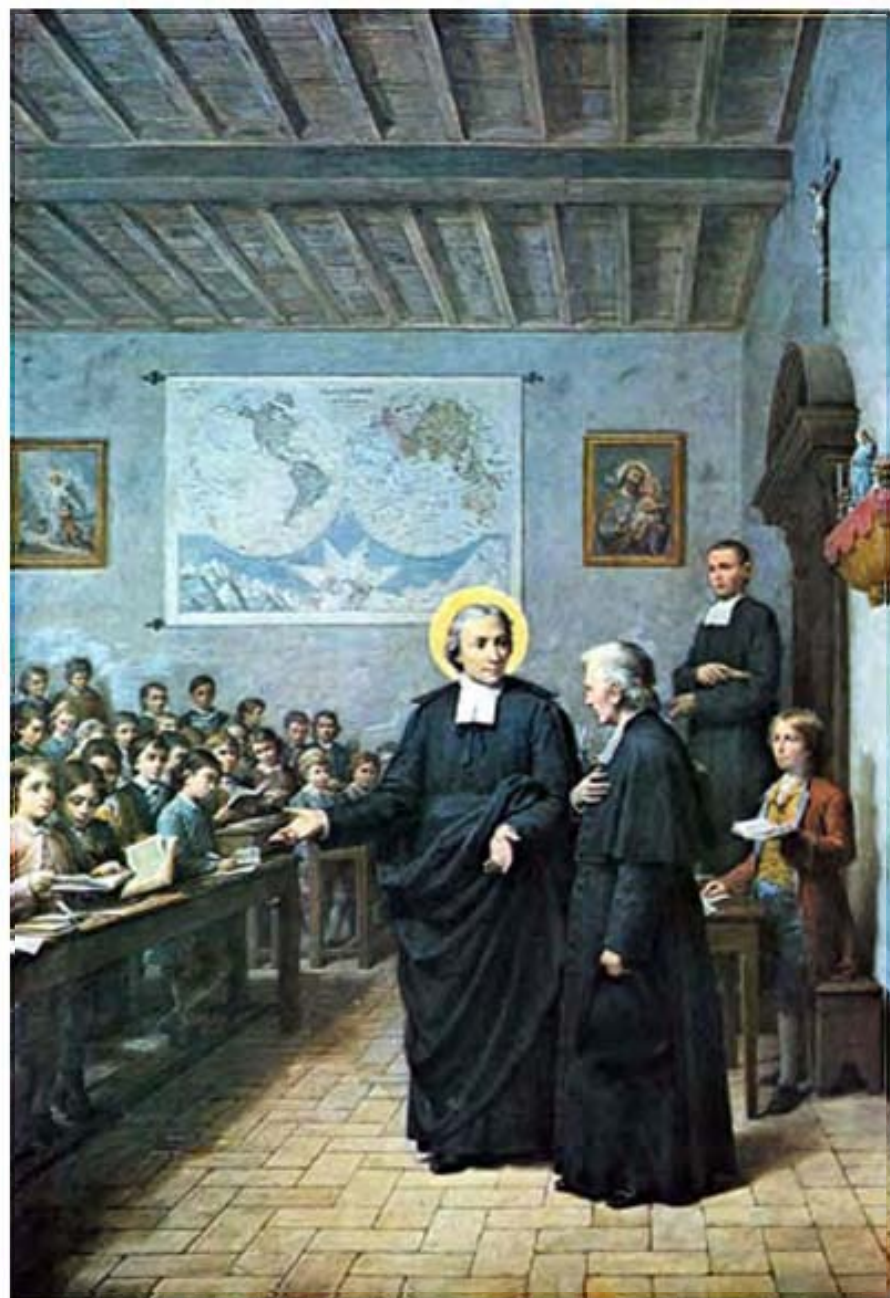




DE LA SALLE

a city saint

and the liberation of the poor

through education

Alfred Calcutt, fsc

**Matthew James Publishing Company Limited
19 Wellington Close
Chelmsford
Essex CM1 2EE**

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Introduction: A story of Christian compassion for the children of the powerless



A member of the bourgeois oligarchy of Rheims, Monsieur John Baptist de La Salle was also a canon of the **cathedral** where the kings of France were crowned. He was a man sure of a comfortable future of increasing benefices and of a possible bishopric later in life. Yet he abandoned all to dedicate his life to the training of communities of schoolmasters in order to cater for the Christian and urban rehabilitation of the impoverished and powerless majority of his own city and then of other towns in France. With a life span (1651-1719) largely coinciding with the direct rule of Louis XIV (1661-1715), his biography is a most interesting illustration of some aspects of French life in this period. Not of court life, nor of the literary coteries and salons of Paris, nor of the theatre, music, architecture and other artistic achievements of the reign, but of urban life, especially of the poor, and of who had the power in the towns.

At the same time, his work was a basic addition to the remarkable reforming movement in the Catholic Church in France and which gave it a new facet. In time his organisation gained the support of town notables keen on reform, but also met with overlapping jurisdictions, vested interests and outmoded traditions. His work above all spells out a new mode of parish schooling that broke with the current inefficiency, lack of expertise and professional motivation by the establishment of a network of schools served by communities of men bonded together by vow to serve the poor.

In 1721, two years after the death of their Founder, the Brothers of his community in Rouen described in a memoir addressed to the town corporation how they saw the origin of their society:

This Institute was started in the year 1680 by Monsieur de La Salle, who had great compassion for the large numbers of the children of the poor and of the artisan class, as much because their fathers and others were not able to instruct them in the principles of religion, being for the most part uneducated themselves and obliged to go out daily to earn their livelihood, as because these poor children were left to themselves. He conceived the idea of setting up schools where children of the poor and of the artisan class would learn reading, writing and arithmetic, free of charge, and would receive a Christian education through catechism lessons and other daily instructions suitable for forming good Christians.

For this purpose he gathered together some unmarried men, the majority

of whom, although full of goodwill for the instruction of youth and for a spiritual life, had been deprived of them through want of opportunity. The said Monsieur de La Salle, seeing that the number of members was increasing, and that they were being asked for in several towns of the kingdom, worked towards getting them to live in a way befitting the aim of this Institute; and in order to revive the life of the first Christians and to arouse in them the desire to put in common whatever they possessed and no longer own anything, he drew up rules for them, both for the overall government of their Institute as for their daily exercises.¹

When John Baptist de La Salle abandoned everything in order to throw in his lot with a group of young men he regarded as below his manservant, it was not through some personal vision or desire of his own. It was because he allowed himself to be led by God through a series of events, in order to respond to needs he had not noticed before. Looking back, he wrote:

If I had believed that the care I took of the schoolmasters merely out of charity would have made it a duty for me to live with them, I would have abandoned it..(But) God, who leads all things with wisdom and gentleness, and is not in the habit of forcing the inclinations of men, wishing to involve me entirely in the care of the schools, did so in a very imperceptible manner and over a long period of time, without my having foreseen it at the outset.²

After some thirty years of experience with his Brothers, reflecting on how the children of the poor had to be left on the street while their parents worked, he could write:

God has had the goodness to remedy such a great disadvantage by setting up Christian Schools...where the children, being kept all day, and learning to read, write and their religion, and so being always kept busy, will be in a position to be employed at work when their parents wish to put them to it. Thank God that he has had the goodness to make use of you to provide the children with such great advantages.³

You must have an altogether special esteem for the Christian education and teaching of children, since it is the means of helping them to become true children of God and citizens of heaven. Such teaching is the very foundation and support of their religion and of all the other good that takes place in the Church.⁴

The aim of this new society was Christian, human and social. The very professional way in which the three R's were taught well beyond the usual average for schools for the poor was meant to enable these children later on to rise out of their dependence on pittance wages paid by the property-own-

ing, commercial and ruling citizen class. They were also given instruction in the Catholic faith. Still more, by their care and example, these Brothers hoped that the children would learn to live their lives “by the spirit of Christianity”, as De La Salle often puts it.

This book is essentially concerned only with what happened in his lifetime. But the full impact of his work can only be seen and judged as it expanded all over France and then beyond until today. For his work has endured. His Society, which took the name of **Brothers of the Christian Schools** (*Frères des Ecoles Chrésiennes*), now runs schools and other educational establishments in eighty-one countries. In Great Britain and Ireland and Australasia they are known as De La Salle Brothers; in North America and the Far East they are called Christian Brothers or De La Salle Christian Brothers. In the wake of the Second Vatican Council (1963-65) they worked at the *aggiornamento* demanded of the whole Catholic Church. This effort gave shape to their rethought Rule of 1987. An indication of the Society’s fidelity to its original purpose was the Unesco Noma award in 1990 for its efforts worldwide in the field of literacy.

Early biographers and recent studies in French.⁵

After their Founder’s death on 7 April 1719, the Brothers of his Society wished to preserve his memory by publishing his biography. His successor at the head of the Society, Brother Bartholomew, asked for memoirs to be sent in with a view to publication, but he died on June 6th 1720. The second Superior General, Brother Timothy, pushed ahead with the project, entrusting it to a young member of the Institute, Brother Bernard Dauge. Born at Fribourg in Switzerland, he was only twenty-three. He had taught in Grenoble and was at the time in the Paris community.

Within a year he had written the first 89 pages, up to the year 1687. He sent a copy to De La Salle’s brother Canon Jean-Louis in Rheims, who wrote his own amendments on the document, and it is this copy that is now in the Archives of the Brothers in Rome.⁶ Bernard began and completed a new life which has not survived. He was moved to Rheims in 1723 so as to be able to consult De La Salle’s relatives and other witnesses of his early life. Jean-Louis de La Salle was not pleased with all Bernard had written, and gave his copy of the manuscript to his nephew, the Benedictine Dom Elie Maillefer, who was the librarian of the monastery of St Remi in the town, for him to write a new biography. He was able to write it better, to add some information, and particularly to cut out references to Jansenist intrigues against De La Salle, for he himself was a Jansenist. He suppressed, therefore, the facts at times. He completed the work by the end of 1723. Two copies of his work exist in the Brothers’ Archives.

Brother Timothy was satisfied with neither biography, and in 1727 he commissioned Canon Jean-Baptiste Blain, who had come to Rouen in 1710 and knew the Brothers and their Founder well, to write an official life. He was given all the material that had been given to Brother Bernard, and memoirs written since then, as well as the two biographies. He produced two monumental volumes in 1733 that in spite of much verbosity at times, have been faithful to the documents and are our best source still.⁷ He made much use of Dom Maillefer's work without acknowledgement, which was usual at the time. In reply, the latter produced in 1740 a new edition of his work (in which he in turn borrowed from Canon Blain) now kept in the Rheims public library.⁸

Immense research has been done in French over the last half century on the life and family background, and the work and writings of De La Salle. 63 volumes to date constitute the series of *Cahiers Lasalliens* in French published by his Institute. They include the incredibly meticulous research of Brother Leon Maria de Aroz. From 1937 to 1953 Georges Rigault brought out the *Histoire Générale de l'Institut des Frères des Ecoles Chrétiennes* in 9 volumes. His first volume covers the lifetime of De La Salle. In 1954 Brother Félix-Paul published in Paris *Les Lettres de Saint J.- B. De La Salle, édition critique*. There is also the two-volume *Le XVIIe Siècle et les Origines Lasalliennes* (1970) by Yves Poutet, docteur-ès-lettres, a member of this Institute.

Together with the three original biographers of De La Salle, these are the main sources drawn upon for the present work. Except where stated, the translations are the author's. In Spanish, Saturnino Gallego, a member of his Institute, published in 1986 a detailed life of his Founder based on thorough checking of the sources, under the title *Vida y Pensamiento de San Juan Bautista De La Salle: I: Biografía*. The second volume presents his writings. Little use has been made of these volumes in the present work, partly because the author came to know of them late, partly because of his very limited knowledge of Spanish. Begun originally as a few pages intended for a group of young people, the present book is not a work of primary research.

The aim of this work.

It first sets out to follow chronological indications closely in order to see what this reveals as to John Baptist De La Salle's life as he actually lived it. Sometimes he appears to be in a period of great activity, whether of innovation, of meeting opposition or of making new foundations. Consequently one meets at times in these years something of the untidiness and unforeseen of life. By contrast, there appear quieter periods when he can give thought to

composing works for his Brothers that experience has shown to be desirable as a support to their life and mission. And throughout most of his life he appears as an alert administrator and a busy letter-writer.

In the second place, very much consideration has been given to background in the hope that this will help to see those events in their proper light at the time. One result is that certain permanent characteristics of De La Salle's endeavour stand out. His belonging to the reforming movement of the French church, for instance, and his true fidelity to the aims of the Council of Trent; his perception of what the genuine evangelisation of the poor meant; his borrowing of ideas from so many others, and the support he was offered by and accepted from, influential groups and authorities. Beyond all this, he stands out as the one who found the real basic answer to the Christian and human education of the poor. And from his writings we can estimate the surprising depth of motivation of his Brothers' life.

A number of recent historians of the France of Louis XIV have been drawn upon in the earlier stages of the work, and will be acknowledged in their place. Poutet's work on Lasallian origins has brought more specific help to a very considerable degree. It has given, for instance, a clearer picture of the circumstances of each school's foundation in twenty-two towns, allowing De La Salle's aims and his relations to the different authorities, local and central, to be better perceived.

The hope is that the present work will make available in English some of the fruits of recent research to an increasing number who wish to know more about the origins and spirituality of the Brothers of the Christian Schools with whom they have lived and worked. Students of Louis XIV's France will find in De La Salle an interesting illustration of urban social and religious life, and also the most significant figure in achieving a permanent breakthrough in popular education.

Previous lives and recent works in English.

Previous lives include the following:

The Life of the Venerable J.B. De La Salle. Translated from the French of Père Garrau, S.J. (1760), Dublin 1843 by the Christian Brothers of Ireland. The life is followed by a chapter on their own independent rise and development from 1802 under their Founder, Blessed Edmond Rice.

The Christian Brothers. Their Origin and work, with a sketch of the life of their Founder, the venerable Jean Baptiste De La Salle. By Mrs F. Wilson. London, Kegan Paul, Trench and Co., 1883.

The Spirit and Virtues of J.B. De La Salle. Translated from the French of Canon Blain (1733), 1890 edition with an introduction by the abbé Auguste

Carion. Mame and Sons, Tours, 1895. This translates Blain's Book IV in his second Volume.

The Life and Virtues of St John Baptist De La Salle, by Jean Guibert, S.S. Translated from the French of 1901. Mame and Sons, Tours, and J. de Gigord, Paris, 1912.

The Life and Labours of Saint John Baptist De La Salle, by Francis Thompson (author of "The Hound of Heaven"). Burns Oates and Washbourne Ltd., London 1923.

John Baptist De La Salle, his life and his Institute. Martin Dempsey, Bruce Publishing Company, Milwaukee, 1940.

La Salle, Patron of all teachers, Edward A. Fitzpatrick, Bruce Publishing Company, Milwaukee, 1951.

St John Baptist De La Salle. W.J. Battersby. See below.

J.W. Adamson's, *Pioneers of Modern Education* (Cambridge University Press, 1921), has a chapter on St Jean-Baptiste De La Salle, pp 212-236.

Recent works in English.

The mass of material to draw upon relative to De La Salle himself, whether of the first biographers or the result of primary research is necessarily in French. But an increasing number of serious works produced by members of his Institute are appearing in English. Still very readable and of high academic standard is W.J. Battersby's *St John Baptist de La Salle*, London, Burns and Oates, 1957.

In 1988 the late Edwin Bannon, Archivist at the time at the Brothers' central house in Rome, published *De La Salle: A Founder as Pilgrim*. He indicates in his sub-title that it is a reading of the life of the Founder of the Brothers of the Christian Schools in the light of Brother Miguel Campos's doctoral thesis on the Gospel journey of Saint John Baptist De La Salle (*L'Itinéraire Evangélique de Saint Jean-Baptiste de La Salle*).⁹ But it is also a very perceptive life of the Founder in its own right.

In the *United States*, individual works of scholarship have appeared, while the entire project titled *Lasallian Publications* was completed in 2002.

In 1980 Luke Salm published his translation of extracts from the research done in French under the title: *Beginnings. De La Salle and his Brothers*, and followed it up in 1983 with his *Encounters: De La Salle at Parménie*. In 1981 a translation by Matthew J. O'Connell appeared of the second part of the deep study of De La Salle's spirituality by Brothers Michel Sauvage and Miguel Campos. It has the title: *St John Baptist De La Salle: Announcing the Gospel to the Poor*. In 1989 Luke Salm published the first biography of our subject in English since W.J. Battersby's in 1957. Entitled: *The Work is*

Yours: The Life of Saint John Baptist De La Salle, its agreeable presentation hides the scholarship and the wide contacts of the author. A second edition appeared in 1996.

The complete list of *Lasallian Publications* as commissioned by the Christian Brothers Conference of the United States and Toronto follows. I am grateful to Brother Paul Grass for updating me on this.

Lasallian Sources: series: The Complete Works of John Baptist De La Salle.

The Letters of John Baptist De La Salle. Translated and edited by Colman Molloy, FSC and Augustine Loes, FSC. Volume 1 of *The Complete Works...*, 1988.

The Rules of Christian Decorum and Civility. Translated by Richard Arnandez, FSC. Edited by Gregory Wright, FSC. Volume 2 of *The Complete Works...*, 1990.

Collection of Various Short Treatises. Translated by William J. Battersby, FSC. Edited by Daniel Burke, FSC. Volume 3 of *The Complete Works...*, 1993.

Meditations by John Baptist De La Salle. Translated by Richard Arnandez, FSC and Augustine Loes, FSC. Edited by Augustine Loes, FSC and Francis Huether, FSC. Volume 4 of *The Complete Works...*, 1994.

Explanation of the Method of Interior Prayer. Translated by Richard Arnandez, FSC. Revised translation by Donald C. Mouton, FSC, editor. Volume 5 of *The Complete Works...*, 1995.

The Conduct of Christian Schools. Translated by F. de La Fontainerie and Richard Arnandez, FSC. Edited with notes by William Mann, FSC. Volume 6 of *The Complete Works...*, 1996.

Rule and Foundational Documents. Translated and edited by Augustine Loes, FSC and Ronald Isetti. Volume 7 of *The Complete Works...*, 2002.

The Duties of a Christian to God. Translated by Richard Arnandez, FSC. Edited by Alexis James Doval. Volume 8 of *The Complete Works...*, 2002.

Religious Instructions and Exercises of Piety for the Christian Schools. Translated by Richard Arnandez, FSC. Edited by Eugene Lappin, FSC. Volume 9 of *The Complete Works...*, 2002.

Lasallian Resources: series : Biographies of John Baptist De La Salle by his contemporaries.

John Baptist De La Salle: Two Early Biographies. Dom François-Élie Maillefer, OSB, and Brother Bernard, FSC. Translated by William Quinn, FSC. Revised translation with notes by Donald C. Mouton, FSC. Edited by Paul Grass, FSC. Volume 1 of *Lasallian Resources*, 1996.

The Life of John Baptist De La Salle, Founder of the Institute of the Brothers of the Christian Schools: A Biography in Three Books. Jean-Baptiste Blain. Translated by Richard Arnandez, FSC. Edited by Luke Salm, FSC. Published in separate bindings with continuous pagination, 2000. *The Mind and Heart of John Baptist De La Salle.* Jean-Baptiste Blain. Translated by Edwin Bannon, FSC. Edited by Augustine Loes, FSC, 2000. The four books by Jean-Baptiste Blain are Volume 2 of Lasallian Resources.

Lasallian Resources: series: Early Documents

John Baptist De La Salle: The Formative Years. Luke Salm, FSC. Volume 1 of Early Documents, 1989.

The First De La Salle Brothers: 1681-1719. Augustine Loes, FSC. Volume 2 of Early Documents, 1999.

Lasallian Resources: series: Current Lasallian Studies.

John Baptist De La Salle and Special Education: A Study of Saint Yon. Othmar Würth, FSC. Translated by Augustine Loes, FSC. Adapted by Francis Huether, FSC. Edited by Bonaventure Miner, FSC. Volume 1 of Current Lasallian Studies, 1988.

So Favored by Grace: Education in the Time of John Baptist De La Salle. Edited by Lawrence J. Colhocker, FSC. Volume 2 of Current Lasallian Studies, 1991.

Spirituality in the Time of John Baptist De La Salle. Edited by Robert C. Berger, FSC. Volume 3 of Current Lasallian Studies, 1999.

John Baptist De La Salle: The Message of His Catechism. Jean Pungier, FSC. Translated by Oswald Murdoch, FSC. Edited by Gerard Rummery, FSC. Volume 4 of Current Lasallian Studies, 1999.

Sacred Scripture in the Spirituality of Saint John Baptist De La Salle. Luis Varela Martinez, FSC. Translated by Francis Vesel, FSC. Edited by Donald Mouton, FSC. Volume 5 of Current Lasallian Studies, 2000.



Acknowledgements

It is difficult to thank adequately the many whose works or whose personal help have contributed to the task of writing this book.

Two of these illustrations, namely, of St Hilary's Church and of the Rue Neuve, both in Rheims, reproduce two that appear in *Reims. Panorama monumental et architectural des origines à 1914*, By P. Demouy, F. Pomarede, R. Laslier. Collection: *Le Temps des cités*. Editions Contades, 1985. I am grateful for the full permission granted to publish them.

Equally to be thanked is the Maison Privat of Toulouse, for the authorisation to reproduce the sketch-map *Répartition des maîtres sergers vers 1685* (distribution of master-weavers c. 1685) from Pierre Desportes' *Histoire de Reims*, Privat, 1983. It is reproduced half-size compared with the original.

Brothers Leon de Maria Aroz and Yves Poutet gave the author the widest permission to draw on their works, and cannot be thanked enough. Their material has been vital. This applies also to Brother Emile Rousset with regard to his *J.B. De La Salle: Iconographie*.

Thanks are due to the Christian Brothers' Conference of the United States and Toronto for permission to use the late Brother Colman Molloy's translation of M. De La Salle's letter to the mayor and councillors of Château-Porcien.

Brother Emile Noirez could not have been more helpful in putting the facilities of the Hôtel De La Salle (as the restored Hôtel de la Cloche is now called) in Rheims, and its library, at my disposal and in obtaining permission from two French publishing houses. The chance to follow in Rome, 1990-91 the International Session of Lasallian Studies for nine months was an exceptional and opportune event. It made it possible to resort many times to the expertise of Brother Edwin Bannon, Archivist of the Brothers' Archives, who answered queries thoroughly and promptly. It also provided the occasion to visit the Archives of the Rome Vicariate near St John Lateran, and to be provided with useful photocopies by a staff most willing to help. Thanks also are due to the Librarian of the Brothers' Rome library.

Lectures given during that Lasallian Session have been an inspiration and a source for certain areas of this work, particularly for De La Salle's writings. Grateful recognition is made to Paul Walsh, CM, for his presentation of seventeenth-century French reform and spirituality; to Brothers Jean Pungier, for a knowledge of the sources and a critique of the Duties of a Christian and the Rules of Christian Politeness and Civility; Léon Lauraire, for details and statistics on French Society, especially in the towns, for the educational setting of De La Salle's work and insights into the pedagogy of the Conduct of Schools; Michel Sauvage, for the meaning of the Rule; and to Sister Elizabeth Germain, of L'Institut Catholique, Paris, for her lectures on the history of catechesis in France. Only a fraction of the erudition and insights of these researchers have found a place in this work.

I am grateful for the use of the Bodleian Library in my research, and also of the library of the Maison Française, Oxford. The staff of the Cabinet des Estampes of the Bibliothèque Nationale in Paris could not have been more courteous or helpful in a search for the painter and engraver Léon-Augustin LHermitte.

In Oxford, Benet Conroy, Auxiliary Provincial of the Brothers in Great Britain, was an indispensable help by reformatting the work and turning it out on his laser printer. Thanks go to the late Austin Chadwick, the Brothers' Archivist and Librarian there for the loan of many titles. Many thanks are due to Brother Kieran O'Callaghan, Warden of the Vietnamese Centre in Oxford and to his community, for performing the wearying task of checking through the whole text. Similarly to Brother Maximus, Director of the community in Cardiff, Wales, who gave the text a further proof-reading and added the perceptive comments of an historian.

I am particularly indebted to Brother Gerard Rummery, a General Councilor of the Institute, for having, through personal interest, read through the text three times and then sat with the author for three days to go through the work and suggest improvements.

A bonus, almost at the printing stage, came from no less a person than Brother Luke Salm. His eagle eye and expert knowledge of De La Salle's life saved many an error from appearing in the final text.

Finally, nothing would have resulted from all this help had not the publication of the completed work been supported and taken in hand by Brother Thomas Campbell, then Visitor of the District of Great Britain of the De La Salle Brothers.

Grateful recognition is made, whether in footnote references or in the Bibliography at the end of the book, of the modern historical sources used. They appear mainly in the earlier chapters, and have served to set them in a wider context or confirm a picture based, for instance, on Rheims sources only. In conclusion, thanking all those who have helped the author is not meant to cover with their approval the deficiencies of the book.

A.C. 1993.

References

1. CL2, 103.
2. Blain I, 169.
3. MTR 2.1.
4. MTR 7.3.
5. See E. Lett, *Les premiers biographes de saint Jean-Baptiste De La Salle*; W.J. Battersby, *Saint John Baptist De La Salle*, ix-xv; Gallego: *Vida y Pensamiento de San Juan Bautista De La Salle: I: Biografia*, 3-12.
6. Reproduced in *Cahier Lasallien* 4.

7. Reproduced in *Cahiers Lasalliens* 7 and 8.

8. His two editions are reproduced side by side in *Cahier Lasallien* 6.

9. Printed as *Cahier Lasallien* 45.

Note to the second edition

The present text incorporates a number of significant changes mainly in the light of new research. The circumstances of the loss of the family house by auction are more fully developed and help to give the true picture of De La Salle's abandoning it. (Chapter 6: The Final Break with his Past). Chapter 9 has an Appendix on the development of the workhouse system in Paris under Louis XIV, a system into which De La Salle and his Brothers never entered. In Chapter 16, the the account of the deliberations in Lyon which decided not to invite the Brothers to run the training centre for teachers is considerably expanded. The additions to Chapters 6 and 16 are again owed to Brother Leon de Maria Aroz. New research on Brother Gabriel Drolin, incorporated by the author in *Gabriel Drolin, Lasallian Publications, Oxford, 2002*, has been drawn upon while the space given him has been reduced.

