the consent of the archbishop of Reims, Charles-Maurice Le Tellier,<sup>43</sup> he was informed of what was being planned. With his usual insight he foresaw the inconveniences of the proposal. When the parties involved came with their proposition, they were surprised to learn that it did not meet with the archbishop's approval. He ordered both priests to remain in the positions where God had placed them. De La Salle was left a bit humiliated by all this, but he offered to God the sacrifice of his willingness to give up his canonry. He thought no more, for the time being, of changing his position. He even mentioned several times later that he had seemed to hear an interior voice then which made it clear to him that he was not called to take charge of a parish.<sup>44</sup>

If this apparent setback checked the ardor of his zeal, it did not disturb his regularity at his exercises. He continued to fulfill his duties as canon, to be faithful to the Office, and to persevere in his studies for the licentiate which he had begun the previous year.

### **1678. He is ordained a priest and celebrates his first Mass.**

The following year, he prepared himself for the reception of the sacrament of Holy Orders, which he received from his archbishop on April 9, 1678, the vigil of Easter. Without special ceremony he celebrated his first Mass the next day in the cathedral. In so acting he wished to avoid the customary ostentation, thinking that it distracted too much from the holy sacrifice which demanded one's total attention. We may believe, without presuming too much, that he received the fullness of the grace of ordination, if we are to judge by the use he made of it in the course of his life. He celebrated the sacred mysteries with such recollection that all who saw him were moved by his piety. There were several such persons who, out of respect for the manner in which he celebrated Mass, waited for him afterwards to consult with him on their spiritual needs. He had such high regard for his ministry that he respected everything related to it. He wished that all things used in church be neat and clean, though simple. He did not allow overly rich ornaments, agreeing on this point with several saints who had forbidden gold, silver, and other precious materials in their



monasteries. He appreciated the offering of the holy sacrifice so much that he made it a point to do so every day of his life. He never omitted it, except when forced to miss or through sickness. Several times during his illnesses he had to drag himself or be helped to the altar to celebrate Mass and to receive Communion.

### **His recollection while celebrating Mass.**

Often he seemed completely enraptured after Communion. According to reliable witnesses, sometimes he was so absorbed after Mass that he lost the use of his senses. He would remain motionless during this time, and only after a while would he return to normal. This form of ecstasy came from the continual domination he exercised over his senses. He paid no attention to worldly things. He disliked appearing in public, preferring to be alone. He spoke little and always seemed recollected, modest, and reserved in his entire conduct. He was calm and peaceful in every situation.

This mastery over his senses meant that he lived only according to the spirit; seeing, he did not see. He could not help observing material things, but he paid no attention to them. Thus it was that he was freed in his celebration of Mass from those distractions to which even the most recollected priests are subject. He could not tolerate the laxity of those ecclesiastics who led too secular a life.<sup>45</sup> The earnestness with which he reproved them appeared excessive to the worldly minded, who judge things only by their own feelings, but he knew how to ignore human judgments when they did not conform to the law of God.

### **1678. Death of M. Roland.**

On April 27, 1678, Canon Roland was summoned by God in a holy death. It was under his eyes that De La Salle had been growing in the virtues of his state. De La Salle had been a priest for only eighteen days when God took from him the spiritual director to whose enlightened guidance he had wholly given himself. He felt this loss deeply. He profited from the last moments that God allowed to this saintly theologian to listen to his good advice and to prepare from this a plan of life which would diminish in some way the loss of his spiritual guidance. Because there was perfect confidence between them, Roland made him the executor of his last will, charging him particularly with

the care of the community of the Sisters of the Child Jesus he had recently founded and asking him to protect it in every way that he could.<sup>46</sup> He made De La Salle promise to do everything in his power to sustain it. He even indicated that God had destined him to found schools for the instruction of boys; he himself had hoped to do so, had time allowed.

### **De La Salle takes care of the Community of the Sisters of the Child Jesus.**

However difficult De La Salle regarded this burden of care for the Sisters, which together with his domestic duties took away the time he would have preferred to give to prayer, he looked upon these tasks as the will of God because they were recommended to him by his spiritual director. He overcame his reluctance, thereby giving clear proof of his perfect docility even after his director's death. From then on, confident in God and filled with renewed zeal by his promise to M. Roland, he began to work to overcome the difficulties that constantly confronted the Sisters of the Child Jesus. Deprived of help, they were faced with total failure at the outset. De La Salle took the prudent measures necessary to save this holy undertaking and to give it the stability which would enable it to withstand all difficulties. Letters patent<sup>47</sup> were needed, as well as the consent of the archbishop and the city government. It was no easy task to obtain these permissions in the present circumstances.

### **He obtains the city's consent for this establishment.**

The magistrates feared that their city was being overly taxed by the number of religious communities established in recent years. Accordingly, they opposed the present application. However much they agreed with the necessity for providing for the instruction of the city's youth, they still could not bring themselves to approve this additional expense.<sup>48</sup> De La Salle made many attempts to change their minds. He was better qualified than any other to do this. The claims of family, friendship, and respect for his virtue were powerful voices. He used these with such prudence and good sense that the magistrates could not long deny his request, which they finally granted officially.<sup>49</sup>

### **He applies for letters patent.**

Armed with this approval, he sought that of the archbishop and easily obtained it; in fact, this prelate did more than was expected of him. In his fatherly concern he took it upon himself to obtain from the court the necessary letters patent. Anyone less influential than Charles-Maurice Le Tellier would have failed in these negotiations, above all at a time when the court was concerned with many other matters.<sup>50</sup> He made use of the favor he enjoyed with the prince and seized the opportunity to obtain the letters patent<sup>51</sup> through the goodness of King Louis XIV,<sup>52</sup> of glorious memory.

### **The archbishop of Reims obtains them.**

He had them registered at the Paris *Parlement* at his own expense and omitted none of the formalities necessary to give this community a permanent status. He then took them under his protection and aided them generously, so that in a short time they flourished and were most beneficial to the public. The Sisters of this congregation have maintained themselves in their first fervor, and they have always recognized the obligation they owe to De La Salle for his advice and for the steps he took to insure the success of their schools. They continue to venerate him in gratitude for what he did for them.

### **He becomes involved in establishing free schools for boys.**

God was thus testing him without his being aware of it, preparing him to undertake the foundation of the Brothers of the Christian Schools, which was to be the chief work of his life. He became involved in this endeavor in so simple and unexpected a way that we must admire in all of this the hand of God guiding his steps. He himself was quite surprised, as we learn from a letter he wrote later to a pious person who had asked him what were the first steps he had taken in the founding of his institute. "God," he said, "who directs all things with wisdom and moderation and who does not force the human will, wishing to have me completely occupied with the care of the schools, involved me almost imperceptibly and in a short time, so that one commitment led to another without my being aware of it."<sup>53</sup> They are wrong, therefore, who think of him as an ambitious man who wished to make a name for himself by being known as a

founder of a religious congregation. The simple and natural way he himself explains it shows how foreign to him such a way of thinking would be. The examples of submission, dependence, and humility which he later gave his Brothers show how far from him was the spirit of domination falsely attributed to him by some of his enemies. We will have more than one occasion to illustrate this later on.

### **Unsuccessful efforts of Father Barré.**

Civil wars which had disturbed the kingdom during the last several reigns were a source of trouble.<sup>54</sup> Heresy,<sup>55</sup> which was at the root of these disorders, compounded the difficulty. Religion was neglected; ruined fortunes, the usual consequence of local independence, led to decadence in morals. Education was also neglected, and ignorance prevailed. Everyone was concerned about regaining financial losses, and children slipped into vice through lack of education. The worst disorders were in evidence among the populace. The situation was well known, and some virtuous persons sought to remedy it, but few succeeded. Father Barré,<sup>56</sup> a religious of the Order of Minims, noted in Paris and elsewhere for his virtue, attempted to start free schools wherein youth might learn discipline, but these projects failed at the very time when they appeared to be succeeding. The schools themselves were the cause of their own failure, and this made him give up the whole idea. He attempted several times to re-establish them, but neither his means nor his influence was sufficient to overcome the difficulties involved. Someone was needed with both enough confidence not to falter at the first difficulties and sufficient means to overcome these initial obstacles.

### **Madame Maillefer establishes a free school for girls in Rouen.**

It was in these circumstances and at this time that God inspired Madame Maillefer with the thought of founding free schools for the instruction of girls.<sup>57</sup> She had all that was needed to bring about the success of this project. Born in Reims of a wealthy and pious family, she had acquired in the family circle a training in virtue which led her to be devoted to whatever good work came to her attention. Caring for the poor, she regarded them as her own children, and she did all she could to bring them both temporal and spiritual assistance. Being

obliged, because of her husband's business, to move to Rouen, where he normally lived, she practiced most of her works of charity there. However, she did not neglect those she had begun in her native city of Reims. These merited for her the name "mother of the poor." While her husband was still alive, she engaged in those charitable works which did not interfere with her family obligations. After his death she practiced almsgiving with great generosity. Every year she gave away a good part of her income, reserving for herself only a bare minimum and leading a poor and penitential existence amid her own riches.<sup>58</sup>

### **Establishment of a school in the suburb of Darnétal.**

The special knowledge she had of the requirements of the Rouen parishes, gained through her association with the administrators of her alms, gave her an insight into where the needs were greatest. While her charity would have inspired her to meet all requests, the necessities of the large suburb of Rouen popularly called Darnétal particularly interested her, because of the many poor occupied in the production of merchandise in the various businesses there. She helped this parish by preference, and it was here that she founded a free school for girls which she supported generously. This school served as a model for several others which were founded later.

### **Madame Maillefer considers founding free schools in Reims.**

Always guided by piety and generosity, Madame Maillefer thought of favoring her native city Reims with the same type of school. M. Roland, a theological preacher of this city whom she consulted, agreed with her plan. It was chiefly at her suggestion and with her support that he established in 1674 the Sisters of the Child Jesus for the education of girls, as has already been pointed out. The great good resulting from this project caused him to desire the same advantage for the poor boys of the city. He often spoke of his plans, but he died before he could realize them.<sup>59</sup>

This did not discourage Madame Maillefer. She had begun negotiations with him the previous year with this project in mind. Because she acted only for God, she placed all her confidence in God and did not doubt that the plan would succeed. With this attitude she sought someone who might replace M. Roland in this work. M. Nyel, an

engaging person, was recommended as having the necessary talents. It was through him that Father Barré, the Minim, had established schools at Rouen and elsewhere.<sup>60</sup>

### **She sends Nyel to Reims.**

M. Nyel, therefore, went to Reims, knowing well the intentions of Madame Maillefer and armed with letters from her addressed to the superior of the Sisters of the Child Jesus. She addressed her letters thus in the belief that the superior would be better informed than any one else of the plan proposed by M. Roland while he was still living. By a stroke of Providence, De La Salle, who had followed the wishes of M. Roland in taking charge of these Sisters, was at the door of their convent at the moment when M. Nyel arrived. After the usual greetings, M. Nyel told the superior the reason for his visit. She in turn spoke to De La Salle and asked his advice. At first he pointed out the many difficulties involved. He knew from experience the considerable trouble involved in starting the school for girls. However, as he had a compassionate heart for all who spoke to him, he listened to M. Nyel and also asked him what steps he planned to take. De La Salle thought over the proposals and approved of them. In spite of his own reasons for predicting failure, he took upon himself the task of overcoming the initial difficulties. First of all, the project would have to become known in the homes of influential persons in the city to gain their confidence. Meanwhile, Nyel would need a place to stay while waiting to open the first school.

### **He takes De La Salle's advice.**

Because public opinion was against starting a new venture of any sort, it was essential to take all the steps necessary to keep their plans secret from those who might oppose them. Confidentiality was most important. Although Nyel had been directed by Mme Maillefer to stay with her brother, which he agreed to do, the consequences of this were pointed out to him. They feared that his project would be discovered and would soon become public knowledge. To avoid this eventuality, Nyel gratefully accepted De La Salle's invitation to stay at his house for the time being.<sup>61</sup>

### **He becomes involved without realizing it.**

Such was the first step in De La Salle's involvement in the establishment of free schools. Nyel thanked God that at this initial meeting he had found both a place to stay and a worthy patron for his new venture. He became quite optimistic about his plan. He wrote to Mme Maillefer of these first happenings, and she in return urged him to neglect nothing that might contribute to the project's success.

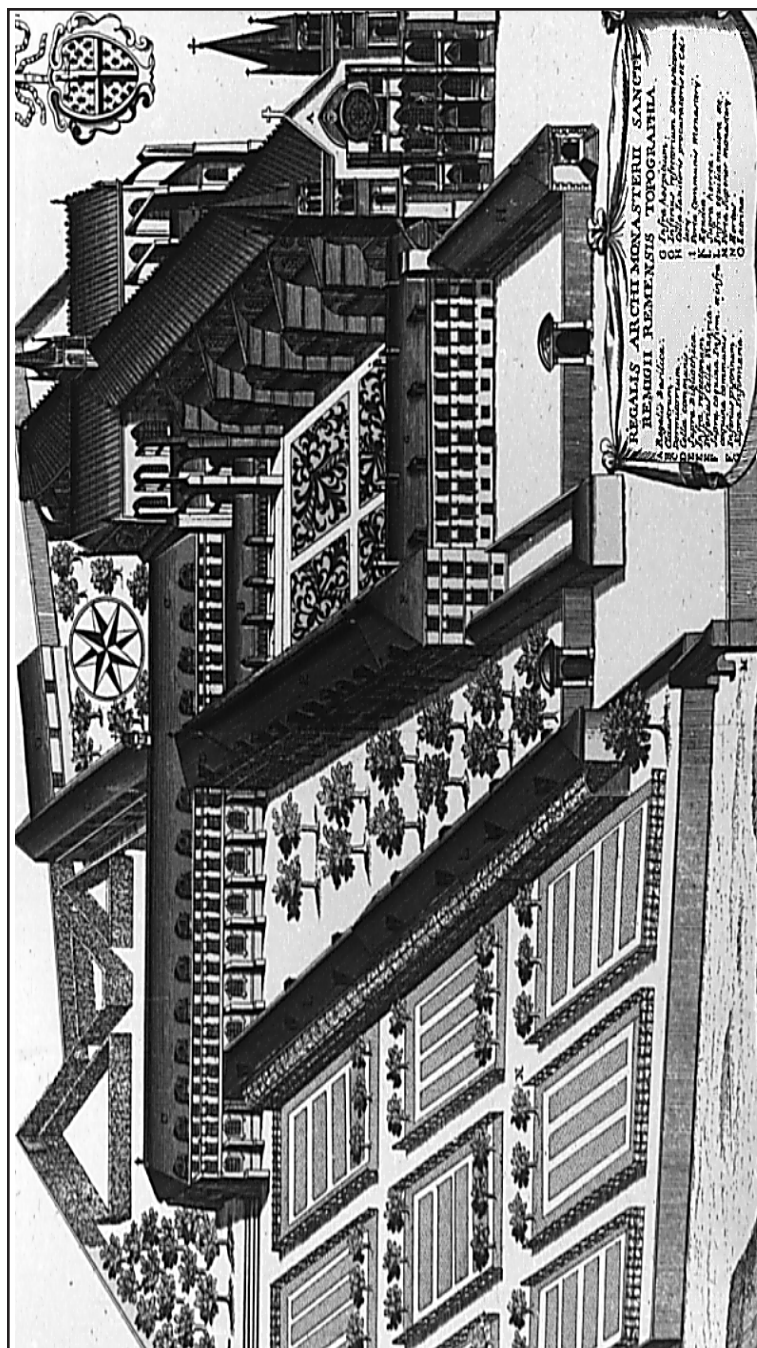
### **De La Salle consults before further involvement.**

Before attempting anything else, De La Salle addressed himself to God in prayer. As was true in all circumstances, he would help out at once if he saw any possibility of doing good, but because he did not trust his own views, he wished to seek counsel. Therefore, he sought the advice of his superiors, men of learning and experience. He first spoke to Dom Claude Bretagne, then prior of the abbey of Saint Rémi in Reims.<sup>62</sup> He was discreet, trustworthy, understanding, and prudent. He was so well thought of that he had been entrusted with writing the life of M. Bachelier de Gentes,<sup>63</sup> a native of Reims who possessed virtue rare in a layman and practiced penance to an unusual degree. The book appeared the following year, 1680.

### **The first school is started in the parish of Saint Maurice.**

When De La Salle initially had explained to Dom Claude Bretagne the plan to found free schools in Reims, he also pointed out the many difficulties he knew stood in the way. He now consulted this learned monk to find the means of overcoming the obstacles to this good work. Not wishing to decide these things for himself, he thought he should not act hastily but should seek the advice of those more experienced with this sort of undertaking. This attitude was in keeping with his spirit of humility. God permitted things to go poorly at first, so that later the work might be better established. More thought was called for. Everyone feared the opposition that would be raised. Several ways to forestall this antagonism were discussed, but none was satisfactory. Finally, after much thought they agreed with De La Salle that the best thing to do was to put the schools under the protection of one of the city's pastors.





Engraving of the Abbey of Saint-Rémi (Reims) from the Monasticum Gallicanum. Photo E. Rousset (ER, plate 96, slide 75).



### **The pastor of Saint Maurice offers to house the teachers.**

This plan had the advantage that few people would dare to object to a zealous pastor's wish simply to provide free instruction for the children of his parish.<sup>64</sup> They, therefore, agreed that the idea would be presented to whichever of the city's pastors De La Salle selected.

**1679.**

He lost no time in speaking with M. Dorigny,<sup>65</sup> then pastor of Saint Maurice parish, who, because of his experience and strength of character, appeared the most likely to help the project succeed. This priest agreed to the proposal so readily that there could be no doubt of its success. He spoke of his own concern for providing schools for his parish, and he offered to help by housing the teachers in his own rectory. In a few days everything was arranged, and the school began in this parish in the year 1679.

### **A school in the parish of Saint Jacques is proposed.**

When De La Salle saw this matter through to its completion, he thought he had accomplished all that God expected of him. He went about his other duties, leaving the future of the school to Divine Providence. He saw the teachers from time to time, encouraging them in their piety and aiding them by his advice. He did not think this would lead him any further. But God, who guided De La Salle's steps, opened a new path for him on which he began to walk almost in spite of himself. M. Nyel, whose ambitions were not limited to this single school, soon learned that a pious woman of the city, the widow of M. Lévêque de Carrières,<sup>66</sup> had plans of founding a free school in her parish of Saint Jacques. This was all Nyel needed. He sought her out and told her how, with the assistance of De La Salle, a school had just been opened in the parish of Saint Maurice. The woman listened with pleasure, thinking that God had created a favorable occasion for carrying out the project which had been on her mind for such a long time. She was acquainted with De La Salle, and before deciding anything definitely, she wished to confer with him. M. Nyel went to him at once, not doubting for a moment that he would approve of the steps already taken. De La Salle was not completely opposed, but the entire project appeared too premature to him. Because he always

dreaded being pushed into things, he felt naturally reluctant to become involved.

### **Madame Lévêque de Carrières wants to establish a school.**

However, Madame Lévêque asked De La Salle to visit her. After several requests, he finally agreed and listened to her views on the subject. She complimented him on what he had done for the poor of Saint Maurice parish and told him of her great desire to provide the same opportunity to the needy of her own parish. "I must profit by an occasion such as this," she said to him, "for I have had for some time the thought of founding a school for my parish, and I would be most happy to see it accomplished before my death." De La Salle could not refuse his help in bringing about this good work.<sup>67</sup> She guaranteed a sum of 500 livres each year for the support of two masters and agreed to leave a principal amount of 10,000 livres after her death to assure an income in the future.<sup>68</sup> Because she was getting old, she urged him to pursue the project, but she was unable to see it accomplished, regardless of her own effort, for she died several weeks after she had made known her wishes.<sup>69</sup> Her heirs made it a religious duty to fulfill the terms of her will exactly, and with difficulty the school in the parish of Saint Jacques opened the same year, 1679.<sup>70</sup>

### **M. Nyel's zeal is detrimental to the schools.**

De La Salle, satisfied with this latest success, had no plans for further involvement, except that circumstances forced him to act otherwise. He counted on Nyel to look after the teachers, but the latter, despite his piety, was not sufficiently diligent or farsighted for that responsibility. Nyel's only thought was to open new schools, without making the effort to strengthen those already established. The continual traveling he had to do made it impossible for him to give sufficient attention to the difficulties inseparable from new foundations. Long and frequent absences caused disruption in the schools. The masters became careless, and this attitude also became evident in the conduct of the pupils, who were no longer being taught as well as formerly. Even the parents became aware of this situation and began to complain. The fear was that if a prompt remedy were not found, the schools would soon fail. Besides, the schools were not accomplishing as much as was expected of them, because the work was inconsistent

and the discipline haphazard. Each teacher followed his own bent without considering what would be most beneficial overall.

### **De La Salle gathers the teachers into one house.**

All these things convinced De La Salle that the masters should live under one roof. He acted upon this conviction by renting a house near his own so that he could keep an eye on them and be with them more frequently. They moved in on the feast of Christmas of this year 1679, and they began to follow a daily schedule which he drew up for them.<sup>71</sup>

### **A third school is opened.**

M. Nyel, who knew how to turn every occasion to his own purpose, approved of the steps taken by De La Salle. Hardly had the teachers settled down in their new house before he proposed that a third school be opened for the district in which they were living. De La Salle found nothing objectionable in this plan, and in a short time the pupils of this school were more numerous than in the other two.<sup>72</sup>

### **1680. De La Salle obtains the doctorate.**

While these schools were being opened as though they had been planned long before, the time limit for the licentiate had expired. Having finished all the courses and examinations customary in the Theology Faculty at Reims, as at Paris, he was granted the doctorate in 1680, after two years of study.<sup>73</sup>

### **A nearly fatal accident.**

This year was also memorable for De La Salle because of an accident which nearly cost him his life. Returning from the country in the winter, he was caught by nightfall. As there had been a heavy snow, he lost the path and fell into a deep trench. He was able to save himself only by great effort, and this caused him a rupture. After recovering from the shock of this accident, he reflected often on the protection God had afforded him in danger and on God's mercy in having preserved his life.

He was so imbued with this thought that he could never speak of this event except with intense feelings of gratitude and thanksgiving.

### **He considers bringing the teachers to his own house.**

All the care he had taken up to then to direct the teachers had not succeeded as he had hoped. Nyel, by his continual absences, was a definite detriment. He could not appreciate this situation as much as De La Salle, who could see the teachers' piety lessen day by day, no matter how much he worked to develop it in the community. His own duties prevented him from being present as often as necessary. After considerable thought, he saw no other solution than to bring the teachers into his own house, where he could be with them and still attend to his own affairs. He was aware of the obstacles he would have to overcome, on the part of either his family, who did not always approve of what he did, or his three brothers who were still with him,<sup>74</sup> who might not care for this manner of living. For some time he was troubled over what course to follow.

Several months passed before he could determine what to do. However, as he saw that further delay only added to the trouble, he finally decided to overcome his own reluctance in the matter. But at the same time, he felt it prudent to accustom gradually to the changes the persons who would be most affected, so that the alterations would not come as a complete surprise.

### **He has them eat at his table.**

At first he had the teachers come to his house to take their meals. There was reading at table, and he used the time to speak with them and to draw reflections from the readings. After meals they returned to their duties in the schools.

**1681.**

The situation remained like this until the following year, when he saw that all his efforts to form them in solid piety were not achieving the results he expected. During this time, he took advantage of M. Nyel's absence to order the teachers to come to his house at seven in the morning and to spend the entire day there outside school hours. He

thus saw to it that they were careful about the daily exercises which he had prescribed for them some time before but which they had been neglecting for one reason or another. The principal spiritual exercises were mental prayer, vocal prayer, and mortification of the senses. He never realized quite so well the need they had for these exercises as when he saw the teachers close up. He noticed that several among them had only a superficial piety, some were wavering in their vocation, and others showed signs of baser inclinations as a result of lack of education. Speaking to them with kindness, he let no occasion pass to point out their failings to them. He observed their different temperaments and suited his reprimands to their dispositions. By this means he was able to reform their exterior conduct and at the same time improve their interior dispositions.

### **The city of Guise wishes to open a free school.**

While De La Salle was thus busy instructing the teachers in the duties of their state, M. Nyel, for his part, was ever on the lookout for founding new schools. He was alert to the least possibility of a foundation, and he would not give up until he achieved what he was after. He learned that the city of Guise was considering the establishment of a free school for the poor. Without further thought he decided to go there, but he first wanted to have De La Salle's concurrence. De La Salle told him he ought not to be so hasty, the project was premature, and to press on so quickly would run the risk of failure. He gently pointed out further that Nyel's frequent absences were prejudicial to the teachers and that his presence and attention in watching over them would be a help in keeping them faithful to their duties, especially during the Easter season near at hand. Nothing he said could change M. Nyel's mind. Nyel left for Guise, went through much trouble which turned out to be useless, and in the end had to return without success, as De La Salle had predicted. The embarrassment of this episode made Nyel more circumspect in the future and more attentive to good advice.

### **De La Salle houses the teachers in his own home.**

When M. Nyel returned, he was agreeably surprised to see that what De La Salle had done for the teachers during his absence had produced a notable change in their conduct. He told him how pleased he

was and urged him to complete the good he had begun by taking the masters completely into his house. This was a decisive step that De La Salle could not take without causing an outcry. But because what he had done for the teachers up to then had succeeded so well, even more than he had hoped, he thought there would be no objection to doing what M. Nyel requested.<sup>75</sup>

## 1681.

He had the masters move into his own house, therefore, on the feast of his patron, Saint John the Baptist.<sup>76</sup> From this moment the public, who had previously suspended judgment on his activities, began to criticize him. Now was the time to expect opposition, of which he had much, especially on the part of his relatives and friends. They could not resist blaming him for the bizarre move, as they called it, which he had just made. It required all the virtue he possessed to listen to the many objections and jokes made at his expense. Some people out of worldly considerations, others because of their irritation, blamed him for his action. The more thoughtful admired his zeal without passing judgment, but few approved of what he did.

## Reproaches of his family.

The most difficult complaints he had to put up with were those of his own family, who were much attached to him but who were aware of what people were saying about him. In an effort to dissuade him from his resolutions, everyone brought up what seemed most disagreeable in his actions. A few of his relatives, more vexed and upset than the others, claimed that he had dishonored his family and his social class by assuming responsibility for the conduct of people of low birth and no education.<sup>77</sup> They objected to his bringing these strangers to his table and making no distinction between them and his own brothers, who were not used to leading this unusual type of life and for whom it was most unbecoming. They warned him that this practice would alienate not only his own household but everyone else. His only answer to all these arguments was patience. In some cases his opponents were quite edified at his Christian spirit of moderation, and they refused to stand in his way further for fear of directly opposing the designs of God. Others saw their efforts have no effect on him or his resolutions, and from that time on they regarded him as a person so

strongly attached to his own opinion that he could not be dissuaded. They resolved to have his three brothers taken from his house.<sup>78</sup>

### **He tries to form the teachers in virtue.**

He felt this separation deeply, but it did not discourage him. He placed all his confidence in God, and now that he realized he was perfectly free, he earnestly went about putting his small community in order. He began by cultivating in them a spirit of modesty, humility, poverty, piety, and an unlimited mutual charity, all necessary qualities for the state they were embracing. He had resolved not to proceed by an appeal to authority alone; he wanted them to be attracted, not constrained, to virtue. He tried at the beginning to lead them gently to accept the truth he was teaching through his exhortations and more so by his example. All this first year, he accustomed the teachers to follow a fixed program of spiritual exercises with which they gradually became familiar.<sup>79</sup>

### **He leaves the family home with the teachers.**

When he saw that they had become used to these exercises, he thought seriously of leaving his own house to take up residence in some other quarter of the city where they would not be subject to so much commotion and to so many worldly distractions. He found a house for rent in the Rue Neuve, opposite the Sisters of Sainte-Claire.

### **1682. Establishment of the Institute's first house.**

He moved in on the feast of Saint John the Baptist in the year 1682.<sup>80</sup> This is the same house the Brothers of the Christian Schools have lived in since that time and which they purchased in 1700, aided by a few charitable persons of the city. This can rightly be considered as the first of their houses and as the cradle of their Institute.<sup>81</sup>

### **He prescribes a uniform way of life for the teachers.**

After the teachers were settled and the required rooms for their various needs were arranged, De La Salle gave them a fixed rule for spending

the hours of the day. The practice of silence was an essential part of this rule. He showed them how much this virtue would help them in acquiring recollection and overcoming their distractions. He advised them to pray often and to use the sacraments frequently to keep their conscience in good order. He suggested that they choose an enlightened confessor who would help them along these lines. The first thought that came to them was to ask him to undertake this task. For a while they said nothing, but as their confidence in him grew, chiefly from the kindness with which he spoke to them, the leaders among them presented their request. Because he did not want to make them uncomfortable in a matter of such importance, he thought it more prudent not to grant their request, fearing that this would diminish the customary freedom with which he could speak to them of their failings. However, after consulting with some friends, he gave in to their repeated demands, and in a short time all the masters were under his direction. The happy change that this brought about soon became apparent. Before long there was talk of their piety, and soon outsiders began to admire those whom they had despised only a short while before.

### **The city of Rethel wants a school.**

Cities near Reims, learning of the advantages that city was deriving from the schools, sought to have similar instruction for their children. Rethel-Mazarin was the first to request a foundation of De La Salle.<sup>82</sup> The matter, however, was a bit delicate, and he did not wish to do anything impetuously. All that he had accomplished in training the teachers of the schools in Reims was but the first step toward the perfection to which he hoped to lead them. He feared exposing their virtue to trial while it was yet so newly formed. It seemed to him that the teachers needed more time to develop themselves and that the best answer to give to Rethel was to promise them some help in the future. However, because the city enjoyed the patronage of the Duke de Mazarin<sup>83</sup> and the support of a zealous pastor in this matter of a school, De La Salle could no longer put off a decision. Besides, the present circumstances were favorable; there was the liberality of the Duke, of the city, of the pastor, and of a certain Demoiselle Bouralleti,<sup>84</sup> who herself offered fifty livres income. A house was available, and funds necessary for the upkeep of the teachers were assured.



## **The school in Rethel.**

Because De La Salle could no longer refuse in good grace, he sent Nyel there to start the school. Nyel did so with his usual efficiency, and no sooner had he arrived in Rethel-Mazarin than all was arranged so that the schools opened in that same year 1682.<sup>85</sup> He was obliged to meet those who had shown interest in the foundation of the schools. This led to the privilege of an audience with the Duke, who questioned Nyel on this new Institute, particularly with regard to the one most responsible for its existence. From this time the Duke wished to make the acquaintance of De La Salle, who was spoken of by M. Nyel as a saintly priest of great piety and limitless charity. De La Salle was not one to put himself forward, but informed of the Duke's invitation, he saw no other course than to accept. The Duke received him with courtesy and was happy to speak with him on matters of piety. He even honored him several times with a visit.

## **The Duke de Mazarin is dissuaded from supporting the schools.**

Because of the regard he had for De La Salle's virtue, the Duke, some years after the establishment of the schools in Rethel, wished to provide from his estates an annual income of 200 livres for the upkeep of the teachers. This transaction was about to be concluded when the Duke was advised against it by some persons he trusted, so that on the next day, when De La Salle came to receive the gift, he noticed at once that the Duke had changed his attitude. Instead of the kindness with which he usually received him, the Duke was formal and noticeably aloof. He raised various disheartening objections. He wished to impose conditions on his gift which were not in keeping with the teachers' manner of living. De La Salle was obliged to listen to the Duke's severe and humiliating comments. Without losing any of the respect he owed the Duke, he replied to him with his usual moderation. He returned home without showing the least emotion, and although he knew who had advised the Duke so adversely, he showed them not the least displeasure.

### **De La Salle suffers humiliations without complaining.**

This prudent and moderate course was interpreted by his enemies as evidence of his lack of feeling, but it was in reality the effect of his complete submission to Divine Providence. This he made the rule of his entire conduct, especially in all the difficulties he had to undergo in the foundation of his Institute. The most serious setbacks did not disturb the interior peace he possessed. One who works only for God is not easily upset by human contradictions. His detachment was so great that he did not seem to be affected by injustices in his regard. He would never speak of them and never complained against those who opposed him. He preferred to give up the best of claims rather than enter into a dispute over them. This is what he did on the occasion of the foundation about which we have been speaking.

### **He renounces his rights in order to avoid litigation.**

The school of Rethel-Mazarin was scarcely opened when the city fathers of Guise regretted that they had turned down the offer of M. Nyel a year before. They entered into a new agreement with him on his second trip there, made at their request. This time they immediately offered him a house for the teachers. Mademoiselle de Guise,<sup>86</sup> who had been alerted to the merit and the needs of the teachers, took them under her patronage and gave them from her property a sufficient income for their maintenance, so that the schools opened this same year, 1682.

### **Dissatisfaction with the first teachers.**

De La Salle had difficulty from the beginning in finding adequate numbers of suitable men for these various foundations. The first teachers he sent to Guise were not sufficiently promising, but he was forced to bide his time until he could train others. After these were formed, he replaced the first teachers with others whose dedication and piety soon gained esteem.

### **1682. School in Laon.**

It was also toward the end of this year that M. Guyart, pastor of Saint Pierre in Laon,<sup>87</sup> hearing of the great good effected by the free schools

recently established in Rethel and Guise, wrote to De La Salle asking him to send two teachers to start a school in his parish. The great love Guyart had for the poor, of whom there were many, and his ardent desire to give them an education had for a long time made him desire to found a school. To forestall any difficulty, he made the proper arrangements with the mayor and city magistrates. He received from them a house for the teachers, and the Canons Regular of the Abbey of Saint Martin of the Order of Premonstratensians generously offered to pay part of their upkeep, while the pastor took care of the rest. With these matters settled, De La Salle could then send two teachers to Laon; they opened the school the following year, 1683. Based on their mutual confidence and esteem, the pastor formed a friendship with De La Salle which lasted all their lives.

### **Most of the teachers become discouraged.**

The rapid success of these first ventures gave promise of what might be hoped for in the future. However, it was too early for De La Salle to be too pleased. God made him experience all those trials which ordinarily surround new foundations that are still fragile. Although he thought he had set up the schools so that they could take care of themselves, he soon saw his work on the brink of ruin. The teachers whom he had gathered together in the same house to accustom them to a regular life found this arrangement too tedious. Their religious exercises were bothersome, their food too simple, and their freedom limited. They preferred to throw off the yoke which they had considered sweet enough up to then and which they had freely accepted. They no longer considered the ordinary exercises of piety to their taste, although these had previously seemed so useful and sanctifying. It is easy to imagine how De La Salle, seeing this, was filled with sorrow. He did all he could to rekindle their fervor and to bring them back on the straight path. But so great was their distaste for this kind of life that he was obliged to renounce any further efforts to help them; he had to let them leave. His kind and touching words to them did not make any impression, for they had already made up their minds. The remedies he wished to use to heal their wounds only made matters worse. They thought nothing of what they owed him for having taken them under his care and for having received them into his own home. They forgot the respect and gratitude they owed to his kindness and good example, and they left his house, abandoning forever the resolution they had taken of consecrating themselves to the teaching of youth. There remained only a few, more faithful

and better grounded in their vocation, who refused to follow the undisciplined ones who left.<sup>88</sup>

### **De La Salle encourages those who remain.**

It cannot be denied that De La Salle was shaken by these many defections and considered giving up all further involvement with the work. It seemed to him that after having undertaken the instruction of the poor for their good, from the purest of motives, and with all his energies, he could have expected greater success. However, human thoughts are too limited to penetrate the designs of God. After thinking over everything that had happened so quickly and unexpectedly, he profited by the humiliation he had suffered to renew his zeal. Filled with renewed confidence, he gathered together with thanksgiving what remained of his scattered flock. He strove to reassure them in the face of their companions' defections; by his prayers, his example, and his kind and affectionate exhortations he strengthened them against temptation.

### **He gives them a uniform religious habit.**

Then God was pleased to send a calm after the storm, showering blessings upon De La Salle's work when he least expected it. Soon a number of new recruits arrived, filled with good will, fortitude, fervor, and piety. These, together with the others who had remained faithful, formed a new community more numerous than the previous one. When De La Salle had overcome his surprise, he was filled with confidence for the future. He gave greater attention to strengthening his disciples against their natural inconstancy, having so recently experienced its devastating effects in the departure of the others. He knew that they were weak but also willing to be strengthened in their commitment. These thoughts led him to prepare new regulations, more moderate and better thought out than the previous ones. He wanted chiefly to remove from the teachers any pretext for returning to the world. After consultation with several learned and saintly persons, and profiting by the good will of his new disciples, he decided to give them a common and simple religious habit which would set them off from secular persons by its simplicity and singularity. This new apparel was conducive to the modesty of their calling, helped them to be more circumspect in their actions, and inspired the respect of others.<sup>89</sup>

### **Some find it unacceptable.**

It is true that this change did not meet with everyone's approval. Some ridiculed the habit and even made fun of it because they were not yet accustomed to it, but this stopped after a while. Several years later, a certain esteemed person, noted for his piety but of a peculiar bent of mind, encouraged De La Salle to change this habit, but De La Salle thought it best not to follow his advice. He feared that by giving the Brothers a more fashionable garment, he would encourage in them a desire for ostentation, and by following the views of this person, much as he respected his ideas and influence, he would lose something of the simplicity of his Institute. He did not give in, even when reasons of propriety were put forward. When he was accused of conceit and stubbornness, he decided to put in writing the reasons for his decision. He did so in such a thorough and Christian manner that he won over many who had been most opposed to the Brothers' habit.<sup>90</sup>

### **He gives them the name Brothers of the Christian Schools.**

He did more. He profited by the good will of his disciples to persuade them to drop the name schoolteachers, which they had borne up to then, and to take the name Brothers of the Christian Schools.<sup>91</sup> This title seemed more modest and more suited to the type of life in common that they had chosen. The effects of this seemingly trivial change were noticeable from the beginning, particularly in strengthening their spirit of unity.

### **Their bond of union.**

The Brothers (for so we shall call them from now on) had but one mind and one heart. They lived in great harmony and assisted each other with tender and compassionate charity. All they possessed they had in common, and no personal interests divided them. Their life of regularity vividly recalled the life of the early Christians. However, there still remained one weakness which could be seized upon by the devil: their too great solicitude for the future.

### **They lack trust in Providence.**

Because of their state in life, their needs were quite modest. But because they had no income, they worried occasionally about their future. They thought of what their situation would be should De La Salle ever fail them. A thousand fancies crossed their minds, and these led imperceptibly to discouragement and weariness. De La Salle soon noticed the change, and when he sought to find the cause, the Brothers told him frankly that they saw nothing fixed and permanent about their situation, that the least thing could destroy all his plans for them. They were unhappy at the prospect of devoting the days of their youth and strength to the service of others in unstable conditions without any assurance they would be cared for when age or sickness made it impossible to carry on.

### **De La Salle answers their misgivings.**

De La Salle, who was motivated completely by the thought of Divine Providence, strove to bring the Brothers to this same point of view and to revive their failing courage. "Men of little faith," he said, "do you insist on setting restrictions on God's Providence? Do you not know there are no limits to His goodness? If God takes care of the grass and lilies of the field, as He Himself says, and the birds and other animals even if they have neither resources, income, cellars, nor granaries, how much more will He provide for you who are devoted entirely to His service? Therefore, do not be troubled about the future, for God knows your needs and will not fail you, if you remain faithful in your service to Him."

It would seem that these words, full of faith and based on God's word itself, would have been sufficient to reassure them. But because of their troubled minds, De La Salle's advice did not fully achieve the hoped-for effect.

### **Their reasons.**

"It is easy for you to speak to us," they replied. "You have everything, you are secure, you have money, you still have your canonry. All these things will save you from the wretchedness into which we shall fall if the schools should fail."

De La Salle saw the force of this argument and stated that they were right in bringing it up to him. From this moment he realized that

the best way to convince them of his perfect disinterestedness was to give away all he possessed and become exactly like them.<sup>92</sup>

### **He wants to use his wealth for his schools. He consults Father Barré, Minim.**

The first thing that came to his mind was to use his patrimony to found new schools, so that his Brothers would have no cause for concern for the future. This seemed the most natural thing to do, a worthy object of his generosity. But as he never took decisive steps without counsel, he wrote to Father Barré, a religious of the Minim order of whom we have already spoken.<sup>93</sup> De La Salle explained his intentions and asked for Father Barré's frank opinion.

The saintly religious answered at once that this thought was not inspired by the spirit of God. The schools were founded on the sole support of Divine Providence, and it would be wrong to provide any other foundation. De La Salle should take as his guide those words of the Gospel in which Jesus Christ says to His disciples, "The foxes have their dens, and the birds of the air their nests, but the Son of Man has not whereon to lay His head" (Mt. 8:20). "The foxes," Barré added, "are the children of the world, who are attached to riches. The birds of the air are religious, who have their monasteries, but those who, like you, are destined to instruct and catechize the poor ought to have no more of this world's goods than the Son of Man. Not only should you give away everything you own, but you ought to resign your canonry and renounce everything that would be able to distract you from procuring the glory of God."

Certainly there was nothing favoring self-love in this advice, and there are not many who would have welcomed it. But Father Barré, knowing De La Salle's virtue and perfect detachment, found it easy to reply frankly to him.

### **He follows the advice to give all to the poor.**

When his own thoughts were confirmed by this letter from such a respected adviser, De La Salle was more convinced than ever that God was asking for the unreserved sacrifice of all he possessed and that this was what would be most pleasing to Him. He at once took the firm resolution to give up all to follow Jesus Christ in His poverty. We cannot but admire this grandeur of soul that moved him with heroic courage to renounce all the world holds dear in order to take up a

hard and laborious life which scarcely appealed to either reason or good sense. Ambition or the desire to make a name for himself in the world could not possibly have been the motive for such a disinterested decision, as was suggested by some unjust and spiteful critics.

### **Some try to dissuade him.**

After thinking over the way in which he would carry out his project, he spoke to his confessor,<sup>94</sup> who thought the idea to be rash. He tried to persuade De La Salle that it would be tempting God to give everything away and that there was no reason why he had to act so drastically. He pointed out that he could work out his salvation in the class into which he was born, that he was already fulfilling all that was required of him as a canon, that the less fervent were edified at the sight of a good canon, and that without leaving his canonry he could continue to direct the Brothers of the Christian Schools in an edifying manner, as he had been doing already.

These remarks made an impression on him because of the high regard he had for his confessor, and fearing to take a wrong step, he remained undecided for some time. He spoke to other enlightened persons, and they found his own reasons quite convincing. After ten months of trial, he finally brought his confessor around to agreeing with him through the instrumentality of a virtuous and influential person.<sup>95</sup>

### **The reasons.**

All these difficulties being overcome, there yet remained one more which he foresaw would cause trouble and which he could not easily prevent. He would have wished to keep the entire matter quiet, but his precautions were in vain. The news of his intention spread throughout the city and caused more of a stir than could have been imagined. His relatives and friends were the most disturbed. The opposition became stronger than ever, with a variety of opinions being voiced. Some said that his recent troubles had unsettled his mind; others, that he was simply following his tendency for extreme behavior. Some blamed him for choosing an obliging spiritual director who would approve such a course of action. The consequences of his resolution were forcefully pointed out to him: his family would be against him; his friends would be unhappy; unforeseen disasters



might occur for his Institute which still was but a dream and would fail together with all his good works; his influence was too limited to prevent or withstand the opposition he would encounter. Because he had taken the firm resolution to abandon himself to Divine Providence, none of these reasons was sufficient to make him change his mind.

### **He wishes to resign his canonry.**

In July of that same year, 1683, he left for Paris with the intention of seeing the archbishop of Reims and obtaining the authorization to renounce his canonry. Upon his arrival there, De La Salle learned that the prelate had returned to his diocese, so he retraced his steps to carry out his own purpose.

### **The pastor of Saint Sulpice asks him to open a school in his parish.**

During his short stay in Paris, he had the opportunity to meet M. de La Barmondière,<sup>96</sup> pastor of Saint Sulpice, who asked him why he was in the city. This gave him the opportunity to explain to him why he was resigning his canonry and embracing a state of poverty. The pastor understood his reasons and agreed perfectly with him. He even had De La Salle promise to send two Brothers to open a school in his parish, which was the largest in Paris. De La Salle made every effort to do this, but a number of things prevented him, as we shall see. It was not until six years later that he was able to send the Brothers.

### **He goes to his archbishop to resign his canonry.**

De La Salle returned to Reims to meet the archbishop, who, knowing what he had in mind, would not immediately give him an audience. He delayed purposely, in order to give De La Salle time for further reflection in the hope that he might change his mind and that a canon of such piety and merit would thus be saved for the metropolitan church. He, therefore, told De La Salle that he was too busy to see him. De La Salle, understanding why he was refused, was not disheartened. He spoke further with several other advisers and in particular with one of his fellow canons much respected for his learning

and ability. This was M. Philbert, professor of theology at the seminary,<sup>97</sup> who was later to become *Grand Chantre*<sup>98</sup> of the cathedral and who was a close friend of the archbishop. De La Salle explained his point of view, and he was advised to go to live in Paris, in order to be away from family criticism. However, he wished to have the opportunity of clarifying his position with his archbishop before taking this step. Having learned that the prelate was about to return to Paris, he resolved to see him at any cost.

### **He resigns his canonry.**

Before appearing at the episcopal palace a second time, he went to the cathedral to prostrate himself before the Blessed Sacrament and to pray with renewed zeal to know the divine will and to receive the grace and strength to follow it. He went directly from the cathedral to the palace, where his second attempt succeeded better than his first. After listening to him, the archbishop asked if he had consulted others on the proposal. De La Salle then gave him an account of all he had done in this matter, finishing by saying that he only recently had consulted M. Philbert, the vicar-general, who advised him that given the circumstances, he should not hesitate to resign his canonry. M. Philbert, summoned at once, confirmed his opinion and informed the archbishop that he had further advised De La Salle to resign his seat in favor of his younger brother,<sup>99</sup> who had embraced the ecclesiastical state and was a young man of considerable promise. Upon hearing this, the archbishop gave his consent, and immediately De La Salle presented his resignation, signing over his canonry to M. Faubert.<sup>100</sup>

### **He prefers a stranger to his brother.**

It was quite a surprise to see the name of this poor priest on the resignation papers rather than that of De La Salle's own brother or of some other deserving candidate whom De La Salle normally should have considered. When he was asked why he had chosen this individual over several others and even over his own brother, he replied simply that he had taken advice on the matter and believed that God did not expect from him this favoritism; then he took his leave.

### **The attempts to have him change his decision.**

The interior joy he felt in leaving the archbishop's palace was tempered by pressure from friends. No sooner was the news out than he was besieged by them to change his mind while there was yet time. In doing so, he would please the archbishop, who held him in high regard; he owed it to his family. If he was absolutely determined to give up his canonry, he should do so in favor of his brother or of some other person agreeable to the cathedral chapter. None of these reasons could make him change his mind. He had chosen his course in the sight of God, and nothing would make him abandon it.

### **Praise of M. Callou.**

M. Callou<sup>101</sup> was one of those rare men of eminent virtue who act for no human motives but who have only God in view in all things. He had ruled the diocese of Reims for more than forty years under the episcopate of M. Le Tellier, who had great confidence in him and a high regard for his virtue. God had endowed him with a talent for preaching which he exercised with sturdy eloquence throughout his exemplary life. When he lost his sight at eighty-eight years of age, he continued to preach and catechize, always with the same success. His memory is still venerated in the city, where he is rightly regarded as an apostle of the region.

### **He approves De La Salle's reasons.**

M. Callou went, therefore, as delegate of the archbishop to find De La Salle and to learn of his decision. He reviewed the reasons which had been put forward to change his resolution. De La Salle replied just as he had to others who brought up the same objections, and he added that his resolution was taken before God and that he could not change it. M. Callou seemed pleased with his views. He congratulated him upon his detachment and reported to the archbishop what had taken place. Upon receiving his favorable recommendation, the archbishop sent the official papers for the canonry to M. Faubert, who took his seat on August 16, 1683. Thus at the age of thirty-three, De La Salle gave up the position which had become a heavy burden because of the continual conflicts it was causing.<sup>102</sup> Those who may be tempted to find fault with the inflexibility he seemed to show on this

occasion should reflect that when God speaks to a heart disengaged from all self-interest, His words are quite different from human ones. The way God led De La Salle clearly shows His guiding hand.

At the time De La Salle made this complete sacrifice, he seemed to be the only one who did not understand the full implications. Deprived of his canonry, resolved to give all his wealth to the poor, reduced to the necessities of life which he would henceforth have to obtain from the charity of others, exposed sometimes to a total lack of everything, and ready to pass the rest of his life in hard work, humiliation, and pain, he still felt that he had done nothing toward his salvation. He possessed extraordinary virtue in thus humbling himself in his own eyes.

### **He wishes to settle in Paris. His director prevents him.**

The first thought that came to De La Salle after he had given up his canonry was to move to Paris, as M. Philbert had advised. He thought that his absence would give time for the turmoil caused by his resignation to die down and that people would gradually begin to view him in a more favorable light. Also, he feared putting his humility to the test by the flattering remarks of some pious persons who admired his great generosity. He spoke to his director about moving to Paris, but the latter did not approve, saying that De La Salle's presence was necessary for the Brothers and that his absence would do irreparable harm, especially at the beginning of the Institute. He spoke of all the trouble De La Salle had already gone through to form the community and of the need it still had of his help. In answer to De La Salle's objection that his word was pledged to the pastor of Saint Sulpice to open a school in his parish, he pointed out that no matter how laudable and edifying his intention was, he must not anticipate the workings of Divine Providence. In seeking to accomplish any particular good, he must not jeopardize the good already begun. These reasons convinced him. He, therefore, wrote to M. de La Barmondière that it was not God's will that he open a school in Paris at this time and that he, as only a weak instrument of Providence, must submit to this fact.

**He wants to give his wealth to the school Brothers.  
Father Barré dissuades him.**

Now that he would remain in Reims because of the advice of his director, De La Salle began to consider how best to abandon himself completely into the hands of Providence. He had resigned his canonry, but he did not believe the sacrifice to be complete unless he gave up all he owned in favor of the poor.<sup>103</sup> He was already determined to do so. There remained only the manner of doing it to achieve the greatest good. His first thought was to give everything to the school Brothers, who were certainly the poor most particularly confided to his care. Several friends of great piety were in agreement with this suggestion. Nothing seemed more natural or praiseworthy. The Institute was his own work; it must be looked after, and everyone would agree that this was the most worthy object of his generosity. Those who would have blamed his too great detachment from the goods of this world would have nothing but praise for this use of his wealth to found his Institute. He would thus provide for his Brothers and preserve them permanently from the fear of lacking the necessities of life, which had troubled them only a short time before.

On the other hand, the thought of Divine Providence, the principal motivation of all his actions, was returning repeatedly to his mind. He feared to take the least step not in keeping with his abandonment to Providence and which had any hint of self-interest. In his perplexity he once again sought the advice of Father Barré, who repeated his counsel of a year before, that having founded his schools solely on Divine Providence, he now ought to give away all he owned to the poor, with absolutely nothing held back for the community of the Brothers. This advice confirmed him in his resolution, and from this moment he decided to abide by it.<sup>104</sup>

**1684. He gives everything to the poor.**

God Himself brought about that same year a favorable situation for giving away his wealth. A food shortage then was so severe that all in the kingdom were reduced to the utmost misery. Touched by the poverty he saw all around him, he was filled with compassionate charity and spared nothing to bring prompt relief. He became a faithful steward, dispensing his wealth, of which he now regarded himself as merely the trustee, with care and order. He inquired about the needs of everyone, anticipating their necessities. He gave bread to the

children in the schools and at his own house daily fed a great number of the poor, who went away helped by his generosity and encouraged by his good counsel befitting their needs. He did more; he sought out the poor to give them alms in their own homes to help them overcome the shame of their situation. This famine, which was most serious, did not make him hesitate in his charity. On the contrary, he gave away everything, reserving nothing for himself.<sup>105</sup>

### **The Brothers are surprised.**

Those who were aware of his liberality were astonished to see a man so filled with confidence in Divine Providence that he gave no thought to the needs of the next day. The Brothers themselves, who assisted him in distributing his wealth, could not help mentioning their surprise to him. He replied with his usual calm that God was a good Father who would never forsake those faithful to Him and that they should be convinced that nothing would be lacking to them as long as they were devoted to God's service.

### **He encourages them by his example.**

This reply was a sort of prophecy. The following year, food was still scarce, and he often reminded them of what he had said. "Thanks be to God, my dearest Brothers, that although we have had neither money nor income during these two terrible years of famine just past, we have lacked nothing. We owe no one anything in any of our houses, while we have seen some other well-established communities ruined despite their resources, because they have been obliged to sell all they owned and to borrow to keep alive."

These thoughts, coupled with the events of the last two years, sustained him in the future in the perfect indifference he felt toward the things of this world. Following his example, the Brothers were so fortified against fear and concern that they too abandoned themselves to that Providence whose care for them had been so evident.

### **His love for poverty.**

De La Salle so trusted Providence that he sought no other resource in founding his schools. He even went so far as to refuse considerable

sums with which several influential people offered to found schools. "Our Brothers," he said, "will succeed only if they remain poor. They shall lose the spirit of their calling as soon as they become preoccupied with the commodities of life." He was so convinced of this idea that he formed the habit of being satisfied with the least. He always chose for himself what was poorest and most contemptible. His furniture, clothes, and food all reflected the poverty he had chosen and in which he was forming the Brothers. It even became necessary to resort to reverential trickery to get rid of clothes he could no longer decently wear. "Anything is good enough for a poor priest," he would say. "As long as it can still be mended, it is good enough. It does not matter that we offend the eyes of the world, provided only that we are pleasing to the eyes of God."

### **Same subject.**

He, however, made it a point not to appear in public with any signs of that disgusting filthiness which often makes poverty despicable. His clothes were simple and clean. He avoided the extremes of neglect or affectation. He saw to it that his Brothers refrained from an appearance that was too studied. One day he asked one of them, in whom he noticed this trait, if he still sought to please the world. "If so," he said, "you are not a servant of Jesus Christ; we left the world not to be guided by it but to despise it and its maxims."

### **Same subject.**

It was this same spirit of poverty which caused him to take out of his house all that might be called comforts of life. He wished that his Brothers should not take any steps to have such things for themselves. We see this in an answer he wrote to one of the Brothers who described at length the poverty of his house. "It is true that you are poor. Our Savior was too, although He could have been rich. You ought to imitate this divine model, and yet it seems to me that you would like to lack nothing. Who wouldn't embrace a poverty like that? The great and powerful ones of the world would leave their riches to have a like advantage which would make them happier than kings. You must remember, I beg you, that you did not come to the community to seek your ease but to embrace a life of poverty with its inconveniences. You say that you are poor, and this pleases me, for to

say you are poor is to say that you are happy. You have never been so poor, you say. So much the better; you have never had so many opportunities to practice virtue.”<sup>106</sup>

Such were the thoughts with which De La Salle sought to inspire his Brothers in the frequent talks he had with them. Throughout his life he himself gave them the example of practicing this virtue in all its rigor.

### **His penance.**

Now that he felt himself free from the possessions which up to then necessarily bound him to the world, he devoted himself more than ever to the retired life which had such an attraction for him. He sanctified this life by prayer and study, and particularly by the practices of penance and humiliation in the community. He himself was a model of penance; every day he discovered new ways to mortify his body. The hair shirts and disciplines made with iron points, which are still preserved in the house at Reims, bear witness to this. He used these with such severity that the walls of his room were stained with blood.

Through discretion he tempered the zeal of his Brothers who wished to imitate him, for fear that their fervor might lead to excesses and injure their health. Despite his attention, there were several who succumbed and fell into sickness from which they did not recover. He was astonished at the ardor with which the Brothers participated in these practices so contrary to human nature. It is true that he encouraged them by his frequent exhortations, but he also urged them to use these penances only with moderation. “You ought to fear,” he told them, “that the devil will make use of even your fervor to make you fall.”<sup>107</sup>

### **He himself teaches in the schools.**

During these first years, he lost several capable Brothers who were not easily replaced. This obliged him, because of lack of men, to teach school himself in the parish of Saint Jacques. It was a matter of great surprise to see him leave the house twice a day, as did the other Brothers, crossing town clothed in the short cassock of coarse material and wearing the mantle with flowing sleeves, the broad-rimmed hat, and thick-soled shoes.



He went with the other Brothers to teach children to read and write, to instruct them in the catechism, to take them to church, and in a word to do literally all that he himself had set down for the regulation of the free schools. This made him the brunt of ridicule by those who see things only in the light of their external appearances. He paid no attention and continued his humble duties until he found new subjects capable of taking over these responsibilities. Several sensible persons remarked that he was carrying his zeal too far. Who would ever have thought that a person of his rank would descend to such a menial state? God gave him the grace to be unmoved by all such human considerations.

### **He relishes seclusion.**

When he had attended to the needs of the school in the Saint Jacques parish, he resumed those exercises of retreat, prayer, and meditation which were especially attractive to him. He took all sorts of precautions to live a hidden life. He even used a bit of pious ingenuity to keep out of view of the Brothers. He chose a tiny, isolated room that could hold only a single person, and there he passed days and sometimes even a part of the night in contemplation. He found this place so much to his liking that it was sometimes difficult to persuade him to leave it in order to eat.

### **He directs the schools in the absence of Nyel.**

While he was thus concerned with his own development and that of the community to which he gave all his attention, he felt obliged to extend his charitable care to the other schools. Those of the cities of Rethel, Guise, and Laon, established some time before, were directed by M. Nyel. But Nyel now was desirous of returning to his native city and several times had requested that De La Salle take charge of these schools. De La Salle had refused up to then, thinking that his first responsibility was to the community. But when M. Nyel went back to Rouen, where he enjoyed a reputation for sanctity and died two years later,<sup>108</sup> De La Salle could no longer refuse his friend, the pastor of Saint Pierre in Laon,<sup>109</sup> who asked him to take charge of the schools which needed his supervision.

### **He organizes the Brothers into a congregation.**

Now seeing himself at the head of a number of Brothers in several towns, De La Salle formed a new plan of action. It seemed appropriate to organize all into a sort of small congregation with a uniform manner of life. He tried out his idea first before setting it down on paper, because he did not want to impose anything by authority alone. It was not until several years later, while living in Paris, that he wrote his regulations after taking sufficient time to give the whole matter mature thought.<sup>110</sup>

### **He regulates the food.**

He had already taken care of the dress and food of the Brothers. On this latter point, he merely confirmed what was already the custom among them. He determined what should be served at table and authorized only the coarsest, most common food. Fowl or other more expensive foods were forbidden. On fast days only vegetables or simply prepared greens were served. All were to feel the spirit of the poverty which they had professed. This unappetizing food was served only in small portions. It required an extraordinary effort for De La Salle to accustom himself to it. He had much difficulty in doing so, and it was only after many hardships that he could become used to this food he could scarcely digest. He often asked God for the grace to overcome his repugnance, and his perseverance was so rewarded that he entirely lost his taste for food. This was seen especially on one occasion when the Brother cook made a mistake by serving some absinthe,<sup>111</sup> thinking it was a vegetable. After the Brothers tasted it, they put it aside, but De La Salle ate it without realizing what it was. After the meal, he asked why the community had not eaten. When he was told why, he admitted that he had not noticed it. He had the same dish served again to see the extent of their spirit of mortification but without forcing them in any way to eat.

### **He recommends that the Brothers pronounce vows.**

When he had reflected on how he wanted the community regulated and had seen that the Brothers were disposed to accept his views, he took some new measures to strengthen them in their vocation. For this purpose, he called a meeting of the principal Brothers of the

three cities in which there were schools.<sup>112</sup> He spoke movingly to them of his thoughts on the natural inconstancy of men and of the necessity of taking fixed and holy resolutions to do good. He added that until then they had been vacillating and inconstant in their vocation, and he asked them to consider the advisability of taking a vow to live in community according to the rules they had been observing.

All the Brothers enthusiastically and unanimously approved the suggestion. A retreat was decided upon to ask for the light of the Holy Spirit. It began on the evening of the Ascension that year<sup>113</sup> and was to finish on the eve of Pentecost but continued until Trinity Sunday because of the absence of several Brothers who had not been able to begin the retreat with the others.

### **They pronounce a vow of obedience for one year.**

Trinity Sunday, therefore, was chosen for the ceremony. The Brothers wished to pronounce the three vows of poverty, chastity, and obedience for life, but De La Salle did not wish to be hasty. He advised them for the present to take the vow of obedience alone and for one year only, putting off for another time the fulfillment of their good intentions after they had sufficient time to test themselves more thoroughly. They agreed, then, that they should take the vow of obedience for a single year, which they all did in the oratory of the house.<sup>114</sup>

Since that time, they have the custom of renewing their vows on the same day, which has come to be regarded as the principal feast in their Institute. It was only eight years later that De La Salle acceded to the wishes of the Brothers and allowed them to take the vow of obedience for life.<sup>115</sup> He began the ceremony by the Mass of the Holy Spirit at which all the Brothers received Communion, and he himself pronounced the vow of obedience, holding a candle in his hand. The Brothers came up, one at a time, to repeat the same vow.

### **De La Salle resigns as Superior.**

De La Salle reflected on the vow he had just made and was moved to live it as perfectly as possible. The superiorship he had naturally assumed seemed to him to be an obstacle to the promise that he had made. He thought seriously of how to give up this office. The following year on Trinity Sunday, he again gathered the Brothers together.

He pointed out that their numbers had increased sufficiently for them to choose a Superior from among themselves, that there were among them several capable ones available, that it would be good, even necessary, to do so, and that they should proceed to an open election to select the one in whose hands they would confide the government of the Institute. Much as they were surprised by this suggestion, they could not but admire the spirit of humility which inspired him to propose it.

### **Brother Henri L'Heureux is elected Superior.**

Before going ahead with the election, he had them make the usual retreat, and in a fervent appeal he gave them the strongest reasons why he himself should not be considered for the position. The respect the Brothers had for him made them follow his advice, and the voting was in favor of Brother Henri L'Heureux.<sup>116</sup> This choice greatly pleased De La Salle, who had for some time been considering Brother Henri as his successor. Brother Henri had the ability to fulfill the duties of this office worthily. He was virtuous, prudent, moderate, and discreet. These qualities and the esteem the Brothers had for his virtue quickly gained their confidence.

### **De La Salle obeys him.**

De La Salle was the first to give him the marks of respect, submission, and dependence. He quickly forgot his former responsibilities, in order to act only through the new Superior's orders; he wanted no special sign of distinction. He was so exact and scrupulous that he actually embarrassed the Brother. Several times he asked De La Salle to spare him the pain he experienced in having to give him unnecessary permissions, but De La Salle requested to be allowed to continue doing so, in order not to lose the merit of the obedience he felt he owed to his Superior. Frequently De La Salle would kneel at the feet of the Superior to accuse himself of his faults and to ask for a penance. He acted as though he had never been in authority in the house. He was the most exact, the humblest, and the first to perform the lowliest offices. The Superior was obliged to use his authority to prevent him from doing some things considered below his dignity as a priest. However much he was requested to treat the new Superior as still dependent on him, or at least as his equal, De La Salle would

not dispense himself from obedience. He spoke to no outsider and received no visits without an express permission. He took care to find out, when called to the parlor, if the Superior had been so informed.

### **He is forced to resume his duties as Superior.**

These practices of humiliation and dependence could not have remained so secret as to be unnoticed to some extent by people outside. Several persons of various ranks who had business to transact with him were the first to observe what was going on and to complain. The ecclesiastical authorities were informed. They appeared shocked and were quite offended that a priest, doctor, and former canon of their cathedral should be thus obedient to a simple layman. The objections to this were pointed out to him, and he was forced to reassume the office he had renounced. The promptitude with which he obeyed, despite his reluctance, was additional proof of his humility. His reinstatement gave much joy to the community, and Brother L'Heureux, the one most concerned, gave humble thanks to God.

This whole incident could not have come from ambition, and those who thought him so motivated were forced to admit that they were wrong and to change their opinion.

From this time on people regarded him highly as a saintly person. Many pious persons hastened to place themselves under his direction. He refused as often as he could, and only after being repeatedly asked did he agree to direct a few, after testing them to see their dispositions.

### **M. Le Tellier, archbishop of Reims, wants to limit him to his diocese.**

M. Le Tellier, archbishop of Reims, who kept informed of all De La Salle's activities and who knew of the good he did in the city, learned that he planned to move to Paris. Because the archbishop appreciated the value of what he would lose, he thought of how he might keep De La Salle for his own diocese. He offered to open and support the schools, provided no new ones would be established elsewhere. De La Salle replied that his ordination promise of obedience to the bishop was more than sufficient motive to make him perfectly submissive, but he begged him to consider that more than five years ago he had promised the pastor of Saint Sulpice in Paris to send two

Brothers to open a school there and that he did not want to go back on his word. The prelate seemed to approve of his reasons and spoke no further of the matter.

### **He establishes a novitiate<sup>117</sup> in Reims.**

When he felt himself free, he thought seriously of accommodating the pastor of Saint Sulpice. The trip to Paris appealed to him as a way of extending the good work of the free schools, but the chief reason for leaving his own area of the country was to have a fuller liberty of action in exercising his zeal. Before departing from his community, he took time to find good candidates for it and to prepare them for his absence. A number of subjects presented themselves who seemed suited for the work, but at first glance they seemed too young. After some thought he accepted them and brought them together in a house adjoining that of the community, where he placed them under the direction of one of the oldest and most experienced Brothers. There was a door between these houses facilitating communication between them and allowing the young men to come over for meals. De La Salle watched over them, saw them frequently, and encouraged them to follow exactly the exercises he had set down for them. These are practically the same as are still in force in the novitiates of the Institute.

### **Seminary for country schoolteachers.**

The new arrangement gave birth to another idea. Most of the pastors of country parishes were continually asking De La Salle to send a Brother to instruct the children of their parishes. But De La Salle had always answered that he could not oblige them, because he had made it a rule never to send fewer than two Brothers together, and good order required that he not depart from this rule. The pastors found a compromise. They would choose teachers themselves for their parishes and send them to De La Salle for training. He could not refuse that service. He accepted up to twenty-five, who were set apart in the house, and he arranged suitable instruction for them. He provided a capable Brother who taught them plain chant, writing, arithmetic, and the method to be used in teaching the children who later would be placed under their charge. Thus De La Salle, without having foreseen it, found himself directing three communities, all tending

separately to the same goal. He was as devoted as possible to all three.

The school for teachers produced much good in the country districts but could not be continued. Because De La Salle valued its usefulness so highly, he tried several times to reestablish it while living in Paris, but he was always unsuccessful, for reasons we will speak of later.<sup>118</sup>

### **Brothers are requested for the schools of Saint Sulpice in Paris.**

After doing all he could to establish the Brothers firmly in Reims, De La Salle finally decided to move to Paris. Just before leaving, he received a letter from his brother, then a seminarian at Saint Sulpice, who reminded him of the promise he had made to the pastor of the parish to send some Brothers for his schools.<sup>119</sup> He mentioned that the ecclesiastic in charge was overburdened with work because of the great number of students, which was increasing every day. De La Salle replied that the rule among the Brothers was that they never be sent out alone. Because only one was asked for, it was quite impossible to comply with the pastor's request. M. Compagnon,<sup>120</sup> the priest in question who was so overworked, did not like the delay and was impatient to receive the help he had been promised. Without hesitation he came to Reims to seek what he wanted. His trip was not as successful as he had hoped, for when he arrived, De La Salle was away. The Brothers felt that they could not arrange these matters without him, and M. Compagnon did not have time to await De La Salle's return.

### **Reasons for the delay.**

When De La Salle learned of M. Compagnon's visit, he began to hope that God was about to bless his efforts. He wrote to M. Compagnon, expressing regret that he was not at Reims when he had come to visit him and saying that despite this unfortunate circumstance, he would be pleased if the pastor of Saint Sulpice would agree to his sending two Brothers to help him in his school. Further, he said that he would bring them to Paris himself if his proposal was acceptable. M. Compagnon replied at once that he should leave immediately and that he and his two Brothers would be well received.

During these negotiations, which lasted nearly two months, De La Salle had received no assurance on the part of the pastor and was afraid to commit himself too quickly. He did not want to leave without a positive order signed by him, because he already thought of him as his superior in this foundation. M. de La Barmondière, being informed of the reasons for De La Salle's hesitation, was edified by his modesty and wrote to him at once, saying how anxious he was for him to come to Paris.

### **He leaves for Paris.**

Assured by this answer, De La Salle arrived in Paris near the end of February in the year 1688. He and the two Brothers were housed with M. Compagnon, the director of the parish school, in a building<sup>121</sup> in which the pastor had set up a type of linen manufacturing business to provide jobs for the poor students.

### **He assigns Brothers to the Saint Sulpice schools.**

After several days of rest, the two Brothers began to work with the teacher in the school. The students were divided into three classes so that they could more easily be given lessons suitable to their age and advancement.<sup>122</sup> The number of children admitted to the school increased so rapidly that soon the Brothers had more students than they could handle. The stronger of the two Brothers fell sick and was no longer able to continue. De La Salle was obliged to take over the class in his place. However well intentioned M. Compagnon was, he had not been able to establish order and discipline in the school. The Brothers customarily followed a uniform method in a sequence of exercises one after another; now they did not know what to expect. The poor boys of the school were under no discipline. The hours for class were not set. The students came when they wanted, creating such confusion and disorder that they left the teachers not a moment of peace.

De La Salle was painfully aware of the situation. Both his patience and his virtue were put to a severe test. But in the beginning he encouraged the Brothers to be patient and not to lose heart because of these initial difficulties. He told them that these would gradually disappear, and he urged them not to become discouraged. He realized what must be done to remedy the situation, but his consideration for the feelings of M. Compagnon prevented him from taking any step that



would embarrass him. Besides, the regard he had for his piety made him hope that if the insufficiencies of his method were pointed out to him with prudence and discretion, he would correct them himself. By this means De La Salle hoped that things might be improved without it appearing that he himself had something to do with the change.

### **They find disorder.**

De La Salle limited himself to going to the schools, where he would walk up and down the rows of students, instructing them in the principles of Christian life, speaking kindly, and inspiring docility, attention, and modesty in them by his affability. His corrections began to produce results in those young hearts, and soon a remarkable change took place in their conduct and their manners. M. Compagnon was the first to notice it, and realizing how important it was to have the children follow uniform practices, he himself tried to make the children do this. But either because things were already too disorganized or because he himself was not capable of handling the situation, he asked De La Salle to take over the direction of both the house and the school. De La Salle declined in a modest and Christian manner. He did not wish the Brothers to be concerned with anything except the school work to which they were committed.

