

**SANTIAGO (CHILE)****INAUGURATION OF  
ST. JOHN BAPTIST DE LA SALLE  
SQUARE**

On May 15th 1990, on the occasion of the 40th anniversary of the Brief "Quod ait" by which Pope Pius XII proclaimed St. John Baptist de La Salle «Principal patron before God of all teachers», the town authorities of Reina (which is part of the capital Santiago) inaugurated a square named after this French Saint who in 1680 founded the Brothers of the Christian Schools.

French also are the robes we wear, we religious of this congregation which was the first in the history of the Church to be formed of men committed by vow, but exclusively lay, to devote their lives to education seen as an apostolic service worthy to occupy the whole life of a man and to motivate a life of sanctity.

It was at the request of Mgr Rafael Valentin Valdivieso, archbishop of Santiago, that President Jose Joaquin Perez gave legal status to our congregation of the Brothers of the Christian Schools in 1862, authorising us to establish ourselves in Chile.

In 1877, the Brothers took over the St. Vincent de Paul Workshops house, founded in 1855 by Mgr Jose Hipolito Salas who had introduced the Society of St. Vincent de Paul to Chile and had been consecrated bishop of Concepcion in 1854. The members of the community were Brothers Amedee (from Paris), Theophile Justin (from Avignon) and Donatoris (from Quimper). Shortly after, the arrival of a Canadian, Brother Xavier (James Peter Davis Mulhall) strengthened its universal character which is proper to our congregation and the Church. These Brothers belonged to the District of Ecuador, the first Latin American country in which the Brothers established themselves (in 1863). The first Director of this house was Brother Jucondus (from Bordeaux).

Confirmation that the Brothers of the Christian Schools had taken root in Chile came quickly: two youngsters, Juan Francisco Rivas and Luis Gonzaga Romero, entered the novitiate and took the habit in 1879. The increasing numbers of those wanting to imitate these religious educators forced the latter to

open a house of formation in 1888. Located first in Providencia, it was transferred in 1916 to the countryside of Tobalaba, by the side of a minor road leading from the town to the foot-hills of the Cordillera.

Close to the place where the square, which has just been inaugurated, is located, the Brothers had bought a country house standing in its own property which included gardens and an artificial lake. Its former owner was a Frenchman, a certain M. Hippolyte Pinaud, with whom quite naturally the Brothers were on good terms. The architect Joannon, whose origins were French also and who had a great influence on the architecture of Santiago at that time, built what is now the central building of De La Salle College. Built on land which, since 1963, has been part of the town of Reina, it was intended to house the novitiate, the postulancy, the scholasticate for the professional training of the young Brothers, the residence of the Provincial of the Brothers in Chile and the infirmary for old Brothers. Building began in 1914 and the auxiliary bishop, Mgr Miguel Claro came to bless the building on March 19th 1916, the feast of St. Joseph. It was one of the first buildings in Santiago to be constructed of reinforced concrete. It was in open countryside, several kilometres from the town, a peaceful area where several congregations had come to find tranquillity, and after which a number of streets has been named: the Daughters of Charity of St. Vincent de Paul, the Augustinians, the Mercedarians. On the side of the square there stands the convent built by the Poor Clares, which is now a retreat centre run by Franciscan nuns.

In 1869, Mgr Rafael Valentin Valdivieso had founded the Society of the Catholic Schools of St. Thomas Aquinas which he subsequently entrusted to the Brothers of the Christian Schools along with its schools: St. Luis, San Carlos, Ruiz Tagle, Providencia, Mercedes Guzman and Juan Francisco Bravo. He died in 1878 and one of his successors, Mgr Mariano Casanova (responsible in his turn for this vast archdiocese which would be split up only in 1925 when Church and State were separated), entrusted to the care of the Brothers of the Christian Schools the diocesan training college which ran from 1901 to 1925, and then in 1909, the Instituto Arturo Prat de San Felipe, the Instituto Zambrano, and then the Blanco Encalada de Talca School (founded in 1912). This latter school numbered among its pupils the future Cardinal Raul Silva Henriquez, Rafael Retamal, future President of the Supreme Court, Osvaldo Iturriaga (at present the Controller General of the Republic), Sergio Molina (at present the minister in charge of the ODEPLAN). In this and other schools there studied several respected political figures like Luis Pareto (at present Mayor of Santiago), Admiral Jorge Martinez Busch (Commander-in-Chief of the Armed Forces), and the only chiropractor in the country, Doctor Victor Hugo Aguilera Altamira, a former student of the San Lazaro school, who did specialist studies in the United States.