This edition has been prepared for reproduction on CD-ROM. The illustrations in the text have either been replaced or given better reproduction. They total 32. Many others form part of the 125 links to websites.

I could not have done this without considerable help in the process from Brother Nicholas Hutchinson, FSC. Thanks are also due to Michael and Gwen Shaw of Matthew James Publishing for producing the master copy of the CD version of *De La Salle, a City Saint and the Liberation of the Poor through Education*, and bringing this project to completion. A.C.2004.

City Saint and the poor

PART I

**A YOUNG MEMBER OF THE RHEIMS OLIGARCHY,
1651-1679**

Chapter 1 : The first eighteen years, 1651-1629

BORN INTO A LEADING BOURGEOIS FAMILY.¹

John Baptist was born on 30 April 1651, the first child of Louis and Nicole De La Salle. His mother, née **Moët**, daughter of one of the local nobility, was 18 while his father, who was 25, was a member of the Rheims royal court of appeal. He belonged to the burgess class: the property-owning, trading, voting and administrative class of the city. It contrasted with the smaller independent craftsmen and the mass of dependent craftsmen poorly paid by bourgeois merchants. John was baptised the same day,² as were all subsequent children, a common practice in an age of poor hygiene and a century of frequent epidemics, when every family knew of early bereavements and would be anxious over every surviving child till it was about three years old. Ten births or so were common in a family in those days, but of these four or five could be stillborn or die within weeks or months. It is possible, as was a common custom, that Nicole chose to be with her mother for the last days before the birth, and that John was born at the Moëts in the Rue du Marc. He was baptised in their parish church of St Hilary, not two minutes' walk away, his maternal grandparents being his godparents. It was in fact common for the bourgeoisie to prefer this church or that of St Symphorian behind the cathedral. The family home in the Rue de l'Arbalète looked down towards the De La Salle's own parish church of St Peter-the-Old, two minutes' walk away. None of these churches is standing, for they were among ten of the fourteen parish churches sold as quarries during the Revolution.

John's parents had married on 25 August of the previous year in the bride's church, St Hilary's. The times were bad. Royal mercenary troops were deployed outside the north-eastern sector of the walls, for an attack by 1500 Spanish cavalry was feared. This was a consequence of the continuing war with Spain (see pp 30s). There was a procession in the town to implore the protection of St Remi, its patron, and the very day of the wedding chains were stretched across the streets. There would have been far less celebration than the usual week of banquets.³ John's father Louis traced his family tree from a Menault De La Salle, known in 1486, a prosperous merchant draper of Soissons, some thirty miles to the west of Rheims. From then on the family was associated with the changing fortunes of the ancient woollen trade. The De La Salles were often allied by marriage with the local nobility. Menault's grandson Lancelot was the first to settle in Rheims, in 1561 (al-

though there had been other De La Salles there since the fourteenth century). He was a silk merchant who married a noblewoman, became alderman of the city and was imprisoned by the civil authorities for two and a half months, from December 1575 to March 1576 on a false charge of Protestantism for having supported the future Henry IV, a Huguenot, in the Wars of Religion. Rheims was the centre of the Catholic League opposing him. It was Lancelot's brother, in fact, who had been a Huguenot, although he renounced his Protestantism later, and suspicion may have fallen on Lancelot. He was known for his kindness to the children of the poor. He sent several to a poor school, paying for their paper and ink, and then putting them out as apprentices. He paid for the upkeep of a boy he boarded with a silkweaver so that he could learn the trade. He used to lend a surgeon a horse so that he could visit needy folk, and he would also send them such things as preserves and dried fruit.

Since King Francis I (1515-47) burgesses could increasingly buy their way into the royal administration, a process encouraged by later kings keen on taking any real power from an ambitious and idle nobility, and using instead the business and administrative acumen of the towns.⁴ Louis De La Salle had himself broken with the family's traditional dependence on the cloth trade by studying law. His parents had supported him in this, and were wealthy enough to pay his fees at the city College and then his three years at the university, and then buy him a place on the magistrates' bench of the *présidial*, the local royal court, where he found as colleagues his future father-in-law and other relatives. He was already in function at the age of 22. A royal post raised the standing of the family in the city and its hopes of eventual letters of nobility.

Louis is another example of a De La Salle marrying into the local nobility. Nicole's father was a country squire of attested nobility, a member also of the royal court in Rheims. A 'nobleman' could be of straightened circumstances, with few lands, but as long as he could prove his ancestral connection with the ancient feudal nobility, he belonged to the first estate of the realm. By marrying a commoner, Nicole forfeited her rank. It was an example of a 'mésalliance', the unthinkable for a 'lord' to marry his daughter to a commoner. Increasing impoverishment of the nobility is a feature of seventeenth century France; marrying a daughter into a wealthy bourgeois family brought a titled man the means to maintain the expenses of his rank.⁵ But in the Moët family, marriage outside the nobility was virtually unknown; and the Moëts were much better off than Louis De La Salle, whose office as magistrate brought him no great financial benefit. Perhaps being on the same bench brought John Moët and Louis De La Salle into close relationship.⁶ This does not mean that Louis and Nicole's marriage was one of convenience; it may well be that two young people, meeting often in a closed society, were at-

tracted to one another, and that the parents were happy to further such a match.

Louis's writ as magistrate in the *présidial*, comprising 19 members, covered only lesser matters of civil and criminal law - the smaller civil suits and petty crime - in Rheims and an area equivalent to the diocese of Rheims. Set up by the king in 1551, these courts of appeal above the local courts, had as aim to take some of the work off the *Parlements* or regional high courts, in this case that of Paris. They could, without appeal, punish with the iron collar, banishment, flogging or a period of years in the galleys. They could not condemn to death or to the galleys for life without referring to the *Parlement*. These *présidials* gradually lost power and purpose and were abolished at the Revolution. In Rheims, the court house of the *présidial* was at the lower right hand corner of the Town Hall Square as you faced the Town Hall, on the corner of the Rue de Tambour and the Rue de la Prison. Besides his service as a magistrate, Louis was on two occasions elected alderman-magistrate on the city council; and twice he gave his services as administrator of the city's General Hospice. He had a love of music, and could play instruments with his friends as a relaxation from public duties. When an inventory was made of the house and its furnishings at his death in 1672, there were three theorbos in a room next to his.⁷

Louis and Nicole De La Salle were devout Catholics keen to bring up their children well, understandably within their social class. Together with their relatives throughout the bourgeois community, they would be conscious of having to keep up living standards, of promoting family interests, of seeking social advancement through positions secured in civic and royal administration. Living in comfortable, well-furnished houses, the burgesses were not indifferent to honour and wealth. Yet for many of them there was a genuine faith and piety, and while they would never think of associating with the dependent 'poor' or even the artisan class, they did have concern to relieve the needs of the poor. John's parents and other relatives must have taught him to seek God first: three boys of the family joined the priesthood genuinely as a vocation, as we shall see. A daughter joined a contemplative order after the death of her parents, and therefore not forced by them, while her sister brought up a Christian family that certainly reflected her Christian values.

That some bourgeois could break away from the exclusiveness of their class and indifference to the poor is shown by the example of a distant relative of De La Salle, Pierre Bachelier de Gentes (1611-1672). He had been to the Jesuit College, and then lived a very worldly life while also studying law. This had brought him to Rome, where his relative John Maillefer, the future father-in-law of John De La Salle's eldest sister Marie, was with him for four months. He was converted during an illness and took up a life of penance:

fasting, mortifying himself, caring for the sick, even sucking the pus from their sores, and burying those struck down with the plague. People he had known looked down on his efforts. He died in May 1672, aged sixty. Claud Bretagne, prior of St Remi's abbey, published his life in 1680. It may have encouraged John De La Salle when he was about to make his own great break with his past.⁸

The first family home

The house in which John was brought up was a large Renaissance-style mansion situated in the heart of the commercial quarter of the city, not a minute from the Cornmarket and Clothmarket, both situated on the site of the ancient forum, now renamed *Place du Forum*. **The house** occupied a little cul-de-sac at the turning of the Rue de l'Arbalète. Its ensign was the Cross of Gold, but it was usually known by its earlier name "at the sign of the Bell". It was built in 1545 and added to until 1557. John's great-great-grandfather, a merchant draper, had bought it in 1609. It is one of the three sixteenth century houses of Rheims left standing after the First World War, and even so it was gutted, but was restored in 1924 and is now a listed building.⁹ "By its architecture and decoration, it calls to mind all the grace of the first French Renaissance."¹⁰ Its graceful open spiral staircase, built into an angle of the inner courtyard, "recalls, due proportion observed, those of Blois and Châteaudun" (two châteaux of the Loire valley).¹¹ "With its curious facade and its fluted plasters and Ionian capitals and, in the inner yard, the gracious open turret, the *hôtel* De La Salle is a remarkable example of the finest Renaissance style."¹²

"The street in which this mansion is situated is one of the most ancient and most central for movement round the city, the one you pass through...from the Cornmarket to St Peter's Church."¹³ In the Middle Ages it became known as the Rue de la Chanvrerie, being the main centre of trade in linen and hemp (chanvre). Finally it was called Rue de l'Arbalète (or Crossbow Street). It makes a sudden turn towards the Cornmarket so that the '*hôtel*' de la Cloche, the De La Salle's residence, built at this point, faces right down the main part of the street and is well seen from a distance. "The Rue de l'Arbalète is described by the ancient chroniclers as a narrow and picturesque street...The houses encroached on to the roadway with no concern about being in line; and a stream, serving as drain, ran down its middle. For centuries this Rue de l'Arbalète was one of the most lively roads in our town. This it owed to the proximity of the Market Place...which was the commercial centre of the city of Rheims."¹⁴

This house, once bought, long remained in the De La Salle family. Louis's elder brother Simon bought it in 1643 at the time of his first marriage, and

rented half of it to Louis when he in turn got married in 1650. Louis bought his half outright twelve years later. Louis and his wife started off their married life endowed by their parents with relatively modest revenues that did not increase greatly as their family grew. They might, on account of Louis being a royal office-holder, have increased status and hopes for their children for the future, but they were less well-off than the merchant traders around them, and to look after a growing family and yet keep up an honourable life-style, they had to watch where the money went. For long, they were never able to be sumptuous or impressive, even when they wanted to; when they needed a second horse, for instance, they had to borrow it from their relatives the Maillefers.¹⁵

They would watch over their first-born, especially as he was somewhat premature, and also because there was another epidemic in the city that year, but baby John survived. They would normally expect him to carry on the family name and fortunes and status and, by buying a more important royal post than his father's, perhaps acquire eventually from the king "noblesse de robe". In Simon De La Salle's half of the *hôtel de la Cloche*, there was also a cousin of John's, a boy two years old, the fruit of Simon's second marriage with a Rose Maillefer, and in 1652 he had a daughter. Later that year, when John was 20 months old, Nicole gave birth to her second son and christened him Remi that same day, 11 December 1652.¹⁶ He brought the first sadness into the family, for he died shortly after. The couple had another child, a daughter Marie, on 26 February 1654.¹⁷ Again, they would have much anxiety, but Marie survived and lived till 1711. This same year Simon and Rose had another boy. Although others were born, these two boys and a girl were their only surviving children. Between the two households, there were now five children in the house.

This same year, 1654, a future brother-in-law of Marie's, a Maillefer, was christened with young Louis XIV's brother, Philip of Orleans, and the Queen-Regent, the Spaniard Anne of Austria, as his godparents by proxy, being represented by their first chamberlain and first lady-in-waiting respectively. The Maillefers were among the most respected families in Rheims. But the honour of that occasion was eclipsed when **Louis XIV** himself, not yet sixteen, arrived in Rheims on 3 June for his coronation on 7th in its magnificent cathedral. The elder John Maillefer, later to become John De La Salle's uncle, gave up his house for the duration to the Queen-Regent and to 'Mon-sieur', Philip of Orleans. Louis himself came to the house, and it was Cardinal Mazarin, the Queen's first minister, who led them to the upstairs suite. There John Maillefer was presented to the Queen in the presence of Louis and his brother. He made a fulsome speech of welcome and loyalty and never forgot the occasion. But he also notes in his memoirs that the Queen

conceded for his use only a ground floor room and the kitchen. "Otherwise," he wrote, "I should have been out of my own house."

On 5 June Louis went in solemn procession to the beautiful abbey church of **St Remi** at the other end of the town, about a mile from the archbishop's palace, where lay the tomb of St Remigius, the bishop of Rheims who baptised Clovis, King of the Franks. John De La Salle's father was in that procession in full robes of office, and many a relative would be taking part, among the aldermen and members of religious orders. There was another procession next day along the same route to the abbey of St Nicaise, close to St Remi's, an abbey with a beautiful Gothic church now destroyed, and finally, on 7th, the coronation itself. Little John may have been taken by his nurse to view these processions for a short while; he was only three then. On Tuesday 9th, Louis returned to St Remi's to exercise the 'King's touch' for scrofula. The patients came from the nearby St Marcoul's home for incurables, opened only as recently as 1650; they were laid out in the cloisters and gardens of the abbey.

Two years after the excitement of the coronation another girl, Rose-Marie, was born to the De La Salles on 29 February 1656,¹⁸ when John was not yet five and Marie was just two. As Rose-Marie grew up, they would play with her and their three cousins in their inner courtyard or in the short cul-de-sac in front of the house. Their father had rented, a few hundred yards away, a garden in the Rue des Murs, on the line of the former town walls, next to the garden of the Augustinian fathers. The children may have had the opportunity to go and play there. John, from the age of about six, would be given a priest as home tutor: this was the normal way for burgesses to cater for their children's education till the age of nine usually.

Early on, John had the idea of becoming a priest. We have no knowledge of when, or how the idea came to him. Perhaps he got it from his tutor, or from his worthy parish-priest. His great-cousin, Canon Dozet, vicar-general, a man very concerned about the reform of the clergy, may have been another influence. It says much for the generosity of John's parents, that they forfeited their family hopes by not opposing John's wish. A second boy, not the first, would be directed by families towards the ecclesiastical state and its benefices. Almost two years after Rose-Marie, Marie-Anne was born on 2 February 1658, before John was seven, but she died shortly after. John had been too young to realise Remi's death; this was his first family sorrow. But on 21 September 1659,¹⁹ another boy was born, and he survived. They called him Jacques-Joseph.

Growing up in a bourgeois family.

Little has been recorded on John's childhood by his first biographers. We

can form some idea of what it was like from the attitudes and practices of the day in respect to childhood and family life and also from social life, which involved so much coming together and public celebration.

With regard to dress: once a child was out of its swaddling clothes and bonnet, boys and girls were dressed alike up to the age of four or five, in a skirt, frock and apron. This is how we have to picture John Baptist as a toddler. The frock had two ribbons at the back, attached to the shoulders; they were the remains of the unused, pendant sleeves affected by the elegant in the 16th century. They survived either in ceremonial or in popular costume, as in the mantle adopted later by De La Salle's Brothers. At about five years, John would be dressed in the *jacquette*, a dress like a cassock down to the knee, with a collar. It opened down the front and was fastened with buttons or hooks and eyes. At about eight he began to dress as a man, with knee-breeches and doublet, stockings fastened underneath the knee with garters, shoes and bonnet. Magistrates, churchmen and statesmen continued, at least for their functions, to wear the medieval coat down to the feet. A cleric would doff this cassock and dress in doublet and hose for social occasions or even to present himself before his bishop. Children would go to college or school with the short robe of their younger days over the doublet.

All this refers to the children of nobles and bourgeois. Costume, under the *ancien régime*, represented strictly one's place in the social hierarchy, and was very expensive. We know that John De La Salle, belonging to one of the outstanding families of Rheims, liked to appear well-dressed, up to the point of being labelled a show-off.²⁰ None of this applied to the children of the 'poor', of the people. Apart from not belonging to the social hierarchy, they could rarely afford new clothes. They bought cast-offs from the second-hand clothes-dealers, several decades out of fashion, and the children, thrown early among adults in workshops, taverns or as cooks, wore the same dress as they.²¹

If Louis XIII, whose childhood upbringing we know in detail,²² had a wooden horse, a windmill, a bird on a string and wooden dolls, we can expect the same to be found in the two De La Salle households. Children after the age of three or four played card games like adults, either among themselves or with adults. They also played with hoop and stick.

Festivities

In those days work occupied less time in the day and less importance than now in public opinion, whereas games and celebrations took far more time than we allow them. They were the main means for people to get together, especially on the great annual festivities. Probably the greatest such occasion was the Feast of Kings (the Epiphany). It was an evening gathering when

everyone stayed up late. Family, friends and servants gathered round the table on which was a large cake with a bean hidden in it. A piece was cut from it and a child hidden under the table called out a name. And so it went on till someone found the bean in his piece. He or she was crowned with a paper crown. (This is the origin of having paper hats in *Christmas* crackers.) Everyone drank to his or her health. It is a scene often caught by Dutch and other painters. When he was a baby, John De La Salle, sat at the table in his high chair, would watch this. Later, he would be the one under the table; later, it would be Marie's turn, then that of the others. And now someone dressed as a buffoon, with several people in disguise, a fiddler and a boy carrying "the (new) king's candle" - it was a striped one in Grance - set out from the house. These "singers of the stars, as they were called in France, went round the neighbours throughout the night, asking for fuel and provisions. We can imagine John begging to carry the candle, or dressing up for the occasion.

At Christmas a log (the Yule log) was put on the fire-dog, and when it was well alight the household gathered round. The youngest child took in his right hand a glass of wine, breadcrumbs and a pinch of salt (surely on a little platter), and in his left hand a lighted candle. All removed their hats, and he began: "In the name of the Father" and threw a little salt towards one end of the hearth; "and to the Son", and threw salt towards the other end of the hearth, and so on.²³

In his great work on Christian politeness, published in 1703, De La Salle borrows from the treatises of civility of his day to present his view of urban manners. In what concerns manners in the home, we have a picture of the very practices that went on in his own family. He has much to say on meals. Grace is said by the head of the family or by a priest if he is present. Often, "when some child is present, it often happens that he is given the commission to discharge this function."²⁴ Children of the family learnt, not only to behave at table, but to serve at table.²⁵ De La Salle has a whole section of his book on how to serve. In giving guidance on carving the meats and selecting the best parts for the guests, he indicates what were the main dishes served up in bourgeois households such as his, at least on special occasions: capon or chicken, beef, roast pigeon, goose, duck, sucking pig, hare, rabbit, veal, fish. "When presenting something on which there is ash" (since meat was roasted at the open fire) "you must not blow on it to remove the ash; it is proper to clean it with a knife before serving it; for breath from the mouth is capable of putting people off, and by breathing one risks sending the ash on the tablecloth or on the dish."²⁶

"Those who serve at table must have very clean hands and be always bareheaded. What they must do is to spread the cloth properly on the table, put the salt-cellar on it and then put out the plates on which they will put the

bread which they will cover correctly with the napkin...Then they must wash the glasses and arrange them in such a way on the sideboard or on a small table covered with a white cloth, that they cannot be taken wrongly. Next one must present water for washing hands, raising the ewer a little with ceremony, with the napkin folded lengthwise on the left shoulder, and holding the basin from beneath, resting on the left hand and arm, unless it is already resting on something. It is on the hands of the most respectable person of the company that one begins pouring water...Those who serve must always be ready to serve what people may ask for, and for that must always have their eyes on the table and not move away from it"...²⁷ There is great scope for art representing De La Salle on these occasions.

One of the most popular festivities for young people was May Day, when children and young people processed dancing through the streets, the young children first, whether boys or girls, crowned with flowers. People came to their doors to watch and to put fruit and cake into the baskets held out by the young maidens. This was another scene favoured by artists.²⁸ There was an occasion in Rheims when young maidens and young men danced their way from the cathedral to St Remi's and back. The feast of St Nicholas, on December 6th, was the day when the family made it a children's day, hiding presents for them in different parts of the house.

Another scene that appears constantly in paintings, engravings and tapestries is the family reunion when parents and children make up a small chamber orchestra, and one of them sings. This takes place either as an interlude during the meal, or when the table has been cleared. "We have no idea," writes Ariès "of the place that music, music and dance, had in daily life."²⁹ Children learnt music very early and sang or played their parts in these home concerts. Marie, John's eldest sister, had a beautiful voice and played on the theorbo, a kind of bass lute then in fashion with two necks and two sets of strings. Her father, as already noted, played music with his friends. Learning to play an instrument and to sing was a part of bourgeois education. John would have been taught music and be expected to take part, and, being sociable and willing to please, he would sometimes have sung while Marie played, and vice versa. It would be wonderful to have a painting of these two accompanying one another on such an occasion, in the manner of Franz Hals or of Le Nain.

On singing in company De La Salle writes: "If someone to whom one owes respect or deference begs us to play or sing some tune, whether to show what one knows or to divert the company, one can excuse oneself politely, and this is usually proper. But if this person really insists, it would not be to understand society if one hesitated any further to sing or play an instrument, as one is asked. For if it so happened that one did not sing quite well, or was

not very skilled at playing the instrument, those in the company would have reason to say that it was not worth the trouble to get oneself asked so much; whereas by accepting politely and without much delay, one covers oneself against reproaches, or at least one does not give occasion for them.”³⁰ Children would also play together on their own: they are often represented playing the lute or the flute.

It has to be said, however, that the biographer Blain states that “the little De La Salle had nothing of his father’s strong inclination for music: perhaps he would have felt it if grace had not forestalled him,...inspiring him with distaste or fear for a pleasure, that quite innocent as it appears, has its dangers...The young De La Salle was not the type to fill his memory with so many songs that it is better not to know...Church hymns had for him more felt attraction...”³¹ Given that John was very sociable and taxed for being something of a show-off, one wonders if this negative view omits what in the writer’s eyes would not make good hagiography in his day.

Before Blain, Brother Bernard had written of the young John constructing little shrines before which he would sing hymns and imitate church ceremonies: “And that was his principal occupation, and which gave him a distaste for taking the recreations people wanted him to take. It seemed already that he was rational and that childishness or childhood had left him at the age of four to five years....” Of his asking his grandmother to read the lives of the saints to him, he comments: “This was no doubt an omen that he would imitate their actions.”³² The whole beginning of his biography is fulsome of his parents and his portrait of his hero limited to the pious. This is not to deny that a child can be both quite adapted to social and family life and also have an inner seriousness. In his good Catholic family, and drawn to the priesthood, John might well at times “slip away from his playmates, turn down their games and amusements...and go to the ‘Temple of the Lord’.” He asked soon to be taught how to serve Mass, while at home he liked to set up altars, sing hymns and imitate church ceremonies.³³

Other leisure activities

With regard to the use of leisure in general, John De La Salle, in his book on Christian politeness, draws on the best opinions of the time to instruct children and adults. He has a long chapter on pastimes. In the section on play he prefers games that exercise the body, such as indoor tennis (*le jeu de paume*), pall-mall, bowls, skittles, battledore and shuttlecock, compared with those that exercise the mind too much, such as chess and draughts. Those card games may be played sometimes that are not purely of chance, but involve some skill, but the others, where pure gambling is involved, are against the law of God and unworthy of an educated person.³⁴ In all games involving skill, he

sees it proper, if one wishes, to put down a small sum, “which serves to enliven the game and give more inclination to win, which contributes greatly to the pleasure of the game.” This was the view that gained ground as opposed to gambling.³⁵ La Salle continues: “Those who play must be careful not to play through greed, play having been invented not to win money, but only to relax the mind and body a little after work.” Here is a cameo of people at play: “It is also unbecoming to sing or whistle while playing, even if only softly and between one’s teeth; and still more, to drum with one’s fingers or feet; yet this happens sometimes to those who are absorbed in their game.”³⁶ Did he play chess like this in his younger days, and have to be reminded?

“In the society of the ancien regime, play in all its forms: physical, parlour games and games of chance, occupied an enormous place.”³⁷ It affected all ages, all conditions. Church authorities opposed it completely, supported by those lay people geared to strictness and order, who tried to tame the still wild masses and civilise their still primitive behaviour. They had some reason: even bowls and skittles could create such brawls among adults that the police sometimes forbade them to anybody. This attitude to games changed in the seventeenth century, especially under the influence of the Jesuits. They made of some of them forms of education to be as much esteemed as studies. They taught dance because it gave harmony to the body and helped the student to overcome awkwardness and learn how to present well. They introduced acting, beginning with Latin dialogues on religious themes, and then profane plays in French. Most plays had even an interlude of ballet, in spite of the general adverse attitude of the Society. Acting was general in their colleges after 1650.³⁸ In their 500 or so colleges across Europe, Jesuit drama was remarkable and influential. We know of tragedies staged at the municipal college in Rheims from 1608,³⁹ and we shall see later that young John De La Salle acted there in a religious play.

The bourgeois town-house or hotel: a busy meeting-place.

In 17th century France keeping in touch with the group one was born in, and using these relations skilfully to improve one’s position, called for an incredible amount of visiting and conversing. Fortune was secondary to social success: the primary aim was to reach a more honourable rank in a society where everyone knew everybody else. The art of succeeding was the art of being accepted, of pleasing. Hence the importance of conversation. Young John De La Salle would see endless callers at the house and himself be much involved in visiting. We know he had many friends, and that would imply the usual forms of socialising, and the usual pastimes.

These visitors never watched the clock and were never ushered out. It was an accepted occupation of the house, so there was never any regular time

kept for meals. Children with private tutors could never get their work done; this was an argument used by educators to recommend going to college.⁴⁰ Having a fixed time for things was a necessity for those who worked, not for the bourgeois who lived on the work of others. This explains in part why John Baptist had later to force himself to limit his social visits and tie himself to a time-table, “something,” he said, “I have never been able to do.”⁴¹ It is hard to imagine all that was involved in his adapting his life later on to that of his poor teachers and the determination he put into it.