### **The number of Brothers is increased to aid the first ones.**

This situation remained until the following month of April, when the pastor, accompanied by one of the priests named Matois, made his visit to the school. He inspected everything carefully, asked about the progress the pupils were making, and examined them on the catechism. He seemed pleased by their answers, but he was quite surprised at the disorder which reigned in the school, because of the large number of students. He asked De La Salle the reasons for the turmoil, but out of consideration for M. Compagnon he answered this point only with the greatest reserve. The pastor understood this discretion but nevertheless asked De La Salle, because of his prudence and experience, to take over the running of the school. When it was pointed out to the pastor that two Brothers were not sufficient for the work to be done, he agreed that as many others as necessary should be added. The pastor further agreed to provide 250 livres for the upkeep of each Brother.

### **The weaving shop disturbs the schools.**

De La Salle was quite pleased at the cooperation of the pastor and was submissive to his orders, but he accepted the direction of the school with some reservations. He foresaw the trouble and inconvenience which would continue as long as the weaving shop existed. Because the shop was the pride of the pastor, it would not have been prudent to suggest doing away with it at once, especially because it was so close to his heart. It would have to be left alone for the time being until more favorable circumstances arose.

### **De La Salle establishes a schedule for school exercises.**

Once in charge of the house and the school, De La Salle thought seriously of how best to conduct both of these enterprises. After mature reflection in the presence of God, he set up for the Brothers the same series of exercises as had been practiced in the community of Reims, where they had first lived the life as Brothers. He established definite hours for school and set the times for teaching catechism and for conducting the children to daily Mass. In short, he completely reorganized the school, and this produced the good results for which he had hoped.

### **Complaints about the effect on the weaving shop.**

The supervisor of the shop, who had a personal interest in the operation, did not appreciate the changes that had been made. They entailed a considerable loss for him. The pupils were now spending more time learning to read and write; therefore, they had less time to devote to working in the shop. He complained openly of the losses he was suffering and threatened to resign. The pastor was informed of this but did nothing about it. Because he thought more of the instruction of the children of his parish than he did of the temporal gain of the individual, he would not listen to the complaints, and he gave his consent for the supervisor to leave if he thought it best to do so. However, the supervisor had taken the trouble to interest a number of influential people in the parish in his cause. These persons were not favorably disposed to the changes which had come about in the school and sought to prejudice the pastor against the recent reforms.

### **The pastor of Saint Sulpice wants to dismiss the Brothers.**

When their efforts proved fruitless, they turned to calumny. They told the pastor that the pupils were more disorderly than ever, now that they were giving less time to manual work, that they were becoming lazy, and that the present training would not prepare them at all for their future work. They further charged that they now recognized that it was a mistake to have invited the newly arrived Brothers to direct the school.

They were most careful to give these accusations an air of great credibility, and the pastor, not sufficiently on his guard, allowed himself to be convinced. He gradually became prejudiced against De La Salle and began to speak harshly to him. He finally decided to thank De La Salle for coming to the parish but to ask him to return the schools to their former director. De La Salle was well informed of the secret moves being made against him but took no steps to ward off the blows he saw coming. He said that if it was God's work, God would protect it against human malice, but that if it was not God's work, it was only proper that it should fail, and no one should complain. Following his example, the Brothers said nothing about these unexpected developments and continued to teach school as usual.

### **De La Salle offers to return to Reims. The pastor opposes this.**

However, because De La Salle saw no way to settle this matter, he decided to return to Reims with his Brothers and to give up the schools of Saint Sulpice. He, therefore, went to bid farewell to the pastor, who was surprised to learn that things had developed to this extent and that he was taking this action. He spoke of his friendship for De La Salle and stated that he would not allow him to leave so suddenly the work he had begun in the parish. De La Salle did not expect such an abrupt change of attitude. Profiting by this favorable opportunity, he spoke of his reasons for leaving. The pastor was pleased with the moderation with which he spoke of what had been going on and of the lack of foundation for the charges brought against him. The pastor resolved more than ever to keep De La Salle and promised to attend immediately to whatever might be causing him pain.

### **Abbé de Janson examines the case and reports favorably on De La Salle.**

The pastor requested his friend M. Forbin de Janson,<sup>123</sup> later to become archbishop of Arles, to make a personal investigation of the whole matter and to submit a report to him. The abbé lost no time. He looked into every detail and listened to the persons involved in the dispute. He examined the ways De La Salle and the Brothers conducted themselves, how they behaved toward the pupils, and how they educated them. Finally, he spoke to De La Salle himself and asked him what complaints he might have. He replied humbly that his only request was to be told of the faults he had committed in the management of the house, so that he might correct them. Such a Christian reply indicated to Abbé de Janson which way to render his decision, and he had no trouble in seeing the source of the intrigue in the whole affair.

He immediately reported to the pastor on what he had seen and heard. He gave his opinion of those on both sides of the controversy, mentioning how greatly he was edified by De La Salle and his Brothers. The pastor overcame his prejudices, offered anew his friendship to De La Salle, and resolved to remove from his presence anyone causing him trouble. However, he did not have time to do this, for he resigned as pastor soon after. M. Baudrand was appointed pastor in his place (1688).<sup>124</sup> He informed the new pastor of all the trouble the parish schools had recently been subjected to, and he disposed him favorably toward De La Salle.

### **M. Baudrand, new pastor of Saint Sulpice, is favorably inclined toward De La Salle.**

M. Baudrand was already well disposed toward De La Salle. In fact, he knew him better than anyone else did, for he had been his confessor during this time, and De La Salle had always consulted him and acted only with his advice. The first thing the new pastor did was to remove M. Compagnon from the house, where he was a potential source of new difficulties. Soon peace was restored. God thus brings calm after the storm, but frequently this is only to prepare his servants for still greater trials.

## **Second school in Paris, Rue du Bac.**

De La Salle now had the peace he so much desired, and he devoted himself to directing his community under the watchful eye of the pastor. Soon good order reigned in the school, but because it was not large enough to receive all the students who applied, the pastor proposed opening a second one in the Rue du Bac, near the Port Royal, for the benefit of families living in that neighborhood. De La Salle had already proposed this very thing to M. de La Barmondière, M. Baudrand's predecessor, but nothing had been done about it up to the time of his resignation. M. Baudrand took up the matter again with the lay leaders of the parish, and when all was arranged, the new school opened in the beginning of the year 1690. Soon filled, it was organized like the one at Saint Sulpice.

## **The schoolmasters in Paris oppose this establishment.**

This latest success aroused the jealousy of the Paris schoolmasters, who were aware that the schools of the Brothers were growing stronger every day at the expense of their own schools, which were nearly deserted. They held a meeting to find some way to halt the progress of these new ventures which were causing their ruin. First they took action, seizing the furniture of the free schools. Next they summoned De La Salle and the Brothers before the *Écolâtre* of the church of Paris as being violators of their ancient privileges.<sup>125</sup> The *Écolâtre*, upon the request of the schoolmasters, rendered sentence against the Brothers by suppressing their free schools.

## **De La Salle has to defend himself.**

This measure seemed to be the ruin of everything that De La Salle had done up to then to establish himself in Paris. He would have preferred to give up all rather than plead his case, for he had an aversion for lawsuits. He would have ceded everything if his director<sup>126</sup> had not made it a case of conscience to defend himself and his cause, which the director regarded as the cause of God, because it concerned principally the poor of his own parish. De La Salle resolved, therefore, to defend himself against the schoolmasters.

The first step in his defense was prayer. He went with the Brothers, on foot and fasting, to Notre-Dame-des-Vertus, a famous place of pilgrimage eleven kilometers from Paris.<sup>127</sup> Here he celebrated Mass and distributed Communion to the Brothers. Later he gave them a piece of dry bread to fortify them a bit for their return, which they completed still fasting and in silence. After thus manifesting his devotion to the Most Blessed Virgin, he felt his confidence in her protection renewed, and he looked for a favorable outcome of the lawsuit. He had to write out his defense, which he did with so much clarity and persuasion that in a short time the affair was settled successfully in his favor.

It must be mentioned that popular sentiment was on his side. In fact, it was this too which allowed the case to be settled so quickly and gained him the approval of all those who had used their influence for him. From this time on, he had no more trouble with the schoolmasters of Paris until the end of the year 1699, when they again attacked him but with as little success as their first attempts, as shall be related in due course.

### **He establishes a novitiate in Paris.**

The troubles brought about by the schoolmasters of Paris against De La Salle's schools made him consider what he might do to protect himself from such attacks in the future. He first sought the backing of François de Harlay, archbishop of Paris, from whom he easily obtained the required permission to carry out his plans for strengthening the schools.<sup>128</sup>

With the permission in hand, he thought only of preventing the self-destruction of the schools through lack of Brothers. He decided to establish a novitiate in Paris,<sup>129</sup> where he could train a number of young men to supply the need for Brothers. The house he possessed in the parish of Saint Sulpice was not spacious enough for his purpose. A more suitable one was needed, but as his resources were meager, he had to exercise the greatest care even to support his community (1691). The entire year went by without his being able to bring any of his projects to fruition. But in the year following, circumstances forced his hand.

## **He moves the novitiate to Vaugirard.**

De La Salle had noticed that even some of the healthiest of the Brothers had fallen sick, and in fact several had already died, so that he was concerned for them all. Their poor food and hard work, coupled with an atmosphere of constant tension, certainly contributed greatly to this state of affairs. Their quarters were cramped, and they were without the benefit of fresh air, for they had no garden attached to their house. After a long, hard search, De La Salle found a place in Vaugirard,<sup>130</sup> near Paris, which was worth all the trouble he had put into finding a suitable location.

He rented a house where he brought many of the Brothers who had become sick. During vacation time he had the Brothers of the Reims community come also. This seemed necessary, because he had been informed that their fervor was beginning to diminish now that they were no longer under his immediate care. The Brother superior who had been left in charge of the Reims community apparently did not have all the discernment necessary for his position. A number of Brothers became dissatisfied with their vocation through a lack of confidence in their superior. Of the sixteen in the Reims community when De La Salle left for Paris, only half remained, and even some of these seemed to be weakening.

When all were brought together in the house of Vaugirard with the Brothers from Paris, he endeavored to restore their spirits and to strengthen them against further relapses. He had them make a retreat and spoke often to them, both in common and to each one personally. The repeated talks he gave on the duties of their state gradually rekindled in their hearts the fire of virtue which had grown dim. In his private conversations with each one, he gave advice suited to individual needs. When he believed a Brother to be sufficiently formed to bear up under the pressures, he sent him back to his duties with the obligation of writing to him monthly about his situation and how he was succeeding in the instruction of the youth confided to his care. He never failed to reply to these letters; by this means he sustained and assisted the Brothers in the trials and difficulties of their profession.<sup>131</sup>

## **He introduces the annual retreat.**

The retreat he had them make at Vaugirard this year was a prudent measure on his part which protected the Brothers against a general

desertion that would have destroyed all the good he hoped to achieve. He resolved, therefore, to schedule this retreat once a year, at least until such time as the spread of his work throughout the kingdom would make this impractical. For the time being, he held these retreats in the Paris house for those who could come there, and for the others he tried to make up for it by the annual visit he made to the various houses.

### **He receives candidates for the novitiate.**

The example of virtue, piety, and modesty given by the Brothers and the austere life they led caused them to be noticed in Paris. Soon several young men who wanted to imitate them applied for admission. They were received kindly by De La Salle. After a month's probation, he accepted them into the novitiate which he had established at Vaugirard that year. He gave the religious habit to five among them who seemed called to this vocation.<sup>132</sup>

### **He introduces serving Brothers.**

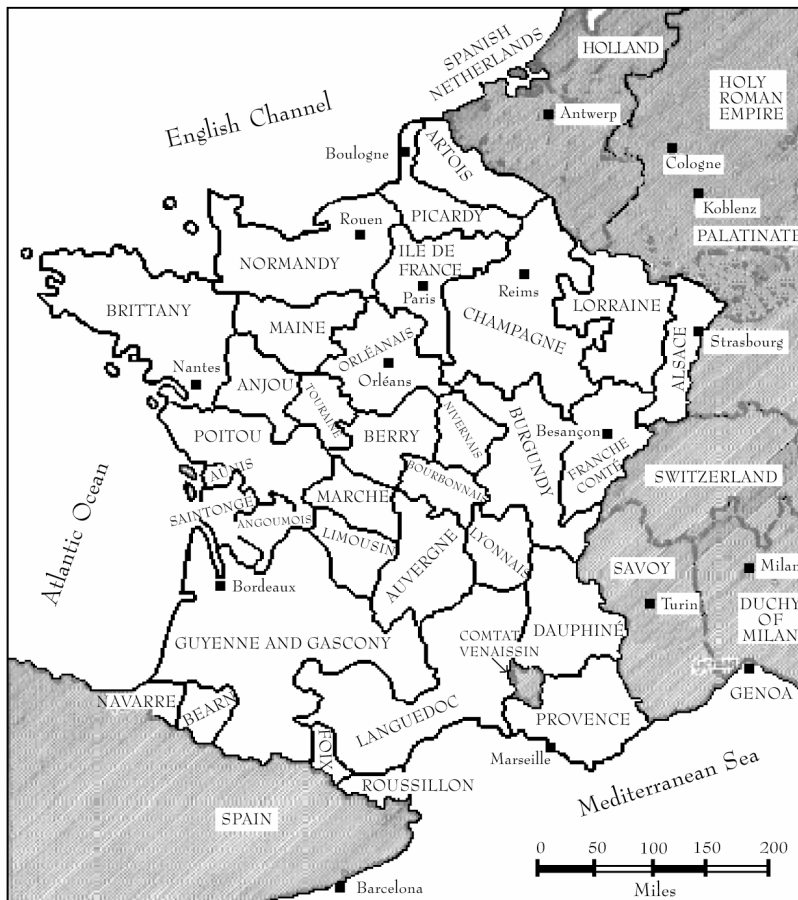
He took advantage of the situation to bring about another change which, because of the lack of Brothers, he had been unable to effect until then. Brothers destined for school work were obliged to look after the meals and other temporal necessities of the house. This responsibility was incompatible with their ordinary duties; it required much of their time and was harmful to their school work. He now put temporal affairs into the hands of the serving Brothers, whose duty it was to take care of these things.<sup>133</sup> Each one found now that he could pay attention to the duties of his state; none were overburdened. By this new arrangement the novitiate grew considerably, for the example of the first novices attracted others who held great promise for the future.

### **He goes to Reims and falls ill.**

The continual strain of looking after his community and the novitiate, together with the hard and penitential life he led, began to affect De La Salle's health. Trusting in his own strength, he did not forgo any of his usual austerities, but the sickness took its toll in a trip he made to



Reims on business connected with his home. Upon his arrival he was so sick that he was obliged to go to bed. He could count on receiving from his family the care he needed in his illness, but because he looked upon himself as a stranger among his own people, he was most restrained in accepting the remedies which they, in their affection for him, offered. Their excessive attention, as he saw it, bothered him; he complained about this and tried to hide from his family, as much as possible, the danger he really was in. He carried this to the point of refusing to allow his grandmother Madame Moët de Brouillet to visit him in his room, for she wished to see for herself how sick he really was.<sup>134</sup> He had her wait in the parlor and went to the trouble of



France and its continental neighbors during Louis XIV's reign (1643–1715).

going there to receive her. She reproached him for his excessive sensitivity in her regard, but speaking with all respect, he pointed out to her that the rules of the house did not allow women into the private rooms.

### **He returns to Paris and falls ill again.**

No sooner did he regain a little strength than he planned to return to Paris. Everything was done to persuade him to remain. The doctor told him that he was not yet fully recovered and that his life itself would be endangered if he attempted to return in his condition. His desire to be rid of the attentions of his family prevailed over the prudence which would have had him stay a while longer. He left for Paris without receiving further care, and as the doctor had predicted, he fell sick again. He was obliged to remain in bed for six weeks. He seemed on the road to recovery, but a urinary problem brought him to death's door. At this moment all hope seemed lost. He felt extremely ill and thought the end was near. He prepared himself for death with great confidence and resignation to the will of God to which he was so attached.

### **He receives the sacraments.**

The consternation and despair of his Brothers could not be adequately described. They tried what they thought would be best to save him. Helvetius,<sup>135</sup> a doctor from Holland then quite renowned in Paris, was called. He proposed a drastic remedy and warned that it could be for better or for worse. The precaution then was taken of having the Viaticum<sup>136</sup> administered before undertaking the treatment. The pastor of Saint Sulpice, aware of the great danger, kept a close watch. He and his clergy arrived together, carrying the Viaticum. De La Salle made a strenuous and painful effort to receive Communion respectfully. He sat upon his bed, had himself clothed in surplice and stole, and thus attired waited reverently for the coming of his Divine Master.

### **He is restored by the remedy given by Doctor Helvetius.**

The pastor gave a most touching exhortation and then asked him to declare his last wishes to his beloved disciples. He could speak only

briefly, for his strength failed him. He simply repeated in two words what he had so often said to them, *union and submission*,<sup>137</sup> and he assured them that if they were faithful in that, God would never abandon them. The pastor then requested, in the name of the Brothers, De La Salle's last benediction as a final token of his affection for them. He seemed to lack the strength to bestow this blessing, so someone took his hand to help him give it. After the ceremony was completed, he took the prescribed remedy, which had the hoped-for salutary effect. Within a short time his problem ceased, he was able to take some nourishment, and he soon regained his strength.<sup>138</sup>

### **He returns to Reims.**

When he was fully recovered, he had to return to Reims to finish the business that had brought him there before but which he had been unable to complete because of his illness. A month before that, he had transferred Brother Henri L'Heureux, in whom he had the greatest confidence, from Reims to Paris to preside over the community there while he was away. This virtuous Brother was a great help to him. De La Salle often made use of him and had given him much responsibility, for his views were in perfect accord with his own. However, he was destined to lose him at a time when he least expected it.

### **Death of Brother Henri L'Heureux.**

Scarcely had he arrived in Reims than letter after letter arrived telling him of the sickness of Brother L'Heureux. Because he had left him in good health, De La Salle felt that there would be no serious complications. With this hope in mind, he deferred his return so as not to lose a favorable opportunity for finishing the business he had begun. He was surprised to receive word that Brother L'Heureux was in critical condition and that the doctors were beginning to give up hope. He hastened to leave for Paris and went on foot as was his custom. He arrived at midnight three days later, exhausted from the trip.<sup>139</sup> His first question was for the sick Brother, but he was told that he had been buried two days before.

De La Salle was so touched by this loss that he could not hold back his tears and had to allow some time to cope with his sorrow. After a while, he blamed himself for this weakness and mentioned to the Brothers assembled around him that through this death God was

making known his will that in the future there should be no priests in the Institute. He had actually chosen Brother L'Heureux as his successor, and for this reason he had taught him Latin, had him study theology with the Canons Regular of the Abbey of Saint Denis at Reims, and had brought him to Paris to be ordained. He was the first to join the Institute of the Christian Schools. De La Salle had seen in him an uncommon virtue, great discernment of mind, affable manners, and a talent for speaking. All of these gifts had earned him the approval and esteem of the Brothers, who long regretted his passing.

The last rites had been performed with as much care as possible, with the pastor of Saint Sulpice himself presiding.<sup>140</sup>

### **Rule forbidding the Brothers to seek the priesthood.**

From this time on, De La Salle thought no more of having any of the Brothers ordained as priests. He even made it a rule that none should aspire to Holy Orders, and he forbade them to have priests among them. Further, he prohibited the study of the Latin language, and he ordered those who already knew it never to use it under any pretext whatsoever. This regulation, which became one of the principal articles of their Rule, has been religiously observed and has contributed greatly in keeping them in the simplicity they have maintained to this day.

### **Attempts are made to cause De La Salle sorrow.**

As time passed, secret enemies of De La Salle continued to plot his downfall. These persons were offended by his disregard for what the world holds dear. He knew who they were.<sup>141</sup> He knew their motives when they spread new calumnies as ill founded as the previous ones. A formal accusation was lodged against him with the pastor of Saint Sulpice, who saw through the charges immediately. He treated them as ridiculous, so that the same embarrassment fell upon the authors of the charges, rather than upon the accused.

The pastor then presented the complaint to De La Salle, who read it as unmoved as though it were not about himself; he offered not a single word in his own justification. He considered himself blessed in being called upon to partake in some manner in the humiliations of Jesus Christ, his Master. The pastor, observing his countenance as he read the accusation, noticed only the joy and contentment characterizing a soul in possession of an interior peace

which did not abandon him for a moment. He must have had well-tried virtue and must have been completely the master of his passions, to keep them from rising when he heard his reputation attacked. There was surely nothing in all of this which could point to self-love.

### **His serenity in adversity.**

One of the most notable characteristics of De La Salle's virtue was serenity in adversity. The testimony of a good conscience and the approval of his ecclesiastical superiors were a sufficient reward. He expected nothing from the world, nor did all the difficulties he encountered make him waver. He did not exhibit those extremes of conduct which would have made him kind and agreeable one day, and harsh and unobliging another. Always of even temperament, both in adversity and in prosperity, he regarded all the events of his life as being the effects of Divine Providence guiding his actions. Always ready to forgive, he forgot injustices done him, and he worked to bring about good whenever the occasion presented itself, even to those who had given him the most trouble.

### **His gift as spiritual adviser.**

He felt amply compensated for these small persecutions he had to put up with, for at this time God greatly blessed his Institute. Candidates came from all over, and the number of Brothers increased every day. The time he devoted to instructing these new subjects did not prevent him from extending his charity to several great sinners referred to him from different parts of the kingdom in the hope that he could return them to the right path. He had a special compassion for them. He listened to them patiently and led them back to their duties with great kindness. He gave them all the time necessary to recognize the seriousness of their condition, and then he reconciled them with God and sent them forth in peace.

### **Spectacular conversion.**

These conversions were startling, and the gratitude of those who had received this grace through the ministry of De La Salle soon led others to seek his help. There was one in particular who inspired his

compassion. We have the story from the lips of the person involved, a spirited young man, gifted for learning, who had already made some progress in his studies. He made a trip of sixty leagues<sup>142</sup> to throw himself at the feet of De La Salle and to profit by his counsel in abandoning his evil life and returning to the way of salvation. He was sensual, impure, and opposed to everything pertaining to piety and religion, and he would not hear of God or pious books. In brief, he was thoroughly corrupt, given to every vice since the days of his licentious youth. He was a person of rank and could hope through right of birth to receive an ecclesiastical appointment, which because of his ambition he rashly desired. This did not lead him to abandon his dissolute living, which he carried out to such an extent that he was affected by a trembling of his whole body. This indisposition prevented him from being ordained when the time came. Although this affliction should have opened his eyes concerning his scandalous conduct, it seemed to have no effect on his conscience. He even planned to pass for a priest, and for this purpose he had false papers made out for himself. To fool the public better, he several times prepared to celebrate Mass and had actually vested to do so. God, who had destined him for His mercy, did not allow him to go so far as to accomplish this crime, for the violent trembling of his body became so great each time that he could not carry out his imposture. Besides all this, he was guilty of sinning by illegally selling a benefice.<sup>143</sup>

### **Continuation of the same subject.**

Despite all that he did to hide the evil state of his conscience from himself, he could not silence the voice of reproach within him. From time to time he seemed to realize the proper path he should follow, but soon he would be overtaken by the desire for pleasure and again fall into further excesses. Finally, he became dissatisfied with this kind of life and was stricken by such bitter remorse that he knew no rest. His sins were constantly before his mind; what had been his greatest joy now became burdensome to him. The pleasures of the world no longer attracted him, and he became unbearable even to himself. He sought peace everywhere but could not find it. His restlessness, worry, and uncertainty were so great that he fell into a state of melancholy which seemed only the first step to complete despair.

### Continuation of the same subject.

In this sad condition he told a friend everything that he was suffering. He was advised to make a general confession to a priest of the city who was suggested to him. The young man replied that he did not believe there was in the whole world a priest patient enough to listen to the entire story of a life as disordered as his. To spare himself embarrassment, he preferred to seek in some distant place an unknown confessor with whom he had had no previous dealings. His friend, seeing him so shaken and not wishing to lose the favorable opportunity to save him from his evil life, took some time for reflection. He had heard De La Salle spoken of as an enlightened and experienced spiritual director. He, therefore, proposed his name to the young man as the one destined by God to aid in his conversion.

The desire the young man had of breaking the chains that bound him made him hesitate no longer. He made up his mind at once and set out for Paris. He sought out De La Salle and spoke to him of the sad state of his soul. De La Salle received him with his customary courtesy and assured him that despite the enormity of his sins, he should not despair of his salvation and that he would help him correct his ways. De La Salle took him into his own house, where he gave every proof of his tender and compassionate heart.

The exemplary life being led in this house, joined with the ardent desire of the penitent to see himself reconciled to God, led him to begin his confession. As he began to speak, De La Salle extended his arms to him so graciously and affably that he felt deeply moved. He then confessed the sins of his past life, except for several he had not the courage to declare because of the shame attached to them. But after a fourth attempt, he made an effort to surmount his great repugnance and confessed his sins without reserve.

During all this time De La Salle, knowing the price of the salvation of a soul, prayed fervently for his penitent. He employed the means sanctioned by the Church for the reconciliation of habitual sinners and made him turn over various papers referring to his past sins, especially the false certificate of priesthood. He finally reconciled to God this soul who had spent so many years under the devil's yoke.

It often happens that those who have been converted from sin experience great trials, and especially scruples, after their conversion. The passions are still strong, the imagination is active, former thoughts again return. The devil makes a final effort to conquer them in their weakness and to make them relapse. God permits these things to try these souls and to purify them further. During this time of trial, they

have particular need of a charitable and helping hand to guide them with prudence and discretion. The penitent of whom we speak realized more than most others how much it costs human nature to return to the grace of God. He was sorely tried and tempted almost beyond his strength. Thoughts of despair returned to assail him because of the enormity of his past sins. He felt that hell was about to open at his feet to swallow him. De La Salle did not abandon him but gently recalled the mercy of God, who had given him the grace of a sincere repentance. He helped the penitent in this way until his death, which occurred soon after his conversion. He accepted his death with Christian resignation and edifying sentiments, full of gratitude for his spiritual director, to whom he attributed his hope of salvation. Despite his own reserve in speaking of these things, De La Salle could not prevent the news of this extraordinary conversion from reaching the ears of those who had been the counsellors of the young man, and they then sent other penitents who came to De La Salle with confidence. Spiritual directors and pastors of Paris and the provinces often consulted him on thorny questions of conscience and were glad to follow his advice.<sup>144</sup>

### **His attention to directing the novitiate.**

His willingness to help all those who came to him (a most frequent occurrence, for he refused no one) did not hinder him from giving his principal attention to directing his novitiate at Vaugirard. He realized the importance to his Institute of having subjects devoted to regular observance of the Rule. He did not pass this responsibility on to any other but examined the novices himself, instructed them in the obligation of the state they wished to embrace, and let no day pass without speaking to them. He presided at their exercises as often as his other duties would allow and worked side by side with them in the lowliest jobs in the house, encouraging them by his example to embrace with joy the humble and laborious life they had chosen. He taught them to endure humiliations without complaint, to suffer the insults to which they were subjected, and to maintain their calm and tranquility amid the difficult situations their poor and simple life might give rise to in the future. He followed this line of action for several years, observing all things with great exactitude. He took on the responsibility of waking up the Brothers every day.<sup>145</sup> If he failed to do this, he would impose a public penance upon himself, which consisted in begging pardon of the community and eating bread and water on his knees in the middle of the refectory.



### **The Brothers edify.**

Such examples of virtue joined to a regular observance of the Rule animated the Brothers with a love of their holy state. They vied with one another in the practice of mortification of the senses and seemed to find new means daily of humbling themselves. De La Salle profited by their good dispositions to form them in solid piety and to strengthen them in it early on. Everything contributed to this end: their religious habit, their food, and their exterior deportment. It was impossible not to admire the modesty with which they walked through the streets, their eyes lowered, in strict silence, never looking about out of mere curiosity.

### **The Count du Charmel is edified.**

After the novices were received into the Institute and De La Salle judged them to be sufficiently instructed in the duties of their profession, he sent them to the various places in need of Brothers. Once when three Brothers were heading for Reims, they passed through Charmel, a village in the diocese of Soissons, and called upon the pastor of the village for hospitality. He was agreeably surprised at the modesty of these young men and was edified by their regular observance of this rule. He spoke of it to the lord of the village, the Count du Charmel,<sup>146</sup> who formerly had been attached to the court but had returned to the lands he owned to pass the rest of his days in penance and retreat. The picture the pastor painted of his guests and especially of their piety made the count anxious to meet them and to speak to them. He questioned them in detail on their manner of life and on all that concerned their Institute. He was so pleased with them that he insisted they stay at his home. He acquired great respect for De La Salle and began a religious friendship with him that lasted until the Count's death.

### **1693. M. de Noailles, archbishop of Paris, authorizes a domestic chapel for De La Salle.**

About this same time, the archbishopric of Paris became vacant through the death of M. de Harlay.<sup>147</sup> King Louis XIV chose as his replacement M. Louis-Antoine de Noailles, bishop of Châlons in Champagne.<sup>148</sup> It was well known with what zeal he had maintained order and ecclesiastical discipline in that diocese. After taking possession of

the see, he made his episcopal visitation to correct abuses in the diocese. One such abuse was the custom of having a private chapel; this was so widespread that even the ordinary bourgeois wished to have private chapels on their property. All such privileges were taken away by an order from the new archbishop. This worked a hardship on De La Salle, who was in the habit of celebrating his Mass in one of these chapels near the Vaugirard novitiate. This was convenient both for him and for his novices, because the parish church was at too great a distance to travel every day. He, therefore, requested the archbishop to permit a chapel in the house, where he could celebrate daily Mass. The archbishop of Paris listened kindly to his reasons for making this request. He knew De La Salle and supported him in his work. On this occasion he gave him a sign of his regard by granting the permission to him which he had refused to others who had asked the same favor.<sup>149</sup> He went further than De La Salle had hoped by confirming in writing the oral agreement given by his predecessor to establish a new community in the city of Paris.<sup>150</sup>

With the permission in hand, De La Salle at once set up an altar in the most suitable location in the house. He himself helped in this, to hasten things along, and in a few days the chapel was furnished and ready for use. It was blessed by the vicar-general of the diocese, and from this time on it served as the chapel of the Brothers of the Institute.

### **His problem with the pastor of Vaugirard because of this.**

The pastor of Vaugirard<sup>151</sup> was aware of the steps taken by De La Salle, and he was not pleased when he discovered that the permission had been given. He was quite upset and complained of what had been done. He said that he could not understand how a man noted for being so attached to the laws of the Church could so easily disregard rules. He blamed De La Salle for depriving his Brothers of the merit of attending the parish Mass. He claimed that the example of the Brothers would influence others to think themselves dispensed from attendance and that De La Salle would have to answer to God for all the trouble he was causing. De La Salle acknowledged his point of view but in turn asked the pastor to consider with an open mind the reasons the exemption was thought necessary. "You are aware," De La Salle said, "that the novitiate is made up of young men who have only recently left the world, who have not yet lost its spirit. It would be dangerous for them to reenter the world so soon. Your

parish is so near Paris that there are crowds of people on the streets. There are some people who will make fun of the Brothers, abuse them, and make them lose heart in their vocation. These are the reasons why I asked permission to have this private chapel which seems to you to be against the laws of the Church.” He added that he was well aware of the respect he and his Brothers owed to him as their pastor, that he recognized this and would continue to do so, and that to give public testimony of this he would occasionally celebrate Mass in the parish church and bring all the Brothers of his community. The pastor accepted these reasons and asked him to fulfill his promise the first day of the following month. De La Salle did not fail to do so; he sang the parochial High Mass with the Brothers in attendance, who received Communion from his hand.

For a time the pastor seemed content with the signs of submission and dependence which De La Salle showed him. But after a while he again felt strongly about the division within his parish. He appreciated the reasons that made it necessary but felt that it offered a bad example to the other parishioners. Every time he had occasion to see De La Salle, he would accuse him of having abandoned the parish. De La Salle in turn would reply that he could not do otherwise, for reasons they both had spoken of many times before. It was useless to object, for the matter was closed and nothing could be done about it. The pastor replied somewhat sharply and walked away, displeased at De La Salle’s determination. Finally he moderated his attitude, and De La Salle’s patience and courtesy were rewarded by gaining the pastor’s friendship, so that there was a mutual understanding between them.

### **1693. Famine during which the Brothers lack essentials.**

In this same year there occurred a famine which reduced De La Salle’s community to extreme poverty.<sup>152</sup> Because he had founded it upon Providence alone, he had no material resources to draw upon. As the need of the community increased, their ordinary resources diminished. Only his great confidence in God sustained him in these trying times. His past experience of the divine assistance in similar situations was a great guarantee of what he could expect. No matter how sorely he was tried by the severity of the famine, he never allowed himself to become apprehensive. On one occasion, far from being discouraged when the community lacked even bread and had little hope of getting any, De La Salle urged his Brothers to be patient. In

this sentiment they went to the refectory for a meal of a wretched, thin soup made from herbs which served as their nourishment for the whole day. They thanked God as though they had eaten a full meal.

During this time the Brother in charge of provisions looked everywhere for enough food to keep the community alive. Often he could obtain only a small bit of black bread. De La Salle had this divided among the Brothers without taking any himself, but they refused to touch it unless he took some also.

When the Brothers of the community of Paris heard of the desperate straits to which the Brothers of Vaugirard were reduced, they sent help at once, but the Brother bringing the food was waylaid by robbers who took everything. He finally arrived at Vaugirard, chagrined because of what had happened to him. De La Salle, seeing him so troubled, said to him, "God be blessed. We will simply have to look for more." This was done, but meanwhile the Brothers were obliged to wait until evening to have some little nourishment.

### **They complain that De La Salle accepts too many candidates.**

The severity of the widespread famine did not deter him from accepting all the new applicants who presented themselves during those times. His unshaken hope was that God, who had sent them, would provide for their needs. The Brothers were astonished at this attitude, thinking that De La Salle carried his confidence much too far. They objected that they were not able to understand how he could receive so many new subjects at a time when evidently there was not enough even for them to live on. It would be better, they said, to choose only the most promising ones and to send home the others not as well suited to join the congregation.

De La Salle was indignant at their lack of faith and replied with some emotion, "If you fear the large number will overburden you, put me out." Then speaking in his usual mild and affable way, he pointed out how wrong they were to distrust Divine Providence, which had never failed them. They should place all their confidence in God, for it was to Him alone they should look for the help they needed.

As it happened, they had not long to wait, for the pastor of Saint Sulpice learned of the extremity to which they were reduced and gave them enough food and money so that they did not have to seek help elsewhere. By being frugal, they were able to survive the year in anticipation of a better one to come.

### **He is asked to give retreats.**

The reputation of this new Institute spread as the number of Brothers increased. Several ecclesiastics of note came to make a retreat under De La Salle. He received all who came without regard to merit or rank. Everyone was treated the same; all ate at the same table, and all were served the same food as that of the community.

### **He puts his Rule in writing.**

When De La Salle was satisfied that his novitiate was well organized according to the rules he had laid down, he decided to put these in writing as a means of making them permanent among the Brothers of his Society. He prepared himself for this by long prayer, frequent fasts, and severe penances. Filled with the spirit of God which he felt directing him, he composed a draft of the Rule.<sup>153</sup> He then brought together the Brothers of the two communities of Paris and Vaugirard, and he asked them to consider these rules and to suggest what should be deleted or added. Several believed it would be helpful to moderate the regulations in several places where they seemed too severe. He replied that he would not make the changes himself but would submit the Rule to three of the most experienced superiors in Paris whom he would select and that he would approve all their suggested changes. He was resolved to submit completely to their judgment, and it was with their authorization that the rules were put into the order that we see today in the Institute of the Christian Schools.

### **He has the Rule approved by all the Brothers.**

Now that the Brothers of the two communities of Paris and Vaugirard came under these rules with the modifications that had been made, De La Salle wished to obtain the approval of all the Brothers, including those in the provinces. Despite his firmness in maintaining the Rule once it was well fixed, he did not want to adopt any regulation that did not meet with unanimous consent, so that all future objections would be avoided and all pretext for relaxation would be removed. He himself was the most exact in observing the Rule, and under no circumstance would he dispense himself from its provisions.

Around the feast of Pentecost, as was the custom, he had all the Brothers assemble in Paris for their annual retreat and renewal of their

vow of obedience.<sup>154</sup> For some time they had been asking him to allow them to make this vow for life, but up to this moment he had deferred his permission in order to give them more time to reflect on such an irrevocable commitment.

### **He wants to resign as Superior. 1694.**

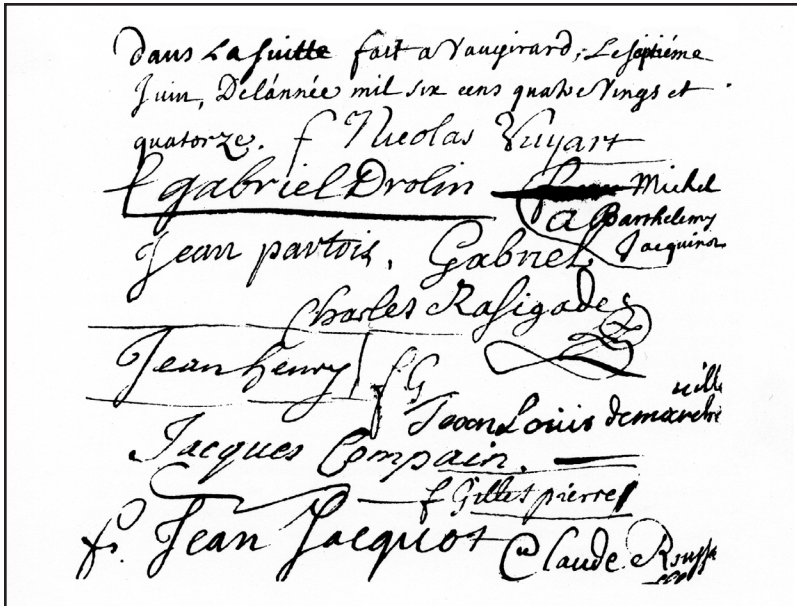
At the close of the retreat, he presented them a copy of the Rule, which was read and approved unanimously. He then spoke to them of the importance of what they were about to do. He mentioned that a vow for all of one's life was a most agreeable sacrifice to God when it was based on a firm resolution. He reminded them that they were deciding for themselves in complete liberty and that there was reason to be pleased that they were not acting from a merely human motive. He added that because the number of Brothers was growing rapidly, it was his desire to give up the office of Superior completely; it was not fitting for him to remain at their head, for he was merely a poor priest in whom they could not rightly place any confidence. This trust should be reserved for God alone, who was their Father and protector. He spoke further on this point to convince them of the necessity of acceding to his wishes, seeing that the good of the Institute demanded they choose one of their own whom they would judge most capable of taking over this charge.

### **They vote for him.**

The Brothers were astonished by this request, which they had in no way anticipated. They asked for time to consider the matter, but De La Salle feared the Brothers might use the delay of a few days to contact the ecclesiastical superiors, who undoubtedly would forbid the proposed election. He proceeded at once, therefore, to the balloting. They first passed a half hour in mental prayer, and this was followed by an exhortation from De La Salle to vote in a spirit of disinterestedness and with entire liberty. They should forget all prejudice and vote only with the thought of pleasing God and for the good of their Society. This was followed by prayers invoking the light of the Holy Spirit, after which the voting took place by secret ballot. The results were unanimous in choosing De La Salle. He was disappointed at this outcome and feared there might have been some complicity. He tore up the ballots and asked them to vote again.

## On the second balloting they again vote for him.

After prayer, the second voting produced the same result as the first. His disappointment was evident on his face, which became flushed several times, and he did not seem to know how to proceed. The Brothers, seeing this, told him that he should accept the result as coming from God, for their vote had shown they were determined to keep him as Superior for the general good of the Institute. They said that once their Society was sufficiently stable, he would be free to resign the superiority in favor of one of the Brothers. This last thought relieved him. He signed the act of election, which confirmed him in office, but at the same time took care to add in writing that in the future only one of the Brothers of the Institute could be chosen as Superior General.<sup>155</sup> To conclude these ceremonies, he then celebrated Mass, and the Brothers received Communion, after which they pronounced their vows of perpetual obedience.<sup>156</sup>



Dans Lafayette fait a Vaujirard, Le septieme  
Juin, Del'année mil six cens quatre Vings et  
quatorze. f Nicolas Vuyart  
Gabriel Drolin ~~Jean Michel~~  
Jean Partois, Gabriel Jacquier  
Charles Rafigades  
Jean Henry f. G. Louis Demarche  
Jacques Compain, —  
f. Gilbert pierref  
f. Jean Jacquot Claude Rousset

Signatures of the principal Brothers on the document confirming the election of John Baptist de La Salle as Superior of the Society, June 7, 1694. Photo E. Rousset (ER, plate 44, slide 125).

### **He regulates conversation during recreation.**

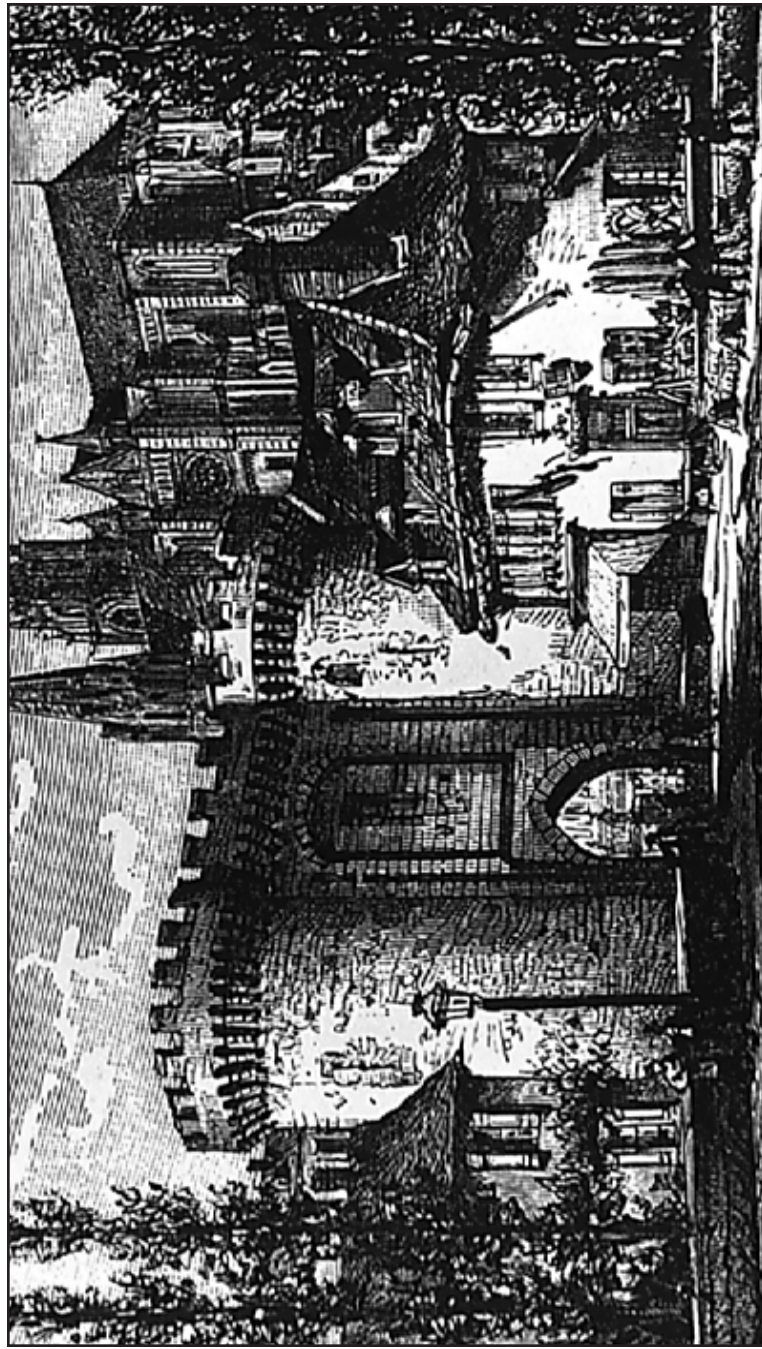
While he was thus working on the Rule governing his Institute, his principal concern was the development of the interior life of the Brothers, which was the foundation and support of everything. He neglected nothing that might contribute to developing a tender and enlightened piety among the Brothers, as well as a profound humility and mutual charity. He had noticed that the recreations they took usually ended in vague and useless talk. He considered how these conversations might be kept agreeable and still not lead to dissipation. For this purpose he obliged the Brothers to speak to one another respectfully and to avoid terms of familiarity. In order to prevent disagreements that arise from differences in temperament, he ordained that only one should speak at a time, while the others should listen. If another had something to say, he ought first to request permission to speak from the oldest among the Brothers. This practice was so successful in the way it was carried out that it became one of the rules of the Society and is still carefully observed among the Brothers.

### **Establishment of Brothers in Chartres.**

While De La Salle was wholly taken up with the training of his novices in an effort to make them worthy replacements for the Brothers who could no longer fulfill their duties, several bishops of France were influenced by the good reports they had heard about the free schools and resolved to establish some in their own dioceses. The first of these to contact De La Salle was M. Godet des Marais, bishop of Chartres.<sup>157</sup> He knew him from the days when De La Salle was a student in the seminary of Saint Sulpice in Paris and had held him even then in particular esteem. From this acquaintance they had developed a spiritual friendship which lasted till death. This relationship, founded on mutual esteem, plus De La Salle's desire to serve the Church through education of the poor, were sufficient motives for him to accede to the bishop's request, but because of the lack of Brothers he could not fulfill his promise for two years.<sup>158</sup> When he had prepared a sufficient number of Brothers, he assembled them and spoke of the bishop's request and of his own great desire to comply. It was decided to send seven Brothers to open schools under the bishop's patronage in locations he would select.

The Brothers went to see the bishop, who received them graciously. He confided the schools to them and issued a directive to the





Old city gate of Chartres, engraving by Méaulle of a drawing by Clerget. *Photo E. Rousset (ER, plate 110, slide 159).*

fathers and mothers of the city to send their children to the Brothers' schools. He instructed his pastors to encourage this, each in his own parish. Things succeeded as he had hoped. Soon the schools were filled, and God blessed the work by the good results that followed.

### **Their fervor exhausts them.**

The bishop was satisfied at having procured this blessing for his people. He encouraged the Brothers by visiting them often, exhorting them to persevere, and doing all in his power to help them in their difficult beginning. The fervor of the Brothers was so great that several among them overworked themselves. The bishop, fearing to lose these men he cherished as most dear children, wanted them to moderate somewhat the austerity of their life. But their sense of regularity to their obligations prevailed over his advice, and the only thing that remained for him to do was to furnish all that was needed in their sickness. He continued to offer his help throughout his life. His devotion to the Brothers, as has already been said, was in large measure due to the singular veneration he had for their Founder, who in turn was most appreciative and showed his gratitude whenever the occasion presented itself.

### **The bishop of Chartres ingeniously arranges for De La Salle to dine with him.**

Some time after this foundation at Chartres, De La Salle came to visit the Brothers to make sure that they were not overtaxing themselves by their work. The bishop received him as a friend and several times invited him to dine at his table, but De La Salle always refused, saying that he was not allowed by the Rule to accept this honor. Seeing that he could not overcome his concern about this point, the bishop decided on a strategy. He gave orders to his servant that when De La Salle came for a visit, all the doors were to be locked behind him. In this way he was obliged to give in to the bishop and accept his hospitality.

The conversation at table turned principally to the reasons De La Salle had in mind in founding his Institute. The bishop of Chartres and M. d'Aubigné,<sup>159</sup> his vicar, who later became bishop of Noyon and archbishop of Rouen, discussed this with him in great detail. Above all, they admired the poor and simple state which he had voluntarily

accepted. They even concerned themselves about his external appearance. They noticed that his clothing was made of the coarsest material and that his mantle was worn. They decided, without telling him, to give him a new one, but to make sure he would accept it, they took care that it was of common material. De La Salle accepted this gift as he would an alms. He wore it for three or four years until, late one night when he was returning to Vaugirard from Paris, robbers stopped him and stole it from his back.

### **His life of penance renders him ill; he is cured only by an extraordinary remedy.**

De La Salle's continual preoccupation with the business of his Institute, coupled with the direction of his novitiate, did not leave him the time for himself that he would have wished. He desired a life of solitude, but he was frequently called upon to found new schools. These cares did not detract from his continual mortifications. Rather, he seemed to find new ways of penance. He used the floor of his cell for his bed and frequently slept in a night shirt on a hair-cloth. When travelling he would sleep fully clothed on the ground.

These practices of penance brought about inflammations and rheumatism which struck him upon his return from Chartres. The remedy used in these situations was more painful than the illness itself. It consisted in lying on a wooden grill under which certain potent herbs were burnt, giving off a foul odor. He suffered this treatment without complaint, and even in his greatest pain he would repeat the words which had become so characteristic of him, "God be blessed." It was remarked that he did not give even a sign of impatience or ill temper during all the time the treatment lasted. The procedure had to be repeated several times each year, for it was the surest and quickest remedy then known.

### **He converts a young Dutch Calvinist.**

When he felt somewhat relieved by this treatment after the first attack, De La Salle left Paris to visit the houses of Reims and neighboring towns. After finishing the visit, he was returning to Paris when he met on the way a young Dutchman who requested his assistance. De La Salle inquired in Latin what country he was from and the reason for his travels. The young man replied in the same language that he was

Dutch and that he was going to Paris to make his fortune. De La Salle asked him several questions which he answered.

During this conversation he recognized that the young man was a Protestant. He was distressed at this and felt a great desire to work for his conversion. He attracted the young man by his kind and agreeable manner; took care of his expenses during the rest of the trip, and when they finally got to Paris, he gave him a room in the novitiate at Vaugirard.

### **Same subject.**

The cheerful disposition of this person gave hope that soon he could be brought back into the Church; events were to prove that his conversion was not to be the work of a few days. The young man was bright but full of prejudices and quite accustomed to argumentation. To make any impression on him, De La Salle had to use the strongest and most solid arguments in an attempt to open his eyes to the errors he had been in since his birth. To every argument presented to him, the young man replied with the subtlety of a pupil well taught in the seminaries of his sect.

De La Salle had recourse to his usual weapons. He prayed and had others pray that God would grant the gift of conversion to the young man. He fasted and mortified himself to obtain the light he needed to cause the truth to be reborn in this heart and to merit for the young man the grace needed to be receptive.

De La Salle then took up the discussion again with more confidence, answered the young man's doubts, and instructed him in the principles of the true religion. He spent a considerable amount of time with him during the day and into the night without becoming discouraged. God blessed his zeal, for at the end of three months he finally had the consolation of bringing back this stray sheep, who now agreed that the one true religion was found in the Catholic, Roman, Apostolic Church, in which he hoped to both live and die. God permitted this long contest so that the young man could acquire an exact knowledge of the Church's teachings on all the disputed points between Catholics and the reformers, and thus his return to the Catholic Church would be sincere and not superficial. This is how God triumphed over a rebellious heart which at first seemed hopelessly lost.

### **Continuation of the same subject.**

Full of gratitude for this great victory, De La Salle prostrated himself before the altar in thanksgiving to God. He offered to the Lord the fruits of his labors, regarding himself as a mere instrument in His hands. Filled with confidence at the happy return of his disciple to the Church, De La Salle continued to instruct him in the principal obligations of the Catholic faith, removing new doubts that had arisen in the mind of the young man. Only after a considerable time did De La Salle, convinced of his sincerity, present him to the pastor of Saint Sulpice, informing the pastor of all the efforts needed to overcome the young man's prejudices and to lead him back to the faith of the Roman Church. The pastor found the young Dutchman well instructed and did not hesitate to receive his abjuration, made in a most edifying manner before many who had come to witness this joyous event in the Church.

De La Salle brought his convert back to the novitiate, where he continued to take care of him and to strengthen him against the temptations he would be exposed to if he were to return to his native country. And this came about, for after spending some time in Paris, he wished to return to his family to bring them the same grace of conversion he himself had received. De La Salle put no obstacle in his way but rather gave him all that was required for the journey. He later had the consolation of learning not only that the young convert persevered in the Catholic faith but that he succeeded in having all his family and a number of friends follow his example.

### **His confidence in Providence.**

It is difficult to understand how De La Salle could give himself to so many charitable enterprises, in view of the poverty in which he lived. It is true that he found help from several well-to-do persons, but as he did not like to be in public and especially did not wish to be a burden to his friends, he limited himself to what was absolutely necessary. Even those who wished to help his community ordinarily could not find out what was needed, except that which could not be hidden from the public. The Brothers, not so detached as he was, were sometimes tempted to distrust Providence and to make provision for the future whenever possible. De La Salle, putting all his trust in God, did not allow them to worry about the future and vigorously criticized the measures the Brothers would sometimes take. He preferred the state of poverty to all the riches of the earth.

### **M. de La Chétardie, pastor of Saint Sulpice, assists him in his needs.**

God, who takes care of His own, did not allow De La Salle's faith and confidence to go unrewarded, for at the very time when he was about to lack everything, he found help in the charity of M. de La Chétardie,<sup>160</sup> now the pastor of Saint Sulpice after the resignation of M. Baudrand (1697). No sooner did he take possession of his benefice than he inquired into the needs of his parish. These were reported to him in detail, including those of the Brothers in the schools. He recognized their benefit to the parish and resolved to do everything in his power to help them.

He visited the schools and found them filled with poor children, but he also realized that the Brothers who taught them were even poorer than their pupils. He acted immediately to meet their most urgent needs until he could take other measures for the future. From this moment he took both the schools and the Brothers under his protection, watching over them to see that they lacked nothing they needed; he seemed to have no other interest. Each month he would visit the schools and encourage the pupils with small gifts distributed with great discernment for the purpose of emulation. He inspired the pupils with respect for the Brothers teaching them.

### **He has the novitiate of the Brothers transferred to his parish.**

By his frequent association with the Brothers, he formed a close friendship with De La Salle. The high regard he had for his ability and his virtue made him consider new ways to increase his presence in the parish. With this in mind, he proposed that De La Salle should transfer his novitiate to Saint Sulpice, so that the parish might benefit from the example of the virtue practiced in that house. De La Salle, who never wished to act except in conformity with the will of God, gave himself to prayer. It appeared to him that such a change would allow doing more good for the glory of God.<sup>161</sup> This was enough to make him agree to the suggestion of the pastor, but he was forced to ask him to assume the expenses of moving because he himself was completely unable to do so. The pastor agreed to do this.

### **The pastor assumes the cost.**

Along the road leading from Vaugirard to the Barrière des Carmes, at the limits of the suburb of Saint-Germain, De La Salle first found a large and spacious house<sup>162</sup> which previously had been the home of the Sisters of the Annunciation of Saint Nicolas de Lorraine. He rented it for 1,600 livres, had the Brothers' furniture moved, and when all was in readiness relocated his novitiate there in the year 1698. The pastor on this occasion realized the great poverty of the community, for there was scarcely anything to transport except a few pieces of plain furniture. He wondered how they could have managed with so little. He assisted them quite generously, either out of his own resources or through the generosity of a number of charitable persons. Madame de Voisin, widow of the chancellor of the same name,<sup>163</sup> gave 7,000 livres to help them purchase the house and some furniture.

### **The bishop of Chartres dedicates the chapel in the house under the patronage of Saint Cassian, martyr.**

In this building was a chapel which the Sisters had used previously. The chapel was quite small, but it was found possible to join to it another room in the back for the altar. When the house was in order, De La Salle requested the bishop of Chartres, then in Paris, to bless the house and consecrate the chapel under the patronage of Saint Cassian, martyr.

It is known that this saint was a schoolmaster at Imola, a city of Italy in Romagna. When he refused to sacrifice to the gods, he was delivered by the judge to the fury and vengeance of his own pupils. They hated him because of the exact discipline he demanded of them, and they put him to death with their stilettos and penknives. It is easy to see De La Salle's reason for choosing this holy martyr as the patron of his house.<sup>164</sup>

### **1699. Establishment of a Sunday academy.**

In the following year, the pastor of Saint Sulpice proposed that De La Salle open a Sunday academy. He wanted the Brothers on the afternoons of Sundays and feast days to take in the young tradesmen of the parish, who worked all week in various trades to earn a living and had only these days to learn the basic principles of their religion.



When it was a question of doing good, De La Salle never hesitated. The pastor's suggestion seemed worthwhile and praiseworthy. De La Salle received it with enthusiasm, and he was not to blame if the plan could not begin immediately. Circumstances made it impossible at that particular time. De La Salle, following his rule of never doing anything hastily, was obliged to wait for a more favorable moment. When he found himself thwarted in a project, he would attribute it to the fact that it did not then fit into God's designs, and he would await in serenity the guidance of Divine Providence. Thus it was that he put off this project until the year 1709, as we shall see later on.<sup>165</sup>

### **Establishment of a new school on Rue de Saint Placide.**

The free school which had been set up in the novitiate to give an education to the poor children of the neighborhood caused some difficulty in the operation of the novitiate. The teaching Brothers were unable to attend the various exercises, because of their class schedules. This conflict was the source of much dissipation, not at all to De La Salle's liking. He explained all this to the pastor of Saint Sulpice, who advised him to look for another house in the neighborhood where he might transfer the school. He found one in the Rue de Saint Placide,<sup>166</sup> near the *Incurables*,<sup>167</sup> and he sent four Brothers to handle the large number of pupils there.

### **1700. The teachers of Paris oppose this in vain.**

The schoolmasters of Paris looked upon this transfer as the establishment of a new school. They did not like this at all and did everything in their power to ruin it. The Brothers were forced to stop teaching for three months because of them. In the end, however, the efforts made by the schoolmasters to close the school<sup>168</sup> were no more successful than their previous attempts. For his part, De La Salle sought help from the lieutenant general of police, and the schoolmasters were obliged to bring back the school furniture they had forcibly removed. They were likewise obliged to put things back in the original state in which they had been and to give assurance that they would refrain from further disturbance.





Louis XIV (1638-1715) King of France from 1643, engraving by Nanteuil of a painting by Mignard. Photo E. Rousset (*ER*, plate 66, slide 141).

### School in Calais.

The troubles occasioned by the new foundations brought De La Salle into the public eye by reason of the steps he had to take to overcome the opposition. Those who thus came in contact with him inquired about his Institute. Once they came to know him better, they formed a high opinion of his virtue, and offers for new foundations, without his seeking them, followed.

This is what happened in the case of his dispute with the schoolmasters of Paris. News of the trouble had reached the provinces. M. Ponton, pastor and dean of the city of Calais, diocese of Boulogne, had been informed by his nephew, then living in Paris, of the success over the past few years of the free schools of Saint Sulpice. The priest wrote him, requesting him to see De La Salle and to inquire into the possibility of setting up a school in his parish. He urged his nephew to act quickly, for his former schoolmaster had just died, and the occasion was most favorable for a new school.

### Same subject.

M. Ponton's repeated requests seemed to make no impression upon De La Salle. He was in no hurry and stated merely that he would do all he could to set up the school, once he was assured that it would be firmly supported. When the pastor realized that more than mere good will was needed, he began to look for ways to forestall further objections to the project. He prevailed upon the city officials to write to the governor of Boulonnais, the Duke de Béthune,<sup>169</sup> to obtain his approval. The governor graciously obliged, and he himself wrote to De La Salle requesting him to favor the petition of the city and the pastor of Calais.

De La Salle agreed to send two Brothers to open a school, and these two found everyone favorably disposed toward them when they arrived.<sup>170</sup> They first wished to obtain the blessing of the local bishop, M. Pierre de Langle.<sup>171</sup> They went, therefore, to Boulogne, where the bishop received them kindly and graciously gave them the required permission to work in his diocese. He also sent a pastoral letter to the people of Calais in which he urged all parents to send their children to the Brothers' school, which opened a few days after their return from Boulogne.

### **1701. Second school in Calais, for sailors.**

The success of this school inspired a zealous priest named Le Prince, chaplain of the sailors of the town, to want the same advantage for their children. He spoke to the president of the city, M. Thosse, who promised to look into the matter. He wrote the minister M. de Pontchartrain,<sup>172</sup> requesting authorization from the court to use an abandoned guard house in the Court-gain region<sup>173</sup> as a site for the school. Nothing came of these efforts until several years later.<sup>174</sup>

### **De La Salle visits the Brothers in Calais.**

Meanwhile, De La Salle did not forget his two Brothers in Calais. He wrote from time to time to encourage them in their first efforts and to sustain them in their initial fervor. After they were well established, he paid his first visit to their school. His reputation for holiness had already spread throughout the whole city, and the principal citizens came to pay their respects. The pastor led the way in paying a tribute of thanks. He invited De La Salle to preside at the solemn Mass on the feast of the Assumption and to give the sermon, so that the people of the parish might have the chance to see and hear him.<sup>175</sup>

Later, in private conversation, the pastor spoke of how edified he was by the lives of the two Brothers who had been sent to open the school. He expressed the hope that God's blessing would rest upon their work and produce an abundant harvest in the future. He wished to retain De La Salle for further conversation and to profit by his advice, but De La Salle was unable to stay. It was necessary to return to Paris, where new matters required his attention.

### **Foundation of the school in Calais.**

Up until that time, the pastor of Calais looked after the needs of the Brothers himself. After his death they were reduced to extreme poverty and were obliged to consider closing their school. The city fathers learned of their condition and, being anxious to keep them, sought ways to help. They obtained from King Louis XIV a grant of 300 livres and made up from municipal funds the additional amount required for their support.

**1702.**

The following year,<sup>176</sup> De La Salle sent two Brothers to found a free school in Troyes, in Champagne, at the invitation of the city and under the patronage of M. Boutilier de Chavigny,<sup>177</sup> bishop of the city, who gave the required permission for this school, which still exists today.

### **A school in Avignon.**

However, De La Salle's chief concern this year was to respond to the pressing invitation of Madame de Chateaublanc,<sup>178</sup> wife of a papal treasurer in Comptat,<sup>179</sup> to set up a free school in Avignon. Despite her great desire to see this accomplished and De La Salle's wish to grant her request, she died before the school could be established. The efforts of her husband M. de Chateaublanc to carry out the last wishes of his wife succeeded only several years later.

### **De La Salle takes charge of fifty Irish boys.**

When De La Salle returned to Paris, the pastor of Saint Sulpice informed him of a request from Cardinal de Noailles to provide for the education of fifty young Irish boys who had taken asylum in France from the persecution of Catholics in their native land. Their exile followed the revolution which had taken place in England a few years before, when the king and queen of Great Britain<sup>180</sup> and the prince of Wales, their son and heir apparent to the throne, were forced to flee to France. Because their zeal for the Catholic religion was the sole cause of the persecution they endured, the usurpers of their throne used every device to wipe out the faith. Persecutions broke out frequently, leaving no alternatives but apostasy or flight. The greater number preferred to leave their worldly goods and their country rather than give up their religion, and they fled to the protection of his most Christian Majesty,<sup>181</sup> who opened his arms to them and received them as a duty of religion into his kingdom.

### **Same subject.**

The pastor of Saint Sulpice knew De La Salle's zeal for good works so well that he did not hesitate to ask him to receive this large number of

Irish young men into his house. De La Salle accepted them at once, housed them in the novitiate,<sup>182</sup> and personally took special care of their education. He selected the Brothers to supervise them and to teach them what they needed to know, each according to his particular situation. In a short time these students were able to meet with honor the different responsibilities awaiting them.

### **Visit of the king of England and Cardinal de Noailles.**

During the time these young men were in De La Salle's house, the king of England, accompanied by Cardinal de Noailles, honored them with a visit. He wished to see for himself the Christian manner in which they were being educated. The king seemed gratified with the instruction they were receiving and with the progress they had made. He approved the forms of emulation used in the school and was pleased with De La Salle for having selected such good teachers. These gracious attentions of a great king served to bring out the profound humility of De La Salle all the more. Convinced of his nothingness, he appeared to abase himself the more he was praised. He urged the king to regard him as a weak instrument of God in carrying out the king's zeal in providing such an advantage for his subjects.

### **Attempt by the Brothers to obtain a Bull of Approbation.**

De La Salle was so taken up with these sentiments that the thought never even crossed his mind of using the occasion to ask for the favor of the king's protection. The Brothers of the Institute were more farsighted and not so reserved. They requested the king to use his influence with the pope to grant a Bull of Approbation,<sup>183</sup> which could be a great help to them in overcoming the occasional attempts of their enemies to destroy their congregation. Since 1694, during the pontificate of Innocent XII,<sup>184</sup> the Brothers had made several attempts along these lines. De La Salle counselled the Brothers not to be too concerned about these matters and to await the moment chosen by Divine Providence. The recommendation did not suit them, for they were convinced that their foundation would be unsafe until they were under the protection of both ecclesiastical and civil authority. They pressed their point so vigorously that De La Salle finally consented. He sent two Brothers to Rome<sup>185</sup> with only 100 francs<sup>186</sup> for their trip, because the poverty of the community made it impossible to give them more. They arrived in Rome at an unfavorable moment. Innocent XII had

died,<sup>187</sup> and despite the letter of recommendation they brought with them, they found all doors closed. Seeing that their first attempts were not succeeding, they considered abandoning the effort. In fact, one of them did return to De La Salle,<sup>188</sup> but the other did not give up hope and remained in Rome with the thought of taking advantage of possibly favorable developments. While there he received authorization to found a school, which he did, completely independent of those of France, and which he directed for twenty-six years.<sup>189</sup> He lost sight of the fact that he had been sent to Rome to obtain a Bull of Approbation for the Institute of the Brothers of the Christian Schools. This was not granted until the year 1725, six years after De La Salle's death.<sup>190</sup>

### **Conversion of a young libertine of rank.**

Occasionally circumstances arose, brought about by Divine Providence, in which De La Salle was instrumental in the conversion of hardened sinners. One example has already been given. Another, no less striking, concerned a young cleric, about eighteen years old, who came from a good family. He was inclined to behavior completely out of keeping with the state for which he was destined. His family was concerned about his fickle character, but they had not yet been able to make him settle down, in spite of many efforts along these lines. In an attempt to make him more stable, he had been placed with a religious community in Paris, but he was no better there. He invented ways of circumventing the watchfulness of his superiors and climbed over the walls of the house at night in order to join forbidden groups or to attend parties for pleasure, gambling, and debauchery.

The superiors of the religious community lost patience with his life of licentiousness and in consultation with his family agreed to place him in De La Salle's hands. This seemed the best course to bring the young man to his senses, for they had heard that more than once God had made use of De La Salle in effecting conversions of this sort. Their hopes were exceeded; at first the young cleric followed the regular exercises of the novitiate and gradually acquired a sense of piety from the constant example before his eyes. God moved his heart so that he became docile to good advice. De La Salle awaited the proper moment and, seeing him well disposed, planted the first seeds of virtue in his heart. Step by step he nurtured this tendency in the young man's soul, until he became an example for the entire community. Having overcome his frivolity, the young man no longer thought of anything but to sever his connection with the world. He began by

dismissing his personal valet and giving up all the small tokens of respect paid him because of his family's standing. He would no longer allow himself to be served special food different from that prepared for the Brothers. Like them, he became penitential and mortified, following the same practices of austerity and humiliation employed by the members of the community.

### **He wants to receive the religious habit of the Brothers.**

During the time of retreat which he made with the others, the young man thought several times of passing the rest of his days in a life of penitence. With the purpose of making reparation for his past life, he asked to be admitted to the novitiate and to receive the Brothers' habit. This request surprised De La Salle, who had not expected his conversion to take him so far. De La Salle would promise nothing until he had the consent of the young man's family.

The young cleric was not discouraged, and he persevered in his request. He even wrote for support to one of the bishops of France, who was his uncle. He received no answer, but the prelate had a relative in Paris speak to him to dissuade him from his project. This person pointed out that it was not at all befitting the young man to associate himself with such a despised profession and that it would not be tolerated for a person of his standing to become a school-teacher. He was told that if he felt himself truly called to the religious state, there were plenty of orders in which he could save his soul, and he was assured that if he acted prudently and reasonably, his relative would have no objection.

But all these reasons, presented most eloquently, could not change the young man's mind. He answered that he was determined to enter the simplest and most humiliating form of life possible and that he was choosing this as the most suitable way to make reparation before God for the sins of his youth. He was so insistent that finally his wish was granted, and he was given the habit of the Brothers of the Christian Schools.

### **His family forces him to leave.**

De La Salle kept the parents of this novice informed of all that had transpired. Up to this point they could not believe that their son was serious in his request; at best they thought it mere youthful enthusiasm

which would disappear in time. De La Salle's letter, however, threw new light on the matter, and they used their influence to force their son to leave the house. When the novice least expected it, they came to take him away. They placed him in another community, where he remained for two years before dying full of regrets for not having been allowed to remain in the humble calling he so greatly desired to embrace as a penance for the excesses of his youth.

## **1702. Persecutions against De La Salle.**

While De La Salle was taken up with his work with sinners who had great confidence in his insights, God put his own virtue to a new test. The persecution he had to endure now was most painful because it came from those who until then had been his protectors. Not much is known about the cause of the misunderstanding which occurred suddenly between such distinguished persons, so well esteemed and of such outstanding piety. We know only that those who opposed De La Salle found the ear of his ecclesiastical superiors and prejudiced them against him.

He was pictured as a man taken up with his own ideas, full of his own importance, rigid, and without consideration for the Brothers of the community. He was accused of being overly severe in punishing the slightest faults, making no concession to human frailty. The excessive severity of the Brother in charge of the novices in De La Salle's absence was also pointed out.<sup>191</sup> De La Salle was blamed for this. All of these accusations were included in a written account of complaints sent to Cardinal de Noailles. The charges were maintained with persistence to give them an air of truth. His accusers pointed out that the community of Brothers was not united, that the Brothers were disgusted, and that De La Salle was unable to preserve peace and order among them. They requested that another Superior be chosen who could restore calm and tranquility, so that the whole Institute might not fall into ruin.

## **Cardinal de Noailles is informed.**

The cardinal, who had formed a high opinion of De La Salle's merit and ability for governing the community and who had seen for himself the good order that characterized the school, was cautious. With a moderation worthy of his prudence, he suspended judgment until



he could be more fully informed of the truth of the charge contained in the accusation. He limited himself to saying to those who presented it that he would look into the matter.

