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### THREE CONTEMPORARIES OF DE LA SALLE

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Among the important contemporaries of John Baptist de La Salle we would like to sketch in this article just three persons who had some relationship with our Founder.

These are just brief sketches which can be fleshed out by consulting the references cited.

#### 1. CLAUDIO POUILLART DES PLACES

He was born in 1679 and died in 1709 at the age of just 30. In 1703 he founded the Missionary Congregation of the Holy Spirit, whose charism is to preach the Gospel especially among the poor and simple people.

In 1848 this Congregation merged with the one founded by Father Libermann and took the name of the "Congregation of the Holy Spirit and Mary Immaculate".

The connection with De La Salle came about as a result of the Saint's interest in assuring good spiritual direction for the Brothers. The Brothers had asked that De La Salle himself assume that responsibility and he accepted it although with some reluctance.

It seems that De La Salle somehow was in contact with Poullard des Places to arrange for his priests to be the spiritual directors for the Brothers but it did not happen.

De La Salle also contacted the Sulpicians for the same service but they did not accept either.

We know from Blain (1) that De La Salle served as an intermediary so that the young Abbé Clément might contact Poullard des Places. And there was a certain relationship between the Congregation of the Holy Spirit and the School for Teachers founded in Saint Denis which was established by Abbé Clément and De La Salle.

"Manuscript 103" in the Generalate describes the Institute and the School for Teachers. Some think that while the handwriting appears to be that of Brother

Anthony (Jean Partois), the ideas that it puts forth seem to come from John Baptist de La Salle himself and that this would be the brief that he drew up to inform Abbé Clément or perhaps Poullard des Places himself (2).

When Clément changed his mind and betrayed De La Salle, the St. Denis School for Teachers collapsed and aid from the Congregation of the Holy Spirit ceased. On the other hand, the early death of Claudio Poullard des Places in 1709 ended the direct relationship between the two founders.

#### 2. CHARLES ROLLIN

He was born in Paris in 1661, ten years after John Baptist de La Salle, and he died at the age of 80 in 1741.

At the age of 33, in 1694 he was appointed the Rector of the Sorbonne at the University of Paris, which in itself is an indication as to what kind of thinker and teacher he was. In 1720 he was reappointed to the same position.

His entire life was in service of education. In 1726 he published his "Treatise on Public Education" in 8 volumes. In this work he deals with topics such as:

- exercises appropriate for children at an early age;
- the understanding of languages;
- the way to conduct class;
- poetry, rhetoric and eloquence;
- History and Philosophy...

Rollin indirectly refers to De La Salle without naming him when he writes: "Some years ago in Paris (he wrote this in 1726) in the majority of the schools for the poor a very easy method for students was introduced that saved a lot of effort for teachers.

The school is divided into classes and the first thing the teacher would do would be to observe the students and their character and to control their behavior" (3).

Rigault affirms that the Brothers themselves verified that Rollin's thought coincided with that of De La Salle. There are several matters that De La Salle deals with in his writings, especially in the Rule, Meditations and the Conduct of Schools, that Rollin reflects in the eighth volume of his Treatise when he speaks about the way to conduct class.

Another curious anecdote for the Brothers is that the "Prayer of the Teacher before School" appears in Volumes Three and Eight of Rollin's Treatise although with slight variations. The Brothers also added the final part, "I unite all my actions to those of Jesus Christ, and I beg..."

Rigault says: "It is an admirable prayer that the Brothers recite each day before going to class".

### 3. ST. LOUIS MARIE GRIGNON DE MONTFORT

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St. Louis Marie Grignon de Montfort was born in Rennes in 1773 when John Baptist de La Salle was already 22 years old and had returned to Rheims as tutor for his siblings.

He was the founder of the Daughters of Wisdom and a group of priests known as the Montfort Missionaries.

He died in 1715 when he was only 42 years old.

Grignon de Montfort, like De La Salle, studied at the Seminary of Saint Sulpice from 1693-1700. The Brothers arrived in Paris in 1688.

Sulpician spirituality had a marked influence on Louis Marie which is why it comes as no surprise that there are similarities between his thinking and De La Salle's. For example:

- Recommendation for frequent communion.
- Favorite expression: "Blessed be God!"
- A marked concern for evangelizing the poor.
- Abandonment to Divine Providence.
- The imitation of Jesus Christ for renewing the Christian spirit.
- Frequent reading of and meditation on the Bible, etc.

Grignon de Montfort was a popular missionary of his time. He was stouthearted, as he traveled all over the lower part of Brittany.

In his missionary efforts in villages, while he and his priests were preaching to adults, the lay colleagues that accompanied him were teaching and catechizing the children. "The School for Children", he wrote, "is the most effective means against the ill effects of heresies". His work would not have endured long were it not for the work of the schools. This was a common idea among Barré, Roland and others. Louis Marie de Grignon "also wrote Rules for his popular schools, inspired by St. John Baptist de La Salle" (4).

Another very useful practice used by Grignon de Montfort was his use of song. He himself composed more than 20,000 verses for popular religious songs which he used to spread the Christian doctrine about which he had preached.

There was a parallel practice used in the Christian Schools where there was singing before beginning the Catechism lesson with the songs chosen to spread the truths of the faith.

De La Salle adopted "Live, Jesus, in our hearts. Forever." as the watchword of the community. Grignon de Montfort had a similar expression: "Live, Jesus. Live by means of your Cross". Perhaps both these expressions came about as a result of the spirituality obtained at Saint Sulpice.

The distinctive characteristic of St. Louis Marie de Montfort was his devotion to the Blessed Virgin and he even wrote a book about this which became famous. It was entitled: "True devotion to the Blessed Virgin". We are all familiar with the tender devotion that our Founder had towards Mary and his recommendations to the Brothers concerning this, the practices of the Institute and the beautiful writings about her such as we have in the Meditations.

All of this shows a striking parallel between the two founders. John Baptist Blain, who wrote a life of our Founder, also wrote the Life of Louis Marie Grignon de Montfort. •

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(1) **Blain**, 2, p.75.

(2) **Gallego, S.** *Vida y Pensamiento de San Juan Bautista de La Salle*, II, p. 726.

(3) **Rigault**, *History of the Institute*, volume II, pp. 575-579, 582.

(4) **Théodule Rey-Merment**, *Life of St. Louis Marie Grignon de Montfort*, p. 139. BAC popular, number 92.