A TIME OF CIVIC DISRUPTION AND DISTRESS.⁴²

A topic most discussed by such callers in John’s early years would certainly be the disruption of life in Rheims caused by the war with Spain and the civil strife known as the *Fronde*. These years were experienced by the people of Rheims as a time when troops pillaged Champagne right up to the walls of their city. Civil war divided its own citizens, disrupted trade and brought rising poverty to the poor of the towns. It meant sheer misery for the peasants who flocked into the city for refuge.

The background to these troubles in the first place was that Cardinal Richelieu, Louis XIII’s first minister, had dragged France into the destructive Thirty Years’ War that involved much of Western Europe. It had been brought to an end by the Treaty of Westphalia in 1648, but war still continued with Spain. Spanish troops in the Netherlands were only 80 miles from Rheims, and, using the Spanish Highway that ran from Brussels to Genoa, could easily invade France. A mercenary army under the Baron of Erlach plundered, raped and wreaked havoc in the Rheims area.

But Champagne was much worse affected by the Civil War known as *La Fronde* which began in Paris the day the Treaty of Westphalia was signed and lasted till 1653. Richelieu’s domestic policy had been to extend royal control at the expense of local freedoms, and he had also had to impose heavy taxes to pay for France’s part in the Thirty Years’ War. When Cardinal Mazarin, his successor, as first minister under the Regent Anne of Austria during Louis XIV’s minority, continued the same policy, the *Parlement* or high court of Paris began and then pulled out of what turned out to be a complicated and ruinous struggle. It aimed at controlling power at the centre, but not to do away with the monarchy. In this struggle a Prince of the blood, the great Condé, so named for his brilliant generalship, first sided with Mazarin and the court and then against them.

The royal troops were making of Champagne a desert - to use the term of the First President of the *Parlement*. Coquault, a bourgeois of Rheims who kept a journal of the civil war,⁴³ preferred Spanish troops. They “hadn’t terri-

fied the people, nor done any harm, compared with what the king's people have done; they pay everywhere, they pillage nothing, they ask for food in return for money." Condé, in place of the royal governor of Champagne, set up his own man in Rheims, a certain Marquis de la Vieuville. When the marquis started opening letters coming from Paris on the pretext of intercepting any subversive messages from the *Parlement*, the burgesses and artisans stirred up the mob against him. They forced their way into his house. He escaped by the attic on to the roof of a neighbouring house, but he was caught up with hiding in the cellar. He was hauled out, beaten up and dragged out of the city through the slush that had followed three days of thaw. This was 1 March 1649. He was left in the open fields.

In Paris, the *Parlement* made peace this month with Mazarin. But locally, later in March, news came that Spanish troops were coming towards Rheims. The Council organised the defence of the city and ordered the rations for bread requested for the royal troops in the countryside nearby to be sent to them. Again there was division: the 120 *notables*, many owning lands outside Rheims, and fearing for their crops, were in favour. The merchants, less involved, were willing to take the risk and refuse. In the end a compromise was reached: bread was sent, but less than the amount asked for. The next year, 1650, the royal troops went off destroying and robbing. Three of the worst were seized and hanged, and their bodies left for dogs and wolves to eat. Raids and pillaging went on all over Champagne as troops on either side in the civil war, or Spanish troops, crossed and re-crossed it. At the end of the year, for instance, the city's own militia helped to defeat the Spanish troops surrounding Rethel, a key defence town 23 miles to the northeast. The victory was celebrated by a *Te Deum* on 17 December.

An arrogant and unpredictable man, Condé started his own revolt based on Bordeaux in the autumn of the year De La Salle was born. This began the final and most destructive phase of the war. He arrived in Paris in April 1652. Marches and counter-marches against the royal troops now under Turenne wasted the countryside. In October Condé left Paris with 3000 men to mount an independent campaign in Champagne, which meant that his troops fed off an impoverished land. Spanish troops came to his support, but in December Turenne defeated them near Rethel and in January 1653 raised the siege of that town and defeated Condé. Later in the month, the Town Council of Rheims welcomed his arrival.

Poor harvests from 1648-52, coinciding with this plundering⁴⁴ had a disastrous effect on the peasantry in terms of starvation and death, while there were outbreaks of plague in the towns, including Rheims. Trade was much reduced in these circumstances and caused much unemployment among the poor of Rheims. Add to this the influx from the countryside and you have a

problem beyond all their experience facing the municipality, namely, what to do about the homeless poor. Coquault wrote: "The number of poor has increased so much, coming from the stricken villages, and these poor people are on the streets at night, crying out in hunger and cold."⁴⁵

Vincent de Paul worked to help the stricken of these areas as he had done in 1640. The month before John was born his Priests of the Mission (or Vincentian Fathers) had come to Rheims to distribute alms to the poor and to preach. In appreciation the city council had invited the population to a thanksgiving Mass at St Remi's. The magistrates of Rethel wrote to him: "Up to the present, no one but you, Monsieur, and your priests, took compassion on our misery. For two years the province of Champagne, and this town of Rethel especially, have been kept alive solely by the relief you sent us."

Little John De La Salle would only gradually become aware of the aftermath of the *Fronde* and the effects of the continuing war with Spain. They lasted throughout his boyhood. He would see in the city the crowds that had flocked in from the countryside, begging for bread, looking for shelter and work. Many of the poor he later worked for would be first and second generation refugees from the villages. He would see ruined villages when his parents took him to see his grandfathers' farms or their own properties: eleven villages round Rheims had been devastated. The food scarcity was prolonged. The pillaging of grain by hungry soldiers and the interruption by war of the grain supplies increasingly shipped to the West by Russia via the Baltic in Dutch ships meant that wheat became in short supply. In 1662, when John was ten, the City Council had to organise public rations each day at the rate of two quarts of wheat per family at a fixed maximum price. 1659-62 was, in fact, another period of wheat shortage in Europe. John would hear his father discussing with his friends the insupportable burden beggars were imposing on the city, and the question of law and order. In 1661 about 500 beggars were turned out. More would have gone but for the merchant traders, who saw a source of cheap labour diminishing. As someone noted: "The public good was sacrificed to sectional interests."

It is not surprising that when John was still young, on occasions when his father relaxed with his friends before the great fireplace in the downstairs drawing room, the conversation would be above his head. He would go over to his grandmother if she was in the company, and ask her to read to him - the book, we are told, being the lives of the saints.⁴⁶ We know Louis De La Salle had a *Lives of the Saints* in his library⁴⁷ and this was probably the only readable book in it for a young boy. But his son might just as well have asked Perrette Lespagnol to tell him a fairy tale. They were listened to even by adults; by Mme de Sévigné, for instance, or Colbert, who in his spare time had people detailed specially to tell him the traditional tales⁴⁸.

A number of public occasions added to John's knowledge of national and European events. There was the *Te Deum* to mark the Anglo-French victory of the Dunes on 14 June 1658, followed by the capture of Dunkirk on 23 June which effectively brought to an end the war with Spain. Negotiations throughout the summer of next year led to the Treaty of the Pyrenees, ratified on 7 November 1659. Couriers brought the news to Rheims on 17 February 1660, for which the town council paid them 10 pistoles. The city fathers decided to organise a fireworks display, and to go themselves in procession to the Franciscan church for High Mass, and to hold a banquet in the evening. "All the burgesses", they announced, "will put candles in their windows in the evening. Wine will be provided free to prisoners and to the inmates of the hospices, on account of the peace." So John, nearly nine years old, would see servants putting candles in the windows of the family house, and would be taken to see the fireworks. There were celebrations later in the year to mark Louis XIV's marriage to Maria Teresa, the Infanta of Spain, on 9 June. This year also the city celebrated the restoration of the monarchy in England with the return of Charles II, and in 1662 the birth of the Dauphin.

EIGHT YEARS OF BASIC STUDIES IN THE LIBERAL ARTS (1661-1669).⁴⁹

To University College or the Jesuits?

John might have gone on to the next stage of his education at the age of nine, which was the usual age, but his parents had reasons for keeping his tutor for another year. John is said to have been somewhat delicate when young.⁵⁰ But Louis and Nicole had also to debate where to send him. There was the ancient city college, now part of the university and called the Collège des Bons-Enfants, and there was the Jesuit College, dating from only 1619. The De La Salles and their relatives had gone to either.

The Collège des Bons-Enfants originated in the ninth century as a hostel or lodging-house for poor students on the site of a former monastery whose revenues supported them. They followed the usual course of the seven liberal arts in the external cathedral school open to laymen and country clergy, while inside the Chapter buildings alongside the cathedral was the school for canons studying theology. This school was in the 10th century an intellectual centre of the first rank in northern Europe, but it was eclipsed in the 12th century by Paris. About 1250 the poor students' house was erected into a college with monastic-type statutes. Courses were still followed outside of it in the external cathedral school, but between 1544 and 1546 the college buildings were extended, and the external cathedral school, whose buildings had been destroyed, was transferred there. By now, as elsewhere, day scholars (called 'bons enfants', good boys or students, because they attended will-

ingly) had begun to attend. The ancient name: *Collegium Bonorum Puerorum Universitatis Remensis*, can still be read over the entrance of the present 'Collège Université' on the same site. It was now mainly a large day school, catering for all the Arts population of a town. Bourgeois families would send their sons there, if only for a few years, without going further unless they intended to be priests or lawyers. Throughout France, such colleges catered for all the educated people of the Ancien Régime.⁵¹

On 6 January 1547 Charles, Cardinal of Lorraine (1524-74), obtained from Paul III a bull authorising the erection of a University. The old *Collège des Bons-Enfants* became the faculty of arts of the new university, that is, the place for the basic study of the liberal arts corresponding to secondary education today. Successful matriculation enabled one to register for one of the higher faculties: theology, law or medicine.⁵²

In spite of its university status the College, by the time we come to the thirty or so years before De La Salle, was being badly administered and the subjects poorly taught. This was in part due to the appearance of a rival. The Jesuits came to Rheims in 1608 and built their house and college alongside St Maurice's church, a short half-mile up the Rue du Barbâtre from the university. They built and extended their college in 1619 and 1627 (and especially later, in 1678. It is one of the finest seventeenth-century buildings remaining in Rheims.) Of the university college Coquault wrote in 1660: "For more than thirty years now the Collège des Bons-Enfants limps along, badly supported, badly run by the Principals...and will soon be completely without students." And: "The philosophy students can't speak Latin; the students go the round of the taverns; wine can be had in college at fourpence a pot; the kitchen resounds with swear-words; and the Principal has not set foot in the classrooms for ten years."

We know of twenty De La Salles and their relatives who attended the Jesuit College between 1646 and 1671, and seven of John's more or less close relatives who became Jesuits in his lifetime.⁵³ Why wasn't he also sent there? In the first place, it was something of a matter of local loyalties.⁵⁴ The City Council had the duty of safeguarding the interests of their college. They had, moreover, a stake in doing so, since they paid the professors and checked College expenses. Together with the 120 *notables* of the city, they opposed the development of the Jesuit college, for their own would soon be empty. Louis de La Salle as member of the '*présidial*' which in Rheims was the recognised protector of the University, would go along with that. The University for its part took the same line by refusing the Jesuits' request for their college to be incorporated into it, so as to make its courses part of the university curriculum. The Chancellor of the University at the time was Canon Dozet, John's great-cousin. In the circumstances it was fairly inevitable that

John should be sent to the city college, even if his parents had some misgivings. John began his studies there on 10 October 1661, when he was ten and a half. As the college was part of the university, John was on its registers from 1661 to 1680, when he gained his doctorate in theology - apart from the five terms when he was in Paris.

But there was another reason why John went to the Collège des Bons-Enfants. During the year of his parents' indecision, matters at the college had improved. Earlier in June, the Grand Master of the University had been censured by the *Parlement* of Paris for his bad administration, and was relieved of his functions the following year. Meanwhile the current Rector of the University (rectors were elected or re-elected annually), Thomas Mercier, a former pupil of the Jesuits, and who was Rector from 1660 to 1662, drew up new statutes for the College. These were approved in May 1662. From that time on the College prospered. Its numbers rose to over 400 while between 1659 and 1669 the numbers at the Jesuit College fell from 600 to 300. Coquault wrote enthusiastically in 1666: "At present, ever since the university was established by the might and credit of the Cardinal of Lorraine, all-powerful in France, the College has never been in the splendour it is, the Faculty of Arts especially."⁵⁵ Mercier would have been delighted, for he was anti-Jesuit, and no doubt imported Jesuit methods into the City College in order to outdo them. Chancellor Dozet and several other College officials were trying at this time to bring about a settlement and incorporate the Jesuits, but Mercier refused, and circulated a pamphlet attacking Jesuit teaching. The reason for his opposition to the Jesuits was that he was strongly Gallican, that is, he held to the claim that the 'ancient liberties of the Gallican Church' should limit the exercise of papal prerogatives in France, and that appeal could be made from a papal decision to a General Council of the Church. It was John's first encounter with something of a national attitude among the clergy. It was to bring him into trouble later. The Jesuits, as he was to be, were staunch defenders of the rights of the Holy See and made many enemies on that account. In the local matter of their incorporation into the University, they appealed in 1663 to the Council of State and, having friends in high places, won their case. The City Council, irritated by what it saw as manoeuvres behind its back, appealed directly to the King, its lawyers judging correctly that he would let the matter drag on. The Jesuit College was not in fact incorporated until the beginning of the next century.

Thanks to the salaries paid by the Corporation and to donations and legacies, students who had not the means could have a virtually free education at *Les Bons-Enfants*, apart from minor charges, and so tradesmen could easily have afforded to send their children to College. But they would have to be literate to start with, which meant first sending their son to a fee-paying 'little

school'. In addition, examination fees, the purchase of the necessary books, and, especially, appearing poorly, perhaps shabbily dressed among well-heeled sons of burgesses meant that most never went. In any case, the studies were long, and foreign to the life of craftsmen. A family could not afford to support a boy till he was seventeen before bringing in any money.

But a number did attend, if we can apply to the city College the information we have about the attendance of sons of artisans at the rival college. In the matter of free tuition, the Jesuits, in accordance with their tradition, opened their classes to literate pupils whatever their origin. In the absence of exact figures to hand as to the social origins of the students attending their college in Rheims, "investigation of their origins in various regions and years shows that sons of merchants and office-holders had the largest share of places; but those of artisans and 'laboureurs' (yeomen farmers) were something like a quarter or a third of the total."⁵⁶ If we allow the same for the *Collège des Bons-Enfants* and a joint clientele of about 700, then at the most something like 180 to 230 sons of artisans attended, and none of the real illiterate poor. We do not know, in any case, how far we are dealing with rich or poor artisans, nor how long they would stay at College before being put to work. To gain some increased skill in reading and writing; to acquire something of bourgeois civility which would help them to feel not too inferior to their wealthy clients, well and good. But Aristotle and Demosthenes and Tacitus would have no interest for them. An education for this large class had not yet been devised, and little for the dependent poor. In contrast, by 1684, between the schools run by the Sisters of a certain Canon Roland and Canon De La Salle's Brothers, 2000 poor girls and boys were being catered for. It shows the need that in 1661 was still waiting to be met.

Even for the city ruling and trading class, the traditional courses hardly suited them: they were more a matter of memory work and training in written style and declamation than forming ideas or giving any understanding of the times. The students learnt Latin and Greek authors for six years, then spent two years studying philosophy. Even among the bourgeoisie, the majority, after being taught by a home tutor, completed their education by travelling widely. Higher education was essentially clerical and therefore marginal. "Only a small number of bourgeois families take it up - those aspiring after some Church benefice for their sons."⁵⁷

John at College. His tonsure and canonry. Additions to the family and a new family home.

When John went to the University College, he would have met with the repressive discipline normal at the time. Life in a fifteenth century college had been that of comradeship, rough and ready, even brutal. Then a changeover

occurred in the 16th century from a community of boys and masters to a severe control of boys by masters. Stricter regulation of time for studies and stricter discipline became the norm everywhere. It took on three characteristics: constant supervision, reporting on other students, and corporal punishment. The previous system of fines for infractions was replaced by punishment by the birch. It took on a debasing character. A student of any age would be bent over another boy, his knee-breeches pulled down, and would then be beaten. We have to note that these practices were later taken into the little schools and parish schools, and that goes for La Salle's schools also, but with considerable moderation and infrequency, and with the aim of making them in time unnecessary.

When he set himself to go through the necessary grind of his studies, John would find, as he expected, that everything was in Latin. Even in their free time the students had to speak Latin. An *explorator* or spy noted failures to do so; they brought severe punishment on Saturdays, and so did speaking bad Latin. So you could never say John never got a beating. College regulations forbade "swearing, shouting, fighting, learning to play the flute" - one imagines so as not to disturb the silence - "to carry a sword inside the College, to curl one's hair."

The textbook of Latin grammar, that of Despautère, a Flemish writer of two centuries back, was an encyclopaedia of grammar in barbarous Latin. As one writer put it: "Everything displeases children in Despautère country: all the rules are like a black and thorny forest." There were more varied exercises, and Latin and Greek authors could be interesting, but there was no original thought involved.⁵⁸ If his sister Marie's example with her children later is any guide, his mother kept a watchful eye on John's progress and on the memorising required at home.

In the course of his first year he was admitted on 11 March 1662 to the tonsure, a liturgical ceremony when a small cross of hair was cut from the crown of his head to mark his option for the clerical state. It was performed in the archbishop's Gothic chapel, adjoining the cathedral, by John de Malevaud, bishop in partibus of Aulône (Malomensis),⁵⁹ acting in the absence of the archbishop-delegate, Cardinal Antonio Barberini, who though nominated by Louis XIV in 1657 did not receive the official letters from the Pope till 1667. (This name of Malevaud is on the copy of De La Salle's letters of tonsure among the deeds for his beatification.⁶⁰) John had persevered in his intention to be a priest, and so the custom of giving the tonsure even to children when they manifested a desire for the priesthood was followed in his case. It did not mean that his vocation was considered as settled; but it opened up the possibility of receiving Church benefices as a help to defray the expenses incurred in preparing for the priesthood. The fact that he was accepted for

the tonsure meant that he had been confirmed within the previous four years, since the only requirement of Canon Law in order to receive the tonsure was to have been confirmed, and that could be done at the age of seven. Possibly the same bishop confirmed him, but we have no record. From now on at liturgical ceremonies John would be required to wear a clerical dress, consisting of a long black cassock made of ordinary wool.

In his second year there was rejoicing at home when Jean-Louis was born on 15 February 1663⁶¹, but ten months later the family was plunged into sadness, for he died at the end of the year.⁶² The next year, with Nicole pregnant again, Louis De La Salle had to think of finding new quarters for his family. He sold back his half of the family mansion to his brother Simon on 31 May 1664,⁶³ for he had just bought, on 23rd, a house beyond the marketplace behind the cathedral, in the Rue Sainte Marguerite. Legal possession did not begin till 24 June 1665. Meanwhile, on Christmas Day, 1664, Nicole gave birth to another son whom she also called Jean-Louis.⁶⁴ John, now aged thirteen, was godfather at his baptism and held him over the font. Marie was nearing eleven, Rose-Marie was approaching nine and Jacques-Joseph was five. So, with their cousins, there were now eight children in the house.

When Louis's family moved to their new home six months later, John and the others would know the excitement of the change and of settling in, along with regrets for the old haunts of the house he had lived in for fourteen years; and they would miss their cousins. Nothing is left of this second house today; a small car park behind the Post Office marks the site. Even the name of the street has gone: it is now Rue Eugène Desteuque. The present clear view from the spot, of the back of the cathedral and of St Symphorian's was hampered in their day by a row of houses.

We know little of John's years at College. In his second year, in April, he acted in a play: *The Martyrdom of St Timothy*, based on the life of a local martyr. He was not quite twelve, and must have shown assurance at this age. In April 1665, in his fourth year, a printed placard was set up in the Great Hall of the College, exhibiting the winners in a recent literary competition. In his class of 40 or 50, John came second in Latin elocution, with an honourable mention in declamation. The placard deliberately ended, in its mention of the University, with the words *cui collegium Jesuitarum non est incorporatum* (into which the Jesuits' College is not incorporated). So, besides his family's civic loyalties, the general attitude at College did not help John at this time to accept any influence from the Jesuits. Yet from 1659 to 1661 a distant relative of his, the Jesuit **Jacques Marquette**, had taught in Rheims. (A great-grandfather of Marquette was great-great-grandfather to John: a tenuous connection admittedly.⁶⁵) In 1666 he went to New France and worked among the Illinois, the Sioux and other tribes. In 1673 he descended the Mississippi

with Jolliet as far as the Arkansas, and died of a serious illness in 1675. Although news did come back sporadically, John would not have read of these exploits until they were published in a collection in 1681.

During the summer holidays John would go along with the family to the vineyards of his paternal grandfather at Rilly-la-Montagne, ten kilometres south of Rheims, and join in the grape-harvest and the singing round the fire in the evening. He never knew this grandfather, for he died shortly after John's birth, and the grandmother, née Barbe Coquebert, died before he was two. There was also the small country seat (*gentilhommière*) in the village of Brouillet, 20 kms west of the city, of his other grandfather, squire John Moët, lord of several villages and lands. John might see him there in summer. This squire usually lived in his town-house in Rheims in the Rue du Marc, only a few minutes' walk away from John's new home. He had taken on the practice of reciting the Divine Office every day, and when John began to be fluent in reading Latin, which would have been when he was being taught by a tutor, he taught the boy how to say the Office, and they would recite it together.⁶⁶ His grandfather was a kindly person and John felt the benefit of his occasional company till 1670, when he died at the end of July. Moët's wife Perrette, who was very fond of her grandson, lived on in her town-house till 1690.

On 9 July 1666, when John was 15, his great-cousin resigned his canonry for reasons of age, and John was told that he intended the vacancy to go to him. It was a mixture of favouring the family with a great honour in Rheims, and a substantial prebend, and also recognising that John was serious in his intention to be a priest. "Abbeys, priories and canonries represented a source of opulence and honours which parents coveted and sought for their children - children who, as the Bishop of Lisieux stated in 1614, 'were still in their nurses' arms or under their teachers at school'...The ecclesiastical and religious state offered to youths of a good family an excellent opening, a secure livelihood and, to crown all, one that made little demands on the parental purse. That, too, was a very important consideration."⁶⁷ While John was preparing to become a canon, another birth occurred in the family: on 3 September 1666, a boy was born and christened Pierre.⁶⁸ John again was chosen to be godfather, and his sister Marie, now 12, was his godmother. John was solemnly **installed as canon** the following 7 January. He was given the stall once occupied by **St Bruno**, who in the eleventh century gave up his canonry to found the monastery of the Grande Chartreuse near Grenoble. (The stalls that replaced the old ones in 1745 were burnt out in the First World War.) Canon Dozet recommended to his young cousin to bring to the recitation of the Divine Office the devotion of a Carthusian. The canonry carried with it a fair prebend: it increased by half the family income - a very welcome help in

running the family and house. Eight months later on 10 September 1667 another son, Simon, was born, making seven children in the family.⁶⁹

The last two years at College. Minor orders.

A month later, John began his two years' study of philosophy. During the first of these years, on 17 March 1668, an important event occurred for him: he received the four minor orders in the Archbishop's chapel from the Bishop of Soissons, delegated for this purpose by Cardinal Barberini. In the summer, the plague created panic in the town, and the cardinal ordered the relics of St Remi to be carried processionally from church to church from 24 September. On 3 October Canon Dozet died, and on 10th, the beginning of John's final year, his brother Jacques-Joseph began his studies in the same College at the usual age of nine. This time, his parents had no qualms in sending him to join his brother, for the College now had a good reputation. John finished his studies the following summer at the age of eighteen. Three months earlier a great sadness had befallen the family: Simon, a darling toddler, died on 22 April 1669, aged only eighteen months.⁷⁰ This is the only precise date of the death of an infant in the family that we know: deaths were registered only after 1667 by edict of Louis XIV, and the parish registers for baptism were destroyed in a fire before 1676.

John had now to present himself for his final examinations. At the beginning of July he had to obtain a certificate of attendance and then, on 8 July, in ceremonial dress, which in his case meant wearing his canonicals, he knelt before the rector and swore on the Gospels to uphold the rights of the University. He then went to the censor's office to have his certificate of attendance checked, and to present his course notes of the last two years to show they were written in his own hand. Many a student got a servant at home to do the neat writing-up, or paid some impecunious fellow-student to do it for him. The next day he had to face a panel of two examiners who took him through an oral examination in Latin of his knowledge of the set books on ethics and logic. This took up to three hours. It was the 'minor examination', otherwise called the baccalaureate. A similar procedure for philosophy on another day was known as the 'major examination' or licentiate. Success led to the award of the degree of *Maître-ès-Arts* (Master of Arts), which gave the right to teach in university colleges and to proceed to one of the higher faculties.⁷¹ It was not, then, the equivalent of our M.A., but of a qualifying requirement for University entrance. It was a stiff examination and failures were many: Rheims set its standards by those of the Sorbonne in Paris. Young Canon John Baptist De La Salle was admitted on 10 July to the degree *summa cum laude*, the highest of the three possible grades, although we do not know how he was placed among the candidates. He immediately signed on for the first year in

the Faculty of Theology.

His family and friends and co-laureates must have celebrated with many a social evening in one another's homes, and John must have been happy to relax on one of the family farms. Jacques-Joseph would have been proud and spurred on by his brother's success. Marie was now fifteen; Marie-Rose was thinking of joining a contemplative order in the town.

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3. Poutet I, 37-38.
4. See e.g. Robin Briggs, *Early Modern France 1600-1715*, 4.
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6. CL26, 164.
7. CL51.
8. A. Ranwez, S.J. in the *Revue Ascétique et mystique*, no. 121, 1955; Poutet I, p. 420; J. Maillefer, C.L. 6, p.35.
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10. *Trésors de Reims*, Maurice Hollande, Michaud, Reims, 1961, 175.
11. *Reims, Ville Royale*, Rheims Tourist Centre, 1988, 115.
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13. *Trésors de Reims*.
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15. Poutet I, 46, n. 117, quoting from the memoirs of J. Maillefer.
16. Aroz, CL27, 6; 41(1), 111. List of baptisms of all the children: CL26, 240-1.
17. Aroz, CL27, 8; CL41(1), 114.
18. Aroz, CL27, 41; CL41(1), 116.
19. Aroz, CL27, 48; 41(1), 122.
20. Bernard, 19.
21. On all the above, see Philippe Ariès, *L'Enfant et la Vie Familiale sous l'Ancien Régime*, Seuil 1973, 42-55.
22. From the journal of his doctor, Heroard. See Ariès, 56-63.