### **The vicar-general visits the schools, and the cardinal wants to remove De La Salle from the government of his community.**

Several days later, the cardinal sent his vicar-general M. Pirot<sup>192</sup> to De La Salle, ostensibly to visit the community but in reality to look into the truth of the charges that had been made and particularly to ascertain the Brothers' attitude to De La Salle. He announced his visit and began his investigation, convinced that he would be overwhelmed with complaints. Only two disgruntled novices, whose grievances had started all the trouble, came forward.

At the conclusion of the visit, De La Salle thought it his duty to pay his respects to the cardinal and to thank him for having sent his vicar-general. At this time De La Salle did not know that the cardinal had been predisposed against him or that the report of M. Pirot was not favorable. He only learned this when the cardinal told him that he had decided to remove him from the direction of his community and to replace him.

His opponents, who felt that by the archbishop's action they had gained a victory over De La Salle, did not realize that this removal from office was in keeping with his long-desired and deepest wish, which he had not been able to achieve even after repeated efforts. Far from being upset by this news, he left the archbishop's presence seemingly satisfied and with his usual composure. He returned home without showing the least resentment against the two complainers who had started the trouble; he prayed fervently to beg God for a happy outcome of the incident.

### **Second visit of the vicar-general to give them a Superior.**

Several days after these events, the vicar-general let it be known that he would pay a second visit to carry out the resolution of the archbishop's council to appoint a new Superior for the Brothers. As soon as De La Salle was informed of the time of his visit, he had the Brothers assemble in the large room of the house, without telling them the reason. All of this activity disturbed them and made them suspect

something was amiss. They were taken completely by surprise at seeing the vicar-general once again, this time accompanied by a young priest from Lyon named Bricot,<sup>193</sup> whom the cardinal had chosen to be their new Superior. M. Pirot presented him to the community in this capacity. He extolled the new Superior's abilities and willingness to help by his advice in the different circumstances that might arise. Finally, he urged them to show him every mark of respect and confidence. However, the Brothers all protested that they would recognize no other Superiors than His Eminence Cardinal de Noailles and De La Salle.

### **The Brothers oppose the move.**

This strong response surprised and disconcerted the vicar-general. He looked to De La Salle, who was manifestly embarrassed at this opposition. De La Salle did everything he could to persuade the Brothers to submit to His Eminence's orders, but without success. The Brothers remained fixed in their position.

The vicar-general, seeing that the Brothers' tempers were heating up, thought it best not to push things any farther until he had a chance to report to the cardinal. Here are the exact words he used in recounting what had taken place, "Monseigneur, if all religious were as attached to their superiors as these good Brothers are to De La Salle, we would have much reason to rejoice." He added that he had used every argument he could think of to convince them to accept His Eminence's orders but without success.

The cardinal was incensed at the thought of a handful of persons of no consequence defying his orders. The instigators of the whole affair did not miss their opportunity; they took advantage of the cardinal's vexation to lead him to believe that De La Salle had suggested this disobedience of his Brothers with the thought of maintaining himself in his position. This certainly was a grave injustice, especially because the vicar-general himself had seen him use all his influence to urge them to submit, and they had insisted that if they were forced to accept any other than he, they would all return to their homes and abandon the Institute.

### **De La Salle attempts to appease the cardinal concerning the Brothers' resistance.**

De La Salle, not knowing what to do in this delicate situation which was capable of overturning in a short time all the good that had been accomplished with such sacrifice, placed his confidence in God. He was convinced that the cardinal was acting only through praiseworthy and holy motives, but that others had taken advantage of his goodness. Besides, he knew that because of the Brothers' obstinacy, the cardinal was not favorably disposed toward him. He went, therefore, to throw himself at the cardinal's feet. Breaking out in tears, he begged His Eminence not to attribute to him this fault which actually came only from the great hesitation the Brothers had regarding the Superior that had been chosen for them. He had done all in his power to have the Brothers obey his orders, but they had been so upset from the beginning that they would not hear of any change. With time he could bring the Brothers to a more reasonable position.

### **The cardinal understands.**

The cardinal was moved by De La Salle's words, had him rise, and let it be known by his affable manner that he did not believe it possible that De La Salle would have encouraged the Brothers in their lack of submission. At the same time, he complained that someone had failed by not convincing the Brothers that what was happening was in their best interests. He added that the whole affair was handled too hastily and that prudent measures were not taken which would have assured its conclusion without so much commotion.

### **Conditions for acceptance of a new Superior.**

Once De La Salle had appeased the cardinal, he called on the vicar-general. There he found a delegation of the principal Brothers of the community, who were setting forth the conditions on which they would receive a new Superior: 1) that he would introduce nothing new into their regulations, 2) that this Superior would put in an appearance only once a month, and 3) that De La Salle would remain their spiritual director as he had been before and that the new Superior would do nothing in the house except in agreement with him. These propositions were taken to the cardinal, who agreed to them out of condescension, and thus the matter was settled.

### **The Brothers have recourse to the pastor of Saint Sulpice.**

While all these negotiations were in process at the episcopal palace in an effort to settle things peaceably and to assure that the Brothers would not oppose the cardinal, the community at home did not know what was taking place. There the Brothers continued in prayer to God to calm the storm that had arisen and to preserve them from attacks against the government of the Institute. Several of the Brothers went to seek the help of the pastor of Saint Sulpice, who listened to their story and agreed to assist them as much as he could, although he thought that he would not be able to do much, because things had already gone too far to change the decisions already made.

### **They receive M. Bricot as Superior.**

Two days later, His Eminence sent M. Abbé Madot,<sup>194</sup> later to be the bishop of Châlon-sur-Saône, to reconcile the Brothers to receiving his appointee, M. Bricot, as their Superior. He fulfilled his delicate mission so capably that he brought the Brothers around to his way of thinking. He assured them on behalf of the cardinal that De La Salle would remain as their spiritual director and that in giving them this new Superior there was no thought of changing any of their regulations, which would remain entirely as they were. He explained that this new Superior was being named to lend them support because of his influence and that De La Salle would continue in exactly the same role as before. The air of conviction with which he spoke gained the confidence of those who listened to him. Without further delay, he presented M. Bricot, their new Superior, who immediately led them to the chapel of the house. The vicar-general said the prayers and then intoned the *Te Deum*, which was sung by the whole community.

### **Letter of the pastor of Villiers on this subject.**

Throughout this ceremony, De La Salle enjoyed profound peace and perfect submission to the decrees of Providence. This we learn from the pastor of Villiers,<sup>195</sup> in the diocese of Paris, in a letter he wrote to the pastor of Saint Pierre in Laon,<sup>196</sup> a personal friend of De La Salle who had become disturbed at rumors of these happenings. Because this letter confirms what has been said, we will simply quote a few of the principal sentences. This is how he describes what had taken place:

I was no less surprised than you, my dear Sir, at the news you told me of De La Salle, for I honor and respect him as much as you do. I am most sympathetic to all the trouble he has been made to endure. I made it a point to see him, and I could not have been more edified at his constancy and resolution, his perfect resignation, and his complete abandonment to Divine Providence. I am not saying anything new in speaking to you of his virtues. You have held him in esteem for a long time. I have seen the cardinal and M. Pollet,<sup>197</sup> and I hope with time the cardinal will correct the bad impressions he has been given of De La Salle.

There is no question of Quietism<sup>198</sup> (the rumor had spread in Paris that he was suspected of embracing this heresy, which at that time was quite prevalent). Rather he is accused only of being too strict with his Brothers, of practicing the most austere penances, and of being so convinced of what he is doing that nothing can change his point of view. He has been described to the cardinal as a person not suited to direct others and particularly as someone extraordinarily attached to his own way of doing things, so that he directs his Brothers and himself after his own manner of thinking. His great crime, as far as I can understand, is that he does not act according to the mind of M. X.<sup>199</sup> This latter would like to meddle with the administration and even the interior direction of the Brothers, but up to this moment De La Salle has steadfastly prevented him from doing so. I do not know how these things will turn out, but you know as well as I the feelings of M. X. He is De La Salle's principal problem, and if De La Salle would agree with him, there would be no trouble with the archbishop.

He goes on to mention the complaints of the two novices, about which we have already spoken. He then continues,

In a second visit to De La Salle's house on orders from His Eminence, M. Pirot introduced M. Bricot to the Brothers as their Superior in external affairs. Upon hearing the word "Superior," the Brothers clearly let it be known that they would recognize as superiors only the cardinal and De La Salle. Upon hearing this, M. Pirot withdrew. Eight days later, which was Friday, the ninth day of the month (of December),<sup>200</sup> M. Pirot again came to the house in company with the abbé in question and preached to the Brothers, making a thousand promises, saying among other things that nothing would be changed of their rules and regulations but that

they must receive and obey the said abbé as their Superior. He added that De La Salle would remain among them and that the abbé would visit them only once a month. They accepted him under these conditions, or at least they made no objections as they had done the first time. If the proverb is true, *qui tacet consentire videtur*,<sup>201</sup> they agreed to this appointment, for no one objected. That is the way things stand at the present moment. It seems unlikely this will last; we can only hope there will be no unfavorable developments. At least a first step has been taken, and perhaps things will go on for a while. The best that can be done is to wait for a favorable moment to point out to the cardinal his mistaken information, to have him appreciate all the excellent qualities of De La Salle. I have already set about doing this and will continue to do so on every occasion in which Providence will give me the opportunity. I owe him this in justice. . . .

### **M. Bricot abandons his position as the Brothers' Superior.**

We can see by this extract the reasons for the accusations against De La Salle and what gave rise to them. The difficulty came from his not allowing any change in the discipline of the rules that had been set up in the house with the consent of all the Brothers. The so-called disunion among them is contradicted by their refusing to accept another Superior in his place. They were supposed to be discontented with De La Salle's handling of affairs, yet they would accept a new Superior only on condition that he would come to the house just once a month. This shows the state of mind of his accusers; a simple examination of their charges serves only to justify De La Salle. As it turned out, all the commotion died down. M. Bricot did not again appear in the house;<sup>202</sup> the two novices whose complaints had started all the trouble were sent away. De La Salle directed the community as he had formerly, and the rules of the house remained in force as before.

### **De La Salle's enemies try to alienate the Brothers.**

Nevertheless, those who had started all the trouble were not disheartened at the poor success of their efforts. They no longer appealed to the authorities against De La Salle, for they saw how impossible it would be to win over the archbishop. Their previous charges had been too well dismissed for further hope from that approach. Instead,

they adopted a new way of introducing division among the Brothers and undermining their confidence in De La Salle. They held out great hopes to the Brothers by pointing out the advantage of complete submission to the new Superior whom the archbishop had chosen for them, for they would thereby gain a further friend who would help them in their poverty and thus give greater stability to their foundations.

They were surprised that the Brothers did not profit by so favorable an occasion to throw off a hard and crushing yoke, especially because De La Salle was losing credibility day by day. Even his best friends were tired of warding off the incessant attacks provoked by his stubbornness in not agreeing to modify the austerities of his Rule. Finally, the Brothers were told that if they did not seize the opportunity afforded them, they would condemn themselves to the hard reality of a difficult and dull life from which they could not be rescued.

### **They fail.**

All of these arguments, given with an air of great confidence, could not shake the constancy of the Brothers. They remained attached more firmly than ever to their worthy Superior. Everything brought forth to discredit him served only to deepen their esteem and respect for his virtue and guidance.

### **They do not become disheartened.**

De La Salle, seeing no end to these attacks, decided to give up the right conferred on him by the cardinal to hear confessions in the diocese. Wishing to be relieved of this burden, he had someone he trusted present his resignation. The cardinal refused to accept this abdication, letting his will be known to have De La Salle continue to govern his community as he had done up to the present.

So his enemies, finding that they could not harm him from within, took steps to persecute him from without. They succeeded in having the community's annual subsistence reduced. In addition, they were able to keep from his hands a sum of 5,000 livres destined by some rich person to help him buy the novitiate house, which was then up for sale. It might seem that so many trials would have overwhelmed De La Salle, but in reality these difficulties did not in the least diminish either his peace of mind or his great confidence in God.

### **De La Salle transfers his novitiate to the suburb of Saint Antoine.**

Meanwhile, the Brothers, annoyed at the continual disturbance of their work and more especially at the constant attacks against their Superior, requested him to look for another place in Paris where, sheltered from all these troubles, they might work in peace. Circumstances favored their request, because they were obliged to move anyway, being unable to pay the rent on their present home after a large part of their subsistence had been cut off.

De La Salle located a suitable house in the suburb of Saint Antoine.<sup>203</sup> He immediately contacted the pastor of Saint Paul, for at that time this suburb was still in that parish, and requested permission to transfer the novitiate there. Previously the pastor had known De La Salle only by reputation. He explained how difficult it was for him to establish new communities within the confines of his parish. It was only after De La Salle had depicted the great good his school would do for the neighborhood children that the pastor gave his consent. De La Salle then immediately sought the best lodging he could for the Brothers to protect them from their enemies, to whom he thought only of rendering good for evil.

### **He opens a school. He is opposed by the district's schoolmasters.**

Once the community was settled in this new house, he opened a school for the poor children of the neighborhood. They came with eagerness and in great numbers. This success reawakened the animosity of the schoolmasters<sup>204</sup> of that section of the city, and they attempted to hinder the development of the school as much as they could. However, they were no more successful than the other schoolmasters of Paris, who a few years before had done all in their power to attempt to ruin the schools there but without success.

### **School in the parish of Saint Hippolyte, district of Saint Marceau.**

A person other than De La Salle would have been discouraged at these continual troubles. However, at the exact moment when things



seemed at their worst, God provided an opportunity for him to make good all his losses. It was just at this time that the pastor of Saint Hippolyte<sup>205</sup> in the Saint Marceau district requested two Brothers to open a free school in his parish. The pastor completely assumed the expenses of the project and continued to offer his help to the Brothers in their work of instructing the numerous poor children in that particular section of the city.

### **Seminary for country schoolmasters.**

This priest's great zeal in starting the school led to a visit from De La Salle to thank him for his help. Their frequent conversations gradually developed into a firm friendship marked by mutual confidence. De La Salle found no difficulty in speaking to the pastor about the plan he had formed sometime earlier of reopening a training school for country schoolmasters. He had already attempted one foundation in Reims in the year 1687, which started well enough, as we have seen, but failed when he left that city for Paris in the hope of setting up a similar training school. During the next fifteen years he experienced so many setbacks and so much opposition to the work he was doing that he never had the opportunity of establishing such a school.

The pastor of Saint Hippolyte was favorably disposed toward the idea. Together they planned how they might raise funds to support those who would attend the school. The pastor succeeded in enlisting the support of a certain ecclesiastic<sup>206</sup> who agreed to provide 200 livres for each country schoolmaster who would go to the new school. Out of his own resources the pastor purchased a suitable house, and thus the training school was started in his parish.

### **1704. Rule for teaching them.**

When preparations were complete, De La Salle received the young men sent to him by the country pastors. He put in charge a well-qualified Brother to teach them to read and write well. This Brother also taught arithmetic, plain chant, and everything required for the teaching profession. Together with their lessons, these candidates were obliged to follow a planned program of exercises, which did not hinder them in their essential work of study but which prepared them for the orderly lives they would be expected to lead in the parishes where they would work.

### **He undertakes certain measures for the school with the pastor of Saint Hippolyte.**

All the difficulties that De La Salle had experienced in founding his other schools taught him how important it was to protect this one from those who might wish to destroy it. Because he had neither letters patent nor the permission of the ordinary, he realized that the teacher-training school was secure only as long as the pastor of Saint Hippolyte was alive. After reflection he felt that he had found the answer to this problem. He decided to name the Brother then charged with running the school as the beneficiary of the funds promised to support the enterprise.<sup>207</sup> The Brother's wisdom, prudence, and disinterestedness could be counted on. The pastor discussed this plan with the Brother to make his intentions clear, and he made him understand that although these funds were put in his name, they were to be used only for the designated purpose.

### **The training school fails because of the poor conduct of the Brother in charge.**

All these precautions did not prevent the training school from failing soon after the pastor's death. De La Salle met the Brother in charge to talk over with him what was best to do in these circumstances. De La Salle was greatly surprised to hear the Brother tell him that he had no legitimate interest in the matter once everything had been turned over to the Brother personally.

De La Salle reminded the Brother of his obligations, of the deceased pastor's intentions, and of the abuse he was making of the trust placed in him. All reasoning proved ineffectual. The Brother was thinking only of profiting as much as possible from his good fortune. He left the Institute, taking with him the funds that had been left solely for the upkeep of the training school.

The ecclesiastic who was contributing his half to running the school, seeing that the last wishes of the pastor were not being carried out, withdrew his own support, and the training school failed for lack of sufficient funds. The miserable usurper attempted for a while to keep the Little Schools of the parish going. After a while he even sought to rejoin the Institute he had so shamefully deserted. De La Salle would have taken him back, but the counsel of several enlightened persons, who pointed out the harmful consequences that might

result, dissuaded him from doing so. In the midst of all this, De La Salle remained so calm and untroubled that he astonished even his friends. He was as affable, recollected, and exact as ever in fulfilling all the duties of his calling.

### **De La Salle's hidden life.**

De La Salle's more secluded life in the Saint Antoine district sheltered him from the remarks going around about his change of location. The fact that he lived some distance from the center of Paris pleased him, because it gave him greater solitude, something much in keeping with his tastes. It was only with great reluctance that he left his seclusion when circumstances forced him to do so.

### **The Sisters of the Cross under his direction.**

Because there was no private chapel in the new house, he was obliged to go out each morning to celebrate Mass at the church of the Sisters of the Cross, which was closest to his own house and most convenient for the community. The Sisters, edified at the piety and recollection with which he celebrated Mass, formed a high opinion of his sanctity. They wished to know him better and to consult with him. He consented, speaking of God and the obligations of the religious state with such lofty sentiments that several of them wished to place themselves under his spiritual direction, despite all he did to dissuade them. Thus it was that at the time he was doing all in his power to lead a hidden life, God so disposed events that he was called upon to exercise charity to those who needed his help.

### **He hears the confession of a priest in the Bastille.**

When he least expected it, an opportunity arose which he could not ignore. The commander of the Bastille<sup>208</sup> sent for him to hear the confession of a priest who had been imprisoned for several years. He went immediately and found the priest in a most deplorable condition in both body and spirit. He was clothed in a filthy, tattered cassock and a dirty, torn shirt full of vermin. De La Salle was deeply affected at the sight. He embraced his penitent and could not restrain his tears upon hearing the story of his misfortunes.

After hearing his confession, De La Salle consoled him as best he could. Then he made him take off his rags in exchange for the clothes he himself was wearing. De La Salle left the Bastille in these garments under cover of his mantle and returned to his home filled with joy at being able to share the sufferings of a humiliated follower of Jesus Christ, the poor man of Nazareth.

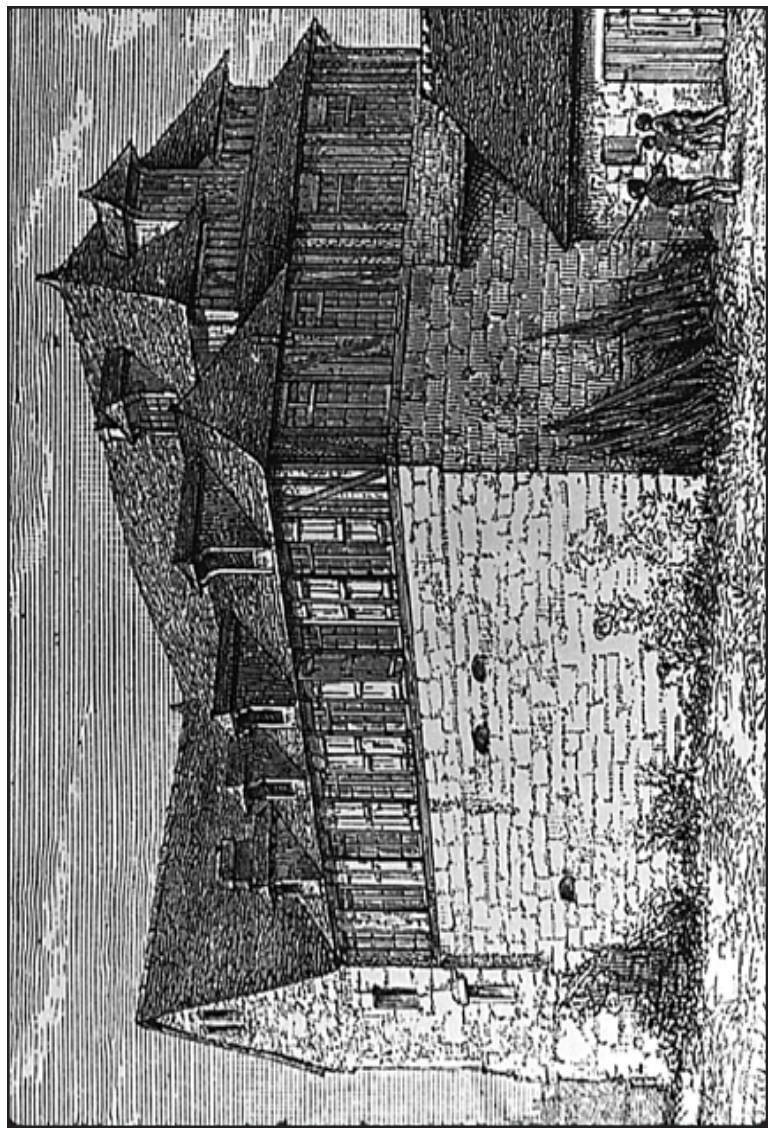
### **School at Darnétal, near Rouen.**

The continual difficulties which the Institute of the Brothers of the Christian Schools had suffered during the first twenty-five years of its existence took their toll. Total ruin seemed likely, when all at once the Institute gained new strength. At the precise moment when the Institute seemed most likely to fail completely, Providence furnished the means to lead it out of the continual state of uncertainty in which it lay. This turnabout resulted from a request to send two Brothers to open a school for boys in Darnétal, a large suburb of Rouen, where Madame Maillefer had founded a similar school for girls a few years before.<sup>209</sup>

This humble beginning, seemingly so insignificant at the time, was actually the forerunner of the sound establishment (1705) later founded in Rouen, which has since become the headquarters of the Institute. De La Salle, with the permission of the Archbishop, M. Colbert,<sup>210</sup> sent at the beginning of February the two Brothers that had been requested. They were most faithful to the obligations of their state and gave careful attention to the education of the children confided to their care.

### **Establishment of schools in Rouen.**

The school was a blessing for this large parish, and the parents were impressed with the changes brought about in their children's behavior. The archbishop was soon informed of the school's success. He congratulated himself for the part he had played in bringing the Brothers to Darnétal, and from that moment he decided to invite the Brothers to take over the schools for the poor which M. Nyel had started some years before in the city of Rouen itself. He, therefore, instructed his vicar-general M. Coët<sup>211</sup> to invite De La Salle to Rouen to discuss this new proposal with him.



Engraving by Cabarteux showing the house at Rouen called "The Rampart" belonging to the General Hospital.  
*Photo E. Rousset (ER, plate 115, slide 191).*

### Establishment of the Brothers at the *Bureau des Valides*.

While waiting for De La Salle to come to Rouen, the archbishop spoke of his plans to M. de Pontcarré,<sup>212</sup> senior president of *Parlement*, who approved of his proposals. When De La Salle arrived,<sup>213</sup> they mutually agreed on conditions that insured the project's success. These terms included two stipulations: first, that the Brothers should be given charge of the schools originally established by M. Nyel, and second, that they should take upon themselves the instruction of the poor in the *Hôpital Général*, known in the city as the *Bureau des Valides*.<sup>214</sup>

### Opposition.

It was decided, therefore, that De La Salle would return by carriage to Paris, where he would select the Brothers destined for the work in Rouen. During the time he was away, a special meeting was called of all the city's pastors, the *Bureau's* administrators, and others who might have an interest in this project. The archbishop opened the meeting in the presence of the senior president and explained the reason they were called together. He spoke of the advantages for the city to have the Brothers of the Christian Schools. Initially he met strong opposition, for it was a question of bringing another congregation into town. But the archbishop insisted on the benefit that would accrue to the city's poor children without laying any additional burden on the taxpayers. The Brothers would simply replace the teachers who were formerly in the schools; this change would hardly be noticed. These arguments and others he put forward convinced those who originally were prejudiced against the idea, and everyone agreed to invite the Brothers.

### The archbishop removes the opposition.

As soon as this question was settled, the archbishop left for Paris, where De La Salle was calmly awaiting word of the meeting's outcome. He knew neither what had taken place nor the outcome. He was told only to send immediately a sufficient number of Brothers to direct the schools of the city and to instruct the poor of the *Bureau des Valides*.

## **De La Salle wishes to transfer his novitiate to Rouen.**

This arrangement was completely to De La Salle's liking, especially in view of his longstanding premonition that God had destined him to take over the schools founded by Nyel. Besides, realizing that his novitiate could not for long stand up to the continual troubles raised against it in Paris, he was hoping to be able to transfer it to Rouen.

## **New difficulties.**

While he was in Paris making the arrangements for the Brothers' departure, the situation in Rouen changed. The teachers, who wanted to keep their positions, became aggressive and used every possible means to bring about the failure of the plans. They so intensely pressured those they knew were favorable to them that they succeeded in reviving the original opposition to the Brothers' coming, to such an extent that the leaders would not even hear of accepting the Brothers.

Of course, the archbishop was informed of these developments, which did not bother him at all. He told De La Salle not to worry but to have the Brothers ready for departure according to the original agreement. The archbishop suggested that under the circumstances it might be well for De La Salle to accompany the Brothers himself. He added that he too would return to Rouen, where he would use his influence to overcome all obstacles to their acceptance and see to their necessities.

## **De La Salle leaves Paris on foot with his Brothers.**

Accordingly, De La Salle set out on foot with his Brothers for Rouen.<sup>215</sup> This trip was similar to a retreat, so much was it sanctified by silence and prayer. Even the precise hours of the exercises were observed. They edified everyone by their modesty and recollection in the various places they passed through and arrived in Rouen several days before the archbishop's return. De La Salle awaited his arrival and then went to receive his blessing and directives. The archbishop received him with renewed courtesy and with an assurance of continued support. This initiative was put into effect without delay, for after consultation with the senior president, the archbishop called another meeting of the *Bureau des Valides* and requested that De La Salle also be present.



### **The Brothers are accepted in the *Bureau des Valides*.**

In his presence the various objections raised against the new foundation were discussed. The archbishop tried in vain to overcome the opposition. Minds were so made up that it was impossible to bring them around to his viewpoint. After much discussion of how the project might be successfully accomplished, he proposed a compromise which could hardly be rejected. It was agreed to proceed with the plan for a period of time to see if the threatened difficulties actually developed. Everyone gladly accepted this proposal, and immediately all obstacles were overcome. It was further agreed to lodge the Brothers in the *Bureau des Valides*.

### **1705. They are crushed by the work.**

The Brothers took up residence there on May 19, 1705. They found themselves faced with the responsibility of instructing five to six hundred poor persons in morning and evening prayers, reading, writing, arithmetic, and the catechism. This work was excessive for the small number of Brothers available for giving instruction. Besides, the Brothers were still obliged to take care of their schools in the four principal parts of the city.<sup>216</sup> Because the administrators of the *Bureau* had limited the number of Brothers who could be assigned there, it was impossible for De La Salle to send additional Brothers to share the work. Soon the first Brothers were overwhelmed with their duties. Patience and adjustment to the situation seemed the only solution. De La Salle counselled his Brothers to be courageous in the face of the difficulties to be expected in any new enterprise.

The people of this large city, not yet used to seeing the Brothers, insulted them and even threw stones at them. De La Salle shared these humiliations, but when the populace saw that neither he nor his Brothers ever complained about this treatment, their hostility gradually turned to admiration, and soon the Brothers' virtue was highly respected.

Both the archbishop and M. de Pontcarré looked upon the establishment in the *Bureau des Valides* as their own project, and they were determined to make it succeed. They inquired carefully into the Brothers' method of teaching the poor. Satisfied, they continued to look out for the Brothers' welfare.



**They leave [the *Bureau des Valides*] after two years and go to [the parish schools in] Rouen.**

De La Salle, however, kept an eye on the situation and saw that the Brothers' manner of life in the *Bureau* was incompatible with their obligations as religious. They were so taken up with teaching that they could not find time for meditation and prayer. The resulting dissipation and relaxation affected all their daily activities. The Brothers were not able to follow the order of exercises prescribed by their Rule; even the hours for their meals were not fixed. This irregular way of living was unsuitable for them because it could make them lose the habits of punctuality and exactitude in which they had been trained. Their example would become a detriment to the rest of the Institute.

For a long time De La Salle sought a solution to these difficulties. He tried several compromises in cases where the duties of the house conflicted with the obligations of the Rule. He prayed much, and finally after two years he decided to withdraw the Brothers from the *Bureau* so that they might return to their chosen way of life.<sup>217</sup> He spoke to the administrators of his concern and problems and of the impossibility for the Brothers to continue to instruct the poor of the *Bureau*. They were overburdened with work, and their duties were incompatible with their obligations as religious. Life in the *Bureau's* hospice did not fit at all with their own manner of living. He proposed to take his Brothers from the *Bureau des Valides* and place them in a house of their own, where they would be able to live according to their usual manner and still continue, if the authorities so wished, to take care of the city schools as they had agreed to do.

### **Same subject.**

De La Salle was told that he was free to do as he thought best but that if he withdrew from the *Bureau des Valides*, he could not expect the administrators to continue the financial support intended only for those who would teach the poor there. However, they did offer to pay him one half of the original amount, in view of the fact that he was going to take care of the schools in the city itself.

**Same subject.**

They believed that he would not accept this arrangement and that things would remain just as they had been for the past two years. De La Salle, who confided only in Providence and never allowed himself to be influenced by selfish interests, accepted this offer. He rented a house and moved in with his community in 1707.

**1707. They are responsible for schools in four parishes and lack what is necessary.**

It is true that the Brothers had much to suffer in these first years and that the allowance of 600 livres to which they were reduced was too small to maintain the eight or ten Brothers who were responsible for the four schools of Saint Maclou, Saint Vivien, Saint Godard, and Saint Eloi. However, God saw to it that they did not lack the necessities of life. During a famine which occurred in 1709, this community, which had always been poor, was helped by a charitable source that remained unidentified. They received a gift, small it is true, but enough in view of their needs, which bore this label, "Do not try to find out where this gift comes from; only place your trust in God, have care to serve Him faithfully, and He will sustain you."

**De La Salle takes steps to transfer his novitiate from Paris to Rouen.**

It was only with regret that De La Salle had left the care of his novitiate in Paris to look after the establishment of the Brothers in the *Bureau des Valides* in Rouen. Despite his efforts there, necessary as they were in those first days, he realized that his presence was also essential for his novices. For this reason, as soon as he saw that the Brothers of Rouen could take care of themselves, he hastened back to Paris to look after his community there.

He found it completely unsettled, now in one house, now in another, not able to remain in any one place. It was impossible to hope to form his novices in recollection, so necessary for the development of true piety, in the midst of so many distractions and changes. It seemed to him that the best solution would be to transfer the novitiate to Rouen. He ventured mentioning this to the archbishop and the senior president, both so evidently his declared protectors. They

approved his plan and promised to do everything in their power to make his project succeed.

### **He moves into the house of Saint Yon.**

The first problem was to locate a suitable house. There was none to be found in Rouen itself, but one was located in the suburb of Saint Sever: the property of Saint Yon, large, spacious, secluded, and suitable for a religious community.<sup>218</sup> It belonged to Madame de Bois-Dauphin, who allowed the Benedictine Sisters of the Abbey of Saint Amand of Rouen to use it as a country house for convalescent Sisters. M. Colbert, their archbishop, did not at all approve of this violation of the rules set up by the Council of Trent, which imposed perpetual cloister on these Sisters.<sup>219</sup> He was glad to find an occasion to eliminate this violation by the Sisters of the cloister rule. He, therefore, suggested that they give up their house to the Brothers for use as their novitiate. These Sisters had been accustomed for some time to this indulgence and were not inclined to give it up so easily. They, therefore, were not happy with the suggestion and sought various means to delay the negotiations, which were still in process when the death of Madame de Bois-Dauphin unexpectedly deprived the Sisters of the use of the house.

Madame the Marquise de Louvois, her daughter, who came into possession of the property, was approached by the archbishop with the request that she rent it to De La Salle for the purpose of housing his Institute's novitiate. She gave her consent, and De La Salle went to Paris to draw up the lease (1705). This was quickly accomplished without the Sisters of Saint Amand even being aware of what was taking place.<sup>220</sup>

### **The furniture is brought from Paris.**

Messrs. Colbert and de Pontcarré, who had taken this project much to heart, generously provided the means for moving the novitiate, with its furniture, from Paris to Rouen. Things were accomplished with as much dispatch as possible to prevent new difficulties and so discreetly that the community was set up in Rouen even before it was known in Paris that it had moved.<sup>221</sup>

### **A school for boarding students is established there.**

De La Salle, at peace in his new residence, thought only of compensating for the losses sustained during recent years because of so many disturbances. From this time on, he looked upon this house as his place of rest. He devoted himself to rekindling the fervor of the novitiate. The great regularity practiced there attracted a number of excellent subjects. Furthermore, the number of persons in his house increased considerably with the arrival of many boarding students sent to him from all parts of the country. He was obliged to set up, distinct from the community, a type of school for them to which he assigned competent Brothers as instructors.<sup>222</sup> He himself directed all this activity. The order he established in the house was such that not the least noise was heard. Silence was so strictly observed that it was difficult to believe that people were actually living in this large building.

### **The archbishop of Rouen grants priestly faculties to De La Salle.**

Occasionally, M. de Pontcarré would come to relax in the extensive gardens of Saint Yon. Much impressed with the peace and recollection that reigned everywhere, he often spoke of it to the archbishop, who for his own part was pleased to have established such a useful and edifying house. The archbishop assured De La Salle of his pleasure in learning that God had blessed his work. He asked him to make himself available for the ministry in the diocese and gave him written authorization to exercise his priestly powers; he exhorted him to use them as he had done in Paris. Despite this request, De La Salle only employed his priestly faculties occasionally, giving himself totally to the direction of his novices.

### **School at Saint-Denis-en-France.**

In spite of the attraction he felt for the peaceful solitude of Saint Yon, De La Salle did not neglect the general business of the Institute, especially when his presence was thought necessary in the new establishments. The school planned for Saint-Denis-en-France (1705)<sup>223</sup> was the occasion of his second trip to Paris that year. Mademoiselle Poignant,<sup>224</sup> with the advice of Dom Charles de L'Hostellerie, prior of the abbey,<sup>225</sup> offered to assume the expenses for the upkeep of two

Brothers who would teach the city's poor children free of charge. De La Salle disliked these small foundations, which were difficult to support, but out of consideration for the request of the prior and the abbey community and because he hoped that Mademoiselle Poignant would increase her support in keeping with the need, he finally overcame his hesitation. However, because of Mademoiselle Poignant's death, things did not develop as he had foreseen, and the school has remained as it was from the beginning.

### **The effort to re-establish the training school for country teachers fails.**

Meanwhile, it was proposed that De La Salle acquire Mademoiselle Poignant's house<sup>226</sup> for the purpose of setting up a training school for country schoolmasters. He had attempted to do this elsewhere several times before without success, as noted earlier. This did not prevent him from trying again at the request of his friends. With their help, he purchased the house with the intent of establishing the training school. When he came to Saint-Denis to take possession of the house, he found to his surprise considerable opposition, so much so that he was willing to forego his validly acquired rights rather than engage in a lawsuit. He thus gave up the idea of the training school for country schoolmasters for the third time, leaving it to others who might be inspired by God to undertake this work.

### **To rekindle their fervor, De La Salle assembles the Brothers of the Institute at Rouen.**

After finishing his business in Paris, he returned to Saint Yon, where he devoted himself completely to the training of the young men enrolled in his novitiate. At this same time, he introduced some new practices and precautions to prevent the danger of relaxation among the Brothers of the Institute. He feared that the many difficulties and anxieties they had experienced during the past several years had weakened regular observance in the communities in the provinces. To remedy this situation as much as was in his power, he brought together Brothers from as many places as he could to make their annual retreat under his direction. At this time he gave them suitable advice to strengthen them against temptation and discouragement. He thus renewed their zeal for the fulfillment of the obligations they had

assumed and reanimated the spirit of obedience, austerity, and mortification which was so much a part of his own disposition. In a word, he neglected nothing to give them a love for their state and to send them back to their communities filled with fervor and courage, so that they would mutually encourage one another to tend to the highest perfection.

While he was thus devoted to having his Brothers practice the virtues proper to their state, he did not neglect his own obligations. He was the first at all exercises; the sight of him was sufficient to encourage everyone. He observed the Rule faithfully, and when the Brothers expressed fear that they might not in the future be able to observe all the obligations so carefully set down, he replied that God would not ask more than they were able to do. As for himself, he was determined to be faithful to the Rule until the end of his days.

### **He is cured of a swelling.**

Full of these pious sentiments, he was far from relaxing anything in his practice of penance. Because of his continual austerities, together with his prolonged prayer in an uncomfortable position, one of his knees developed a considerable swelling. A painful operation was performed in the hope of reducing it. He was so accustomed to suffering that he seemed insensible to pain. During the actual operation he prayed with such recollection that he seemed unaffected by it.

### **School of Saint Roch in Paris.**

When the incision was entirely healed, he went to Paris to found a new school in the parish of Saint Roch,<sup>227</sup> where for some time there had been talk of setting up a free school. His experience in planning these new establishments made him take more precautions than before to insure greater stability than many of his other schools had enjoyed. He stayed a considerable time with the Brothers to help them over the first difficult days. Despite these efforts, this school did not last long, for the Brothers found themselves forced into situations incompatible with their way of life.<sup>228</sup>

## He composes several works of piety.

De La Salle found that he had to stay longer in Paris than he had planned. Because the swelling on his knee, which he thought had been cured in Rouen, flared up again, it had to be attended to once more. He made use of the imposed leisure to revise several small books of piety he had composed for his novices during the previous time they were at Vaugirard. These works breathed the spirit of God with which he was animated and the fullness of the spirit of Christianity which he possessed and expounded so completely. They were written in a simple, flowing style but with such feeling that it is impossible to read them without being moved.

The first of these, which he entitled *Les Devoirs d'un chrétien envers Dieu et les moyens de pouvoir bien s'en acquitter*,<sup>229</sup> is written in the form of a dialogue so that anyone can understand it. The purpose of the first part is to explain clearly and precisely the obligations of a Christian. The second part speaks of *Du Culte extérieur et public que les chrétiens sont obligés de rendre à Dieu et des moyens de le lui rendre*.<sup>230</sup> This part led him naturally to give a full explanation of the ceremonies of the Church, the mysteries of religion, and the principal feasts of the year.

The second treatise is *Instructions et Prières pour la Sainte Messe, la Confession et la Communion, avec une Instruction méthodique par demandes et réponses pour apprendre à se bien confesser*.<sup>231</sup> De La Salle enters into great detail concerning confession, and at the end of the treatise there are prayers and aspirations drawn for the most part from Sacred Scripture.

The third book he wrote is entitled *Les Règles de la bienséance et de la civilité chrétienne*,<sup>232</sup> in which he uses examples drawn from Sacred Scripture and the Fathers of the Church. He worked harder on this book than on any of the others. It was so well received by the public that it has gone through a great number of editions.

We also have from his hand other books which were not released to the public. These are *Recueil de ses Règles* and *Maximes de Piété*,<sup>233</sup> both written for the use of his novices, who were actually always the principal audience he had in mind, for he thought of them as the most precious portion of the flock that God had confided to his care. Therefore, as soon as he was cured of his knee trouble, he again took the road for Rouen to return to Saint Yon, where he resumed the direction of the novitiate, from which he absented himself only with the greatest reluctance.

### **New litigation by the Paris schoolmasters.**

He was not destined to enjoy the calm and tranquility he expected, for soon he was caught up in new difficulties. The schoolmasters of Paris, whose opposition to the schools of the Brothers of the Institute had for a while subsided, began anew to make difficulties over those in the parish of Saint Sulpice. Because they no longer hoped to be able to ruin them completely by the means they had previously taken, they settled for attempting to prevent the Brothers from taking any but the poorest into their schools, thereby obliging them to turn away any student whose parents were able to pay for his education.

Nothing would seem to be more reasonable or more just than this proposal, and it was expected that De La Salle would agree, because he had founded the schools chiefly for the education of the poor. However, he would not accept these conditions, either because he knew of the evil purpose of the schoolmasters, who desired only to see the schools fail, or possibly because he did not want to put any conditions on those who might be admitted to the free schools,<sup>234</sup> or finally for some unknown reason of his own.

In fact, De La Salle was at the limit of his patience because of the continual troubles that had been his lot ever since he had first brought the Brothers to this parish. He preferred to withdraw them completely rather than to see himself deprived of the freedom of action required by his zeal and charity. He, therefore, closed the schools, recalled the Brothers stationed there, and sent them to various parts of the kingdom where there was a demand for them.<sup>235</sup> He left only one Brother in the house in Saint Sulpice to look after the residence and furniture, and he gave him orders not to assume any new obligations.

### **The pastor of Saint Sulpice asks for the return of the Brothers who had left his schools.**

It did not take long to see the effect of this change upon the parish. The majority of the fathers and mothers of the parish complained to the pastor of Saint Sulpice, who seemed as distressed as they. He promised immediate action to remedy the situation. Those most interested in seeing that the Brothers did not return offered to provide replacements for them. The pastor, however, would have nothing to do with this measure and sought some compromise solution. He wrote to De La Salle, asking him to send back the Brothers to reopen the



schools. De La Salle replied that he preferred to take his Brothers away rather than have them harassed continually by quarrels which were a considerable annoyance to them. He explained further that the bad treatment they had received during their latest difficulties had discouraged many of the Brothers, that it was not easy to find replacements for them, and finally that he was resolved not to send any others until he could be assured they would be well treated and free of the jealous activity of the Paris schoolmasters.

### **They could return under certain conditions.**

The pastor of Saint Sulpice agreed to these conditions and made new arrangements with the Brothers, stipulating that they would allow in their schools only children possessing a note signed by the pastor testifying that they were among the poor of the parish. Under these conditions the schoolmasters would cease their opposition once and for all.

### **The schools reopen.**

When all this had been agreed, De La Salle sent (1706) a competent Brother to Paris to ratify this arrangement in such a way that the schoolmasters could not find any new cause for trouble. After this had been settled, he sent a sufficient number of Brothers to take over the schools, which were not nearly so well attended as before because of the limitations placed on who could enroll. This aspect was more than compensated for by the fact that the schools have since then continued in peace, free from interference.<sup>236</sup>

### **De La Salle makes a retreat at the discalced Carmelites.**

When this business was completely settled, De La Salle thought seriously of retiring to some isolated place where he might give himself wholly to prayer and self-examination. He had often considered doing this, but a succession of pressing matters always prevented him from putting this desire into execution. Now being free and not foreseeing any obstacles, he spoke of his plan to only one or two Brothers on whose discretion he could rely, then left secretly for Paris to make a retreat in the discalced Carmelite monastery. The particular veneration

he had for Saint Theresa, from whose works he had imbibed the spirit of mental prayer he so appreciated, and the particular esteem he had for the Religious of her reform made him choose this monastery over others.

He stayed fifteen days in recollection and profound union with God. He gathered enough new strength during his continual prayer to stand up to the troubles and difficulties that he knew the future was to bring when he returned to Saint Yon, where his beloved children were greatly distressed at his absence. His presence brought them peace once again, and he used the renewed inspiration he had acquired in this retreat to animate them more than ever to tend to the highest perfection of their state.

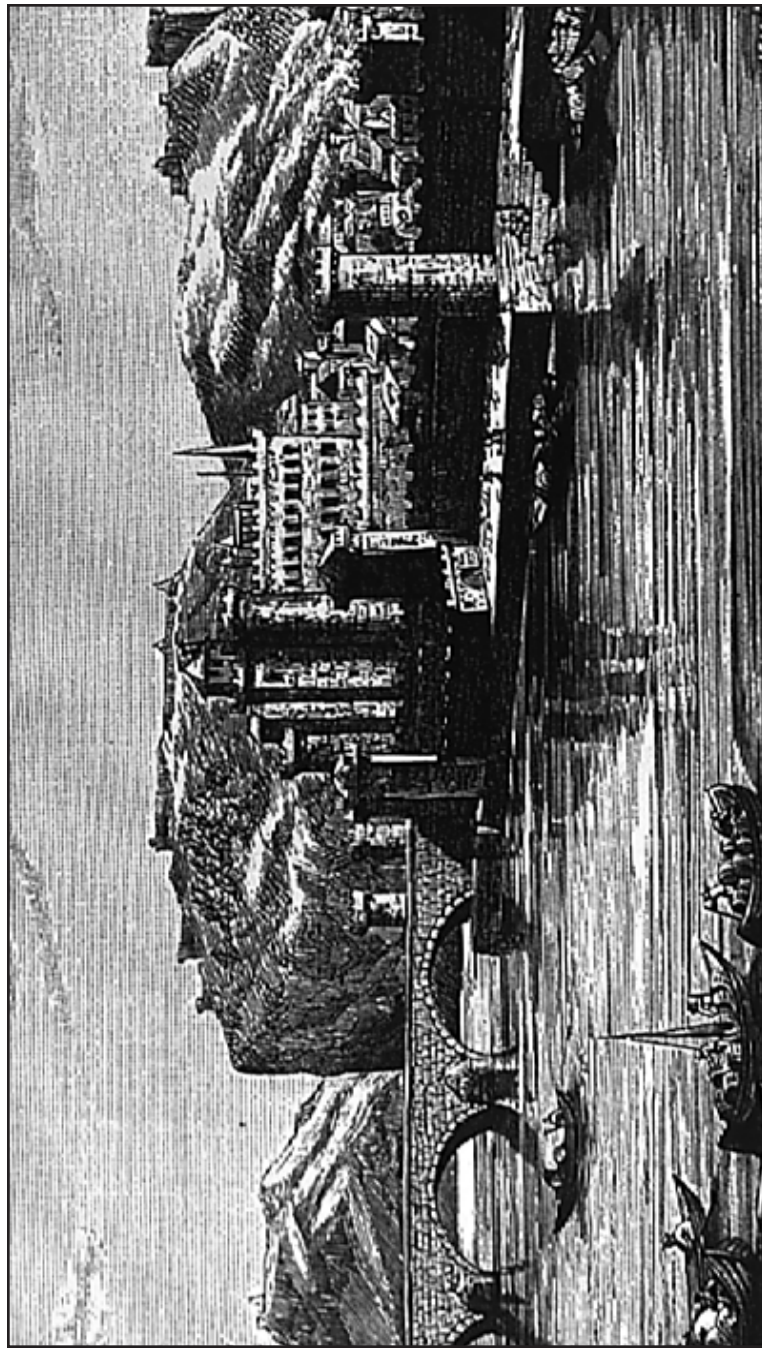
### **Schools in Provence.**<sup>237</sup>

While De La Salle enjoyed the solitude of Saint Yon that he so much desired, God opened a new field for his zeal in Provence and neighboring places. Since 1702, certain highly respected and virtuous persons had been thinking of setting up free schools, for they were well aware of the great good the schools had wrought in localities where they were already established. They contacted De La Salle to ask him for the services of the Brothers of the Institute. Their request caused him careful thought. It might be dangerous to send the Brothers so far away that they would be, so to speak, on their own.<sup>238</sup> He would be unable to see them often to give them necessary guidance. Besides, he feared to put them in a region only recently infected in large part by heresy,<sup>239</sup> for they were not sufficiently prepared to prevent errors from creeping into their schools unsuspectedly. These reasons made him hesitate in his decision, and for a time he remained irresolute.

However, he was urged with such insistence that he could no longer refuse politely; therefore, he decided to accept the offers. He resolved to begin with the city of Avignon.

### **School in Avignon.**

I have already mentioned that it was due to the urgent requests of Madame de Chateaublanc,<sup>240</sup> wife of a papal treasurer in Comptat, that this first foundation was made. This truly Christian woman, devoted to the instruction of the poor, kept after her husband until he agreed to let her devote a certain sum of money for the establishment of a free



View of Avignon from the river Rhône, engraving by Méaulle of a drawing by Garnier. *Photo E. Roussel (ER, plate 119, slide 173).*

school in that city. De La Salle delayed in accepting her offer, and she died before having the satisfaction of seeing her plans realized, but her husband considered it his duty to carry out her last wishes. He wrote to De La Salle, inviting him to send two Brothers to Avignon (1707); they arrived that same year.<sup>241</sup> At first, M. de Chateaublanc lodged them in a friend's house until the one he had bought for a school was ready. He generously saw to their needs over and above the legacy left by his wife, so that he too could share in her merit for this work of charity.

### **Second school in Avignon.**

While everything was being put in order for the Brothers' work, they were presented to M. de Gontery,<sup>242</sup> archbishop of the city, who received them with fatherly kindness and took them under his protection. They then opened their school,<sup>243</sup> which soon became so successful that they were obliged to open a second one to take the strain off the first. The archbishop himself financed this second school. He was so pleased with the methods of instruction used by the Brothers that he would frequently have them come to his palace to teach the catechism classes in his presence. By his interest in their work he inspired a respect for the Brothers and a spirit of emulation among the pupils.

### **1707. School in Grenoble.**

About this same time it was proposed that free schools be opened in Grenoble. Several ecclesiastics formed a pious association whose principal purpose was the relief of the city's poor.<sup>244</sup> Some members of the *Parlement* found out about this society and wished to join it to participate in its good works. M. Ennemond Alleman de Montmartin,<sup>245</sup> their bishop, took this society under his protection and became its director. Its members agreed upon certain practices of piety which they drew up as a sort of Rule, and all pledged to observe them. They formed a *Bureau de Charité*, where they met regularly to discuss the needs of the poor and other matters of public interest. One of their first cares was to provide for the education of the children of the city. They were aware that the best means of accomplishing this was the establishment of free schools; therefore, they wrote to De La Salle, asking him for a sufficient number of Brothers to assume

this responsibility. They themselves underwrote the expenses involved and agreed to give a fixed sum annually for the upkeep of the schools and the Brothers. The first school was begun in the parish of Saint Laurent,<sup>246</sup> and several years later another was opened in Saint Hugues parish to lighten the burden of the first school and to make it easier for children from the various parts of the city to attend classes.

### **School in Mende.**

From Avignon the schools gradually spread into neighboring towns. M. de Piencourt,<sup>247</sup> bishop of Mende, the capital of Gévaudan, asked De La Salle to start a school in his diocese. De La Salle was disposed to honor this request and had one of the Brothers come down from Rouen to prepare the way and make the necessary arrangements.

The bishop, fearing that matters might be unduly delayed, wrote to De La Salle to hasten the Brothers' arrival:

I cannot thank God enough for having inspired you to train schoolteachers and to form them in Christian virtue. Seminaries form good priests, but good teachers give the first impressions of piety and the Christian religion, thus contributing to the sanctification of all Christians. I could not be more pleased with the Brother you have sent me. He, while awaiting other helpers, has begun the instruction of our youth. I would be much obliged to you if you could send another, able to teach writing and arithmetic, because this will attract all of our young people, and they will be given thereby a first introduction to Christian piety. On my part, I will give the Brothers all the assistance in my power so that they will be perfectly pleased with their work in this town. The Brother who is already here will be able to tell you of my good sentiments in his regard and in reference to the school. I trust that this will continue to grow by the good choice of those you will send to me. I shall be much obliged to you, and I remain, with particular esteem. . . .

The bishop of Mende, April 8, 1707.

By reading this letter we can see the regard the bishop of Mende had for the free schools and the particular esteem he had for De La Salle, their Founder. He saw clearly that the schools would be a great help to his people in preserving them from the poison of heresy surrounding them on all sides.

### School in Marseille.

This same thought led several other bishops of neighboring localities to set up schools in their dioceses under De La Salle's direction, and he did all in his power to respond to their requests. This same year (1707) he sent two Brothers to the bishop of Marseille, who had asked for them in order to begin a school, with the hope of sending more as soon as the need arose. The bishop's plan did not materialize, however, for he was named to the diocese of Aix, and only these two Brothers remained there up to the time De La Salle established his novitiate in Marseille, as we shall see later.

### School in Alès.

Several years before, King Louis XIV had separated the city of Alès from the diocese of Nîmes and named as its first bishop M. François-Maurice,<sup>248</sup> head of the Royal Missions, which were founded to work for the conversion of the Calvinists of Bas-Languedoc.<sup>249</sup> As soon as he had received the Bull from Pope Innocent XII,<sup>250</sup> the new bishop set about the institution of different religious organizations in his diocese to oppose the power of the heretics, who were in the majority. He knew from firsthand experience how important it was to have good teachers to inspire children from their earliest years in the principles of the Catholic religion and to withdraw them gradually from the religious errors into which they were born. With this in mind he succeeded in obtaining sufficient funds from the king to set up royal schools, and he confided these to the direction of the Brothers of the Christian Schools.

The Calvinists were frightened at these new measures and did everything in their power to oppose the schools from the outset. But because the schools were under the protection of the king and the bishop, the Calvinists could not prevent their opening and were obliged to give way to the powers behind the undertaking. The best they could do was to prevent their own children from attending these schools and to have them instructed in their own homes by schoolmasters of their sect.

## **Order to the Calvinists to send their children to the schools.**

The bishop was aware of this and soon obtained an order from the court that no teaching was to be done in town without the express permission of the Brothers. Further, all parents, without exception, were subject to serious penalties for any violations and were to send their children to the catechism lessons regularly taught on Sundays and feasts. These orders of the king were obeyed, but as soon as the children returned home, their parents sought to eradicate the Catholic doctrine they had been taught. Thus the Brothers' task was often an unproductive and thankless one. The bishop, to whom they expressed their frustration, inspired them with his zeal and encouraged them not to give up sowing seeds that would grow in due time, even in unrewarding soil. Indeed, God blessed their work, and they had the consolation of converting several of their students who afterwards persevered in the Catholic faith.

## **De La Salle visits the schools of Provence and Languedoc.**

The Brothers kept De La Salle informed of everything that was taking place. They expressed their desire for De La Salle to visit them and give them advice on how to cope with the difficulties they were experiencing. Accordingly, feeling that he could no longer put off bringing them this assistance (1708), he set out from Rouen that year to visit his houses in Provence and Languedoc.<sup>251</sup>

He appeared on the scene without previous warning, to the agreeable surprise of the Brothers. He was well received both by the bishops of the various localities and by distinguished citizens of Provence. Some attempts were made to have him stay longer than he had planned. Some new foundations<sup>252</sup> were proposed to him which would have required his staying, but other pressing obligations demanded his prompt return to Rouen.

## **1709. School in Versailles.**

The school founded the following year in Versailles was first suggested to him by M. Huchon,<sup>253</sup> pastor of that city, who wanted the poor children of his parish to have the advantage of an education. It was not too difficult for him to obtain both the resources and the protection



needed, for everyone knew that King Louis XIV esteemed and trusted the pastor.

### **De La Salle leaves Rouen and transfers his novitiate to Paris.**

The great famine that afflicted France that same year forced De La Salle to transfer his novitiate from Saint Yon in Rouen, where he could no longer find the means to maintain it, to Paris, where resources were more abundant than in the provinces. He looked for a secluded house where he might set up his novitiate, but despite the good will of many of his friends who wanted to help, he suffered greatly. God blessed the patience with which he and his Brothers endured the hardships to which they were reduced. They were so poor that they lacked absolutely everything. They no longer had bread, and the baker who usually looked after them would no longer give them anything, for they had no money to pay him.

De La Salle had recourse to his usual means in this circumstance; he placed his confidence in God, strongly persuaded that God would not abandon them in their pressing need. Not long after, he felt the results of his trust, for on his way to celebrate Mass the next day, he came upon someone on whose charity he had no reason to depend who asked him where he was going. He replied, "I am about to celebrate Mass to beg God to send our community what we need to keep alive, for there is nothing in the house, and we have no money to buy anything."

The person to whom he was speaking was touched at this and said, "Go in peace, for I myself shall look after this." This charitable person then gave ten *écus*<sup>254</sup> to the community, which was sufficient to buy bread for several days. However, because the community suffered so much during this famine, several Brothers fell sick. Some became victims of scurvy caused by their poor diet, and several were soon in their last extremity. De La Salle gave them every care and by his own devotion and that of the famous physician Helvetius brought them back from death's door.

### **Insubordination of some Brothers.**

Meanwhile, God tested De La Salle's virtue at a time when he expected to be able to enjoy more peace. A source of trouble developed



with unforeseeable and lamentable repercussions. While De La Salle was in Rouen, several of the Brothers who had been left to direct the schools in Paris became lax during his absence. He sought to bring them back to the practice of the Rule, but these undisciplined children disavowed him and ranged themselves against him. They refused him the obedience that was his due. Far from submitting with docility to what he required of them, they complained loudly of the severity of the regulations that had been established in the house.

Although he was astonished by their rebellion, De La Salle sought to win them over by his kindness. He carried his effort to the point of appointing one of the malcontents to direct a newly founded school in Provence. He tried by this gesture of confidence to have the Brother reconsider his position and to give him time to reform his conduct, for he was persuaded that once the Brother saw himself the head of a community, he would become more moderate and reasonable.

### **Their desertion.**

Far from being touched at De La Salle's kindness, this hard-hearted Brother used the remedy itself to become more bitter than ever. He became arrogant in dealing with his Brothers, which annoyed them. Then he gave way to a licentious manner of living and finally scandalized the whole town by his haughty way of speaking, so that De La Salle felt obliged to have him recalled. However, he would not obey the orders of his Superior. Abandoning his religious habit, he returned to the world, where he had already prepared a place to live as he pleased.

Several other Brothers, influenced by his bad example, seemed set on rebellion and used various means to evade De La Salle's control. They relied on the influence of various persons who assisted them and worked to detach them from the Institute for the purpose of forming a new society. Secretly they looked for a building where they might go and gradually attract others to join them in an easier and more comfortable style of life. Everything would be done according to their inclination, and they thought of themselves as experienced and enlightened enough to reform what seemed to them to be too excessive in De La Salle's conduct.

### **Hypocritical repentance of a Brother who had to be expelled.**

God, who humbles the proud, brought all their schemes to naught. One of the Brothers involved in the plan, touched with remorse, came to throw himself at De La Salle's feet in the presence of the whole community and, bursting into tears, disclosed the whole scheme. Touched with compassion, De La Salle did all that a tender father's charity could to let him know the seriousness of his fault and to inspire him to sincere repentance. The Brother seemed to give a number of signs of sincere conversion, but the shame and embarrassment caused by his revelations continued to trouble his mind. He became convinced that he was despised by those who had remained faithful, and gradually this thought became unbearable for him. Not having the strength to conquer these feelings, he gave in to them more and more. Soon he began to stir up new trouble in the community.

De La Salle was so touched by his unhappy state that he could not bring himself to sever this corrupt member from the community. He hoped against hope that he might yet be able to bring this wandering sheep back to the fold. The great fear he had of losing a soul confided by God to his care made him seek means to give him time to change his ways. In fact, De La Salle hesitated so long to initiate further action that the Brothers took it into their own hands to send the Brother away, along with those associated with him in his revolt. This seemed to be the only way they knew to rid themselves of a scandal which had lasted too long, to the prejudice of good order. Soon it was peaceful again.

### **1709. The Sunday academy in Saint Sulpice parish.**

During this same year the plan for starting a Sunday academy that had been formulated ten years before by the pastor of Saint Sulpice was finally put into effect.<sup>255</sup> Its purpose was, as I stated earlier, to gather together on Sunday and feast day afternoons young working men who could not otherwise go to school because of their occupations and to teach them the fundamentals of religion. Because De La Salle's eagerness to carry out the original plan was not matched by that of the pastor who at first made the suggestion, the whole idea had almost been forgotten. However, this year circumstances were more favorable, and again measures were taken to carry out the project. The permission of Cardinal de Noailles was sought. He was informed of the reasons for the new undertaking and gave his approval.

### **Same subject.**

This Christian academy was opened at noon the following Sunday for the young men twenty years old and under who had assembled for this purpose. Things progressed so well that in a short time there were more than 200 students, all studying according to their individual capabilities. Some were taught drawing; others, arithmetic. The less educated were taught to read and write. The lesson lasted about two hours, followed by the catechism and then by an exhortation suited to their circumstances and abilities.

It is easy to appreciate the benefit the city of Paris derived from these classes. All who came with good intentions were accepted. It was an excellent means of removing from vice and dissipation a large number of young people with little or no instruction in the duties of being a Christian, who ordinarily spent Sundays and feasts in dissolute, frivolous, and useless activities. In the Sunday academy they acquired a taste for the arts; they were better prepared to earn a living, and more important still, all were taught how to work out their salvation by sanctifying their ordinary occupations.

### **The Sunday academy is destroyed.**

De La Salle was well aware of this school's usefulness, for he kept a watchful eye on it. He spared neither care nor expense to have the Brothers assigned to teach drawing become excellent teachers. Soon he saw to his disappointment that their training led to their loss. Taken up with their skills and flattered by some of their students with the prospect of more lucrative and, in truth, selfish earnings, they were soon punished for their infidelity, for they were abandoned by both God and others. Instead of the advantages they had promised themselves because of their talents, they led a miserable life in the world, followed by a sudden death, which did not allow them even time to make amends for the scandal they had caused.

It was only through the interest of the pastor of Saint Sulpice that the school continued to exist for some time. But when it came to a question of training others to take over the drawing classes, the Brothers begged not to be given this assignment, through fear of succumbing to temptation, for they still had before their eyes the sad events of recent days. There was not a single Brother who seemed willing to learn to draw in order to teach it to others. For this reason the Sunday

academy began to decline, many young men stopped coming, and gradually it ceased to function.

### **School in Les Vans.**

The interest of several bishops who had invited the Brothers to take charge of the free schools in their dioceses and the great usefulness of the schools were sufficient motives for several pious persons to make it a duty of religion to procure a similar advantage for their own locality (1710). Such was the reason for the foundation made in the small village of Les Vans in the diocese of Uzès in Languedoc.

### **The Calvinists oppose it and are repressed.**

The founder of this school was the Abbé de Saint-Jean of this town, son of the illustrious house of the Barons of Elze in Vivarais.<sup>256</sup> He was motivated by his zeal for the conversion of the heretics in his part of the country. Indeed, he encountered great opposition on their part, but he overcame this through the authority of the *intendant*<sup>257</sup> of the province, who went to the scene with the express purpose of suppressing these heretics.

The inhabitants of the town were not pleased with this treatment; they could see the dire consequences for their party. They did everything in their power to free themselves from this opposition but without success, for the same force that had defeated them held them in check. They vigorously petitioned for their liberty and independence, but seeing that ways were always found to ignore their demands, they turned to violence. Several times they made attempts on the Brothers' lives. They laid snares for them and set up barricades in the streets to prevent them from leaving the house. Not being able to intimidate the Brothers by insults, they gathered as a mob one evening and surrounded the house with the intention of destroying it and massacring the Brothers who lived there. At first they threw stones at the door and through the windows. Later they tried to scale the walls, doing all in their power to succeed in their plot against the Brothers.

During this assault the Brothers were praying in their oratory, offering their lives to God as victims sacrificed in His honor. But God did not allow them to become victims of this fanatical mob bent on their destruction. By intervention of the magistrate the mob was dispersed, and the Brothers were rescued from the danger that threat-

ened them. At the insistence of the bishop of Uzès, the ringleaders of this violent action were punished as an example to the others. Meanwhile the Brothers took care to inform De La Salle of their anxiety because of this extraordinary opposition and told him of the steps they had taken to survive this turbulence. He replied that he thanked God that He had inspired the Brothers to have recourse only to Him in their difficulties and that they had used only the weapons of prayer for their defense. He added that he was overjoyed to learn that his disciples had been found worthy to suffer humiliations for the honor of their holy religion.

Far from discouraging him, this extraordinary event served only to give De La Salle greater confidence. It seemed in fact that his own understanding became more enlightened in proportion to the bitter trials he had to endure. He admitted that he no longer was prey to those uncertainties and misgivings which formerly had made him hesitate when there was a question of extending his work into the various other provinces of the kingdom.

### **School at Moulins in Bourbonnais.**

De La Salle was in this frame of mind when he was asked to send two Brothers to open a free school at Moulins in Bourbonnais. This was at the request of a holy priest<sup>258</sup> who had spent almost his entire life teaching the children of this town. Age and experience had convinced him of the importance of instructing the young. For some time he had been looking for someone on whose zeal he could count to take over this duty. Not that the task had become too demanding for him, but he had learned of the great good accomplished by the schools founded by De La Salle. He, therefore, resolved to confide his school to him.

This holy priest's own reputation for piety and his zeal easily overcame all difficulties which would have been raised if a man less revered than he had attempted to found a new school in the city. He spoke so well of the Brothers of De La Salle's Institute that he was listened to with pleasure, and such was the people's confidence in him that they accepted his word even before meeting the Brothers. He was authorized to bring them to the town, and soon the inhabitants realized that they were not mistaken in their trust, for the Brothers perfectly lived up to what had been said of them. Everyone was pleased that their priest had invited the Brothers.

### School in Dijon.

The school at Moulins had been preceded several years before by the one at Dijon, which traced its origin to M. Rigolet, the son of the senior president of the *Chambre des Comptes*.<sup>259</sup> The piety which was traditional in this family led both these gentlemen to consecrate a part of their wealth to the establishment of a school. From that time on, the Brothers have been supported by their generosity.

### School in Boulogne.

The last of these foundations made by De La Salle was that of Boulogne-sur-Mer in 1710. He sent four Brothers at the request of M. de La Cocherie,<sup>260</sup> who wished to do this for the benefit of his native place and who assumed all the expenses. The bishop of Boulogne,<sup>261</sup> to whom the Brothers presented themselves, received them as favorably as he had previously received those who went to Calais in 1701. He was especially kind to them and not only gave them all the permissions required for setting up their school in the city but also allowed them to stay in his seminary during the time the house destined for them in the lower town was being put in order.

### Second school in Boulogne.

The great usefulness of this school suggested the idea of founding a second one in the upper city for the benefit of children there. The bishop was impressed by the people's eagerness to support his good intentions by providing a house for the Brothers. The work on the house proceeded rapidly but soon was halted because of a shortage of materials. As it happened, the Marquis de Colbert, governor of the city, had himself drawn up the plans for the new house. Because he appeared interested in its progress, his help was requested to obtain the needed materials. His involvement stimulated action, and soon others contributed to the work. Before long the house was finished, and the Brothers moved in.

### **De La Salle visits the Brothers.**

Meanwhile, De La Salle arrived in Boulogne. He was agreeably surprised to see with what interest so many had contributed their help. His reputation had preceded him, and he was the center of curiosity in the city. Everyone wanted to see such a noted person whose virtue had acquired for him such an excellent reputation. He was continually shown every mark of respect, which was not at all in keeping with his personal tastes. He would have preferred to dispense with some of the ceremony described to him as absolutely necessary, but fearing to offend against Christian civility, he did all that was asked of him in order to have nothing for which to reproach himself. As soon as he could, he left the town of Boulogne to visit his other houses. He then returned to Paris, where he had been obliged to reestablish his novitiate in the preceding year, as we have seen. There he lived in great recollection as a compensation for the distractions inherent in setting up so many new houses in such a short time.

### **To avoid going to court, he gives up his rights to a house in Saint-Denis-en-France.**

Hardly had he begun to enjoy the peace and solitude of his novitiate than new troubles arose over the house in Saint-Denis which he had purchased several years before to set up a school for training country schoolmasters, of which I spoke earlier. He was blamed for the purchase of the house on the grounds that he had suborned a minor, and the case was brought to court.<sup>262</sup> We have already noticed during the course of his life how much he detested lawsuits. No matter how serious the charges made against him and despite the perfectly good title he possessed to the house in question, he preferred, following the Gospel precept, to give up more than was asked than to go to court to protect his own interests. He had not found a better way to bring these legal cases against him to a close. He always used this method, for he had never allowed himself to be dominated by acquisitiveness. He was so little preoccupied with such secular matters that during the time others were heatedly pursuing the effort to take this house away from him, he left Paris for a visitation of his new establishments in Provence.

## **1712. He visits the establishments in Provence and arrives in Avignon.**

He arrived in Avignon near the end of Lent in 1712. The pleasure his visit brought to the Brothers cannot be expressed. They were agreeably surprised to find him with them at a time when they least expected it, and they detained him as long as possible. The Brothers pointed out to him the danger in proceeding further into the surrounding country, for the Camisards<sup>263</sup> had control of the area and had declared open warfare against the clergy. They were known to torture cruelly and then kill their victims out of unmitigated hatred of the Catholic religion. The Brothers related several horrible occurrences in the recent past and warned him that it would be foolish to expose himself to the fury of these fanatics. However, all this failed to temper his zeal.

## **His trip to Alès and the town of Les Vans.**

De La Salle went from Avignon to Alès without incident. All the people of the town were edified to see and converse with him. The zeal with which the Brothers devoted themselves unceasingly to the instruction of youth in the town was attributed to his devotion and great desire for the public good. The schools had improved greatly since the Brothers had taken charge. The bishop of Alès received him with every mark of distinction as a long-time and respected friend. He was particularly pleased with the way the Brothers devoted themselves to the conversion of the children of the heretics, whose numbers decreased daily by reason of the excellent instruction they were receiving. De La Salle thanked God for the results of their labors, which he had not dared hope would be so successful, and then set out for the little town of Les Vans, where there was a school.

He passed through Bravières, where the pastor, whom the Abbé de Saint-Jean<sup>264</sup> had commissioned to look after the Brothers in the town of Les Vans, received him with respect and reverence because of his virtue. The pastor himself served his Mass, despite the prolonged protests of De La Salle. Such signs of special consideration were distasteful to him, and as often as he could he avoided the occasions likely to give rise to them. For this reason, he decided to change his return route to avoid the display planned by the pastor of Gravières upon his reappearance.



From Les Vans he went to Mende. He crossed the mountains of Gévaudan at great peril and almost by miracle escaped on several occasions from losing his life. Fortunately, he finally arrived at Mende, where the Brothers had not expected him.

### **He arrives at Mende.**

De La Salle paid his respects to the bishop, who esteemed him highly and expressed his pleasure with the Brothers. The bishop invited him to stay in the episcopal residence and to eat there as well, but De La Salle would not accept either invitation because of the rules of the Institute. People in this town were so anxious to make his acquaintance that many came to see him and occupied his time much more than he had anticipated. When it came time to leave, he was even obliged to conceal the moment of his departure from several important persons who opposed his going, and he left by coach for the town of Les Vans. From there he went to Uzès, where he concluded several matters of business with the bishop of that town. Without further delay, he set out for Marseille, the goal of his visit to that part of France.

