



04-A-21

THE KNOWN MANUSCRIPTS OF SAINT J.B. DE LA SALLE (2)

(B) THE OTHER DOCUMENTS WRITTEN THROUGHOUT AND SIGNED BY M. DE LA SALLE

Of the 12 manuscripts, other than the Letters (surveyed in LASALLIANA 3), written throughout and signed by our Founder, 7 are in AMG, 3 are in the municipal archives of Rheims, 1 is in private ownership also in Rheims, and 1 is in the archives of the Département Seine-Maritime in Rouen.

THE FORMULA OF VOWS. 1694

The first, in chronological order, of the AMG collection is the Formula of Vows, personally composed by M. de La Salle for the ceremony of the first perpetual vows in the history of the Institute (leaving aside the secret "heroic" vow of 1691), the ceremony which took place at Vaugirard on Trinity Sunday, 6 June 1694. The formula, contained on one side of a sheet of paper 14x17 cm, would seem to have been written out by the Founder to serve as a model for transcription by the copyist for the occasion, Brother Michel-Barthélemy Jacquinet. The latter made thirteen separate copies of it, leaving blank spaces for the individual names, closing lines and signatures to be added personally by the Founder and by the twelve Brothers chosen by him to pronounce with him these first perpetual vows of association, stability and obedience. The "model" formula ("one of the most precious relics left by Saint John Baptist de La Salle") (CL2) is preserved between glass in a frame similar to those in which the letters are kept. The historical context of the formula has been fully explored by Br. Maurice Hermans in CL2, and the same authority has demonstrated its place in the young Society's progress towards canonical status, in CL11. An illuminating discussion of it as a "parole-force" in the Founder's faith-journey can be found in CL45, a work of Br. Miguel Campos. A curiosity of the manuscript, as such, is that it does not contain the addition "Roman Priest" after the signature, despite a statement of Canon Blain to that effect (CL7).

THREE "OBEDIENCES"

Next in order of time are three "obediences" addressed to Brother Joseph, Jean Le Roux, already mentioned as a recipient of two of the extant letters. By these three documents the founder appointed Br. Joseph, first in 1708, then in 1709, and again in 1711, to visit certain named communities, of which the Directors were instructed (in the first of the documents) to "receive the aforementioned Brother in the aforementioned capacity (of "Visitor") and to make known to him all that takes place in their house". The significance of these three brief, formally-worded mandates in the administrative evolution of the Society has been shown, again by Br. Maurice Hermans, in CL11.

THREE ACTS OF CESSION

The remaining three AMG manuscripts in this category reveal the Founder, with a consciousness that he had not long to live, disposing of property held in his name, in favour of his successor, Br. Barthélemy (and, therefore, in favour of the Institute). On 11 August 1718 — less, that is, than nine months before his death — he wrote out and signed, in duplicate, a formal cession (to "Joseph Truffet, called Brother Barthélemy, charged with the general

conduct of the schoolmasters known as the Brothers of the Christian Schools") of his library which, according to Blain (CL8), he had transferred from Paris to Saint-Yon, Rouen, which had been his residence since December 1715. The fact that this library was (in Blain's words) "quite well stocked with books" recalls the assurance of the earliest biographer, Br. Bernard Dauge, that the Saint used the annual income of 200 livres which, in obedience to his confessor, he had withheld from the distribution of his fortune to the poor, for his journeys, for the upkeep of the chapel, and for "furnishing his library with books for his own use and that of the community" (CL4).

Three months later, on 14 November 1718, he drew up a formal bequest to Barthélemy of "all the furnishings of the house of Saint-Yon". This and the previous duplicate document have been published in full by Br. Leon de Marie Aroz in CL26. All three manuscripts were to receive specific mention with their dates, confirming their validity, in the Testament of the Founder, dated 3 April 1719, which is also reproduced *in extenso* by Br. Aroz in CL26 (but only according to an ancient copy, since the original is unhappily lost).

THREE DOCUMENTS RELATING TO M. DE LA SALLE'S ROLE AS EXECUTOR OF NICOLAS ROLAND'S WILL

Three manuscripts preserved in the municipal archives of Rheims were written throughout and signed by M. de La Salle in fulfilment of his responsibility as co-executor of the will of his friend and spiritual director, Canon Nicolas Roland. They relate specifically to that part of the will which entrusted him (and a joint-executor, Nicolas Rogier) with the task of "securing, in its own situation and place, the establishment of the house and community of the Daughters of the Holy Child Jesus, together with the means needed to bring this about... not ceasing until the purpose is fully achieved." In a *Cahier Lasallien* (No. 38), devoted entirely to the life and foundation of Nicolas Roland, Br. Leon de Marie Aroz has shown, with abundant documentation, how seriously, and with what efficiency, John Baptist applied himself to the task thus imposed upon him by Roland's will. Three of the nineteen documents adduced by Br. Aroz in this monograph are the manuscripts we are considering. All three are reproduced in facsimile and in transcription, with detailed annotation by the learned commentator.

Particularly impressive among these three manuscripts is one headed: "Statement of all the goods, houses, properties and investments yielding revenue, belonging to the Community of the Holy Child Jesus..." It consists of ten pages of the Saint's small, compressed script, itemising in meticulous detail the property and goods held by the Sisters at the time of Roland's death. The provision of such an inventory was a necessary step in the process of obtaining the letters patent which would give Roland's foundation legal recognition. Interestingly, not only is the document written throughout by M. de La Salle, but his signature alone appears at the end of it and not that also of the joint-executor, Rogier, who was a year below the legal age of majority (then 25) and who seems to have left all the initiatives to John Baptist — himself only 28 at this time.

The second of these three documents is a form of contract renting a property of the Holy Child Sisters situated at Beine to a local farmer. It fills a single page and is written throughout by M. de La Salle but in the name of the lessee (it begins: "I, the undersigned Archambault Pierre, farmer...") whose barely decipherable signature is appended alongside the Saint's customary "De La Salle".

The third manuscript is a brief statement of twelve lines, dated 18 February 1682, in which the Founder undertakes to indemnify personally the Sisters for any financial loss they might incur from a contract entered into, on his advice, three years earlier. It is a curious piece about which it would be interesting to know the underlying story.

TWO MORE LEGAL STATEMENTS

The document in private ownership (that of the Rheims lawyer, M. Thiénot, mentioned in another connection, in our previous article) is a private deed, dated 21 October 1699, whereby John Baptist authorised his younger brother Pierre, then a Counsellor at the Presidial Court of Rheims, to bring to a conclusion "in whatever manner he deemed suitable" a matter of a debt long owed to the Saint. It was a gesture of confidence in Pierre, whose distinguished career and noble character are portrayed by Br. Aroz in CL39, where the document here referred to may be found reproduced in fac-simile.

Finally, in this category, there is a formal attestation by the Founder, dated 11 December 1717, to the effect that certain investments in the city of Rouen belonged in reality to the Brothers of the Christian Schools and not to himself, even though the four contracts concerned had been made out in his name. The small document, some 120 words in all, has a significant place in the early history of the Institute. A month after its writing, the property of Saint-Yon, until then only rented by the Brothers, became available for sale. The price asked was 15,000 livres, and the sum of 6,000 livres realised by the Community on the strength of this attestation of M. de La Salle made a substantial contribution to this sum. Saint-Yon was to remain the Mother House of the Institute until 1771. The text of the document, of which the original manuscript is in the keeping of the Seine-Maritime Archives in Rouen, is reproduced with annotations by Br. Aroz in CL26. (*To be continued*)

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