23. On the above, see Ariès, 56-73.
24. *Rules of Christian Politeness and Civility*, reproduced in CL19, 84.
25. Ariès, 408-12.
26. CL19, 94-98.
27. CL19, 125-131.
28. Ariès, 74-5.
29. id., 77.
30. CL19, 151-2.
31. Blain I, 119-20.
32. Bernard, 11. Generally speaking, however, although stock phrases abound, Bernard has something attractive about his writing; he does give the facts that the other biographers followed.
33. Bernard, 11; Blain I, 118, 119.
34. CL19, 147-8.
35. Ariès, 79-83.
36. CL19, 142-4.
37. Ariès, 84.
38. See Ariès, 85-101.
39. Poutet I, 155, n.28.
40. See Ariès, 441-447.
41. Blain II, 319.
42. For all this section see Poutet I, 97-113. For a summary of the *Fronde*, see Robin Briggs, *Early Modern France 1560-1715*, OUP 1977, 128-140. For Rheims in the period, *Histoire de Reims*, Pierre Desportes, Privat 1983, 178.
43. Quoted in *Histoire de Reims*, 180.
44. See *Histoire de Reims*, Pierre Desportes, Privat 1983, 178.
45. Quoted in *Histoire de Reims*, 180.
46. Bernard, 11; Blain I, 118.
47. CL51, 25.
48. Ariès, 96, 97.
49. For this section throughout see Poutet I, 139-179. For details on the *Collège des Bons-Enfants* and its history, Aroz, CL41(2), 9-21; its organisation and regulations, 21-34; John De La Salle at College, 34-42.
50. Blain II, 451.
51. Ariès, 175-8; 186-7.
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56. Pennington, *Seventeenth Century Europe*, Longman 1970, 154.
57. *Histoire de Reims*, 230.
58. J. Guibert, *Histoire de Saint Jean-Baptiste De La Salle*, Poussielgue, Paris 1901, 11-13.
59. Aroz, CL41(2), 141-145.
60. Poutet I, 491, n.36.

61. Aroz, CL27, 62; CL41(1), 125.
 62. Aroz, CL27, 62.
 63. Aroz, CL41(1), 129-136.
 64. Aroz, CL27, 65; CL41(1), 140.
 65. Aroz, CL42, 176: genealogical table.
 66. Bernard, 12; Blain I, 122.
 67. Ponsenet: *France Religieuse du XVIIe siècle*, Paris 1958,
 68. Aroz, CL27, 110; CL41(1), 145.
 69. Aroz, CL27, 142.
 70. Aroz, CL27, 145; CL41(1), 149.71.
 71. Aroz, CL41(2), 211-216.
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Chapter 2 :

The Rheims dimension and a look beyond¹

A proud city of Champagne

Champagne was one of the most famous provinces of ancient France. Travellers and writers of the period noted the average inhabitant of Champagne to be hardworking, disciplined and perhaps overtrusting of others. The people were seen to be self-assured, a little cocky perhaps, ready with a smart answer. For centuries now they had been more town dwellers than countrymen, used in consequence to organised action. They were regarded as rather stubborn. De La Salle shared these characteristics: ‘stubbornness’, or sticking to a line of action or reform was something he was often taxed with.

Although the official capital and fiscal centre of Champagne was Châlons, 24 miles to the south, Rheims, with its memories and its cathedral where all the kings of France came to be crowned, was looked upon as the capital by its inhabitants. To gain some idea of the quality of life there helps us to understand what it meant for John De La Salle to abandon it. The civic and commercial centre where the bourgeoisie lived was still identical with the oval area, though without its walls, of the fourth-century Gallo-roman city. Its two main axes remained and much of its chessboard pattern. Of its four triumphal arches one still stands majestically, and there are traces of another at the opposite end of the old city where the Rue de l’Université becomes the Rue du Barbâtre.

A short mile away, at the other end of the town, as enclosed in its fourteenth-century walls, was the tomb of St Remigius or Remi (c.457-c.533). (The dates of his life are uncertain; the Rheims tradition gives him a lifespan of 96 years.) This tomb used to be outside the Gallo-roman city in the necropolis occupying either side of the road to Rome. Remigius was bishop when the Salian Franks, long settled within the Empire on the lower Rhine, were expanding in the fifth century. He baptised the Frankish king Clovis on Christmas Day 498 or 499. Remi’s ninth century successor, Hincmar, established the myth that Clovis was not only baptised but also crowned by St Remi, with the aid of anointing chrism that came specially from heaven in the ‘Holy Ampulla’. Up till 1027 kings were anointed in the basilica of St Remi, but from then on till 1825 every king except Henry IV was crowned in the cathedral, and the Holy Ampulla (*La Sainte Ampoule*) was used until it was solemnly smashed on the steps of the empty pedestal of Louis XV’s statue in the Place Royale of Rheims in 1793.

From the Middle Ages the Archbishop of Rheims was both an ecclesiastical and temporal power in the land. The real property of his see was one of the most extensive in the West. From 12th century he had been a count and a duke, and a peer of France, that is, next in rank to the Princes of the blood. Rheims became strongly marked with ecclesiastical and monastic buildings. By the fourteenth century there were some thirty either parish churches or extensive monastic institutions, most of these outside the original city walls. There were then ten thousand inhabitants within the city, while the land between it and St Remi was gradually becoming inhabited, along the Roman road which became the Rue du Barbâtre, and along a new road parallel to it, the Rue Neuve, of which we shall hear more. In this century a new rampart and wall on top of it were begun, four miles long, taking in the settlement of Saint Remi and much open land running down to the River Vesle, while the old were demolished.

The rising merchant burgesses in the twelfth century forced the archbishop to allow them to elect twelve aldermen to apply local law. The king later had another six burgesses elected to assist the Town Captain in organising the defence of the city, but after the Hundred Years' War he was replaced by an elected city lieutenant, later called the townsfolk's lieutenant (*lieutenant des habitants*), with a status similar to that of a modern mayor, but elected only by the burgesses. There were squabbles between the two parts of the city council until in 1636 Claude Lespagnol, De La Salle's great-uncle, mayor from 1633 to 1637, obtained from Louis XIII a decree amalgamating the two into a single municipal council. It was recruited from the long-established families based on wealth deriving from trade in woollens and wines. Rheims's textile industry was second only to that of Amiens, providing a flourishing trade with other towns of France and beyond. It is still the main wool market of France.

The following comparison between Beauvais and Amiens would equally apply at this time to Rheims: "A fortified town, a burgess corporation and a town of smells, no doubt; but above all a town of bells inhabited by a numerous and powerful clergy and particularly that bishop-count (for Rheims, we have to say count, duke and peer) with considerable temporal powers; and at the same time a trading and clothmaking town: less than Amiens no doubt, but with the same filthy open drains, the same influx of heavy bales of wool, the same dress of light drapery and light serge; in the hum of looms and the beating of the fullers, a mass of tightly-packed, plentiful and starving linen weavers; a mass bent under the economic, social and political domination of the merchant burgesses, and under the religious, moral and seignorial domination of a clergy whose private merits could not let be forgotten its temporal magnificence."²

The De La Salles: members of an oligarchy

With the rise of the University, besides many of their ranks studying there in order to join the clergy, increasing numbers of the bourgeoisie studied law and so qualified for posts in local royal and civic administration of justice, while others went into medicine. So that a new influential class developed alongside the business community. But the latter continued to dominate the city institutions through a policy of intermarriage: the Bacheliers, the Coqueberts, the Lespagnols, the De La Salles, the Maillefers: these and another half-dozen families ran the town. John Baptist De La Salle's grandmothers were a Coquebert and a Lespagnol; his sister married a Maillefer; his brother Peter married a Bachelier - to give only some examples from his family. From 1550 to 1660, out of 57 mayors, 20 were from these interrelated families. In 1645 the town council of 21 (the 18 members plus dignitaries) counted 10 relatives of the De La Salles.

When Cardinal Mazarin stayed a while in Rheims after the recapture of Rethel from the Spaniards by Turenne in 1653, the gentlemen Bourgeois, Coquebert, Bachelier and De La Salle presented to the Town Council on February 13th a list of the burgesses' houses they judged would easily accommodate the said Lord Cardinal and the generals and principal officers of the army. The Town Council agreed (being composed of their relatives) and asked them to take it on themselves to apportion the houses. Those chosen - not surprisingly - were the hôtel de la Cloche and the houses of the two Lespagnols in the next street, Rue de Tambour.³ If the Lord Cardinal was lodged with one of the Lespagnols, a general and his officers may have resided with the De La Salles. John was not quite two then, and may have remembered little of the feverish bustle and activity in the house at the time.

The select bourgeois area

The bourgeoisie of Rheims, even though the fourth-century walls had now gone, lived in the ancient area of the city, geographically apart from the artisans generally and from the 'poor', those who worked for them at a pittance. In this ancient Rheims you would find, then, administrators and magistrates and the merchant traders as well as local traders and shopkeepers and the wealthier artisans, the jewellers for instance. They were all people more or less well-to-do, citizens of independent means living in town mansions off their trade and off the revenues of lands and properties that it was one of their concerns to add to and lease out. To have money available to buy land, taking advantage of hard times in the rural world, and then rent it out was a mark of success and a source of prosperity in economically difficult times. This profiting by others' necessity was one of the collective sins of this class.

Louis De La Salle had two houses in Rheims, one of them by the cloth market and which he exchanged in 1664 with his brother Simon for a small farm a few miles out of town. He had already two vineyards which he sold in 1663. These were bourgeois aspirations in all the main towns. E.N. Williams writes of Beauvais: "Every bourgeois (at any rate at Beauvais) aimed to own at least his own vines at the edge of the city, but preferably a country estate to visit during the summer, or a lordship with its feudal dues. The purchase of an 'office' and a manor, then, were the signs that the bourgeois had 'arrived', that he could afford the enjoyment of local power and the luxury of local prestige. The next ambition would be the purchase of a post conferring nobility,..."⁴

Living also in this select area of the town would be landlords, members of the *noblesse campagnarde* or titled country gentlemen who needed an income derived from posts in the town to supplement their revenues. "For any family with high political or social aspirations, a house in the capital was increasingly necessary. In one way or another, the city-dwelling landowner who only spent part of the year on his estates was becoming more common."⁵ What is said here of Paris was true of the lesser centres. We have seen that this applied to John Moët, John's maternal grandfather, who lived mostly in his town house. The burgesses, as property-owning citizens, paid local and national taxes and could be called upon for various duties in time of riot or threat from approaching troops.

Only among the burgesses were there elections to civic office. Every Shrove Tuesday, each of the twelve wards of the city elected ten representatives, so providing the body of 120 'notables' for the year. These met at seven o'clock next morning to elect from themselves by secret ballot the 18 councillors for the year. What Pennington says of towns generally was true of Rheims: the ruling oligarchy "kept entry to its circle almost impossible for those outside the privileged families."⁶ But it was not entirely impossible. The Colberts are an example of how you could work your way up. Originally farmers on the outskirts of the town, they became merchant haberdashers and gained a place on the town council. They then went into diversified wholesale and retail commerce, especially in fabrics, trading with Lyons, Milan and finally Paris. It was there that John Baptist Colbert, though born in Rheims, grew up and got into the 'right set' through his energy and through being patronised by Mazarin. He was appointed in 1665 Louis XIV's Controller-General of Finance, and by 1669 had the whole internal administration of France in his hands. Inevitably, at some point, the Colberts and the De La Salles became related. In 1648 or 49 a great-cousin of John Baptist Colbert married a great-cousin of John Baptist De La Salle.⁷

The woollen industry and the poor

In the much larger area of the city taken in by the fourteenth-century walls, we meet the non-citizen poor. After the slump at this time in the manufacture of muslins intended for the Mediterranean market, the Rheims capitalist traders switched to meeting the demand for serge in northern Europe, against English and Dutch competition. For this, there was much cheap labour, for a result of rural devastation, as we have seen, was an increase in the immigrant poor in Rheims. There was, as has been noted, a first influx as the result of the Spanish War and of the *Fronde*. They built shacks in the many open spaces of the town so that the city council had the great extra expense of feeding them. These refugees either found work of some kind and some sort of accommodation, mainly in the Rue du Barbâtre-Rue Neuve area, or, if destitute, went to the General Hospice. Those who had weaving skills already were more likely to find work as weavers of serge on home looms, working at starvation wages on the raw material supplied them by the bourgeois manufacturers.

Already in August 1650 Coquault was writing bitterly about these refugees: "We are afflicted by the dregs of the people who always want to overflow with an abundance and have bread, wine and meat more cheaply than the one who tills the soil and cultivates the vine..." But he also realised the gain in labour: that these poor could be exploited as a source of wealth by his class. These were the poor, though they were not officially recognised as such for benefit, and they were perhaps not the worst of the poor - these would be homeless beggars and those who chose to be inmates of the General Hospice which functioned in part as a poor house. All the time of the working poor was taken up making a living in cramped conditions. They were undernourished, easily struck down by epidemics.

The population of Rheims increased between 1620 and 1680 from 18,000 to 28,000, in spite of the severe epidemics of 1651 and 1653 among the overcrowded poor. As the depressed, non-voting families were already the majority, you now had a very large working class, the poor. In August 1661 a census was made of those who had come into the city since 1649. Those who had not the necessary income by now to maintain their family were told to leave by October. Apparently only 500 were driven back to the villages. The merchant-manufacturers found them hard workers, while the signing of peace with Spain meant that the lines of trade were open again and more weavers of serge were needed. And so they saw to it that the poor remained, even if they paid them so badly that they "couldn't survive two days' illness without the help of the General Hospital."⁸

The next year the wheat situation worsened as a result of poor harvests in Europe generally. In May 1662 the corporation had to take the control of the

sale of corn already referred to (p. 22). René Bourgeois complains that “we were weighed down with poor people and especially with weavers of serge...it was a mistake not to have forced them to leave...the destitution was great and universal, and without the help obtained from the city of Châlons, (from) Champagne, (from) la Brie and part of the country round Paris, they might have died of hunger.”⁹ In fact, deaths and less births among the poor in Rheims led to a drop in population nine months later. Note Bourgeois’ identification of serge-weavers as being ‘the poor’.

These wage-earning poor had no time to look after their children, and had certainly not the money to pay for any form of schooling. Their children gathered at the street-corners, left to their own devices, getting some odd job if they could. They lived in unheated homes; the oiled paper put to their windows in lieu of glass did little to keep out the winter cold. These people, both the older strata and now the first, second and third generation refugees, whose plight John De La Salle never noticed, and whom he despised, were the very ones to whom he was to dedicate his life and live among, and found for them a society of schoolmasters committed to their Christian and social redemption.

The weavers, in order to take up work, would have to be ‘master-weavers’, certified by their guild and able to work to Colbert’s and municipal regulations. It was a sign of having the necessary skill, not of wealth, nor even of independence. For the bourgeois fabricant or manufacturer gave the master the raw materials and perhaps a loom, and required of him cloth of various weaves and regulated sizes which he paid by the piece. Being a master meant he could take on one or more apprentices, who received no wages and whose keep was paid by their father, and one or at the most two journeymen. These former apprentices became journeymen by contracting to serve the master for adequate wages till they could become a master in their turn. The end products of their industry were various woollen fabrics or fabrics part silk, part wool; hats, bleached and dyed cotton and linen. Because the industry was hardly mechanised, its various stages demanded much labour to provide a meagre livelihood. A whole family would be employed in the process: children often did the first picking of the wool; beating and carding (combing) would be done by men; women spun at the wheel. But the weaving on the loom was done only by the master - the father of the family, in fact - and his journeyman. In 1685 there were 1500 master-weavers employing 2000 other workers. If we suppose a fifth were not yet married and, owing to a heavier mortality, there was an average of three children per family, with about half those between the ages of six and twelve, when they might be put to work, there were over 4000 children left in ignorance.



A closer look at the social categories of Rheims.¹⁰

All told, the families in possession of honours and profits in seventeenth century Rheims came to about 450, including nobles, royal officials, the professions and the wealthiest master-craftsmen such as the goldsmiths, silver-smiths, jewellers, leather-workers. The numerous parish clergy, canons, monks and friars originated from this upper bourgeoisie. Even if you count six surviving children per family, that makes only 2700 among a population rising to 28,000 and then falling a little. The real power and wealth was in the hands of some 50 capitalist manufacturers or organisers of production, some 40 other wealthy merchants and traders and another 35 dealing only in wines.

But the upper bourgeoisie and the dependent working poor were not the only social categories in Rheims. There were the middle social categories, the whole gamut of the 'petite bourgeoisie'. They were the more-or-less well-to-do, usually able to weather difficult times. They included those law practitioners who held small posts with the city council, or acted as property agents for prosperous bourgeois or for religious houses. But for the most part this group was made up of the artisan classes: independent master-craftsmen and small traders and shopkeepers who had no say in the running of the town's affairs but who were relatively well-off, along with some 200 assistants and clerks of various kinds. At this level also there were a hundred or so small independent farmers installed within the city boundaries. The shopkeeper category included bakers, innkeepers, grocers, pork butchers, taverners, cooks and pastry-cooks; and in the clothing trade, craftsmen such as shoemakers, tailors, rug-makers, seamstresses: all these paid fair amounts of tax, indicating comfortable incomes. In the wood-working trades there were master-coopers (fairly numerous because of the wine trade) and other carpenters and sawyers. Include also metalworkers, wheelwrights, blacksmiths, clockmakers. All these were grouped in guilds. But there were also the unattached small, self-employed craftsmen such as cobblers and locksmiths, and shopkeepers. All told, these occupations provided a living for some 3500 households.

These, also, were to become the concern of De La Salle's future Society. For they, too, were busy all the day in their workshops and shops, occupied with a less slavish kind of work perhaps than that of the serge-weavers, but often living in cramped quarters. If we allow a higher rate of survival for their children than the poor, then we have to think of an even larger number of children of school age. Some of these would be sent to the many one-master 'little schools' of the town that charged fees and taught more or less well, and some might be sent to one of the two colleges of the town for a year or two, perhaps more, but, as we have seen, the colleges catered for only a minute portion of these children. The majority were therefore idle until their father

could take them into his own workshop or, more likely, arrange for them to be taken on as an apprentice with another craftsman. They, too, were in ignorance of their faith, easily led astray by bad companions and certainly not rising to their full potential, neither personally nor socially. Many of their parents practised their trades traditionally in St James's parish. Here the wage-earning poor and the more-or-less well-off independent craftsmen crossed constantly on its streets. Among the early members of De La Salle's community in the Rue Neuve was a young man who joined in 1684 when he was twenty. He was the son of a **harness-maker**¹¹ from St James's parish and therefore reasonably well-off. His name is one that the De La Salle Brothers cherish: he was Brother Gabriel Drolin.

In the years following the signing of peace with Spain in 1659, when the lines of trade opened up again, master-craftsmen were doing so well that the better-off among them compared favourably in income with the still upcoming bourgeois. Coquault, who was one of this class, noted somewhat disgruntledly in his journal: "The wealth of the artisan is way above that of the self-made bourgeois, and this town has more than others." This was merely a grumbling surmise. He had written earlier: "Artisans are forever cursing and blaspheming with their offensive tongue the powerful and good inhabitant (meaning the bourgeois) who gives them a living. They think they are doing you a favour when they actually pay the lease on a house or for the wine and wheat they buy. They pay no *tallage* (property tax) or any rates; they never have to billet a soldier; they have never lost a penny on wars, since providing arms and gangs of workers" (*corvées*, for work on the ramparts) "fall on the good inhabitant." Nevertheless, what characterised the artisan class as compared with the medium and big bourgeoisie, who would have capital, property and investments to fall back upon, was financial insecurity. The skilled craftsman had the support of his guild, but even he could be ruined by long illness or bad times. But for the others, insecurity and therefore poverty were a permanent feature of their lives.

At the bottom of the social pyramid was the exploited wage-earning class already seen, the 'poor'. We have seen so far only the industrial labourers, those weavers of serge and their families, who earned nothing when they were ill. These workers could subsist when the price of bread was steady, but they were in penury when bread doubled in price or wages were cut. In Rheims no doubt, as in Beauvais, the price of bread trebled in 1649, 1651, 1661-2. And as trade slumps usually occurred at these times, the higher cost of living was accompanied by low wages and unemployment. The poor lived in constant fear of unemployment and fluctuating bread prices, for purchases of bread took up the greater part of their income. In his diary, a businessman of Beauvais wrote in April 1694: "One sees nothing any more in Beauvais but

an infinite number of paupers, languishing from hunger and want, dying in the squares and streets...Having no occupation and work, they have no money to buy bread...Most of the poor, to prolong their lives a bit and to appease their hunger a little, for lack of bread eat unclean and tainted things, such as cats, the flesh of skinned horses thrown into the gutters, the blood from slaughtered bulls and cows which flows into the stream, offal, guts, intestines and other such things.”¹²

Add to the serge-weavers in Rheims over 1000 domestics, more men than women, employed in the houses of the bourgeoisie, and of whom eighty per cent were from the country. Below all of these was a whole host of people doing what jobs they could for a pittance: street-porters, sweepers, people who delivered letters, water-carriers, rag-and-bone men, knife-grinders, errand-boys, ferrymen...All of these, with those in the textile industry, constituted the mass of the ‘poor’, the non-class, the dependent, exploited and powerless.

SOME ASPECTS OF THE WIDER FRENCH CONTEXT THE YOUNG DE LA SALLE CAME TO KNOW

John De La Salle learnt of national events and personalities by hearing them discussed in the family circle and by people who dropped in to pass the time of day. Amid the diverging opinions he would have to form his own views. There would be much that in time he would have to learn and unlearn; he must have come to regret some views and find others petty. As the same Burgess already quoted noted in his journal: “Such are the times we are in: among us only jealousy, envy and avarice hold sway...For forty years I have seen nothing else than town against clergy, town against aldermen, drapers against mercers, and almost all other trades one against the other.”¹³ Whatever he made of it and of other people’s opinions later in life, John did absorb many of the prejudices of his class; his understanding of the national scene at the moment was very limited. To have before us some of the relevant facets of French life helps towards placing his later work.

French towns: some population figures¹⁴

In later years, as De La Salle was invited to provide two or three of his masters in different towns, he would meet the same social stratification, the same majority of the dependent and ignorant. Paris was basically no different but more complex, and will be seen in its place. For all the categories, while 20 to 40 per cent of the population did not reach their first year, there were often four or five surviving children per family, so that there were many young people. Up to the age of five, however, the death-rate was very high from

illnesses like scarlet fever and mumps, general lack of hygiene or accidents in the narrow streets. Epidemics ravaged more severely the crowded poor quarters of the towns. Half the population died before the age of twenty, and the remainder often died young, so that old people were rare. About the year 1660 the average age was only 25, and at 50 you were an old man. France was then in population the greatest country in Europe: her population is by some estimated to have risen between 1600 and 1720 from 18 million to 23 million. If there were too many mouths to feed, or if it was illegitimate, a newborn baby might be abandoned at the door of a church or elsewhere. Cases of more or less intentional smothering of children in their parents' bed were not uncommon. The children of working-class people lived in the family's one-roomed home; or they might fit into three rooms, shop and workshop included. Water, which had to be paid for, was not much in evidence; dirt and strong body odours were supposed to be signs of health.

Adult illnesses included tuberculosis, rabies, and what we would call cancer today. There could be major epidemics of smallpox, dysentery, typhus and others, and in addition there could be extraordinary times of high mortality, as when the price of wheat rose, even up to ten times, and when the plague swept through the country. The worst periods were those of 1649 to 53, when up to a third of a million died from war and epidemics; of 1660-63, when up to one and a half million died from famine, epidemics and a terrible winter. Temperatures in the Paris area were down to -40 or -50° Celsius. Rheims would be no different. In 1693-94 between two and three million died, adults and children. In 1709, the cruel winter, following a bad harvest, led to enormous suffering and innumerable deaths. This was the constant hampering backcloth to De La Salle's work.

He correctly summed up the dependent urban categories when he said his schools were established for the children of "the artisans and the poor". The term "artisan" covered both the independent master and his journeymen. The journeyman was likely to remain so all his life because the masters of his guild, by requiring a more and more difficult masterpiece as condition of joining their ranks, established a monopoly for the few, specifically for their own families.

Because of famine and plagues, poverty in this century easily became destitution and privation. Yet even when the plague passed through France by 1720 and the climate improved, poverty was still the plight of a third of the population. Conditions, therefore, were worse in the Founder's day than those revealed in a survey of 1770 by intendants, bishops and parish priests. It reported that "Casual farm labourers, unskilled urban workers and journey-men artisans and all those whose work provided little more than food or clothing are those who produce beggars. While still boys they work,...(and when they are married) they feed a first child, they have great difficulty in feeding

two, and if a third comes along their work no longer suffices to meet the expense.”

The poor are “the family of a working man where such an individual cannot earn enough to support every member, and when the individual members cannot support themselves.” He is, in short, a non-property owning wage-earner having no other resource than his poor pay.

The situation of the journeyman, who was at subsistence level at best, represents the plight of these categories at the turn of the century. He could rarely afford meat; he lived on bread and a few vegetables: beans, cabbage, salads. On the best days he would buy offal and cheap cuts of meat. And on the other hand, he could be sacked on the spot or after a week’s notice. The chance of unemployment or of illness left him very insecure. A serious accident meant he went to the hospice or was out on the street. He had nothing to fall back on and was usually crippled with debts to retailers. All he had to pawn were a few rags and the tools of his trade.¹⁵

The Protestants or Huguenots

It has been said that the inclination of the people of Champagne to criticise - and therefore to stand back from a situation - explains to some extent how many of them took to the ideas of the Reformers.¹⁶ Places in Champagne, like Troyes, Châlons and Vitry, were early centres of Lutheranism. The Reformation gained followers in Rheims: as early as 1525 Lutherans took an aggressive stand against Catholic practices: a few crosses were overthrown, a few statues soiled. The later Calvinists were bolder, counting on a neighbouring Calvinist lord.¹⁷ They preached openly and created disturbances; several *notables* converted to them (including John’s great-uncle already mentioned), but by 1585 there were only about 100 Protestant families in Rheims. John Calvin, one of many fleeing persecution from Noyon, on the other side of Soissons from Rheims, settled in Geneva, and from 1541 a new wave of Protestantism radiating from there made rapid progress in France. Its adherents and Protestants generally became known as Huguenots, a word possibly derived from the German for ‘confederates’, meaning the patriots of Geneva in 1520-24.