### **He goes to Marseille.**

For some time, many persons in this city were hoping to see him, and several attempts had been made to have him visit. His presence was necessary to discuss the establishment of free schools where they were needed in the different parts of the city. Several worthy and zealous priests, anxious to have schools, had written him about these matters. When they discovered he was in town, they met with him to find out his thinking on the subject and to take definite steps toward the accomplishment of their plans. They found no difficulty in having him approve the steps they had already taken to expedite the project.

### **He establishes a novitiate in Marseille.**

The favorable dispositions of these persons toward his Institute made De La Salle think of the possibility of setting up a novitiate in Marseille. He wanted to do this especially to train young men from this part of the country as teachers for the schools of the locality. They would have a better chance of succeeding than those he had had to

send previously, who did not possess the native manners and customs of Provence.

He found better facilities and assistance than he expected. People lost no time in helping him set up his novitiate. The bishop of Marseille<sup>265</sup> was the first to show his enthusiasm, and he was imitated by most of the city's pastors. Many pious persons contributed to the cause, one giving a sum of money and others promising to help in the future. As a result, a house was rented and quickly furnished. Applications for the novitiate were encouraged, and in a short time the number of candidates was considerable. Each day was marked by some new blessing, and it seemed that the future was assured by such happy beginnings.

### **The success makes him fear the consequences.**

Although these developments filled him with joy, De La Salle did not lose sight of the future. He feared that this enthusiasm might not last. He was not used to seeing such support for his undertakings. In all others he had to endure so much opposition that he was justifiably concerned at the apparent ease with which everything was accomplished in the present case, and he feared that such support might suddenly start to wane.

### **The number of schools in Marseille increases.**

However, his novitiate prospered daily and showed signs of progress beyond what he had thought possible. Those who had been the first to help him continued their support and worked to increase the number of free schools in the city, setting them up for the Brothers to be placed in them. Several parishes, it is true, did not yet have schools; steps were taken to provide them. A Jesuit priest who was preaching in the parish of Saint Martin was selected to urge the congregation to contribute to this worthy purpose. He was favorably heard; the congregation contributed what it could, and soon there were enough funds to begin a school.

### **De La Salle's care to train teachers for the schools.**

While everything was going well for the growth of the Institute of the Christian Schools, De La Salle worked unceasingly to form fit subjects

who would fulfill the hopes of those who had confided their children's education to the Brothers. He devoted himself so completely to this task that it seemed he had forgotten the needs of the other houses and Brothers of the Institute spread throughout France. In fact, he did not answer any letters sent to him, either from Paris or from the provinces where the Brothers were wondering just where he might be. He limited himself strictly to the schools of the Marseille region. From time to time he would have the Brothers come from nearby places to make retreats to strengthen them against laxity. In doing so, he asked nothing of them that had not been customary among the Brothers before they were sent to Provence.

### **Laxity of several Brothers.**

However, several of the Brothers had grown accustomed during his absence to greater freedom of action and now were quite annoyed at the exactitude in their duties demanded of them by De La Salle. Those teaching in the parish of Saint Laurent in Marseille were the first to object to a more orderly life. They were required to make their religious exercises daily in the novitiate house, and this was not to their liking. They took their complaints to the one who had founded the school. They pointed out to him that De La Salle's regulation of conforming to the timetable of the novitiate was entirely out of keeping with their duties; it required too much of their time, leaving too little for their school work. Besides, under pretext of supplying their food and support, some of the income from their school was assigned to the novitiate house. Their complaints, thought to be well founded, were listened to and steps taken to lessen their dependence on the novitiate and to withdraw them from the vigilance of their worthy Superior. Thus they were able to live in the independence and freedom they had known before, but this was to have serious consequences in the future.

### **His establishment in Saint Martin parish is opposed.**

Meanwhile, efforts continued to set up the school in the parish of Saint Martin. When everything was arranged, De La Salle proposed to send two Brothers, as originally agreed. However, the pastor of this parish, despite his personal esteem for De La Salle, did not care for the practices in use among the Brothers for the education of the

young, and he secretly opposed the project. He spoke to those involved in the foundation who had supplied the money, counselling them to limit their funds to priests who could be of service to the parish while they also took care of the school; thus their money would be used to greater advantage. The pastor being a person of high birth, prestige, and intelligence, it was not hard for him to convince these people to agree with him. With this accomplished, he made it a point to speak to the bishop of Marseille to convince him of his idea. He presented his case with an air of great sincerity, saying that the founders of the school had changed their attitude toward the Brothers, that they preferred to have the school under clerical control, and that if they were pressured into changing back to the original plan, they would withdraw their support for the school and give it to some other charitable work.<sup>266</sup>

### **The bishop of Marseille is influenced unfavorably toward the school.**

The bishop, unaware of the true intentions of the pastor and suspecting nothing sinister, was perplexed at the sudden change in attitude on the part of the benefactors. He himself was inclined to favor the Brothers of the Institute of the Christian Schools and would have liked to see all the schools of his diocese under their care. But he had just been appointed to his position and did not yet know the people. He did not want to antagonize them by invoking his authority. Instead he allowed the change to take place without giving even a sign of personal disapproval.

### **The pastor of Saint Martin explains the situation to De La Salle.**

When the pastor saw that he no longer had to worry about further opposition on this side, he summoned De La Salle to give him a detailed report on the apparent reasons for the changed views and to obtain his assent. Actually, De La Salle had little trouble in seeing who was behind all this, but at the same time he was not too distressed. He said to the pastor, "God be blessed; apparently it is not His will that this school be established." He thanked the pastor for any trouble he had gone to and after leaving him went to prostrate himself to adore the designs of Providence. From this moment he foresaw the

storm that was gathering against him and armed himself with the courage and fortitude he needed to withstand its violence.

### **The public is prejudiced against De La Salle.**

In truth it was not long before De La Salle began to feel the blows. Those who had shown so much zeal in encouraging his foundations were among the first to oppose them and declare themselves against him.<sup>267</sup> The frequent contacts of these persons with him previously gave them the opportunity to know his personal sentiments and the principles of the Institute's internal government. They disapproved as too restrictive most of the practices established among the Brothers. They attempted to convince him either to drop these customs altogether or at least to temper them. De La Salle, who had instituted these observances only in the light of much experience, was adamant in not wanting to change anything. He was too well aware of the consequences of change. In vain did they try to have him agree with their views. Because of this, they developed a dislike for him whom they regarded as hard, severe, inflexible, and one who would not be shaken in his point of view. Gradually they broke off their friendship with him and considered him henceforth as a silent critic of their own conduct. They went so far as to speak against him, prejudicing the minds of those who listened to them.

### **They seek to destroy his novitiate.**

They did not stop there; they attacked his novitiate. Several novices were prevailed upon to leave, and those interested in entering were dissuaded from doing so under the pretext that his direction was too severe. They said that his own fancy was the only rule of this novitiate and that it was impossible this house would ever produce the good it first seemed to promise. Nor was this all. They published a vicious and defamatory statement filled with calumnies and designed to make him despicable in all eyes. Seeing his reputation attacked, De La Salle felt it his duty to defend his own character. Without exceeding the limits of moderation and Christian charity, he contradicted the false charges levelled against his form of government for the Institute.

### Consequences of the prejudice.

Despite his solid arguments, the prejudice persisted. What was said only through rumor began to be believed, and soon many thought these accusations were founded in truth. Those who knew the real worth of De La Salle were not convinced, and all the false accusations did not in the least lessen their esteem and friendship for him. They openly sided with him and used every opportunity to try to dispel the prejudice against him and to bring people back to a more fair-minded understanding of the situation. Despite their efforts, people were not persuaded; things had gone so far that their reactions were carried to the extreme.

The Brothers no longer had even a hope of attracting new members. The school of Notre-Dame-des-Accoules had been planned for them, but this was now out of the question. The novitiate closed for want of candidates. Even Brothers most stable in their vocation were shaken, and some left the Institute. Those who were in the various schools in Provence and the neighboring region, not knowing exactly what the situation was, began to give credence to the false reports being circulated about De La Salle. They sided with his opponents and began to murmur and complain along with them. There were even a few, more outspoken than the others, who had the audacity to tell him that it seemed he had come to Marseille not to build up the Institute but only to destroy it.

### De La Salle yields to the storm and flees to the hermitage of Saint Maximin.

This allegation affected De La Salle more than anything else he had to endure up to that time. He tried in vain to influence the thinking of these discontented Brothers who were about to leave him. He was greatly affected by their desertion. Under assault from all sides and with no human resources to fall back on, he began to wonder if in reality his work did come from God. He had recourse to prayer but no longer felt the consolation he often experienced, even at the height of tribulation. He attributed this to his own sins. Filled with this thought, he decided to give way before the storm and to leave everything until it should please God to calm the tempest. He was persuaded, as he said, that "my absence would serve to pacify my enemies and inspire them with thoughts of peace for my dear children." So he retired to the hermitage of Saint Maximin, about twelve leagues from Marseille.<sup>268</sup>

### **He desires to finish his days there.**

There, freed from the continual troubles that had been raised against him, De La Salle gave himself with a completely renewed fervor to exercises of prayer and meditation on Sacred Scripture and to the most painful practices of penance. He enjoyed such peace of mind that the thought came to him of passing the rest of his days there, entirely forgotten by the world. During this time, while he expected to be able to enjoy the solitude he so much desired, God was preparing new trials for him to endure.

### **His peace is disturbed.**

The Brother<sup>269</sup> who had been left in charge of the novitiate at Marseille, seeing that there were no more subjects, came to De La Salle in his retreat to tell him of the state of that abandoned house. The news was not unexpected, for he had foreseen that his enemies would do everything in their power to cut off all the resources required to make a success of the Institute's work in Provence. What did surprise him, De La Salle said, was that the Brothers still thought of him. He had hoped, in leaving Marseille for this solitude, that he would be completely forgotten, and this had been for him a cause of joy. He would have wished that the Brothers had forgotten him and not even have tried to find out where he was staying. He was so content in his solitude that he preferred to remain there, hidden and in perpetual silence.

### **He believes himself incapable of governing the Institute.**

The Brother concerned was taken completely by surprise at such a resolve so contrary to the best interests of the Institute. He implored De La Salle not to abandon his children just when they had the greatest need of his presence. To this request De La Salle replied, "God be blessed, my dear Brother. What must you be thinking to speak like that? Don't you understand how little talent I have to direct others? Don't you know that several of the Brothers no longer want me as Superior? And they are correct, for I have very little ability."

The Brother, who always had a reverence for his worthy Superior, could not restrain his tears. He threw himself at his feet and said that he would not leave until he had been told what his wishes were.

De La Salle embraced him tenderly and directed him to go to another house of the Institute, where he should wait until it pleased God to bring calm to the troubles in Marseille.

### **Motives for his isolation.**

De La Salle's enemies profited by his absence to spread a report that he had deserted the Institute and that because of his action, several others had also left. It is true that during the time the most serious difficulties were being raised against his work, he gave thought on several occasions to retiring to some parish in Paris to devote himself exclusively to the work of converting sinners, a ministry that was especially attractive to him, and to leave the Institute entirely in the hands of Providence. He had never taken any steps in this direction, for the thoughts were merely passing ones. He always had much affection for the members of his Institute, being persuaded that God had confided them to his care. When he left Marseille, it was not because of irritation or anger. It was merely with the idea of preserving the peace by removing all cause for further harm to his Brothers, from whom he withdrew only to restore tranquility.

### **His reasons for not returning to Marseille.**

It was impossible for him to remain unknown any longer at Saint Maximin, now that the Brothers had found out where he was. Feeling that his presence in Marseille would only cause new difficulties, he decided to leave the region entirely, to let time smooth out the difficulties caused by those who provoked the city against him while he was there. He consulted several friends as to whether he would be doing the right thing if he returned to Paris. They considered it a good idea but advised him first to go to Rome, something he had in mind for a long time.<sup>270</sup>

### **He decides to go to Rome.**

There were two things to be accomplished by this visit. The first was to venerate Rome's sacred shrines, for which he had a particular veneration; the second was to respond to the Brothers' ardent desire that he should obtain the approbation of their Institute from the pope.<sup>271</sup>



He had already taken some steps in this direction, having sent two Brothers to Rome in the year 1694 under the protection of Cardinal d'Estrées.<sup>272</sup> Innocent XII, who then occupied the papal throne, received them favorably. Sure of his protection, they hoped to have a favorable reply to their request for a papal Bull of Approbation. However, the death of the Sovereign Pontiff, which followed shortly,<sup>273</sup> interrupted all the steps already taken. De La Salle was encouraged to renew these negotiations under the pontificate of Pope Clement XI<sup>274</sup> and to profit from the opportunity to bring these matters to a successful conclusion for the good of the Institute. This was all the encouragement he needed to make the decision. He reserved two places in a vessel soon to set sail and bought the provisions that he and the Brother who was to accompany him would need for the voyage.

### **The bishop of Marseille prevents him.**

While awaiting the day for sailing, he devoted himself completely to prayer, beseeching God to know if it was His will that he should go on this trip. He was soon heard, for at the moment of boarding the vessel, he met at the port the bishop of Marseille,<sup>275</sup> who was surprised to see him. After learning the purpose of the trip, the bishop counseled him to return to his community and to set about arranging to take over the school of Notre-Dame-des-Accoules. Through this incident De La Salle knew that God did not approve of his planned trip. Without further reflection, he rejoined the Brothers, to whom he said, "God be blessed, here I am, back from Rome. It was not His will that I should go; He prefers that I should do something else."

### **He retires to Grenoble.**

After the encouraging word from the bishop of Marseille, there was no doubt that the Brothers would immediately take over the school of Notre-Dame-des-Accoules. However, De La Salle's adversaries still found it possible to prevent this and to stir up new trouble. This latest turn of events was enough for him, and he determined to leave Provence (1714), where each of his efforts had experienced the same difficulties. He retired to Grenoble, where he found the Brothers living in great peace, and he decided to stay with them as long as possible. He chose for himself the most secluded place in the house where he might devote himself to mental prayer. Thus he managed to

live unknown and almost forgotten for the several months he was there, neither receiving nor paying visits. He did not leave his room except to attend the regular exercises at the proper times.<sup>276</sup>

### He visits the *Grande Chartreuse*.

It was during his stay in this city that De La Salle profited by the proximity of the *Grande Chartreuse*, only three leagues distant, to visit the frightful solitude which Saint Bruno sanctified by his penitential life.<sup>277</sup> He had a particular devotion to this holy patriarch of the hermits of France; he had already imitated him to a certain extent by giving up the canonry of the cathedral of Reims and all that the world had to offer him, in order to devote himself to an austere form of life.



The stone stairs leading to De La Salle's garret room in Grenoble. *Photo E. Rousset (ER, slide 263).*

After crossing the mountains and passes leading to this wilderness, De La Salle felt himself moved at the sight of the places sanctified by the tears and austerities of the holy reformer of the eremitical life in the West. He admired the spirit of quiet and recollection which prevailed among those religious, who seemed buried alive, living in rocky crags covered during a great part of the year with snow and ice. He would have liked to remain and finish his days there. The reverend prior<sup>278</sup>, who also was the Superior General of the Order, struck by the modesty and recollection evident in his bearing and without being aware of his identity, invited him to remain. De La Salle had taken the precaution to warn the Brother accompanying him not to mention who he was, for he was afraid that the monks would give him those honors they customarily rendered to the canons of Reims out of regard for the memory of Saint Bruno, who himself had been chancellor of that cathedral.



The tiny garret room used by De La Salle while he stayed with the Brothers in Grenoble. *Photo E. Rousset (ER, slide 261).*

He left this holy retreat after having given, during the three days he spent there, not all the time he would have wished to his devotions but as much as he could spare from Institute affairs. He returned to Grenoble filled with reverence for this hallowed monastery.

### **He returns to Grenoble and remains hidden.**

De La Salle returned to his own seclusion, filled with the thoughts of the edifying things he had seen. He redoubled his attachment to recollection and silence, of which he had just seen such moving examples. He avoided all that might distract him from mental prayer. Because he used the greater portion of his time in this way, he could almost always be found in the oratory. No matter how pressing matters might be, he managed to spend the greater part of the day in mental prayer.

### **He teaches in Grenoble.**

However, he was obliged to yield to the requirements of the school. The Brother<sup>279</sup> charged with the school in the parish of Saint Laurent was sent on a long trip concerned with Institute matters, and during this time De La Salle took his place teaching in the school. He applied himself with such attention and charity to the instruction of the children that everyone admired him. The parents of the pupils were so edified and thought so highly of his virtue that from that time on they referred to him as the “holy priest.”

### **He returns to his seclusion and works on a new edition of several books of piety.**

When the Brother returned from his trip, De La Salle gave him back the direction of his school and returned to his solitude, where he used his time in composing several works of piety for the instruction of the Brothers and for the youth under their care. He revised *Les Devoirs d'un Chrétien envers Dieu*,<sup>280</sup> of which he prepared a third edition, more accurate and complete than the previous ones. However, the additions he made were not to the liking of the printer, so to satisfy him it was agreed that they not be made, and the book was republished as before.<sup>281</sup>



Entrance to the Grande Chartreuse monastery. *Photo E. Rousset (ER, plate 128, slide 259).*

### **He appoints Visitors of his establishments.**

While De La Salle was thus busy in his seclusion, he learned with joy that God had restored peace to his houses in Provence and that all was quiet. He decided not to return there, for fear that his presence would again raise up enemies against his work. He limited himself in the future to sending Brothers Visitors to look into the situation, and he had to be satisfied with writing the Brothers who sought his advice.

### **His rheumatism obliges him to submit to a painful remedy.**

Scarcely had he finished writing the new edition of the book mentioned above than he was stricken with a grave attack of rheumatism. Some time before, he had suffered several attacks that he disregarded, but now the pain was so great that he could not conceal it. He was forced to keep to his bed. The accompanying fever was such that the Brothers began to fear for his life.

Despite all the efforts of the Brothers of the Grenoble community, he could obtain no relief. It seemed that it would be necessary to apply the same extraordinary treatment that had previously been successful in Paris when he was afflicted with the same sickness. It is true that his nature rebelled, because the remedy was in some ways as bad as the illness it was meant to cure. However, his great love for suffering made him overcome his aversion, and he acceded to the wishes of his Brothers, who so ardently desired to see him cured. He once again submitted to the painful procedure and occupied himself totally with prayer, as though he felt no pain. When the Brothers expressed their surprise, he answered in the words of the holy man Job, "God be blessed; may His will be done and not ours. If we have received health from Him, why should we not receive sickness in the same way? May His name be blessed eternally."

### **The Abbé de Saléon brings him to Parménie.**

After he recovered somewhat, De La Salle wished to make up for his losses (for this is the way he spoke of the time he had been unable to give to his usual exercises). In fact, at the moment he was planning to make a retreat, M. de Saléon,<sup>282</sup> vicar-general of Aix, a friend of his, invited him to spend several days at a place he owned called Parménie,<sup>283</sup>



situated about four leagues from Grenoble. This invitation pleased him, for it was a place where many pious people went to make retreats each year. He accepted, therefore, with pleasure and left with the priest for the site.

### **He visits a pious woman on the mountain.**

Parménie is situated at the foot of a high mountain; on the summit is a cross to which the inhabitants of the village go in procession each year. Nothing else is remarkable about the place except that according to the custom of the region, it was used as a pasture for the many sheep in the area. A virtuous girl named Louise<sup>284</sup> often took her flock there out of devotion and a desire to pray before the cross. After a time, she had the desire to live there, at first without any other



Present-day view of Parménie. *Photo E. Rousset (ER, slide 266).*

thought than to be near the sheep and to have greater opportunity for prayer. She obtained the permission of M. de Saléon, lord of the terrain, to build a modest house there, which she was able to do through the generosity of some persons who admired her piety.

She lived in great seclusion on the mountain, but gradually her reputation for sanctity spread throughout the region, until she began to be looked upon as a model of holiness. The edifying conversations she had with those who came to consult with her gained the confidence of a number of people who placed themselves under her direction during several days of retreat.

Her house became too small to receive all who came to see her, for the number increased daily. She received generous help enabling her to construct two groups of buildings, one for women and one for men, together with a small church built for the convenience of those who went there. The almost continual prayer at the foot of the cross, which was her usual occupation, filled her with extraordinary inspiration from heaven, and she received a particular gift for knowing the future. People came from many places to consult with her as with a prophetess, and her words were regarded as oracles.

### **Their edifying conversations.**

De La Salle, who did not miss any occasion for edification, wished to see for himself such singular graces conferred by God upon a simple shepherdess. No sooner was he at Parménie than he hastened to visit her. He had a long talk with her in which he outlined all the troubles and difficulties in his life since undertaking the foundation of the Christian schools. This good Sister spoke of the trials she herself had to endure in her solitude, of the struggle she had to wage against the temptations of the devil, and of God's graces enabling her to emerge victorious in the conflict. She went on to say that he was not at the end of his difficulties; he would yet have much to endure.

De La Salle explained to her his desire to pass the rest of his life in solitude, something for which he had always felt a great attraction. The Sister replied that it was not according to God's will that he should neglect the care of his Institute. God had destined him for this work, and it was His will that he should persevere in it until the end of his days. He accepted this reply as though it were a decision rendered by God Himself. After they mutually encouraged each other during the fifteen days De La Salle remained in this retreat, he returned to Grenoble full of esteem for Sister Louise. He continued to



correspond with her, advising her and consulting her in turn. Although she could not read, she wished to have all of his works of piety, which she kept as precious souvenirs of the author whom she regarded as a saint.

When De La Salle returned to Grenoble, he learned that the Brothers of the Institute had new problems to face. These cleared up quickly with no other effect than that of strengthening their patience as well as his own.

### **De La Salle's absence distresses the Brothers in Paris.**

While De La Salle was thus concerned with his personal sanctification during the secluded life he led at Grenoble, the Brothers in Paris and other cities suffered greatly from his absence. They were anxious about his situation, for up to this time they had received no definite word concerning him. Their careful inquiries as to his whereabouts were useless. They did not know what to think of such a long silence. Various explanations were offered; some thought he had died, while others felt he had abandoned the Institute. The more reasonable ones kept silent and reserved judgment on the matter. Several, however, who could not endure the uncertain position in which they felt they had been placed, considered leaving the Institute for some other position.

### **Some difficult Brothers are dismissed.**

In the midst of these uncertainties, Brother Barthélemy,<sup>285</sup> whom De La Salle had left in charge of the Paris novitiate during his absence, did all he could to encourage the Brothers by his calm. The reputation he had earned by his virtue aided him in consoling and fortifying the Brothers in their anxiety. Only two or three inflexible characters would not accept his more moderate views. They refused to submit themselves to his authority and would have caused much annoyance in the house if a prompt remedy had not been sought. Brother Barthélemy called together the more respected members of the community, and upon their advice he sent away the malcontents for fear that their bad example would prove harmful to the others.

### **The superior of the Paris novitiate asks the bishops to watch over the Brothers during De La Salle's absence.**

The distress which this turn of events caused him and the fear that the Brothers would name him Superior General of the Institute in the absence of De La Salle (it seemed that they were ready to do this in view of the great confidence they had in his abilities) led Brother Barthélemy to take steps that would prevent this. He wrote to the bishops in whose dioceses the Brothers had houses, telling them of the Institute's situation because of De La Salle's long absence and requesting them to appoint ecclesiastical superiors to look after the Brothers' welfare.

This delicate step might have had serious results for the Institute. Several of Brother Barthélemy's friends pointed out that this was an infraction of the Rule. The Brothers too, for the most part, protested. They objected to this innovation that would surely lead to their complete destruction. These local superiors would gradually come to look upon the members of a particular house as being under their jurisdiction and would thus have no trouble in changing things to suit themselves. Soon each of the communities would become isolated and independent of one another.

De La Salle's friends, who always took a lively interest in his Institute, wrote him a pointed letter reproaching him sharply for his prolonged absence. Most of the letters on this subject did not reach him, and those he did receive arrived only after there was no longer anything to fear.

### **Success of these steps.**

About this same time, De La Salle learned that the government of the Institute remained unchanged in spite of Brother Barthélemy's action. As a matter of fact, far from weakening the Society, his strategy had served to strengthen it more than could have been expected. The outside superiors<sup>286</sup> appointed by various bishops to look after the Brothers' communities were dutifully concerned about the Brothers' welfare, persuaded as they were that De La Salle disappeared only to be relieved of the administration of the houses. These priests studied the Rule of the Institute and encouraged the Brothers to observe it carefully. They exhorted the Brothers to have complete union among themselves and great respect for the advice of Brother Barthélemy, the one destined by God to be their Superior, despite his own personal misgivings.

The most zealous Brothers, who were the most concerned, were reassured at seeing how well the new situation was working. De La Salle later was of the same opinion and spoke of the great obligation his Institute had in regard to these priests.<sup>287</sup>

### **De La Salle is urged to return to Paris.**

After he became aware of what was occurring in Paris because of his absence, it might be thought that De La Salle would have left immediately to restore calm there. However, the reasons which urged him to stay in his cherished seclusion in Grenoble were more important to him than those which impelled him to leave. He did not reply to the letters written to him on this point, for his idea was to help the Brothers forget him and manage without his presence. These measures were not successful. The Brothers continued to entreat him by letter to return, but not achieving their goal, they resorted for their purpose to an extraordinary means which they had never before tried.

### **1715.<sup>288</sup> The Brothers gather to force him to return.**

The superiors of the communities of Paris, Saint-Denis, and Versailles and several of the older members of the Institute decided to write a letter in common in the name of the Institute. In it they presented the strongest and most pressing reasons for his return. Without diminishing their profound respect for De La Salle, they *commanded* him, in virtue of the vow of obedience which he had taken together with them, to return to Paris as soon as possible.<sup>289</sup>

### **Such a step surprises him.**

This letter, written in a simple, naive style, but direct and pointed, shows clearly enough the esteem and reverence the Brothers had for De La Salle and the fear they had of losing him. To demonstrate this, it suffices to quote the letter itself, which will also serve to refute those who on different occasions complained about the severity of his direction and his supposed stubbornness, claiming that to be the source of all the Institute's troubles.

Monsieur, our dearest Father. We, the principal Brothers of the Christian Schools, having in view the greater glory of God, the greater good of the Church and of our Society, recognize that it is of the utmost importance that you resume the care and general direction of God's holy work, which is also yours, because the Lord has made use of you to establish and guide it for so long a time. Everyone is convinced that God has given and will continue to give you all the graces and talents necessary to govern this new Society so useful to the Church. It is with justice that we bear testimony to the fact that you have always guided it with great success and edification. Therefore, Monsieur, we beseech you most humbly, and we command you in the name of and on the part of the body of this Society to which you have promised obedience, to assume immediately the general direction of our Society. In testimony of which we have signed, at Paris, this 1st

*Jean Jacquot dit f. Jean*  
*Directeur de la maison de Paris,*

*Jean Bouqueton dit f. Jean Francois*  
*Directeur de la maison de S.<sup>t</sup> Denis,*

*Jean Vantier dit f. Coë*  
*Directeur de la maison de Versailles*

Signatures from other authentic documents of the three principal Brothers of the Paris region who signed the letter of April 1, 1714. *Photo E. Rousset (ER, plate 49, slide 277).*

day of April, 1715,<sup>290</sup> and we remain with most profound respect, our dearest Father, your humble and obedient inferiors. . . .

### **He resolves to obey the Brothers' order. His friends try in vain to prevent him.**

De La Salle was struck with astonishment on reading this letter. Various conflicting thoughts ran through his mind, leaving him undecided for a time. At first the action taken by the Brothers seemed rash and presumptuous, as though it had been suggested by someone seeking to set a trap for him. He was tempted to mistrust it and was encouraged in that idea by his friends in Grenoble. But after thinking it over, he told them that having made the vow of obedience, he would submit. By complying with the Brothers' order contained in the letter, he would give an example of the dependence he had promised at the foot of the altar. In vain did his friends point out that he was not obliged to obey the orders of the Brothers, his inferiors. He kept to his decision, saying that having taught obedience for such a long time, he now ought to practice it, seeing that God had given him such a favorable opportunity to do so in circumstances where there was little chance for self-love to play a part. All were edified at this point of view and no longer insisted, for fear of opposing such a Christian and selfless decision.

### **He returns to Paris.**

De La Salle took his leave of all those who had been so considerate of him during his long stay in Grenoble. The evening before leaving, he prayed for the success of his trip and passed considerable time recommending to God the Brothers of the community, whom he left enjoying a great sense of peace. Later he exhorted everyone to persevere in obedience to the Rule, then embraced each one of the Brothers and set out for Paris. It is easy to understand how the Brothers felt at this separation, especially because there was no hope of ever seeing him again.

Several days later, he stopped at Lyon to rest, but no sooner had he arrived than he paid a visit to the tomb of Saint Francis de Sales, where he remained some time in prayer. From Lyon he went to Dijon, where the Brothers received him with joy tempered with sadness because of the short time he could spend with them after such a long

absence. He finally reached Paris, where obedience alone had directed him.<sup>291</sup>

He appeared before the Brothers as an inferior, consistently refusing all the honors and marks of respect they tried to give him. In presenting himself before them, he said simply, "Here I am; what do you want of me?" The Brothers were surprised but full of respect for him. They replied that they wished him to take over the general direction of their Institute. De La Salle protested that they had succeeded so well in his absence that they must trust God not to abandon them and they ought to continue as they had been doing.

As for himself, he said that he was determined to live henceforth in the particular manner in which Providence was quietly directing him, which he recognized as his calling, and that the Brothers ought to elect a Superior General whose good conduct would make up for all the mistakes he had made.

The Brothers protested that they would never elect anyone else for the position during his lifetime. Their determination distressed him. He went to his room, where he prayed to God with all his heart to relieve him of this burden. His prayer was not heard until two years later, as I will show in due time, but during the interval he retained only the title of Superior, leaving to Brother Barthélemy the details of administering the Institute. However, Brother Barthélemy was careful to consult him on everything before acting.

### **Story of the conversion of the Chevalier d'Armetat.**

Some time before the return of De La Salle, the Chevalier d'Armetat<sup>292</sup> had taken up his residence in the Brothers' novitiate in Paris. A young lord of an illustrious family of Germany, he had served several years under the command of Prince Eugène de Savoie.<sup>293</sup> After the battle of Denain he left the service, came to France, and settled in Lyon. One day he went into a church to see a possessed person who was the talk of the whole city. We do not know through what motive he went to the church, whether through simple curiosity or with the idea of becoming better informed about the true religion, about which he had been thinking.

As soon as the possessed person caught sight of him, she said in a transport of rage, "You don't believe in demons, but there will come a day when you will experience their fury." The young man was struck with astonishment at this unexpected outburst. On the spot he decided to give up the Lutheranism he professed. He received

instruction in the faith and made his abjuration in the presence of the archbishop of Lyon.

Later he went to Paris to avoid the stir occasioned by his conversion, remarkable both because of his person and because of the unusual circumstances surrounding it. He sought a suitable director to help him make a review of his entire past, as well as to plan his future. He was advised to see a priest of Saint Sulpice, who counselled him to enter the community of De La Salle established in the Saint-Germain-des-Prés district. He was received there on October 8, 1714, and began to follow the exercises of the house the next day, the feast of Saint Denis.

### **Continuation of the same subject.**

From the moment he decided to lead this laborious and penitential life, D'Armestat felt acute pains in all the members of his body. During his service in the army he had been wounded several times but had been cured by a remedy commonly called "the Secret." All those wounds reopened. During the first days, he said nothing of his pain; there was only an occasional moan mingled with tears when the wounds were particularly painful. The Brothers interpreted these groans as signs of compunction and repentance for the sins of his past life. Only later was the real cause of his suffering discovered. On one occasion he was found unconscious in his room, bathed in blood from all his wounds. He was given every possible care, but because the remedies had no effect, the last sacraments were administered. At the instant he received the sacrament of Extreme Unction,<sup>294</sup> he regained consciousness, his wounds were healed, and he appeared completely cured.

### **Continuation of the same subject.**

After he regained his strength, D'Armestat followed the novitiate exercises with renewed fervor, but at the end of several days he relapsed into a worse state than before. He once more lost consciousness; he began to bleed from the mouth and rolled his eyes as though he were possessed. It was noticed during this fit that he stared at a particular spot in his room and that he moved his lips as though he were talking with someone. He passed the entire night in these extraordinary disturbances, and the Brothers were not even able to force any nourishment upon him.

Later he fell into a torpor lasting four hours in which he seemed to see an infinity of devils come to take him away if he did not leave the new life he had embraced. After this the attack began again. He was urged to have recourse to the Most Blessed Virgin, by whose help he was soon relieved. No sooner did he come to himself than he asked earnestly to be clothed in the Brothers' habit. Immediately after he received it, his troubles began again. His tongue thickened so much that he entirely lost the use of speech.

### **Continuation of the same subject.**

In this extremity, Holy Viaticum<sup>295</sup> was brought to him. Because the community believed that his end was approaching, the Brothers were summoned to recite the prayers for the dying. It appeared that his difficulties decreased during the prayers, and he regained consciousness. However, the devil continued to torment him and in fact redoubled his efforts and caused him such suffering that it was feared he would succumb.

### **1715. De La Salle exorcises him.**

It was when D'Armetat was at the height of his illness that De La Salle returned from Grenoble. He witnessed the extremes to which the devil subjected this new convert. After looking into everything that had occurred, he was convinced that he was dealing with a case of true possession. He used the prayers specified in the ritual for the deliverance of possessed persons. He shut himself in the same room with the sick man, recited over him the prescribed prayers, and delivered him entirely from the influence of the evil spirit which had given him hardly a moment's peace. From that time on, D'Armetat experienced no further attacks, but he did follow the advice of some persons of distinction who advised him to leave the Institute, saying that such a manner of living did not seem fitting for one in his state in life.

### **1715. De La Salle is obliged to transfer the novitiate from Paris to Rouen.**

The death of King Louis XIV, which occurred in September of this same year 1715, deprived De La Salle of the help which his friend, the





Mme de Maintenon (Françoise d'Aubigné, 1635–1719), with stepdaughter Marie. Second wife and widow to King Louis XIV, she was a patroness of Father Barré and supported De La Salle in a lawsuit brought against him by the writing masters. *Photo E. Rousset (ER, slide 142).*

bishop of Chartres, had been able to obtain for him from the king's generosity through the favor of Madame de Maintenon. For a long while, this assistance had enabled him to maintain his community in Paris. Now, at the end of this year, he was in such privation that he had to leave Paris for Rouen, where he felt he could better maintain the novitiate. In the month of October,<sup>296</sup> therefore, he sent the novices to Rouen under the care of Brother Barthélemy, who brought them to the house of Saint Yon, where the novitiate has remained until this day. De La Salle stayed some time longer in Paris to attend to several matters there, then set off for Saint Yon with the expectation of giving up all duties other than preparing himself for death.

### **He thinks of being freed of the superiorship.**

For this purpose, De La Salle put aside everything that might take him away from his exercises of piety. He handed over the details of direction to the Brother Director of the house, limiting himself to seeing the novices from time to time, encouraging them in the practice of virtue by his frequent exhortations. Despite all the precautions he took to avoid taking part in the running of the Institute, he could never accustom the Brothers to forego seeking his advice and guidance. They continued to have confidence in him and would not do anything without consulting him. He felt obliged to reply to letters written to him for advice, so that despite himself he was doing what he was trying to avoid. This made him decide to take steps to give up the superiorship which was becoming a burden to him. He wanted to disengage himself from all responsibilities which demanded his attention, in order to fulfill well his own duties. He had already taken steps in this direction before, as we have seen, but his efforts had not been successful, because the Brothers of the Institute would not hear of it. Filled with the earnest desire to have more time to prepare himself for death, he felt that this time the Brothers would accept his reasons for resigning.

### **His reasons.**

De La Salle saw himself advanced in years, and he feared that after his death the Brothers would find it difficult to elect one of their own as Superior General. He knew from experience what trouble he had had to prevent the Institute from being governed by outsiders, who several

times had been forced upon the Brothers. He foresaw that if he did not prevent this from happening in the future, relaxation would creep in and, as a necessary consequence, result in the loss of all the good he had hoped for from his Society.

### **1716. The Brothers accept his reasons.**

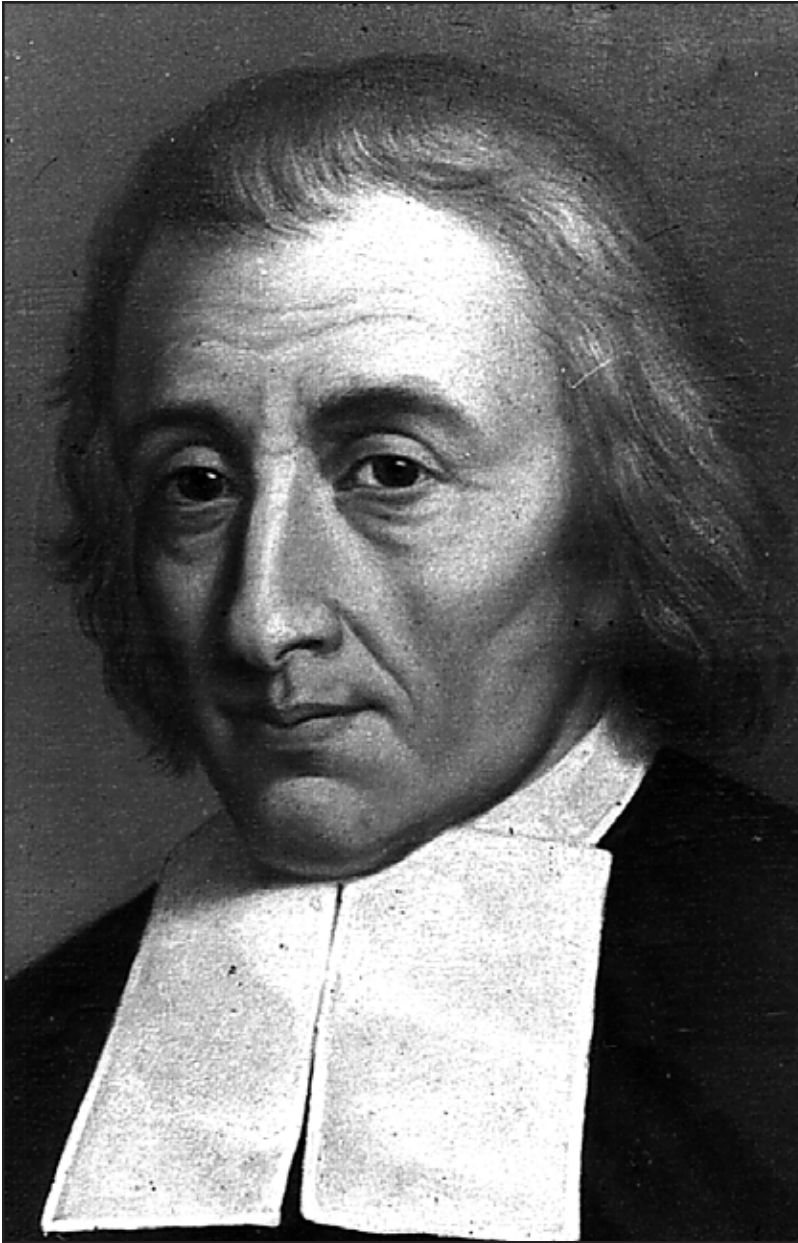
These reflections, based on long experience, led De La Salle to believe that when he spoke of them to the Brothers in an assembly to be called for this purpose, they would no longer oppose his resignation. He first discussed this with the two communities of Rouen and Saint Yon to obtain their views, with the hope that this mark of confidence in them would dispose them to be more favorable to his recommendation in the general assembly which would be called with their consent. He had the thought of death, which he sensed near at hand, ever present in his mind. This premonition and his profound humility, which had led him to wish to give up the superiorship in order to practice obedience and attend only to his own spiritual needs, led him to take all the necessary precautions so that the Brothers would accept his resignation. After he spoke of his resolution and his reasons for wanting them to choose a successor, they all agreed that his proposal was motivated by prudence, but they also pointed out the practical difficulties involved in carrying out this plan. It would be difficult to convince the Brothers to give up both his wise counsel and their freedom to seek his guidance, once someone was elected to take his place.

### **He urges the election.**

De La Salle agreed that he would not abandon the Brothers as long as he saw that they needed him. He would always be available to listen to them and to give them advice. He urged them to hasten the election, for he felt that he had not much longer to live and that it was of the utmost importance to hold this election while he was still alive.

### **Brother Barthélemy is commissioned to obtain the consent of the Brothers in the provinces.**

They agreed that all necessary steps would be taken to inform each house in the Institute of De La Salle's wishes, his reasons for wanting



Brother Barthélemy (Joseph Truffet, 1678-1720), first Superior General; portrait in the Chapter Hall of the Generalate, Rome. *Photo E. Rousset (ER, plate 151-1, slide 286).*

to resign, and the day set for the general assembly to elect the new Superior. Brother Barthélemy was selected as the one possessing the most ability to carry out this mission. He objected, however, arguing that his own humility and love for retirement led him to avoid this responsibility, but these arguments were ignored. He was ordered to leave without delay and to accomplish his task as quickly as possible.

Brother Barthélemy carefully informed himself of all that De La Salle wished and began his visits with the house at Chartres in the month of October that same year (1716). He told the Brothers the purpose of his visit, and they agreed to everything that was proposed. From there he went to Moulins, where he stayed only a short while; with winter approaching, he was anxious to cross the Alps. He was received by the Brothers with great demonstrations of joy and respect for his virtue.

### **Results of his trip.**

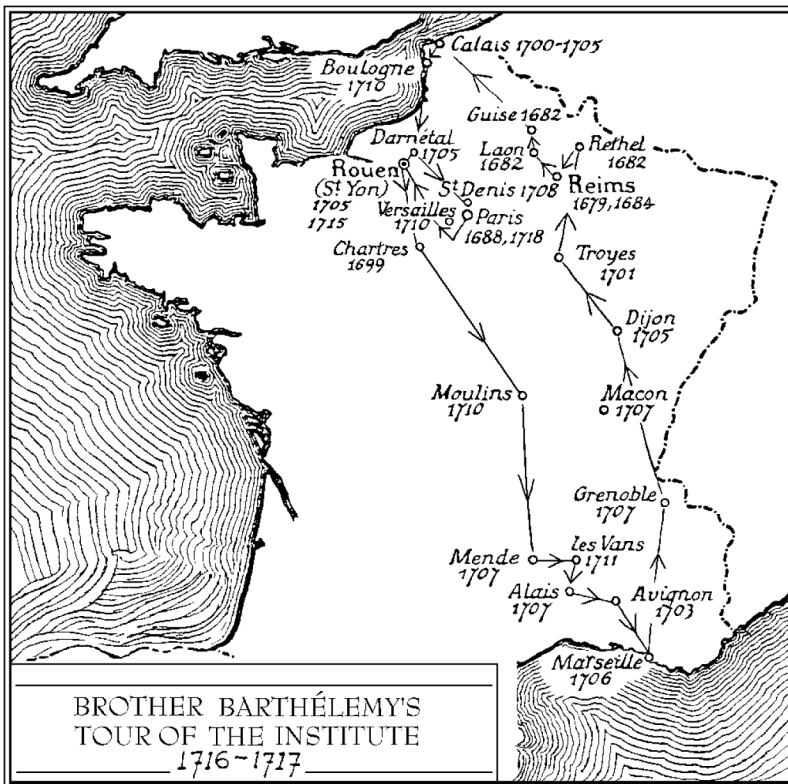
After having travelled by coach to all the houses of the Institute, even those in Provence, Brother Barthélemy returned to Saint Yon to give his report to De La Salle. After several days of rest, he continued his visits to the houses in the other provinces of France, finding no more difficulty with these than he had encountered in the other houses he had already visited. Near the beginning of the year 1717, he finally came back to Saint Yon, having taken only three months to cover the whole of France.<sup>297</sup>

### **1717. Favorable disposition of the Brothers; De La Salle is pleased.**

De La Salle was perfectly happy to learn from Brother Barthélemy that the Brothers were docile and disposed to accede to his request on his own word that he would still continue to aid the Brothers by his advice. He thanked God for giving him this favor. He ardently longed for the moment when he could put down the burdens of office, which would give him the rest he had looked forward to for many years, when he might concentrate on his own affairs, particularly with his immediate preparation for death.

## General retreat to prepare for the election.

The day of Pentecost<sup>298</sup> had been chosen as being the most suitable one for the General Chapter, out of consideration for those who had to come from far away. De La Salle sent word to all the Directors of the Institute's houses to be at Saint Yon at the appointed time to begin the retreat which would precede the election. When everyone had arrived, he opened the retreat by a most touching conference. He spoke of the reasons that had led him to call this general assembly and of how important it was for the overall good of the Institute that they choose as his successor someone who would maintain among them peace, union, and regular observance of the Rule. He urged them to be free from all prejudice, in order to choose a worthy Superior whose talents would enable him to govern with kindness but also



Brother Barthélemy's tour of the Institute, 1716-1717.

with firmness. Finally, he asked them to pray fervently for the light of the Holy Spirit, who ought to preside over the election.

### **Election of Brother Barthélemy.**

During the first two days of the retreat, he explained how they were to proceed in the election. On the appointed day, the Brothers gathered, then voted by secret ballot. The votes of the majority were cast for Brother Barthélemy.<sup>299</sup> To give the Brothers greater freedom of action, De La Salle had requested that he not be present during the election. A Brother was sent to bring him word of Brother Barthélemy's election. He did not seem surprised to learn who had been chosen and remarked immediately, "He was elected a good while ago."

### **Two assistants are provided for him.**

Meanwhile, kneeling in the middle of the assembly, Brother Barthélemy was protesting his own lack of ability and in tears begged that they respect his weakness and little talent for fulfilling worthily the office being imposed on him. He felt strongly his inability to succeed De La Salle, whose experience and wisdom in governing the Institute were so well known. He pleaded with the Chapter to proceed to a new election and to accept his refusal of the honor just paid to him. His earnest entreaties were useless, and he was obliged to accept. He then requested that two assistants<sup>300</sup> be elected who might aid him by their counsel. This request was found to be reasonable and was honored. Later everyone left the chapter room to continue the retreat, at the close of which all renewed their vows on Trinity Sunday with their new Superior presiding.<sup>301</sup>

### **De La Salle makes some changes in the Rule.**

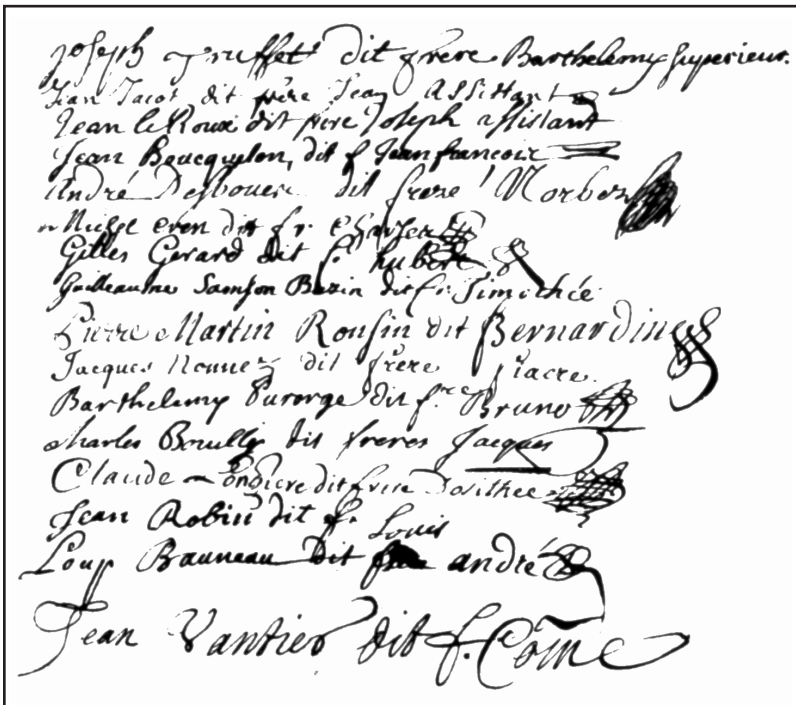
On the following day the meetings continued for the purpose of discussing amendments to the Rule that were thought necessary. It was agreed, however, that nothing would be changed before seeking De La Salle's advice; his views would be sought on each proposal. Thus it was that after everything had been looked into and discussed, he was asked to put the final touches on the changes. He promised to do so, and in fact he gave it his closest attention. In a short time, the Rule



was drawn up as it exists today, and was sent to each house of the Institute to be uniformly observed by the Brothers of the Society.<sup>302</sup>

### His submission to the new Superior's orders.

Now that he found himself completely relieved of being Superior, De La Salle thought only of fulfilling perfectly the duties of an inferior. He kept absolutely no sign of distinction for himself, wishing to use his new liberty only to practice the virtues of submission and dependence. He devoted himself with scrupulous exactitude to the least observances, refusing to accept any signs of distinction that some wished to continue. Brother Barthélemy asked him a number of times to receive several Brothers who still wanted to seek his advice. He would listen to them only after having obtained permission. He refused even to read the letters addressed to him, because he was, thanks be to



Joseph Juffet dit frere Barthélemy superieur.  
 Jean Jacob dit frere Jean Assistant  
 Jean Le Roux dit frere Joseph assistant  
 Jean Baucquillon dit fr. Jean Francois  
 André Desbours dit frere Morbore  
 Michel even dit fr. Chazotte  
 Gilles Girard dit fr. Hubert  
 Guilhaume Saumon Brin dit fr. Simothée  
 Pierre Martin Roufin dit Bernardine  
 Jacques Nouze dit frere Pierre  
 Barthélemy Durge dit fr. Bruno  
 Charles Brulle dit freres Jacques  
 Claude Andrieu dit fr. Barthélemy  
 Jean Robin dit fr. Louis  
 Loup Baumeau dit fr. André  
 Jean Vantier dit fr. Côme

Document confirming the election of Brother Barthélemy as Superior, May 22, 1717. Photo E. Rousset (ER, slide 284).



God, relieved of the duties of Superior and did not want to interfere in the government of the Institute. He pointed out that he had reserved his little remaining time to prepare with tears and penance for death and to take care of his own spiritual needs.

### **He declines a general permission.**

Knowing De La Salle's great delicacy of conscience in regard to the Rule, Brother Barthélemy thought to please him by giving him a general permission to do whatever he might think most useful or most perfect. De La Salle did not want to make use of this permission but preferred to have the merit of obedience by doing nothing without an express permission. He lived in this dependence until the end of his life, thinking himself fortunate both to practice the obedience he had vowed and to be an example for others in the exercise of this virtue.

### **Deference of Brother Superior to his advice.**

Despite his efforts to avoid all manifestations of confidence in him, particularly in regard to those asking his advice, De La Salle could not prevent Brother Barthélemy himself from seeking his counsel whenever necessary. In fact, Brother Barthélemy took no important step without consulting him, and he followed the advice he received with the docility of a child. De La Salle spoke to him with the respect and deference of an inferior to a superior, but the more reserved De La Salle was, the more he attracted veneration and esteem. This relationship between the two leaders was reflected in the perfect union existing among the members which sustained the Institute during the two years that De La Salle lived after Brother Barthélemy's election. He, in turn, survived De La Salle only one year, a year lived in great and meritorious virtue. His passing<sup>303</sup> was regretted by everyone who knew him.

### **Different views on De La Salle's resignation.**

Rumors of De La Salle's resignation soon spread in Paris and aroused considerable speculation. Those who understood the motives for his action justly praised his decision. Others attributed his renunciation to inconstancy or discouragement. Some thought the change ruinous to

his Institute, which was not yet sufficiently stable. They said it was unthinkable that an undistinguished, simple Brother should be charged with the complete direction of the whole Society; his precautions were going to have the opposite effect of what he hoped. They predicted that before his death he would be saddened to see a secular priest in charge of the Institute. Those who were not his friends let it be known that the resignation was his attempt to attract attention and to have himself spoken about in the world.

### **They help to foster his humility.**

All these speculations, which were not hidden from De La Salle, made no impression upon him. God, who wished to effect his salvation through tribulations, had given him much patience, which served him well during all the various difficulties of his life. He continued practicing humility, choosing always the last place during the regular exercises, at which he was as exact as a novice.

One day the Brother Director of the house sent a novice to De La Salle's room to tidy it up, but De La Salle would not hear of it. He sent the novice back, saying that these special marks of attention made him fear that they were trying to make him leave the house. He was so exact in observing the Rule that he did not want to change even the hour of celebrating Mass without an express permission. He took recreation with the Brothers, not speaking until the Brother who presided gave him permission, and if it happened that any special notice was paid to him, he would leave the recreation to avoid this attention.

### **He is called to Paris to accept a bequest.**

It was thus that De La Salle retired within himself, if we may so express ourselves, to attend completely to his own sanctification. Voluntarily removed from all responsibility, he could not be distinguished in the house except by his profound humility and scrupulous exactitude to practice the Rule in every point. He enjoyed perfect peace in the secluded life he now led, with the expectation that nothing would disturb it.

Just at this time he learned that a former acquaintance (M. Rogier),<sup>304</sup> with whom he had been friendly for a time but who later had grown somewhat distant, had felt an obligation toward him and had

left him by testament a sum of 260 livres of annual revenue, payable after the death of a servant of the house. When this servant died seven months later, De La Salle was asked to go to Paris to take possession of the income destined for him.

### **He goes through obedience.**

It was only with some difficulty that he could be persuaded to leave his retreat to take care of a purely business matter. "What must people be thinking of," he asked, "to leave me anything in their will? Don't they know that I have given up all worldly goods and that I am not allowed to have anything personally?" However, Brother Barthélemy pointed out that it would be for the Institute's general good to accept this legacy. De La Salle submitted and went to Paris in October of the same year (1717).

### **He goes into seclusion at Saint Nicolas du Chardonnet. Why?**

He did not want to stop at the Brothers' house, because of the signs of respect and submission that would await him there. Instead, he went to the Seminary of Saint Nicolas du Chardonnet, where he stayed as a private individual, hidden and unknown.<sup>305</sup> He followed the exercises with his customary exactitude. We cannot help but quote here the letter written by the superior of this seminary to Brother Barthélemy in testimony of De La Salle's virtue. He reports only what he himself had seen; his letter well serves as proof of an aspect of what I have written about De La Salle's life. The letter reads as follows:

#### **Letter of the seminary superior on De La Salle's manner of life there.**

We had the honor and privilege of having this holy priest in our seminary from the 4th of October, 1717, until the 7th of March the following year. The time was not long, but it was sufficient for us to see in him the particular gifts with which God has endowed him, as well as the graces he tried to keep most hidden from the eyes of others. We noted in him chiefly an ardent zeal, an extraordinary fervor in working out his own sanctification, a profound humility, and a great love of mortification and poverty.

This zeal for his own sanctification appeared not only in attending all the exercises of piety, morning meditation, spiritual conferences, and divine offices without missing a single one, but also in confiding to me that every day he devoted an additional two and a half hours to mental prayer. This zeal appeared, secondly, in the total subjection of himself to the regulations of the seminary. He was the first at all the various exercises, nor was there a single article of the regulations that was not important to him. He would ask permission not only for going into the city but even for speaking to anyone. Several times I mentioned to him that these regulations were not made for him and that in our house he had general permission to do as he pleased. It was impossible to convince him to make use of this dispensation.

His humility, equally admirable to us, was universal. He did nothing without seeking advice; the opinion of others always seemed better to him than his own. In conversation he listened much more readily than he spoke. He was never heard to say anything to his own advantage. He had a disdain and contempt for the worldliness affected by certain ecclesiastics in their bearing and dress. His own clothes were the most common cloth, and his whole demeanor leads me to say that he was a lover of poverty. This virtue was particularly noticeable in the generosity with which he renounced all his wealth to found and establish his community and in his endeavors to inspire and perpetuate among the Brothers of the Society a spirit of simplicity and renouncement of all that was not absolutely necessary.

His mortification astounded us, although we were greatly edified. He would never accept a heated room when he came to live with us, and rather than warm himself at the common stove, even during recreation, he preferred to walk in one of the rooms or in the gardens with several of the seminarians, in order to speak of some pious maxims or of something that would serve to detach them from the things of the world. Because his modesty, his recollection, and the feeling in his words left no doubt that he himself practiced much more than he spoke of to others, there is no telling the amount of good he did among the seminarians. . . .<sup>306</sup>

This brief portrait is a faithful account both of the virtues that De La Salle practiced wherever he happened to be and of the good impression he made on others. He lived in such seclusion in this seminary that acquaintances were scarcely able to speak to him. He would not even allow the Brothers of the Institute to come to see him. Only

the Brother Superior had this permission, and he used it rarely and with discretion.

### **He refuses to sign the bequest document. His reasons.**

When De La Salle came to Paris to settle the business about the bequest left to him, of which I spoke earlier, he sought out the lawyer who was supposed to hand over the legacy. The official document named him as the Superior of the Brothers of the Christian Schools. De La Salle stated that he no longer was the Superior and that he would not sign anything unless this title were crossed out. The lawyer explained that the whole matter was not of great consequence but that it was absolutely necessary that the letter of receipt, to be valid, be phrased in exactly the same terms as the will itself. De La Salle insisted strongly on his point, saying that he would not tolerate being given a title he no longer possessed. The lawyer too held his ground, and De La Salle left without signing the papers. Three months passed without any possibility of changing De La Salle's position. Finally, the lawyer, edified at his modesty and humility, agreed to strike out the word Superior, an action which allowed De La Salle to sign and accept the legacy.

### **He turns over the bequest to the Brothers and prefers to remain in Paris.**

As soon as this business was concluded, De La Salle asked Brother Barthélemy to come to Paris. Upon his arrival, De La Salle handed over the money he had received, together with a legal document by which he transferred to the Brothers of the Institute all his interest in the legacy. The Brothers of the Paris house asked Brother Barthélemy to find out as prudently as he could why De La Salle had chosen to stay at the Seminary of Saint Nicolas du Chardonnet rather than at their own house. They were afraid that he was thinking of leaving the Brothers and the Institute completely.

Their fear was not entirely groundless, for when Brother Barthélemy questioned him, he replied that he found such an attraction in this seminary and enjoyed such peace and tranquility in working toward his own salvation that it would be difficult for him to leave. Brother Barthélemy did all he could to persuade him to return to Saint Yon, where his presence would be most helpful in edifying the novices. He

reminded him of the promise he had made on the occasion of his resignation as Superior, namely, that he would continue to counsel those Brothers who might still wish to speak with him. He pointed out that he would be breaking his word if he abandoned the Institute. De La Salle answered that he wanted to stay at the seminary, for it was time now, more than ever, for him to have no other preoccupation than his eternal salvation.

Fearing that he might not succeed in convincing him, Brother Barthélemy sought the assistance of several persons who had great influence with him. Even the superiors of the seminary earnestly urged him to accede, as an obligation of conscience, to the Brothers' desires. De La Salle finally consented to do by obedience what offended his humility so greatly. After giving the Brothers of Paris the happiness of enjoying his company for a day, he left with Brother Barthélemy.

### **He returns to Saint Yon.**

The Brothers of the Saint Yon community were delighted to have De La Salle back again. For the past six months, they feared he had been lost to the Institute. His return was a mark of Providence, for no sooner had he arrived in Rouen than the heirs of Madame de Louvois<sup>307</sup> put the house of Saint Yon up for sale. This was a problem for the Brothers, for they lacked sufficient funds to make the purchase and seemed on the verge of having to move once again. They were indeed happy to be able to speak to De La Salle, who calmed their fears. He said with his usual confidence that God would not abandon them; they must set about buying the house. This advice surprised them at first, but upon reflection they agreed that he would not have spoken with such assurance unless he had some secret source of funds. However, the only resource available to him was the inexhaustible riches of Divine Providence, which had never failed the Brothers in their needs. He had such faith in this assistance that without too much difficulty he found the required money through the generosity of several friends.

### **He buys the Saint Yon property.**

With this backing they approached M. l'Abbé de Louvois, executor of his mother's will. He was found to be favorably disposed toward De La Salle, whom he knew well and for whose virtue he had the highest

regard. He promised to favor the Brothers in the negotiations for the sale of the property, to give them preference in purchasing it, and to put a modest price upon the buildings, giving the Brothers a better chance to acquire them. This affair dragged out for two months, but by the end of this time it was finally settled in favor of the Institute, and title to the property was recorded in the name of two Brothers.<sup>308</sup>

De La Salle was the principal figure in these negotiations, but he was careful that his part should be kept quiet. He was most anxious that nothing, regardless of what it was, would again draw him into relationship with the world.

### **He discourages the Brothers from confiding in him.**

During the rest of this year, De La Salle gradually helped the Brothers become less dependent on him. He continually spoke of his approaching death, telling the Brothers that they ought to become used to not having him available, for he was persuaded that he did not have long to live. The Brothers would not have long to wait to see the sad truth of his prediction.

### **1719. He suffers from rheumatism again.**

I have already noted that for several years De La Salle had suffered greatly from a painful rheumatism in his whole body. He experienced another attack in the last year of his life, but it was impossible to convince him either to moderate his austerities or to forego any of his customary exercises. His fervor seemed to increase in proportion to his infirmities. His efforts to conceal his sufferings were so successful that few knew of the pain he endured; no matter how great his affliction, he managed to appear in good spirits and at peace. However, his strength was noticeably failing, and he could not move around as easily as before. This trouble, coupled with an asthmatic condition which had bothered him for many years, weakened him considerably.

### **He is urged to take remedies.**

Near the beginning of Lent the asthma worsened, leaving him enfeebled. He continued fasting, however, as if he were in perfect health. The Brothers sought to give him some relief, but he refused, saying

that the victim was now ready to be immolated and must still be purified and made agreeable to God. Brother Barthélemy returned from Paris, where he had concluded the purchase of the house of Saint Yon. The Brothers, thinking that he might have more success than they with De La Salle, asked him to use his influence, but De La Salle replied that he, better than any other, knew the necessity of his suffering for the expiation of his sins. He implored the Superior not to make him obey in this instance. Finally, his confessor was called in and expressly forbade him to continue his Lenten fast. De La Salle submitted to these orders and accepted the remedies given him.

### **The remedies bring no relief.**

Several days later, he developed a severe pain in his head as well as in his side. This was a seizure for which he could obtain no relief, no matter what efforts were made. The doctor was called, and his verdict was that the illness was fatal. De La Salle received this news with joy and serenity, saying with Saint Paul that his ardent desire was to leave this world and be united with Jesus Christ, his Divine Master. All remedies likely to assist in curing his sickness were tried; he accepted whatever was offered, despite his personal dislike and even repugnance for such measures.

None of these treatments had any effect, and the illness grew worse. De La Salle then remarked to the doctor that he could not be helped; his hour was approaching, and all that remained was to have recourse to the heavenly Physician, who alone knew what was best for him.

### **His sentiments in suffering.**

No matter how violent the pains that afflicted him, De La Salle did not interrupt his custom of celebrating Mass daily. However, his strength failed so suddenly that it became necessary for him to take to his bed. His joy increased in proportion to the weakening of his forces. The peace and tranquility of his soul shone forth on his face. "I hope," he said, "that I shall soon be delivered from captivity in Egypt to enter into the true promised land."



### **Almost miraculously, he celebrates Mass on the feast of Saint Joseph.**

Meanwhile, the feast of Saint Joseph approached. De La Salle had always had a most tender devotion toward this holy protector of his Institute, and he ardently desired that God would give him sufficient strength to celebrate the sacred mysteries on Saint Joseph's feast day. Humanly speaking, he had little hope of obtaining this favor, for on the eve itself of the feast, he was so weak that he could neither walk, nor even stand, nor was he able to say his breviary.

Toward ten o'clock in the evening, however, he seemed to be in less pain and regaining some strength. He thought he might have been dreaming, so he mentioned nothing to anyone. He was greatly surprised the next day to feel strong enough to rise to celebrate Mass. He accepted this last favor from God with thanksgiving. His fervor and recollection were such that the Brothers were persuaded that God had heard his prayer and had given him back his health by the intercession of Saint Joseph. They hastened to express their joy, but after he had said a few words to each of them in turn, he became weak again. From this time on, they began to despair for his life.

### **He receives the last sacraments.**

The pastor of the parish of Saint Sever,<sup>309</sup> in which the house of Saint Yon was located, was alerted about De La Salle's dangerous condition. He came at once and expressed his sadness at seeing him so near death. He spoke to De La Salle in an edifying manner, exhorting him to renew his sentiments of piety so as to be prepared to appear before God. "I have this in mind," De La Salle said to him, "and I am convinced that my hour is at hand. My fate is in His hands; may His will be done."

Indeed, from this time until his death, he thought only of being ready. He asked for the Viaticum<sup>310</sup> so earnestly that he surprised those who did not think him to be so near death. He passed the entire night preparing himself to receive the sacrament. In the morning he asked that everything be arranged and conducted with great propriety. He had himself clothed in surplice and stole to await the arrival of his Divine Master, but when he was told that the pastor was arriving with the Viaticum, he felt ashamed to receive it in his bed. He asked to be lifted to a chair, but when the pastor entered his room, De La Salle summoned his waning strength to fall upon his knees to adore his

Divine Master. Those who stood by were astonished at the administration of the last sacraments to one seemingly in possession of considerable stamina. They were deceived by appearances, not understanding the true source of De La Salle's strength.

### **He receives Extreme Unction.**

The next day, Holy Thursday, he asked to receive Extreme Unction,<sup>311</sup> which he did in full possession of his faculties, responding to all the prayers that were said over him. After the ceremony he remained in profound silence for seven hours, solely taken up with thinking of the grace he had just received; during this time he asked not to be disturbed.

Later De La Salle engaged in conversation with his beloved children<sup>312</sup> and others who came to his bedside to witness his blessed passing. He spoke to everyone with such noble and elevated sentiments that it was easy to realize what occupied his mind and heart. He recommended to the Brothers charity, union, and fidelity to their vocation and showed to the end his great affection for them. A secular person who was present asked him for some words of advice for his own sanctification. "It is up to you to work out your own salvation," he told him, "for God has showered his graces upon you. Up to the present, you have not made use of them. You are not as devoted to God as you should be, and you have buried the talents that have been given to you." This unexpected reply astounded the one to whom it was addressed, who stated that De La Salle must have received some extraordinary revelation to know what took place within his soul.

### **He expresses his final sentiments to the Brothers.**

Meanwhile, the Brothers, aware of the loss they were about to suffer, wanted to be attentive to De La Salle's last words. He showed no signs of weakness but continued to instruct them and to give them salutary advice about their needs. Here is the precious legacy he left them as he was dying and which is the last sign of his great affection for them:

I recommend my soul and that of all the Brothers of the Christian Schools to God. I recommend them to have a great devotion to our Savior and to love Holy Communion very much, as well as

mental prayer. I recommend them also to be particularly devoted to the Most Blessed Virgin and to Saint Joseph, patron and protector of the Society, to fulfill their duties with zeal and great disinterestedness, and to have a blind obedience to their superiors; this is the foundation and support of all perfection in a community.<sup>313</sup>

As he pronounced these last words, his voice gradually faded; it seemed that he was about to enter into his agony. Brother Barthélemy and the community knelt at his bedside, asking his blessing for themselves and all the members of the Institute. He had trouble overcoming his reserve, but upon the insistence of Brother Barthélemy he lifted his eyes and his hands to heaven and said, "May the Lord bless all of you."

### **He regains consciousness and again exhorts the Brothers.**

Near evening, De La Salle began to lose consciousness; he could no longer speak coherently. The prayers for the dying were said, and after some time he revived again. He profited by these last moments given him by God to speak once more to his dear children:

If you wish to persevere and die in your state, you must have nothing to do with the people of the world, for little by little you will acquire a taste for their ways, and you will not be able through politeness to withhold approving their conversation, no matter how harmful it might be. This will cause you to fall into infidelities, and then being no longer faithful in the observance of your Rule, you will lose attraction for your vocation, and finally you will abandon it.

He could say nothing more, for he broke out into a cold sweat that prevented him from speaking. His difficult agony began about midnight and lasted until two o'clock. About that time, regaining consciousness somewhat, he was helped in imploring the assistance of the Most Blessed Virgin by the prayer of the Church he was in the habit of reciting each evening, *Maria, mater gratiae*.<sup>314</sup>

Brother Barthélemy, who did not leave his side, asked if he accepted with submission the sufferings that God sent him to test his patience until the end. He replied in a dying breath, "Yes, I adore in all things the will of God in my regard." These were the last words he uttered, for at two-thirty he again fell into an agony, which lasted until four o'clock.

### His death.

Despite his suffering, his features reflected peace and confidence. Finally, about four o'clock, he made an effort as though he were rising to meet and greet someone. He joined his hands, lifted them to heaven, and expired. He died in the peace of the Lord on April 7, 1719, Good Friday, at sixty-eight years of age.

### His portrait.

Such was the death of the holy priest whom God had raised up in these latter times to labor for the instruction of youth. De La Salle devoted his entire life without respite to this task, leaving to the Brothers and all others who knew him a reputation for zeal and for all other virtues appropriate to the ecclesiastical state. He preferred a poor and penitential life to all the comforts he might legitimately have enjoyed in the world. He worked unceasingly to do good wherever charity or Providence led him. The contradictions and setbacks that were a constant part of his life never affected his peace of soul, and God so showered His blessings upon his work that he conquered his enemies by the sole weapons of patience and moderation. His great confidence in God was his greatest strength, and he was never disappointed in this trust.

His austerities and the continual mortification of his passions gave him such command over them that it would be impossible to say what his dominant passion was. His features, somewhat bronzed by his many travels, were always serene, affable, and obliging; his manners were simple, but polite, and without affectation. He had a natural and penetrating intelligence. He was particularly gifted in bringing hardened sinners back to God; he was never known to undertake their conversion without success. He was generous, sincere, and tenderhearted.<sup>315</sup>

### Continuation of the subject.

De La Salle was above the normal height, well proportioned, and well developed. His complexion was delicate at first but became more robust with age. He carried his head inclined slightly forward. His forehead was large; his nose, too, was large and well formed but still not aquiline. His blue eyes were lively; his hair, brown and wavy in his

youth, turned gray and white in his later years, giving him a venerable appearance. His voice was strong and distinct. He was of a firm and intrepid disposition, taking a position only after reflection and remaining inflexible when he believed it to correspond to God's will for him. He was ready to undertake even the most difficult tasks for the glory of God. This is the genuine portrait of John Baptist de La Salle, priest, doctor, former canon of the cathedral of Reims, and Founder of the Brothers of the Christian Schools.

