



02-A-08

AN X-RAY PHOTOGRAPH OF ST. JOHN BAPTIST DE LA SALLE

This paper will, like an X-Ray, show only a skeleton. It could be covered in flesh and blood and given a living soul by a reflective reading of good biographies and the Founder's own writings. The following may serve as a guide.

I. HIS LIFE

A. He prepares himself without knowing it: 1651-1678

- 1651-1661: Education at home: parents, grandparents.
- 1661-1669: "Bonorum Puerorum College": Latin, Greek, Rhetoric.
- 1662?: First Communion.
- 1662?: Confirmation.
- 1662: Clerical Tonsure. Rheims.
- 1667: He takes possession of his Canonicate.
- 1669-1678: Universities of Rheims and Paris. Philosophy and Theology.
- 1670-1672: Seminary of Saint Sulpice in Paris.
- 1672-1676: Guardian of Brothers and Sisters.
- 1672: Spiritual Direction by Nicolas Roland.
- 1672: Sub-deacon in Cambrai.
- 1676: Diaconate in Paris.
- 1678: B. Theology. Rheims.
- 1678: Ordination. Rheims.
- (1680-1684: Guardian of Brothers and Sisters, second time).
- (1680: Doctor in theology. Rheims).

He does not yet know exactly what his vocation will be as a priest. The thought that it could be the christian school was furthest from his mind.

"I had never thought of it before. Many of M. Roland's friends had tried to get me interested but it had never made any impression; and I had never had any thought of doing anything about it". (Blain I,169; Bernard 30).

B. A ninety degree turn: 1678-1682

- 1678: He interests himself in the Sisters of the Child Jesus.
- 1679: Meeting with Nyel. St. Maurice School.
- 1679: Meeting with Mme. Catherine Leleu. St. James' School.
- 1680: He brings the masters to live with him.
- 1681: He introduces them into his family life in his own home.
- 1682: He moves with them into a house in the Rue Neuve.

Thus starting a new community life.

Some people have doubts about the future.

"End 1682": He sees clearly that the christian school is his vocation.

"After much prayer, after much consultation, it became clear towards the end of the year 1682 (he himself says so) that God was calling him to take care of the schools..." (Blain I, 193; Bernard 49).

C. The foundations of God's work:

- 1682: The Brothers of the Christian Schools.
- 1683: He gives up his family.
- 1683: He reduces his priestly activities to a minimum (preaching, confessing, directing).
- 1683: He gives up his canonicate.
In favour of a priest who is not his brother.
- 1684: He gives up his personal fortune to the poor.
- 1682-1684: First foundations outside Rheims.
- 1684: He gives the Brothers a habit.
- 1686: They make the first vows of obedience.
- 1686: He consecrates the Institute to Our Lady of Joy in Liesse.
- 1686: He gives up his post as superior.
- 1688: He goes to Paris to give the Institute a character of universality.

Such are the essential and solid foundations but a stout building needs to be raised thereon.

"I always looked on my salvation and the establishment and government of our community as the work of God; that is why I leave everything in his care, to do only therein what is according to his orders; and I shall consult him often on all that I should do for the one or the other; I will often say to him these words of the prophet Habacuc: Domine, opus tuum." (Rules which I have imposed on myself, Blain II, 319).

D. Consolidation: 1688-1694

- 1689: "Decision to maintain completely the lay character of the Institute.
- 1689: He draws up the "Mémoire sur l'habit". Among other things he says: "Work in schools requires the entire man."
- 1691: Vaugirard. No more schools will be opened until the Institute has grown.
- 1691: Heroic vow of two Brothers.
- 1691: Long annual retreat.
- 1692: The novitiate is established.
- 1694: First Rules.
- 1694: General Chapter.
- 1694: First perpetual profession with 12 Brothers.
- 1694: New attempt to give the society a Superior General who is a Brother.

It could be said that the work was complete. If God decided that the Founder should vanish physically, the Institute was already constructed. If he survived, it was to enrich it...

"Most Holy Trinity, Father, Son and Holy Ghost, prostrate in profound respect before your infinite and adorable majesty I consecrate myself to you to procure your glory as far as I am able and you will require of me..." (Signed formula of his profession).

E. Enrichment: 1695-1719

a) Under his direction

- He opens 20 communities.
- He sends two Brothers to Rome.
- He writes six spiritual books.
- He publishes 13 school books.
- He plans to write and writes the "Conduct of Schools".
- He answers 7,000 letters.
- Each year he visits the houses.
- He establishes Visitors from 1708 onwards.

General Chapter 1717.
Brother Barthélemy, Superior General.
Second Rule, 1718.

b) *By his virtues*

Abandonment to Divine Providence.
Spirit of faith. Prayer.
Zeal. Charity.
Fidelity to the Pope.
Penitence. Poverty.
Obedience. Humility.
1702. Deposed from the superiorship.
1704,1706,1712. Condemned by the courts for
various reasons.
Betrayed in Saint-Denis and Marseilles.
1713-1714 Obscure night of the soul.
7.04.1719 A holy death.