It was at Wassy, 70-odd miles to the southeast of Rheims, that the massacre of a Huguenot congregation started off the Wars of religion (1562-1598) during which Rheims became the centre of the Catholic League led by the Guises against the Huguenots under the Prince de Condé. Henry IV, the first Bourbon king and a Huguenot, won over the Catholic majority of France by himself becoming a Catholic in 1593, and brought the fighting to an end by the Edict of Nantes in 1598, which gave the Protestants religious freedom within a politically controlled framework. They were given complete civic equality

with Catholics, the right to public worship in certain places, and to fortify two hundred places of refuge. At the time there were about a million and a half Huguenots, well-organised, on a population of some eighteen million. They controlled much of the southwest of France and Languedoc, and also an area in the west. They were numerous in Normandy.

In 1622, by the Treaty of Montpellier, the Huguenots, after a revolt, lost most of their fortresses. By the Treaty of Alès (or Alais) in Languedoc in 1629, they were allowed religious freedom but lost their special political rights. Alès had been their main stronghold in the Cévennes. De La Salle sent two of his Brothers to start a school there in 1707 and passed through the town in 1712, when he visited his schools in the area. It will be interesting to see how La Salle envisaged teaching Protestant children.

Government from above.

In 1661, when Mazarin died, **Louis** set about building a state controlled by himself. Most of De La Salle's life was spent under that one rule. He never had any experience of democracy. Action at all levels of society was from authority downwards; he experienced endless negotiations with authorities always conscious of their jurisdiction. On the other hand, royal control was not as absolute as royal edicts would make it out to be. The fact that decrees had to be continually re-enacted shows this. Provincialism and immemorial local rights could not so easily be obliterated. It has also to be remembered that people often suffered more oppression from local authorities than from the distant centre. All De La Salle's difficulties, and they were very great at times, were with local powers and vested interests. Only once was he threatened - through the archbishop of Paris - with lettres de cachet banishing him. Royal government could be benevolent. As occasion allowed, and as long as the nature of his work did not suffer, he accepted royal subsidies and the support of royal governors and *intendants*, just as he accepted financial support from town corporations or from *notables* keen on helping the poor.

The foreign policy and conquests that occupy such a large part in Louis's reign affected the life and work of De La Salle in so far as they disrupted trade, creating unemployment, while increased taxes, falling mostly on the peasantry, drove more of them to the towns. The price of food increased with inflation. The effect would be seen in the increased poverty of the clientele of his Brothers' schools.

THE RELIGIOUS DIMENSION OF RHEIMS: UNWORTHY PRELATES AND A PIONEER OF CLERICAL REFORM.¹⁸

The beautiful cathedral that dominates Rheims was the metropolitan church of an ecclesiastical province that stretched to the Channel. The appointment of its archbishops was an example of the scandalous abuse that the Council

of Trent had legislated against a hundred years before. The see of Rheims was neglected between 1605 and 1667, and was virtually vacant for the first sixteen years of De La Salle's life. It all came from the use of patronage by the Dukes of Guise, the French branch of the House of Lorraine, who looked upon the see as being at their disposal, appointing members of their family in order to enrich them from its many benefices. One of this family was the Mary de Guise who was the mother of Mary Stuart.

A Henry de Guise (1614-1644) was nominated to the see when only fourteen, and held it till 1641 without even being sub-deacon. He returned to the lay state in 1641 as fifth Duke of Guise, and tried unsuccessfully to secure the crown of Naples. For the next ten years a certain Léonor d'Estampes was archbishop. Of him the sharp tongues of Rheims would say: "He deceived everyone he had to do business with; and when he didn't, it was because he couldn't." Perhaps he was too smart for them. But he did take steps to improve priestly training. In 1651, the year De La Salle was born, he fled, owing not only to rich merchants, but also to butchers, masons and other tradesmen. From 1651 to 1667 the see was virtually vacant. The archbishop-designate, Henry of Savoy-Nemours, had received only the tonsure. He resigned in 1667, married and died two years later. With no male heirs, the Guise patronage at last ceased. The last of the line was Marie de Lorraine, called Mademoiselle de Guise, who died in 1688. She comes into La Salle's story later.

With the lapse of the Guise patronage, Louis XIV in 1657 nominated to the see, as he was entitled to do by the Concordat of 1516, Cardinal Antonio Barberini (1608-71), although papal bulls giving him jurisdiction were not sent till 1667.¹⁹ It was a better but still an unsatisfactory choice. The Barberinis were an aristocratic Italian family. Antonio's uncle, Urban VIII (1623-44) saw to it that all his family were given posts of power and wealth in the Church and in the Papal States. It was his making the present baldaquino of St Peter's from bronze plates taken from the Pantheon that drew the pun: "Quod non fecerunt Barbari fecit Barberini" - What the barbarians didn't do Barberini did.

When Antonio Barberini took possession of his see in December 1667, the people of Rheims had the novel experience of actually seeing their Archbishop presiding the liturgy in the cathedral. He called on the City Council, the University and the Jesuit College, and had the offensive remark about it removed. "He's the rising sun everyone worships," wrote Coquault. But the cardinal was too fond of Rome to stay long in this northern town, and the Chapter, too long used to power, was known to be continually at loggerheads with him. He was therefore often absent. There was no real attempt to administer the archdiocese till Barberini was given a coadjutor in the person of Charles Maurice Le Tellier, son of Michael Le Tellier, Louis's famous Secre-

tary of State for War. Charles Maurice was appointed on November 11th 1668 and entered Rheims in April 1669. Cardinal Barberini returned to Italy this year and died in 1671. Le Tellier was nine years older than De La Salle, a doctor in theology in Sorbonne. He was a self-confident man of great drive, and although he, too, was often away at court, he ran his diocese well, refounded the seminary and chose the Genovevans in their abbey of Saint Denis opposite the cathedral, as its professors. This abbey is now a museum. He remodelled his palace into a sumptuous building in the 'modern' style by 1690, leaving intact the 13th century Gothic chapel adjoining the cathedral, in which kings spent the night in prayer before their coronation. This was the chapel in which John De La Salle received the tonsure and minor orders. The seminary buildings were in poor shape by 1680 and from 1686 to 1688 Le Tellier had them rebuilt. He despised the poor and only appreciated people 'with an income of 50,000 livres'. Madame de Sévigné, the famous letter-writer of the period, wrote from Paris on 5 February 1674:

The archbishop of Rheims was coming back very quickly from Saint-Germain, like a whirlwind. If he thinks he is a great lord, his attendants believe it more than he. They were going through Nanterre, tra, tra, tra; they meet a man on horseback: "Out of the way! Out of the way!." The poor fellow tries to get out of the way but his horse doesn't; so the coach and six horses knock the poor man and his horse head over heels and drive over them, so much over that the coach tipped over and overturned. At the same time, the man and the horse, instead of hanging around to get crippled and beaten black and blue, miraculously pick themselves up, and remaining one on the other, flee and are still running while the lackeys and the coachman, and even the archbishop, start shouting: "Stop! Stop the rogue! Give him a hundred blows!" The archbishop, telling the story, used to say: "If I had got hold of the villain I would have broken his arms and cut off his ears."

Altogether, the young De La Salle was given little edification from the see of Rheims.

The cathedral chapter was not greatly edifying either. It had become used to running the archdiocese in the absence of its bishops, and became very influential and conscious of its rights. It counted 64 canons besides several cathedral dignitaries. When in 1658 the King ordered a Te Deum to be sung to celebrate the capture of Dunkirk, the City Council decided on the day and then informed the Chapter. It protested vigorously: "You have no power or authority in our church. If the king orders such ceremonies, he is addressing our archbishop, and, if the see is vacant, ourselves. Moreover, our archbishop can do nothing in our church without the advice and consent of the Chapter,

and we can do everything in the church without him.” The Council proceeded to the cathedral and arrived when Vespers had begun. Constables of the watch preceded them into the church and lined the nave as the Council members processed to their special seats. At this the canons stopped singing half-way through a psalm, rushed out of their stalls and insisted on the archers being removed. When the Council would not give way, the canons as a body left the cathedral. Ten years later, when Barberini was in residence, the king ordered a *Te Deum* to be sung to celebrate the end of the War of Devolution with Spain (1667-68). It was fixed for Sunday, 8 April. The Chapter began the *Te Deum* without waiting for the cardinal, who arrived after a few verses had been sung. He complained to the king, who ordered the Chapter to start again on a day fixed by the archbishop. The Chapter had to give way, but saved its face by saying it was obeying the king, not the City Council or the Cardinal!

Adrian Bourdoise, a pioneer in the reform of the clergy

Fortunately, the growing Canon De La Salle met with more positive examples to encourage his desire to be a priest. His parents took him from his early years to mass and vespers in their parish church of St Peter-the-Old, just down the street. From 1654 to 1661 it had as parish priest, among a dozen or so curates or other clerics, a remarkable man, Andrew Cloquet, a doctor in theology who had been vicar-general at Léonor’s death. John seemed to be quickly at home with what he saw in church, and became an altar-server. His parish-priest was a friend of Adrian Bourdoise, a pioneer in the French movement to reform the clergy in the wake of the Council of Trent. Bourdoise had built up in Paris on the parish of Saint Nicolas-du-Chardonnet a community of those aspiring to the priesthood, and he had done the same in the College of Rheims there. He accepted in 1625 an invitation to come to Rheims, and preached a powerful mission to its clergy. He later gave great credit to Canon Dozet for his efforts - backed by the English Archbishop (1621-28), the Benedictine Gabriel of St Mary - to reform the clergy of Rheims and bring new life to the minor seminary. In 1632 Dozet obtained a copy of the statutes of the community of Saint Nicolas-du-Chardonnet (recognised as a seminary in 1643) and also tried, though unsuccessfully, to persuade either Bourdoise or his second-in-command, Michael Beuvelet, to take charge of the seminary. He managed to have a worthy priest appointed as rector, but he failed to find anyone to organise a community of priests in the seminary who would at the same time run a parish on model lines.

Adrian Bourdoise died in 1665, but his book: *The Idea of a Good Cleric*, was published in Rheims in 1658 and ran to four or five editions till 1668, so that De La Salle would have seen the book and read it, especially as his great

cousin, Canon Dozet would have warmly recommended it. Bourdoise was blunt about people being tonsured too soon. He stood out against the current laxity. "I couldn't do better than do the contrary of whatever I saw most clerics doing, even the most learned, and I've always found this rule has done me good." "You must hope to succeed in the affairs of God only in so far as they have met with contrariety." "When everyone gangs up against you, go ahead boldly. That's when you feel good." No wonder he was called a man of "uncompromising severity and an insufferable character." Perhaps De La Salle was strengthened by such an example when his time came to face a barrage of criticism.

While he maintained a spirit of independence towards generally received behaviour, Adrian recommended poverty, abjection and work. His seminary maintained its high standard after him. De La Salle, towards the end of his life, when he was no longer superior of the Brothers, retired there for six months. To Adrian Bourdoise "more than any other, was due the reform in liturgical practice and manners, the renewal of reverence and decorum too long missing from French altars. He would stride up the nave of some Paris church, laden with freshly-laundered surplices, aspersing his brethren right and left, glaring at priests who did not know the proper time for standing and kneeling and bowing...One morning he saw a priest go straight into the street after finishing mass, without any thanksgiving. Bourdoise seized a taper from the altar and the acolyte's handbell and raced after him, ringing the bell as he went...'I'm only accompanying the Blessed Sacrament', he told the embarrassed priest."²⁰

John De La Salle, keen to read the best about the priesthood, would have bought the texts known to be used at St Nicolas-du-Chardonnet not only on Dozet's and Cloquet's recommendation, but also because Bourdoise's successor, Beuvelet, was maternal uncle to Nicholas Roland. This Nicholas was a very alive and spiritual priest who was made canon of Rheims in 1665 and became a very close friend and guide to the young La Salle. The recommended texts were: The Bible or the New Testament, the *Catechism of the Council of Trent*, books on the liturgy, on prayer and retreats, and the *Imitation of Christ*. Beuvelet himself paid a visit to Rheims in 1652; his books, too, would have been read by La Salle, for they were recognised as texts to be studied or meditated on by anyone serious about becoming a priest. One was a book on ritual that may have helped him to develop the great love he had towards the Blessed Sacrament, his love of well-performed ceremonies and his respect for the priesthood and consecrated places. In his *Meditations on the Priestly Life*, written in order to restore the quality of life in the clergy, Beuvelet tried to give candidates to the priesthood an exalted idea of the priestly state. He put the priest on a pedestal, and explained that his different

dress from that of others was meant to show this. He appropriated to the priest alone the mission of saving souls. Religious, he thought, looked only after their own salvation. Given the low level of formation of the clergy, even though there were seminaries in most dioceses by now, presenting this model of the priestly state is understandable. De La Salle came to dissociate himself from this model, being ready to obey the Brother who became Superior of his community, and to render the meanest services to anyone. He also saw in his Brothers' life a true way of Gospel holiness, and came to recognise their work in the Church as a share in the ministry of the word of God in the basic field of the education of the young.

Monastic and mendicant communities²¹

Rheims was in many ways a late medieval town that had not known the spoliation of its religious houses as had happened in other countries, nor the ravages of foreign wars. In its streets you would meet Franciscans, Capuchins, Dominicans and the numerous clergy of the fourteen parishes. There were Benedictine monks in the two abbeys of Saint Remi and Saint Nicaise at the southern end of the town. You had easy access in those days to the parlours of the Carmelites, Poor Clares, Augustinians and other enclosed nuns. There were also various lay communities looking after the poor and the sick. As elsewhere, religious life was pulling out of a long decline.

There were some fourteen communities of monks, nuns and friars in the city. Among male orders you would add Augustinians, Minims and Jesuits to those listed above. Among his near relatives John De La Salle counted a Cistercian, a Minim, a Canon Regular of St Genevieve and six Jesuits. Five others were canons and at least three more were diocesan priests.²²

It is possible that the Benedictines had an influence on De La Salle as he sought to grow in the ways of prayer. Their monastery of Saint Remi had undergone a great renewal. Its reform really began when in 1627 it became affiliated to the **Maurist Congregation of Benedictines**, founded six years previously. The great abbey of Saint Germain-des-Prés in Paris joined the Congregation in 1630 and became the seat of the superior-general. Most French Benedictines joined the Congregation and strove to combine contemplation with scholarship. Mabillon, who studied in Rheims before becoming a monk in 1654 was considered to be one of the most learned monks of his time. In De La Salle's day the monastery counted forty monks. Its library became the best in Rheims, with 25,000 books and 900 manuscripts, most of them lost in the fire of 1774.

A humble but outstanding figure in Benedictine piety was the sacristan of the abbey church, Dom Paul Bayard. He had been sacristan since 1636 and still fulfilled the role in De La Salle's time. He had an extraordinary gift of

contemplation. He kept a journal on the orders of his spiritual director; it was published by Dom Martène in his *History of the Congregation of Saint Maur*. After great trials of aridity in prayer, Dom Paul was able to write that “four hours of application to mental prayer cost him less than half an hour’s external occupation.” He noted: “Faith alone works in my soul... A simple view of faith that God gives me binds me to him without my having to do anything.” On that degree of mental prayer which De La Salle later termed ‘simple attention’, Dom Paul wrote: “It is as if one were contemplating a beautiful picture without turning one’s eyes away because of the pleasure one has looking at it...a simple view without words, or a simple regard which sees many things at once.” De La Salle was to borrow the very same comparison when he wanted to show his Brothers how to accede to simple personal prayer.

Personal prayer for the monk had always been the *lectio divina*, the meditative reading of the Bible, stopping his reading when the Word of God spoke to him personally. It was perhaps from the Benedictines that De La Salle first learnt of ‘affective’ prayer that instead of being a meditation, a time of mental reflections on a passage of Scripture, is a conversation with God. It is also interesting, for it is connected with this, that the General Chapter of the Maurists in 1648 ordered there to be a Bible in the room of each monk “so that he could read a few passages every day.” De La Salle, in his Rule, asked his Brothers “always to carry the New Testament about them, and pass no day without reading some of it...looking upon it as their first and principal rule.” Their life, too, was strongly based on the Gospel, a life of faith lived as consciously as possible in a busy life-style. In its daily routine it was considerably different from that of a Benedictine. Yet there is a contemplative dimension to it, represented in the Brothers’ active life by their daily time of affective prayer and by the practice of judging and doing everything by the light of faith. Where, for the monk, the *opus Dei* is singing the praises of God in choir, for the Brothers of John Baptist De La Salle and for all Christian educators, it is the Christian education of youth, exercised with faith and zeal.

The Capuchins of Rheims also had a serious spiritual tradition. They first came to the city in 1593 and met with opposition: the mendicant orders were unpopular and, coming after the Franciscans, the newcomers were seen as superfluous. They were ordered to leave in 1597, but in 1613 Renée of Lorraine (the aunt of Mary Stuart who was still abbess of St Peter’s nunnery) and others secured from an assembly of burgesses a favourable vote for their return, and the Cardinal of Lorraine gave them a suitable site. Relatives of De La Salle: the Coqueberts and the Lespagnols, were on both sides in the reaction to the Capuchins, but in his own day there were four Coqueberts and one De La Salle, all cousins of his, who were novices between 1661 and

1668. One of them became Guardian of the community in 1674-6. The sister of another presented the community with a magnificent frontal for the altar of their chapel. John Maillefer wrote on November 24th, 1675: "We talked over things in the paths of their gardens." His son, a priest, left them his library, and Pierre Dozet gave them a painting of St Francis. His own brother died a Capuchin in 1660. This brother of his, Brother Jean-François, was well known as a guide in prayer, and published in 1635 his treatise on *La Vraye Perfection*, True Perfection. Canon Roland's Sisters still have a copy of the edition of 1641. The Capuchin novice master, Fr Hyacinth, who died in 1666, was looked upon as "the greatest man of prayer and contemplation that the religion (the Order) of the Capuchins had witnessed". It would be easy in later years for De La Salle to draw upon the traditions of the religious life and adapt them to a life lived for the poor.

Convents of nuns

There were many convents in Rheims, mainly of enclosed orders: Carmelites, Poor Clares, Augustinians, Benedictines, with sixty to eighty nuns in each. Coquault didn't think much of them. Girls were taken too young, he thought, "wearing the hat of a so-called vocation of the Holy Spirit" at ten, twelve or fourteen years, before 'natural sensibility' makes itself heard. "More than four years after, they do not know what they are doing; it is at twenty-two, twenty-three, twenty-four and twenty-five that they begin to realise what sex they are." He blamed the parents: those who, if they can't get their daughter married to a nobleman, put her in a "noble" convent, where, he says, "they live like great ladies." "This abuse," he noted in 1667, "is so overdone that six convents are not enough to take in all the daughters of families that their parents present there, driven and blown along by their blind vanity. They do not want a son-in-law because to have one of the quality they want they wouldn't have the means to provide a dowry." With little to do, according to him, visits from relatives and friends helped these nuns to pass the time. In each of these convents, he says, there were six parlours at least where nuns "itched" to know the latest news, quarrels in the neighbourhood and forthcoming marriages. Coquault lets his critical spirit run away with him to some extent, for the increased numbers entering religious houses in his day was also likely to be the result of a reformed piety. Of the elder John Maillefer's two daughters, one became a nun. Far from her parents pushing her, it was she, notes John, who "was often asking my consent at fifteen"; and a granddaughter entered St Peter's convent at nineteen "without saying a word to me or her mother."

One group of nuns, the Canonesses of St Augustine or Sisters of the Congregation of Notre-Dame, have some interest for us.²³ They ran a school for

the bourgeoisie and also a free day school. The Canonesses were founded by St Peter Fourier (1565-1640, canonised 1847) and had been cloistered against his intentions, for he had intended them to teach the poor and hence have day pupils. He wrote of them: "I always felt that it was necessary to state that first they were schoolmistresses and that in order to be more disciplined they asked and pleaded to become religious, lest people should believe that they were religious first and would only afterwards ask for schools."²⁴

De La Salle knew them well for between 1638 and 1689 fifteen of his relatives from the La Salles and Maillefers entered this congregation. Canon Dozet had been their superior at the time of their hard beginnings in Rheims, 1637-46. In 1668-70, about twelve nuns looked after 200 day girls, and only four looked after the little boarding-school. It was very small, entirely within the monastic enclosure, and in fact many of these boarders joined the nuns. This was out of 58 nuns: most, therefore, pursued the contemplative life. In 1678 De La Salle, in his memorandum to the City Council defending Canon Roland's new congregation, refers to the Canonesses as having 400 pupils, mainly day girls. There were three classes or levels of learning; corporal punishments were to be moderate; there was an inspector or superintendent in the school. De La Salle's schools would have similar features, but with a much more refined planning and application by the teacher. The Augustinians' vocation was, however, mainly contemplative: school hours were shorter than customary so as not to cut into the time for prayer. In his Constitutions St Peter Fourier places first the teaching of catechism and then, in order to attract the children and give them the means of earning a livelihood, reading, writing and suitable manual skills. We shall see how De La Salle dropped the manual skills thought appropriate for the poor and gave a different meaning to the three R's seen as skills far more valuable for their future.

Provision for the poor

There was in Rheims a civic provision for orphans and children and for beggars on the streets.²⁵ De La Salle and his Brothers never took up this kind of work, except once under duress. Dominating the left side of the cathedral square was the huge General Hospital (*Hôtel-Dieu*). At one time in 1650, during the *Fronde*, it had managed to take in 700 wounded and sick people from among the immigrant rural refugees. The poorest women came here to give birth. Babies abandoned at the doors of churches were taken in before being placed with foster-mothers. Orphans in their early years were brought up here until they were old enough for schooling, when they were transferred to the General Hospice.

A *Hôpital-Général* or General Hospice had been begun in 1623 near the Town Hall by two bourgeois for the purpose of relieving exceptional cases of

distress. *Hôpital* then meant either a hospice or house destined to give provisional lodging to poor people in transit, to pilgrims or the poor of the town. It could also mean a smaller specialised place (a 'home' we would call it). Like the General Hospital, the General Hospice came under the Poor Board (*Bureau de Miséricorde*), each having its own committee of administration.

In Louis XIV's time its character changed. It took in beggars harried by the police and had a prison for loose girls and others put in solitary confinement for reasons of law and order. Occasionally difficult children were taken in at the request of their parents. Abandoned children were cared for in another part of the hospice known as the House of Charity. But its main work was now the 'education' of the poorest in confinement. It had become, in fact, a poorhouse or workhouse, keeping the poor off the streets by confining them till their late teens. Rheims had been one of the first towns to copy Lyons in this respect. De La Salle's father had served on its committee in 1662 and 1665. John Maillefer, his brother-in-law to be, served on it in 1697 and on the hospital committee in 1703. The charity that the well-off provided by direct alms or left in their wills was channelled into these institutions. After the *Fronde* the Crown took up the idea in the hope that this form of urban relief would take beggars off the streets without cost to the state.

In the Rheims workhouse the orphans transferred from the General Hospital were taught boys and girls separately, the boys by unmarried men, the girls by unmarried women, the two groups forming two communities following the same general regulations. Thanks to various legacies, in 1657 workshops for spinning and weaving, hosiery, basket-making, lace-making and shoe-making were set up to occupy these children and also to provide funds for the institution by the sale of what they made, and to teach these children one of the lower crafts they could earn their living by.

The regulations admitted children between the ages of 8 and 17 years. The girls were taught by two mistresses who were called Sisters, with a Superior in general charge, without being a religious community. 1684 they were given a uniform, rather austere dress, which no more indicated a religious community than nurses' uniforms today. For the children, the day began at 5.30 and went on till 7.00 in the evening. The main occupation took place in the workshops, where they spent all told eight and a half hours working in total silence, during which the master employed specially for this purpose gave each in turn a five or ten minutes' lesson in reading and writing. They would not get far in these skills. Religious instruction was given by a chaplain on Wednesdays from 12.30 to 1.30 and after Vespers on Sundays, but the master-in-charge had to make the boys recite some parts of the catechism in the workroom at five o'clock, and had to see, by questions and simple explanations, that those who needed it most learnt their catechism by heart.

The statutes laid down that “sound devotion consists in doing well one’s duty, which alone among the exercises of piety has the advantage of making us certain that in doing it we are actually doing the will of God.” This resembles the moral tone of instructions given to servants in the nineteenth century, impressing on them the God-given duty of keeping to one’s state in life and level in society. On education the regulations stated: “Nothing contributes more to public utility than good education given to youth.” “Those who have children in their charge should consider that the future and salvation of these young people depend on the care they take to bring them up, and that, with the greater part of the common people of the town passing through their hands (this was not true, unless they gave a restrictive meaning to ‘common people’.) they render the public an overall good when they take the proper care, and a universal evil when they neglect them.” “As instruction (i.e. religious instruction) is absolutely necessary for the good education of the poor, which is the principal aim of the General Hospice, and moreover, this is what this kind of people lack most, they will omit nothing of whatever seems likely to contribute to so great a good.” These are high principles, applied to what the Board considered education for the confined poor.

The stress is on “public utility”: the education given was seen as an aspect of the public assistance or poor relief the Board was concerned with. It kept these children off the streets. The children’s own real good and needs were not the point. They were taught from the point of view of the bourgeois of Rheims, represented by the committee: to respect law and order, to do their duty, to learn to do useful skills up to a point, but not to rise beyond their class. The policy was not purely utilitarian: Catholics were teaching Catholics; nevertheless, it was in view of the good of the city of Rheims and of bourgeois interests. Colbert, who was well-established as Controller-General of Finance at the time, and was working hard to improve the industries and trade of France, saw these hospices as trade schools. Having children in care and learning a trade was a remedy for idleness in the streets and a contribution to industriousness and therefore to the welfare of the state. Again, their real needs were not considered. De La Salle’s attitude would be very different. He never had his brothers teaching or working with those confined in hospices, except under constraint temporarily in Rouen.²⁶ His aim was not public utility as the city administration might see it, nor would he want to deal with inmates kept to low-level crafts up to adulthood.