### **His personal effects are quickly sought after.**

As soon as the news of his death spread through Rouen, everyone hastened to see this saintly priest who had gained the esteem and veneration of so many people during his life. It was difficult to satisfy all those who wished to have some token of his personal effects in memory of him. Because he was so poor, he kept nothing out of greed or self-love. His only riches were a crucifix, the New Testament, the *Imitation of Jesus Christ*,<sup>316</sup> and his rosary beads, and these were given away. Others had to be content with small pieces of cloth from his garments, which they preserved as remembrances of his sanctity.

### **His burial.**

His features in death continued to be as serene and peaceful as they had been in life. His body was clothed in priestly vestments and laid out until Holy Saturday afternoon for the veneration of the public in the chapel of the Saint Yon house. On that day the body was carried without ceremony to the parish church of Saint Sever and buried in the chapel of Saint Suzanne in the presence of a great crowd of people who attended the funeral. The following epitaph was placed over his tomb.

### **His epitaph.**

*Hic expectat resurrectionem vitae venerabilis Joannes Baptista de La Salle Rhemus, Presbyter, Doctor Theologus, Canonicus Ecclesiae Metropolitanae Rhemensis, Institutor Fratrum Scholae Christianae. Obiit Sexta Parasceves annum agens LXVIII die Septima Aprilis anne MDCCXIX in aedibus Fratrum Sancti Yonis hujusce Parochiae. Det illi Dominus invenire requiem in illa die (1719).<sup>317</sup>*

A great number of persons of all conditions in life hastened to offer in his memory those honors he had so earnestly avoided during his life. Thus does God recompense even in this world those who have been faithful to him until death. *Vita ejus si in probatione fuerit coronabitur* (Tob. 3:21).<sup>318</sup>

## **1720. Death of Brother Barthélemy; his successor Brother Timothée.**

Brother Barthélemy was the Superior General of the Institute at the time of De La Salle's death, but he survived him by only fourteen months. His death occurred in June of the following year.<sup>319</sup> His passing was greatly regretted by all the Brothers, who regarded him as a worthy successor of De La Salle, under whose direction he had been trained.

The two Assistants<sup>320</sup> wrote a circular letter on this occasion, calling a General Chapter to be held at Saint Yon on the day of the Assumption that year. Brother Timothée,<sup>321</sup> director of the house at Avignon, was unanimously chosen as Superior General. In this choice they were mindful of the advice of Brother Barthélemy, who regarded Brother Timothée as the one most suitable to succeed him. There was considerable difficulty in persuading Brother Timothée to accept the honor, but finally he submitted through obedience.

## **He solicits letters patent and obtains them.**

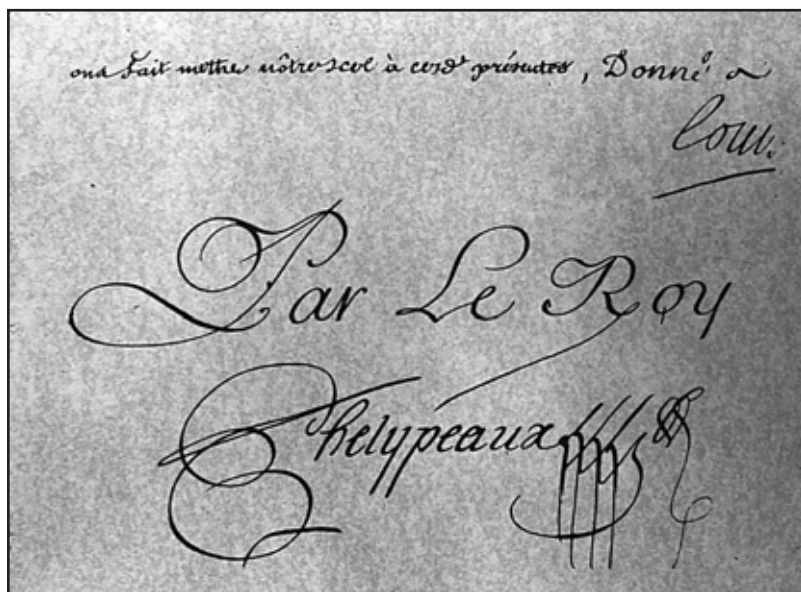
As soon as he assumed the responsibility for the Institute's general government, Brother Timothée's main care was to see to its solidity and stability. The first thing he looked into was to assure for the Institute the house of Saint Yon itself. The original sale had been in the name of two Brothers, one of whom was now dead and the other advanced in age. It was impossible to make a donation or sale to the Institute itself, for it had no right to acquire property in its own name until letters patent would give it official recognition. Relying on the influence of M. de Pontcarré, senior president of the Rouen *Parlement*, Brother Timothée attempted to obtain the letters patent. Despite the good offices and efforts of M. de Pontcarré, the matter dragged on. There was opposition from the *Conseil de Régence*, which was in power during the minority of King Louis XV. M. de La Vergne de Tressant,

then archbishop of Rouen,<sup>322</sup> succeeded in overcoming this opposition after the death of the Duke d'Orléans, regent of the kingdom.<sup>323</sup>

Letters patent were granted on September 28, 1724, and were forwarded at the beginning of the following year. They were registered without delay with the *Parlement* and the *Chambre des Comptes* of Rouen, despite the opposition of the pastor of Saint Sever, who objected to the removal of the Saint Yon house from his jurisdiction. The pastor and his friends had sufficient influence to place in the documents several restrictions likely to be prejudicial to the Institute, but these constraints were removed later by a direct order from the king's *Conseil Privé*.<sup>324</sup>

### He obtains the Bull of Approbation from Rome.

At this same time, Brother Timothée sought to obtain from Rome a Bull of Approbation by virtue of which the Institute would become a religious congregation. He was not disheartened by the lack of success that had attended De La Salle's efforts to obtain this during his lifetime.



Letters Patent for the charity school of Saint Yon, 1724, signed by King Louis XV (*par le Roy*). Photo E. Rousset (ER, slide 314).



Brother Timothée (Guillaume-Samson Bazin, 1682-1752), second Superior General; portrait in the Chapter Hall of the Generalate, Rome. *Photo E. Rousset (ER, plate 153-2, slide 318).*



At first a Brother<sup>325</sup> of the Society was commissioned who had been in the service of the Prince de Soubise, father of Cardinal de Rohan.<sup>326</sup> This resourceful Brother presented himself to the cardinal, who received him favorably because of his past service in the household of his father, the duke. This Brother, profiting also from the fact that the king had just appointed the cardinal to serve as his minister in Rome, persuaded him to accept the Brothers' detailed petition to serve as their intermediary with the pope for obtaining the Bull of Approbation for the Institute. M. Vivant, the vicar-general who was to accompany the cardinal to Rome,<sup>327</sup> supported the Brothers' request to the cardinal and offered to promote the project in Rome.

Nevertheless, things moved slowly. It was only four years later, at the beginning of 1725, that M. l'Abbé de Tencin, now a cardinal, renewed the negotiations after consulting with the Court of France<sup>328</sup> and obtained the Bull of Approbation at the end of January through the beneficence of Pope Benedict XIII.<sup>329</sup>

Brother Timothée hastened to present the Bull to the *Conseil du Roi*.<sup>330</sup> There was still some opposition, but the letters patent were signed and sealed.<sup>331</sup> Brother Timothée registered them with the Rouen *Parlement* during the course of the same year.

### **The Brothers of the Institute assemble at Saint Yon to pronounce the three vows.**

During the following month of August, thirty-two Brothers, directors as well as older members of the community, assembled at Saint Yon for the solemn reception of the Bull of Approbation. It was proclaimed in the presence of the Blessed Sacrament with all the ceremonies usual in such circumstances. The Brothers then made three days of retreat, choosing the Feast of the Assumption of the Most Blessed Virgin to pronounce the three vows<sup>332</sup> common to congregations approved by the Holy See.

### **He has a chapel built at Saint Yon and a vault for the tomb of De La Salle.**

Not content with having obtained the Bull of Approbation and the letters patent that the Brothers of the Institute had sought for so many years, Brother Timothée gave thought to how he might bring back to Saint Yon the body of their Founder De La Salle, who had been

buried in the parish church of Saint Sever. The Brothers originally had been disappointed to see the precious remains taken from them, but they were told that their own chapel was in such a state of disrepair that it did not seem possible to bury the body there with fitting decency. Despite the scarcity of funds in the house, Brother Timothée undertook the construction of a new chapel, larger and more spacious. He incorporated a vault with the hope of someday transferring De La Salle's body. After fifteen years everything seemed ready for the relocation.

### **The objections of the pastor of the parish to surrender the body are overcome.**

The Brothers were careful first to secure the permission of the archbishop of Rouen. Next they used the influence of M. de Pontcarré, senior president, to have the pastor of Saint Sever agree to having the body removed from the tomb in his church and placed in the new crypt prepared for it. The pastor and his people objected to this move, but they had to give way before the pressure brought to bear from authorities whom they dared resist no longer.

### **1734. Exhumation of the body by the vicar-general of Rouen.**

On July 16, 1734, therefore, M. Bridel, archdeacon and vicar-general of Rouen, came to the parish of Saint Sever for the exhumation, in the company of several other vicars-general, the pastor of the parish, and a number of canons. The coffin was raised, then opened in the presence of M. de Pontcarré de Vienne, brother of the senior president, the Marquis de Cani, the Comte d'Enneval, and so on, as well as the doctors, surgeons, and notaries who had been called to certify the record of the proceedings. All the religious orders of the city were also present, as well as a gathering of the faithful. The bones were found in the normal position; the flesh and priestly vestments were completely decomposed. The remains were transferred to a leaden coffin which was placed in another of oak wood. Both were closed and sealed in the presence of the notaries, who proceeded to draw up the account which was signed by the vicars-general present and other witnesses.

## Ceremony of the transfer of the body from the parish to the chapel of Saint Yon.

More than three hundred ecclesiastics had been invited to these ceremonies. The body was then borne in procession to the chapel of Saint Yon to the accompaniment of chanted psalms. The Brothers of the Christian Schools, eighty in number, each with a candle in his hand, came to meet the clergy and the body of their holy Founder. While prayers were finishing, the vicar-general blessed the grave, and the desires and hopes of the Brothers for the last fifteen years were realized with the sealing of the tomb. In this way the prediction De La Salle made to them some time before his death was fulfilled, that God would visit the house of Saint Yon and make it prosperous. This may be seen every day by the many people who come frequently to pray at the tomb since its transfer from the church of Saint Sever to this chapel. *Deus visitabit vos. Asportate ossa mea de loco isto* (Gen 50:25).<sup>333</sup>

## Notes

1. See *Cahiers lasalliens* (CL) 27:24–32 for a summary of the family history.

2. *Mémoires de Jean Maillefer*, published in the *Travaux de l'académie nationale de Reims* (*Works of the National Academy of Reims*), 1887–1888. From 1679 until 1716 the *Mémoires* are continued in the *Journalier* by the son Jean, father of François-Elie.

3. The other two source biographies were commissioned by and intended for the members of the Institute of the Brothers of the Christian Schools: *Conduite admirable de la Divine Providence en la personne du vénérable Serviteur de Dieu Jean-Baptiste de La Salle, prêtre, docteur en théologie, ancien chanoine de l'église cathédrale de Reims et Instituteur des Frères des Ecoles chrétiennes* (*The admirable guidance of Divine Providence in the person of the Venerable Servant of God John Baptist de La Salle, priest, doctor in theology, former canon of the cathedral church of Reims and Founder of the Institute of the Brothers of the Christian Schools*), 1721, by Frère Bernard (CL 4); and *La vie de Monsieur Jean-Baptiste de La Salle Instituteur des Frères des Ecoles chrétiennes* (*Life of Monsieur John Baptist de La Salle, Founder of the Brothers of the Christian Schools*), 1733, by Jean-Baptiste Blain (CL 7 and 8).

4. References to all three manuscripts, the 1740 (Reims manuscript), the 1766 (Manuscript X), and the 1775 (Carbon manuscript), are found in CL 6.

5. For example, Maillefer reports the concern of the family over De La Salle's illness and the solicitude of his grandmother Moët de Brouillet for him (CL 6:94–95); even when they disagreed with him, De La Salle's family loved him tenderly (CL 6:43); when his brothers were taken from the family home, De La Salle was deeply affected (CL 6:45), and so on. These examples are in contrast to the harshness toward the family found at times in the other biographies. For the Jansenistic tendencies, see note 7.

6. It is possible that François-Elie learned from his mother, Marie, a number of things about her brother and his uncle, John Baptist. Marie married Jean Maillefer (born December 4, 1651, and died in 1718, thus a contemporary of John Baptist) in 1679, the same year the first school in Reims, Saint Maurice, opened. In 1681 she and her husband received John Baptist's brothers, Pierre and Jean-Remy, into their home after he had the teachers move into the family home. Marie died on March 23, 1711. François-Elie was ordained to the priesthood less than two weeks later, on April 4, 1711. Thus, he and John Baptist de La Salle each suffered the death of his mother shortly before taking an important step in his priestly vocation.

7. *Unigenitus* (this papal document, known as a Bull, takes its name from the first word of its Latin text, *Unigenitus Dei Filius*, "Only begotten Son of God") makes specific mention of erroneous Jansenistic propositions contained in a book published in 1671, *Réflexions morales sur le Nouveau Testament* (*Moral Reflections on the New Testament*), by Quesnel (Pasquier Quesnel, 1634–1719). During De La Salle's lifetime, there were at least twelve papal decrees against Jansenism. Louis XIV called for an ecclesiastical assembly to settle the matter of those who did not accept *Unigenitus*, which had also become state law through letters patent. The king died on September 1, 1715, before the assembly took place. Those who objected to the Bull *Unigenitus* and wanted it appealed to a General Council were called, in the French, *appelants*. François-Elie Maillefer was an appellant, and his Jansenistic convictions were shared by many friends and members of the family: his brother Jean-François, his uncle Louis de La Salle, and others. In a note to the family history in the *Mémoires* and *Journalier*, François-Elie's father Jean writes, "My good wife would have died a thousand deaths if she had been alive when her beloved son (François-Elie) was persecuted for the Bull (*Unigenitus*), as I have described in another place" (n. 1980).

Jansenism refers both to a theological system of moral rigorism and to a political sect. The theological system and moral code are based on a notion of grace as absolutely irresistible and necessary. Sin resulted from the absence of grace, and a person was either good or sinful depending on the presence or absence of grace. This interpretation led to many unorthodox positions and to a denial of the traditional idea of free will.

See Calcutt, Alfred, FSC. *De La Salle; A city saint and the liberation of the poor through education*. Oxford: De La Salle Publications, 1993, 67–69. This work in English presents a considerable amount of

the documentary material contained in the original French volumes by Aroz, Poutet, and Rigault.

8. CL 6:137.

9. CL 7; CL 8:255.

10. G. K. Chesterton. *Saint Francis of Assisi*. New York: Doubleday and Company, Image Books edition, 1957, 75.

11. *Catechism of the Council of Trent*. Translated by Rev. J. Donovan, D.D., Maynooth. Dublin: James Duffy & Co., Ltd., 1829.

12. There was much variation throughout its history in the spelling of the family name: for example, Delasalle, de Lasalle, De la Salle, de la Salle, and de La Salle. Correspondence which John Baptist wrote after 1680 is usually signed De La Salle, with the letters of the name somewhat joined together (CL 41–I:219; 379–481). In French usage at the time, *de* was normally left off if not preceded by another name or by some honorary title. Because *de* does not indicate nobility in the case of John Baptist, the most appropriate way to write the name would be “Delasalle” (see Yves Poutet. *Le XVII<sup>e</sup> Siècle et les Origines lasalliennes [The 17th Century and Lasallian Origins]*. Volume I. Rennes: Imprimeries réunies, 1970, 28).

13. See *Introduction* and note 17.

14. Maillefer may be referring to the difficulties De La Salle had with M. de La Chétardie, pastor of Saint Sulpice, in Paris, and with those who, behind the scenes, used the pastor in their efforts to undermine De La Salle’s work. It is also possible that the author has in mind certain priests, not only in Paris but in Marseille, Rouen, and elsewhere, who were of Jansenistic tendencies and caused many problems for De La Salle. In this case, given the author’s own support of Jansenism, his discretion is understandable.

15. A comparison of Maillefer’s two manuscripts, 1723 and 1740, shows his hesitation on some dates (CL 6). A detailed chronology of De La Salle’s life can be found in CL 41–I:29–47. The Institute publication, *Lasalliana*, Number 31, 1994, has compiled and published in English, French, and Spanish an extensive chronology based on the most recent *Cahiers lasalliens* and other sources.

16. Presented here as subtitles or as years enclosed in parentheses within the text.

17. John Baptist’s brother, Jacques-Joseph, Canon Regular of the Congregation of Saint Genevieve in Paris, died on March 29, 1723. Their nephew, Jean-François Maillefer, Canon of Saint Symphorien in Reims, died on October 21, 1723. It is possible that one of these was to assume the cost of the printing. Another possibility is the brother of John Baptist, Canon Jean-Louis de La Salle, who died on September 24, 1724.

18. Charles Frappet (December 18, 1670–February 24, 1742) entered the Institute in 1690 as a Brother in charge of temporal matters, particularly as a cook (CL 3:33, n. 6). He was soon, however, given a number of administrative positions in various houses. He was one of De La Salle's right-hand men early on and much appreciated by him.

19. The "ecclesiastic of Rouen" is a polite circumlocution referring to Canon Jean-Baptiste Blain.

20. The places copied word for word are rare. Both Maillefer and Blain depend in some cases on a common source.

21. See *Introduction*.

22. In this revised edition of 1740, Maillefer made certain corrections and additions that resulted in part, no doubt, from his reading of Blain's work of 1733.

23. Saint Hilaire was the parish not of John Baptist but of his maternal grandparents, Jean Moët and Perrette Lespagnol, who were also his godparents. His parents, Louis de La Salle and Nicole Moët de Brouillet, lived in the *Hôtel de la Cloche* (the Bell Mansion), the state-ly residence of his paternal grandparents, Lancelot de La Salle and Barbe Coquebert, in the Impasse de la Chanvrière off the Rue de l'Arbalète in the parish of Saint-Pierre-le-Vieil. However, the custom of baptizing children outside their own parish seems to have been common at the time. In fact, the Archbishop of Reims, Charles-Maurice Le Tellier, in 1685, had to forbid baptizing a child outside the parish of the father (CL 41–I:106). It is likely that John Baptist was born in the *Hôtel de la Cloche*; at least it is certain that he spent his childhood there until 1664. Claims that he may have been born in the home of his maternal grandparents, Rue du Marc (not *Hôtel le Vergeur* [probably named after an earlier owner], as some once thought), have not been convincingly proven. Exactly where John Baptist was born is still an open question to some extent. (CL 26:109–129; 236–244; CL 37:9–16; CL 41–I:96–110; also, Poutet, I, 31–32. See Luke Salm, FSC, editor, *Beginnings: De La Salle and His Brothers*, Romeville: Christian Brothers National Office, 1980, 7–10; also Calcutt, 11–20).

24. A position he held with great dedication, for the only note of his having been absent is on March 30, 1672, about one week before his death (CL 26:209). With this position came places of honor at certain official ceremonies (Calcutt, 12). See note 34.

25. De La Salle's maternal grandfather, Jean Moët de Brouillet, was of feudal nobility (of the land, in contrast to nobility of the sword and of the court). De La Salle's mother was thus of the nobility by birth, but became of the bourgeoisie through her marriage with De La Salle's father, Louis (CL 26:164; Salm, 1980, 81–86; Calcutt, 12, 32–37).

26. In fact, John Baptist was the eldest of eleven children. Four died in infancy: Remy (b. 1652), Jean-Louis (b. 1663), Simon (1667–1669), and Anne-Marie (b. 1656). Except for Simon, the dates of the other infants' deaths are not known. The surviving children were John Baptist (1651–1719), Marie (1654–1711), Rose-Marie (1656–1682), Jacques-Joseph (1659–1723), Jean-Louis (1664–1724), Pierre (1666–1741), and Jean-Remy (1670–1732).

John Baptist probably caused some anxiety at his birth and during early infancy. He was frail at birth and suffered from various maladies throughout his life. It is likely that this was the consequence of a premature birth, about eight months after the marriage of his parents on August 25, 1650 (CL 8:451; CL 7:331, 170; Poutet, I, 31–32).

27. This was the *Collège des Bons-Enfants* (*Collegium Bonorum Puerorum Universitatis Remensis* or *Good Students' College of the University of Reims*), where John Baptist enrolled on October 10, 1661, at the age of ten. *Bons-Enfants* began as a ninth-century monastic school which accepted lay day students. With the creation of the University of Reims in 1547, the college became the school of liberal arts within the University of Reims and was subsidized by the city. The curriculum was a ten-year, pre-university-level program, mainly in Latin and Greek grammar, literature, and philosophy, culminating in the *Maîtrise-ès-Arts* (Master of Arts), largely equivalent to a modern-day diploma at the termination of secondary school. Proximity to the home was probably one reason why *Bons-Enfants* was chosen over the younger, more progressive, private school run by the Jesuits in the city. John Baptist seems to have been a good student and also showed talent as an orator and actor. During his time at *Bons-Enfants*, he received the tonsure (1662), the appointment as canon (1667), and minor orders (1668). His classical training is reflected in his writings, which lack lyricism but display a style that is correct, logical, and precise (CL 41–II:9–42, 146–167; Luke Salm, FSC, *John Baptist de La Salle; The Formative Years*, Romeoville: Lasallian Publications, 1989, 7–22; Calcutt, 23–25).

28. He received the tonsure (a ceremony in which a small cross of hair is cut from the person's head to mark his option for the clerical state) in the chapel of the archbishop's palace at the hands of Bishop Jean de Malevaud of Aulône on March 11, 1662, when not quite eleven years old (CL 41–II:141–146). Bishop de Malevaud was acting in the absence of the archbishop-designate, Cardinal Antonio Barberini, who, though nominated by Louis XIV in 1657, did not receive official letters from the pope until 1667. At the time, it was not all that exceptional to receive the tonsure at such an early age. The



only requirement was that the person be confirmed. Because the age of Confirmation varied, so did that of receiving the tonsure. The Council of Trent (1545–1563) recommended that Confirmation not be administered before the age of seven (Calcutt, 26).

Receiving the tonsure implied an intention to enter the ecclesiastical state, just as espousal indicated an intent to marry (*Catechism of the Council of Trent*, Pt. II, Ch. VII, Q. XIII). Those who were tonsured had to wear the ecclesiastical habit (and on Sundays and feasts, the surplice) for the Divine Office, frequent the sacraments, and give good example. De La Salle wore the tonsure all his life and did not approve of ecclesiastics who did not do so (CL 8:245).

The consent of his parents was no doubt a sacrifice made possible by their religious faith. John Baptist was the eldest son and the normal heir to his father's position as a municipal magistrate in Reims.

29. Pierre Dozet, cousin of John Baptist's paternal grandfather, Lancelot de La Salle, had been a canon for fifty-two years (1614–1666) and Chancellor of the University of Reims (1619–1668). He resigned on July 9, 1666, in favor of his young relative, who was then fifteen years and three months old. The impressive ceremony of investiture on January 7, 1667, was attended by other canons, priests, John Baptist's brothers, sisters, grandparents, and guests, and Pierre Dozet himself. Among the sixty-four stalls, John Baptist took possession of number twenty-one, the stall once occupied by Saint Bruno, who in the eleventh century resigned his canonry to found the monastery of the *Grande Chartreuse* near Grenoble (CL 41–II:168–194). Nineteen canons at John Baptist's time claimed some relationship with the De La Salle family (CL 41–II:297–301). See also Calcutt, 27–29; Salm, *The Formative Years*, 28–33.

John Baptist was a canon for sixteen years, from 1667 to 1683. This placed him in an ecclesiastical community that had obligations related to public prayer, solemn liturgies, and processions. The canons also advised the archbishop, shared many common interests, and were held in high esteem socially. Thus, his eventual renunciation of the canonry involved much more than giving up the financial security of an ecclesiastical benefice.

30. Concessions were made for the more youthful members and for students. These latter, however, needed attestations from their professors of attendance at courses and were expected to attend High Mass and pray the Divine Office on Sundays and major feasts whenever possible (CL 41–II:187–189). See also Salm, *The Formative Years*, 32–33.

31. His certificate of *Maîtrise-ès-Arts* from the *Collège des Bons-Enfants* with the citation *summa cum laude* (with highest honors) is

dated July 10, 1669. He had to pass two sets of oral examinations, the first in logic and moral theology, the second in philosophy, each exam lasting three hours. This degree gave him the right to teach in the *collèges* and to enroll in one of the University Faculties of Law, Medicine, or Theology (CL 41–II:211–216). See also Calcutt, 29; Salm, *The Formative Years*, 37–38.

32. Before going to Paris, he studied in the Faculty of Theology at the University of Reims from October 1, 1669, to July 1670. The program for the bachelor's degree lasted five years, two in philosophy and three in theology. His choice of Reims for the first year of theology may have been suggested by his father, whose backing as a magistrate of the presidial court was sought in the matter of a controversial appointment of a new Chancellor of the University of Reims, Louis-Eléonor Tristan de Muizon, to succeed Pierre Dozet, who retired in 1668. By enrolling his son in the University of Reims, he was recognizing the legitimacy of the new Chancellor. There was some unrest over the authority of the University of Reims to grant degrees in theology, because, among other things, Tristan had only a bachelor's degree in theology, and, therefore, the validity of the examinations was questioned. This unrest possibly contributed to the decision to go to the Sorbonne in Paris. De La Salle entered the seminary of Saint Sulpice on October 18, 1670, and stayed there eighteen months, until April 19, 1672. (CL 41–II:43–46; also, Calcutt, 53–57; Poutet, I, 228–229; Salm, *The Formative Years*, 39–46).

Of the several major seminaries in Paris at the time, the seminary of Saint Sulpice enjoyed the best reputation. Founded by Jean-Jacques Olier (1608–1657), it was noted for theological teaching centered on Christology, a rigorous daily horarium, a well-structured community life, solid spiritual direction, an apostolic orientation, and a close connection between spiritual direction and doctrine. Olier, in the tradition of Cardinal Pierre de Bérulle (1575–1629), founder of the French school of spirituality, formed the Company of Saint Sulpice, a community of secular priests without vows, to run this and other diocesan seminaries. (Calcutt, 57–62)

The Sorbonne, named after its founder, Robert de Sorbon (1201–1274), was the theological college or faculty of the University of Paris, which became one of the most famous universities in Europe. Robert de Sorbon was the chaplain of Louis IX (Saint Louis), King of France from 1226–1274 (Calcutt, 63–65).

33. She died on July 19, 1671, at the age of thirty-seven years and eight months, ten months after John Baptist had left Reims for Paris. She left behind seven children; the youngest, Jean-Remy, was twelve

months old. Because she was buried the same day, John Baptist was unable to be there. The year at the Sorbonne ended on July 27, whereupon he returned home to Reims. His mother was noted for her great piety (CL 26:222–225; CL 41–I:154–157).

34. He died at the age of forty-seven years and seven months. For twenty-five years he had served with integrity as a municipal magistrate (CL 26:207–211) at the *praesidium*, a tribunal created in 1551 by Henry II. This was an intermediary court which handled various civil and criminal cases, whereas *Parlement*, the highest judicial body, was a court of justice, not a Parliament in the modern sense of a democratically elected legislature (CL 41–I:168–171; Poutet, I, 41–42). Louis de La Salle had a Master of Law degree and was a great lover of music. His daughter Marie was an accomplished musician. She had a beautiful voice and played the theorbo, a stringed instrument similar to a lute, with two necks and two sets of strings. There were musical *soirées* at the *Hôtel de La Cloche*, and it is likely that John Baptist would have been taught singing (CL 27:35). Blain notes that the young John Baptist would set up altars, sing hymns, and imitate church ceremonies (CL 7:118–119). John Baptist was not at his father's burial, which took place on April 10, 1672 (CL 26:205–214; CL 41–I:165–172).

35. Left behind were seven orphans, the youngest, Jean-Remy, being twenty months old. In his will his father named John Baptist as legal guardian of his brothers and sisters (CL 26:199–202; see note 74 of this present work). John Baptist held this responsibility from his father's death in 1672 to 1676. He then passed the role officially to Nicolas Lespagnol, who had been selected by the family advisory council charged with overseeing the guardianship, but John Baptist continued to take care of his brothers and sisters. After completing his theological studies, De La Salle again resumed the guardianship from July 18, 1680, to August 16, 1684 (CL 32:5, n. 4).

The matters to attend to were numerous and complex. Detailed inventories had to be made, debts settled, debtors pursued, expenses and receipts recorded, funds invested, and the brothers and sisters cared for. John Baptist dictated and edited a detailed account of his management as legal guardian. This invaluable record, its existence unknown for centuries, was discovered by Brother Luis Arroz in 1964 in the Reims annex of the Archives of the Department of the Marne (CL 28–31). While the document shows John Baptist to be an able accountant and a zealous steward of the family heritage, it above all reveals, behind the meticulous numbers, a person of great sensitivity and goodness. In him was joined the “integrity of the administrator” with the “tenderness of a big brother” (CL 28:XXXI; also, Calcutt, 73–75, 84–89).

36. Nicolas Roland (1642–1678) was an advocate of the reform of the clergy, a gifted orator, canon of the cathedral of Reims (since 1665, three years before De La Salle's appointment), administrator of an orphanage, and Founder of the Sisters of the Child Jesus in Reims (CL 38:51–92; Calcutt, 77–83). Nicolas Roland was beatified by Pope John Paul II in Saint Peter's Square on October 16, 1994.

37. Actually, De La Salle had received the minor orders (porter, lector, exorcist, and acolyte) in Reims four years earlier on March 17, 1668 (CL 41–II:195–203). He was ordained subdeacon by the bishop of Cambrai on June 11, 1672. The main duties of a subdeacon were to prepare the sacred vessels for Mass, assist the deacon, sing the epistle at solemn Masses, recite the Breviary, and remain celibate (CL 41–II:302–306). Between his minor orders and subdiaconate, both his parents died, and he assumed the guardianship of his brothers and sisters as he continued his theological studies.

38. De La Salle returned to Reims on April 23, 1672, two weeks after the death of his father. He continued his theological studies at the University of Reims and finished the three-year cycle on August 10, 1672 (CL 41–II:367–373). This was followed by two years of philosophy from 1673 to 1675, at which time he resumed his duties as canon (CL 41–II:187).

39. He received his bachelor's degree in 1675, probably in August. The examination, the *Tentative*, was a public oral defense lasting several hours, dealing mainly with dogmatic propositions and the *Sentences* of Peter Lombard (CL 41–II:59–61). During the period of study for the licentiate, which lasted from January 1676 to December 1677, he continued his studies in theology and philosophy. Under the guidance of his professors, he prepared three theses: one in speculative theology, one in practical theology, and one on a subject of controversy. The subjects he chose are not known, but the printed invitation to the public to attend the *Paranymphe*, the festive ceremony for conferring the licentiate on De La Salle and four fellow students, held at one o'clock in the afternoon of January 26, 1678, in the auditorium of Saint Patrick's College of the University of Reims, indicates that he had successfully passed all examinations (CL 41–II:61–62; 407–418; Calcutt, 83–84, 91; Salm, *The Formative Years*, 96–99, 105–109).

40. He was ordained deacon on March 21, 1676, in Paris in the palace of the archbishop, François de Harlay. Because the archbishop was absent at this time, Bishop François de Batailler presided at the ceremony. The interval of four years after receiving the subdiaconate was probably caused by De La Salle's family responsibilities and his studies. The deacon's main duty was to assist the priest at the altar,

sing the Gospel, preach, and in special circumstances distribute Communion and baptize (CL 41-II:399–406).

41. The exchange of the canonry at this time could not have been the reason for De La Salle's trip to Paris. He received the needed letters for ordination as deacon on March 9 and March 13, 1676 (CL 41-II:383, 393). By that time, however, the exchange of the canonry had fallen through because of the revocation by one of the principal parties involved, André Cloquet, then pastor of Saint Pierre. The act of revocation is dated March 2, 1676, and was delivered, in the absence of John Baptist, to his brother Jacques-Joseph on March 3, 1676 (CL 41-I:30; CL 41-II:380–381). It is likely that De La Salle, by the time of his trip to Paris, already knew about this accomplished fact, which made a request for exchanging the canonry meaningless.

A triple exchange was planned. De La Salle was to exchange his canonry for the pastorate of Saint Pierre. The incumbent pastor of Saint Pierre, André Cloquet, who was looking for a less burdensome position, was to take over the chaplaincy of Saints Pierre and Paul in the cathedral of Reims; the incumbent chaplain, Rémi Favreau, a good friend of Roland, was to receive De La Salle's canonry. In papers signed on January 20, 1676, in the presence of M. Rogier, notary, at Châlons-sur-Marne rather than in Reims, for purposes of discretion, Cloquet yields his pastorate to De La Salle, De La Salle yields his canonry to Favreau, and Favreau yields his chaplaincy to Cloquet. However, later, on March 2, 1676, Cloquet officially reneged on this arrangement after discovering that the chaplaincy entailed more obligations than he had originally been led to believe (CL 26:245–259; CL 41-II:376–379; Calcutt, 158, 165–167; Salm, *The Formative Years*, 99–102).

Blain and Bernard speak of De La Salle's intention to exchange his canonry for the pastorate of Notre-Dame-de-Mézières, eighty kilometers northeast of Reims (CL 8:240, 447; CL 4:48–49). From reports of the pastoral visit by Archbishop Maurice Le Tellier, the pastor in question, M. Launois, was not exactly exemplary (CL 41-II:382). It is possible that De La Salle assisted him for a while, but it is highly unlikely that John Baptist would have wanted to exchange his canonry with him.

Had the ill-advised initiative of M. Roland in attempting to have De La Salle exchange his canonry for a pastorate succeeded, the Institute of the Brothers of the Christian Schools might never have come into existence (Calcutt, 81–83).

42. It was the largest parish in Reims, with from 3,000 to 3,500 parishioners (CL 26:258). *Hôtel de la Cloche* was in this parish.

43. Charles-Maurice Le Tellier (1642–1710), son of François-Michel Le Tellier, Louis XIV's famous Secretary of State, was appointed archbishop of Reims on November 11, 1668, and entered Reims as archbishop on October 11, 1671. The see of Reims was neglected between 1605 and 1667, virtually vacant for the first sixteen years of De La Salle's life. The Dukes of Guise looked upon the see as being at their disposal and appointed family members to the see in order to profit from the benefices. The last of the line of the Guise branch was Mlle de Guise, Marie de Lorraine (see note 86).

In 1657 Louis XIV nominated Cardinal Antonio Barberini (1608–1671), nephew of Pope Urban VIII (1623–1644), to the see. Barberini did not take possession of his see until December 1667. He made no real attempt to administer the diocese. His coadjutor was Le Tellier, an energetic, authoritarian, self-confident man. He ordained De La Salle to the priesthood on April 9, 1678. It was Le Tellier who annulled the election of Brother Henri L'Heureux (1686) as religious Superior of the community and ordered De La Salle to resume his position at the head of the Society so that a priest and former canon would not be subject to a Brother. Although Le Tellier held De La Salle in high esteem and early on helped him obtain letters patent for the Sisters of the Child Jesus of Reims, the archbishop often opposed his undertakings. He did not appreciate De La Salle's repeated requests to give up his canonry, nor his desire to give away his wealth, nor his vision for his new Society. He offered to obtain legal recognition of De La Salle's schools if the Founder would restrict his work to the archdiocese of Reims, with ultimate control in the hands of the archbishop (CL 41–II:387–392).

44. The other two early biographers, Blain and Bernard, also state that De La Salle did not feel called to take charge of a parish at this time (CL 7:136; CL 4:49).

45. See CL 41–II:447–460; Salm, *The Formative Years*, 123–126.

46. Roland, aged only thirty-five when he died, named as executors De La Salle, not yet thirty years old, and Nicolas Rogier, twenty-four years old, a deacon, later canon, and a protégé of Roland (CL 38:91, 186. The entire CL 38 treats of Nicolas Roland, De La Salle, and the Sisters of the Child Jesus of Reims; Calcutt, 91–95; Salm, *The Formative Years*, 117).

47. Letters patent from the king conferred legal existence upon an institution and disclosed to the public its nature, objectives, and means of support. Louis XIV required that all new religious communities have sufficient resources to guarantee income and retirement for the members. Letters patent permitted the community to receive

financial help from public and private sources. A major reason for letters patent was to prevent mendicancy and dependence upon subsidies from the city or the Royal Treasury for the aged and infirm members of the community.

48. There were already in Reims several hospitals and religious communities of mendicants (Calcutt, 45–46).

49. The City Council of Reims officially approved the community of the Sisters of the Child Jesus on August 12, 1678 (CL 38:114). For the involvement of De La Salle in obtaining legal recognition of the community, see CL 38:93–112 and Salm, *The Formative Years*, 117–120. All these efforts put him in contact with religious and civil authorities and gave him an idea of their interest in schools for the poor. Less than a year later, on March 5, 1679, he was to have his first encounter with Adrien Nyel at the house of the Sisters of the Child Jesus on Rue Barbâtre. The negotiations also gave De La Salle first-hand knowledge of the process for obtaining recognition of a religious community and taught him the necessity of prudence in such a matter. In fact, he was content to leave his own community of teachers without letters patent for forty years.

50. Louis XIV was in difficulty with Rome since 1673 concerning the financial arrangements of some bishoprics; several regions in the kingdom (Brie, Vivarais, and Charollais) were causing difficulties because of taxes; the war against Holland and its allies continued.

51. The letters patent were obtained in February 1679. At this point De La Salle probably thought his role with the Sisters of the Child Jesus was finished (CL 38:201–212). For the important part played by Le Tellier in this matter, see CL 28:201, 213; also, Calcutt, 89–94; Salm, *The Formative Years*, 118–119.

52. Louis XIV, son of Louis XIII and Anne of Austria, was born at Saint-Germain-en-Laye on September 5, 1638. He was only five years old when his father died. The Regency of his mother Anne of Austria, who appointed Cardinal Jules Mazarin Prime Minister, lasted from 1643 to 1661; the personal reign of Louis XIV extended from 1661 (upon the death of Mazarin) until his own death on September 1, 1715. His reign, including the Regency, covered practically the entire life of De La Salle.

53. These lines are taken from De La Salle's *Memoir on the Beginnings*, describing the role of Providence in founding the Institute of the Brothers of the Christian Schools. Although the actual *Memoir* has not been found, it is referred to and quoted in Blain (CL 7:167, 169, 193, 326). Bernard says that De La Salle kept the document hidden for more than twenty years (CL 4:22). The phrase "and in a short



time” also appears in Bernard (CL 4:33), while Blain has “over a long time” (CL 7:169).

54. The reference is to the *Fronde Parlementaire* in 1648–1649 (Louis XIV was ten years old) and the *Fronde des Princes* in 1649–1653. These revolts during the minority of Louis XIV and the Regency of Anne of Austria by magistrates and aristocrats against the unpopular Prime Minister Mazarin dragged the people into the conflicts. France also had been involved since 1635 in a war with Spain until the *Paix des Pyrénées* (Peace of the Pyrenees) in 1659. The phrase “last several reigns” refers to Louis XIII, who died in 1643, and to Henry IV, assassinated in 1640.

55. That is, Protestantism.

56. Nicolas Barré (October 21, 1621 – May 31, 1686) belonged to the severe Order of Minims, a mendicant, penitential order of contemplatives, scholars, and preachers founded in 1435 by Saint Francis of Paola (1416–1507). The name *Minims* indicates their intention to become the least of all, so that they might die to self and live in and for God alone. Barré was interested in the education of the poor and established a school for girls in Rouen in 1662 and later in other cities. He formed the school mistresses into the community of the Child Jesus, from which Nicolas Roland obtained some Sisters to take charge of his orphanage for girls in Reims. Barré was anxious to provide the same opportunity for poor boys. He gathered together a number of schoolteachers, called them Brothers, and gave them the same rule as the Sisters. They existed in Paris in 1682–1684. After Barré’s death, Servien de Montigny’s efforts to continue this group of teaching Brothers failed. De Montigny, a priest, was second in command to Barré in 1683 and became the superior of the Sisters of the Child Jesus after Barré.

Was Barré a precursor of De La Salle? There were some important differences between the visions of the two men. Barré wanted to provide priests working in hospitals and isolated country parishes with assistants to help them in the Christian formation of children. De La Salle’s interests were in urban schools, not rural parishes. Also, De La Salle did not want his Brothers to be isolated individuals serving the priests but members living a religious community life. Both Barré and De La Salle, however, ultimately failed during their lifetime to create and sustain training centers for country schoolteachers.

Barré was the counselor to De La Salle who advised him to live with his teachers, share their poverty, and not use his patrimony to fund his schools (Poutet, I, 515–525). Barré’s cause for beatification is pending in Rome.



See Calcutt, 105–109, 156–158, 171–173.

57. Mme Maillefer, née Jeanne Dubois, was born October 27, 1622, in Reims. Her husband Ponce was a cloth merchant and supported Nicolas Roland in his desire to establish a free school for boys in Reims. Mme Maillefer, with the consent of her husband, promised to contribute financially to the foundation of the schools planned by Roland. The role of her husband in these charitable undertakings is overlooked by the early biographers.

In spite of Blain's assertion of kinship (CL 7:161) between Mme Maillefer and De La Salle, there was no blood relationship. There was, however, some relationship by marriage. Rose Maillefer (1623–1683), the aunt of Jeanne Dubois's husband Ponce Maillefer, married John Baptist's uncle Simon de La Salle. Ponce Maillefer's grandmother was Jeanne de La Salle, sister of the great-grandfather of John Baptist, Francis de La Salle. Jean Maillefer, son of a cousin of Mme Maillefer's husband, married Marie, De La Salle's sister (Poutet, I, 631, n. 1).

58. Throughout her life she was generous to the poor and to good works, intensifying these after the death of her husband, when she was freer to disburse funds. Blain's exaggerated portrait of her dramatic "conversion" needs to be tempered by the present biographer's account. "She died in Rouen in 1693 of contagion contracted at the *Hôtel-Dieu* (General Hospital; literally, God's Mansion) while caring for the poor. She spent most of the day in prayer, slept on boards, and normally ate only bread" (footnote by Maillefer, CL 6:33, n. 1; see also CL 38:61; Calcutt, 110–112).

59. Roland died on April 27, 1678.

60. Adrien Nyel (born near Laon about 1621) had already been involved in the education of poor boys in Rouen before being contacted by Father Barré. He was supervisor and instructor of the adolescent apprentices and children living on welfare at the *Hôpital Général* (General Hospice) of Rouen. *Hôpital* then meant a house or hospice which provided temporary lodging for poor travellers and pilgrims, as well as regular care for the homeless poor of the town. Nyel was asked to open two schools in Rouen and its suburbs. This was made possible through an Act of Donation in 1666 by Laurent Le Cornu de Bimorel, principal administrator of the *Bureau des Valides* (literally, Office for the Able-bodied), a charitable organization in charge of the administration of the *Hôpital Général* and involved as well in a number of other activities (Calcutt, 46–48, 101–104, 110, 127–130, 472–473). One of the most important among these projects was primary schools for boys and girls in Rouen. De Bimorel provided an annual lifetime pension to Nyel, for as long as Nyel remained involved

with the schools. De Bimorel gave buildings and funds (1,600 livres) to sponsor two teachers for three years. (Later, the ordinary annual support of a Brother at a modest level would be set at 200 livres.) This Act of Donation marked an essential step in the evolution of the teachers, because of the document's use of the title "Brothers." It showed that they were now an association of masters, the embryo of a community. The Act also demanded stability of programs and gave powers to Nyel for three years (Poutet, I, 497, 498).

Nyel also took on the task of training auxiliaries to teach Christian doctrine, reading, and writing (Poutet, I, 495–498). Nyel's relationship with the school in Darnétal put him in touch with M. and Mme Maillefer, who provided financial assistance for the school, which was directed by the Sisters of the Child Jesus. Two of these sisters, Françoise Duval and Anne Le Coeur, later went to Reims to help Roland establish a teaching congregation there.

61. The house on the Rue Sainte Marguerite where the family lived for seventeen years, from 1665 to 1682 (CL 26:172–181; CL 41–I:129–139; Salm, ed., 1980, 10).

62. Roland had sometimes referred penitents to Dom Claude Bretagne (Poutet, I, 632). Saint Rémi was the monastery where Maillefer wrote his biography of De La Salle.

63. Pierre Bachelier de Gentes was a relative of Jean Maillefer, the husband of De La Salle's sister Marie (Poutet, I, 420, 458, 539).

64. Pastors had a right recognized by councils, episcopal ordinances, and acts of *Parlement* to procure Christian instruction for the children under their care. The Council of Trent prescribed that near each church there be at least one teacher in charge of instructing the clerics and poor children gratuitously and that this teacher receive a suitable stipend (Session V, June 17, 1546, *Decretum supra lectione et praedicatione* [Decree on teaching and preaching], 13).

65. Nicolas Dorigny was born in Reims on September 9, 1637. Named pastor of Saint Maurice in 1674, he was at this time looking for someone to direct a school for the children of the parish. He died on August 5, 1686, while still pastor (CL 36:72, n. 4).

66. Catherine Leleu, wealthy widow of Antoine Lévêque de Carrières and a benefactor of the Sisters of the Child Jesus, had no children and was gravely ill at the time. De La Salle had known her since at least 1678 (CL 37:22). In the Carbon manuscript of Maillefer's *Life*, the name appears as M. Lévêque de Croyère (CL 6:36; Calcutt, 131–132).

67. This encounter and the previous one with Nyel were decisive experiences for De La Salle, as he himself says, for they made him

begin to take care of the schools for poor boys, something which he had not thought of doing before. (See his *Memoir on the Beginnings*, quoted in CL 7:167, 169; CL 4:30, 34.)

68. Some estimate of the amount in question can be made by considering that the ordinary support of a Brother at a modest level was 200 livres per year. This was the annual income De La Salle reserved for himself when he gave his wealth to the poor in 1684 (see note 105). De La Salle paid this same amount for the support of his sister Marie in 1672 when she was living with her grandmother (CL 28:XLVII).

69. Madame Lévêque de Carrières died on May 28, 1680 (CL 37:22).

70. In view of the date of Mme Lévêque's death, 1679 is questionable; it was probably 1680 (CL 38:111, n. 1).

71. The house was rented from Mathieu Ruynart and was located in Rue de la Grue, "near the ramparts," 100 yards from the street of De La Salle's Sainte Marguerite residence (CL 4:35). Although De La Salle visited the five masters there, they were still under the direction of Adrien Nyel. When present, Nyel presided over meals and mental prayer and assisted at Mass with them. When he was not in residence, as was often the case, there was less regularity and stability. Hence, De La Salle drew up a daily schedule for the masters (similar to the one he had known during his student days at the Seminary of Saint Sulpice) with times for rising, retiring, meals, common prayer, and Mass. Nyel, delighted at this development, abandoned the internal management of the house in favor of recruiting the additional teachers needed for the already over-crowded classes (Poutet, I, 637–638). De La Salle had now narrowed the distance between himself and the schoolteachers (Calcutt, 132–134).

72. This third school was opened in 1680 in the parish of Saint Symphorien.

73. Because De La Salle obtained his licentiate on January 26, 1678, he could have fulfilled the requirements for the doctorate by August 1678 but waited until after Easter 1680. During this interval he became responsible for the Sisters of the Child Jesus through Roland's testament of April 23, 1678, met Adrien Nyel on March 15, 1679, and assembled the teaching masters in a rented house near his own around Christmas 1679.

The formalities for the doctorate included the *Expectative*, questions posed by two students in the licentiate program, and the *Vespéries*, a development of a number of propositions or theses in Scripture, Church History, and Moral Theology, drawn up by the candidate. Two Doctors

in Theology responded and recognized De La Salle as competent. At the ensuing celebration, paid for by the student, he received the doctoral hood. Research so far has not discovered the thesis topics or the announcement of the actual conferring of the degree. De La Salle was a non-resident Doctor, not a regent Doctor with residency obligations to the University of Reims. His degree gave him official recognition as a defender of the faith and an advisor to the bishop, with the possibility of an eminent ecclesiastical career (CL 41-II:468–473; Calcutt, 134).

74. Jean-Louis, Pierre, and Jean-Remy were sixteen, fourteen, and ten, respectively. The other three siblings, Jacques-Joseph, Marie, and Rose-Marie, had already left the family house. Jacques-Joseph entered the Augustinian order of the Canons Regular of Sainte-Geneviève in Paris in 1676. De La Salle watched over his studies and cared for his needs almost as a parent would (CL 27:50–56). Jacques-Joseph was a Doctor in Theology and taught in Blois. He died at the age of sixty-three in Chauny, having lived an exemplary and edifying life. Marie married Jean Maillefer in 1679. Rose-Marie entered the contemplative order of Saint-Etienne-les-Dames (Religious of Saint Stephen) in Reims in 1672 at the age of sixteen. Her religious life was short, for she died suddenly on March 21, 1681, at the age of twenty-five. De La Salle was always attentive to her needs during her life in the convent. He was most affectionate toward his younger sister and occasionally referred to her as “Rosette” (CL 27:42–45; CL 41-I:117–118). See note 35.

75. John Baptist was advised by Father Barré to let the masters live with him (Calcutt, 136–137).

76. Personal devotion to his patron saint was not the main reason De La Salle chose this day to move the teachers. Local law set June 24, feast of the birth of Saint John the Baptist, as the annual day for surrendering or renewing options on rented property. Indeed, De La Salle had originally rented for a year and a half, at Christmas 1679, the house behind Saint Symphorien.

Already in 1680, most likely, the teachers began taking their meals in De La Salle's house, and later, from Holy Week 1681, were kept there from morning until evening, except during school hours.

From 1679 to 1682 the housing arrangements for the teachers changed three times. The first and third locations were rentals, the house “near the ramparts” behind Saint Symphorien (1679) and the house on Rue Neuve (June 24, 1682). Thus, De La Salle began his Institute in rented facilities. The second change was to move the teachers into the paternal home on Rue Sainte Marguerite (June 24, 1681), before the transfer to Rue Neuve. (See Brother Maurice-Auguste, “La date du 24 juin et les origines des Frères [The date of June 24th and

the Origins of the Brothers],” *Bulletin des F.E.C.*, January 1959, #156, 27–35; see also CL 36:74.)

77. De La Salle himself once remarked that in the beginning he considered the teachers as beneath his own valet in social standing (CL 7:169; see also CL 4:30).

78. Pierre and Jean-Remy went to live with their sister Marie and her husband Jean Maillefer, possibly at the latter’s instigation (CL 41–I:334). Jean-Remy then went to Senlis as a boarder with the Canons Regular (CL 32:5, n. 5). Jean-Louis stayed with De La Salle (Calcutt, 139–141).

79. Calcutt, 141–142.

80. The *adieu* to the family home must have been filled with emotion for De La Salle. His mother had lived there for six years; his father, seven. Three children were born there: Pierre (1666), Simon (1667), and Jean-Remy (1672). After the death of their parents, John Baptist, Marie, and Jacques-Joseph continued to live there with their three younger brothers, Jean-Louis, Pierre, and Jean-Remy.

Prior to this move of June 24, 1682, two of John Baptist’s brothers, Pierre and Jean-Remy, had already left (see note 78), and only Jean-Louis, then seventeen years old, was with De La Salle. Jean-Louis entered the seminary at Saint Sulpice, Paris, on November 8 that same year, 1682. Nyel had departed definitively for Rethel, Guise, and Laon, and almost all of the original teachers had abandoned their work and been replaced by others. De La Salle released the maid and the cook, and he sold this family house on Rue Sainte Marguerite to François Favart for 10,200 livres on June 24, 1682 (CL 26:189).

In the newly rented house on the Rue Neuve, then, were De La Salle, his brother Jean-Louis, Jean Faubert (see note 100), two or three poor young men preparing for the priesthood under the tutelage of Faubert, and eight teachers (CL 37–I:133; CL 37–III:37, n. 2; CL 41–II:490; Calcutt, 149–151, 189–191).

81. This house where the first members of the Institute were trained by De La Salle no longer exists. Its location is now the corner of Rue Eugène Desteuque and Rue de la Grue (CL 41–I:138).

82. Maillefer speaks here not of Château-Porcien, twelve kilometers from Rethel, but of Rethel itself, the capital of a territory owned by the Duke de Mazarin. In a letter to the mayor and councillors of Château-Porcien, dated June 20, 1682, four days before he and the teachers moved out of his family home, De La Salle promised to send two “schoolteachers” from “our community.” He did indeed open the school on June 30, 1682 (*The Letters of John Baptist de La Salle*. Translation, introduction, and commentary by Brother Colman Molloy, FSC.

Edited with additional commentary by Brother Augustine Loes, FSC. Romeoville: Lasallian Publications, 1988, 15–16). The allusion De La Salle makes in his *Memoir on the Habit* to Château-Porcien (CL 11:354) may indicate that the Brothers had been asked to wear clerical dress and perform certain ecclesiastical functions in that city. Jean Faubert, who lived in the Rue Neuve community and to whom De La Salle would turn over his canonry in 1683, was a native of Château-Porcien. (See note 100.)

83. Armand-Charles de La Porte, through his marriage in 1661 with Hortense Mancini, the niece of Cardinal Mazarin, inherited the Cardinal's name and fortune. The Duke was fifty years old and already separated from his wife when he met Adrien Nyel for the first time. He was a grand nobleman of great piety and attachment to the Church. Personally austere, he was generous to the poor and interested in their education. Although pious, he was erratic, and his friendship could either be immensely beneficial or greatly damaging, as De La Salle was soon to find out (Calcutt, 142–143, 162–165, 181–185).

84. Probably Anne Potou, widow of Jean Bonvarlet des Orgiers, counsellor to the king and provost of the constabulary of the Duke de Mazarin. In addition to other forms of financial assistance, she gave the free schools of Rethel a house with a rental income to support the teachers in those schools. This was an early example of an endowment gift (CL 26:276).

85. The schools of Rethel, Guise, and Laon remained under the direction of Adrien Nyel until 1685.

86. Marie de Lorraine, first cousin of Louis XIV, princess of royal blood, daughter of Gaston d'Orléans and Marguerite de Lorraine. She died on March 3, 1688. She had supported Father Barré's schools for girls and his community of Sisters in Paris and met with him about the care of poor children in her own domain of Guise. She also encountered Adrien Nyel. De La Salle sent two Brothers to work in the school in Guise, supported by her perpetual annuity of 400 livres which continued until the French Revolution (Poutet, I, 658–661).

87. Pierre Guyart (1654–1736) had succeeded François Fondeur as pastor of Saint Pierre parish in 1682. Guyart was a personal friend of Nicolas Roland (De La Salle's spiritual director) and of De La Salle. He lived across the street in Reims at the time when De La Salle began assembling the schoolmasters in his own house (Poutet, I, 668).

88. Calcutt, 144–145, 156, 159–160.

89. The habit finally chosen distinguished the Brothers both from ordinary lay persons and from ecclesiastics. De La Salle proceeded

with great caution, in order to avoid having to make subsequent changes, for he considered constancy to be a matter of great importance. The habit consisted of a cassock, called a robe, of black material descending to mid-calf and fastened by hooks which could not be seen, along with a type of peasant's mantle of thick serge, a white collar called a *rabato* (common among the clergy), bulky shoes similar to those worn by the poor, and a black, wide-brimmed hat. The habit gave the Brothers a new identity and a better understanding of their obligations (CL 11:46–48; Calcutt, 177–178).

90. The *Memoir on the Habit* was written at the end of 1689 or the beginning of 1690, about two years after the Brothers took over the direction of a charity school in Saint Sulpice in Paris (February 24, 1688). The pastor, M. Henri Baudrand, objected to what he considered the bizarre habit worn by the Brothers and wanted them to adopt the usual ecclesiastical dress. De La Salle refused to do this and maintained the habit worn for the past five years. In the *Memoir* written for the benefit of M. Baudrand, De La Salle gives his reasons (CL 11:349–354). Because the principle of the internal autonomy of the community was at stake for De La Salle, the *Memoir* is more than a defense of the type of habit the Brothers wore; it is a defense of the community as such. De La Salle writes as a member of the community (he does not use “I” in the document) and gives in the *Memoir* thematic expression to his nine years of experience with the teachers since his first encounter with Nyel. See CL 5:241–315.

91. There is disagreement among the source biographers as to when the term Brothers was first used. Bernard places it in 1682 at the time of the arrival of new candidates in the Rue Sainte Marguerite family residence (CL 4:47); Maillefer also puts it in 1682, but after the June 24th transfer to Rue Neuve, when they were called “Brothers of the Christian Schools” (CL 6:55); Blain cites it at the time of the formal assemblies in 1686 (CL 7:233). From the publication of the *Memoir on the Habit* (1689–1690), the name *Frères des Ecoles Chrétiennes* (Brothers of the Christian Schools) is to be found in Institute texts. Other names were applied to the Brothers by outsiders: *Frères des Ecoles Gratuites* (Brothers of the Free Schools), *Frères de Saint Yon* (Brothers of Saint Yon), *Frères de l'Enfant Jésus* (Brothers of the Child Jesus), and so on (CL 11:176, n. 10). In 1697 Gabriel Drolin in Rome signed a receipt that refers to the *Teachers of the Christian and Gratuitous Schools*, and in 1698 he signed one in which reference is made to the *Teachers of the Christian Schools* (CL 40–II:77; Calcutt, 160–161).

92. Calcutt, 156–158.

93. See note 56.

94. M. Jacques Callou, Rector of the Reims seminary and grand-vicar of M. Le Tellier.

95. Probably Barré. See note 104.

96. Claude Bottu de La Barmondière (1635–1694) was named pastor of Saint Sulpice in 1678 and resigned for reasons of health on January 7, 1689. He was an outspoken supporter of papal infallibility *ex cathedra* (from the chair of Peter, that is, by the pope's authority) at a time when many theologians and pastors were favoring a Gallican type of infallibility *ex unitate cathedra* (from the chair in unity), where the pope's infallibility was exercised in a General Council or depended on subsequent acceptance by the Church. He was a professor at the Seminary of Saint Sulpice from 1665 to 1673, where De La Salle, who was at Saint Sulpice for eighteen months (1670–1672), had occasion to hear him. He no doubt played a role in influencing De La Salle's own position of attachment to Rome.

97. Canon Nicolas Philbert, a colleague of De La Salle, was "a man of weight and influence" (Carbon manuscript 31; CL 6:60).

98. The *Grand Chantre* (literally, precentor, one who leads the singing), also called *Écolâtre* (school director), was the canon responsible for teaching the choir children in the cathedral. In this capacity he also directed the presbytery school and, in the seventeenth century, had jurisdiction over all the popular schools of the diocese. This role was to lead in the ensuing years to conflict in Paris with the pastors who wanted to protect their authority over their own charity schools. A number of juridical battles resulted in which a compromise was reached: the pastors would choose the teachers, but the *Grand Chantre* would have the right to inspect and judge in litigious cases. As the years passed, De La Salle, who wanted to preserve his freedom with respect to the school and the community, had to reckon both with the *Grand Chantre*, who wanted to interfere in school programs and policies for admitting students, and with the pastors, who at times wanted to influence the Brothers' way of living and their internal government (Calcutt, 227–229).

99. Jean-Louis, who was nineteen years old at the time. Regarding John Baptist's decision not to name his own brother, one author offers the interpretation that "Jean-Louis was at his studies in Paris for the next few years and could not fulfil the duties of a canon of Reims. He probably would not want to be one at nineteen; he and his brother were likely to be at one, in line with the reforming movement among the clergy, in opposing nepotism and early benefices" (Calcutt, 166).



100. Jean Faubert took over the canonry on August 16, 1683, and kept the position for twenty-two years, until his death on August 12, 1705. Faubert, without any social standing or family connections, was born in Château-Porcien and was a doctor in theology, talented, of fine reputation, and devout. Blain says that De La Salle “did not know of a person of more distinguished merit” (CL 7:203) or more worthy to replace him as canon at the cathedral of Reims. Faubert had lived with De La Salle at Rue Neuve beginning in 1682. Possibly before that he had lived with De La Salle in the family home on Rue Sainte Marguerite. According to Blain, De La Salle later regretted this choice, for Faubert’s career, begun in fervor, ended in laxity (CL 7:205). For a kinder view of Faubert, see CL 37–III:37, n. 2; CL 41–II:489–490. See also CL 41–II:479–490; Calcutt, 165–167.

101. See note 94.

102. De La Salle had been canon for almost seventeen years, from January 7, 1667, to August 16, 1683.

103. In addition to this sacrificial motive, a major reason for divesting himself of his wealth in favor of the poor was to share the lot of the Brothers and thus respond to their complaint about their insecurity. This gesture of De La Salle was prompted neither by contempt for worldly goods, nor by the famine of 1683–1684 (CL 41–I:33), but was De La Salle’s response to what he perceived as a call to another state in life, of total abandonment to Providence in sharing the life of those who would dedicate their lives to teaching the poor (*Memoir on the Beginnings*, CL 7:191–192; Calcutt, 152–158, 171–175).

104. It took several months before M. Jacques Callou, De La Salle’s spiritual director, came to agree with Father Barré (Calcutt, 171–173).

105. Just how much De La Salle gave to the poor is not known. His personal fortune consisted of income from his canonry (2,000 livres per year, Poutet, Yves. *Saint Jean-Baptiste de La Salle*. Paris: Beauchesne 1992, 39), capital and annual income, cash funds, rent income, patrimony, and so on. Not all of this was available for distribution to the poor. He continued paying rent for the houses on Rue Neuve (1684–1700) and in Vaugirard (1691–1698) and for the *Grand-Maison* (literally, Big House) (1698–1703), a spacious house and former convent in the Paris suburb of Saint-Germain. He funded various projects, such as the Sunday academy, the school for Irish boarders, and the purchase of other houses. He kept enough capital (about 4,000 livres) to assure an annual income of 200 livres, the amount required for ecclesiastics with a clerical title and the sum he asked for

the yearly support of a teacher. According to Bernard, he used this annual income for books for his library and that of the community, for sacred ornaments and vessels, and for priestly vestments (CL 4:61). Present research indicates that De La Salle had from 11,000 to 15,000 livres available to give to the poor (CL 41–I:224–227; Poutet, I, 722–723; see also Poutet, 1992, 41–42). He assisted poor boys and girls of the schools, men and women coming to the Brothers' house for help, and the poor whom he visited in their homes. The magnanimous statement, "he gave away everything," is imprecise, but his generosity did leave De La Salle personally in a state of poverty. See also Calcutt, 173–175.

106. Letter 38, to Brother Robert (Denis Maubert), who entered the Institute in 1700 at the age of twenty-four and probably opened the school and community in Darnétal. This letter was written around 1705 (*Letters*, 136–137).

107. One of the characteristics of the spirituality of the time was its negative view of human nature. Jansenism considered human nature to be radically corrupt (see note 7). There was much insistence in the writings and teachings of the spiritual masters of the time on the weakness of human nature, on our sinful condition, and on our nothingness as creatures. More stress was placed on the distance between us and God than on our being in the image of God.

During this period of religious renaissance, however, the underlying conviction was that Christian perfection consists in following Jesus Christ, not simply in deprivation. We die to ourselves so that Jesus Christ may live in us (Calcutt, 61–70, 377–378).

108. On May 31, 1687, at the age of sixty-six. From 1675 to 1679 Nyel was a supervisor of the *Hôpital Général* (General Hospice) in Rouen and of several schools for the poor. His mission outside Rouen, that is, his involvement with De La Salle, lasted from 1679 to 1685. He opened three schools in Reims and three others in neighboring towns. On October 26, 1685, he resumed his duties at the General Hospice in Rouen.

Nyel was a gifted and competent person whose projects De La Salle wanted to help succeed. To see him only as a volatile, simple, good-natured person is to misunderstand his true calibre.

There is no evidence that Nyel ever made vows with the Brothers or that he attended the General Assembly in 1684 of the principal Brothers. He would have been sixty-three years old at the time, with his own ambitions in life. Though Nyel cannot properly be called the "first Brother of the Christian Schools" (J. Guibert, S.S., *Histoire de S. Jean-Baptiste de La Salle*, Paris: Librairie Ch. Poussielgue, 1900, 143),

he is the *premier Promoteur de l'Institut des Frères* (initial promoter of the Institute of the Brothers), in the words of Blain (CL 7:282). He was a courageous pioneer of gratuitous schools for the poor, a precursor, an animator, and the prototype of the future Brothers of the Christian Schools (CL 48:20–32; Poutet, I, 494–500; Calcutt, 186–187, 203–204).

109. Canon Pierre Guyart, also a personal friend of Nicolas Roland, was De La Salle's spiritual director. De La Salle respected the directives given by the pastor of Saint Pierre of Laon, ordinary confessor of the Brothers (see *Letters*, 37, 43). When, at the instigation of M. de La Chétardie, a clerical superior was forced upon the Brothers at the *Grand'-Maison* in Paris, the Brothers in Laon asked Pierre Guyart to find out exactly what happened. Guyart wrote to Charles de La Grange, the parish priest of Villiers-le-Bel and a friend of De La Salle, to look into the matter (see note 196). For a summary of Pierre Guyart's role in assisting the establishment of the school in Laon, see Calcutt, 183.

110. This document is the *Pratique de Règlement journalier* (*Practice of Daily Regulations*). Although only a copy dated 1713 of the original text now exists, it seems certain that it reflects practices that go back to 1682 (CL 11:3–4, 84–135).

111. Wormwood, a European plant yielding a bitter, slightly aromatic, dark green oil used in the drink absinthe.

112. At this time there were some twelve to eighteen Brothers in the schools of Rethel, Guise, Laon, Reims, and possibly Château-Porcien. If the principal Brothers were the directors of the schools, there would have been six or seven present at the assembly (CL 2:21–22). In his 1723 version of the biography, Maillefer wrote, “the Brothers superiors of the schools of Laon, Rethel, and Guise, who with those of the house (of Reims) constituted a sufficient assembly” (CL 6:74).

113. There is a discrepancy among the three early biographers as to the year: Blain, 1684 (CL 7:232); Bernard, 1687 (CL 4:72), and Maillefer, 1686. Present research seems to favor 1686 (CL 2:34). See Calcutt, 192–193.

114. Blain speaks of three years, rather than one (CL 7:236). It is possible that the vows were pronounced for three years and then renewed annually after the expiration of the first three-year period. Institute statistical reports from the mid-nineteenth century, for example, do not list any Brothers as having annual vows. It was this annual *renewal* that may have misled the biographers and historians. There are no extant vow texts that speak of vows for one year, only for three years or for life (CL 2:12–36).

115. On June 6, 1694, De La Salle and twelve Brothers took vows of association, stability, and obedience for life. On November 21, 1691,

the feast of the Presentation of Mary, De La Salle and two others, Gabriel Drolin and Nicolas Vuyart, had already taken their secret, “heroic vow” of association and union whereby they promised “never to leave . . . the Society . . . even if . . . obliged to beg for alms and live on bread alone” (CL 2:23–24).

116. He was twenty-four years old. One of De La Salle’s earliest followers, he was head of the community at Rue Neuve and supervisor of the schools in Reims before being sent to Paris to study for the priesthood. He died unexpectedly in Paris in 1691 (Calcutt, 204–207, 237–238).

117. Maillefer uses the word “novitiate,” but the first novitiate properly so called opened in 1692. See note 132.

118. For about twenty-nine years (1683–1712), De La Salle was involved in the attempt at establishing or running training centers (seminaries) for lay teachers destined for rural areas, apart from a possible project at Reithel (1683–1685) with Nicolas Vuyart (Poutet, I, 690, 692; CL 26:272). There were three major phases in this effort of De La Salle: 1) negotiations with the Duke de Mazarin, who was keenly interested in such centers (Poutet, I, 687–706), and the establishment by De La Salle himself of a center in the community at Rue Neuve in Reims that functioned from 1687 to 1691; 2) the center at Saint Hippolyte in Paris that operated under the direction of Nicolas Vuyart from 1699 to 1705; Vuyart betrayed the confidence De La Salle had placed in him and ultimately caused the institution to fail; 3) the center at Saint-Denis in Paris from 1709 to 1712 that was highly successful for a while, drawing praise from Louis XIV, but that failed in the wake of the painful Clément affair. De La Salle speaks of the country teachers in his *Memoir on the Habit* (CL 11:349, #4, 5, 6; Calcutt, 181, 198–199, 344–345).

119. This brother was Jean-Louis. After his studies at the *Collège des Bons-Enfants* in Reims, he entered the seminary at Saint Sulpice on November 8, 1682. He obtained a doctorate in theology at the Sorbonne (October 19, 1693), taught at the Reims seminary, and was a canon with privileged rank of the Reims cathedral for thirty years (1694–1724). He was made canon by Archbishop Charles-Maurice Le Tellier “to make up for the folly of his brother for giving his benefice to someone else” (CL 7:204, 284). A pious and devout person, he died at the age of sixty on September 26, 1724, five years after John Baptist.

Jean-Louis was a staunch adherent of Jansenism, an appellant, that is, one who did not accept the Constitution *Unigenitus* issued by Clement XI on September 8, 1713, condemning Jansenism and one

who called for (appealed to) a General Council (CL 22:86–96). He never retracted this position, which caused a painful separation from his brother John Baptist (CL 7:228). In spite of this, Jean-Louis greatly assisted the Institute in Reims (CL 27:103–104). He had a deep love for the Church, his family, and the poor (CL 27:71–111).

120. M. Compagnon, not a Sulpician, had taken over the direction of the parish schools from a certain M. Lespagnol. M. de La Barmondière was the pastor.

121. In the Rue Princesse (Calcutt, 216–221).

122. The class in De La Salle's school was an administrative grouping of fifty to sixty students; a school usually had three classes: one each for beginner, intermediate, and advanced students. Each class had four to six different teaching units, called lessons, which in turn were broken down according to levels of difficulty into homogeneous clusters of five to ten students, called orders, which were the actual study groups for beginner, intermediate, and advanced students. Within each order the student had a place determined according to individual needs. Thus, not all students in the same class were studying the same thing. De La Salle's simultaneous method must be understood in the context of his school organization. Only later were there classes of students all following the same lesson in the same room. It is important to note that in De La Salle's schools the separation was not the class-conscious separation between the rich and the poor, as was the case in the popular schools that received both students who could pay and those who could not. The separation was according to the level of learning and the mastery of material. Also, the organization of the class helped the teacher to be closely attentive to each student's individual academic needs (in a class), academic ability (in a lesson and an order), and individual achievement (in a specific place in the row). Careful attention was paid to each student in view of promotion from one level to the next.

123. Jacques de Forbin-Janson, born in 1673, member of the Sulpician community, was consecrated archbishop of Arles on August 2, 1711. In his testament he left furniture and a capital fund of 2,000 livres to the Brothers in Arles (Poutet, II, 254). His uncle, Toussaint de Forbin-Janson, was bishop of Marseille (1668–1679) and became a cardinal in 1690.