The work of the Brothers founded by St. John Baptist de La Salle, inspired by the Christian spirit, concentrated in particular on gratuitous schools. And so, in 1889, there were founded the Arturo Edwards de Valparaiso School (its first Director, Brother Gagelinus, was taught for 6 years in Ecuador by Brother Miguel who was recently canonised); the San Vicente de Valparaiso School and the San Vicente de Limache Workshops, which were destroyed during the 1906 earthquake. In 1891, the first Chilean Brother, Br. Gumersindo Vasquez Alamos opened the San Luis Gonzaga School, and the following year the San Carlos de Santiago School was opened. In 1897, a former pupil of the San Vicente de Valparaiso School, Brother Luciano (Jose Ismael Turriz), became the first Director of the Manuel Jose Irrarrazaval de Santiago School. A former pupil of the Arturo Edwards School, Brother Simeon, taught for 37 years at the Blanco Encalada School (now De La Salle de Talca College) till his death in 1954, having greatly impressed his many former pupils.

The work of St. John Baptist de La Salle has become very well known in the country thanks to the school textbooks produced by the Brothers of the Christian Schools in the H.E.C. Series. Brother Clarence Francois (called Br. Pancho by the pupils) published some very successful arithmetic, algebra and geometry textbooks in the Series under the pseudonym "Omer Cano". The updating of successive editions has been ensured by Br. Cornelio who, at the age of 83, continues to work at the free Arturo Edwards de Valparaiso School. Br. Teodoro Soulie (who had Santiago Bruron, Rene Pienovi and Jose Miguel Silva as his pupils) produced textbooks on the history and geography of Chile in collaboration with other experienced Brothers, thus continuing a tradition that goes back to the beginning of the Institute.

To be present for this occasion, delegations have come to De La Salle College from the Francis de Temuco School (founded in 1955) and from the former Instituto San Jose (founded in 1904 and which also is now called De La Salle College). Pupils have

come from Talca but also from our free schools: San Gregorio de La Granja (founded in 1983), the Instituto La Salle de La Florida (founded in 1954), and the San Lazaro de Santiago School (opened in 1955). Pupils and teachers have come who have been inspired by the example and the pedagogical and mystical teachings of St. John Baptist de La Salle. Since 1909 we have been running an agricultural school at Macul, and since 1936 another one in Las Condes, and since 1943 yet another one near Puente Alto. Urban expansion, however, has changed the unspoilt setting and teaching methods.

Brother Leopoldo Galvez Saavedra, who died in 1936, had organised Catholic teachers' associations in Valparaiso and Santiago. Since 1976, a group of lay people who joined together under the name of "Signum Fidei", have been applying to their daily lives the lay spirituality for the service of education formulated by St. John Baptist de La Salle. Our schools have begun taking in girl pupils, and already one of our former pupils has joined the Carmelite missionaries.

After the transfer of the novitiate to Cordoba (Argentina) in 1940 and that of the juniorate to La Florida, successive Directors of De La Salle College have collaborated with the municipal authorities of La Reina (founded in 1963), hence the splendid idea of naming a square in honour of St. John Baptist de La Salle. In the square, a symbolic monument has been erected, the creation of the architect Cesar Lazcano: the three columns at the centre of the monument symbolise the three pillars of the spirituality of the Brothers of the Christian Schools. These three elements they transmit to the pupils, the parents, the teachers, the members of the administrative team and their helpers. Faith is translated into consecration and prayer, the community extends its brotherhood, and their mission urges all on to render apostolic service to others.

**Br. Enrique García Ahumada**