The other three or four smaller homes and hospices were put by the Corporation under the General Hospice in 1667. It became the “General Hospice for those in care.” The Charity Board over the years became the executor and administrator of any legacies and investments made on behalf of the hospital and hospices. It came to claim control over any charitable initiatives

in the city and to oppose new ones. One example matters to our story. In 1661 a certain Madame Varlet took in a few orphans and was authorised by the mayor to collect for them. Numbers grew, and she was able to buy a house for them. On the grounds that some of her orphans were not from Rheims, two members of the Charity Board complained to the City Council about the misuse of town funds. They got her orphanage closed in 1662, took the children to the General Hospice, and took over the house. Madame Varlet did not give up. She started again with children only from Rheims, and the mayor backed her up again, giving her a house and granting her the right to have a collecting-box fixed outside it. She was allowed to take in several orphans from outside Rheims paid for by private arrangement.

THE CHURCH IN MID-SEVENTEENTH CENTURY FRANCE: ADELAYED BUT REMARKABLE TRIDENTINE REFORM WELL UNDERWAY

We are about to see John De La Salle, a young successful student aiming at being a priest, move to Paris to study at the seminary of Saint Sulpice. That seminary was one of the products of the remarkable renewal that had gone on in the French Church over the last fifty years in the wake of the Council of Trent. The situation has analogies with the present post-Vatican II period. It is not possible to grasp the meaning of De La Salle's educational work without reference to the Council of Trent and French reforms based on it. He aimed at bringing the poor effectively into the life of a restructured Church which he saw also as the body of Christ into which they entered like anyone else by baptism, and so he carried forward the renewal of the Church in the basic area of evangelizing its youngest members. He was affected by French reforms on the one hand and on the other had to resist other attitudes in the French Church foreign to Trent. He is significant in introducing a novel sense of lay ministry that made slow headway against what may be termed a standard direction of Tridentine reform that exalted the priest and distanced him from the laity. Today, lay ministries of wide scope are beginning to change the life of the Church. De La Salle's was an important work with several facets in helping to achieve the ultimate aim of Trent against out-dated or interested views of what the good of children required.

The work of the Council of Trent and its implementation in France

Prior to the Council, the Church was in desperate need of renewal. The disciplinary decisions of the Council, which met in three sessions between 1545 and 1563, aimed at a thorough pastoral reform. The bishop, from being a feudal lord, was to regain his position as head of a "particular church" or diocese, his first duty and that of his clergy being to preach the Gospel. A key

need, to replace a very ignorant clergy, was clerical formation. With this went the need to institute catechism teaching for children and the ignorant. The Council's decree on this left open who should teach catechism, but later it was narrowed to be only the clergy. Parish life was to be strengthened as a framework for Christian life. The bishop was to visit the parishes, hold synods and especially establish seminaries. The decision to compose a catechism was never achieved by the Council, but the catechism of the Council of Trent was finally published in 1566.

Trent was the most important Council before Vatican II. In France, the wars of religion held up its implementation, but a major reason for the delay was that not only the Crown and the *Parlements* refused to accept the decrees of the Council, but they were also opposed by the majority of the clergy in the name of the "ancient liberties of the Gallican Church." When peace after the Wars of Religion was established by Henry IV in 1598, one could say that the Holy Spirit did not allow this official attitude to block the road to salvation, but raised up a whole host of saints and saintly persons who worked for the internal and external reforms demanded by Trent. The Assembly of the French bishops accepted its decrees in 1615.

It was only then that the renewal began, even though it was fifty years since the Council had ended. De La Salle encountered it when it was showing much positive fruit. Its pivot was the renewal of the episcopacy. By 1660 unworthy and child nominees to bishoprics had been replaced by bishops trained in college, then at St Sulpice or the Sorbonne, with a clear idea of the bishop's mission. They were still temporal lords, their reform was held up by the benefices system and the royal abuse of benefices, and they could still be absent at court and distant from the faithful and the other clergy. But they did, in their Assemblies, try to meet the needs of the times, albeit within a Gallican sense of the Church for most of them.²⁷

The presence of an enlightened bishop in his diocese was basic to a person like De La Salle. The evangelizing work of his communities among the young poor would need the authorisation of the bishop, as legitimate and supreme pastor of his diocese, usually through the parish priest who invited them in. He always sought the bishop's approval when his Brothers were invited into a diocese. But he saw equally that this new work in the Church was a need throughout French society. It could not be tied down to one diocese. For this and for other reasons that will appear later, he sent two Brothers to Rome in 1702. He trusted that in God's good time, the Holy See would declare to the whole Church that this new Society's lifestyle and work was truly a new way of living the Gospel in the service of education.

He himself, we can say, like the saints of the previous generation, was called to play his part at the opportune time in completing the reforms of the

Council of Trent. Once some of the immediate needs of the starving countryside and of the urban poor had been met by the tremendous organising compassion of St Vincent de Paul, and he and others had set up permanent structures for revitalising the country parishes and for reforming the clergy through seminaries, people began to look to the catechising of the ignorant poor. There were many attempts to further the work of the clergy in this respect, but in the end, the answer to what in the towns was both a religious and a social problem came from De La Salle and his Brothers.

The *parti dévot* and reform

Early in the century a new climate of piety (not without some intolerance and triumphalism) developed among a compact, upper-class group. It was united by common ideals revolving round the triumph of Catholicism whether in France or Europe generally. Richelieu's policies weakened its scope in the political field so that it turned more in the direction of inner renewal. In place of an official drive by the French Church to implement Trent, since the clergy were not yet reformed, this group worked to provide the kind of bishop and parish priest who would take up the reform. The *parti dévot* is important to our story, because without the results it achieved prior to De La Salle, there would not have been the reformed priests, bishops and laity to invite him to open schools because they now saw their importance.

This Catholic movement had as its leading figure a mystic from the highest level of society, Madame Acarie. She was a cousin of de Bérulle. On the death of her husband in 1613 she became a Carmelite, Marie de l'Incarnation. She was beatified in 1794. The movement included St Francis de Sales, Cardinal de Bérulle, professors from the Sorbonne, Jesuits and Capuchins such as the English mystic, Benet of Canfield. They were very effective in bringing fervent religious communities to Paris as a sort of example and ferment. There were, for example, reformed Carmelites from Spain (1603), and Ursulines from the Comptat-Venaissin to look after young girls. They gave strong support to St Francis de Sales and St Frances de Chantal in setting up their order of the Visitation. The Jesuits had come to France in 1603; all the older orders went through a reform. It is striking how many figures influential in the reform met one another through this movement.

The foremost aim of the *parti dévot* was the reform of the clergy. It helped in a concerted effort to reform the monastic orders, so much so, that by the middle of the century, at the time of De La Salle's birth, many cloisters had become centres of spiritual life and had a profound effect on the laity. This, as has been observed, had been the case in Rheims, and De La Salle on his return from Paris may have gained much from it. For the secular clergy Adrian Bourdoise was a pioneer in seminary training, by being the first to

form a group of aspiring priests into a community. From 1622-1680 similar seminary societies were started up in a score of towns, though many were short-lived. But Bourdoise's effort inspired the later structured societies of the Oratory and the Society of the Priests of Saint Sulpice.

For the other way to reform the clergy was to have a specially trained secular clergy as an example and complement to the existing one. In 1611 de Bérulle, the leading figure in the reform and about whom more needs to be said later, founded the Oratory of Jesus, a society of secular clergy planned to be a single structure under a superior general; this allowed members to be moved round as required. They undertook college teaching. By 1673 the Oratory had 71 colleges and ran into open conflict with the Jesuits who were working in the same field. Besides promoting priestly spirituality, the Oratory took over seminaries, but with limited success because Charles Condren (1588-1641), de Bérulle's successor, was not a decisive person enough to develop the Oratory in this direction.

One of his students, **Jean-Jacques Olier** (1608-1657), became parish priest of Saint Sulpice in Paris in 1642. He established a seminary from which developed the highly successful *Compagnie de Saint-Sulpice*, an association of secular priests still in existence, dedicated to teaching in diocesan seminaries and even directing them. By his death there were four other such associations in France, and then numerous others were founded or incorporated into the group in France and in Canada. These Sulpician seminaries were considered exemplary; their members, who came from the bourgeoisie, were educated according to de Bérulle's exalted view of the priesthood; they produced priests who were pious, well-educated, charitable, leading a dignified and retired life. This meant a very strong build-up in France of pastoral care. De La Salle began by following this pattern. The weakness of the training was that the good priest stood apart from the common people and from popular piety, and in time, having no profane intellectual culture, was unable to do other than stay out of the new intellectual movements.²⁸

The revival of rural parishes by St Vincent de Paul had two points of relevance with De La Salle's later work. Monsieur Vincent founded in 1625 the Congregation of the Priests of the Mission (the Vincentians), that is, a group of priests willing to be trained to go round the villages a few weeks or months at a time, often in tough conditions, to preach, teach, catechise and prepare people for a general confession; but also to encourage, help or convert priests. De La Salle looked at St Vincent's view of his men as a religious community when he considered the status in the Church he thought right for his Brothers. When the Vincentians moved on to another parish, they would leave behind a confraternity of Ladies of Charity to look after the sick poor, and a confraternity of prayer. When M. Vincent saw that the Ladies of Charity, most of them

rich, often failed to serve the poor satisfactorily, he started the Sisters of Charity.

Against ingrained traditions, he had no enclosure for his Sisters, and since taking the usual vows of a religious congregation would mean their being enclosed as in the case of the Visitandines, he decided that they would not be religious; even today they only take annual vows. And again, whereas ‘works of charity’ were seen hitherto as associated only with the clergy and performed by ladies of high society, now ‘ordinary’ people in a special dress cared for the sick poor and for those chained in prison while waiting to be sent to the galleys. These characteristics would encourage De La Salle as he also struck out in new directions. He gave his Brothers a catechising function traditionally done by clerics, and saw their whole work as a real lay ministry. The other point of contact with the Vincentian ministry was that De La Salle several times set up training-centres for village schoolmasters, training them also to be the priest’s right-hand man. They would help more than others to consolidate and continue the work of Vincent’s missionaries, and conversely be much helped where they had passed through.²⁹

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Chapter 3: His experience of seminary training and of French spirituality at St Sulpice, 1669-1672¹

A DISTURBED YEAR AT THE FACULTY OF THEOLOGY OF RHEIMS: 1669-70

John Baptist De La Salle at eighteen, with his College years over, moved into a period which in his own mind was to be a preparation for the priesthood within his own social rank and his own circle of friends. His ambition was, being now a Master of Arts, to become a Doctor in Theology. His biographer Canon Blain writes “This first step which leads to the Doctorate, and which is still far from it, gave him the idea of going to look for it at the source of knowledge which is the University of Paris”. He took the decision “to go and study at the Sorbonne, to take his Licentiate there and to take there the doctor’s hat.”² With that decision would go serious consideration as to how to prepare spiritually for the priesthood. Although seminaries were becoming numerous, it was not yet fully established that attendance at one was the necessary way of preparing for ordination. The formal time of preparation required by a bishop before ordination could still be short. But faithful to the recommendations he had found in the writings of Bourdoise and Beuvelet, and to the advice of his friend Nicholas Roland, John intended to make a serious preparation and to take his time.

Ten years earlier St Vincent de Paul had written of the seminaries available in Paris: “There are in Paris four houses that are doing the same thing: the Oratory, Saint Sulpice, Saint Nicolas-du-Chardonnet and the “beggary” (*la gueuserie*) - meaning his own seminary for training the Vincentians or Lazarists, and which occupied the former hospice of Saint Lazare.”³ For the young De La Salle, to go to the seminary of Saint Sulpice in Paris was the only choice. Apart from its high standards of priestly formation, it catered for candidates from the bourgeoisie. It became the main road to higher posts in the Church: important parishes, teaching posts in seminaries, bishoprics. It was the ‘classy’ seminary of the capital. The seminary-community of St Nicolas-du-Chardonnet, created by Bourdoise, catered for people lower in the social scale and for rural clerics. For a canon from Rheims and a De La Salle, Saint Sulpice was the right place to go to.

Why, then, did he not go there and to the College of Sorbonne in 1669? The fact that Canon Dozet had been Chancellor of the University of Rheims for so long may have swayed family preferences. A matter the family certainly would have weighed was the fact that while away from Rheims, John would not receive his prebend. He would be away for at least three years for his seminary training; if he continued his theological studies at the Sorbonne, as

he would wish, rather than return for this to Rheims, they would have to allow for five years at least, or as much as eight or nine. Instead of his 1000 livres a year, John would receive only an annual grant of 120 livres towards his expenses. The fees at Saint Sulpice were high: 400 livres a year, with clothing, books and any additional furniture and pocket money in addition.⁴ The family would be willing to spend on what was the best course, all things considered, but they would certainly have talked much on it.

But there was something else that year. To replace Canon Dozet as Chancellor, Cardinal Barberini had appointed a certain Eleanor Tristan, who was only a B.D. The licentiates and doctors of the university challenged the nomination. One of them, Duchemin, lodged an appeal, declaring the appointment null and void. Tristan took the matter to court. The *présidial* rejected Duchemin's appeal. Louis De La Salle, being a member of the bench, and having supported the new Chancellor, could hardly be seen sending his son away to Paris and the Sorbonne. John was old enough to reason with his father and express his preference: young people, then as now, who had found their feet, could distance themselves from their parents. At the same time, he would have respectfully considered his father's views and dilemma. Showing loyalty to family feeling and to the University must have weighed with him. He therefore started the academic year at his own university on October 1st, 1669. He must have been very disappointed.

He would need five years to gain the degree of Bachelor in Divinity. If he wanted to go on for the Licentiate he would need another three years and, for the doctorate, the "exercises" of a further year. The first year's theology comprised the treatise *De Deo Uno*, dealing with the existence of God, angels and predestination, followed by treatises on Man and free will. It was an unventuresome scholastic theology, the arguments being based on traditional authorities, and the method a logical sequence of premisses and conclusions.⁵ There was a morning lecture in St Patrick's Hall, an annexe of the College des Bons-Enfants, and another in the early afternoon in St Denis's Hall in St Denis's Abbey, where the Canons Regular of St Augustine had been given a lectureship by Le Tellier. Since 1656 this lecture had been given by an Irish priest, Daniel Egan, of County Longford. Later in the evening, back at St Patrick's Hall, there was an explanation of the Old and New Testaments based on the Fathers of the Church.

This Daniel Egan was an appreciated lecturer. There was an Egan, doctor in Sorbonne, who in 1656 took a stand against the Jansenist Arnaud's argument about the "*de facto et de jure*" of a decision by the Pope. He is mentioned as having in 1663 a parish at Nangy, about 70 kms southeast of Paris. He was attached to the diocese of Rome, not to a French diocese. The one in Rheims came to the city in 1648.⁶ He became a doctor in theology of the

University and in 1656 he was appointed to the chair of theology at Saint Denis's. He gave an hour's lecture between one and two in the afternoon for which he was paid 120 livres a year. When Tristan was named Chancellor, Egan joined his colleagues in opposing him (although he later named him one of his executors). He became canon of the collegiate church of St Timothy in 1678, but switched this with a cathedral chaplaincy the same year. In June this year also, he was naturalised a Frenchman, according to letters granted by Louis XIV. This document authorised him to accept benefices canonically bestowed, "without derogation to the privileges and liberties of the Gallican Church."

He was later parish priest of St Sixtus's parish and became Grand Master of the College des Bons-Enfants; he became canon of the cathedral in 1695. He maintained a concern to provide for the training of Irish students in exile, in order to equip them to go back to Ireland to support the faith of their countrymen under the dreadful regime set up by Cromwell. On 17 October 1691, the year after the Battle of the Boyne, where James II was defeated, he placed a sum in the hands of four trustees, one of whom was an uncle of De La Salle, as a capital from which the interest would provide a scholarship for students from Longford named Egan or Freal. The contract states that a candidate "must get himself ordained a priest in order to return to Ireland as soon as he is promoted to the order of priest and exercise there the functions of a missionary." The Irish Capuchins at Wassy and Bar-sur-Aube - both seventy-odd miles southeast of Rheims - would vouch for them. Perhaps these were the receiving communities in the first place. Egan himself lived very modestly. He was given for his lodgings two rooms in Les Bons-Enfants, and when he died in 1699, all that was worth affixing official seals to in one of the rooms was a wardrobe, and in his study, two cupboards containing his theology library which he bequeathed to the University.⁷

The academic year there of 1669-70 was peaceful for only one term. In January the cathedral cantor maintained that he, and not the new Chancellor, should preside the presentation ceremonies of the previous licentiate year. He told Tristan that all his acts were null and void. The Faculty put off giving the Licentiate till Easter, but Tristan went ahead, whereupon the Faculty appealed to the magistrates. They were able to calm the cathedral cantor, but the Faculty remained adamant. This was the situation when the academic year ended on 25 July. John received attestations from his two professors that he had attended regularly. Three days earlier on 12 July, there had been a new addition to the family: Jean-Remy.⁸ The family numbered seven children again. But John was saddened by the death of his grandfather, John Moët, on 28th of this month, and would have been at his funeral on 31st.⁹ The affair at the University dragged on. The *présidial* referred the matter to the

Parlement. This was now September, during the summer vacation: the new academic year was likely to have a stormy start. It was quite unsatisfactory. De La Salle discussed the matter with his father, and it was the latter who now suggested that he should go to Saint Sulpice after all.

He would be studying in the **University of Paris**, at its famous College of **Sorbonne**, the seat of the Faculty of Theology. The University of Paris came into existence about the turn of the 12th century. From the time the Dominicans and Franciscans started teaching there in the 1220s, it became the most celebrated teaching centre of all Christendom, especially in theology. Among its sixty-five colleges, the most famous was the Sorbonne (the name given now to the whole University), founded in 1257 by Robert de Sorbon (born at Sorbon, near Rethel), a master of theology and a legate. It served as a hostel and true house of studies for poor lay students such as he himself had been. It became synonymous with the faculty of theology, and its professors were seen as the arbiters of orthodoxy. The present buildings were begun by Richelieu in 1627. The magnificent church was begun in 1634, and a large number of houses were pulled down to make way for the present piazza. The inside was bare even of altars when De La Salle arrived. The high altar was finished in 1687, the year before he returned to Paris on a different purpose. The majestic dome, influenced by St Peter's in Rome, is typical of the classical domes of seventeenth century French architecture.¹⁰

On to Paris

There was no time to lose. The courses at the Sorbonne began on 18 October 1670. John would have to say goodbye to so many people, to get leave of absence from the Chapter and make his formal leave-taking of it. There was his outfit to get ready, and he would have to book a place on the stage-coach. There were relays of horses and stage-coach services both for passengers and parcels. The different systems were rivals, and the fares kept changing in consequence. To do the 90 miles from Rheims through Soissons to Paris by coach would take the best part of two days, doing about 60 miles the first day, changing horses 18 times and putting up at an inn for one night. It was costly: for a schoolmaster, to give a comparison, it would take a quarter of his salary for the year. The alternative of hiring a horse would cost a week's salary. Most people had to go on foot. At twenty miles a day, allowing stops for meals and a rest and putting up at hostelries for the night, and also allowing for what were mainly bad roads in all weathers, it would take four or five days. Colbert, in the interests of trade, had only just set up, in 1669, a Public Works Department to supervise road-mending and widening. As the only instruments were picks and spades, hods and wheelbarrows, progress was slow. People, therefore, travelled only for good reasons, and not in winter,

when the roads were snowbound or impassable through mud and rain, and even dangerous. Where the road was steep, passengers on a stage-coach had to get down and walk.

La Fontaine puts it vividly:

*“Six forts chevaux tiraient un coche,
Femmes, moine, vieillards, tout était descendu.
L’atelage suait, soufflait, était rendu.*

(Six strong horses heaving at a coach. Women, a monk, old men - everything had got down. The team sweated, puffed and blowed, exhausted.)

Ten years on from this, De La Salle for over thirty years travelled, on foot or on horseback, the roads of France from Calais to Marseilles. **Madame de Sévigné** wrote in 1687: “About the roads: their beauty is something extraordinary. The ‘intendants’ have worked wonders...Instead of going via Moulins we can go straight to Bourbon: only thirty miles - you see the improvement.” But from Bourbon she wrote: “What a thirty miles! Endless rains, bewitched roads; always having to walk for fear of falling into frightful ruts.” So, even if provided with comforts for the journey, John De La Salle in 1670 would have to be prepared for a bumpy enough ride, and be glad to get out of the coach once he reached Paris.

As being a minor, he would already have forwarded his father’s consent to his attending the seminary, and the testimonials of the cathedral chapter. But as many still looked upon ordination as the way to a benefice, and came without any sense of vocation, no decision was made by the seminary authorities until the candidate had been interviewed by the Superior. After this, the newcomer would find his rank among the other seminarians. The regulations took notice of precedence, but in the order: sacred orders received, rank of benefice and years in the seminary. Among sixty or so inmates, Canon De La Salle would be about thirtieth in standing .

The seminary building (demolished in 1808) occupied what is now the esplanade in front of the present Church, which was in process of construction. Queen Anne of Austria had laid the foundation stone in 1646. The chancel and aisles were rising around the old church when De La Salle arrived. Among the students he lived with in the seminary and others he met at the Sorbonne, there were a number who come into his story later. Paul Godet des Marets, who became bishop of Chartres, became a lifelong friend of De La Salle. Anthony Grenier was from Grenoble. He remained afterwards in Paris and was able to keep the clerk to the *Parlement* in Grenoble in touch with what went on at St Sulpice. This clerk, Claude Canel, was an earlier Sulpician than

De La Salle, and when later he wanted to set up a school like the ones he heard about that were run by the Brothers in Paris, he was instrumental in bringing them to Grenoble in 1706. Another fellow-student was Merez, who became grand-vicar of Alès. He was another one who in similar fashion wrote to De La Salle reminding him that they had been at Saint Sulpice together. De La Salle sent Brothers to Alès in 1707. Among the students at the Sorbonne who were not at the seminary but in Colleges of the University, there were Louis-Antoine de Noailles, who became Cardinal Archbishop of Paris in 1696 and had some unfortunate relations with De La Salle, and Jacques-Nicolas Colbert, brother of the 'great' Colbert. He was Archbishop of Rouen when De La Salle and his Brothers went there in 1704.

DE LA SALLE RECEIVES A SPIRITUAL FORMATION ARISING FROM REFORMS IN THE FRENCH CHURCH

Jean-Jacques Olier, Founder of Saint Sulpice.

The seminary of Saint Sulpice is inseparable from the name of its founder, Jean-Jacques Olier. He was born in Paris in 1608 but grew up in Lyons, where he began his studies under the Jesuits and then went to the Sorbonne. He took St Vincent de Paul as his spiritual guide and was ordained in 1633. He then came under the guidance of Charles de Condren, successor to de Bérulle at the head of the Oratory. De Bérulle is a great figure we shall see later. Condren's great concern was to found seminaries on the model laid down by the Council of Trent, but he lacked decisiveness. On December 29th 1641, Olier and two others began a community life in a small house, later known as "the Solitude" in the village of Vaugirard, two miles southwest of Paris. They reformed the parish and were asked to attempt the same for Saint Sulpice. This parish, the size of a small town, was reputed to be the largest and most vice-ridden in Christendom. The previous incumbent had wanted to resign. Olier took charge in August that year.

He divided the parish into eight districts, each under a priest with other clerics, and thirteen centres for teaching the catechism, not only for children but also for adults. The poor were cared for by relief methods based on those of Monsieur Vincent. Olier supported hundreds of families during the *Fronde*; he opened shelters for fallen girls; he founded many free schools for girls but had less success with boys, and he perceived that for them a new congregation was needed. He it was who began building the present church of Saint Sulpice.

The Seminary and the Priests of Saint Sulpice

Olier wanted to work for religious revival in France by providing a worthy secular priesthood. He started training priests in his presbytery, and then,

already in 1642, moved to a house nearby. He came to see that it was God's will that he should accept the running of some seminaries permanently. And so the Company of Saint Sulpice developed, a community of secular priests without vows. After a stroke, he handed over the parish to Monsieur Bretonvilliers, and was paralysed and in bodily and mental pain from 1653 to 1657. It can be noted here for future reference that Olier had sent that year four priests to Montreal to the Mission of Villemarie founded by the Society of Notre Dame of Montreal. They handed it over in 1663 to the Sulpicians, who paid off their debts. Bretonvilliers, who followed Olier, put about 400,000 livres of his personal fortune into the mission. By the end of the seventeenth century the Sulpicians had six parishes around Montreal, provided with their churches and schools. They made contact with De La Salle later.

Olier's successor, Alexandre Le Ragois de Bretonvilliers (1657-76), the Superior when De La Salle arrived, drew up the Constitutions of the Society. Its aim was to work, in direct dependence on the bishops, for the education and perfection of the clergy. In their seminaries they taught philosophy, theology, plain-chant and the liturgy, but especially the practice of mental prayer and of the Christian virtues. Bretonvilliers transferred the novitiate to his family possession at Ayron; Tronson, his successor, finally moved it to Issy, a few miles beyond Vaugirard, where the seminary itself is today.¹¹

Getting used to a new routine

John De La Salle would learn what a remarkable man Olier was and come to venerate him. His immediate concern was to adapt to seminary life and its regulations and to profit by this important stage on his life, perhaps not without some trepidation. There was a daily time-table to get used to, and so far he had been his own master, and never having had to earn his living, had never had to time himself. Rising at the seminary was at half-past four in summer and five o'clock in winter. John was a heavy sleeper and seems to have got up at home when it pleased him. He had been known to arrive at times late for the Office in the cathedral. He was also of an independent mind and must have found regulations irksome. There was an hour's mental prayer after rising, followed by mass. Then off to the Sorbonne, a few minutes' walk away through St Michael's gate into the University area, for lectures at eight o'clock and nine o'clock. Back in the seminary there was plain-chant practice till eleven o'clock if it was your group's turn. Then a time of private examination on some individual failing, and then the midday meal.