124. De La Barmondière's successor as pastor of Saint Sulpice, Henri Baudrand (January 3, 1637–October 19, 1699), was a good administrator, attentive to the needs of the poor. When he attempted to have the Brothers dress as ecclesiastics, De La Salle resisted his intrusion into the internal affairs of the community (see note 90; Calcutt,

232–235). There was a mutual respect between the two men, but there also were times of tension (CL 41–II:100–101).

125. The teachers of the Little Schools felt that the opening of the schools (Rue Princesse and Rue du Bac) without the express authorization of the *Grand Chantre* of Notre-Dame, who had jurisdiction over the Little Schools of Paris and the suburbs, was an infringement of their privileges recognized by the *Parlement*, the king, and the local authority. Thus, they had the right of seizure. They complained to the *Grand Chantre*, Canon Claude Joly, eighty-three years old and *Grand Chantre* since 1670, who ordered the closing of the school on Rue du Bac on February 23, 1690. The school on Rue Princesse had been in operation before the law of September 20, 1684, requiring the authorization of the *Grand Chantre*, and thus was not in question here. In spite of his aversion for lawsuits, De La Salle presented a defense, and the sentence was not carried out (CL 40–I:93, n. 107; Calcutt, 223–232).

126. M. Baudrand was still De La Salle's spiritual director at this time.

127. Notre-Dame-des-Virtues, in Aubervilliers, a traditional place of pilgrimage for the seminarians of Saint Sulpice. A marble plaque, a statue of De La Salle, and a stained-glass window witness today to his visit there.

128. François de Harlay de Champvallon (1625–1695) was archbishop of Paris from 1671 to 1695 (CL 41–2:400, n. 1). The schools were recognized as truly charity schools for the poor only and under the authority of the pastor of Saint Sulpice. Because the pastor had the right to select and change the teachers in the charity schools and the *Grand Chantre* had the right to visit the schools to control these changes, the role of De La Salle seemed superfluous. De La Salle requested of Archbishop de Harlay the authorization to train future Brother teachers (the training center was at Reims at this time) and to assign them to their teaching positions. Once granted, this authorization put De La Salle and his work under the authority of the bishop, not of the local pastor. This important step by De La Salle gave a distinctive shape to his Institute (Poutet, II, 83–87; Calcutt, 230–231).

129. The young men usually received only a few weeks of preparation before going out to teach (CL 4:79); this arrangement made it more like a postulancy than a novitiate in the present canonical sense of the term.

130. Three kilometers southwest of Rue Princesse, Vaugirard was semi-rural and much appreciated by Parisians for their Sunday walks in the countryside. According to Blain, the house was dilapidated. In

spite of the austerity of the place, Vaugirard was a center of renewal and retreat where the Brothers went on Thursdays and Sundays. There was also a novitiate there. In its seven years of existence, Vaugirard became the second cradle of the Institute (the first being Rue Neuve in Reims). It has an important symbolic value in the Institute, much as the Portiuncula chapel of Saint Francis of Assisi has for the Franciscans (Calcutt, 239–243, 247–252, 264).

131. Estimates as to the number of letters De La Salle wrote to Brothers and to others range from slightly over 3,000 to as many as 18,000. The Institute at this time possesses only 134 (*Letters*, 1988).

132. A first attempt at a novitiate in Paris began October 8, 1691, for Brothers already teaching who did not have the benefit of a sufficient time of probation (CL 7:315). The first novitiate properly so called began on November 1, 1692, at Vaugirard with the taking of the habit by five novices and a serving Brother (CL 7:325).

133. They were called serving Brothers (*Frères servants*), wore a brown habit, and used a different wording in the vow formula from that of the teaching Brothers. “To hold together and by association gratuitous schools wherever I may be sent” is missing in the formula of the serving Brothers (CL 3:17, f. 38; 18, f. 41; CL 25:141). They were considered full-fledged members of the Institute, and De La Salle had great confidence in them. The Rule of 1705 mentions serving Brothers twice (CL 25:22, f. 9; 23, f. 11). The Rule of 1718 devotes all of chapter 15 to the serving Brothers (CL 25:59–62). There were serving Brothers at least as early as 1690 (CL 3:33 entry on Brother Thomas, Charles Frappet). Some serving Brothers became teaching Brothers and vice versa. Later, an effort was made to eliminate the distinction between the “first and second order” Brothers, as they were sometimes called (CL 11:66, n. 6). The General Chapter of 1810 decided that there should be no distinction in the habit and that the serving Brothers should also make the vow of teaching the poor gratuitously. The Rule of 1923 still contained a chapter on the serving Brothers, but there is no reference to them in the Rule of 1947 or subsequent Rules (Calcutt, 351–353).

134. She was De La Salle’s maternal grandmother and godmother, Perrette Lespagnol (1615–1691), married to Jean Moët de Brouillet (1599–1670). She always had a great affection for her godson and supported him in his difficulties with the family (CL 41–I:16–17).

135. Jean-Adrien Helvetius (Helvetius is the Latin translation of Schweitzer), 1661–1727, was of a noble family from Germany that moved to Holland and then later to France. His father Jean-Frédéric was a well-known doctor, named principal doctor of the Estates-

General, and author of several books. Jean-Adrien Helvetius became famous for his treatment of dysentery with *imécacuahan*, a root from Brazil. Louis XIV made him reveal his secret remedy, and victims of dysentery flocked to him. He wrote several medical treatises.

136. The Christian Eucharist given to a person in danger of death.

137. Maillefer characteristically does not include the reference to Rome, which is what De La Salle had in mind.

138. Calcutt, 267.

139. The distance from Reims to Paris is one hundred forty-one kilometers, about eighty-five miles.

140. See note 116.

141. False reports were spread by Compagnon, the priest in charge of the parish schools of Saint Sulpice, and by Rafrond, the weaving instructor, and were fostered by the parish association of pious ladies (Blain, CL7:292–293; CL 8:380–381; Calcutt, 220–221).

142. Two hundred forty kilometers, about one hundred fifty miles.

143. Maillefer uses the word *simoniaque*, from simony, which refers to the buying or selling of a church office, ecclesiastical preferment, or benefice.

144. See Blain, CL 7:332; CL 8:246, 351, 352.

145. According to Bernard, a problem that plagued De La Salle all his life was the difficulty he had in waking up in the morning (CL 4:19–20). This sometimes caused him to fail in his duty of awakening the Brothers (Calcutt, 97–98).

146. Louis de Ligny, Count du Charmel, was a nobleman introduced into the court of Louis XIV. He made friends by lending money acquired through gambling. After reading a religious book (*Traité de la Religion Chrétienne [Treatise on the Christian Religion]* by Abbadie), he underwent a profound conversion and became a man of great piety and penance. He spent the Lenten times at the Trappist monastery of La Trappe, founded in 1140 in Soligny (Orne) and reformed into strict observance by Abbot de Rancé (1662).

Unjustly suspected of being favorable toward the Jansenistic heresy, he was exiled by the king from his winter residence in Paris to his 13th-century château in Charmel, a village about twenty-seven miles from Reims. The king later refused his request for surgery in Paris for a gall-bladder condition. The Count died in 1714 at the age of sixty-eight, three days after an unsuccessful operation by a surgeon in Charmel. De La Salle comforted him in his last days, during which time the Count spoke only words of repentance and submission to God's will (see CL 7:328–329; Calcutt, 266).



147. On August 6, 1695.

148. Louis-Antoine de Noailles was born in Paris on May 27, 1651, about one month after De La Salle's birth. Doctor in theology in 1676, he became bishop of Châlons-sur-Marne in 1681 and archbishop of Paris in 1695. He was involved in the quarrels of the time—Quietism, Gallicanism, and Jansenism—and became embroiled with the Jesuits because of his Jansenistic leanings. He presided over both the General Assembly of the clergy in 1700 and the one convoked in 1714 by Louis XIV because of the Papal Constitution *Unigenitus*. De Noailles was one of seven French bishops who refused to accept *Unigenitus* (forty bishops endorsed it); he later complied. He died on May 4, 1729, at the age of seventy-eight, having been an archbishop thirty-four years and a cardinal twenty-nine years.

Throughout his life De Noailles had good relations with De La Salle. At a time when he was weak and misled, he deposed De La Salle as Superior but later restored him to his good graces. Though benevolent to the Brothers and to De La Salle, he did not protect them against their detractors when he could have done so. De La Salle was intransigent with respect to his own loyalty to the pope and thus distanced himself from De Noailles. (CL 41–II:498–508)

149. Given on March 27, 1697.

150. This document has not been found.

151. M. Faron Leclerc.

152. During the winter of 1693–1694, the price of bread quadrupled (Calcutt, 252–254).

153. The oldest Rule that is extant (1705) seems to depend on this first draft of 1694. Before writing a Rule, De La Salle had, of course, lived in community with the Brothers, and a daily regulation and program of exercises had evolved, tested by experience over the years. But a Rule also had to include the purpose and underlying principles of the Institute. There existed four monastic Rules approved by the Church, those of Saint Basil for Oriental monks, of Saint Benedict for monks of the West, of Saint Francis of Assisi for mendicant friars, and of Saint Augustine for women, but De la Salle and the Brothers were forging a new concept of religious life (Calcutt, 254–255, 275–282, 585–587).

154. There were about thirty Brothers in the Institute at this time, 1694 (CL 8:143). Because they assembled not just to pronounce vows but to approve the Rule, this meeting is considered to be the first General Chapter of the Institute (Calcutt, 255–257, 260–262).

155. The Act of Election, dated June 7, 1694, includes the phrase, “[A]fter the present election of De La Salle as Superior, there never

shall be in the future someone chosen for Superior who is a priest or has received sacred orders, or anyone else who is not associated with us by vow" (CL 3:10, f. 18; photocopy of the Act in CL 40–I:101). In this way De La Salle assured the autonomy of the Institute. Pastors and bishops had something to say about the schools, but they could not interfere in the internal life of the Institute.

156. Here Maillefer has reversed the actual sequence of events. On June 6, 1694, De La Salle and twelve Brothers pronounced perpetual vows of obedience, association, and stability. The next day, the twelve Brothers proceeded twice to elect De La Salle as Superior. The Act of Election states, "[A]fter having been associated with M. Jean-Baptiste de La Salle . . . by the vows which we pronounced yesterday. . . ." (CL 3:10; Calcutt, 258–262).

157. Godet des Marais, a fellow student with De La Salle at Saint Sulpice and the Sorbonne from 1670 to 1672, was installed in Chartres on September 26, 1692. He was attentive to the needs of the Brothers and visited them often. He wanted them to teach Latin but did not insist when De La Salle refused. He generously helped the Brothers during the purple fever epidemic in 1705, during which four Brothers died (cf. CL 41–II:335–344; Calcutt, 345–348).

158. Actually for five years. Godet des Marais's first request, often renewed, was in 1694. He received six teaching Brothers and one in charge of temporal affairs. Classes began on October 29, 1699.

159. Claude-Marc d'Aubigné (1658–1719), cousin of Mme de Maintenon (Françoise d'Aubigné), the second wife of Louis XIV, was consecrated bishop of Noyon on July 24, 1701, and assumed his duties as archbishop of Rouen on July 10, 1708 (CL 41–II:345–346). Canon Blain, the future biographer of De La Salle, came with D'Aubigné from Noyon to Rouen. D'Aubigné was a devout, charitable man who strongly opposed Jansenism. However, as vicar at Chartres, he was not sympathetic to the Brothers and criticized De La Salle for imposing excessively strict regulations and a crude religious habit on the Brothers (CL 7:373–374). He was even less sympathetic to the Brothers when he was archbishop of Rouen (CL 8:58, 419). He forbade De La Salle to celebrate Mass in the Saint Yon chapel and revoked his power to hear confession. On April 5, 1719, while De La Salle was on his deathbed, D'Aubigné revoked his priestly powers. However, when De La Salle died on April 7, 1719, D'Aubigné declared, "He is a saint; the saint is dead" (CL 8:167–169). D'Aubigné died two weeks later, on April 22, 1719.

160. Joachim Trotti de La Chétardie became pastor of Saint Sulpice on February 13, 1696. For thirty years he had been successively a teacher at the seminary in Le Puy and rector of the seminary

in Bourges. He authored the well-known *Catéchisme de Bourges* (*Catechism of Bourges*) and was a strong supporter of charity schools (CL 41–II:101; Calcutt, 268–269).

161. Blain says that De La Salle wanted a new place that was more spacious (CL 7:360). There were probably about forty Brothers and novices at this time (Calcutt, 268–272).

162. Near the Luxembourg Garden and the church of Saint Sulpice, this house was known as the *Grand'Maison*. With the move to the *Grand'Maison*, all the Paris communities were now in the Saint Sulpice parish (Calcutt, 269–272, 338–339, 389–391).

163. She was Charlotte Trudaine, a benefactor of the poor in the parish of Saint Sulpice and a friend of Mme Maintenon, and according to Maillefer, *douaière*, or widow who inherits the fortune of her deceased husband, Daniel-François Voisin. However, he was still alive at this time and among other duties was administrator of the Saint Cyr school founded by Mme Maintenon. He became chancellor for the king in 1714, the year his wife died (CL 42–I:297, n. 1).

164. Saint Cassian's martyrdom occurred on August 13, 363, during the reign of Julian the Apostate. He is mentioned, along with Saint Joseph, as one of the patrons of the Institute in De La Salle's suggestions for topics of conversation (CL 25:32; CL 15:34). De La Salle wrote a meditation for the feast of Saint Cassian, and there is a short life of the saint in the appendix (CL 12:273–274; *Meditations by St. John Baptist de La Salle*, translated by Richard Arandez, FSC, and Augustine Loes, FSC; edited by Augustine Loes, FSC, Landover: Lasallian Publications, 1994, 406–408). Perhaps at this time the recent tragic death at the age of thirty-two on March 1, 1694, of Brother Joseph (Jean Paris) of Laon was on De La Salle's mind. Brother Joseph had been fatally injured by a penknife placed on his chair (playfully? maliciously? carelessly?) by a student (CL 8, Abrégé, 70–71).

165. A date of 1700 is probably more correct. The Brothers were no longer in the Rue Princesse in 1709, and De La Salle lived in the parish of Saint Antoine from 1703 to 1704, where Blain says the Sunday academies existed (CL 7:439; Calcutt, 343–344, 379–380).

166. Maillefer's suggestion that the school first started in the *Grand'Maison* and then moved to Rue de Saint Placide is probably not correct. Parish records show that classes were already being held there in December 1697, before the Brothers had even moved to the *Grand'Maison*.

167. A hospital for the terminally ill, Rue Saint-Placide.

168. The school's rapid success led to the second assault in 1697–1699 by the Masters of the Little Schools. (See note 125 regarding

the first attack, in 1690 on the school in the Rue du Bac.) By law they were allowed to seize the furniture of the *écoles buissonnières* (truant schools), schools operating clandestinely. They declared the school on Rue de Saint Placide to be an *école buissonnière* and laid claim to the furniture. When they began to move the furniture from the building, De La Salle told them, "Take me too!" (CL 7:362). They claimed they had nothing against him personally but only against the five Brothers who were considered to be *maîtres buissonniers* (truant masters). Classes were closed for three months, and a judicial process began. The situation was quite delicate. Legally, the pastor was the Brothers' superior in school matters, for the Brothers did not yet have status as a religious congregation. However, it was De La Salle, not the pastor, who had assigned the Brothers to the school on Rue de Saint Placide. Because no document could show that the pastor had appointed them, they were there illegally. Furthermore, the absolute gratuity of the school was in question. But De La Salle challenged the Masters of the Little Schools to substantiate their claims that the school was not gratuitous. De La Salle's position and a letter by Madame de Maintenon, wife of Louis XIV since 1683, to the president of the *Parlement*, Achille de Harlay, saved the day. Classes were reopened, and there was peace for three years (Poutet, II, 87–92; Calcutt, 340–342).

The issue here of gratuity was crucial. Without the principle of gratuity for the schools, the establishments of the Brothers would have been unnecessary, for there were many schools in operation at the time. Also, both civil and ecclesiastical law then in force could have closed them for trespassing on the rights of other systems. That is why De La Salle was clear in his Rule of 1705 that gratuity was "essential" to the Institute and that the Brothers should receive nothing from the students or their parents, not even *une épingle* (the tip given to a notary for drawing up a contract). His meditation for December 31 is equally explicit on the matter of gratuity.

169. Armand de Béthune-Charost, Lieutenant-General of Picardie, resided in Paris.

170. Gabriel Drolin was one of the two Brothers sent by De La Salle; the other was Claude Fouquet (CL 3:15).

171. Because of his Jansenistic tendencies, De Langle later became hostile to De La Salle and the Brothers. He is said to have used the expression *Frères ignorantins* for the Brothers, a term coined by Voltaire (François Marie Arouet, 1691–1778) and his friend La Chatolais (Louis-René de Caradeuc de La Chatolais, 1701–1785), who did not want to see the educational level of the common people raised.

*Ignorantins* seems to be a transformation of *Yontains*, meaning the Brothers of Saint Yon (Poutet, II, 59–60, n. 28).

172. The Count de Pontchartrain was the Secretary of State under Louis XIV. He was consulted about any schools that were established without authorization. He would allow none without letters patent (Poutet, II, 107, 118).

173. A neighborhood used by sailors and separated from the city by the port (CL 7:284).

174. The first school in Calais opened in 1700; the second, in 1705 (CL 7:380, 384; Calcutt, 348–351).

175. Blain uses this incident to explain that De La Salle reprimanded the pastor for not mentioning the solemnity of this feast, so highly regarded in the Church. Because of his Jansenistic views, the pastor failed to do this. Blain then develops considerations on attachment to Rome (CL 8:225). It is understandable, given Maillefer's sympathy for Jansenism, that he does not mention this aspect.

176. The "following year" would be 1702, but negotiations for the school in Troyes were in 1703 (CL 40–I:123–125; 159–165).

177. Denis-François Boutilier de Chavigny was bishop of Troyes from 1699 to 1716. He supported De La Salle's work and wrote laudatory letters about the Brothers of the Christian Schools (CL 41–II:344). He also wrote an attestation for the granting of the Bull of Approbation (CL 11:381). At one time he was called "Superior of the Brothers of the Christian Schools" of Troyes. This probably resulted from the initiative of Brother Barthélemy (later to be the Founder's successor and first Superior General), who during De La Salle's absence in 1712–1714 asked the bishops in dioceses where the Brothers worked to name ecclesiastical superiors for them.

178. Marie-Anne de Sifredy, wife of Jean-Pierre Madon de Chateaublanc. She met with Gérard Drolin, on his way back from Rome (see note 185), to discuss the matter. She died on September 20, 1704.

179. A territory belonging, with Avignon, to the popes from 1274 to 1791.

180. James II and Queen Mary of Modena. James II, born in London on October 14, 1633, the son of Charles I, reigned in England from 1685 to 1688. He converted to Catholicism and was dethroned by his daughter Mary and her husband William of Orange. He went into exile in France and finished his days at Saint-Germain-en-Laye, where he died on September 16, 1701.

181. Louis XIV.

182. In the *Grand'Maison*, probably in 1698 (Calcutt, 335–338).

183. A Bull of Approbation gave official recognition by the Church to a religious community and placed it under the protection of the Holy See. Here Maillefer puts the initiative with the Brothers, in keeping with his practice of underlining De La Salle's own abandonment to Providence.

184. The pontificate of Innocent XII (Antonio Pignatelli, born March 13, 1615, near Spinazzola, Italy) lasted from July 12, 1691, to September 27, 1700. Maillefer's chronology of the attempts to obtain a Bull of Approbation is questionable (CL 11:92–101).

185. The two were Gabriel Drolin (1664–1733) and probably his natural brother Gérard (1679–??). When they went to Rome in 1702, Gabriel was thirty-eight years old and Gérard was twenty-three. Gérard returned to France the following year. Maillefer's stress that the main purpose of sending the two Brothers to Rome was to obtain papal approbation needs some qualification (CL 11:91–101). While De La Salle's eventual intent was to secure papal approval, his primary objective at the outset was "to ask God for the grace always to be entirely submissive to the Church of Rome," as he states in his final testament (CL 26:287). He wanted a school in Rome, preferably one of the papal schools established by Alexander VII (Fabio Chigi, 1599–1667), to be an *école témoin* (model school) (CL 11:96). The twenty or so letters of De La Salle to Drolin that are now known encourage him in his mission as an educator and a Brother, not as a negotiator for a Bull of Approbation. Only one letter (*Letters*, #29, 105–106) attributes a more direct intention to De La Salle in this matter. In 1704 Drolin obtained a teaching position in a regional school, and later, provisionally in 1709 and permanently in 1712, he received permission to teach in a papal school. It is probable that he was the director of the school, for De La Salle implies in his letters to Drolin that the latter does have the direction of a school (*Letters*, #27, 4; #28, 4; #29, 8). In fact, De La Salle wished that all six papal schools in Rome could have been under the direction of the Brothers. In spite of De La Salle's impatience at times, it must be noted that it was not easy for a layman to obtain a position in a closely guarded, clerically dominated educational system. This may explain why Drolin possibly received the tonsure (CL 40–I:134, n. 1). This reference also mentions that he was "called" a subdeacon four years before he received the tonsure. However, there is no mention in other references to Drolin of his being a subdeacon (for example, CL 11:95–99; Poutet, II:283–289). Because of his manner of dress, he may have been mistaken by some for an ecclesiastic (Calcutt, 495). The Rome attempt is one of the few

ventures begun at De La Salle's own initiative; ordinarily, his undertakings were responses to requests made of him (Calcutt, 359–361, 380–389).

186. Maillefer uses the word *francs* here, but the meaning is most likely livres.

187. On September 27, 1700. He could not have received the Brothers graciously in Rome, as Maillefer later states in this biography. (See note 272.)

188. Gérard Drolin returned to France from Rome in 1703 and subsequently left the Institute.

189. Gabriel Drolin remained in Rome until 1728. The present Brothers' school in Rome known as *Istituto Colle La Salle* traces its origin to the school begun by Brother Gabriel Drolin.

190. Granted by Benedict XIII (Pietro Francesco Orsini, 1649–1730) on January 26, 1725, the Bull of Approbation, known by its opening words in Latin, *In apostolicae dignitatis solio* (*In the See of apostolic dignity*), recognized the Institute as a pontifical congregation with simple vows. The Institute became a religious congregation in the technical sense only in 1917, when the Code of Canon Law enlarged the juridical definition of the religious state to include congregations as well as orders. (CL 11 traces the history of the Institute's canonical status from 1679 until 1725.)

191. Calcutt, 363–364.

192. Edme Pirot was an able theologian and negotiator. De La Salle knew him at the Sorbonne in 1670 and respected the former *syndic* (officer) of the faculty of theology (1681–1683). Pirot was seventy-one years old when De Noailles sent him to visit the community (Calcutt, 364–371).

193. Not much is known of this priest. Research has failed to discover even his baptismal name. On the question of ecclesiastical superiors for the Brothers, see Calcutt, 363–370, 545–546. See also note 287 below.

194. A priest of the diocese of Saint Sulpice. Maillefer is not correct in saying that the cardinal dispatched Abbé Madot; De La Chétardie, the pastor, sent him.

195. Charles de La Grange, pastor of Villiers-le-Bel, a friend of De La Salle.

196. Pierre Guyart; see note 109. Nearly the entire letter, in an English translation, is presented in Calcutt, 366–369.

197. No further information is available about M. Pollet.

198. Quietism is the somewhat unorthodox mystical doctrine of absolute passivity and pure contemplation. Good works, moral rules,

virtue, and sin have no importance in this doctrine of perfect indifference. Miguel de Molinos, a Spanish Jesuit (1628–1696), was its foremost theoretician. Jeanne-Marie Bouvier de La Motte (1648–1717), widow of Jacques Guyon, was the principal artisan of Quietism's popularity at the time of De La Salle. Fénelon (François de Salignac de La Mothe Fénelon, 1651–1715), De La Salle's contemporary, who also studied at the Seminary of Saint Sulpice, became a disciple of Mme Guyon. He was condemned by Rome but submitted to Rome in his own cathedral of Cambrai, where he was archbishop, before the sentence was made public. Bossuet (Jacques Bénigne Bossuet, 1627–1704, bishop of Meaux) opposed Quietism and its elitist understanding of God's grace.

199. The mysterious M. X has often been identified as M. de La Chétardie, pastor of Saint Sulpice. While De La Chétardie was a source of trouble for De La Salle (Calcutt, 363–370, 428–429, 541–546), it is possible that someone else behind the scenes is the unnamed M. X, some influential person who did not agree with what De La Salle was doing and who was able to rally other well-placed persons in his opposition to De La Salle. If indeed the mysterious M. X is De La Chétardie, one wonders why the biographers went to the trouble of being so cryptic. The pseudo-discretion does nothing to diminish the reader's awareness of the animosity of De La Chétardie toward De La Salle, made clear in later sections of the biography.

200. In 1702.

201. "Silence implies consent."

202. He returned once more after three months (CL 7:428).

203. The school opened on August 20, 1703, in the Rue de Charonne, across the River Seine and four kilometers from the Rue Princesse. In addition to the charity school, De La Salle also had there a novitiate and a Sunday academy. Because of a "cooperative franchise," this district allowed the free exercise of all professions, except that of teaching without a patent (Poutet, II, 92).

204. Maillefer here uses the expression *maîtres de pension* (teachers of the hostel), signifying tradesmen with a double profession: hostelry and teaching. (In his earlier 1723 manuscript Maillefer uses *maîtres d'école de Paris* [Paris schoolmasters]). Actually, both the Writing Masters and the Masters of the Little Schools were involved in this third major offensive against De La Salle.

The Writing Masters had two complaints. First, writing and arithmetic, two disciplines exclusively reserved to them, were being taught by the Brothers to the novices at Rue de Charonne, as well as in the training center for rural schoolteachers at Saint Hippolyte in the Saint



Marceau district. Second, the Writing Masters were losing students daily because not all the students who attended De La Salle's school were certifiably poor. They officially denounced De La Salle to the police lieutenant, D'Argenson, and on February 22, 1704, a sentence of condemnation was pronounced. (For a description of the history and role of the Writing Masters, see Calcutt, 395–396.)

In the meantime, the Masters of the Little Schools objected that De La Salle had opened schools without the authorization of the *Grand Chantre*. On February 14, 1704, the *Grand Chantre*, M. Perrochel, who had succeeded Claude Joly, condemned De La Salle, forbidding him “to teach, train teachers, or conduct schools” without authorization. The *Grand Chantre* ordered the school furniture to be seized and given to the Masters of the Little Schools. De La Salle, who had not responded to the accusations thus far, at this time saw that the public good and the cause of the poor must be protected. He enlisted the services of a lawyer, M. Guillaume Quellier, and appealed on the feast of Saint Joseph, March 19, 1704. On July 11, 1704, it was decreed that the “gratuitous Christian schools” could not be “public” but were restricted to a special social category of the poor who could not pay. On August 29, 1704, the training school at Saint Hippolyte was severed from any connection with De La Salle, and the Brothers were forbidden to “live together” until they received letters patent from the king. These three sentences against De La Salle, February 22, July 11, and August 29, 1704, hung like a cloud over the Brothers and their work during the two years his appeal was still in process. The inevitable sentence of *Parlement* came down on February 5, 1706, against De La Salle, the “so-called Superior of the pretended Brothers of the Christian Schools.” The doors of the schools were closed, and after eighteen years in Paris the Brothers left the city for schools in the provinces. (Regarding the opposition by the Writing Masters and by the Masters of the Little Schools, see Calcutt, 396–407, 424–431, 583–585.)

In all of these cases, De La Salle was fighting for an important principle: a Christian school had the right to be public and not to be restricted to a special social category, namely, the poor. The principle of gratuity was being refined. Joining together the poor and the children of artisans also laid the seeds for a gradual heightening of the level of instruction, which would benefit the poor and, therefore, contribute to eroding class distinctions (Poutet, II, 92–121).

205. Guillaume-Denis Ravillair, successor of M. Lebreton.

206. Guillaume de Vougez, pastor of Saint Martin, which was also in the Saint Marceau district.

207. Nicolas Vuyart. Prior to this time, Vuyart had been a director at Rethel (1683–1699). Encouraged by the pastors of Saint Hippolyte and Saint Martin, Vuyart and his colleague Brother Gervais later disassociated themselves from De La Salle and the Brothers of the Christian Schools, in order to avoid the opposition of the schoolmasters. Vuyart had in his possession funds left by Lebreton, former pastor of Saint Hippolyte. He could not manage both the free school and the seminary for country teachers; the latter failed in 1704. This ended De La Salle's second attempt at such an institution. Vuyart continued for twenty-four years to direct the free school. He died in September 1719 (CL 7:67; Calcutt, 344–345, 409–410).

Nicolas Vuyart and Gabriel Drolin had pronounced the “Heroic Vow” with De La Salle on November 21, 1691, by which they bound themselves to remain together until the establishment of the Society or until their death, even if they had to beg alms and live on bread alone (CL 3:40; Calcutt, 244–247).

208. A fortress constructed in 1370 to protect the Porte Saint Antoine, one of the entrances into Paris. For a long time it served as a state prison. The seizure and destruction of the Bastille by the citizens of Paris on July 14, 1789, symbolically marked the beginning of the French Revolution (Calcutt, 216).

209. The request came from Louis Deshayé, pastor of the parish of Saint Odon, because the teacher, Jean Houdoul, a former assistant to Adrian Nyel, had died. The Brothers opened the school in February 1705. See note 60.

210. Jacques-Nicolas Colbert, son of the minister of Louis XIV, had been archbishop of Rouen since 1691.

211. Bernard Coët (Couët) wrote to De La Salle on April 3, 1705, to come quickly to Rouen to discuss the opening of a school. Later he informed De La Salle that the Brothers and students in the Saint Yon boarding school had to assist at Mass in the parish church of Saint Peter. This and other restrictions affecting De La Salle, the Brothers at Saint Yon, and the students can be found in a *Concordat* dated March 22, 1706, signed by M. Jacques Hecquet, pastor of Saint Sever, and by De La Salle. Bernard Couët signed the document in the name of the archbishop, Mgr. d'Aubigné (CL 11:64–65). Bernard Couët was closely linked to a Jansenistic milieu (Poutet, II, 162).

212. Nicolas-Pierre Camus de Pontcarré had been senior president of the *Parlement* of Normandy since 1703.

213. De La Salle travelled in haste to Rouen, uncharacteristically by post stagecoach, (*en poste*) (CL 8:18).

214. The *Bureau des Valides*, literally, the office for the able-bodied, was charged with sheltering the poor and orphans. This type of *Hôpital Général* did not care for the sick, the *invalides*; they were the responsibility of the *Hôtel-Dieu* (see note 60).

215. About seventy-five miles (one hundred twenty-five kilometers) northwest of Paris.

216. In the parishes of Saint Eloi, Saint Godard, Saint Maclou, and Saint Vivien.

217. De La Salle had promised to send ten Brothers annually to staff the *Bureau des Valides* and the four schools for the poor (CL 40–I:155; CL 40–II:86–90 photocopy). On August 2, 1707, the *Bureau* authorities allowed De La Salle to increase the number of Brothers working in the *Bureau's* hospice and to lodge the Brothers in another house (CL 42:300–301).

218. Seventeen acres in the Faubourg Saint Sever. The name comes from *Le Manoir de Saint-Yon* after its proprietor in 1604, Eustache de Saint Yon. The property was eventually inherited by Marguerite de Barentin, wife of Urbain de Lavall, Marquis de Bois-Dauphin. Her only child, Anne de Souvré, widow of François-Michel Le Tellier, Marquis de Louvois and Minister and Secretary of State of Louis XIV from 1683 until the Marquis's death in 1691, received the property in inheritance upon her mother's death. The Archbishop of Reims, Charles-Maurice Le Tellier, was her brother-in-law (CL 42–I:301; Calcutt, 418–419).

219. The Council of Trent, in its twenty-fifth Session, Chapter V, restored the enclosure of nuns, by use of the secular power if necessary.

220. De La Salle leased the property on July 11, 1705, for a modest 400 livres per year for six years (photocopy of lease in CL 42:303–306; see 301–308). The lease was renewed after six years, and the property was bought by the first Superior General, Brother Barthélemy (Joseph Truffet, 1678–1720) on March 8, 1718, for 15,000 livres (CL 42:311). Saint Yon housed three educational institutions: a boarding school for students from middle and upper class families, whose fees supported the novitiate, a house of correction for troubled youths, and a house of detention for delinquents (Calcutt, 418–419). See Othmar Würth, FSC, *John Baptist de La Salle and Special Education; A Study of Saint Yon*, Romeoville: Lasallian Publications, 1988.

221. Among the novices who moved with De La Salle to Saint Yon were two of the Sceillier brothers and their seventy-year-old father, from Villiers-le-Bel. Two other brothers had previously entered

the Institute before their father himself asked to be accepted. De La Salle agreed on condition that the two remaining sons also enter with their father, which they indeed wanted to do. The only daughter, who would have been left alone in the home, was placed in a convent. The youngest of the sons, Brother Dominique, was at Darnétal and moved to Saint Yon as sub-director of novices, where his father and brothers lived under him. All five persevered and left a happy memoir (CL 8, Abrégé, 77–78; CL 3:35, n. 14; 42, n. 48–49).

222. Calcutt, 422–424.

223. In the north of Paris, within the *Île-de-France*, as the Paris region was called. The request was made in 1705, but the school did not open until 1708, with two Brothers (CL 8:55). It was far enough away not to attract the attention of the Writing Masters.

224. Mademoiselle Charlotte Poignant lived in Paris (Georges Rigault. *Histoire générale de l'Institut des Frères des Écoles chrétiennes; L'oeuvre religieuse et pédagogique de Saint Jean-Baptiste de La Salle* [General History of the Institute of the Brothers of the Christian Schools; The religious and pedagogical work of Saint John Baptist de La Salle]. Tome I. Paris: Librairie Plon, 1937, 249). No further information is available.

225. No further information is available.

226. From the sister of the benefactress, Mademoiselle Poignant (note 224).

227. In the Rue Saint-Honoré.

228. The pastor, M. Louis Cognet, expected the Brothers to be involved in certain non-school activities, such as assisting the priests and the sacristan (Poutet, II, 145, n. 14; Calcutt, 406–407, 480–481).

229. CL 21. The title can be translated as *The Duties of a Christian toward God and the Means of Being Able to Accomplish Them* (Calcutt, 441–448).

230. CL 22. The title can be translated as *The External, Public Worship That Christians Are Obligated to Render unto God and the Means of Doing So*.

231. CL 17. The title can be translated as *Instructions and Prayers for Holy Mass, Confession, and Communion, with a Methodical Instruction by Question and Answer on How to Go to Confession Well*.

232. CL 19. For an English translation, see *The Rules of Christian Decorum and Civility*. Translated by Richard Arnandez, FSC. Edited by Gregory Wright, FSC. Romeoville: Lasallian Publications, 1990. See also Calcutt, 433–439.

233. Possibly Maillefer here is referring to *Règles communes* (Common Rule) (CL 25) and to *Recueil des Différents petits Traités*

(*Collection of Short Treatises*) (CL 15). He does not mention *Méditations* (CL 12–13), *Explication de la méthode d'oraison* (*Explanation of the Method of Mental Prayer*) (CL 14), or *Conduite des Écoles* (*Conduct of Schools*) (CL 24). See Calcutt, 273–298.

234. De La Salle did not want to make the financial condition of the parents the sole condition for the admission of students. He was also concerned about parents who, because they had to work all day to earn a living, did not have the time to bring their children up properly. “This Institute is of the greatest necessity because the artisans and the poor are generally little instructed and are occupied all day to earn a living for themselves and their children and thus cannot give them the instruction that they need, nor can they provide them a good, Christian education” (Rule of 1705, f. 3 in CL 25:16–17). See note 204.

235. On July 15, 1706, De La Salle deposited with the notary, M. Lemerchié, the originals of the leases of the Rue Princesse, thereby indicating that he probably did not see much hope of returning there (CL 42–I:333–335).

236. To avoid further problems, the pastor compromised with the opponents. He assumed full responsibility for the school and the placement of the Brothers there, thus complying with the law. He also agreed to keep a record of the poor parishioners to assure that only they would have access to the school. De La Salle agreed to send ten teaching Brothers, one Brother Director, and one serving Brother. School opened on October 2, 1706, with ten classes. There had been thirteen classes functioning when the school closed some months earlier.

237. *Provence* is the name of a former province of France on the Mediterranean coast between the Alps and the Rhône River. A center of the civilization of southern France, Provence has kept the traditions of its distinctive language and literature. It was the first Roman *provincia* beyond the Alps. In 1481 Provence was willed to the King of France on condition that it keep its administrative autonomy. In 1673 the *généralité* of Aix was established as the seat of an *intendant* (royal governor). See Calcutt, 383–385.

238. The distance between Rouen and Avignon, for example, is 475 miles (790 kilometers).

239. Protestantism.

240. See note 178.

241. 1707 is incorrect. On February 11, 1705, De La Salle writes to Drolin and tells him that the schools in Avignon are doing well

(*Letters*, #16, 3). It is probable that the opening of the first school was in 1703 in the parish of Saint Symphorien (CL 7:396; Calcutt, 381–383).

242. The introduction was actually to the archbishop of Avignon, Lorenzo Rieschi, who as the papal nuncio was temporarily living in Paris at the time. François-Maurice Gontery became the nuncio later, on May 6, 1706. By obtaining a blessing from the papal representative when he established the school in the papal territory of Avignon, De La Salle made a significant gesture of union with Rome.

243. In 1703.

244. The name of this association of distinguished persons is not known. The association was especially interested in education and in helping the poor (Poutet, II, 306–309).

245. He was consecrated bishop of Grenoble on May 6, 1708, and took possession of the see on March 7, 1709. Between those dates, two Brothers arrived in Grenoble and began teaching there. Thanks to the bishop's help, a second school was opened in 1715 in the parish of Saint Hugues (Poutet, II, 183–184).

246. In October 1708.

247. François-Placide de Baudry de Piencourt had been bishop of Mende since 1678. In 1706 he donated his fortune to establish two free schools, one for boys and one for girls. Negotiations between the bishop and De La Salle were conducted by the Sulpician Joseph Gabriel de La Sayette and later also by Blaise Boulet, a priest and native of Mende serving the poor at the *Salpêtrière* hospital. Mme de La Fage of Mende had spoken to Boulet about her interest in the proposed school. De La Salle was hesitant to open a school in a small town of 4,000 inhabitants in the isolated region of the Gévaudan, the homeland of the Camisards. The Camisards were Cévennes Calvinist insurgents who revolted against Louis XIV for his revocation in 1685 of the Edict of Nantes of 1598, which had given legal recognition to the Protestants. The name *Camisards* is derived either from the kind of white shirt (*camisa*) they wore over their clothes in order to recognize one another during night raids, or from the *camisades*, the night attacks themselves. It was a popular uprising mainly of peasants and artisans, not aimed at social transformation or political systems but more of a “holy war.” There were many atrocities until a military intervention finally put an end to the rebellion in 1704; the intransigents did not disappear until 1713 (Calcutt, 385).

De La Salle preferred his schools to be in urban areas that could support at least four Brothers in order to have a viable community life. Although at the time there were eight communities with only two Brothers each, they were all, except the one at Les Vans, near larger

communities or had the potential of having four Brothers (Poutet, II, 186, n. 13). De La Salle conceded, however, to send one Brother to start the project. The school opened on March 28, 1707.

248. François-Maurice Chevalier de Saulx.

249. The bishop's objective was the conversion of the Protestants. On June 2, 1707, he wrote to De La Salle about the need for the education of the young people in Alès and the necessity of "destroying heresy" and "establishing the Catholic religion." He also assured De La Salle that the school would be completely gratuitous and that the students needed to become "good writers" (CL 8:52). The social class in question was not the poor but the artisans and *petits bourgeois* (lower middle class) that formed the bulk of the Protestant citizenry. Two Brothers began classes in September 1707. Rich and poor alike attended the school.

This was the Brothers' first school in Protestant territory. Whatever the motives of the bishop and his aggressive vicar-general Guillaume de Mérez, who had been with John Baptist in the seminary of Saint Sulpice (CL 41 II:351–353), De La Salle did not envisage a missionary school in the strict sense of the term of bringing people from one religion to another. For him, "conversion" concerned primarily those who were already Catholic, including the Brothers themselves (Poutet, II, 202–203; for Alès: 199–212; Calcutt, 473–477).

250. The diocese of Alès was canonically established by the Bull, *Animarum zelus* (Zeal for souls), on May 17, 1694.

251. It is now known that De La Salle was in Paris from January to July 1708, because of letters he wrote (CL 40–I:156–160). The trip to Provence was, therefore, probably in 1711, as Blain asserts. There was another, longer trip in 1712 (CL 8:79–107).

252. In his earlier 1723 manuscript, Maillefer speaks here of foundations in Moulins, Dijon, Grenoble, and Boulogne (CL 6:184).

253. Claude Huchon, Vincentian, pastor of Notre-Dame in Versailles. He bought a house for the Brothers. When De La Salle wanted to move the senior Brother of the community to another place because he neglected keeping the Rule and had become worldly, M. Huchon stood up to De La Salle and told him that if he removed this Brother, he could take the other one also. De La Salle gave way, not wanting to close the school. The Brother finally did leave the Institute, and M. Huchon realized his mistake and made amends (CL 8:66–68; Calcutt, 501–502).

254. Ordinarily one *écu* was worth three *livres*, but this was apparently a time of inflation. At certain times the *écu* was worth six *livres*.

255. See note 165.

256. Les Vans was the last foundation in De La Salle's lifetime. The school, which opened in 1711 and was made possible in large part by a capital bequest of 7,000 livres from Abbé Vincent de Saint-Jean d'Elze du Roure. This Catholic school in a Protestant milieu drew hostile opposition from the local population, but thanks to the patience of the Brothers, the school continued (Poutet, II, 64; Calcutt, 510–511, 520–522).

A tradition developed that while De La Salle was the guest of a notable in Les Vans, a certain M. Jauffret, a retired officer with mediocre talent as a painter, surreptitiously sketched his portrait. De La Salle is pictured in secular apparel, which it was assumed he had worn as a disguise while travelling through the dangerous Camisard territory. The artist then finished the painting later. This portrait was discovered in 1888 in the church of Gravières, near Les Vans, and is still there today. Expert examination in June 1951, however, revealed an underlying picture of De La Salle in ecclesiastical dress. Another artist, around 1810, may have painted another subject (in secular clothes) over the original portrait of De La Salle. (cf. CL 49:133–146.)

257. In the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, the *intendant* was a deputy who, in the name of the king, served as inspector of the various general services in a province. The persistent and ruthless royal official in this case was Lamoignon de Basville, *intendant* of Languedoc (Poutet, II, 65).

258. Gaspar de Savignac was named pastor in 1675. Louis Aubery became his curate in 1681 at the age of thirty-one and dedicated his life there to the education of the poor. He taught one class, tried to enlist other clerics in teaching a second class, and lived in poverty, having given away all his money and furniture for the sake of schools for the poor (Poutet, II, 212–221; Rigault, I, 296–310).

259. Claude Rigolet (Rigoley), secretary and auditor general for the Province of Burgundy. He became senior president of the *Chambre des Comptes* (Auditing Bureau) in 1712. Since 1662, from father to son, the Rigolets were secretaries and auditors for the Province of Burgundy and the official correspondents for the governors (Poutet, II, 51–52).

Claude Rigolet probably learned of the Brothers from his brother-in-law and friend of De La Salle, M. Languet de Gergy, vicar of M. de La Chétardie at Saint Sulpice since 1704 and successor in 1714 of M. de La Chétardie as pastor of Saint Sulpice. Through Rigolet's initiatives, and with his family's support, the Brothers opened a school in Dijon in 1705. Rigolet had to accommodate the two Brothers who arrived in June 1705 in his own home until the Brothers' residence was



ready. De La Salle wrote to Claude Rigolet on July 10, 1705, apologizing for the inconvenience caused by the Brothers' living arrangements and the necessity of storing furniture and textbooks in his home. He also reminded Rigolet that the Brothers' Rule required their classes to be in adjoining rooms (*Letters*, #35, 130–131). Claude Rigolet died in 1716 and was buried in the church of Saint Sulpice.

Blain states that the Christian schools in Dijon owe their beginnings to M. Rigolet, senior president of the *Chambre des Comptes*. He does not refer to him, as does Maillefer, as “son” of the senior president (CL 8:45; Calcutt, 416–418, 464–465).

260. Jacques Abot de La Cocherie, a deputy of the intendant of Amiens, the jurisdiction in which Boulogne fell. He was a devout man of the nobility, living a monastic life in the world and dedicated to the Church and the poor (Calcutt, 505).

261. Bishop Pierre de Langle was a Jansenist and later became hostile to the Brothers (CL 11:233). He replaced the Brothers of the Christian Schools with the Jansenist Brothers of Tabourin, who failed in their attempt at running the school. In spite of De La Salle's directives to the Brothers not to involve themselves in the doctrinal controversies of the time, one of them, Brother Romuald, did become implicated and eventually accused De La Salle of not wholeheartedly accepting the Constitution *Unigenitus*. This Brother left the Institute some time later (Calcutt, 593–594).

262. Sentence was pronounced against him on May 31, 1712. This disastrous *affaire Clément* was a severe blow to De La Salle, both financially and to his reputation. In good faith and after considerable thought, De La Salle had cooperated with the zealous young Abbé Jean-Charles Clément (who was not ordained) to open a training school in Saint-Denis for country teachers. De La Salle advanced 5,200 livres to Clément for the purchase of a house from Mlle Poignant (see note 224). Clément being a minor of twenty-three years, a certain M. Louis Rogier stood in trust. Because of the repairs needed for the house, the recruitment of candidates, and the severe winter, the training school did not open until sometime between 1709 and 1712. It was forced to close shortly thereafter. Clément received a rich benefice and, instead of reimbursing the sum advanced by De La Salle, was encouraged by his father Julien Clément, surgeon to Louis XIV, to begin a lawsuit against De La Salle for suborning a minor. Money does not seem to have been the main consideration for the well-to-do Cléments. The father's vanity could not accept the idea of his son's involvement with country schoolteachers. In spite of efforts by De La Salle to handle the whole matter through a mutual understanding, the Cléments

were bent on legal prosecution. The sentence against De La Salle annulled the agreement of Clément to reimburse the sum De La Salle had advanced and also required De La Salle to reimburse Clément for the 2,300 livres the latter had invested in the house. The intermediary, M. Rogier, turned against De La Salle and took possession of the house for which he had stood in trust. Thus, another courageous effort of De La Salle to train teachers for country parishes failed. At his death, Louis Rogier in his will reimbursed, "for reasons of conscience," a sum equivalent to the amount originally advanced by De La Salle (Poutet, 1992, 94; Calcutt, 485–489, 515–518). See note 304.

263. See note 247.

264. See note 256.

265. Charles Vintimille de Luc. The Saint Laurent school was confided to the Brothers, who began teaching there in January 1706 (*Letters*, #21, 15) and took charge of the school in March of that year (Calcutt, 458–460).

266. The person behind this opposition was probably the pastor of Notre-Dame-des-Accoules, Joseph Arnaud, a staunch Jansenist. There is a possibility that De La Salle had been offered the bishop's hat by Cardinal de Noailles a few years before, but De La Salle refused because of De Noailles's opposition to the Constitution *Unigenitus*. (This possibility is mentioned in Lucard's *Vie du Vénérable J.-B. de La Salle*, Paris: Librairie Prussielgue Frères, 1876, Tome II, 75–76, where he records testimony in 1742 to this effect by Brother Bernard, who had been director in Avignon in 1712.) De La Salle's position of complete loyalty to Rome did not endear him to Arnaud (Calcutt, 530–535). See note 148.

267. Blain ascribes to the Jansenists most of the problems De La Salle encountered at Marseille (CL 8:87–93). Naturally, Maillefer is more reserved on the subject.

268. Thirty miles northeast of Marseille, near the grotto of La Sainte Baume (The Holy Balm). According to tradition, Mary Magdalene spent thirty-three years in prayer and seclusion at La Sainte Baume. De La Salle remained forty days at Saint Maximin before leaving for Mende (Calcutt, 535–537).

269. Brother Timothée (Guillaume-Samson Bazin), the future Superior General (Salm, *The Work Is Yours*, 166; Calcutt, 361).

270. In a letter of May 12, 1710, to Drolin, De La Salle says that he had not yet considered going to Rome (*Letters*, #28, 16). The only other letter so far discovered that is dated before De La Salle's attempt to go to Rome in 1712 is from July 1711 (*Letters*, #30, 108) and makes no mention of his desire to go to Rome (Calcutt, 524–525, 537).

271. See note 183.

272. Maillefer's chronology here is faulty. Cardinal d'Estrées left Rome on January 2, 1690, and returned on March 24, 1700. If "under the protection" means that the cardinal was in Rome, the date of 1694 is incorrect. It is probable that the Brothers did not go to Rome until 1702 (CL 11:94). See note 185.

273. On September 27, 1700.

274. The pontificate of Clement XI (Giovanni Francesco Albani, born in Urbino, Italy, on July 23, 1649) lasted from November 23, 1700, to March 19, 1721.

275. Henri-François-Xavier de Belsunce, bishop of Marseille since 1709. Known as the "hero of the plague" because of his courageous presence among the people during the terrible plague in Marseille of 1720–22, he sold all he had to help the poor. He was an indomitable enemy of the Jansenists and the "despair of heretics." A close friend of De La Salle, he died on June 4, 1755, after serving as bishop for half a century (CL 41–II:521–524).

276. During De La Salle's stay at Grenoble, the Constitution *Unigenitus* condemning Jansenism, issued in Rome on September 8, 1713, was published in France in February 1714 (CL 8:106). De La Salle openly declared himself in favor of the Constitution, both before his Brothers and before the public of Grenoble (CL 8:106–107; Calcutt, 555–556). Maillefer is silent about this. See note 7.

277. Born in Cologne sometime before 1030, Bruno completed his education in Reims, where he was appointed master of schools in 1056 and chancellor of the archdiocese in 1075. He refused to be named archbishop of Reims and instead decided to follow the penitential life of a hermit. In 1084 he and six companions founded the hermitage of the *Grande Chartreuse* in the French Alps, about thirty miles from Grenoble. In 1090 Pope Urban II, his former student, summoned him to Rome. Shortly thereafter, Bruno founded a second hermitage, Santa Maria de la Torre, in Calabria, Italy, where he died on October 6, 1101. Bruno is known as the Founder of the Carthusians, a name derived from cartusia, the Latin word for the French *chartreuse*. Leo X (Giovanni de'Medici, 1475–1521) canonized Bruno in 1514.

278. Antoine de Mongeffond, prior from 1703 to 1731, succeeded Dom Le Masson, prior and architect who rebuilt the *Grande Chartreuse* after the fire of 1676 (Rigault, I, 380).

279. Brother Jean Jacquot (1672–1759), who was born in Château-Porcien and died at Saint Yon, was one of the twelve Brothers who pronounced perpetual vows with De La Salle in 1694 (CL

3:3). In 1717, he was elected one of the first two Assistants to the Superior General. See note 300.

280. *The Duties of a Christian toward God* (Calcutt, 441–448).

281. Royal Letters granting permission to publish *Les Devoirs I* were issued on December 19, 1711, for five years. Because of his revisions, De La Salle needed a new examination of the work for approbation. The censor gave an unfavorable opinion and rejected the work as being incorrect, even erroneous, in places (CL 20:VI). Possibly De La Salle's position on *Unigenitus* was reflected in the revision, and the examiner did not approve (*ibid.*, VII). There is no known manuscript of this rejected draft.

282. CL 57. For the history and significance of Parménie, see Leo Burkhard, FSC, and Luke Salm, FSC, *Encounters; De La Salle at Parménie*, Romeoville: Christian Brothers National Office, 1983; Calcutt, 550–555; Salm, *The Work Is Yours*, 142, 170, 172.

283. About sixteen kilometers northeast of Grenoble at 700 meters altitude, overlooking the picturesque valley of the Isère and the Bièvre plain.

284. A humble peasant woman, Louise Hours was born in 1646 in Thouret, northeast of Grenoble. Her family moved to Beaucroissant, a village close to Parménie. She was sixty-eight years old when De La Salle met her at Parménie.

285. See note 299.

286. In Paris, M. de Brou; in Rouen, Canon Blain; in Reims, Canon Fremyn; in Troyes, Bishop de Chavigny; in Mende, M. Martineau (Poutet, II, 147–150, 171; CL 11:76, n. 4).

287. Blain is not so enthusiastic about this course of events and states simply that De La Salle was happy that this new system of government was provisional and had no further consequences (CL 8:117). See note 193.

288. The meeting of the Brothers in Paris took place in 1714. See note 290.

289. De La Salle's return to Paris between July 17 and October 5, 1714, is certain. Most probably the date was August 10; see note 291 (CL 11:76, n. 1; 78). The attempt by outsiders, M. de La Chétardie and M. de Brou, to alter the Rule the Brothers had agreed upon with De La Salle and the danger of being organized into parochial branches without one central Superior precipitated the Brothers' action in writing to De La Salle. M. de La Chétardie's death, which occurred on June 29, 1714, favored De La Salle's return to Paris.

290. The letter was actually dated April 1, 1714 (Calcutt, 552–553).

291. Probably on August 10, 1714. Four months had passed since the letter was sent. The command by the principal Brothers in the name of the Society may have convinced De La Salle that the sense of autonomy he had always hoped the Brothers would develop regarding their Institute was now a reality; the Brothers were in control of the destiny of their own community. Hence, De La Salle may have felt little urgency to return to Paris quickly (Calcutt, 555–558).

292. CL 8:125; Calcutt, 560–561.

293. Eugène de Savoie-Carignan (1663–1736), born in Paris, was a famous general of the imperial army. He fought the Turks, won the battles of Audenardt and Malplaquet, but was defeated at Denain in 1712 by the French General Villars (Claudio Luis Héctor, Duke de Villars, 1653–1734).

294. This sacrament is known today as the rite of anointing the sick, a sacrament of spiritual and physical healing.

295. See note 136.

296. October 1715 (Calcutt, 562–563).

297. He visited the twenty-two communities of the Institute over a period of five months. The register he kept, signed by the Brothers in each community, begins at Chartres on December 9, 1716, and ends at Saint Yon on May 7, 1717. At the time there were 102 Brothers in the Institute, counting De La Salle and Drolin; in addition there were several novices (Rigault, I, 406–409; Calcutt, 569–571).

298. May 16, 1717. Sixteen directors of communities were capitulants. Communities with only two Brothers (Moulins, Mende, Les Vans, Marseille, Dijon, and Troyes) were not represented, because of the hardship an absence of about three weeks would cause. They were represented by the region's other communities. The oldest capitulant was Brother Dosíteo (Claude Longières, 1671–1737; CL 3:51), who was forty-six. Brother Jean Jacquot (1672–1759; CL 3:3) was the only one remaining of the twelve who had made their perpetual profession with De La Salle at the 1694 Chapter. The others had either died or left the Institute, with the exception of Gabriel Drolin, who was still in Rome (Calcutt, 571–575).

299. Brother Barthélemy is considered the first Superior General of the Institute; De La Salle, the Founder of the Institute. Thus, in accord with De La Salle's wishes, the Institute has always had a Brother as Superior General, in the strict sense of the term. Brother Henri l'Heureux had been elected Superior in 1686, but this lasted only fifteen days, whereupon Archbishop Le Tellier reinstated De La Salle.

Brother Barthélemy (Joseph Truffet) was born in a poor family on February 11, 1678, in Saint, diocese of Cambrai. His father was a

schoolmaster. He studied for the secular priesthood under the Jesuits, but felt called to leave the world and enter religious life. His parents protested, claiming their need of him in their old age. However, he went to the Cistercian monastery of La Trappe, still under the direction of abbot De Rancé. His delicate constitution could not take the rigors of monastic life, and after trying several other priories he went back to civil life. Then he heard of a new group of men dedicated to educating poor youth, and at the age of twenty-five decided to join them. He was received by De La Salle at the *Grand'Maison* in Paris and after overcoming several temptations to abandon the community, received the habit and the name Barthélemy.

Because Barthélemy was too intense, De La Salle sent him to teach in Chartres in 1703 before he completed his year of novitiate. He was not a gifted teacher but worked hard to succeed. He became ill, and De La Salle recalled him to Paris in 1705 and put him in charge of the novices. Barthélemy was intellectually gifted and mature, but the temptation to abandon the Brothers' life continued to assail him. To counter this, he made perpetual vows of obedience and stability in the Institute on June 7, 1705. He was nearly sent away five years later because he had contracted scrofula, and the Brothers were afraid of contagion. De La Salle was on the verge of asking him to leave but after a night in prayer decided to let him remain in the community.

Upon his father's death, Brother Barthélemy's mother begged him to come to her support in her old age. However, he was committed to his vocation. In time he regained his health, and De La Salle chose him to take his place when, aware of his own dangerous situation in Paris, he fled the city. Brother Barthélemy died at Saint Yon on June 8, 1720 (CL 3:31; Calcutt, 375–376). For the life of Brother Barthélemy, see CL 8: Appendix, 3–68.

300. Brother Jean (Jean Jacquot, 1672–1759), who had joined the first community in Reims in 1686 and was Director of the Paris community, and Brother Joseph (Jean Leroux, 1678–1729), who had entered in 1697 and was Director of the Reims community as well as Visitor, were elected Assistants to the Superior General on May 23, 1717, the day after the election of Brother Barthélemy (Rigault, I, 411; CL 3:3, 12).

301. May 23, 1717. De La Salle and Brother Barthélemy renewed their vows; then the other fifteen capitulants followed.

302. The Rule then consisted of the 1705 Rule and three new chapters added by De La Salle concerning the serving Brothers, regular observance, and modesty. The topic of recreation provoked a

pointed discussion, some wanting more flexibility than the Rule allowed, but ultimately the original text remained unchanged. A significant addition at the beginning of Chapter 2, "*Of the Spirit of This Institute*," emphasizes the utmost importance of having the "spirit" of the Institute, without which the keeping of regulations would be meaningless. Another important addition occurs in the prologue to Chapter 16, "*On Regularity*," where emphasis is placed on the primacy of love of God and neighbor (Calcutt, 585–587). The *Pratique de Réglement journalier* (*Practice of Daily Regulations*) (March 9, 1713) was also reviewed, as was the *The Conduct of Schools*, particularly the question of corporal punishment.

303. On June 8, 1720.

304. M. Louis Rogier, who in the Clément case took for his own use the 5,200 livres De La Salle had given him to purchase a house, later bequeathed to De La Salle the annual interest on the sum of 5,200 livres that Rogier had invested. As things turned out, the person with whom Rogier had deposited the money released the entire capital to De La Salle, who then used it to help pay for the purchase of the Saint Yon property. See note 262.

305. There is a receipt dated March 5, 1718, given to Brother Barthélemy for a portion of the room and board payment for De La Salle, who was staying at Saint Nicolas du Chardonnet (CL 40–I:201; Calcutt, 579).

306. The unsigned letter, dated March 1, 1721 (CL 8:155; CL 40–I:224, n. 2), was received by Brother Timothée, the second Superior General, rather than, as Blain claims, by Brother Barthélemy, who had died on June 8, 1720. (CL 40–I:224 implies that the letter was written to Brother Bernard.) Maillefer quotes the letter almost in full, but omits the references to a life of De La Salle (which had been entrusted to Brother Bernard) and to De La Salle's loyalty to Rome.

307. Calcutt, 576–577; see note 218.

308. Probably Brother Thomas (Charles Frappet), treasurer at Saint Yon, and Brother Barthélemy (Joseph Truffet), Superior General (CL 40–I:192, n.1; Calcutt, 576–577).

309. Louis du Jarrier-Bresnard, who died November 12, 1740, at the age of fifty-three.

310. See note 136.

311. See note 294.

312. Maillefer uses the expression *chers enfants* to refer to the Brothers gathered around their Founder's deathbed.

313. Maillefer converts De La Salle's will, dictated on April 3, 1719, four days before his death, into an oral exhortation. A copy of

the will, certified by Brother Barthélemy, is in the Institute Archives (BJ 504,15). The original is lost, but the reconstituted text can be found in CL 26:286–289. Significantly, Maillefer deletes from the middle of the text the following words: “. . . and I advise them above all things to have an entire submission to the Church, especially in these troubled times, and to show it by never dissociating themselves from her in any way, always mindful of the fact that I sent two Brothers to Rome to ask of God the grace that their Society should always be submissive to her” (Caltcutt, 594–599).

314.

Maria, mater gratiæ,  
Dulcis parens clementiæ,  
Tu nos ab hoste protege  
Et mortis hora suscipe.

Mary, Mother of grace,  
Sweet Mother of mercy,  
defend us from the enemy  
and receive us at the hour  
of our death.

Jesu, tibi sit gloria,  
Qui natus es de Virgine,  
Cum Patre et almo Spiritu

Glory to You, Jesus,  
born of the Virgin,  
and to the Father, and  
to the Holy Spirit,

In sempiterna sæcula. Amen.

forever and ever. Amen.

315. Caltcutt, 96–99.

316. One of the best-known classics of devotional literature in the spirit of late-medieval piety, generally claimed to be the work of Thomas à Kempis, a German mystical writer (1379–1471).

317. “Here awaiting the resurrection of life lies the venerable John Baptist de La Salle of Reims, Priest, Doctor of Theology, Canon of the Metropolitan Cathedral of Reims, Founder of the Brothers of the Christian School[s]. He died at the hour of Sext on Good Friday, at the age of sixty-eight, on April 7, 1719, in the residence of the Brothers of Saint Yon in this parish. May the Lord grant him rest on this day (1719).”

318. “His life, if it be under trial, shall be crowned” (Douay version). This text is not in the Greek codices.

319. June 8, 1720.

320. See note 300.

321. Brother Timothée (Guillaume-Samson Bazin) was born in Paris on January 29, 1682, and entered the Institute on January 24, 1700. He died at Saint Yon on January 7, 1752. (CL 3:23)

322. M. Louis de La Vergne de Tressant (Blain, CL 8:188).

323. The Duke d’Orléans was Philippe III, the son of Philippe II (the brother of Louis XIV). The Duke d’Orléans governed during the legal infancy of Louis XV. His reign was characterized by a reaction to



Louis XIV's policies. During Philippe III's period as regent, the finances of the state were jeopardized and public morality was low, due in some measure to the regent's own bad example of a corrupt life.

324. *Private Council*. The restrictions were incompatible with the rights and privileges of a regular congregation recognized as such by Rome and the kingdom of France. They imposed on the Saint Yon community such duties of a parishioner as tithing, contributing to the expenses for the church's repair, providing blessed bread to the parish, and bringing the deceased Brothers to the church of Saint Sever and the parish cemetery (Georges Rigault, *Histoire générale de l'Institut des Frères des Écoles chrétiennes; Les disciples de Saint Jean-Baptiste de La Salle dans la société du XVIIIe siècle, 1719–1789* [*General History of the Institute of the Brothers of the Christian Schools; The disciples of Saint John Baptist de La Salle in 18th century society*], Tome II, Paris: Librairie Plon, 1938, 103).

325. A serving Brother whose name is not known for certain. According to Blain (CL 8:190), he died piously at the age of sixty in August 1721. The community registers show only one sexagenarian deceased in August 1721, namely, Brother Honoré (Nicolas du Moutier), who was born in 1661 in Liesse, Diocese of Laon (CL 3:46). That the Brother in question was Nicolas du Moutier has not been proven conclusively (CL 11:110, n. 1).

326. There are abundant references to Cardinal de Rohan in CL 11.

327. See Brother Maurice-Auguste's study of the origins of the Institute from 1679 to the Bull of Approbation (1725) in CL 11. See also CL 5:405.

328. In fact, Abbé de Tencin was more responsible for the delays by the Roman Curia than for resuming negotiations, which made progress only after De Tencin was replaced by Cardinal de Polignac (CL 11:251–252).

329. Benedict XIII (Pietro Francesco Orsini, born in Gravina, Italy, on February 2, 1649) was a Dominican. His pontificate lasted from May 29, 1724 to February 21, 1730. He issued the Bull of Approbation, *In apostolicae dignitatis solio*, on January 26, 1725. (CL 11:290–300).

330. King's Council.

331. According to legislation during the *ancien régime* (old regime, the political and social system of France before the Revolution of 1789), a Roman document was not received and thus not binding on consciences without the concurrence of civil authority and unless the magistrates found nothing at variance with the decrees and

concordats passed between the Holy See and the Kingdom of France, with the rights of the King, and with the franchises and liberties of the Gallican Church. Louis XV signed the certificate of authentication on April 26, 1725, exactly five months after the Bull of Approbation was issued in Rome (Rigault, II, 100).

332. The three vows are those of poverty, chastity, and obedience. Although the practice of poverty, chastity, and obedience was included in the Brothers' Rule, up to this point the Brothers had not actually pronounced these three traditional vows.

333. "God will visit you, and you shall carry up my bones from here."

# John Baptist de La Salle

by  
Brother Bernard



# Introduction to Brother Bernard's Manuscript

Note: This Introduction is an adaptation of the introductory essay in *Cabiers lasalliens 4* based on material prepared by Clement Marcel, FSC; Armand Xavier, FSC; Maurice Auguste, FSC; and Oliver Noel, FSC.<sup>1</sup>

Shortly after John Baptist de La Salle's death, a certain Brother Bernard was commissioned by his superiors to write in an orderly fashion the *Life* of M. de La Salle.<sup>2</sup> To assist him in this task, the superiors handed over to him a large number of testimonials and, especially, a fairly lengthy manuscript written by M. de La Salle in his own hand.<sup>3</sup> Thinking that these documents were insufficient, Bernard sought to supplement their information by applying for help to Jean-Louis de La Salle,<sup>4</sup> De La Salle's brother, to M. Jean François,<sup>5</sup> to the community of the Sisters of the Child Jesus of Providence,<sup>6</sup> and to the superior of the seminary of Saint Sulpice.<sup>7</sup> When Bernard's work was partly finished, he sent it to Jean-Louis for corrections. Because Jean-Louis took a long time to return the manuscript, Bernard grew impatient and resolved to begin this work all over again.<sup>8</sup> However, this second attempt has not come down to us.

## The 1721 manuscript

Of Bernard's entire biographical work there remains only a short manuscript of eighty-six pages which covers the years from 1651 to 1688 in the life of John Baptist de La Salle.<sup>9</sup> In his Preface Bernard states that his work will comprise four parts. The first part consists of six chapters, while the second part (which remained incomplete) has nine chapters. Nothing has been found of the last two parts. After the Preface Bernard has "A Word to the Reader" and a "Disclaimer"

declaring his submission to the Holy See. The year MDCCXXI (1721) appears at the bottom of the title page.

As it exists today, this manuscript is not a final text but a corrected draft which the author would have had to rework carefully. The manuscript is not Bernard's original text, but a copy. The fairly elegant penmanship, identical with that found in various documents signed by a certain Brother Romain,<sup>10</sup> suggests strongly that he is the copyist. After the first fifty pages of elegant cursive script, the copyist, possibly because of haste or fatigue, progressively writes in a more hurried and careless manner. Corrections and revisions, particularly abundant in the first part of the manuscript, become fewer and fewer, with virtually none in the latter part of the text.<sup>11</sup>

### Corrections in the manuscript

Most of the corrections in the manuscript were made by Jean-Louis de La Salle. This is not surprising, because the work was sent to him for this express purpose. "I drew up a draft of the first part and of a few chapters of the second," writes Brother Bernard in his remarks to the reader. "This was sent to M. [Jean-Louis] de La Salle, so that he might see whether it contained anything to which the family might take exception."<sup>12</sup> It was entirely proper that this biography should have been submitted to the examination of John Baptist's own brother. The corrections made in a firm, heavy, and angular handwriting are identical in style with the script in a letter of Jean-Louis to John Baptist.<sup>13</sup> However, the manuscript shows that although Jean-Louis was the principal corrector, there were others also.

Classification of all the corrections found in the margin of the manuscript is difficult; they cannot be grouped into any common system. Jean-Louis's corrections consist of words or phrases deleted or additions giving more details. In many cases, marks or comments do not lead to any modification of the text. It is possible that Jean-Louis intended to return to these sections and to rework them later. Perhaps he wished eventually to modify a passage he found offensive because of its graphic realism or to verify certain allegations concerning M. de La Salle or others named in the manuscript. He may have wanted to soften or delete certain details of too personal a nature or remarks capable of embarrassing John Baptist or members of his family.<sup>14</sup> He may also have intended to eliminate superfluous and wearisome repetitions.

Of greater significance are the corrections which appear to be spontaneous and decisive and which have less to do with John

Baptist than with Jean-Louis himself. For example, where Bernard in his "Disclaimer" acknowledged the authority of the Holy See "to decide infallibly on a person's sanctity," Jean-Louis deleted the adverb "infallibly."

Another example is the substantial reduction by Jean-Louis of a paragraph in which Bernard described Jean-Louis's work in the schools and his interruption of his studies in order to exercise his zeal by going with M. Nyel to work in the school in Guise.<sup>15</sup> Elsewhere, paragraphs showing Jean-Louis's docility in following the regulations adopted for the teachers, his affection for his older brother, and his resolve not to leave him despite the urging of the family have been modified or deleted completely.<sup>16</sup> It is possible that Jean-Louis wished to eliminate details that gave him praise he felt he did not deserve and revealed the family's opposition toward John Baptist, or that he wanted to protect his other two brothers, who were disgusted by the gross manners of the new guests.<sup>17</sup>

Other corrections made by Jean-Louis have to do mostly with style and consist essentially in suppressing certain useless words or phrases and in rectifying misspellings. There are other cross-marks, lines, parentheses, and words found in the margin which are clearly not in Jean-Louis's hand.<sup>18</sup>

Brother Bernard's handwriting—less heavy, thinner, and more difficult to read—is definitely recognizable in many places.<sup>19</sup> These are mostly spelling or stylistic faults which may have struck him as he reread the text copied by Brother Romain. Sometimes he adds further details or tones down certain expressions. When elements of the account remind him of biblical passages, he indicates these references in the margin.

Finally, there are corrections of minor importance made by Brother Romain himself, consisting in changing one word for another or in correcting a misspelled word.

