

**FEMALE PRESENCE  
IN THE LIFE OF  
SAINT JOHN BAPTIST DE LA SALLE  
III  
Relationship with the Sisters  
of the Child Jesus and other women**

**Brother Carlos José Láinez Paz**

– In April, 1678, Nicholas Roland returned to Paris but he was exhausted. Preaching and other activities such as those having to do with theology, the canonry, the young seminarians that he had at home, his many concerns for the Sisters of the Child Jesus had drained him of energy. Two of the sisters contracted typhoid and Roland caught it also since he often took care of them.

On April 19 Roland retired to his bed not to rise again. On December 23 he dictated his last will and testament and he named John Baptist de La Salle and Nicholas Rogier as executors.

Roland died in the odor of sanctity on April 27 and on the 29<sup>th</sup> he was buried in the sisters' chapel.

De La Salle was again chosen to be the guardian, this time of a religious congregation. The Sisters were hoping to receive the Letters Patent so that their congregation would be recognized by civil authority. On May 23, Archbishop Le Tellier personally delivered the royal letter, in accord with the executors, to the city council and to the notaries public Roger and Dallier. This was so they would be in favor of the establishment of the Sisters' Congregation.

It was very likely that De La Salle celebrated daily Mass in the Sisters' Community.

The two executors, De La Salle and Rogier, improved the Sisters' financial situation and in this way the Sisters were not a burden to the city.

They drafted a memorial according to the spirit of Roland: the Sisters would be lay and their schools were to be entirely gratuitous; they would care for 30 orphans in Rheims and they would support themselves

by means of private income although in order to care for the orphans there would be charity collections. The final clause planned for the eventual liquidation of the society.

On August 11 an agreement was reached. De La Salle and Rogier had clarified the terms and had sounded out each of the 29 persons who were eligible to vote. On August 12 five canons, twelve parish priests and the abbots and superiors of ten convents agreed to the arrangement.

With Villa's approval, the king awarded the Royal Patent and it was signed in February in St.-Germain-en-Laye. On February 17 it was registered in the parliament in Paris.

Archbishop Le Tellier, De La Salle and Rogier all could claim credit for having put an end to this chapter.

Blain insists that John Baptist was very remiss in visiting the Sisters of the Child Jesus (in the chapter on the chastity of the subject of his biography and for that reason he had to emphasize his distance from women) but at times he admits that "Necessity demanded it". Documents, nonetheless, prove that obligatory dealings were frequent. He did not delay these visits when his technical advice was needed. He had to clear up their financial status:

There are two lengthy documents autographed by De La Salle which establish the financial position of the Sisters: "Temporal goods, houses, farms and income". These documents are dated August and October, 1679.

In April or May, 1679 the same type of situation occurred.

On September 16, 1678 he also intervened to establish the income for two Sisters: Agueda and Mary Blondel.

On December 15, 1678 he purchased a house across from St. James' parish in the name of the Sisters.

He rented the house that he purchased across from St. James' parish as well as another one in Canneton street; he leases the farm in Beinne and commits himself to compensate the Sisters if they are cheated by a sales contract. All this takes place in 1678, 1679 and 1682 (see note 106, Chapter IV of Gallego, Saturnino, I).

He would often speak with Frances Duval about spiritual topics and about news of the life of Roland and of the story of the small congregation. He would also speak with Mrs. Maillefer concerning her thoughts, and her generous support with organizing a school for poor children; and also Adrian Nyel of whom the superior of the Sisters never ceased to tire of praising.

His conversations with the superior of the Sisters served to strengthen his interest in the schools which

the work of Roland and the Sisters had awakened in De La Salle.

It was Frances Duval who made the presentation when De La Salle and Nyel had their first dialogue.

In the terrible winter of 1684-1685, De La Salle distributed bread among the students in the Brothers' schools and the students in the schools of the Sisters of the Child Jesus.

On May 31, 1687 Adrian Nyel was dying in Rheims. De La Salle offered a Mass in memory of Nyel and the chapel of the Sisters of the Child Jesus was decorated with tapestries and crepe paper. He also presided at the funeral services for Nyel's eternal repose and in attendance were all who lived in the Brothers' residence and all the Sisters as well.

Recalling all the manuscripts left by Roland to the Sisters of the Child Jesus, De La Salle got the idea for a collection of maxims and treatises that would be useful for the Brothers.

On July 30, 1692 De La Salle sold the Sisters' farm that they had left in Beine-Mouchery.

By means of the Sisters of the Child Jesus, Gerardo Frizon left 150 livres to De La Salle on June 30, 1712.

(Gallego, Saturnino, Volume I, pp. 128-130 and note 96; 133-135 and notes 2,3,4; 204; 247-248 and note 96; 430 and note 68).

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### RELATIONSHIPS OF JOHN BAPTIST DE LA SALLE WITH OTHER PIOUS WOMEN.

In Rheims along with the spiritual direction of the Sisters of the Child Jesus, he also directed many other women known for their piety. From time to time they would come to see him at the Brothers' house in order to reveal their conscience to him; but, if they were satisfied for receiving his prudent advice, they were mortified at not being able to receive his blessing even though they knelt down in order to receive it in the entranceway. They very humbly asked to receive the grace that was characteristic of him. They never succeeded in getting him to do this. The reason for his negative response was that he only gave blessings from the altar.

...In spite of accepting only a limited number of persons for spiritual direction, among these was his own sister who took unnecessary advantage of him (Blain I cited by Felix-Paul, Letters of Saint John Baptist de La Salle, p. 422).

In Blain there are some extracts from four letters directed to the same woman requesting spiritual direction from Saint John Baptist de La Salle (Letters 115 to 118, Lasallian Publications, 1988).

Letter 115. To a laywoman.

...Faith is the way by which God wished to lead you to himself and by following this way you will please him most. Perhaps human nature will feel repugnance, but what does it matter? Is it not enough for you to know God alone? Surely this is of more value than all the other knowledge of the most learned men. . . .

Not only is the way of faith which God wants you to follow most advantageous for you, it is also very necessary, for you are well aware that other ways almost led you astray and caused you to lose God, once you abandoned the way of faith. . . .

Letter 116. To the same laywoman.

...The Most Blessed Virgin lived her whole life by the spirit of faith, and it is this spirit which God wants you to have. This is why you would derive much benefit from asking her to lead you to Our Lord along this way which is the one most pleasing to him. . . .

Letter 117. To the same laywoman.

... look on everything with the eyes of faith. You must never fail to do this, no matter what the reason.

Viewing things with the eyes of faith will earn for you in one day more good, more interior application, closer union with God, and greater vigilance over yourself than a month of those penances and austerities to which you are attracted.

Believe me, you will see its effect, though perhaps for the present you will not understand it.

Let me repeat, the more uncomplicated your view of faith, the more surely you will be disposed to simplicity of action and conduct which is the disposition God wants of you. . . .

Letter 118. To the same laywoman.

...I am very pleased to know, Madame, that your life is more peaceful now and more in keeping with the spirit of faith.

You are right in saying that, in the light of faith, you see things quite differently from when they are looked at in themselves without going beyond the natural view... •