The seminarians in turn, three at a time, served the meal for three days, and helped in the scullery and kitchen on the fourth day. Recreation followed and a second singing practice. At two o'clock Vespers were recited, and at three o'clock there was a talk on cases of conscience, intended to complement the

academic teaching received at the Sorbonne. Then a licentiate or doctor led a feed-back on what had been taught in the Faculty that morning. Once a week, it was replaced by a 'thesis' or talk each had to give in turn and which was afterwards thrown open to comments and criticism. At 5.30 those canonically obliged to say the Office recited matins and lauds. The evening meal followed, then recreation and night prayer. John must have found it tough. He is reported as having kept the regulations faithfully from the start. One would hardly expect anything else, but mere conformity would not be a personal way of life for him. He did, however, begin to learn the value of an organised life as a condition of effective and creative work, but with his ingrained easy-going socialising attitudes, he was still working at it ten years later.

He receives a spiritual formation

For the development of their own spiritual life, the seminarians were invited to 'have the mind of Jesus Christ' and to have a devotion to 'the interior of Jesus', i.e. to taking on his inner dispositions. Bretonvilliers had a great devotion to 'Jesus living in Mary', and the Sulpician motto was: *Vivat Jesus in Maria!* (Live Jesus in Mary). There was an overstress of Mary's place in the Christian life that De La Salle stood back from. He had a great devotion to Our Lady but it was a devotion scripturally and dogmatically, not emotionally based, as his meditations on her show. In his testament he recommended to the Brothers "a great devotion to Our Lord, and a particular devotion to the Most Blessed Virgin Mary." While Bretonvilliers never left his room without kissing the feet of a statue of Our Lady on his desk, De La Salle and his Brothers knelt down to adore God present whenever they came into a room in the community or in school. And the invocation with which, from the earliest times until today, the Brothers end their prayers and activities is not: "Live Jesus in Mary!" but "Live Jesus in our hearts!" said by whoever is presiding the exercise, and to which the others answer: "Forever!"

Each seminarian was appointed one of the three lecturers or 'directors' as they were called, as his spiritual director. Olier had stressed the importance of spiritual direction, a feature of the French renewal.¹²

The teaching of Louis Tronson, the senior director

Louis Tronson,¹³ the senior director, succeeded Bretonvilliers as its third Superior in 1676. He was a former student of the Jesuits and a godson of Louis XIII whom his father had served as Secretary to the Privy Council. He was a licentiate in Canon Law, a rarity in those days. He was appointed chaplain to the young Louis XIV, but resigned in order to join the Society of St Sulpice in 1656. He had a reputation for knowledge, wisdom and moderation, and holiness. He was very simple and down-to-earth: he fed birds on his

window-sill and let them fly about his room; he fed flies to lizards outside his door. When a priest showed him his will, expressed in a quantity of devout phrases, he remarked that something more to the point would be needed for a lawyer to make sense of it.

In his lectures he laid great stress, following Bourdoise and de Bérulle, on the dignity and duties of the priestly state. He stressed the need to stay in the seminary for the whole of the three years' formation it gave. But in fact, the majority of seminarians stayed for only a limited time: of the 28 who entered with la Salle, 21 stayed less than eighteen months, and 2 less than two years. Tronson aimed in his teaching to convince the seminarians that the excellent dignity of the priesthood made a man superior to all others. He made all the Christian virtues priestly ones: the ideal being the imitation of Christ; better, union with him, for he was an *alter Christus*, another Christ. This was true, and the ideal needed to be stressed. Only later would the wider truth be regained that all Christians are the body of Christ, all are other Christs and all are called to holiness.

Every Saturday Tronson gave a talk on the spiritual life. His topics covered the use of time, mental prayer, spiritual reading and fidelity in small things. All in all, it was Tronson who by his example and his teaching, set De La Salle on the road to taking seriously the Christian life. The young canon began to take himself in hand. Saint Sulpice set him on the road to meditating on the Gospel daily and striving to follow it, and of developing openness to the will of God that he had in some measure already. But we have no records to tell us of his progress.

Besides Tronson, who presided over all the exercises of the house, there were in De La Salle's day two other directors: La Barmondière, who was 35 at the time and taught theology in the house, and John Heudon, who was 64. Perhaps the brilliant Leschassier, then only 29, resided in the seminary and helped the elderly Heudon. We do not know for sure which of these was De La Salle's spiritual director, but it seems to have been Tronson. La Barmondière was well versed in dogmatic and moral theology. He was an ardent defender of papal authority and an outspoken critic of Gallicanism and Jansenism. He was looked upon by the seminarists as one of the most perfect directors. He went to the seminary of Limoges in 1673-78 and then returned to Saint Sulpice as parish priest. He and De La Salle were to meet there again.

THE UNDERLYING SPIRITUALITY OF SEVENTEENTH CENTURY FRANCE

The seventeenth century is the golden age of spirituality in France.¹⁴ Besides its efforts to set up the structures for renewal demanded by the Council of Trent, the *parti dévot* was at the origin of a great spiritual movement. Since France had been slow to accept Tridentine reforms, models and cur-

rents had at first to be taken from outside. St Francis de Sales modelled his work in his diocese on St Charles Borromeo. He himself, who was not a Frenchman, had a great following in his optimism that Christian life is possible anywhere. The Jesuits had enormous influence in France through the Spiritual Exercises of the Basque St Ignatius and through their colleges.

A mystical invasion greatly influenced the movement. Madame Acarie's salon in Paris was the place where the 'devout party' from the lower aristocracy took inspiration by reading the Flemish and Rhineland mystics. Some of these moved into a mysticism which removed the human face of God by by-passing Jesus and seeking the union of the human essence with the essence of God. It is known as the abstract school and had a great influence at the beginning of the century. They were also influenced by a whole school of spirituality that insisted on the stripping off of human nature and all that is not God.

At the same time, other movements for renewal were coming from the revival of the older medieval traditions, from the Cistercians and Carthusians and also from the Capuchins. Another development to notice is the readiness to seek spiritual direction. In one sense the renewal was a matter affecting the individual, and spiritual directors became very important. There were at the time people gifted for this. Francis de Sales was seen as *the* spiritual director, but there were also Vincent de Paul, Condren, Barré, and the Jesuit Louis Lallemant.

Cardinal Pierre de Bérulle (1575-1629)

Whatever De La Salle drew from these trends in Paris and later, the training he received at St Sulpice was marked by an original development that came from Cardinal Pierre de Bérulle (1575-1629) that has been called the French school of spirituality. Pierre de Bérulle was a remarkable man. In the diplomatic field, he had relations with Mary de Medici and Richelieu; in 1620 he arranged the wedding of Louis XIV's sister Henrietta with Charles I of England; in the sphere of religion, he engaged in controversy with the Reformers, introduced the Carmelites to France and oversaw their 43 communities. He travelled much abroad, wrote many letters, and had several works published. He studied in Paris under the Jesuits and at the Sorbonne, joined Madame Acarie's circle, and for a time adopted its abstract view of the interior life. From the Rhine and Flemish mystics he gained a sense of the absolute of God, his greatness and our duty to adore him. This became one of the marks of the French school.

He was ordained in 1599 and from 1605 took seriously the decrees of the Council of Trent concerning the renewal and training of priests. His priesthood became the heart and life of his mission: for him, to be a priest was to be wonderfully taken up into the person of Christ. In 1607 he had a mystical

experience as a result of which he passed from the abstract view of intimacy with God to seeing in the Incarnate Word the perfect adorer, the model of approach to God. To work effectively for the reform of the clergy, he founded on November 11th 1611 the Oratory of Jesus, modelled on that of St Philip Neri, as an association of secular priests living in community. They were approved by the Pope in 1613 and were asked to educate in colleges in 1615. Their seminaries, in which priests prepared for ordination by retreat and spiritual formation were copied by Vincent de Paul from 1631.

De Bérulle wrote in 1623 his enormous *Discourse on the State and Grandeurs of Jesus*, a masterpiece of French spiritual writing at the time. Each event in the life of the Son of God is a mystery or 'state', that is, an interior attitude of Jesus towards his Father. These states, he writes, persist in Jesus, and the Christian, meditating on them, adores him and loves him in this state and asks "the Son of God to communicate to us some effect of the mystery and to give us some part in it." This calls for a total denial of the self. De La Salle adopted this consideration of the 'states' or mysteries of Jesus in teaching his Brothers a way of mental prayer.

Under de Bérulle's influence, imitating Jesus by spiritual infancy became a major theme of the French school. To centre on Jesus, to adore him, to ask his Spirit in us to share with us his dispositions and to act by this same Spirit was a spirituality taken up by Olier and St John Eudes and St John Baptist De La Salle.

De Bérulle is conscious of the transcendent holiness of God; he stressed our distance from God, bridged, however, by the Incarnation. He took St Paul's teaching on life in Christ very seriously, with little sense of the human. But he did see that our life in Christ comes from our being baptised into him and living in his body, the Church. Life in the Church is the Incarnation extended. De Bérulle sees Christ working only through his ordained ministers. He did see that the priesthood is not just a function but a vocation, and that was a new idea at the time. De Bérulle was made Cardinal in 1627 and died in 1629.

Charles de Condren (1588-1641) succeeded de Bérulle at the head of the Oratory. At the heart of his life and mission was "an inestimable esteem for the priesthood and the conviction that God was calling him to it, however unworthy." He put a more negative tone on Bérulle's spirituality: where the latter speaks of adoration and praise, Condren speaks of adoration and total sacrifice. He speaks of death and self-destruction.

Olier became the populariser of Berullianism. A spiritual experience led him to see that the Holy Spirit has the first place in the Christian life: he is the life of the mystical body of Christ. The Christian is "the one who has in him the Spirit of Jesus Christ"; "we must abandon ourselves totally to the Holy

Spirit and let him act in us.” Later on, De La Salle was to define the genuine Christian as the one who lives by the movement of the Holy Spirit and by the teachings of the Gospel.¹⁵

An assessment of this school of spirituality

This Berullian school of spirituality certainly helped men on their way to holiness, even if some, now canonised saints, came to see God not only in terms of his grandeur, but in his presence in daily life. Like any true school, it does not pretend to originality in its central message, which is to follow Christ in the Church. But it has its own particular accent, some of which is still valid, such as its Christocentrism; its teaching that it is the Spirit in the Church that makes Christ-like; that the liturgy is the prayer of Christ with his Church; and in its restoring of a sense of vocation to the priesthood. It had a fine Christocentric approach to prayer, exemplified in the Sulpician method of mental prayer: adoration of Jesus, communion with him in one of his mysteries, co-operation leading to a practical resolution. But it also has a certain grim pessimism about human nature. There is so much insistence on abnegation, ‘annihilation’, dependence, that it is difficult at times to see what place is left for a free personal response to grace and a flowering of our innate being with its gifts.

The starting-point of De La Salle’s concentrated efforts to live with Jesus certainly came from de Bérulle and others through Saint Sulpice. But over the years he read much and made other contacts. Certainly Canon Nicholas Roland in Rheims and also, as we have seen, the Benedictines of St Remi. There was also Jesuit influence, if not at the moment then certainly later. The Jesuits had a considerable place in the development of spirituality in France. Louis Lallemant (1588-1635) left his mark on the mysticism of a whole generation of Jesuits. His teachings were published in 1694 under the title of *Doctrine Spirituelle*. He stressed, like de Bérulle, the union of the Christian with Christ.

De La Salle would certainly have read this work when it came out, but he was already familiar with its ideas through a Jesuit contemporary of Lallemant, Jean-Baptiste de Saint-Jure (1589-1657) whose best work : *De la Connaissance et de l’Amour du Fils de Dieu, Notre-Seigneur Jesus-Christ* (On the knowledge and love of the Son of God, our Lord Jesus Christ) showed a profound knowledge of mysticism. De La Salle shows in his Meditations an awareness of the possibility of intense union with God and an insistence on the need for no half measures in removing the obstacles such as we meet in the writings of St Teresa and St John of the Cross.

But like St Vincent de Paul before him, he learnt to see God not only in the liturgy but in the ordinary. Hence his understanding of life lived in the spirit of faith in the events of life, and his finding Jesus in the children of the poor.

AT THE SORBONNE

Meeting new ideas

Going daily to the Faculty of Theology in the Sorbonne meant rubbing shoulders with students of varied convictions and ideas. Of 43 who obtained their doctorate in theology in 1670-72, 27 were orthodox, though few had the courage to stand by their convictions, and 16 were Jansenists, some very active.¹⁶ Even at Saint Sulpice, among many men who gave the impression of taking the training seriously, there were those of strict morality, some who were Jansenist in tendency and others, Jansenist or orthodox, who had mystical depth. Jansenism had been till recently in Paris the focus of religious and political controversy. The conflict would flare up again. As an unhealthy influence on Catholic piety it would concern De La Salle, and he would suffer for his stand against it till the end of his life. Jansenism will be looked at later in this chapter.

Cartesianism was in vogue at the time, but seems to have had no influence on De La Salle due to its condemnation by the Sorbonne. René Descartes (1596-1650) had been a student of the Jesuits. He had had a profound Christian education and considered himself all his life as a devout Catholic. De Bérulle encouraged him at the beginning of his career, when in 1619 he had a strong impulse to devote his life to the restoration of human knowledge, stagnant through too much reliance on past authorities. He sought for a single principle that would explain all reality. As method, he used systematic doubt. He searched for truth in evidence, in experiments examined with mathematical logic, and so he gave modern science its methods. He was able to reconcile his faith with a very logical extreme philosophical position, but his systematic doubt furnished weapons for the sceptical and even atheistic currents that attracted a large part of high society. His works were put on the Index in 1663. In 1669 candidates for the doctorate at the Sorbonne had to defend anti-Cartesian theses. In 1671 the archbishop of Paris forbade the teaching of Descartes' views, and in September that year the Sorbonne condemned his philosophy but was derided for couching its condemnation in terms of archaic scholasticism.

Discussion of his ideas was alive while Canon De La Salle was in Paris. As a lively-minded young man of twenty he would have joined in the arguments of his fellow-students. But given the official prohibitions and condemnations, Descartes's ideas would not retain him.

Ideas of a different order came to him from some of his fellow-seminarians. John de Lespinay, for instance, came from Rouen and had joined the

seminary three days after De La Salle. From him John learnt that Lespinay's family had provided funds that made it possible for his sister and 28 other mistresses working in poor schools for girls to form a new community for the education of the poor. They were on that occasion being founded as the Sisters of the Child Jesus by a certain Minim, Fr Barré. The information triggered off nothing for the moment, yet De La Salle was to link up with those very Sisters in Rheims and then in Rouen through a chain of circumstances he never foresaw.

A fellow-student who had a real and beneficial influence on De La Salle was Jacques Baüyn (pronounced Bouin). He had come to Paris seven years before, but he was of such a moderate intelligence that he was still working at his baccalaureate, being about five years behind his fellow-students.¹⁷ Nevertheless, he showed many gifts of the Spirit. He had converted from Protestantism, and his greatest desire was to convert Huguenots. He had a genuine and simple love of God, and would break out in exclamations like "How good God is!" "How happy we would be if we wore out our lungs speaking of God!" He would salute the Blessed Sacrament in the chapel each time he passed by the nearest window. He was a charming personality, a great storyteller - an art he used to interest the seminarians in foreign missions. Jacques' faith and devotion were much admired by the young canon. They met again when De La Salle returned to Paris in 1688, and John made of him his friend and adviser. Jacques Baüyn died in 1696.

Courses and lectures at the Sorbonne. The state of theology in the period

Courses at the Sorbonne covered the three disciplines: dogma, ethics and sacred Scripture. They were taught over two years by two professors each. De La Salle opted to begin with the major subject, dogmatic theology, taught by two great lecturers, Jacques Despériers and Guillaume de Lestocq, known for their robust faith and orthodoxy. There were two lectures a day on the subject. Supplementary courses partly covering the matter, partly on spirituality, were given at the seminary. In the first year, De La Salle followed courses on the Trinity and the Incarnation, and in his eighteen months there he studied grace, the sacraments in general and baptism in particular. The course on grace, original sin, the need of grace, grace and free will, was a firm exposition of Catholic teaching in an era of Jansenism.

The subject-matter of the courses was controlled by the University, and students' notes had to be submitted to the examiners. There were no new ideas and no stimulating guidance for further reading. John Evelyn, visiting Paris in 1643, noted: "Thence to the Sorbonne...the restoration which the late Cardinal Richelieu has made to it renders it one of the most excellent modern

buildings...We went into some of the Scholes, and in that of Divinity we found a grave Doctor in his chaire, with a multitude of auditors, who all write as he dictates; and this they call a Course.”¹⁸ The course on the Incarnation, it seems, was very unoriginal, stifled by endless syllogisms. But by means of what were known as “additional questions”, on which the students took no notes, it was possible for a professor to get across his personal views.

While there was, through de Bérulle and others, a great renewal of Catholic life and spirituality, there was no change in theological method. The Sorbonne was a bastion of traditional speculative theology. Lectures on Thomism were merely commentaries of the *Summa Theologica*. The course was “of a wearying formalism”.¹⁹ The Fathers were used, not as a return to early Christian thought, but as proofs or illustrations. The teaching at the theology faculties “more and more lost contact with reality, towards an abstract speculation and out of step with the spiritual needs of the time.” “Teaching duties at the Sorbonne, instead of being a true source of intellectual education, appeared even to the best of minds as no more than a condition for obtaining university degrees.”²⁰

De La Salle represents his age on the whole in being a great spiritual guide while being traditional in theology and exegesis. In times of Jansenism, Gallicanism and Quietism, he advised his Brothers against novelty. But he kept in touch with new thought, being always careful to build up his library. It is not possible to write precisely on De La Salle’s own inner integration of the Berullian and other spiritual trends of his day. He has left us no personal notes, and the study of the sources of his spiritual writings has hardly begun.²¹ The seventeenth-century spirituality outlined above, it may be noted, was that of a social elite striving to be other-worldly, without being pressed by the needs of others. De La Salle as a priest inspired by it might have lived a quiet, exemplary, retired life.

As it was, his time in Paris was providentially cut short. He was first thrown into administrative realities and was then gradually led to face up to the needs of the poor. For him and his Brothers, it was their experience of God in their ministry of educating the poor that reshaped their understanding of the following of Christ. This new outlook and spirituality appears in the whole of De La Salle’s life, work and writings. Some considerable works on his journey of faith, investigating those sources, have appeared in recent years.²²

DE LA SALLE MEETS GALLICANISM AND JANSENISM

While in Paris, canon De La Salle gained a clearer notion of two pervasive attitudes in the French Church: Gallicanism and Jansenism. The former was a much older attitude and more easily defined. He had met it already in Rheims,

we have seen, in Mercier's pamphlet against the Jesuits. Jansenism was a recent attempt to reform the Church that needed much discernment and left people confused. De La Salle made it clear later on that his name was in no way to be associated with the one or the other. As he later had both to instruct his Brothers carefully about these two positions and himself suffered from Jansenists, it is useful to see at this point what they involved.

“The ancient liberties of the Gallican Church”

Gallicanism²³ was a tendency to restrict the authority of the Holy See in France for political reasons, but it developed also into a theological position diminishing the Pope's position in the Church. Theology and constitutional law, in fact, remained confused throughout this controversy. There was a royal Gallicanism that had its roots in Charlemagne's work of reforming and reorganising the Frankish Church in the 8th and 9th centuries, but it took an adverse stance towards the exercise of papal authority in France as a result of Philip the Fair's struggle in the fourteenth century to be politically independent of the Pope. Royal jurists began codifying “Gallican liberties” with the aim of limiting the interference of the Holy See to a minimum in order to exalt the king's position. The large body of customs and privileges that the courtly clergy called “Gallican liberties” had little to do with the good of the Church of France. The *Parlement* or royal High Court of jurists and ecclesiastics that had early taken shape in Paris claimed to decide whether papal decrees should be promulgated or not within its area of jurisdiction.

Then there was the Gallicanism of the clergy itself or rather of the powerful prelates. The statements at the Councils of Constance and Basle in the fifteenth century that a General Council drew its power directly from Christ, so that even the Pope was subject to its decisions (statements never ratified by the Pope) were taken up by the French bishops. In 1438, the year after Basle, at their Assembly in Bourges, they reaffirmed in 23 articles this conciliar theory, and that the Pope's jurisdiction in France was conditioned by the royal will. Charles VIII signed it as being law: this was the Pragmatic Sanction of Bourges; it was not revoked till 1516, when the Pope conceded to the King of France the right to nominate bishops. The decisions of the Council of Trent affirming the primacy of the Pope and the superiority of spiritual over temporal power revived Gallican opposition.

Louis XIV was surrounded by advisers, including his two Jesuit confessors, who were steeped in the Gallican tradition. France was preponderant in Europe at the time, and as a consequence Louis could maintain a strong independence towards the Pope. In 1663 he asked the Sorbonne to formulate what are known as the Gallican theses. The Faculty set out as its doctrine: a) that the Sovereign Pontiff has no authority, even indirect, over the temporal

matters of the Most Christian King; b) that the Most Christian King has no superior in the temporal sphere outside of God; c) that his subjects owe him obedience and can never be dispensed from it under whatever pretext; d) that it has never approved any statement against the authority of the Most Christian King nor against the genuine liberties of the Gallican Church. For instance, the Pope cannot depose bishops against the Canons of that Church; e) that the Sovereign Pontiff is not above a General Council; f) that it does not accept as a dogma that the Sovereign Pontiff is infallible, outside of the consent of the Church. Clearly, theology and a theory of French kingship are being thrown together; one sees also why the bishops, being the king's nominees, had an advantage in being Gallican, and that most were.

In 1673 Louis extended to southern bishoprics the right of 'regalia', by which the benefices of a vacant see went to the king pending the nomination of a new incumbent. This was a right he could abuse of by delaying to nominate. Two of the bishops involved stood out against him and appealed to the Pope. Louis was at the time on the verge of a war with England and also, in a renewal of the Jansenist quarrel, appealed more than once to the Pope. Once more Gallicanism, for the time being, was left on one side. This was the situation while John De La Salle was at the seminary. To say too loudly that you supported the Pope could be taken as disloyalty to Louis and lose favour with bishops. Yet De La Salle never hesitated to make clear his fidelity to the See of Peter and in significant ways.

Jansenism: a thorough attempt at reform that became self-righteous and forgot love

There was a different trend in the Church of France that was more disturbing to the faithful at large.²⁴ John De La Salle would have soon heard about the Cistercian nuns living to the south of the University quarter, beyond the suburb of Saint Jacques. Theirs was the vast pile of abbey buildings constructed in 1625 when they moved from their unhealthy site at Port-Royal des Champs, some eighteen miles to the southwest. The new abbey took the same name of Port-Royal. Its Superior was Mother Angélique Arnauld, a woman of great reforming zeal whose holiness had edified St Francis de Sales and whose charity to the poor was an encouragement to St Vincent de Paul. Her father had forced her into the convent to be abbess at the age of eleven. With other nuns, similarly coerced, she had led a very worldly life until a travelling friar converted her when she was seventeen. She then drove the whole community into a rigorous reformed life. She made a general confession to St Francis de Sales and kept up correspondence with him. He counselled moderation and kindliness.

At this time, Jansenism was on the point of emerging. It originated with

Bishop Janssen of Ypres in Flanders, and with Saint-Cyran, an abbot in Poitiers in the west of France. They had become fast friends while studying in Paris, and planned to reform the Church by restoring its ancient doctrine and discipline. It was a serious attempt, but more in the sphere of newly-discovered ideas than in the realm of a lived relationship with God, at reconciling personal responsibility with absolutely gratuitous divine grace. The studies of these two led them to tip the scales against human freedom and against accepting into one's life the unconditional love of God. Janssen's part in this was to leave aside scholastic theology and go back to the Fathers of the Church. But he concentrated, in fact, on Saint Augustine, taking as starting-point the extreme positions he took on grace and free will in his fight with the Pelagians, without taking into account the conditions in which they developed. He died in 1638, but his life-work, *Augustinus*, running to 1300 pages, and which he submitted to the judgment of the Pope, was published in 1640 without reference to the Pope. Janssen personally, therefore, had no part in the controversy that followed.

While Janssen had been working on St Augustine, Saint-Cyran had delved into the primitive practice of the Church, and on that basis claimed that it is inadvisable to confess venial sins or the circumstances of mortal sins, while requiring the utmost perfection for Communion or even for assisting at Mass. Saint-Cyran had met Mother Angélique in 1612. They both had enquiring minds, they were convinced they had been chosen to reform God's Church, and they completely lacked humour. Monsieur Vincent met Saint-Cyran and thought he was "one of the most virtuous men I have ever met." In time, Saint-Cyran looked down on Monsieur Vincent as not being at his level of understanding. In 1633 Mother Angélique founded an Institute of the Blessed Sacrament in Paris, housed near the present Rue de Rivoli. There "the nuns who for some time past had given up going to confession and Holy Communion, were all prostrate on the floor of the chapel, as far as possible from the Blessed Sacrament, in order to adore with due respect." They practised the penitential discipline of the early Church and meditated on a remote, judging God. Saint-Cyran told M. Vincent that he did not believe in Councils such as that of Trent, and did not submit to the Pope's decisions. The Port-Royal group showed such devout and sincere lives at a time when devotion was not much in evidence, and also wrote some excellent works of perfect orthodoxy, that impressed some while others took a long time to discern what was wrong.

The publication of *Augustinus* revived the controversy over grace of the previous century. The Jesuits of Louvain began the attack in 1641; there, as in France, the Jesuits played a significant part in anti-Jansenists polemics, while Janssen's work tended to find favour among Oratorians, Dominicans, Carmelites and many professors at the Sorbonne. In 1641 also, Richelieu

ordered a professor at the Sorbonne to make an attack on Janssen's teachings. A vehement controversy followed, and many treatises were written. Mother Angélique Arnaud took Saint-Cyran as her spiritual director. The latter used Port-Royal as a centre to spread Jansenist ideas. He got men of irreproachable character and distinguished professional men to live in cells in the monastery grounds. Up to forty became such "Solitaries", and from 1646 they ran their Petites-Ecoles or preparatory schools with up-to-date methods. Here altogether about one hundred people were brought up, including the playwright Racine. Richelieu had Saint-Cyran imprisoned in 1638. He was released on Richelieu's death in 1642 but died a few months later. In 1648 a group of his Solitaries returned to the old Port-Royal, drained its grounds and settled there. It was this Port-Royal that remained a hotbed of Jansenism.