## Literary analysis

If there is a particular point on which Bernard should be especially commended, it is the title he gave to his work: "The Admirable Guidance of Divine Providence in the Person of the Servant of God, John Baptist de La Salle." Indeed, De La Salle's faith in Divine Providence illuminates the entire course of his life. Convinced that it was God's will that the Christian schools should come into existence, he responded to this divine call. He himself stated this clearly:

“God, who guides all things wisely and gently and who as a rule does not force our inclinations, wishing to bring me to devote myself entirely to the care of the schools, did so in a most imperceptible manner and little by little, so that one undertaking led to another which I had not foreseen at the beginning.”<sup>20</sup>

Bernard singled out the essential and original character of John Baptist's response to God's imperceptible call: a total abandonment to Providence. God acts through events, and John Baptist submits himself to the divine action, thus becoming the providential instrument for the founding of the Brothers of the Christian Schools.

The title, which sums up in a few words the entire work of De La Salle, became in Bernard's mind the organizing principle of his biography. Unfortunately, the author falls short of his purpose, because his text does not sufficiently show this power of God's action in De La Salle's daily life. The expressions “Divine Providence,” “abandonment to God,” and “God's guidance” recur often throughout the text, but their frequency suggests a certain artificiality about the biographer's effort. Because of his lack of skill in showing how the mystery of Providence breaks through in a human life, the author fails to achieve his purpose.

In addition, the awkward, halting rhythm of the narrative reveals a lack of mastery of the subject on the author's part. There are frequent reminders of what he has already written and excessive promises about what he will write. The whole work contains many clumsy transitions and numerous pious digressions which in general are useless and tiresome. Simply reading the first paragraphs, preferably out loud, reveals a literary style marked by awkward sentence construction, careless paragraph structure, poverty of vocabulary, annoying word repetitions, and painfully slow development of ideas. It is easy to understand why Jean-Louis did not correct the manuscript more thoroughly—the document's style would have discouraged any editor!

It is unfair to blame all these faults on Bernard; the copyist must bear a share of responsibility for the careless spelling. As for the style, while Bernard admits his inadequacy, he declares that he tried to follow faithfully the notes given to him and adds that it sometimes went against his judgment to be obliged to write, not in his own usual style, but in that of others. Lack of time and fear of provoking criticism and stirring up dissatisfaction only exacerbated Bernard's native lack of ability as a writer.<sup>21</sup> His level of education was probably not very high, and he does not seem to have possessed any exceptional natural gifts to compensate for this deficiency. Compared to the other Brothers of



the day, he may have been considered a fairly competent writer able to handle routine composition. However, that did not give him any special ability for the more demanding role of biographer and historian. But inasmuch as the superiors apparently expected only that he put together a collection of the most authentic and significant testimonials on the Founder's life, it may be supposed that the question of his inadequate writing ability did not present any special problems.

## **Contribution of the first biographer**

The value of this manuscript is not in its literary form but rather in the fact that it is the first written testimonial on the Founder of the Brothers of the Christian Schools. Composed almost immediately after De La Salle's death, it possesses even in its shortcomings a unique sincerity and a genuine emotion not found in the other early biographies.

Many of the facts related by Brother Bernard are later repeated by Maillefer and even more so by Blain. In general, Maillefer condenses Bernard's material, while at times Blain amplifies it out of all proportion. Indeed, the technique and style of these two later writers mask the spontaneity of the material first gathered in 1721 and reported by Bernard. He presents unedited testimonials, first-hand accounts by people present at the incidents, or statements by third parties closely involved in them.<sup>22</sup> He relates the happenings of the early years of the Institute in a simple and direct, at times even ingenuous, manner.

Bernard gives us unique insights into the De La Salle family and into John Baptist's personality, with details that sometimes border on indiscretion.<sup>23</sup> But overall, the author is tactful and probably closer to the truth at times than Blain.

Bernard also gives us details on the topography of Reims. Because he knew the city well, he is able to indicate distances and to situate exactly the various places where John Baptist, Nyel, and the first teachers lived and worked.<sup>24</sup>

Bernard's account contains minute explanations which reveal how near he is to his sources and how accurately he captures the freshness of these early testimonials.<sup>25</sup> He brings a breath of vitality to the narrative, that same spirit which enlivened the simple, courageous, and fervent life led by M. de La Salle's first followers. On the other hand, a serious deficiency of Bernard's work is his sometimes unclear or even erroneous chronology.<sup>26</sup> These inaccuracies come from the pen of a fledgling biographer, too quick to transcribe certain memorials which

were not themselves accurate to begin with. However, some of the erroneous chronology deals with happenings not directly concerned with the founding of the Institute and its early stages.

### **The present edition**

It seems that Bernard submitted the complete manuscript to the De La Salle family in 1723<sup>27</sup> and that it was returned to the Institute at the time when Blain was working on his two huge volumes. But the fact is that little of the immense amount of documentation furnished to Blain has been found. Bernard's manuscript itself seems to have suffered the same fate as did most of the material utilized by Blain. Once the latter had been chosen as the official biographer of M. de La Salle, Bernard's work was apparently considered of little value.

However, during the past century a different opinion of Bernard has been slowly developing. Ever since Brother Lucard's biography<sup>28</sup> and the beatification process for De La Salle, no serious biographer of the saint has felt justified in disregarding the eighty-six pages of Bernard's manuscript, even though it was not published until 1965.<sup>29</sup> Perhaps a certain hope of someday finding the original text of the entire work made it previously seem inadvisable to publish only this incomplete text.

Although this manuscript is incomplete, the material it contains will contribute to the growing understanding and appreciation of Saint John Baptist de La Salle, Founder of the Brothers of the Christian Schools.

# John Baptist de La Salle

by  
Brother Bernard  
(Manuscript of 1721)

Conduite  
Admirable de la Divine Providence,  
en la personne du vénérable Serviteur de  
Dieu, Jean Baptiste de la Salle, prêtre,  
Docteur en Théologie, ancien chanoine de  
l'Eglise Cathédrale de Reims  
& Instituteur des frères des Ecoles  
Chrétiennes, divisé en quatre parties.

Celui qui observera et qui apprendra aux autres à  
observer les Commandements sera grand dans le  
Royaume du Ciel en S. Matth. ch. 5. v. 19.

M. DCC. XXI

The Admirable Guidance  
Shown by Divine Providence  
in the Person  
of the Venerable Servant of God,  
**John Baptist de La Salle,**  
Priest, Doctor in Theology,  
Former Canon  
of the Cathedral Church of Reims,  
and Founder of the  
Brothers of the Christian Schools

by  
Brother Bernard  
(Manuscript of 1721)

Whoever obeys and teaches these commandments  
will be called greatest in the kingdom of heaven  
(Mt 5:19)

## Author's Preface

If only those whom God praises are truly worthy of praise, we can indeed say that the venerable servant of God, John Baptist de La Salle, merits praise, for he is undoubtedly among those praised by the Holy Spirit through the mouth of the Son of Sirach. "Let us honor," he says, "those glorious men, our ancestors whose offspring we are, who excelled in virtue and were adorned with prudence, men full of love and mercy, whose deeds of piety will endure forever."<sup>30</sup> Thus it was that these great men merited the very praise of God by their holy lives. Such praise is most fitting for him whose life we are writing, because he excelled in all the qualities attributed to these great men of the past, both in what concerns the glory of the God who filled his life and in the designation of "Father" which he deserves no less than they. He too bequeathed to us a spiritual family a thousand times more glorious than any temporal family he might have had, no matter how large it might have been.

If it is said of these saintly men that they were great in virtue and filled with prudence, gifted with love and compassion, and that because of this, their deeds would ever be blessed, we may say as much of our servant of God. His virtues were countless, his love was boundless, and his compassion knew no limits. Thus, let us say of him, as of the others, that his memory is worthy of honor. Even more, his memory is like that of the saintly King Josiah.<sup>31</sup> As we say of this great prince, so too can we say of our servant of God that his memory remains as the sweet fragrance of a precious perfume, for the remembrance of the virtues he practiced has the same effect on our souls as an excellent fragrance has on our bodies.

It shall not be difficult to prove what we say of this great man, for we need only read his life to see that we propose nothing that is not true. However, we shall not pretend to describe in this book a conquering hero who by force of arms subjected entire kingdoms, but rather a conqueror of souls and a laborer of the Gospel who, not content to conquer a kingdom, wanted to destroy it. That kingdom is the

kingdom of Satan which takes root in the souls of young people and grows stronger day by day through ignorance and sin. He set out, I repeat, to destroy this infernal kingdom by the means he took to instruct young people in their religion, that is, by founding a society which would have no other purpose than to teach children their duties toward God and neighbor. No longer would these children have to cry out for bread, for this man of God provided it for them abundantly.

The good done for the Church by such a society can be appreciated by the esteem that Jesus Christ and many great saints professed for the mission of teaching. Regarding our Lord Jesus Christ, he so desired that children come to him that he rebuked his disciples when they prevented them from approaching him. He invited the children to draw near, embraced them tenderly, and blessed them.<sup>32</sup> Saint Cyril of Jerusalem<sup>33</sup> and Saint Augustine<sup>34</sup> displayed such zeal for this work that they composed catechisms to be used for instruction and taught children themselves. What shall I say of the great Saint Jerome<sup>35</sup> or the learned Gerson,<sup>36</sup> who considered it a higher privilege to teach a child that should belong to Jesus Christ than to teach emperors? And in recent times, Saint Ignatius<sup>37</sup> and his disciples gloried in teaching catechism to little children. But without delaying too long by illustrating the zeal shown by so many outstanding people for the instruction of youth, let me say only a few words about what Saint Charles Borromeo,<sup>38</sup> Reverend Father Fourier,<sup>39</sup> the Venerable Father Barré,<sup>40</sup> and others did for this same cause.

In his diocese Saint Charles founded numerous schools for the instruction of children. Because of the marvelous results they produced, this great saint was fully convinced of the good of such schools for the Church. Father Fourier, with the same zeal he brought to the reformation of his parish and his order, founded a community of women to teach young girls. But this holy man did not rest there. His zeal for the glory of God which consumed him prompted him to undertake the establishment of an institute of Brothers for the teaching of young boys. In this, however, he was not successful. Nor was Father Barré of the order of Minims, who also gathered young men for this purpose, just as he had done with young women. But like Father Fourier, he did not have the happiness of succeeding in his efforts with these young men, although he succeeded perfectly with the community of young women.

It is to the glory of our servant of God that the joy of succeeding in this undertaking had been reserved to him and that he was destined by God from his mother's womb<sup>41</sup> to procure such a great good for the

Church. Thus we may say of him what Scripture says of another, “Do you see the man whom the Lord has chosen? There is none like him among all the people!”<sup>42</sup>

But why is it necessary to speak of the importance and necessity of something which bears in itself its own praise and approval? Jesus Christ approved of it when he directed that the children be brought to him. Saint Paul, too, it seems, urges us to undertake this work when he says that without faith it is impossible to please God.<sup>43</sup> In this way he makes us understand that children must be instructed in those matters they need to know in order to be pleasing to God. Finally, what should make us most esteem this work is the harm it does to the devil, for this monster of iniquity made clear how much horror he held for this holy work when he inspired Julian the Apostate<sup>44</sup> to issue his abominable edict forbidding anyone to teach youth. The evil one, it seems, could not find a more effective way to combat the spread of Christianity.

One can judge by all that has been said how worthy of praise is the author of such a work so pleasing to God, approved by the saints, and condemned by the devil.

That is why we have undertaken to write his life. His was such a saintly and admirable life, in which Divine Providence manifested itself in such a remarkable manner, that we decided to give this book the title, *The Admirable Guidance Shown by Divine Providence*. It is clear that this saintly man always lived in complete abandonment to God in all the events of his life, a life filled with as many adversities as a life could be. But far from being overwhelmed by so many contradictions, he generously took up arms and did not permit himself to be vanquished like a coward without defending himself. But what weapons did he use? He used the most powerful ones that can be found, that is, the weapons of God with which he fought valiantly against the demon. He stood upright, girded with the belt of truth and clothed with the breastplate of justice.<sup>45</sup> In all the conflicts he had to face he carried the shield of faith with which he extinguished all the fiery darts of the demon.<sup>46</sup> Hope of salvation always served as his helmet, and the word of God, as the sword of the Spirit.<sup>47</sup> It is thus that this valiant soldier of Jesus Christ engaged in combat. It is true that he did not conquer fortresses with these weapons, but he did succeed in making his body submissive to the Spirit.

Such, dear reader, was the life of John Baptist de La Salle, who, not satisfied merely with providing others with spiritual weapons, was the first to make use of them himself. He exhorted others to the practice of virtue, but he first gave the example of numerous virtues in his



own life. Among others, he combined piety with zeal, zeal with patience, and patience with humility. These four virtues so characteristic of his own life will serve as the four divisions of this present book. In the first part we will treat of his childhood and his preparation for sacred orders; in the second we will describe the establishment of his Institute; in the third part we will relate the difficulties he encountered in his work and the travels he undertook to spread the Institute; and, finally, in the fourth we will describe his principal virtues and the strength of his soul. This, briefly, is what we propose to do. We hope that it will bring rich spiritual benefits to those who read it without bias and who seek in it what profits the soul rather than what simply pleases the mind. We have not proposed to ourselves in writing this biography anything other than to edify the reader, to praise the one we are writing about, and to please only God to whom alone belongs honor and glory, for ever and ever. Amen.

### **A Word to the Reader**

Dear reader, we are living in an age so corrupt, at a time when piety has grown so cold, that most people are content to read the lives of the saints with no intention of imitating them. And the great concern of most readers is to approve what is to their taste in their reading and to disapprove what is not. If the heroic virtues practiced by the saints are vividly described, they say that in order to imitate them they would have to be saints themselves. In saying this, they imagine they have found a means of hiding their own cowardice, but they are accusing themselves of being unable to attain that to which everyone has been called, namely, that holiness without which no one will see God.<sup>48</sup> If the matter written about is not striking or remarkable, they say that these details would better be left forgotten forever, not realizing that by this complaint they again accuse themselves of having little zeal for their own salvation. They do not wish anyone to speak of the ordinary things the saints have done, because, not having any desire to imitate them, they are ashamed to be faced with things they can easily do but have no desire to do.

All these considerations, dear reader, have made me resolved to do what Jesus Christ said, namely, not to cast pearls before swine.<sup>49</sup> That is why I have omitted some matters which, though insignificant to many people, nonetheless have great value before God. Other than this, I have followed faithfully the recollections furnished me by a great number of people, most of whom were eyewitnesses to what

they reported. They are so sincere in all they say that I am certain they would say nothing but the truth, for their piety, their competence, and their knowledge put them above any deceit.

This then, dear reader, is what I felt I ought to do for your satisfaction and for my own. I must also say that for my part I have added nothing but what was necessary to connect the different parts of the story.

## Disclaimer

If our Lord Jesus Christ calls blessed those who practice his counsels, who are poor in spirit and suffer persecution for justice, and so forth,<sup>50</sup> we can, it seems, attribute the same quality to him whose life we are writing, for he walked closely in the footsteps of his Divine Master. However, because a decision of this kind is reserved to the Holy See, which alone has the right to decide on a person's sanctity, I declare, in obedience to the Holy See, that if in the course of this work I ascribe the quality of sanctity or blessedness to the subject of this biography, it is only in the sense which Jesus Christ uses in referring to those who are still alive in this world, or like Saint Paul, who calls "saints" those to whom he writes.<sup>51</sup>

# PART ONE

# Chapter I

## His birth, education, studies, and promotion to the canonry.

If, as the Apostle Saint Paul says, the just are the aroma of Jesus Christ,<sup>52</sup> we can say without exaggeration that John Baptist de La Salle is one of those just, for the fragrance of his virtues spread like a precious balm during his life and more so after his blessed death, increasing day by day the esteem that respected persons had for him. What should have erased all memory of him from people's minds seems to have made it more alive than ever. This is as it should be, for during his life he avoided honors and remained hidden from all eyes, preferring to identify himself only with the humblest and most despised in the world. It is only fitting to rescue him now from the obscurity in which he chose to remain hidden all his life. Doing so will put him upon a lamp-stand where the example of the virtues he practiced might well serve as a light for all who read of the many holy deeds recorded in this book.

We shall begin the recital of his virtues with a brief account of his birth, without attempting to delve into the origins of his honorable family and establishing an elaborate genealogy. It suffices to say that he was born into one of the most respected families of the city of Reims in the Champagne region. His father, who fulfilled with exemplary uprightness the responsibilities of counsellor in the Reims royal court of appeal, was a man of great piety who traced his origins to an honorable family.<sup>53</sup> Amid his obligations in the world, he sought to preserve throughout his life the treasure of piety that he had acquired. He found that the best way of achieving this was to marry a person of similar piety and virtue. In keeping with this intention, he chose as wife a virtuous woman of the noble Brouillet family by the name of Nicole Moët.<sup>54</sup> She was as remarkable for her piety as for her nobility, and her good qualities were equal to those of her husband.

This was a happy marriage, both because of the virtue of the partners which drew down God's blessings and because of its fruitful-

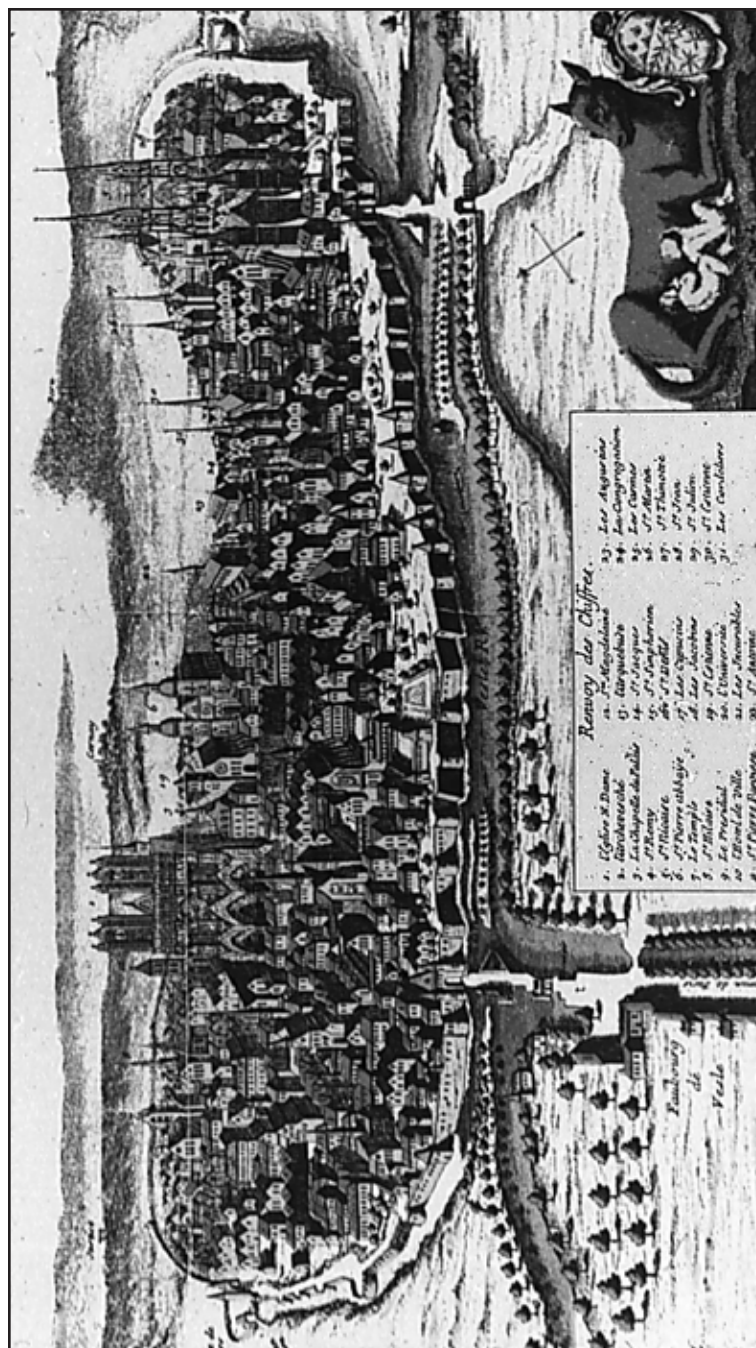
ness. Seven children were born of this union, five boys and two girls, all of whom walked in the footsteps of their father and mother in the path of virtue.<sup>55</sup> Three boys became priests, of whom two were appointed canons of Notre Dame of Reims and the third became prior of the religious of Saint Genevieve. The two other sons were destined for marriage, as was one of the two girls, while the other daughter entered the religious order of Saint-Etienne-les-Dames.<sup>56</sup> Such were the felicitous offspring of the mother and father of our man of God, who was himself the firstborn of this marriage and the first to be offered to God as the Church's fervent minister and laborer in the Gospel vineyard.

The child was born in the city of Reims on April 30, 1651, and regenerated into new life at the baptismal font of the parish church of Saint Hilaire and given the name John Baptist.<sup>57</sup> This name was a good omen, for he closely imitated the holy precursor of Jesus Christ in his penance as well as in his zeal for the glory of God and the salvation of souls. After he was cleansed by baptism from original sin, his parents took great pains to raise him in piety and the fear of the Lord. To the extent that he increased in age he also "advanced in wisdom before God and man."<sup>58</sup>

It soon became evident day after day that this amiable child was inclined to piety and had a great attraction to the ecclesiastical state. As soon as he was old enough to use his small hands, he began fashioning little oratories near which he sang and imitated, in his own way, the grand ceremonies of the Church. This was his usual preoccupation, and it led him to dislike taking part in the other more usual childhood activities expected of him. At four or five years of age, he already seemed to have attained the use of reason and to have outgrown his childhood, judging from the questions he asked and the answers he gave when conversing. This is clear from an incident he recalled later in which he left a family entertainment to seek out his grandmother, whom he asked to read to him from the lives of the saints. This undoubtedly was a happy omen of the future in which he would imitate their holy lives. He began already to love what brought the saints great joy, namely, praying and visiting churches. Nothing pleased him more than to be taken to the celebration of the Divine Office by his father, who was most regular in its observance. The young boy's piety in church was evident; he was eager to serve Mass and often volunteered to be an altar boy. How fervent and modest he was in the least functions in which he participated! He drew the attention of all who were there and inspired a sense of devotion in everyone who could see him. Thus it was that he grew from day to day, like a precious plant destined to bear much fruit.

At the age of eight or nine he began his schooling and in a short time made marvelous progress.<sup>59</sup> The wisdom and gentleness he manifested during this time pleased his teachers and impressed his fellow students. His companions found in him a model of how to live in a devout and Christian manner while involved in pursuits that seemed to banish such a desire in those who have no zeal for their salvation. What made him more likeable was the absence of affectation in his behavior when he practiced his many devotions. He was light-hearted without being fickle and devout but not grim, revealing already what he would one day become.

God, seeing how this young plant had begun to mature, wanted to transplant it into the garden of the Church by providing him with a canonry, a step which only increased his fervor and piety.<sup>60</sup> Recognizing that he now had the happy duty of saying, with the Prophet, that God alone was his portion and his destiny,<sup>61</sup> he became so faithful to the obligations of the canonry, of which the principal one was the recitation of the Divine Office, that he never failed to do so every day. Indeed, he did not even wait to be provided with a prebend<sup>62</sup> in order to recite the Divine Office. His grandfather, a pious man who imposed upon himself the duty of reciting it every day, taught John Baptist, even before he received the tonsure,<sup>63</sup> how to recite it. While still quite young, John Baptist recited the Office conscientiously. He fulfilled this obligation so carefully throughout the rest of his life that it was difficult to prevent him from doing so even when he was suffering severe illness. During these times he still recited the Office with such devotion that it drew tears from those who witnessed it.



Engraving by Daudey (1722) of the city of Reims. Photo E. Roussel (ER, slide 1).

## Chapter II

**He goes to Cambrai to receive minor orders; he chooses a spiritual director; he has an accident; he goes to the seminary of Saint Sulpice; he receives the subdiaconate.**

Wishing to receive the four minor orders, our young canon was obliged to leave Reims for Cambrai for that purpose, because the archiepiscopal see of Reims was then vacant.<sup>64</sup> Several other young men accompanied him on this occasion for the same purpose. Upon his return he devoted himself with much fervor to the practice of virtue. Not wishing to lose his way on this holy path, he decided to select a spiritual director. Whom should he choose? He began to lay the foundations of his life of holiness under the guidance of one of the holiest and most zealous persons in Reims at the time, a great canon and theological preacher of the cathedral.<sup>65</sup> Even though still young, John Baptist began some harsh penitential practices. A respected priest bears witness to this in reporting that this fervent acolyte, in a spirit of mortification, would sleep on plain boards. This is not hard to believe, in light of his practice of great mortifications throughout the rest of his life. Often he slept on beds more conducive to preventing sleep than to ensuring rest. In community, when someone was sick, he would give up his own bed if it was a better one and sleep on a simple mat or on chairs.

Under the guidance of this same director, he began to cultivate a great zeal for the salvation of souls. M. Roland—this was the name of his director—was himself most zealous in this matter and strove to inculcate, as much as he could, the same sentiments in the soul of his fervent disciple. On his deathbed M. Roland strongly urged the founding of schools for boys, as he himself had already done for girls. Roland's confidence in his disciple and his conviction that he acted only under the inspiration of God were so great that he appointed him the executor of his will.<sup>66</sup> Being thus filled with the spirit of God, John Baptist progressed day by day along the road of virtue.



God, according to the words of the son of Sirach, has constant care of those who fear him and do his will,<sup>67</sup> and he took particular care of John Baptist. While it is true that in the beginning he suffered some lesser trials, these were to accustom him to greater ones during the course of his life. He was to become a model of patience that everyone could imitate. God gradually brought him to realize that being counted among his children, he must learn to accept trials. This he began to learn when one day our young canon was returning from the country to Reims. With only a short way to go, he fell into a deep snow drift, possibly because a heavy snowfall prevented him from seeing the road. He remained there most of the night. Fearful for his life, he succeeded in climbing out but only after strenuous effort that resulted in a rupture which was to bother him for the rest of his life. Thus it was that Providence accustomed him from his earliest days to the trials and afflictions which would never be lacking throughout his life, as we shall see in the third part of this book.

John Baptist went to Paris to attend the seminary of Saint Sulpice, rightly described as a conservatory of good priests because of the piety and regularity in which young ecclesiastics were trained.<sup>68</sup> It was there that our servant of God was sent to be formed in holiness and to learn the rituals of the Church. He had M. Bauin<sup>69</sup> as spiritual director, a man of rare piety who, after a life spent in the practice of all the virtues, died in the odor of sanctity on the feast of St. Joseph, March 19, towards the end of the last century.<sup>70</sup> This holy priest took great care of the spiritual life of our new seminarian, and seeing how inclined John Baptist was to a virtuous life, he formed a lasting friendship with him. This became more evident later when John Baptist brought the Brothers of his community to Paris. Despite the feebleness of old age, M. Bauin would often come to visit his fervent disciple.<sup>71</sup> If he could not immediately be received, he would kneel down in the garden or elsewhere while awaiting the one with whom he was united in heart and soul.

John Baptist stayed nearly two years in this renowned seminary, from October 18, 1670, to April 29, 1672, having gained there by his edifying behavior everyone's esteem and affection. There he laid the foundation for all the virtues he practiced with such courage and constancy throughout his life. There too he was caught up in the love of Jesus and Mary. And, finally, it was in that house of God that he consecrated himself to God's service in a particular way by receiving the order of the subdiaconate and fulfilling the duties thereof with great piety and exactitude.<sup>72</sup>

## Chapter III

**His return to Reims; his second trip to Cambrai to receive the diaconate and, shortly after, his ordination to the priesthood by his bishop; he becomes responsible for the affairs of his family and of an orphanage for girls.**

Our fervent subdeacon returned to Reims, but because the archiepiscopal see of Reims was still vacant, he soon left again for Cambrai, where the candidates for ordination were sent. He received the diaconate<sup>73</sup> after having prepared himself by endeavoring to acquire the qualities stressed by Saint Paul when he says that a deacon should be chaste, not deceitful, nor addicted to drink nor greedy for sordid gain; that he should be one to hold fast to the mystery of the faith with a clear conscience and, he adds, that he must be tested and recognized as exempt from all crime before being called upon to serve.<sup>74</sup> Our new deacon possessed all these qualities: he was chaste and truthful in word, temperate in food and drink, detached from the goods of this world, and possessed of great purity of conscience and a readiness to believe all the mysteries of the faith. Therefore, he could, in all confidence and with no proof other than a careful examination of his own life, be assigned to the exercise of the ministry.

After receiving the holy order of deacon, he returned to Reims to continue his studies in sacred theology<sup>75</sup> with great success. Being the proper age and possessing the requisite knowledge, he prepared himself for the priesthood by attending the seminary in Reims. Aware of the august nature of the sacrament he was about to receive, he prayed to God for the grace needed to fulfill this ministry in a way that would be worthy of the Divine Majesty. With these dispositions he was ordained priest by His Excellency M. Le Tellier, archbishop of Reims, and celebrated his first Mass in the cathedral church of that same city.<sup>76</sup>

We shall not dwell here on John Baptist's great piety after the reception of this holy sacrament, nor shall we speak of his fidelity to

the offices in choir. We shall dwell neither on the good order in which he put his family affairs nor, except in passing, on the zeal he manifested after having become a priest of the Lord. Henceforth he considered that because he was God's minister, everything that concerned God was his own concern also, and he would permit nothing that would bring dishonor upon his Divine Master's house. Thus it was that seeing a priest unmindful of his duties to God and to the Church, he intervened with such courage and zeal that he finally forced him to leave the city.

Having been consecrated by the Lord's holy oils, our man of God applied himself as best he could to the study of theology and made such great progress that he was soon ready to receive the doctor's hood, which he did to the applause of all those who then comprised the renowned University of Reims.<sup>77</sup> His studies did not prevent him from attending to his practices of piety nor to the many business affairs for which he was responsible. Upon the deaths of his father and mother, he assumed, as the eldest child of the family, the management of its affairs.<sup>78</sup> He was so successful in this that one might have said that it was his sole occupation. People commonly recognized that he was unusually perceptive, able to sense the heart of an issue before others saw even the surface. He not only was responsible for his own family affairs but also was in charge of the orphanage for girls founded in Reims by M. Roland, canon and theological preacher of the city, who had made him executor of his will and responsible for obtaining legal recognition of the orphanage.<sup>79</sup>

How did this zealous servant of God manage such a large number of duties? Could he succeed? Or did he feel that because he could not succeed, his only recourse was to give up? No, no! On the contrary, he would show that those who entrusted these matters to him were not mistaken in their choice of one who could handle them properly. The Spirit of God guided him and led him to happy resolutions of all these matters, as we shall see.

The first duty to which our devout canon applied himself was to obtain legal recognition of the orphanage. By his earnest care and solicitude, aided by the assistance of the Lord for whose greater glory he worked, John Baptist was successful in this matter and obtained recognition from the king, the parliament, and the city of Reims.<sup>80</sup> Only a virtuous man of unblemished reputation, such as he was, could have succeeded in such a difficult undertaking. But why do I say difficult? Nothing appeared difficult to him when it was a question of the glory of God, no matter how painful the matter might be or how unlikely to succeed. In these circumstances he would put his

confidence in God and say that if it was God's work, it would succeed. He then would do everything in his power to assure the success of the undertaking. Such was this holy priest's disposition at the beginning of his career. Edifying as all this may be now, prepare yourself, dear reader, to learn later in this book of things still more instructive. Read on, then, with attention, and awaken within yourself the desire to imitate in some small measure this servant of God.

## Chapter IV

### Some remarkable things accomplished by our servant of God.

Saints do not suddenly arrive at the high degree of perfection that is theirs at the time of their death. Rather, they acquire it little by little and climb step by step, so to speak, until they reach the goal they have set for themselves. God, to whom they have given themselves, provides them with a great number of occasions to grow in virtue. God does this by permitting them either to experience temptations for a long time or to encounter opposition from others through petty disagreements, criticism, or lack of appreciation for their person or their work. All of this, I say, serves as an occasion to advance quickly along the road of virtue.

Such was God's conduct toward our virtuous canon. God permitted him to suffer contradictions and adversity from those close to him,<sup>81</sup> as well as condemnations from those who themselves should have been censured. All of this was of much help to him, for God, who had chosen him from his mother's womb to found a community in which he would live in poverty and abjection, prepared him, it seems, by circumstances which appear trivial to those who admire only what is extraordinary. However, we will describe them at some length, because in them Divine Providence was at work in a special way.

God, who chose him for a life of poverty, as we have said, allowed several people to find fault with him for his excessive neatness of person. One such critic said to his face that he was considered by many to be too much given to finery and that this revealed a boastful disposition. What have you to say about this, great servant of God? Did such unkindness cause you pain? What shall I say? Your virtue was equal to this test, and you demonstrated the truth of what Saint Paul says of God's friends, "All things work for good for those who

love God.”<sup>82</sup> Indeed, our virtuous canon profited so well from this trivial criticism that he began to neglect his appearance without, however, being unbecoming. Later he showed how little importance he attached to finery in clothes by wearing a habit similar to that of the Brothers of his Institute and thick shoes like those worn by peasants or cart drivers. Thus did this holy priest begin to practice poverty with no intention other than to avoid being a subject of scandal to those who criticized his conduct. He had no idea of doing what he was to do later on.

What shall I say of his efforts to conquer sleep, which he himself said was his greatest enemy, for it caused him to be late for the office of Matins?<sup>83</sup> Often he had to be awakened several times, only to fall back into sleep, which caused him much concern. All his life he was to fight this battle against sleep, which nevertheless is so necessary to restore energy spent during the day. His efforts in this matter were not in vain, for many times in later years he would pass entire nights attending to the affairs of his Institute or in composing various books. To avoid falling asleep during prayer, he would place a stone on the prie-dieu on which he was kneeling in such a way that if he nodded, his chin would strike the stone and cause him considerable pain. This was an effective way to overcome his enemy.

What shall I say of his efforts to help the poor, to give them alms and visit them, thereby observing to the letter what Jesus Christ said, namely, that he would consider as done to himself what was done for the least of his own?<sup>84</sup> Impressed as he was with these words, John Baptist lost no opportunity to serve the members of the body of Christ, never allowing himself to be discouraged by the inconvenience he experienced in so doing. This was illustrated in a particular way on one occasion when a sick person he was visiting spilled soup all over his surplice. He showed no annoyance at this and returned home in the soiled vestment.

O Lord, what are the limits to grace when it touches the heart? It makes a person generously embrace what the world holds in contempt and reject all that the world esteems. You will see this illustrated in the person of M. de La Salle, dear reader, for he accepted with pleasure what some others completely held in horror, and he regarded nothing as base or contemptible before God, except sin.

And finally, what shall I say of his practices of penance, which at first were so severe that on several occasions he tried to eat nothing at all, except for a bit of broth each day, from Holy Thursday until Easter Sunday? And even then he would take food only on the evening of Sunday. This form of penance weakened his stomach so

much that he could hold no food, and he would throw up what he had eaten. It was easy for anyone who so desired to follow John Baptist along the street on his way to church, for the way was marked by signs of his continual vomiting. When he lived with the Brothers, he wanted to practice the same penances by spending all of Holy Week in interior prayer in the remotest corner of the house without taking a bit of nourishment. But he experienced the same difficulties as before, leading him to moderate his fervor. He ceased such ruthless punishment of his body, which was incapable of supporting such rigorous treatment.

All of these penances caused him considerable suffering because he had been reared and nourished in such a delicate manner. However, with time he grew accustomed to the practice of great penance, especially in regard to food, as we shall see later in this book. Because he found it so difficult to eat the same common fare as his Brothers did, he strove courageously to master himself in this matter. He grew so accustomed to eating coarse food that the darkest bread or ill-prepared, half-cooked vegetables became his choice dishes. Here is the testimony of a reliable person who knew him well. When speaking to a Brother of the Institute, he said, "Your Founder is a saint, for when we remember how delicately he was brought up in the paternal home and how innocent a life he led, the manner in which he treats himself now is truly amazing." He added that like Saint Francis,<sup>85</sup> John Baptist on his deathbed will have to ask pardon of his body for having treated it so badly.

## Chapter V

**How Divine Providence led Monsieur de La Salle to establish the Christian Schools in Reims, the city of his birth; his charity and prudence shown in these circumstances.**

The time destined by Divine Providence had finally come to satisfy the constant cries of children for bread. The man whose virtues we recount was ready like a new Isaiah<sup>86</sup> to go wherever Providence might direct, although he never thought he would do what in fact he later did. Indeed, God brought about a situation to accomplish what had been planned from all eternity. Once M. de La Salle recognized the will of God in anything, nothing could distract him from the undertaking. Neither hardships, obstacles, nor persecutions could prevent him from doing God's work. On the contrary, all these difficulties served as oil to rekindle the fire of his zeal. Blessed are you, great servant of God, for thus imitating the saints who preceded you! The work you founded is totally opposed to Satan's domain. The world could never give its approbation to a work whose aims it opposes, and the flesh could not consent to it, for your work teaches the repression of its desires. This explains why these three enemies—the world, the flesh, and the devil—raised such attacks against you.

All this was perhaps necessary to put our zealous canon's virtue to the test. Like a young tree, his Institute was to develop strong roots in order to withstand the violent winds of persecution. Here is the way the Institute of the Brothers of the Christian Schools began. Our servant of God himself gave a summary in a manuscript, written in his own hand, that had remained unknown for more than twenty years and was fortunately discovered during the Founder's stay in the south of France.<sup>87</sup> His reluctance to speak of himself and his projects was so well known that it was undoubtedly under obedience that he was ordered to write it; moreover, only his confessor could have directed him to write something so contrary to his sense of humility. We



shall draw what we say of the first fourteen years of his Institute from this source, which covers only this period, adding only what he passed over in silence because of his own humility.

In the year 1679 M. de La Salle, aged twenty-eight, was the executor of the will of M. Nicolas Roland, theological preacher of the Reims cathedral church, who died April 28, 1678. A certain man<sup>88</sup> of about fifty-five years of age, a native of the diocese of Laon, arrived from Rouen, where he had worked diligently to open free schools for boys. In company with a fourteen-year-old boy, this man had been sent by Madame Maillefer to set up similar schools in Reims. To understand the situation better, we must go back a bit and say something of this woman who had sent them to Reims.<sup>89</sup>

Madame Maillefer was originally from Reims, but she lived in Rouen with her husband, who was city treasurer for the *Parlement* of Rouen. This virtuous woman was outstanding in the practice of virtue, especially in her zeal for the education of youth. That is why she founded free schools for girls in Darnétal, near Rouen. Wishing to extend this same benefit to her place of birth, she saw to the establishment of schools for the boys of this city, as we shall see shortly. Finally, after a lifetime of practicing the Christian virtues, she died and received in heaven the reward of her charity and zeal. Her memory is still held in highest honor in Rouen, where she is buried in the cemetery of Saint Nicaise. To attest to her sanctity, God has performed several miracles.

This virtuous woman, so desirous of starting a school for boys in Reims, realized she had found the right opportunity when M. Roland came to Rouen to preach a series of Lenten sermons. To carry out her desire, she arranged with him to send M. Nyel, the person we mentioned earlier, to Reims and gave him and his companion a note for an annual subsidy of a hundred écus.<sup>90</sup> Nyel then came to Reims, as we have said, where he went first to see the superioress of the orphanage for girls, because he had known her previously in Rouen.<sup>91</sup> She had been superioress of the schools of the daughters of the Reverend Father Barré, from whom Monsieur Roland had obtained help to start his community in Reims.<sup>92</sup> It was to her, then, that he presented himself to discuss why he had come to Reims. By chance, or rather by Divine Providence, it happened that at the precise moment he entered the orphanage, M. de La Salle was also at the door. Because neither knew the other, they did not exchange greetings. M. Nyel went into the parlor, while M. de La Salle walked into the house to discuss some business matters. Nyel remained in the parlor, explaining to the superioress at some length why he had come. After some discussion

the superioress asked our holy priest to join them at M. Nyel's request, for he had learned from her of the priest's reputation for his prudence, his great gift of wisdom, and his uprightness of life. This good man was overjoyed to find a person such as our servant of God who would advise him in his project.

M. de La Salle, having joined them, learned from the superioress of Nyel's purpose and that she had advised him to stay at the home of the brother of the lady who had sent him to Reims. The servant of God saw at once that the project would come to naught if that course of action were followed. He explained to M. Nyel that by staying at that particular place, it would soon become known throughout the city why he had come. The authorities of the city had put many obstacles in the way of the foundation of a girls' school which had been established only at the insistence of the archbishop. As soon as they became aware that a school for boys was about to be set up by people unknown to them, the authorities would immediately look into the matter and probably send them away for fear that they would begin this new work without their approval. Joining hospitality to wisdom, M. de La Salle invited M. Nyel to his own home,<sup>93</sup> where he would remain unnoticed because M. de La Salle had the custom of often inviting clergymen or rural pastors to stay with him. M. Nyel could easily be mistaken for one of them, because he dressed in black, with a rabat,<sup>94</sup> and wore his hair short. In any case, there was no reason to be disturbed by what others might say, for he would be in seclusion and at peace for a week, if he so desired. During that time measures would be taken to assure the success of his undertaking. As for himself, M. de La Salle mentioned that he had made plans to go to the shrine of Notre-Dame-de-Liesse,<sup>95</sup> but that upon his return the project could begin.

It would be difficult to describe the joy felt by this good man at such a helpful offer. Suffice it to say that he accepted M. de La Salle's invitation at once. His joy was all the greater in that he was at a loss about how to begin his project. Let us leave M. Nyel in his happiness, in order to admire the graciousness and charity of our holy priest, who, without being obliged to do so, welcomed and advised so kindly a total stranger solely to procure the glory of God and the salvation of souls. M. de La Salle did this without thinking he would have to support the new undertaking. But what, man of God, were you thinking of when you so easily committed yourself to the success of this enterprise? Could you not foresee that such kindness would produce many troubles and even persecutions? Dear reader, allow this servant of God to exercise his charity. The hand of God is with him, and only

good will come of this. If he is truly a man of God, we must believe that he acts only in response to the Holy Spirit, who inspires him to proclaim himself the protector of this holy work of which, as we shall see, he was soon to become the head.

## Chapter VI

**The setting up of a first school for boys in Reims and, later, a second; the charity with which M. de La Salle managed these.**

During the week M. Nyel spent with M. de La Salle, the latter made every effort to bring about the success of the new undertaking. On this matter he consulted several people known for their piety, among them the Benedictine Father Bretagne, whom the servant of God knew well.<sup>96</sup> Bretagne was then prior of the abbey of Saint Rémi in Reims and later of Saint-Germain-des-Prés in Paris. M. de La Salle conferred with this good priest and with several other respected churchmen on measures to take in order to succeed. Each expressed his opinion on what was the best thing to do and on what difficulties a project so contrary to the wishes of the city fathers might encounter. Our servant of God, enlightened by heaven, overcame all objections by a proposal he made. "It seems to me," he said, "that there is no better way to begin the schools well than to put the teachers who will be there under the protection of one of the parish pastors willing to take them in and to say that he is employing them for the instruction of his people." No one could possibly object to that. The successful outcome would prove how right this recommendation was. We may be certain that any other course of action would surely have led to failure. All those gathered to discuss the matter were extremely pleased with the proposed solution.

Next came the question of which pastor to ask to employ the teachers. Four names were proposed, all worthy men. Our man of God examined each one in turn. The first was not well liked by his superiors; the second should not be considered, for he was lacking in zeal; the third was the nephew of a city official to whom he owed his position and who would only have to tell the priest to dismiss the teachers and it would be done. Although Father Bretagne strongly

supported this third priest, the others agreed with M. de La Salle in all three cases. They saw no reason to select anyone other than the pastor of Saint Maurice.<sup>97</sup> No difficulty was found with him, and he had the necessary piety, zeal, and strength of character to bring to completion whatever he undertook.

What do you think, dear reader, of the wisdom and prudence of the man of God? Does it not seem that he had spent his entire life dealing with these matters and that he had the gift of reading hearts and knowing people's capabilities? It was frequently remarked that he had the gift of discernment of spirits, and once he was heard to say that he needed to hear only six words from someone to judge his character.

But, to return to the meeting, once Father Dorigny, pastor of Saint Maurice, had been chosen as the one to start the new school in his parish and to take it under his protection, it remained only to obtain his consent. The pastor was well pleased with the proposition and stated that he had been planning such a school under the direction of an ecclesiastic who would live with him. He even wished to have the teachers stay in his house, which contributed greatly to the success of the project. He seemed satisfied with the hundred *écus* per year furnished by Madame Maillefer for the two teachers who were to begin the school, which happily opened under the care of the man of God.<sup>98</sup>

M. Nyel, having thus begun the school, came from time to time to visit his charitable benefactor, who remained well disposed towards him and who, under no other obligation but what charity suggested, continued to render him whatever services he could. In turn this good man expressed his gratitude by the trust he placed in him. M. Nyel was truly a good man and had great zeal for the glory of God, ever seeking ways to procure it, as we shall see.

The school of Saint Maurice had hardly begun before this good and enterprising man learned that a wealthy and childless widow<sup>99</sup> of Saint Jacques parish had been thinking of founding a new school there. M. Nyel took the liberty of calling upon her to explain what he was about, what he had been doing in Rouen, and what he had come to do in Reims. Then he told her of hearing her wish to open a school, and he offered to undertake this project if she so desired. Fearing that she might refuse his offer, he added that he had the honor of knowing M. de La Salle, a canon of Notre-Dame cathedral, who would help him in carrying out what she had in mind. This comment was most helpful to him, for this lady was aware of M. de La Salle's reputation and was well informed of his qualities and integrity. She

expressed an earnest wish to speak with him and assured M. Nyel that indeed it was true that she had in mind the founding of a new school.

This good man was filled with joy and promptly sought out M. de La Salle to report all that had transpired between him and Madame l'Evêque (de Croyères) and tell him of her wish to meet with him. Our virtuous canon was taken aback by this request, but seeing that it was a question of the glory of God and the salvation of souls, he went immediately to find the lady, who was delighted to see him. She explained her project to him and told him how pleased she was at the possibility of seeing it realized during her lifetime. She begged him to undertake the founding of this school as soon as possible and promised him that by the following Easter she would give him 500 *livres* annually for the support of two teachers. Furthermore, she would give him a sum of 10,000 *livres*, an equivalent capital amount that would earn 500 *livres* per year, or simply 500 *livres* annually, whichever of the three possibilities he preferred.<sup>100</sup>

Our zealous canon, in admiration at this virtuous lady's generosity, agreed with her request, and she in turn did not fail to provide before Easter the 500 *livres* she had promised. She died six weeks later and thus did not see accomplished what she had promised.<sup>101</sup> The 10,000 *livres* remained under the control of the executor of her estate, who faithfully each year gave the promised 500 *livres* to the Brothers who succeeded the original teachers at the school, until finally the entire principal of the grant was placed on deposit at the Hotel de Ville<sup>102</sup> of Paris. This deposit was repaid in 1720 but only in bank notes, because of the lack then of hard currency. Divine Providence, who cares for all and especially for faithful servants, saw to it that in spite of this situation, the needs of the Brothers were met by the generosity of the well-to-do townspeople of the city of Reims.

Thus it was that God made use of these two people, namely, M. Nyel and Madame l'Evêque, to lead M. de La Salle to take charge of the schools about which he had given no thought whatsoever, as we remarked earlier and as he himself stated in his own account.<sup>103</sup> Nevertheless, it is true that some of his friends and those of the late M. Roland had suggested to him that he consider founding schools for boys, just as M. Roland had done for girls. But he had never given serious thought to this, and he had not the slightest intention to found any schools, because he was committed to his canonry, responsible for the sisters of the orphanage, and charged with the care of his own family. If he could have foreseen at that time that his involvement would lead him eventually to live with the teachers, he would never

have become involved with them or with the schools. He naturally did not have a high opinion of these teachers, who were quite common, and it would have caused unbearable pain even to think that he would live with them.<sup>104</sup> Nevertheless, he was to do so only two years later when he invited the teachers to come into his own home,<sup>105</sup> which caused him considerable suffering.

Servant of God, what do you say about yourself? Do you wish to dim the brilliance of your virtues by what you report of yourself? Do you think that what you say about your reluctance will thereby lessen everyone's esteem for you? No, no! Allow us to take the liberty of saying that you are happily mistaken. What you say in humility only serves to make us regard you the more highly. The repugnance you felt in taking charge of those so different from you in social standing and culture serves only to make us understand better how God clearly guided you to undertake, for God's greater honor and glory, a work which you would never have thought of nor touched even with your fingertip.

And, dear reader, what do you think of all that we have said of this man of God? Do you not see how God drew him ever closer without his being aware of it? Even if you have already begun to notice this, you will also have many more occasions to do so in the Second Part, which we will begin with God's help. There you will see how God led him gradually to accomplish what at first was so distasteful to him. One day he takes a single step; the next day another, so that without his knowing it, he was freed of his indifference and was happily caught like a fish in God's net, but with the difference that the fish, once caught, fights with all its strength to struggle free, whereas our servant of God, being captured, did not seek a way of escape but, on the contrary, remained firm as a rock and pleased to be in this happy state.





## PART TWO

# Chapter I

**How Divine Providence led M. de La Salle to found the Brothers of the Christian Schools by inspiring him to take an interest in the teachers; he brings them to live in a house near his own.**

When Divine Providence attracts chosen ones at any time to work for the good of souls, without making known to them the trials and work that will follow, they engage themselves and work with all the more zeal because they do not even imagine when they undertake the work that anyone would dare raise objections to what is done solely for God's glory. God, who is omniscient and directs everything to its proper end, does not immediately reveal all that will have to be endured, for this would discourage many and cause them to abandon the enterprise. Rather, God attracts people imperceptibly without their even being aware of all they will undertake and hope to accomplish in the work destined for them. Thus it was in the case of John Baptist de La Salle when he was chosen to be the Founder of the Society of the Brothers of the Christian Schools.

The better to understand the ways of Divine Providence in his regard, listen to what he himself says, "God, who directs all things with wisdom and gentleness and who does not compel our wills, wishing to have me take care of the schools, led me imperceptibly and in a short time from one commitment to another in a way I did not at all foresee at first."<sup>106</sup>

These statements of M. de La Salle show that he never thought of himself as a founder or as one wishing to have a title, as some mean-spirited persons have wrongly claimed. They used this as a pretext to persecute him for seeking domination and a position of authority, despite the fact that he showed a marked repugnance for rank and wished always to be regarded as the least among the Brothers. This he expressed in his meetings with the Brothers, and on several

different occasions he tried to resign as Superior in favor of one of the Brothers. Although he did not succeed in this, he did strive always to place himself at the feet of every Brother, as we shall see in Part Four of this work.

But, to return to our subject, we must see how Providence arranged everything to engage M. de La Salle in an enterprise he had in no way anticipated. Although he was ready by his care and the good advice he received to assist the teachers in the schools recently opened in Reims, he considered, as he himself said, that his involvement with the teachers and the schools was purely exterior.<sup>107</sup> He did not consider himself bound to them in any way except to visit them occasionally to see that they accomplished their duties well and that they were sufficiently provided for. Happily, he was mistaken, for God wished to make use of him in the founding and support of schools for boys and in extending this work to all the places where the schools presently are. He had the consolation, before his blessed death, of seeing schools opened in twenty-two principal cities of France.

Just as grace influenced him day by day to give himself to the care of the schools, so did it move him at the same time to enter into the designs of Providence for him. As we said in Part One, M. Nyel started the school in Saint Jacques parish in September 1679. M. de La Salle took the responsibility of finding a replacement for him at Saint Maurice, which he had left to start the school at Saint Jacques. All the teachers at the beginning were living with the pastor of Saint Maurice.

The number of students increased daily at the Saint Jacques school, so that the total number of teachers for the two schools of Saint Maurice and Saint Jacques had to be increased to five. M. de La Salle, still a canon of the cathedral, recognized by his own experience and through divine inspiration that because the rectory of Saint Maurice was quite distant from his own home, the teachers could not be properly guided. Because of their increased number, they demanded more care. In addition he was obligated to give the pastor of Saint Maurice 200 *livres* for their lodging over and above the cost of their upkeep which he still had to provide.<sup>108</sup> These reasons led him to rent a house near his own<sup>109</sup> so that he could see the teachers more often and have their meals prepared in his home. Thus, he could exercise better control over them, and besides, it would be much less expensive, for the 300 *livres* from M. Maillefer of Rouen and the 500 *livres* from Madame l'Evêque amounted to only 800 *livres*, whereas 1,000 *livres* were required per year for the five teachers.

Thus, step by step, everything worked together to bring about the successful beginning of the schools. Having decided to rent a

house near his own, M. de La Salle found one behind Saint Symphorien, near the ramparts.<sup>110</sup> Because his own house, the family dwelling, was near Sainte Marguerite, he was not too distant from that of the teachers. As soon as they were settled in their new home, M. Nyel, always enterprising, spoke to M. de La Salle about opening a new school in the house, and he agreed, seeing that it would contribute to the glory of God and the public good.

The changed behavior of the teachers made it evident that M. de La Salle had been inspired by God in having them move into this new house. They became more exact than before in keeping certain regulations, as, for example, retiring on time, prayer, attending Mass, and taking their meals together. But inasmuch as M. Nyel visited many people, spent most of the day at the Saint Jacques school, and on Sundays and feasts had his students attend high Mass, he was seldom in the house and could not provide the teachers with the true community life they needed. There was neither order nor silence when he was away. The teachers received Holy Communion only when they felt like it and on the morning of feasts and Sundays would come and go as they pleased.

## Chapter II

**M. de La Salle considers moving the teachers into his own home; the reasons for this and the problems that this would bring about; he goes to Paris; Father Barré advises him to invite the teachers into his home; he first tries out for some time having them at his table.**

This holy priest, animated with zeal for the glory of God, saw that the six teachers were not leading the kind of life he desired. Their mode of life was not one worthy of their important role as schoolteachers, and they were not likely to persevere in their calling. They would have abandoned their state in life earlier than in fact they did if God, through M. de La Salle, had not helped them. He saw that the disorder among them continued and even increased day by day because of their lack of regular observance. When he found little order or discipline among them, he concluded that the teachers did not have great piety, nor were they filled with the spirit of their state. He was inspired strongly to remedy such a problem, moved to do so only by his love and zeal for God, for in addition to his duties as a canon of the cathedral, he had many family obligations.<sup>111</sup>

He rented the house for the teachers for one year and a half, that is, until the feast of Saint John the Baptist in 1681. But six months before the termination of the lease, he began to consider whether to renew the lease or to bring the teachers into his own home so that he could supervise them better and have them live a more ordered life. He could only with great pain, as he says himself, see how they continued to live and conduct themselves as poorly as they did.

For a considerable time his intention was thwarted by various obstacles, the slightest of which could have made him abandon the undertaking were it not for his courage and steadfastness of soul that made him rise above all natural considerations. In this period of uncertainty he had occasion to go to Paris on some business. While



Nicolas Barré (1621–1686). *Photo E. Rousset (ER, plate 74, slide 62).*

there he took the time to visit the Reverend Father Barré, who was then living with the Minims in their convent on the Place Royale.<sup>112</sup> He gave him an account of everything that had happened in Reims in reference to the teachers' conduct. A man of experience, this worthy son of Saint Francis of Paola<sup>113</sup> did not hesitate after considering the matter to advise M. de La Salle to bring the teachers into his own home. He was well aware of the character and disposition of M. Nyel, who, although zealous, lacked the qualities and firmness necessary to maintain the teachers in regular observance and good order. He judged rightly that good order and regular observance could hardly be maintained among them as long as M. Nyel was in charge, considering the fact that he could not stay in one place for long.

These reasons made Father Barré all the more entreat and urge M. de La Salle to take charge of the teachers, fully convinced that God had chosen him to direct the work that he himself had not been able to bring about. Father Barré had succeeded well enough with the schools for girls, but those for boys begun at a number of places, and especially at Saint Gervais where there were six teachers, had a less successful outcome. The teachers misbehaved to such a degree and fell into such disorder that they left, one after the other. Undoubtedly it was only after many fervent prayers of this holy religious that M. de La Salle decided to bring all the schoolteachers into his own home.<sup>114</sup> It was by this critical decision that M. de La Salle began to lay the foundations upon which the Society of the Brothers of the Christian Schools would be established.

The demon, who could foresee all the good that would develop from this humble beginning, spared no effort in placing obstacles in the way, especially by reminding this future founder of all the problems he had already experienced. God permitted these trials in order to strengthen him even more in his good intentions. Without his being aware of it, they undoubtedly also solidified further the Institute that had just come into being.

Confronted with all these obstacles, the servant of God was in great perplexity as to what to do. On the one hand, his ardent desire for the spiritual good of the teachers and the schools which depended on them and his own appreciation for good order and regular observance attracted him strongly to put Father Barré's advice into effect. On the other hand, he felt a great repugnance for bringing the teachers into his own home, with the result that he experienced extreme difficulty in reaching a decision. His uneasiness was increased when he considered the consequences and how much he would suffer from them. He had formerly entertained only distinguished guests known

for their social graces or noble background either in the Church or in the world. Furthermore, there were his three brothers<sup>115</sup> to consider, for whose upbringing and education he was responsible. He could foresee that their closer association with the teachers would not at all please either his relatives or his friends, who would consider this step as totally unacceptable and a cause for them of great annoyance. Such indeed was the case when he finally carried out his resolution, knowing that he would suffer much pain, especially in the beginning.<sup>116</sup>

But grace triumphed over nature, and God helped him stand firm as a stone wall against the opposition that descended on him from all quarters. God, it seems, permitted these difficulties for two reasons. First, they put to the test the good will of his relatives and strengthened their virtue. They loved this servant of God tenderly but disapproved of his project because of the troubles and fatigue they knew he would experience. Second, these difficulties served to increase the merit of the servant of God. He could not resist the power of grace that gently moved his heart to put behind him all mere natural impulses and to adopt the sentiment of Saint Paul after his conversion, who, as he says himself, no longer consulted flesh and blood when it came to the service and glory of Jesus Christ, who called him through his grace.<sup>117</sup>

All the difficulties of which we have spoken and the opposition M. de La Salle experienced by bringing the teachers into his home caused him to remain almost three months in doubt and indecision. But grace has its own time and its predetermined moment to bring everything to its proper end, and so in Holy Week of 1681 God permitted M. Nyel to go to Guise, eighteen leagues<sup>118</sup> from Reims, with the intention of beginning another school. He thought only of starting schools, without considering that in so doing he caused others to close because there was no one to sustain what he had initiated. Our devout canon did everything he could to dissuade him from making that trip, pointing out how inappropriate it was to leave five or six young teachers unsupervised during the Easter season, especially because their poor conduct and lack of solid piety would lead them to do as they please and not spend the holy season in conformity with the Church's intentions. All of M. de La Salle's arguments fell on deaf ears and could not convince M. Nyel to stay home. As soon as he left, M. de La Salle resolved to have the teachers take their meals at his home.

The teachers customarily attended daily Mass at six o'clock after their morning prayer, and M. de La Salle invited them to come afterwards to his house rather than to their own, for his was about as



close to the church as theirs. They did this and remained with him, except during school hours, from six-thirty in the morning until evening prayer, when they returned to their own house. Because certain practices already existed in our pious canon's home, such as regular hours for prayer and reading during meals, there was no need for great changes. He saw to it, first of all, that they ate in common, everyone receiving his own ration. He also provided certain regulations for each hour of the day. After eight days M. Nyel returned from Guise, where a school was eventually established a year later through the good offices both of Mademoiselle de Guise,<sup>119</sup> who provided support for two teachers, and of the city fathers, who gave a house for them to live in and to use as a school which continues to the present day.

During M. Nyel's eight-day absence, M. de La Salle became more acutely aware of the failings of several teachers, caused principally by M. Nyel's frequent absences, either on school business for which he left early in the morning and returned quite late or in frequent visits to call upon various people. This situation convinced the holy priest that M. Nyel could never bring about good order and regularity in the house or stability and dependability among the teachers.

Besides, M. de La Salle noticed that several teachers seemed more inclined to fidelity since he had invited them to his home, where everything was carefully regulated from morning to night. He thought it best to continue having the teachers come in the morning and remain with him until evening, in order to see if they could grow accustomed to being in the house with him. He wanted to observe if there would be any inconvenience in their moving in completely. If an insurmountable difficulty arose, he would have to renew the lease on the house they were using or else rent another one that had become vacant. God so caused things to work out that M. de La Salle finally decided to bring the teachers completely into his own home,<sup>120</sup> as we shall see in the following chapter.

## Chapter III

**M. de La Salle invites the teachers into his own home; his relatives object and convince two of his own brothers to leave home; the teachers choose M. de La Salle as their confessor; M. Nyel goes to Rethel.**

It is not sufficient to form good resolutions; they must be put into practice. To do otherwise would be to become like those persons spoken of by Saint James who, gazing in a mirror, immediately forget what they looked like.<sup>121</sup> But this was not the case with our man of God. His character and disposition were such that if he formed good resolutions, he put them into practice as soon as he possibly could. This is what he did when he decided to bring the teachers into his own home. In the preceding chapter we saw that his love for good order led him to invite the teachers to take their meals with him. Because he found no great problem with this, he then decided to bring them completely into his home. From the feast of Easter to that of Saint John the Baptist,<sup>122</sup> the teachers had been coming to his home for meals and remaining there all the time they were not in school. During this period the good order and regular observance found there and the instability of M. Nyel, who was always on the go, confirmed M. de La Salle's intention to bring the teachers to live in his own home. This he did on the feast of Saint John the Baptist in the year 1681. This date is noteworthy, for the saint whose name he received at baptism was his patron, and he had a particular devotion to him.<sup>123</sup> We might note too that M. Nyel also lived with the teachers.

What the holy priest had foreseen soon came to pass. As soon as six or seven teachers of little standing in a worldly sense became noticed, simply dressed in rabat and short black robe without either mantle or hood, tongues began to wag. No one spoke directly to the holy priest, in view of the people's great respect for him. His relatives and friends were quite disturbed, but because he acted completely

independently of them, even their pain, which undoubtedly he keenly felt, did not shake his resolution.

It would take a person of his courage and fortitude to remain firm in the face of so many objections and reproaches from various people who thought he was bringing dishonor upon his distinguished family. But what should have shaken him served only, it seems, to strengthen him all the more. He displayed heroic patience by listening to objections and reproaches to which he answered not a word. This is borne out in the testimony of one of his virtuous aunts, whose piety was equaled by her nobility of birth. She told a person worthy of credence that the family would gather on occasion at M. de La Salle's home to share meals and to foster their union, because he was responsible, as the eldest son, for his brothers' upbringing. This was also the custom among many other pious families. Because our man of God held the first place in the family, he had to summon all his patience during these dinners to put up with the reprimands from the entire family for the foolishness they felt he showed in taking care of the schoolteachers at the expense of his own family. On these occasions he would simply cross his arms and listen patiently to the reasons each one brought forth as to why he should change his mind, and he would not offer a single word in his own defense.

It was particularly displeasing to his relatives that there was only one table and that, therefore, his own brothers and the teachers ate together. The oldest<sup>124</sup> of his three brothers willingly followed the same regulations as the teachers, as much as his studies would allow. This brother had a great affection for John Baptist and did not want to leave him, despite the encouragement he received to follow the example of the two younger ones,<sup>125</sup> who left the house. Because he was provoked to dislike John Baptist, the older of these two<sup>126</sup> left six months after the events mentioned above to live with his brother-in-law. Some time later, the youngest brother<sup>127</sup> was also taken away to reside as a boarding student with the Canons Regular at Senlis. Thus it was that only the oldest brother did not want to leave, as we have said.

The first thing our man of God did after bringing the teachers into his home was to urge them all to choose the same confessor. This holy priest saw clearly that things would not be as orderly as he desired if there were numerous confessors. The teachers agreed with this recommendation and chose the pastor of the parish.<sup>128</sup> Although he was a good and capable man, several of the teachers were not happy with the choice because he did not understand community life. That is why John Baptist selected another priest, but he too proved

unsatisfactory to several teachers who disliked him because they had to wait for him and prepare for confession in mixed company and thus often return home quite late. That is why the more virtuous among them cited these reasons and their affection for M. de La Salle in asking him to serve as their confessor. He delayed a long time before agreeing to do so, but finally, seeing that their incessant pleas and petitions were reasonable, he accepted. Soon even those who had not asked him came of themselves to him, so that before long everyone did so. From that time he served as confessor to everyone who came to join the community. Neither he nor those he consulted found anything amiss in this. Even the confessors who came from time to time to the house did not recommend that he discontinue this practice, although he had asked them several times if they knew of any reason why he should do so.

It was doubtless a blessing of Divine Providence that M. de La Salle was, in a way, obliged to be the confessor and spiritual director of the teachers—we say “teachers,” for those men were not yet Brothers, because they did not wear the habit at this time—as well as of all subjects who entered the Institute up to the time of his death. This seems to have been important for the good of the Brothers, because experience ordinarily shows that all the good one does depends on having a good confessor. The servant of God had a remarkable talent and a special grace to be a good confessor. Because of this, all the Brothers went to him willingly as their confessor, despite the fact that it usually is uncomfortable to go to confession to one’s superior.

It was observed that those who went to M. de La Salle for confession made great progress, just as it was always noticed that most of the difficulties experienced by several Brothers could be attributed to inexperienced confessors who were otherwise men of excellent qualities.

The teachers, having chosen their confessor, as we have already mentioned, began to show marked improvement because of the regularity of life in their new home. M. Nyel stayed with them six months. He was overjoyed to see the new developments. Because he was ever on the move in his efforts to found new schools, he was gratified to see the situation in Reims becoming stabilized.

After six months, around Christmas time, our zealous canon sent M. Nyel to Rethel to look into the establishment of a school there.<sup>129</sup> M. Nyel succeeded in having the city subsidize the teachers and received some financial help from the Duke de Mazarin<sup>130</sup> and from the pastor of the parish. M. de La Salle arranged to buy the house, which is today still used by the Brothers, with the thought of setting up a

training academy for country teachers. This did not come about, although the schools themselves were begun and have continued to the present. A certain woman later endowed these schools.<sup>131</sup> M. Nyel, after having accomplished his mission in Rethel, was not to have the pleasure of living again with his benefactor. He was away for four years and so lost contact with the teachers, because from Rethel he went to Guise<sup>132</sup> and then to Laon,<sup>133</sup> where he received a house and fifty *écus* a year from the city to aid in the upkeep of the teachers. The monks of the abbey of Saint Martin and a certain other person, then pastor of Saint Pierre,<sup>134</sup> also helped out and have continued to do so to our own time.

M. Nyel looked after the three houses we have mentioned,<sup>135</sup> while M. de La Salle took charge of the one in Reims.

## Chapter IV

**Most of the teachers leave M. de La Salle; new ones arrive;  
M. de La Salle considers resigning his canonry.**

We have not had to wait for our own time to see the words of the Gospel fulfilled that many are invited but few are chosen.<sup>136</sup> From the very beginning of the Church we have seen these words fulfilled, either in those called to Christianity but who were not all saved, or even in those called to the religious life who did not profit from such a grace but often threw off the yoke that they had put on with such joy just a short time before. These returned to their former sinful manner of living, as we see especially in the beginnings of several orders where the members were noted for their great piety and mortification. This state of life was not acceptable to those living only according to natural inclinations. We read something of this in the life of Saint Ignatius, who with six companions founded his Society of Jesus in Spain<sup>137</sup> only to have everyone leave him, but when he went to Paris, God sent others to take their place.

The same sort of thing happened to M. de La Salle. Most of the teachers who originally lived with M. Nyel in the house M. de La Salle had rented for them were undisciplined and led a life of freedom incompatible with community life. They could not endure for long the well-ordered and secluded style of life envisioned for them by M. de La Salle. Because they preferred to live more freely and independently, they soon decided to leave. Several others had to be sent away, for although they were sufficiently devout, they lacked the talent and the vocation for teaching. They had been accepted originally only out of necessity. Soon, in less than ten months, an entirely new group was formed, except for one or two of the original number.

At the end of six months, toward the beginning of the year 1682, new candidates presented themselves who were apt for teaching, sufficiently devout, and disposed to living in community. It was at this

time that a true community life began to exist in the house and that what have since come to be called the *exercises*<sup>138</sup> were initiated. These are still observed today in all the Institute's houses. The teachers took a common form of dress, as we shall see, and from this time on became known as Brothers.<sup>139</sup>

M. de La Salle noticed that several teachers, from the time they first began to live in his home until the end of 1682, were tempted to leave because, as they said, they were not sure about what the future might hold for them in this form of life. The holy priest attempted to persuade them to remain and reassured them that they should abandon themselves to God, who would never fail them in their need. They in turn pointed out to him that it was easy enough for him to speak like this, for if the schools failed he could fall back upon his canonry and patrimony which would more than cover his needs.

This response showed the lack of virtue and confidence in God of these early teachers. At first this surprised their holy Superior, who did not know how to answer them but realized that there was some truth in what they were saying. God permitted this, no doubt, to lead M. de La Salle, little by little, to Gospel perfection in which he made great progress by the faithful imitation of Christ and the holy Apostles.

The holy priest thought of ways to put the teachers' minds at ease about their concern for the future of the schools. To assure more stability for the schools, he thought that the best course of action from a worldly point of view was to endow them through foundations, although in the eyes of God reliance on Providence was more fitting. M. de La Salle was dissuaded from the first course of action by the advice of Father Barré, whom he often saw on his trips from Reims to Paris.<sup>140</sup> Father Barré's recommendation was clear: the schools should not be endowed, because, as Jesus Christ had said in the Gospel, the foxes have their dens, the birds their nests, but the Son of Man has nowhere to rest his head.<sup>141</sup> We must understand the foxes to represent worldly people who are overly attached to things of the earth, the birds as standing for religious who have their own little cells, while those who work in the schools should share the same fate as the Son of Man.

M. de La Salle was convinced that he should follow the second course and trust in Providence, but this did not appeal to the Brothers, as we have already pointed out. To persuade them of what he considered the better way, our servant of God had recourse to his usual weapon, prayer. In the presence of God he seriously considered what course of action he ought to follow.

After having thought it out carefully, he was inspired by God to be the first to place himself in the hands of Providence and to trust

that the others would follow him. Because his canonry, in the Brothers' eyes, was the first thing that made it easy for him to speak of Providence, he decided to abandon that office.

It also seemed to M. de La Salle that he could not give himself completely to the schools and to the Brothers' direction if he continued with the duties of his canonry, which demanded five or six hours of his time every day reciting the office in choir. In this connection we should not forget that he had been encouraged five or six years previously to resign his canonry in order to take charge of the parish of Mézières in the diocese of Reims. In fact, he had discontinued his duties as canon for a considerable time to serve as pastor there.<sup>142</sup> But he did not feel called by God to be a pastor and left this position, in agreement with the former pastor and with the archbishop's endorsement.