"I adore in all things the conduct of God in my regard." (Blain II,174; Maillefer, 163 and 297).

F. The zenith, after his death

1724: Letters patent for St. Yon.
1725: Bull of approbation of Benedict XIII.
The Church approved the Institute just he wished it to be.
1888: Beatification of the Founder. Leo XIII.
1900: Canonization of the Founder. Leo XIII.
1950: The Saint is declared "Patron of all Teachers". Pius XII.
1926: Beatification of Brother Salomon (Nicolas Leclercq), martyr.
1967: Canonization of Brother Benildus (Pierre Romançon).
1977: Beatification of Brothers Miguel (Francisco Febres) and Mutien Marie (Louis Wiaux).
Survival and diffusion of the Institute in the world.

II. ASPECTS OF HIS PERSONALITY

A. SAINT: see his life sections B,C, and E.

"One must cast a look interiorly at Our Lord Jesus Christ doing this action, and then begin, continue and finish ours in union with Our Lord, and with a view to imitating Him as perfectly as we can" (Recueil p. 125).

B. FOUNDER: He opens Christian and free schools for the populace in 25 towns.

Rheims, Rethel, Château-Porcien, Guise, Laon, Paris, Chartres, Calais, Troyes, Avignon, Rome, Darnétal, Rouen, Dijon, Marseille, Valréas, Mende, Alès, Grenoble, Saint-Denis, Moulins, Mâcon, Versailles, Boulogne sur Mer, Les Vans.

Secondary schools: Paris (Irish), Rouen.

Sunday schools or academies: Paris.

Missionary schools: Alès, Les Vans.

Re-education centre: Rouen.

Confinement centre: Rouen.

Seminary for country teachers. Rheims, Paris, Saint-Denis.

He writes: The Conduct of Schools, from experience. Something entirely new: School for the populace. Priority given to reading in the native language. Groups and standards by classes. Silence, (the use of the "signal"). Continuous activity: various jobs. Individual control. Personal record cards. Catechism; Christian atmosphere.

Eight Catechisms: Instructions and Prayers for the Holy mass. Instruction and Prayers for Confession and Communion. Instruction for Learning how to make a Good Confession. The Duties of a Christian towards God: by question and answer. Exterior and Public Worship (Christian Life). The Duties of a Christian towards God. Continuous discourse. Long summary of the Duties of the Christian towards God. Short Summary of the Duties of a Christian towards God.

Five other school books: Spelling book (to learn how to spell and pronounce). Office of the Blessed Virgin and Psalter (for reading in Latin). Exercises of Piety for the Schools. Rules of Good Behaviour and Christian Politeness.

"If you love Jesus Christ, you will take every care to imprint his holy love in the hearts of the children you train to be his disciples: see, therefore, that they often think of Jesus, their good and only Lord, that they often speak to Jesus, that they aspire only after Jesus and that they breathe only for Jesus" (*Meditation* 102,2).

D. SPIRITUAL WRITER: His originality becomes apparent in four principal themes:

— Unity of life. Make no distinction between the business of your state and those of your salvation and perfection..." (*Recueil of short treatises*, p. 184).

— Spirit of Faith. The spirit of faith should induce those who compose it (the Institute) to view nothing except by the eyes of faith, to do nothing except with a view to God and to attribute all to God. (*First Rule*, Ch. II, art. 1).

— Meditation in the Presence of God. "It is worthy of note, as regards the presence of God, that one must not dwell on it for but a short time, for it is that which most contributes towards obtaining the spirit of prayer..." (*Explanation of the Method of Mental Prayer*, p. 35).

— Theology of Education. "All the care you take of the children confided to your care will be useless if Jesus Christ Himself does not give them the virtue, the strength and the efficacy..." (*Meditation* 195,3).

He writes: The Collection of Short Treatises. The Common Rules of the Brothers of the Christian Schools. The Rule of the Brother Director. The Explanation of the Method of Mental Prayer. Meditations for the Time of the Retreat. Meditations for Sundays and the Feasts of the Year (192 in all). Numerous letters, nearly all of spiritual direction. We have only 134 of them of which 53 are signed.

"You have committed yourself to taking the place of God with regard to those you teach.

And in taking care of their souls you have, so to speak, offered him soul for soul" (*Meditation* 137,3).

E. PRIEST: A very small aspect since he subordinated everything to his vocation as Founder. He was a priest however:

— An exemplary celebrant of the Mass.

— Confessor.

— Spiritual director (there are 14 letters giving direction to people outside).

— Convertor of souls. (There are 8 very impressive cases known).

— Defender of the Pope: against Gallicanism, Jansenism, Quietism...

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