From this time on, also, he considered resigning his canonry, for he did not see himself called to the life of a canon. He took no action, however, in spite of his feelings, because he believed that he ought to remain where it seemed God had placed him. He did not want to abandon the canonry until it was clear that God was calling him elsewhere. Thus it was that this holy priest, enlightened from above, advanced step by step to embrace the poverty of Jesus Christ, who calls upon us to leave all things to follow him.<sup>143</sup>



## Chapter V

### **M. de La Salle resigns his canonry; the objections raised against this and how he overcame them.**

Toward the end of the year 1682 it seemed evident to M. de La Salle that God was calling him to take charge of the schools. He was aware that he ought to be the first at the exercises he had prescribed in the house, as an example to those for whom they were intended, but this was impossible if at the same time he was to fulfill scrupulously his duties as a canon, which his spiritual director<sup>144</sup> insisted he should.

All of this convinced M. de La Salle that he should resign his canonry. He proposed this to his spiritual director, who found difficulty with the suggestion. It happened that M. de La Salle made a trip to Paris about this time and consulted several people, some of whom approved of his proposal while others were opposed.<sup>145</sup> However, the Minim, Father Barré, founder of the charitable schools for girls called Schools of the Holy Infant Jesus, who at that time, as we have already mentioned, lived in the convent at the Place Royale, strongly advised M. de La Salle to resign his canonry and come to Paris, where he foresaw that God would use him to found schools for boys. He went so far as to predict that he himself would not die before he had seen a certain number of Brothers in Paris. This proved to be true. This priest was a man most zealous for the salvation of souls, which explains his having started the schools for girls, as we have already said. However, by order of his superiors he was obliged, ten years before his holy death, to moderate his zeal and to live in retirement with no further involvement with schools.

This holy religious suggested that M. de La Salle himself propose to the archbishop<sup>146</sup> his successor as canon. After having sought the advice of others, a practice he followed in these early stages and continued throughout his life, M. de La Salle went a second time to his spiritual director to indicate his decision but could not obtain his approval. Far

from being discouraged by this refusal, our holy servant of God continued to present to his spiritual director all the reasons why he should allow him to go ahead with his plan. This situation lasted, not for a day or so, but for nine or ten months. It was only after a cleric living with M. de La Salle pointed out to his spiritual director the incompatibility between M. de La Salle's obligations to the schools and his duties as canon that his director relented and allowed him to divest himself of his canonry in July 1683.<sup>147</sup>

The fervent minister of God was overjoyed at finally obtaining the authorization he had so long desired. He left Reims for Paris, so that he could place his resignation directly in the hands of his archbishop, who was in the capital at that moment. However, he was unable to see the archbishop, who had left Paris to return to Reims.

On all his trips to Paris our servant of God stayed at the Saint Sulpice seminary, where he was always welcomed with great manifestations of affection because of the example he gave in the house by his piety and regular observance. During his stay in Paris he met with the good pastor of Saint Sulpice, M. de La Barmondière,<sup>148</sup> and promised to send him two Brothers to conduct his parish school and to see to this as soon as possible. But the time was not yet ripe, and not until six or seven years later would he be able to keep his promise.<sup>149</sup>

The archbishop having returned to Reims, our holy priest went to see him on the same matter that had taken him to Paris. When M. de La Salle presented himself, the prelate was reluctant to receive him, for although he had a high regard for him, he feared that the priest would probably bring up something disagreeable, especially the subject of his resignation from the canonry, about which he had already heard some reports.

Inasmuch as M. de La Salle sought only to fulfill God's will and wished to do nothing without serious reflection and only after receiving the advice of as many people as possible so as not to deceive himself, he spoke again to several other persons in whom he had confidence. He met with M. Philbert, one of the superiors of the seminary at Reims and later the *Grand Chantre* of the cathedral church of that same city, whom our man of God knew well.<sup>150</sup> M. Philbert approved of his plan and suggested that he again go to Paris.

On the eve of the day the archbishop was to leave Reims for Paris, M. de La Salle, who until then had been unable to speak to him, thought of how he might do so. Before going to see the archbishop, he visited the cathedral to pray before the Blessed Sacrament. He remained motionless in prayer for several hours, disposing himself to complete abandonment to the will of God, praying that God's will

be done and not his own. We should not overlook what was said in praise of him as he poured out his heart to God. A certain woman, seeing him so pensive and downcast because of the pain caused by his decision to abandon his canonry, was moved with pity for him and said to a friend that he was losing spirit and should be prayed for in his troubled state. Her friend, with a higher view and a better appreciation of the virtue of the servant of God, said that it was true that M. de La Salle had lost spirit, but it was the spirit of the world that he had forsaken.

After his prayer M. de La Salle was led by God to find a way to speak to the archbishop before his departure. He presented his plan of resigning his canonry and of going to Paris, but was immediately asked if he had consulted anyone. He answered that he had spoken to M. Philbert and received his approval. On the spot the archbishop sent for M. Philbert, who was reciting the Divine Office in choir, to ask if he had counseled M. de La Salle to resign his position as canon and go to Paris. M. Philbert did not deny it but said that he had only suggested that the canonry could be passed on to M. de La Salle's own brother.<sup>151</sup> The archbishop replied that he might give it to whomsoever he wished. This reply pleased our holy priest, for he saw in it an approval of his plan to bestow the canonry upon a stranger<sup>152</sup> rather than upon his own brother, thus following the call of the Gospel<sup>153</sup> which so inspired him at this time. The archbishop made M. de La Salle's happiness complete by agreeing to his resignation; he signed the papers that same evening.

As he indicated to several people, the archbishop was not happy to lose the services of such a priest, but he did not let M. de La Salle know this. He recognized how determined M. de La Salle was and that nothing he could say would change his mind. God permitted this so that M. de La Salle would encounter fewer obstacles in carrying out the difficult step of giving up a considerable benefice and, like another Abraham,<sup>154</sup> of leaving the place of his birth. Thus deprived of all natural resources, he could make greater progress along the way of virtue and follow our Lord, who had nothing.

The joy felt by the servant of God over leaving the canonry was so great that when he returned from the archbishop's palace, he had the Brothers join him in their oratory in singing a *Te Deum*.<sup>155</sup> He saw himself released from a responsibility in which he felt of little use to the Church. Thus he was following the example of Saint Dominic,<sup>156</sup> as he says in his meditation for the feast of this saint,<sup>157</sup> as well as that of Saint Bruno,<sup>158</sup> also a canon of Reims, who resigned to become a Carthusian monk in a monastery near Grenoble.<sup>159</sup>

At the same time that he presented his resignation to the archbishop, M. de La Salle suggested a successor: M. Faubert, from Château-Porcien, a zealous priest who made up in spiritual gifts what he lacked in material things.<sup>160</sup> His numerous and fervent sermons in many different churches had marvelous results. M. de La Salle thought that by giving M. Faubert the benefice, he would enable him to continue the fine work he was doing.

But honors often change behavior, and M. Faubert little by little lost his zeal and soon ceased preaching. This led M. de La Salle to acknowledge that if he had known how things were to turn out, he never would have given over his canonry to him.

At the time our servant of God first spoke to the archbishop about his successor, De La Salle had not yet said a word to M. Faubert, who was surprised, then, when the archbishop summoned him, spoke briefly with him, and announced that the superior<sup>161</sup> of the seminary would deliver the formal appointment to him. Faubert had not expected this at all. M. de La Salle's choice of this priest did not please the archbishop, who was astonished that M. de La Salle had not resigned in favor of his own brother, a cleric in training who had begun to wear the ecclesiastical habit. M. de La Salle answered that no one had recommended this to him.

M. de La Salle's detachment would be rewarded. Upon the death of one of the canons several years later, the archbishop conferred the position upon M. de La Salle's brother.<sup>162</sup> No steps had been taken to secure the benefice for him, nor had anyone suggested this, even though several other persons had sought the honor. The archbishop was happy to state in the presence of several people that he was making up for M. de La Salle's foolishness in not having appointed his brother to succeed him.

What disposed the archbishop toward M. de La Salle's brother was undoubtedly the recommendation of M. Philbert, who accompanied M. de La Salle to Paris the day following the resignation.<sup>163</sup> M. Philbert used the occasion to urge him again to give the canonry to his brother, for M. Philbert had not yet sent the official papers to M. Faubert. He had even written to the superior of the seminary to have him use his influence in favor of the appointment of M. de La Salle's brother. Our holy priest replied that if he were ordered to choose his brother over the one he had already selected—if, indeed, this were not his brother—he was ready to follow the desires of the superior. The holy superior was so impressed by this disinterested response which showed the spirit that motivated M. de La Salle that he no longer insisted on M. Philbert's position and, in fact, advised against it.

He, too, was a man of God, zealous for God's glory as much as he could be. This man we speak of was the distinguished M. Callou,<sup>164</sup> whose memory is still revered in several dioceses of France, especially Reims, where his zeal was particularly well known. The archbishop, in fact, had turned to him for help in the reformation of his clergy who were in disarray when he came to his see, which had been vacant for almost thirty years.<sup>165</sup>

M. de La Salle was happy to learn of the will of Divine Providence through M. Callou's advice, which led to the successful outcome of his effort to resign his canonry. He immediately wrote to the archbishop about what he had told the superior of the seminary and the response he had received, whereupon the archbishop sent the appointment to M. Faubert, as had been suggested by our servant of God. Thus he was relieved of his duties as canon the day after the Assumption of our Blessed Mother of God in the year 1683.<sup>166</sup>

Just as the choice of M. Faubert as M. de La Salle's successor displeased the archbishop—and he made M. de La Salle aware of his discontent—so too the canons of the cathedral were no less disturbed. They spoke of their chagrin in several meetings, to various people, and even to M. de La Salle, who remained as unmoved as a stone.

M. de La Salle's relatives and friends were more outspoken, accusing him of hardness of heart for not passing on his canonry to one of his own brothers. These and other reproaches to which he was subjected because of this matter made no impression on him, and he remained steadfast in his resolution.

## Chapter VI

**M. de La Salle plans to move to Paris; his spiritual director advises against this; his activities in Reims; his abandonment to Divine Providence; he distributes his patrimony to the poor; the dedication of the first Brothers and the edifying deaths of several among them.**

Our holy priest, having promised M. de La Barmondière, pastor of Saint Sulpice, two Brothers to teach in the schools of his parish and even to come himself, sought ways to fulfill this promise after his resignation from the canonry. He had already spoken of it to his spiritual director,<sup>167</sup> and he again brought up the question, only to have the director advise against the move. The director pointed out that the Brothers' community in Reims was not yet sufficiently stable for M. de La Salle to leave it, and he counseled that for the time being he should remain in Reims. As a man of obedience, M. de La Salle heard the voice of God in this advice and thought no more of leaving Reims. He abandoned himself to Divine Providence and put off his plans, which were not to be fulfilled until some years later. He wrote to M. Epagnol,<sup>168</sup> then charged with the charity schools of Saint Sulpice parish, to let him know that he had been counselled against going to Paris and that he would follow that advice. He expressed the hope that this news would not be too disappointing. In fact, however, it was, for both M. Epagnol and the pastor of Saint Sulpice were most desirous of receiving him and two Brothers in order to enjoy the same benefits in their parish that were so appreciated in the city of Reims.

The one who experienced the most regret at these developments was Father Barré. He expressed his disappointment to several people when he learned that M. de La Salle was not coming to Paris. It seemed that Divine Providence did not allow M. de La Salle to come to Paris at this time so that the servant of God could solidify his new Institute and show forth heroic virtue. Chief among these virtues was

his detachment from worldly goods, which was so evident. Not being satisfied with leaving the canonry, he now took the initiative to dispose of his patrimony in favor of the poor, following the precept our Savior Jesus Christ had given to his Apostles and to all those who wish to follow him: sell all that you have and give to the poor.<sup>169</sup> This is what the Apostles did and, after them, all the saints who have worked for the salvation of souls.

The occasion brought about by God which led M. de La Salle to dispose of his patrimony was, as we said in Chapter IV of Part Two of this book, the complaint of the Brothers who threatened to leave the community because of the lack of security for the future. He felt obliged to show by example what he stressed, namely, that they should abandon themselves to Divine Providence. His uncertainty was over the question as to whether or not he should endow the schools with his patrimony. On the one hand, Father Barré strongly dissuaded him from doing so. Such unpopular advice, given in writing, especially coming from one of such reputation for holiness, made its impression upon him.

On the other hand, M. Roland's case was different, for he had endowed his schools for girls. M. de La Salle did not know which course to follow. In this perplexity he adopted the plan which was to be his all the rest of his life. He abandoned himself to God with this short, simple, but fervent prayer:

My God, I do not know whether to endow these schools or not. It is not up to me but to you to establish and maintain a community of teachers. You alone are aware of how to bring this about in the manner most pleasing to you. I dare not endow the schools, for I do not know your will, nor shall I take any steps to found our houses. If you support them, they shall be well supported, but if you do not, they shall remain without support. I pray thee, my God, to manifest your will in this regard.

Such a fervent and disinterested prayer could not go unanswered. From this moment on, aware of his servant's holiness, God inspired him to total abandonment without reserve. Henceforth, every school M. de La Salle opened was placed in the care of Providence. Both he and his Brothers were convinced that as long as they were committed to the service of God and neighbor, God would never fail them in their need. One day, to bring home to them what he had been saying about the Gospel passage where Jesus Christ had said, "Seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these other things will be given to you besides,"<sup>170</sup> he urged them to be grateful to God for

Divine Providence. “Thanks be to God, my Brothers, for although we are without funds or income, we owe nothing to anyone, despite two bad years of high costs. Some other religious houses have been ruined, even though they were well endowed, and have been obliged to borrow or to sell their property in order to survive.”

This man of God always remained trusting in Divine Providence, which never failed him in the course of this life, as we shall see. Being in this state of holiness, M. de La Salle made it a duty to report to his spiritual director, who—aware of his true poverty of spirit—agreed that he should use his worldly goods to help the poor. He was disposed to follow his director’s advice exactly: to give away his patrimony either completely, or in part, or not at all, whichever his director thought best. He said in so many words that if advised to keep something back, even five *sols*,<sup>171</sup> he would do so. During the later distribution of his worldly goods, he was guided by this spiritual director’s counsel.

All of this behavior showed the holy priest’s detachment and his total indifference towards affluence or poverty, as permitted by God. At the same time, it demonstrated the great respect he had for his director, whom he regarded as speaking in God’s name.

In 1685 M. de La Salle began distributing his wealth to the poor.<sup>172</sup> This timing was most fortuitous, for in that particular year there was a big increase in the price of food. Ecclesiastics living with him at the time assisted him in distributing bread both to the poor and to the boys and girls in the schools. He had the poor, both men and women, come to his door at different times. He first had them instructed in their spiritual duties and then looked to their bodily needs. He himself would often take part in their instruction. He continued this charity for a considerable time, until little remained of his earthly goods.

Each day M. de La Salle’s distribution of bread to the poor cost about 100 *pistoles*.<sup>173</sup> In addition, he gave alms to certain people whose poverty and pressing needs moved him to pity. On the advice of his director and some intimate friends, he did hold back a personal income of 200 *livres*,<sup>174</sup> so as not to tempt Providence. He used this money to provide funds for the long trips he took, to purchase books for himself and the community library, and to use for some other religious purpose, such as for church furnishings, sacred vessels, or priestly vestments—all matters in which he was deeply interested. Thus it was that the pious servant of God despoiled himself of everything to follow Jesus Christ, poor and destitute, and to be free to pursue his own sanctification and that of others. He carried this out with much zeal and regularity.



After having brought the Brothers to his father's home, as we have said, he remained there only a short time. He rented a house opposite Saint Claire, where the Brothers remain to this day.<sup>175</sup> It was later purchased for the Brothers by friends of the servant of God who were much impressed by the good work being done in the schools he had established. It was into this house that he and the Brothers moved, accompanied likewise by several devout priests who had been living with them.

In this house, freed from all temporal care of his family, especially of his own brothers, M. de La Salle enjoyed the benefit of the solitude he had so long desired. He lived the common life of the Brothers of his Institute and of the priests who were with them, all seemingly motivated to emulate the mortifications he practiced. The servant of God appeared ready to destroy his innocent body by his mortifications and by the instruments of discipline he used. Five or six of these iron instruments, fearful to behold, may still be seen in this house; one even has iron points. There are also metal belts and hairshirts which he used to dominate his delicate body.

The Brothers were already inspired each day by their Founder's example, especially by his detachment from worldly honors and temporal goods. They now sought to imitate him in his mortifications, but with the caution not to carry these so far as to make themselves unfit for their school duties. Despite his counsel, he had difficulty moderating their penance, such was their desire to walk in his footsteps. In fact, several among them were incapacitated for a while because of their excessive zeal in these matters.

Far from being influenced by what people thought of them, they became even more fervent. The novelty of their life and work, together with their simple clothes, attracted much abuse from the common people, but this did not deter them. Even the stones occasionally thrown at them were regarded simply as tests of their patience, for they accepted all abuse out of love for him who had called them to this form of life. Far from being disheartened by all these difficulties, the holy Founder rejoiced with his fervent disciples that, like the Apostles, they could consider themselves happy to be able to suffer something for the love of Jesus Christ.<sup>176</sup>

The desire of the first Brothers for mortification and self-abnegation was so great that one of them, a Brother named Bourlette<sup>177</sup> of a worthy family of Reims, one day asked M. de La Salle permission to go into the streets wearing a red jacket to show his contempt for the values of the world there in his own town. He would surely have done so if the Founder had not refused his request. His father was not

at all pleased that his son lived in a community that the people regarded so poorly. Even after the Brother was sent to Laon, his father persisted in his efforts to bring him home. Neither the father's tears nor his entreaties were successful, for his son finally died in this newly founded house, mourned by all because of his heroic virtue and universally regarded as a saint.

Several days before young Bourlette took to his bed, the pastor of the parish made a visit to the school and found him presiding over two classes, for his fellow teacher was ill. Desirous to safeguard the young Brother's health, the pastor suggested that he send the students home for a few days. The Brother declined respectfully, observing that he had one foot in one class, the other in a second class, his heart in heaven, and his mind with the sick confrère.<sup>178</sup> Another Brother died a short while before this, so enamored of a blissful eternity that he sang aloud of the call of eternal love as he expired in the arms of our man of God. A third Brother died on the first day of May, refusing to follow the advice of his doctor to return home, even after having received his holy Superior's permission to do so. Finally, a fourth Brother shortly thereafter left this earth in extraordinary sentiments of devotion to join the group of intercessors before the throne of God in prayer for the new Institute. Those who remained were a great consolation to the Society.

## Chapter VII

**M. de La Salle is criticized for his withdrawal from the world; he teaches class and instructs his Brothers on the manner of caring for their students; he takes charge of the schools started by M. Nyel, who dies shortly thereafter; he regulates the way the Brothers are to dress; the death of Father Barré.**

M. de La Salle, that saintly man, detached as he was from everything of the world, dedicated himself to the practice of all virtues. Separated from the world, he devoted a good part of the day and night to vocal and interior prayer, using for this purpose the topmost place in the house, as did Saint Ignatius of Loyola before him. So as not to be disturbed at prayer by those who wanted to speak with him, he chose a tiny room that could only accommodate a single person. There he would give himself over to prayer without interruption and without being seen by anyone. He found it painful to leave the room whenever called away to consult with someone. It was even difficult to have him come out to take his meals, such was the delight he took in his conversation with God.

M. de La Salle had such a love of solitude that visiting became quite distasteful for him, and thus he rarely went out. When obliged to make visits, he kept them brief, fearing that long conversations would merely cause him to lose taste for his encounters with God in prayer. In order to give an example to the Brothers of the community, he did not go out for meals, not even to his relatives' homes, despite their insistence. He later made this a matter of Rule, which he himself strictly observed for the rest of his life.

This extraordinary and unexpected behavior of the servant of God was not appreciated by some of his friends, but their frequent reproaches did not succeed in making him abandon his good resolutions. He became all the more faithful to his resolve, and this so surprised those who criticized him that they later came to admire him.

Our holy priest, desiring to acquire ever more the perfection that he felt God was demanding of him, devoted himself to everything that could lead to the practice of virtue. Divine Providence was soon to provide the opportunity for him to cultivate many virtues. When several of the Brothers died and few arrived to take their place, God undoubtedly allowed this so that the new Founder would personally experience all the duties the Brothers of the Institute would be called upon to fulfill. Because of the lack of subjects, he had to teach classes at the Saint Jacques school for a considerable length of time. On Sundays and feasts he went to the parish Mass with the students. After having taught them catechism, he would take them to Vespers. He looked after them carefully in the streets and in church, placing himself in a spot where he could observe them easily. He did all this with such simplicity and humility that he edified all who saw him. These persons were even more impressed to see him—dressed with a short cloak over his soutane and wearing a large hat and heavy shoes—coming and going four times a day in the company of a simple Brother, without worrying about what people might think or say.

M. de La Salle was careful to insist that the students observe all points of good order, even those which seemed of lesser consequence. He was particularly concerned that the students be orderly in going to Mass, and he wanted the Brothers to do the same. He let this be known to a Brother some years later when, on a visit from Paris to Reims to visit the Brothers in the community there, he stopped by the school of Saint Jacques. He waited to see the children leaving school for the church and noticed that the Brother in charge did not have them observe the order that he himself had insisted upon. He pointed out to the Brother how, when he had taught in this school, he saw to it that the students took a longer way around to ensure better order. He showed the Brother how he did this and the route he had the students take. These few words show his care for correct behavior, his love for order, and his profound humility.

It seemed that one of his own brothers<sup>179</sup> was moved to imitate the zeal and humility of our holy priest in his work in the schools. He readily agreed, at the price of interrupting his course of study, to go to Guise to work in the schools there with M. Nyel. Not only did M. de La Salle himself teach school at Reims, but he also did so in Paris and elsewhere, as we shall see in the third part of this work.

Some time after, M. Nyel, desirous of returning to Rouen, left the school at Laon where he then was and went to Reims repeatedly to persuade M. de La Salle to assume in his place the responsibility for the schools of Guise and Laon. He saw clearly that God had endowed

this virtuous priest with the wisdom and prudence needed for the guidance of his new Institute, and he witnessed the many blessings bestowed by God on his faithful servant's work.

M. de La Salle was slow to respond to this request, for he was not persuaded that God wished to make use of him to multiply the houses of the Institute. Besides, he was careful not to take on too many extra duties, for these would deprive him of the leisure to pursue his two great loves, namely, interior prayer and solitude.

Not being able to persuade M. de La Salle himself, M. Nyel used the good offices of the pastor of Saint Pierre in Laon,<sup>180</sup> who urged our servant of God to take over the schools of Laon and Guise. At the insistence of the virtuous pastor and because of his great regard for him, M. de La Salle agreed.<sup>181</sup> The pastor, for his part, had no less regard for M. de La Salle and expressed this in writing after the Founder's death.

The holy priest thus found himself charged with the operation of these two schools. He sent Brothers to conduct them, and they have remained there to this day. M. Nyel, meanwhile, saw that everything had worked out as he had hoped and in good order. Filled with joy, he felt he could repeat with the elderly Simeon, "Now, Master, you may let your servant go in peace,"<sup>182</sup> because I have seen him whom you have called to work for the salvation of souls through the education of youth."

This zealous man then left for Rouen, his place of birth. He died soon after, enjoying a reputation for sanctity, having given his life to the education of youth, the practice of virtue, and detachment from things of this world.<sup>183</sup> It can be said that God made use of him to start the Institute of the Brothers of the Christian Schools, inasmuch as he persuaded M. de La Salle to devote himself to something he had never before considered. M. Nyel was gifted with all the good qualities that can be found in the simple layman that he was.

Our virtuous priest, having learned of M. Nyel's death, expressed his sorrow and had prayers offered for the repose of his soul. He prayed for M. Nyel in private and in public and had the church of the orphanage draped in mourning. He himself celebrated a solemn Mass at which he requested all the Brothers to receive Communion for the deceased's intention. He wanted them to have all their students present, and they participated at the Mass with much fervor and recollection.

Some time after this pious man's death, M. de La Salle found himself pressured by a number of people, including the mayor of the city of Reims, to provide a mantle for the Brothers' use. Up to that time,

they simply wore a short black robe, a rabat, and a large hat. As it was then the custom to wear hats with large brims, the Brothers adopted a still larger one so as not to conform to the present age, as the Apostle says.<sup>184</sup> This drew upon them the mockery and derision of the people. What finally convinced M. de La Salle to allow the mantle was the insistent wish of the Brothers themselves to have a habit that would clearly set them apart from people of the world. The holy Superior, happy to see the will of God made known by the counsel of so many persons, had mantles with sleeves made for them. These mantles, in common usage at that time, were called *capotes*, a name still employed. He also had robes made with the same rough material, coarse serge, and they were worn just as they still are today.<sup>185</sup> The pastors and bishops who invited the Brothers of the Christian Schools into their parishes and dioceses were pleased with this simple and humble habit.

But not everyone thinks alike. God allowed an influential person<sup>186</sup> to disturb M. de La Salle's peace of mind by objecting to the clothing worn by the Brothers. This controversy, which happened in Paris two years after the Brothers had arrived there, caused considerable difficulty. This person wanted the Brothers to wear a long ecclesiastical mantle, something M. de La Salle strongly opposed as being contrary to his views and intentions and a subject of consternation in all the Institute's houses. Providence permitted these difficulties in order to demonstrate the patience and steadfastness of M. de La Salle, who spared neither prayer nor mortifications to have God bring about a change of heart in those who were causing the difficulties.

At the same time, M. de La Salle, wishing to show that his opposition to any change in the Brothers' habit was well founded, put into writing<sup>187</sup> his reasons, so convincingly and forcefully that it would be almost impossible for a person of good will to find fault with them. He showed the document to his spiritual directors and to the superiors of the Saint Sulpice seminary, who strongly approved of his position. He was thus confirmed in his resolution to maintain the Brothers' habit in its original form. We do not think it necessary to repeat here what he wrote, for not only are the reasons too numerous, but what we have already said is enough to show his determination to stand by his decision on the advice of wise and prudent counselors.

Before all these events happened in Paris, where the Brothers were not yet established, M. de La Salle was distressed to learn of the death of Father Barré, who died on May 31, 1686.<sup>188</sup> This holy religious, advanced in age and merit, died in his Order's house located on the Place Royale in Paris. He was mourned by all who knew him,



Three Brothers walking in front of a cathedral. Photo of an undocumented engraving by E. Rousset (La Sallian Studies collection, B23).

especially by our servant of God, who had a particular regard for him and whom he consulted frequently in his undertakings and difficulties. God seemed pleased at the detachment of the one who sought counsel and of the one who counseled and poured out blessings upon both the one and the other.



## Chapter VIII

**M. de La Salle regulates the use of food for the Brothers of the community; the personal sacrifice he makes to be faithful to this Rule; the Brothers come together to pronounce vows; M. de La Salle steps down as Superior but is forced to reassume this charge.**

After having determined the style of dress of the Brothers in his Institute, M. de La Salle turned his attention to other matters essential to the good order of a community. First, there was the question of regulating those practices the Brothers should observe concerning their meals. He excluded all delicacies, serving only food from the local shops and vegetables alone on Fridays, Saturdays, and fast days. Initially he had great difficulty accommodating himself to this diet so contrary to his refined disposition, and he was repelled at the sight of soup made of salt pork. Because he could not retain this food, he was forced to eat items other than what the Brothers had, much as he disliked doing so. This situation did not last long, for he waged an internal war to force himself to conform to community usage, despite his natural repugnance and discomfort.

At first he had great difficulty doing so, but gradually he overcame himself to the extent that he grew accustomed to eating what was presented and finally became indifferent to what was served, however coarse or badly prepared it might be. The best way he found to achieve this result was to go a long time without eating, so that he would find palatable whatever was served. As he says himself in the book he wrote on Christian civility and politeness,<sup>189</sup> hunger makes all food taste good. To overcome more and more his repugnance, he went so far as to swallow what he normally would not be able to eat and what he would readily have thrown on the ground. These mortifications were not in vain. It seemed that God saw to it that he was no longer served food repugnant to him, or rather that he had so con-

quered his sense of taste that food which should have been intolerable seemed to have changed into something he could bear, as we shall see in the following episode.

One day the Brother cook, not an expert in the field, mistakenly put some absinthe<sup>190</sup> in the food. The Brothers could not eat it because it was so bitter. The man of God was surprised at the Brothers' refusal, and at the end of the meal he inquired as to why they had not eaten as usual. They asked if he had not tasted the bitterness in his food. He replied that he had eaten as usual and had not been aware of the bitterness of which they spoke. On other occasions he was so attentive to the reading done at table that he seemed oblivious to the taste of what was served.

After taking care of matters having to do with food, M. de La Salle considered the topic of the stability of the Brothers, both those already in the Institute and those who would be entering. In view of this he called the Brothers into retreat on Pentecost Day, 1687,<sup>191</sup> a practice observed in the Institute ever since. On that holy day these newest successors of the Apostles, in their zeal and poverty, disposed themselves to attract the graces of the Holy Spirit necessary for them if they were to overcome the obstacles to their vocation and accomplish any lasting good. These graces were particularly necessary to support courageously the opposition of the world and of hell to the good work in which they were engaged.

They were in the same disposition as the Apostles on the day of Pentecost, and they were also filled with the Holy Spirit,<sup>192</sup> as seen in their determination to consecrate themselves entirely to God by the vows of obedience and chastity. Before deciding on this step, they discussed together whether they should make the vow of chastity, as a few proposed, and if so, whether it should be for life or for a limited time only. As can easily be imagined, the man of God was hesitant about their making a perpetual vow of obedience so soon, and still more so, a perpetual vow of chastity. He advised less haste in the matter, saying that they should first ascertain for a time if this was really the will of God for them. Having heard their Superior's observations, the Brothers restrained the ardor of their first fervor and pronounced only the vow of obedience, and this for a single year.<sup>193</sup> This event occurred on the feast of Trinity Sunday, a day that has since been observed as the principal feast of the Brothers of the Christian Schools.

Their retreat lasted from Pentecost Sunday to Trinity Sunday, and they renewed their vow on this day until the year 1694, when the servant of God judged that God's will was for the Brothers to make the

perpetual vow of obedience, which they did.<sup>194</sup> He himself was the first to do so, aloud, in the Brothers' oratory following the Mass which he celebrated and at which all the Brothers received Communion. He was followed by each of the Brothers in turn, to the great consolation of everyone, both the holy Superior and his fervent disciples, as we shall relate later.

Some time after the Brothers had made annual vows but before they made perpetual vows, the holy priest, through humility and love for obedience, called together the principal Brothers of Reims and of the three other houses that had recently been founded.<sup>195</sup> This second assembly was held in 1687. After making an eight-day retreat with them, M. de La Salle expressed his conviction that one of their number, a Brother, should become the Superior of the Institute. The Brothers could not object to the good reasons put forward by M. de La Salle and agreed quite simply to everything he asked. They reflected on who among them might be able to fill this office, and the choice finally came down to Brother Henry l'Heureux, a wise man filled with the Spirit of God.<sup>196</sup> One of the first to join the Institute, he had become one of the holiest of all the Brothers, as we shall see later. He accepted his election with both simplicity and humility, to the joy of the Founder, who had such a high regard for this virtuous Brother.

Our holy priest submitted himself so humbly and respectfully to this simple Brother that all witnesses were filled with admiration. His good example encouraged the most lax to fervor and the more fervent to walk further along the path of virtue. Brother Henry l'Heureux was embarrassed at M. de La Salle's profound humility and great fidelity to the Rule. He was in constant admiration of the Founder's care to be the first at the exercises, of his faithfulness to the least regulation of the house, and of his love for holy obedience. It was evident that the holy priest would do nothing without having first obtained permission from the new Superior. He would not even leave the house to say his Mass without seeking permission. He offered to take his turn at cleaning parts of the house, and this was no mere formality, unlike what so often happens these days when the offer is made with the expectation that it will be refused or not carried through when the opportunity presents itself. It was not this way with the servant of God; if he offered to perform some menial and humiliating task, he immediately looked for an occasion to carry it out, as can be seen in the following example.

Once, while the Brothers were at recreation following their meal, M. de La Salle overheard someone remind the Brother Superior that a particularly repulsive part of the house needed cleaning. Immediately

this truly humble man offered to attend to the matter. Believing he had obtained permission to do so, M. de La Salle went at once for the necessary supplies and had these in hand, ready to perform such a vile task, when the Brother Superior happened to meet him. Brother Henry respectfully pointed out that no one had authorized him to take care of something so beneath his dignity, and he requested him not to do so. The obedience of this great servant of God deprived him of the advantage he thought of procuring from the humility he was about to practice. With much regret he left off at once what he had begun with such joy. We can see by this example how genuine and solid his virtue was, and as we earlier remarked, how practical rather than merely speculative.

Up to this point there was no written Rule among the Brothers. It seems that none was needed, for the Rule was supplied by the continued example of virtue given by this holy man. M. de La Salle was, I say, their living Rule; the Rule composed later was simply a written expression of what he had practiced all along.<sup>197</sup> If in this Rule he demands a great submission, it is because throughout his life M. de La Salle had a high regard for what Saint Augustine called the most important virtue he knew, namely, obedience. M. de La Salle spared nothing to impress upon his Brothers a love of this virtue which he regarded as the support of his communities. If he prescribed so many regulations concerning good order, it was because he always had such a high regard for regular observance and endeavored to inspire his Brothers with that same spirit. But let us allow this man of God to speak for himself, in order to see the love he had for these two virtues. His words are more convincing than anything that we might say. Here is what he wrote to a woman religious whom he had for a long time counseled by letters. We will quote only several passages, for it would take up far too much space to present them all. This is what he says:

It is only through obedience and total submission for the love of God that you will draw down on yourself the graces of our Lord. In order to do God's will, practice obedience with total interior submission to the Spirit of our Lord who dwells in those who take his place. Adore the Spirit by whose inspiration you must allow yourself to be led in all you do.

Be faithful to ask permission for the slightest exemptions without listening to the arguments of self-will. Human nature craves nothing more than to shake off the yoke of obedience. It is natural to find no difficulty in doing what we like to do, but doing only what agrees with our inclinations is not obedience.

To carry out commands without discussion, no matter how opposed they are to our feelings and inclinations, is true obedience. For our obedience to be pure, we must act through the spirit of faith. We must not examine the reasons or the purposes behind the commands we are given but rather stifle all questioning and all objections.

Simply obey the commands you are given; that is how you must act from now on. Know that once you call upon reason as the basis for your compliance, you are no longer acting through obedience. What perfection is there in being ready to do only what pleases you? Be more perfect, my dear Sister, and let there be no reasoning about what you are told to do nor about who gives you the orders. In God's sight everything is good when seasoned by obedience.<sup>198</sup>

From what has been said, it is easy to understand what motivated this holy priest who showed such submission and dependence. But let us see his high regard for regular observance from a few of his own words in what he wrote to this same Sister.

You should be guided in what you do by your rules, not by the example of those who transgress them. If you have read thoroughly the work of the Abbot of La Trappe,<sup>199</sup> you surely have realized that it is not to make oneself noticed that one observes the rules in a community in which several others do not do so. Let people think what they wish of you and do not be troubled, provided that you are doing what you ought.

Regard yourself as a novice and act as a fervent one in the matter of faithful observance. From now on, look on your rules as an application for you of what is contained in the Gospels. Observe them as such. The spirit of faith will lead you to these sentiments and actions.

Remember that those who neglect small things fall into great faults. Keep your rules and daily regulations as your essential occupation. This will be worth more than working miracles.<sup>200</sup>

If, according to the Gospel, the just one can draw from the heart's treasure both the new and the old,<sup>201</sup> may we not say that our man of God is this prudent servant, able to draw from his heart such salutary instructions for those who wish to put them into practice? What M. de La Salle wrote to this Sister was also his constant advice to the Brothers: as long as they were faithful to the Rule they would persevere in piety and in their vocation and produce great fruit in their ministry, because God would bless them.

The saintly M. de La Salle was not content to edify his Brothers only by submission and regularity. He continually practiced the virtue of humility, going so far as to kiss their feet, to ask pardon for any offenses, and to serve one and all in every situation. He could be seen at Brother Superior's feet, accusing himself of faults and asking for a penance. If he acted humbly before the Brothers, he did not do less when his friends came to visit him, for he let them know that he could not speak with them until he had first obtained permission to do so. This happened one day on the occasion of a visit by several of his friends who were canons. They noticed to their great astonishment that he would not converse with them until he had first received authorization.

These canons were not the only ones who witnessed his humility. On another occasion others went to visit him and found him by chance in the house. As they came forward to greet him, he excused himself to obtain permission to speak with them. He quickly returned to converse with them, and those who were his close friends complained bitterly about this manner of acting, saying that a doctor of theology—not to mention a priest—should not have to submit himself to a simple Brother. The only response of our servant of God to this was a gentle smile. This incident became known in town. Some people complained to the church authorities about this behavior of M. de La Salle, saying that in acting thus he was bringing shame upon his dignity as a priest. This explains why he was obliged, to his great regret, to resume the office of Superior which he had left with so much joy. The Brothers and, above all, Brother Henry l'Heureux were pleased, for they were ill at ease at the way the holy priest so humbled himself.

Perhaps an explanation of the opposition of some to M. de La Salle lies in the fact that his humility exposed their pride. We will show later how mistaken they were to condemn the conduct of the man of God. For the present, let us say only that he was simply imitating Jesus Christ, the priest forever according to the Order of Melchizedek,<sup>202</sup> who did not disdain to wash the feet of his Apostles,<sup>203</sup> common people though they were, and of whom one was a traitor. To disapprove what this holy priest did in humbling himself before his Brothers is to condemn Jesus Christ for what he did before his Apostles.

## Chapter IX

**The high regard several distinguished people had for M. de La Salle; the opposition which he and his Brothers suffered from people of the lower classes; his archbishop wants him to remain in the diocese, but he refuses; he founds two communities in Reims.**

M. de La Salle resumed the office of Superior, serving with even greater humility than before, advancing daily along the path of virtue and awaiting the opportunity to resign from the position he had taken up again with such reluctance. The example he offered to his beloved disciples was no small incentive to their advancement in virtue. At that time there was as yet no novitiate, but a candidate could spend only about two weeks in the company of this holy man and be ready to go out to one of the schools, such was the inspiration to them by his practice of virtue and that of the Brothers. The example of his virtue—or rather that of Jesus Christ—which he manifested among his Brothers extended to other worthy people who, moved by his piety, zeal, and detachment from things of the world, conceived a high regard for him.

The late Duke de Mazarin, a pious prince most zealous for the glory of God, was among those who had a special esteem for M. de La Salle.<sup>204</sup> Whenever he visited Reims, the Duke made it a point to demonstrate how much he appreciated De La Salle for his life of virtue, of which the Duke was well informed, and for the great good De La Salle accomplished by involving himself with the gratuitous schools, one of which the Duke himself had sponsored in his town of Mazarin.

One day the Duke made it known that he would like to attend the holy priest's Mass at six o'clock the following morning. M. de La Salle readily agreed to this request. The Duke appeared about five o'clock, attended by a valet, and together with M. de La Salle walked

to the parish church, followed a little later by the Brothers, who took their usual places. Not having been told of the Duke, they did not recognize him seated in the middle of the church. Some sat beside him, others in front or behind, and he was greatly edified by their recollection.

M. Bailly, the late abbot of Saint Thierry,<sup>205</sup> also had a high regard for M. de La Salle. He appreciated the good work in the schools, which he often visited as much to be edified by the Brothers as to see him who had left all for the love of God and the salvation of souls, a man who led a life of poverty and was misunderstood and condemned by people of the world. This good abbot, quite well acquainted with M. de La Salle, noticed one day that his soutane was made of the same coarse material as that of the Brothers. He smiled as he asked M. de La Salle if this were the proper attire for a person in his profession. The servant of God answered only by a modest smile of his own, leading the abbot to change the subject.

One day, another person filled with admiration for M. de La Salle came to visit him. She said simply that she wanted him to pray for her because in her estimation he was a saint. At these words M. de La Salle blushed and then, to dissuade her from even thinking like that, forced himself to laugh loudly. But far from losing her esteem for him because of this episode, she admired him all the more, convinced that he had acted as he did only to lessen her veneration for him.

We will not elaborate on this topic, for what we have said is sufficient to point out the regard people had for M. de La Salle because of his eminent virtue. We will say only, in a few words, that his manner of life had a marvelous effect on several people who were untiring in their admiration of his behavior, so saintly, so apostolic, and so detached from all things of this world. This led a number of people to ask to be under his spiritual direction. Not wishing to neglect the Brothers by taking on too many obligations, M. de La Salle accepted only a few people for spiritual direction; among these were a number of women religious whom he selected after being persuaded to do so by several women of some standing in society. Because he was anxious to lead all the men and women under his direction to the practice of virtue, especially detachment from earthly goods in view of attachment to God alone, M. de La Salle one day required a woman religious to bring him everything that was superfluous in her bedroom; the man of God was aware that she was quite attached to some trinkets. She obeyed simply, though with some reluctance, and laid before her director a number of strange things. He then said that if she wanted to remain under his direction, she must immediately set



fire to all these items, which she did, so desirous was she to be directed by this man of God.

If on the one hand there were those who admired this holy man, on the other there was the devil, who did everything to thwart him. Because the work begun by M. de La Salle threatened his infernal kingdom, the devil sowed discontent in the souls of the working people and the poor who until then had disgracefully neglected their own children. They did not correct their failings and did not heed the advice of the Wise Man of Proverbs, who counseled not to spare the rod which, far from harming the children, would rescue their souls from the nether world.<sup>206</sup> Because these punishments would be useless if the children themselves did not amend their ways and avoid the faults that had led their parents to punish them, the Wise Man exhorts the children to submit to punishment and correction, telling them that this will give them wisdom.<sup>207</sup> If, on the other hand, they insist on having their own way, they will shame their mothers. Both parents and children were deaf to the word of the Holy Spirit and would not hear of correction. That is why the parents reacted violently when the Brothers found it necessary to discipline their children. The children themselves, ignoring the care which moved the Brothers to correct them, were the first to complain. Those who protested the most were the working people and the poor, who had themselves been badly brought up and showed this by the little appreciation they had for all the care and concern taken by the Brothers in educating their children.

If the Brothers had much to endure in this situation, their humble Founder had no less, for what was said against the Brothers in general was said against him personally. Thus, this man of God had ample opportunity to demonstrate his great patience in this matter. This was brought out in a strange way. Far from lessening his dedication or forcing him to give up his undertaking completely, all of this opposition made him and his Brothers more courageous than ever. It seemed as if God permitted these misunderstandings from people of the lowest class in society so that more respectable people could witness these examples of patience. Soon after, even the powers of hell were constrained to leave in peace those they persecuted, because the Christian education given to the children lessened Satan's hold on souls redeemed by the blood of Jesus Christ. It came about that, little by little, these difficulties subsided and were gradually followed by an increased esteem for M. de La Salle's work.

Among M. de La Salle's greatest admirers was M. Le Tellier, at that time archbishop of Reims.<sup>208</sup> He regarded M. de La Salle highly



Charles-Maurice Le Tellier (1642–1710), archbishop of Reims. *Photo E. Rousset (ER, slide 309).*

because of his appreciation both for the Institute founded by the man of God and for the good qualities of its Founder. The archbishop, hoping to retain the Institute in the diocese, offered his patronage to the Founder, as well as funds for the Institute, on condition that the Brothers open schools only in the Reims diocese. This was the arrangement already in force in the case of the Sisters who conducted the orphanage in the city.<sup>209</sup> After hearing of the generous offer of this noted prelate, M. de La Salle thanked him profusely for it and for his kindly disposition toward him, but he had to decline because he had previously promised the pastor of Saint Sulpice two Brothers to run the schools of that parish, and he had to accompany them to Paris himself.<sup>210</sup>

M. de La Salle was aware of how much the Lord had blessed the enterprise put into his hands by Divine Providence. He wished to expand his work, so useful to the public good, to other places and not to limit it to a single diocese. He also welcomed the opportunity to leave his native place should Providence furnish him a suitable occasion. In the meantime he devoted himself with great care to preserving regular observance in the Institute, which happily was progressing well, both in Reims and in the three other houses founded in the vicinity.<sup>211</sup>

Because this man of God was completely devoted to the good of his Institute and to its growth, he did not miss any occasion he deemed suitable to further its progress. Being a man of faith, he saw the hand of God in everything that happened, as we shall see in the following incident. A young man of fifteen years came to enter the Institute, and the servant of God, who was then in Reims, received him even though it was not his custom to take anyone so young. A little later, three more came to join the Institute. Our servant of God realized that in sending these four young men to the Institute, God was providing for its development, and he decided to form a separate community for them and for any others who might enter. In two months this community was so blessed by God that it had grown to twelve. M. de La Salle prepared a Rule for them and gave them one of the experienced Brothers as their superior. He often spoke to them himself, becoming as one of them to gain all for Jesus Christ, after the example of the Apostle Paul.<sup>212</sup> This community was entirely separated from the Brothers' community, though located next to their house. There was a single door between the two communities so that the Brothers could bring to the other community what was needed. God's grace so blessed the care taken of these young men that several became quite holy. It was most edifying to see them in the streets or in

church, as recollected as fervent religious. Almost every week they received Communion from the hands of their holy priest, who also taught them how to pray; soon they were performing the same spiritual exercises that the novices of Saint Yon practice today. From time to time, the older and more devout of these men were given the robe of the Brothers, so that this community took the place of a novitiate.<sup>213</sup>

Some time later, God provided still another opportunity for M. de La Salle to manifest his zeal and charity. Several rural pastors, having heard of the success of the Christian schools, requested that he send a Brother to each of their parishes. He replied that he was unable to do so, for at least two Brothers had to go together in order to live in community. The country pastors, zealous as they were for the good of their people, continued to entreat the servant of God not to deprive them of the benefits of the schools already established in the towns. Accepting the reasons already given that M. de La Salle could not help them, several of the pastors decided to send him teachers, as well as young men who would be teaching the children of their parishes, to be trained as schoolmasters.

These men were graciously received by the man of God, who lodged them on the other side of the Brothers' house. He provided a Brother to teach them both spiritual things and everything else they would need to accomplish well their parish duties. Because singing would be one of their responsibilities, they were taught plain chant. This undertaking for the glory of God was so blessed by Providence that soon this second community counted twenty-five people of great devotion, of whom several received the robe of the Institute. Those who returned to their parishes took up the work of their ministry with remarkable piety and charity, looking upon M. de La Salle as their true father.<sup>214</sup>

Thus, before this servant of God established the Institute in Paris, there were three communities in Reims: the Brothers, the younger men we have already mentioned, and this recent community which became known as the seminary for country schoolteachers. In all, these three communities comprised about fifty persons. This goes to show the care of Providence for this holy servant, for having only enough to provide for the Brothers, M. de La Salle still was able to maintain these other two groups, with neither of them ever lacking anything truly necessary.

# Appendix

## Additional Documents

Editor's Note: These two documents give us more information, especially regarding the lost second work of Brother Bernard: a complete manuscript in four parts, concluded shortly before May 4, 1723. The Remarks confirm the existence of a first draft limited to Part One and a few chapters of Part Two, composed in 1720–21 (eighteen months before the second text), and then sent to Canon Jean-Louis de La Salle for his approval.

## Document One

### *Remarks on the Life of M. de La Salle*

As soon as it was decided to entrust to me the composing of a Life of M. de La Salle, I felt deep anxiety, fearing the reproaches and the criticism which would arise here and there.

My fear was not unfounded, for I have already experienced what I so greatly dreaded. What added to my fear was that I did not think that I could succeed in such a task, not only because of my incapacity but because of the little time I knew I would have to devote to an undertaking which would demand much time. Nevertheless, I had to follow the desires and orders of my superiors, who promised me their help, and this is what convinced me to undertake this project.

First, they gave me a large number of memorials which I read and reread attentively, but what pleased me most was a rather long manuscript written by M. de La Salle himself, containing an account of the beginnings of the Institute of the Brothers of the Christian Schools. From these documents I gathered everything which I have set down in the second book.

After reading all these memoirs, I realized that they were insufficient for the kind of book that was wanted. For this reason I urgently asked for more material, especially dealing in greater detail with his childhood and whatever had taken place prior to the founding of his Institute.

For this purpose I wrote to Reims to his brother and to M. Jean François, his nephew;<sup>215</sup> the latter sent me a memorial containing a few details about the piety manifested by M. de La Salle in his earliest years. But that was all I could get from anybody, and this made me resolve to apply to the community of the Sisters who ran the orphanage. They willingly cooperated with my desires, but I still felt that the information was meager.

This led me to request M. Leschassier, superior of the seminaries of Saint Sulpice, to be kind enough to send me some help. This he did willingly; he sent me a memorial dealing with all that John Baptist had done during his stay in the seminary of Saint Sulpice. After all this, I resolved to begin, even though I was not satisfied with the material I had in hand; I saw clearly that I could not expect to obtain much more.

I therefore drew up a draft of the first part and of a few chapters of the second. This was sent to M. [Jean-Louis] de La Salle, so that he might see whether it contained anything to which the family might take exception. I waited for over six months, hoping that he would return the material to me. I made use of this long delay to review my original text, and in doing so I perceived that by following too scrupulously and literally both the documents and the mentality of those who had supplied them to me, my text was too clumsy. This convinced me to begin my work all over again, speaking in my own style and not in that of others. And as I waited, day after day, for the return of my first draft from M. de La Salle so that I might take into consideration the remarks he would make, I was astonished to learn that he did not want to return the text to me until I had shown him the sequel. This was what made me resolve to go ahead with the work without the help that I might have had from the earlier draft, which would have been considerable.

I spent eighteen months on this second draft, and I would have finished it sooner had I more time, for I was able to devote only two hours a day to this often-interrupted project. This is the reason why I repeated myself several times.

Hardly had I finished this work when my superiors sent me from Paris to Reims. They ordered me to bring the book with me and to show it to Canon de La Salle, so that, once this was done, it might be given the final retouches, something that all the Brothers eagerly desired.

While I was waiting patiently for him to do this, I was asked to show the manuscript to M. Guyart, Canon of Laon. He found that the early parts of the chapters, the reflections, and the application of certain passages were correct enough and the style passable, but that a number of words and repetitions needed to be corrected. This Canon reproached me with having spoken of our current difficulties and accused me of showing some partiality. He said that in his opinion, to make the book acceptable everywhere, all that was needed was to state simply that M. de La Salle had always been submissive to the decisions of the Church and full of respect for the Sovereign Pontiffs. To this I replied that I did not think such a statement was enough and that I needed to say how he had shown this respect and submission. I did agree, however, to omit and to soften various things, which I did.

As for other faults, they can easily be corrected once M. de La Salle has made his own remarks. It would be useless to do this earlier.

This is what I thought I should say before my work is put into the hands of Canon de La Salle, and I hope that he will read it attentively.

I certify that I wrote the above.

Brother Bernard

## Document Two

### *Letter of Brother Jean to Canon Jean-Louis de La Salle*

To M. de La Salle, Canon of the Church of Notre Dame at Reims  
Monsieur:

With confidence I take the liberty of sending you these lines to offer you my most humble respects and at the same time to ask you to be kind enough to read the complete manuscript *Life* of M. de La Salle, our very dear Father and Founder, so that you may see whether everything therein is properly stated and whether there is anything incorrect or self-contradictory, as you do me the honor of stating in the letter you were kind enough to send me. We have, Sir, so much esteem and respect for you personally that it makes it an indispensable duty for us to submit to whatever you may decide on this point.

However, I take the liberty of declaring what follows: namely, that several persons earnestly hope that what is said in this

manuscript about his true sentiments concerning our current difficulties and concerning various opinions should be left intact; this, they think, is in the best interests of the Institute. Others, a much smaller number, say that it would be best to omit all references to these questions. Furthermore, Monsieur, if I may express an opinion on this point, I think that it is good and even necessary to say things as they are without, however, shocking anybody; this would be to our advantage.

I am convinced, Monsieur, that because you are, like your beloved brother, entirely desirous to be of service to us, you will not fail to do in this matter whatever is most conducive to the glory of God and to the salvation of our neighbor. We feel sure that we have found another father in your kind self to replace the one who has left us and enjoys heavenly glory. We shall not fail, Monsieur, to offer our prayers to God, asking Him to reserve the same eternal happiness for you also.

This is the sincere wish of one who is glad to declare himself, with deep respect and full confidence, Monsieur, your most humble and perfectly obedient servant.

Brother Jean<sup>216</sup>

Paris, May 4, 1723



## Notes

1. CL 4:XIII–XXV.

2. Brother Bernard (Jean d'Auge) was born in Fribourg, Switzerland, on June 24, 1697. He entered the Institute in March 1713 and made his perpetual vows on June 16, 1726. *The Catalog of the Brothers of the Christian Schools* mentions without any further explanation that he left the Institute (*sorti*). See *Cahiers lasalliens* (CL) 3:55.

On the back of a letter written to him by John Baptist de La Salle, Brother Joseph (Jean Leroux), De La Salle's representative to the communities and schools in the northern part of France, wrote the following uncomplimentary description of Brother Bernard:

As for Brother Bernard, he acts only by impulse. I have no control over him, and nothing that is said to him makes any impression on him. He goes out alone when he feels like it, does all he wants, and acts more authoritatively than a Brother Director. It is said that he intends to return to Paris soon. Consider, my dear Brother, how difficult it is to run schools with such absences. I have never seen in our Brothers what I see in this Brother. Our Brothers have always observed the Rule and observed it in quite a different way before Brother Bernard disturbed everything because of his stubbornness. (*Les Lettres de Saint J.-B. de La Salle*, Edition Critique, F. Félix-Paul, Paris, 1952, 227; see also *The Letters of John Baptist de La Salle*, translation, introduction, and commentary by Brother Colman Molloy, FSC, edited with additional commentary by Brother Augustine Loes, FSC, Romeoville: Lasallian Publications, 1988, 162).

In his *Remarks on the Life of Monsieur de La Salle*, Bernard indicates that he was in Paris from 1721 to 1723, whereupon he was transferred to Reims (see F. Bernard, *Remarques sur la Vie de Monsieur de La Salle*, CL 4:102–103; the English translation is in the Appendix of this present volume).

3. Brother Timothée was Superior General at the time. See Maillefer, *The Life of Saint John Baptist de La Salle*. . . ., note 321, in this present volume. The manuscript in question is the *Memoir on the Beginnings*, mentioned by all three early biographers, Bernard, Maillefer, and Blain.

4. See Maillefer, note 119.

5. Nephew of John Baptist and son of John Baptist's eldest sister, Marie.

6. See Maillefer, notes 36, 46.

7. See Maillefer, note 32.

8. After six months his manuscript had still not been returned to him; he spent eighteen months on the second draft; see Appendix, *Remarks on the Life of M. de La Salle*.

9. A copy of the original manuscript is in the Archives of the Generalate in Rome.

10. Brother Romain (Charles Plansson), born October 28, 1671, entered the Institute in 1719 and died at Saint Yon on January 29, 1738 (CL 4:XIV, note 3).

11. There are 112 corrections in the first 43 pages of the manuscript, 17 in the next 43 pages; the last 20 of these 43 pages contain only a few changes.

12. See Appendix, *Remarks* . . .

13. Letter dated January 3, 1719, in the Archives of the Generalate in Rome.

14. For examples of this in the French text, see the footnotes in CL 4:XV–XVII.

15. See CL 4:XVI–XXXVII for other examples.

16. See CL 4:XVI, notes 6 and 7.

17. Pierre and Jean-Remy; see Maillefer, note 78.

18. Most of these markings are made in black, blue, or red pencil and are quite small and barely visible. It is not clear who made them, possibly Bernard himself, Brother Romain (the copyist), or some reader who might have marked passages that attracted attention. Corrections are called for in only two cases (see CL 4:XVII, note 6).

19. For example, CL 4:XVII, note 6; compare the handwriting to that of *Remarks on the Life of M. de La Salle* (see Appendix), signed by Bernard.

20. *Memoir on the Beginnings*; see note 3 above.

21. See Appendix, *Remarks* . . .

22. It is enlightening to compare passages from several other sources describing the same event. Take, for example, the pages of Bernard and those of Blain dealing with these matters: Adrien Nyel

and his first companions, the ecclesiastics whom M. de La Salle consulted, the generous foundress of the schools in Saint Jacques parish, the Brother who taught in the same school, the confessors of the community, Brother Nicholas Bourlette, a certain pious lady, and the Duke de Mazarin. In all these cases the differences are quite clear. Blain has embellished his story but is farther from the sources and materially less faithful to them than is Bernard.

23. For example, a brother-in-law takes into his home one of the younger De La Salle boys to remove him from John Baptist's influence; John Baptist is reproached for a certain affectation in his dress; he makes heroic and at times imprudent efforts to eat the Brothers' common fare.

24. For example, details concerning the house belonging to the pastor of the Saint Maurice parish and the distance of the De La Salle residence and that of the teachers in relation to the church.

25. For example, we learn that the Founder had composed an autograph account of the beginnings of the Institute during "the first fourteen years" and that this document had "remained unknown for more than twenty years" until it "was fortunately discovered during the Founder's stay in the south of France" (CL 4:22).

We find two brief but revealing assertions about the teachers gathered around Nyel: their "not retiring on time" and their "coming and going as they pleased" on Sundays and feasts (CL 4:35).

26. He is wrong, for instance, on the place or date for certain of De La Salle's ordinations, on the dates of his stay at Saint Sulpice, and in stating that the See of Reims was vacant at the time of De La Salle's diaconate (CL 4:13–15).

27. See Appendix, *Letter of Brother Jean to Canon Jean-Louis de La Salle*.

28. See Maillefer, Bibliography.

29. CL 4 reproduces, page for page and line for line, the original text transcribed into modern typography with spelling and punctuation following current usage. The words or passages crossed out in the original are given in italics when the meaning of the sentence requires it; some slight additions or modifications are added in brackets, but only to permit easier reading. The purpose is not to issue a critical edition, but to present a text which is materially faithful to Brother Bernard's manuscript.

30. Sir 44:1–8. English Scripture texts are from *The New American Bible* and the *Revised New Testament* of the Confraternity of Christian Doctrine, Nashville, Tennessee: Catholic Bible Press, a division of Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1987.

31. Josiah was King of Judah for 31 years, beginning in 640 B.C. His reign coincided with the decline in power of Assyria and featured the discovery of the Book of the Law and the subsequent reform in morality and religious worship. (2 Kgs 22–23; 2 Chr 34–35).

32. Mt 19:13–14; Mk 10:13–16; Lk 18:15–17.

33. Bishop (c. 350 to 387) and Doctor of the universal Church, Saint Cyril of Jerusalem was the author of the famous *Catecheses* and fought the Arian heresy, which denied the divinity of Jesus Christ. He was a leader in the second ecumenical council (Constantinople I, 381) and was renowned for his Lenten instructions to those about to be baptized. His feast is March 18.

Of the early saints mentioned by Bernard here and throughout the text, all but one (Cyril of Jerusalem) are subjects of Meditations written by John Baptist de La Salle.

34. A brilliant genius considered to be one of the founders of the Christian tradition of the West, Saint Augustine was born in Numidia, Africa, November 13, 354. While teaching in Milan, he met Saint Ambrose, the bishop, and began the process of conversion. Augustine's autobiography, *Confessions*, is one of the classics of Western literature. He died August 28, 430, in Hippo, where he had been bishop since 395. His feast is August 28.

35. Saint Jerome was born around 345 in what is now northeastern Italy. A Father and Doctor of the Church, he was a Scripture scholar and one of the most learned men of his day. After years of service in Rome as papal secretary, he settled in Bethlehem in 386 and devoted himself to study, writing, and spiritual direction. Jerome translated the Hebrew Bible into Latin. His feast is September 30.

36. Jean Gerson, Chancellor of the University of Paris, was born near Rethel, in the province of Champagne, December 14, 1363, and died in Lyon, July 12, 1429. He was a renowned theologian, master of the French language, spiritual writer, orator, poet, mystic, and teacher.

37. The Founder and first General of the Society of Jesus, Ignatius of Loyola was born in Spain in 1491 and died in Rome on July 31, 1556. His feast is July 31.

38. Cardinal archbishop of Milan and nephew of Pope Pius IV, Saint Charles Borromeo was born October 2, 1538, and died November 3, 1584. In Rome and later in Milan he promoted the *Catechismus romanus ad parochos* and energetically championed projects to carry out the reforms of the Council of Trent with respect to seminaries, the Missal and the Breviary, sacred music, and publication of the writings of the Church Fathers. His feast is November 4.

39. Saint Peter Fourier was born in Mirecourt, Lorraine (France) on November 30, 1565; he died in Gray, Franche-Comté on December 9, 1640. A member of the Order of Canons Regular of Saint Augustine, he held a doctorate in patristic theology and was a promoter of education for the poor. With Alix Le Clerc, he founded in 1597 the Canonesses Regular of Saint Augustine of the Congregation of Our Lady, dedicated to the education of poor girls in free elementary schools. His feast is December 9.

40. See Maillefer, note 56.

41. Is 49:5; Jer 1:5.

42. 1 Sm 10:24.

43. Heb 11:6.

44. Julian the Apostate, born c. 331, was Roman Emperor from 361 to his death in 363. Completely devoted to Greco-Roman civilization, he proclaimed tolerance for all Christian sects but removed Christians from political office and forbade them to teach.

45. Eph 6:14.

46. Eph 6:16.

47. Eph 6:17.

48. Heb 12:14.

49. Mt 7:6.

50. Mt 5:3–10.

51. Rom 12:13; 1 Cor 6:1; 2 Cor 1:1; Eph 1:1; Phil 1:1; Col 1:2; 1 Tm 5:10; Phlm 1:5; Heb 6:10, among many references.

52. 2 Cor 2:15.

53. The family tree has been traced to a Menault de La Salle, known in 1486 as a prosperous woolen trader in Soissons, a town some thirty miles west of Reims. The De La Salles were often allied by marriage with the local nobility. See Maillefer, notes 24, 25.

54. See Maillefer, note 25.

55. See Maillefer, note 26.

56. See Maillefer, note 74.

57. See Maillefer, note 23.

58. Lk 2:52.

59. See Maillefer, note 27.

60. See Maillefer, notes 29, 30.

61. Ps 16:5.

62. A stipend allotted from the revenues of the cathedral.

63. See Maillefer, note 28.

64. See Maillefer, notes 37, 40.

65. Nicolas Roland; see Maillefer, note 36.

66. See Maillefer, note 46.

67. Sir 2:10, 18; 34:13.

68. See Maillefer, note 32.

69. Jacques Bauin (Baüyn), though older than De La Salle, was a fellow student at Saint Sulpice. They met again when De La Salle returned to Paris in 1688, and John Baptist selected him as his spiritual director from 1691 to 1695 (Blain I, 329–330; Poutet I, 292; Calcutt, 64, 268).

70. March 19, 1696.

71. At Vaugirard.

72. See Maillefer, note 37.

73. See Maillefer, note 40.

74. 1 Tm 3:8–10.

75. See Maillefer, notes 38, 39.

76. On April 9, 1678.

77. See Maillefer, note 73.

78. See Maillefer, note 35.

79. See Maillefer, note 46.

80. See Maillefer, notes 47, 49, 50, 51.

81. See Maillefer, note 78.

82. Rom 8:28.

83. Morning prayer, in general; the term also has a specific meaning as the early-morning hour of the Divine Office, prior to Lauds.

84. Mt 25:40, 45.

85. Francis of Assisi, the “seraphic saint” and founder of the Order of Friars Minor, the Poor Clares, and the Third Order, was born in Assisi around 1182 and died there on October 3, 1226. His feast is October 4.

86. The first of the Major Prophets in the Old Testament, Isaiah was born probably around 760 BC and was active in Jerusalem during a critical period of Assyrian power.

87. See Maillefer, note 53.

88. Adrien Nyel; see Maillefer, note 60.

89. See Maillefer, notes 57, 58.

90. At this time one *écu* was usually worth 3 *livres*; sometimes it was worth 6 *livres*; the annual support De La Salle requested for a teacher was 200 *livres*.

91. See Maillefer, note 60.

92. Nicolas Barré; see Maillefer, note 56.

93. See Maillefer, note 61.

94. A white piece of cloth resembling a small bib, worn around the neck by clerics and university professors, for example.

95. Twenty-seven miles from Reims; see Blain II:489.

- 96. See Maillefer, note 62.
- 97. Nicolas Dorigny; see Maillefer, note 65.
- 98. In 1679.
- 99. Madame Lévêque de Carrières; see Maillefer, notes 66, 67, 69.
- 100. See Maillefer, notes 68, 105.
- 101. See Maillefer, note 69.
- 102. City hall.
- 103. *Memoir on the Beginnings*; see Maillefer, note 53.
- 104. *Idem*.
- 105. In 1680; see Maillefer, note 76.
- 106. *Memoir on the Beginnings*.
- 107. *Idem*.
- 108. See Maillefer, notes 68, 105.
- 109. See Maillefer, note 71.
- 110. See Maillefer, note 71, 76.
- 111. See Maillefer, notes 1, 35, 74.
- 112. See Maillefer, note 56.
- 113. Francis of Paola, founder of the Order of the Minims, was born in Paola, Calabria (Italy) on March 27, 1416, and died in Tours (France) on April 2, 1507. His last twenty-five years were spent in France, where he was an influential international peacemaker at court. His feast is April 2.
- 114. See Maillefer, note 76.
- 115. Pierre, Jean-Remy, and Jean-Louis.
- 116. See Maillefer, note 78.
- 117. Gal 1:15–16.
- 118. About fifty-four miles.
- 119. See Maillefer, note 86.
- 120. See Maillefer, note 76.
- 121. Jas 1:23–24.
- 122. June 24.
- 123. See Maillefer, note 76.
- 124. Jean-Louis.
- 125. Pierre and Jean-Remy.
- 126. Pierre.
- 127. Jean-Remy.
- 128. The pastor of Saint Symphorien.
- 129. See Maillefer, note 82.
- 130. See Maillefer, note 83.
- 131. See Maillefer, note 84.
- 132. See Maillefer, note 86.
- 133. See Maillefer, note 87.

134. Pierre Guyart, *Idem*.

135. See Maillefer, note 85.

136. Mt 22:14.

137. In 1540.

138. Daily community prayer, spiritual reading, Mass, and so forth.

139. See Maillefer, note 91.

140. See Maillefer, note 56.

141. Mt 8:20; Lk 9:58.

142. Mézières is about fifty miles northeast of Reims. It is likely that De La Salle did assist a pastor there, but Bernard is the only early biographer to link De La Salle's resignation of the canonry with his taking over that parish.

143. Mt 19:21; Lk 18:22.

144. See Maillefer, note 94, 104.

145. See Maillefer, note 94.

146. Charles-Maurice Le Tellier; see Maillefer, note 43.

147. See Maillefer, notes 94, 104.

148. Claude Bottu de La Barmondière; see Maillefer, note 96.

149. De La Salle and two Brothers took up residence in Rue Princesse and began to direct the school on February 28, 1688.

150. See Maillefer, notes 97, 98.

151. Jean-Louis; see Maillefer, note 99.

152. See Maillefer, note 100.

153. Mt 25:35.

154. Gn 12:1–5.

155. A traditional Latin hymn of praise composed at the beginning of the 5th century and attributed to Bishop Nicetas of Remesiana.

156. Founder of the Friars Preachers, or Dominicans, Saint Dominic was born in Caleruega, Old Castile (Spain) after 1170 and died in Bologna (Italy) on August 6, 1221. His feast is August 4.

157. Meditation 150, in *Meditations by St. John Baptist de La Salle*, translated by Richard Arnandez, FSC, and Augustine Loes, FSC; edited by Augustine Loes, FSC, Landover: Lasallian Publications, 1994, 275–277.

158. See Meditation 174, in *Meditations*, 324–325.

159. See Maillefer, note 277.

160. Jean Faubert; see Maillefer, note 100.

161. Jacques Callou; see Maillefer, note 94.

162. Jean-Louis de La Salle.

163. See Maillefer, note 97.



164. See Maillefer, note 94.
165. See Maillefer, note 43.
166. See Maillefer, note 102.
167. See Maillefer, note 94, 104.
168. See Maillefer, note 120.
169. Mt 19:21, Lk 18:22. This is the second time that Bernard refers to these passages.
170. Mt 6:33; Lk 12:31.
171. 20 *sols* = 1 *livre*; see Maillefer, note 68.
172. See Maillefer, note 105.
173. 1 *pistole* equals 11 *livres*; see Maillefer, note 68.
174. See note 90 above.
175. See Maillefer, notes 80, 81.
176. Rom 8:17.
177. Blain mentions Nicolas Bourlette in CL 7:252–254.
178. Bourlette died on September 6, 1686.
179. Jean-Louis de La Salle.
180. Pierre Guyart; see Maillefer, note 87.
181. See Maillefer, note 85.
182. Lk 2:29.
183. See Maillefer, note 108.
184. Rom 12:2.
185. See Maillefer, note 89.
186. Henri Baudrand; see Maillefer, note 90.
187. *Idem*.
188. See Maillefer, note 56.
189. See Maillefer, note 232.
190. See Maillefer, note 111.
191. See Maillefer, notes 112, 113.
192. Acts 2:1–4.
193. See Maillefer, note 114.
194. See Maillefer, note 115.
195. See Maillefer, note 112.
196. See Maillefer, note 116.
197. See Maillefer, notes 153, 154.
198. Source unknown.
199. Notre-Dame de La Trappe is a Cistercian abbey founded in 1140 near Mortagne (France). Armand le Bouthillier de Rancé became abbot in 1664 and began the Trappist reform.
200. Source unknown.
201. Mt 13:52.
202. Ps 110:4; Heb 5:6, 10; 6:20; 7:11, 15, 17.

203. Jn 13:5–14.

204. See Maillefer, note 83.

205. Abbot Guillaume Bailly; Saint Thierry is five miles from Reims.

206. Prv 23:14.

207. Prv 29:15.

208. See Maillefer, note 43.

209. Sisters of the Holy Child Jesus of Providence.

210. See Maillefer, notes 119, 120, 121.

211. Laon, Rethel, Guise; see Maillefer, note 85.

212. Phil 3:8.

213. See Maillefer, notes 117, 132.

214. See Maillefer, note 118.

215. See note 5.

216. Brother Jean (Jean Jacquot, 1672–1759) was born in Château-Porcien and entered the Institute at the age of fourteen in October 1686. He made perpetual vows on the Feast of the Holy Trinity in 1694 and was twice elected Assistant: to Brother Barthélemy in May 1717 and to Brother Timothée in August 1720. He was Director of the Paris community.

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