In 1643 Antoine Arnauld, Angélique's brother, wrote his *De la Fréquente Communion*. To mend the relaxed discipline of the Church, he called for public penance for mortal sins and a long course of rigorous discipline to prepare sinners for absolution and Communion. His work was approved by 16 bishops and 20 doctors in Sorbonne. It had a wide sale and its effects were considerable. Vincent de Paul noticed the rapid drop in the number of Communion in Paris: 3000 in less than one year in St Sulpice's parish alone. He wrote to a Vincentian Father who was impressed by Arnauld's arguments: "A perusal of Monsieur Arnauld's book, instead of giving men a love for frequent communion, frightens them away...Perhaps what you say about some persons in France and Italy having greatly benefitted from this book is true, but for a hundred here in Paris who may perhaps have derived some good from it in that they show greater reverence to the Blessed Sacrament, there are ten thousand who have been harmed by it, as it has caused them to stay away altogether."²⁵

In 1649 five propositions taken from *Augustinus* were submitted to the Sorbonne and attacked. The *Parlement*, which counted many Jansenists, forbade the Faculty to go further, and a stormy discussion followed throughout the country. In 1651 85 bishops asked Pope Innocent X to pronounce judgment. He listened to both the episcopal and Jansenist delegations at length, and in 1653 condemned the five propositions, four as being heretical, the fifth as erroneous. They may be summarised as follows: 1. Not all the Commandments can be kept, not even by the just, and they do not have the grace for this; 2. In the state of fallen nature, inner grace never meets resistance; 3. Christ did not die for all men. Mazarin got the Bull accepted throughout France. Although he opposed Jansenism all his life, Monsieur Vincent kept friendly with the people of Port-Royal, and even after the Bull, he did what he could to soften the blow and held friendly conversations with the Solitaries. He and Monsieur Olier tried to win them back from their position, fearing another

secession in the Church, but their efforts were vain. Arnould now led a new Jansenist line: he accepted that the propositions condemned by Innocent X were heretical, but claimed they were not found as such in Janssen's works nor in the sense given them by the Bull. The Sorbonne condemned his distinction and, without a fair hearing it is true, expelled him and 60 other doctors from the Faculty.

Most Jansenists accepted his means of escape, but the nuns of Port-Royal did so with difficulty. **Blaise Pascal**, one of the Solitaries, refused to compromise. On 23 January 1656 he wrote the first of his *Lettres à un Provincial*. 17 others followed within the year. He attacked the Jesuits for their laxism and defended the Jansenist views on grace "with a style and delicacy of wit that have never been surpassed in any literature." Henceforth the Jesuits and laxism, and Jansenism and rigorism, were firmly established in the eyes of the general public.²⁶ Mazarin, irritated by the *Provinciales*, got the Assembly of the French clergy to petition Pope Alexander VII in 1656 for a definition about the 'question of right' and 'the question of fact' as made out by Arnould. The Bull *Ad Sacramenta* of that year was accepted by the French clergy in March 1657 and with some difficulty by the *Parlement* in November.

The Bull provoked a great outburst of feeling in France. Arnould, declaring the Pope was in error on non-revealed fact, refused inner consent to the Bull but counselled respectful silence. It was a dishonest attitude. But the nuns of Port-Royal, who had never even read *Augustinus*, refused to submit even in this way. In 1661 Louis XIV sent 'lettres de cachet' against the leaders and the leading nuns of Port-Royal, but the Solitaries managed to flee. In 1664 the new archbishop of Paris made a move to overcome Jansenist resistance and was rejected. He now had 12 of the nuns in Paris deported to other convents and put under police supervision; it achieved nothing. Next year Alexander VII reaffirmed his position in a Bull, but four bishops sided with Port-Royal, and when a commission was appointed by the Holy See to try them, 19 others joined them and 20 more protested. Pope Clement IX, realising that Bulls, even when requested, solved nothing, sought reconciliation. He restored the four bishops to favour, mistakenly believing they had made an adequate submission. The nuns of Port-Royal held out but finally signed an acceptance of the Bull. So began the "Clementine Peace" (made official by a papal brief dated 14 January 1669), which lasted thirty years. Jansenism ceased to be a major public preoccupation while Rome and the French Church clashed on Gallicanism.

John Baptist de La Salle and Jansenism

This, then, was the situation in the Church of France when De La Salle

came to Paris. The peace did not mean people's minds had changed. There were many people around him who held to Jansenist beliefs, and many others who were affected by their strictness and their understanding of God. Later on, when the controversy flared up again, he stood out for the orthodox view and suffered for it. For his Brothers, who could be influenced like anyone else, besides counselling them not to get involved in the disputes of the day about grace, he wrote ten meditations on the Eucharist. They are not only a refutation of Arnould's views, but a beautiful presentation of Catholic teaching on the Eucharist, not in all its aspects, but in so far as it covers its effects on the individual and his or her relations with Christ.

The Company of the Blessed Sacrament

Associations concerned with prayer and good works were to be found everywhere in France in this century.²⁷ Many, such as the Third orders of the Dominicans and Franciscans, the lay confraternities and the guild confraternities, existed before Trent. Certain more secret and more intellectualised forms of social coming together developed this century, especially in Paris and the provincial capitals, around some more appreciated spiritual director among the religious orders. They were centres of high spirituality as well as effective action, such as supporting Spain or the foundation of Carmelite convents in France. After 1630 they made possible the rise of the *Company of the Blessed Sacrament*, which spread from Paris to the provinces.

The Company of the Blessed Sacrament was particularly political and devout (*dévôte*). It was started by Henri de Levis de Ventadour, lieutenant-general of Languedoc, a 'penitent' nobleman and mystic, with the agreement of Louis XIV. He gathered together a number of leading lawyers from the *Parlement* and sons of the great aristocracy, backed up by a group of reformers such as the Capuchins, the Jesuits, St Vincent de Paul, Condren, Olier. The Company was a secret organisation aimed at procuring the glory of God by every means, but especially by living the Christian interior life through meditation and prayer and devotion to the Blessed Sacrament and to Our Lady. But it also had its very active side. It had large financial resources, and so was able to help St Vincent de Paul and national and foreign missions, especially in Canada. Vincent de Paul left it finally, disagreeing with some of its methods.

It had a finger in all the charitable initiatives in towns as well as in means of bringing deviants to order. It sought to create general hospices, supported relief to the poor, the sick, prisoners and it kept an eye on salaries, prices, and the craft guilds. It fought, getting the support of many bishops, for the strict interpretation of the Edict of Nantes (see p. 40). It kept a check on opinion,

and on deviants, comedians and free-thinkers. It spread very rapidly, by virtue of the high social standing of its members. Its strength lay in its being set up in a network in groups of about 30 in 50 different towns, each with a spiritual superior and a lay director. The associates met every Thursday for prayer, reports on activities and new needs, spiritual reading and alms. Between these groups there circulated information, and news. The movement took in leaders in the Tridentine reform from among the nobles and the big bourgeois. It maintained its lay character and independence, accepting no members of religious orders and few priests. Its hidden strength was to be able to act on all by awakening their social and professional conscience, in a chosen anonymity for spiritual reasons in the sensitive area of public life.

It was disliked for its surveillance of the observance of Church law and for its attempts to have important posts filled by good Christians. It was merciless in its fight against Protestants and used any means to close their schools. Above all, it attacked the Jansenists. In revenge a Jansenist publication appeared in 1660, naming it as a secret society acting without letters patent. The Company had made of Mazarin an enemy, and he forbade all secret meetings (December 1660). The Company burnt its archives and disappeared officially, but some members kept up meetings and action.²⁸ We shall see them appearing as a group of 'notables' in a town. While Gallicanism and Jansenism were two widespread attitudes at variance with De La Salle's sense of fidelity to the Catholic Church and its faith, the Company of the Blessed Sacrament was an association whose support in a number of towns later, even if they did not necessarily share all his educational aims for the poor, was decisive in getting him to send Brothers there. In that sense, they have considerable importance in the later years of John Baptist De La Salle.

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3. Coste, Vol. XIII, 185.
4. Poutet I, 234.
5. Poutet I, 230.
6. Aroz, CL42, 232, 241.
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9. Aroz, CL26, 130-131.
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 25. As quoted in *The World of Monsieur Vincent*, 179.
 26. Jedin VI, 96.
 27. Goubert and Roche, op. cit., 68-74.
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Chapter 4: Thrown into a new situation.¹ Experiences shaping him for the future, 1672-1679

Pain and crisis

John was nearing the end of his first academic year in 1671 at the Sorbonne when on 22 July he received the news that stunned him: his mother had died three days before, and according to custom, had been buried the same day.² She was only thirty-six. The year at the Sorbonne ended on 27th; only then did he return to Rheims and to a sad house. His father must have told him to finish the term. Not to find in the house his loving, lively, intelligent mother was a painful loss, even if bereavements were well-known in families. He must support and comfort his father and his brothers and sisters. There was, all the same, joy in meeting the family again. Marie at eighteen was, as we know from her husband's memoir after her death, a beautiful young woman ready to enter society and thinking of marriage. Rose-Marie, at sixteen, was thinking of joining the Canonesses of St Stephen's abbey, and may now have deferred the step in order to comfort her father in his bereavement. Jacques-Joseph would soon be thirteen. He had just finished his third year at Les Bons-Enfants and wanted to join the Canons Regular of Saint Augustine. Jean-Louis was seven and a half and by now would have a home tutor. Pierre was coming up to six. All were happy to see their elder brother again, even if tears flowed freely. Little Jean-Remy, just over a year old, wouldn't remember him.

John was back in Paris by 18 October. It was time to make a final decision about the priesthood by being ordained sub-deacon. He could have sought ordination at the Quarter Tenses of September, while he was in Rheims, but being the eldest at the time of the bereavement made him hesitate and delay. He had taken seriously also those admonitions of Bourdoise and of Tronson. Christmas was another time when ordinations were conferred, but he was in dreadful uncertainty whether it was the time, and put it off again. Then he got the quite unexpected shock on Tuesday in Holy Week, 11 April 1672, of the news of his father's death two days before after a brief illness, and of his burial the same day.³ Coming nine months after the death of his mother, this new loss by itself was very distressing. But a crushing disappointment came with it: he was informed on the same occasion - possibly someone had been sent up on horseback - that by his father's will, drawn up the day before his death, John had been made legal guardian of his brothers and sisters and trustee of the family property, and also executor, along with his grandmother and three uncles, of his father's will.⁴ It meant the end of his stay at St Sulpice.

His father's decision might well be the measure of his trust in his eldest son, though still a minor, and John would see it as a filial duty to be carried out, but his recall from Paris was something he would have to come to terms with. Why had this happened? If God was calling him to the priesthood, why was his training interrupted? Why had he to break off his studies at the most renowned faculty of theology in Europe? The new situation really put a question mark on the rightfulness of going forward to the priesthood, and on whether God had really called him.

But he could not just stay with his grief. He had to act at once and sort out his own crisis as soon as possible after that. The day after he received the news, Wednesday in Holy Week, was the end of term at the Sorbonne; but this time it was the day he ended his studies there for good. Strangely, he did not leave for Rheims immediately, but spent a whole week of retreat in the seminary. Seminarists were invited to do this when they were leaving, but Tronson would have seen that delay was inappropriate in this case. There may be a simple answer: John had much luggage to take back and would have to go by coach; coaches possibly did not run in Holy Week or on Easter Monday and Tuesday, which were important holidays then. Or again, with winter just ending, and the state of the roads still frightful, coaches may have been few and far between. Whatever the reason, he said goodbye to Saint Sulpice only on Easter Wednesday, 19 April. We find him back in Rheims on 23rd, which is again unexplained, since even if he left Paris on 20th, he should have been home late on 21st. Again, bad roads may be an explanation.

He had first to face up to meeting his brothers and sisters and consoling them. He would be told about his father's short illness. He was only forty-seven and had been taken ill suddenly on April 7th. Three doctors and an apothecary had attended him. But Louis was aware that this was something fatal. The next day, sitting in an upstairs room, he made out his will helped by a notary. His funeral had been a sumptuous one befitting one of the city's royal magistrates. Over the years, as his children grew up and could help one another, Louis had cut down on his permanent domestic staff to one matron, Poncette, originally from Nantes in the west of France. There were always in addition maids placed with him for a few years. To cope with the household immediately after Louis's death, the one who had been Jean-Louis's nurse was asked to come and help for three days. Marie and Rose-Marie must have been towers of strength. Marie took enough from the loose cash in her father's desk to run the household for a few days. There was calm and order when John arrived. He would certainly have visited his parents' grave in the cemetery on the south side of St Symphorian's church.

But he himself was in inner turmoil. He must come to a decision and settle down to his new role. He turned to his friend in the Chapter, Canon Nicholas

Roland, and asked him to be his spiritual guide. He confided to him his doubts. Nicholas, who was nine years older and had thrown himself into advancing renewal in the Church, had no hesitation in seeing that to go on to be a priest was for John the right thing to do. We have that first influence of Roland on De La Salle to be grateful for. Meanwhile, family matters had to be tackled without delay. On 27 April, at a first meeting with the other executors, who formed a family council, John took up officially his duties as guardian and trustee. In his will, Louis De La Salle had stipulated that his son must do nothing without the “advice and consent” of Perrette Lespagnol, his grandmother, and his three uncles: Sir Nicholas Moët, member of the *présidial*, Simon De La Salle -the one living in the hôtel de la Cloche - and Anthony Frémin, his uncle by marriage to Marie De La Salle, Louis’s sister. Frémin was a Controller of the *Election* of Rheims. It was agreed that Marie should be taken out of John’s daily responsibility and placed under the legal curatorship of her uncle Simon. John had no experience in advising a young woman as to what she could do or not do legally as a minor, nor could he help her to mature in society. He remained her testamentary guardian, responsible for guaranteeing her share of the family wealth and for providing for her financially. The day after this meeting John set in hand the drawing up of an inventory of all his father’s papers, furniture and properties.

But he also re-registered without delay at the Faculty of Theology with the same lecturers as in 1669-70. For we have an attestation from Daniel Egan again that John Baptist De La Salle attended lectures that year from Easter to August 10th, when the academic year ended. John had to cope with fitting in time for prayer, discharging his canonical duties which he now had to resume, attending lectures twice a day, finding time for study at home and the time to look after the family, maintain the house and keep quite a range of accounts. Poncette and the girls would take care of Jean-Remy; Jacques-Joseph attended College; Jean-Louis and Peter would have their tutors. In decisions about buying and selling, looking after the family inheritance and investing its funds, he had the advice of a shrewd grandmother and of uncles who were landed gentry knowledgeable in affairs. It was still a lot of work and responsibility for a young man of twenty-one who had just been taken out of the seminary. Little did he realise that he was learning management skills that would serve him in a totally different sphere. One might call the next few years the time of God’s hidden apprenticeship.

John’s inventory of his father’s belongings

He first had to arrange a legal inventory of his father’s belongings. It began on 28 April. The document had long been presumed lost. Brother Leon de Maria Aroz has put us in his debt by finding it on 30 January 1981, in the

archives of the *Département* of the Marne. It is a folio of forty-four sheets, paginated in pencil, and written in a fine cursive hand. What Brother Aroz has discovered is the detailed list of all the things needed for the running of a bourgeois town house, of its furniture and decoration, and of the clothes and personal belongings of a magistrate, an office-holder of the Crown. He has reproduced it, with full commentary, in *Cahiers Lasalliens*, no. 51. It details the material provision for the life De La Salle lived. The following paragraphs draw upon that inventory.

On the morning of Thursday, 28 April, a clerk of the court and two assessors came and began their inventory, first in the kitchen, then the cellar, and then room by room up to the attic. In the kitchen and annexes, 246 articles were listed and valued. In the fireplace, for instance, there were andirons, fire-tongs, a spit, iron and bronze cauldrons of various sizes, copper cooking-pots and pie-dishes. The great fireplace was fed with wood; here were the bellows, the fireguard and the iron plate protecting from the roast. In a small annexe were kept cups, glasses and a whole array of plates: six dozen plates, two dozen pewter plates, twenty porcelain plates. There were pots, bowls, jugs, pint- and half-pint pots.

On the ground floor of the house proper was the bedroom facing the street, very likely that of Louis and Nicole; the 'red room' Aroz calls it. It had a walnut bedstead, red blankets and red serge bed curtains; a walnut table, a pedestal table, backgammon pieces and board. It was a large, pleasant room. On the walls was a tapestry of sixty metres. There were eight chairs and two walnut armchairs.

Next to this bedroom was the great drawing-room, richly furnished with a tapestry and provided with ten walnut chairs upholstered in pink and six folding stools. In the fireplace were the andirons, tongs and a cast-iron fire-screen. This would be the room where Louis De La Salle entertained his friends, and where Marie played the theorbo. Alongside was a small room with a tapestry nine metres long on its wall, from which hung eight pictures. There were three theorbos kept in this room.

On the first floor there were three bedrooms facing the street: a red room, a small green room, a blue room, and also another green room. This last may have been used by the matron Poncette Godinot, for in it were kept spare mattresses and the like. The red room Brother Aroz would see as belonging to Jacques-Joseph and Pierre, for, besides the tapestry on the walls and the bed curtains, there are two blankets, two mattresses, two armchairs and four chairs with six folding stools. The small green room was possibly Marie's, with little Jean-Remy, and the blue room that of John and Jean-Louis (though their ages would suggest rather the pairing: John with Jacques-Joseph and Jean-Louis with Pierre). This blue room contained six large chairs, two small

ones and two folding stools, two mirrors and a square table and a walnut cabinet. Marie's room had a long tapestry, eight paintings, a mirror, a footstool inlaid with ebony, a leather-covered chest, a summer hat with aigrette feathers and a gauze justaucorps decorated with pearls.

Up in the attic were kept oats, flour, rye, small and large barrels, and the usual in an attic: an old bed taken apart, a commode and sixty-odd broken pots. Down in the cellar, there was wine and casks and a large store of wood for the fire. On the ground floor was to be found the linen store of the house: shirts, nightshirts, nightcaps, drawers, knee-breeches, neckbands, cuffs, stockings, slippers, 19½ dozen table napkins, simple or embroidered; sheets, pillow-slips, table-cloths; forks, spoons,... Here were also kept jewels and precious objects: a gold chain, a pair of diamond earrings, a purse with ten silver counters, two small fine pearl necklaces.

The assessors visited the garden rented by the family, situated a few hundred yards away in the Rue des Murs (Rampart Street) next to a garden belonging to the Augustinians. It measured roughly 28 by 19 metres. In it was a single-roomed building containing a beechwood cupboard, a small table, two other tables, eight straw chairs and nine framed pictures on the wall. It was used in winter as well as in summer, for it had fire-irons. A spade, a rake, a pruning-knife, a trowel, a hoe and a pruning-hook were listed. There was a well with two watering cans and four old pairs of ladders. A bourgeois was not likely to do manual work as a distraction, yet Louis had three books on gardening in his library. More likely he had a hired gardener to produce fruit and other things for the table and keep the garden attractive, so that he could walk about in it or play some easy game. The children would have been able to play there, too. John renewed the lease at some point, for his own need of exercise apparently, and must have bought it later, for he sold it in 1683, after he had moved to the Rue Neuve.

The clerk and assessors finally visited Louis De La Salle's library. It was not extensive: they catalogued only 189 volumes. These included books on law, classical texts he would have studied at college and lent his son; books of general culture, especially history, and some on French literature. The greater part, as was usual that century, were books of religious culture: the majority were on Scripture, many were on Doctors of the Church and recent spiritual writers, especially St Francis de Sales; and there were histories of the Church and catechisms. The assessors returned on May 10th to make an inventory of Louis's papers.

Meanwhile Rose-Marie, now that her father had died, and seeing her family well cared for, felt free to follow her vocation, and after the usual month of mourning - a Mass used to be said the thirtieth day after death - on 11 or 12 May she entered as postulant the St Stephen's abbey, whose canonesses

were addressed as 'Madame'. This convent, St Etienne-des-Dames, was situated in the Rue Neuve, next to the Poor Clares. We know the date of Rose-Marie's entry because in his accounts for his guardianship John notes that he has on 6 August 1672, paid in advance the fees for her board for six months, due to fall on 12 November. Meanwhile, he was being guided by Nicholas Roland to prepare for ordination as sub-deacon. Cardinal Barberini had died during the previous summer vacation in Rome and had been replaced by Maurice Le Tellier; but, as was often to be the case, the latter was absent at this time at court. John had to get written credentials from the cathedral Chapter to seek ordination elsewhere. They were granted on 27 May. He travelled to Laon, then to Noyon, but in vain, but at last he was accepted by the bishop of Cambrai, who ordained him on 11 June. He then had to return to Rheims - a round journey of 180 kilometres, which, even if done on horseback, was a tribute to his clear intention to go on to the priesthood. He came back to arrears in his studies, but with a happier heart.

John arranges the auction of his father's goods and bids at it

So far, the young De La Salle had simply had to call in the assessors and make the house available to them. But a customary legal sequel involved his time much more. On 30 and 31 May, and also on 1 to 3 June, and again on 11 to 13 July a public sale was held of all his father's moveable goods. The house and its effects belonged jointly to all the children, but customary law required them, through their guardian, to sell off everything other than what the family council authorised them to keep. The family council did, in fact, authorise John Baptist to withhold from the sale the contents of the rooms he and his wards occupied and what was needed for their daily living. It authorised the sale of those things they considered not needed by minors, but John and Marie were free to bid in the public auction. The extent of the sale would leave a fairly denuded house: much of the kitchen and linen-room stock went to bidders, as well as carpets, tapestries, chairs and the like. Presumably some rooms were cleared and then closed.

The sale had to be announced by having a copper basin struck at the main crossroads and by notices being posted outside the town hall, in church porches and outside the house itself. This had to be arranged by John at the request of the family council. The main sale was at the house itself in the Rue Sainte Marguerite, and also, on 13 July in the garden already referred to. For each item a starting price was given, and then the cry was made: "Who says better!". A first, second and third bid were allowed, and then the item was knocked down to the bidder at the stroke of the gong. 408 items fell under the hammer. 124 of these items went to John, for which he had to pay 1128 livres. If he was present and bid personally, then he could have been away seeking

to be ordained sub-deacon only between 4 and 11 June. He seems to have bid and bought on each day of the sale. But his dates look very cramped. On 11 June, for instance, he bought a red blanket. He could have covered the eighty miles or so from Cambrai after an early morning ceremony and bid for this one item perhaps. He was a young man who could enjoy such a ride and the challenge of arriving before the bidding ended for that day. But perhaps he got his sister Marie to bid for him on some days. On 12th he bid for a whetstone for his cutthroat, which surely means he was there in person. On 13th, he bid for the complete contents of two bedrooms. How novel a picture of the young canon at scarcely twenty-one (his birthday, we recall, fell on April 30th) bidding about a hundred times for his 124 items (some of them were sold in lots)! One can imagine the scene: "Item no. 351, a whetstone in fine condition. One sol two deniers. Who says better!" "One sol six deniers!" No one else bids against him for this memento of his father's, and the stroke of the gong knocks it down to him.

Collecting all the receipts and drawing up the official minutes of the sale took till 16 August. These minutes take up 23 sheets, measuring approximately 16 by 23 centimetres. The sale netted something like 45,000 euros - not a great sum. One wonders how the children felt at seeing all their dear father's things being critically valued and bid for. The inventory gives us some idea of the level of living John De La Salle was used to and that ten years later he would walk out of. The whole business was one more considerable down-to-earth responsibility for a young cleric.

Four brothers in a big house. John's degree in theology

On 24 June Marie took little Jean-Remy, who was almost two years old now, with her and went to live permanently with her grandmother until she married five years later. Being the only woman in the family house, now that Rose-Marie had left, she would feel the need of female companionship and of a confidante of her hopes and feelings. She also needed a more social life and to have parties in the house, and she knew this would impinge on John's work and style of life. And either then, or when she was away at parties elsewhere, she needed someone who knew how to handle Jean-Remy. Perhaps on account of losing his parents so early, he may have been emotionally unstable and difficult to understand.

It seems strange to have now only four orphaned brothers in a large house, looked after admittedly by an experienced matron and some domestic helps. It was partly a question of having to hold on to the house. John did try this year to let it out on lease, but there were no takers. However, we are told that every so often the family came round for a meal "to keep up the union between them".⁵ With their many cousins, there would be many occasions when

the younger brothers would be in an out of one another's houses; there would be frequent birthday parties and also weddings, and births, and frequent festive days.

Since he had begun his theological studies in Rheims before going to Saint Sulpice, John completed, the August after Marie's departure, the three years' theology required for the Bachelorship in Theology. But he still had to do two years' philosophy to qualify. As his studies proceeded, he found less to be preoccupied with at home. For in October 1673 Jean-Louis, who would be ten at Christmas, began his studies at College, and two years later Peter followed suit.

Two months before, in August 1675, John had finished his five years study for the B.D., and was allowed to go forward to the examination. He was questioned over the whole range of theology by three examiners in the presence of students in their first year of the licentiate, who were expected to challenge him. He had to satisfy at least two examiners, and in fact did so. He then went on to the graduation ceremony in which the Dean of the Faculty, after tendering the usual oath and giving him the crucifix to kiss, handed him the diplomas declaring him a Bachelor in Theology. Most students went no further than this general study of theology: the B.D. by itself opened the door to many a benefice. Only John and four others signed on for the Licentiate. Rather than involving anything new, the same matters had, in the two prescribed years, to be taken to a deeper level by the students themselves. The two years in John's case began on 1 January 1676.

To be accepted for the course, each candidate had to apply to be examined by three doctors who tested whether by his own study in the intervening five months he had deepened to the required extent his knowledge in the four areas of positive theology, scholastic theology, the history of the Church and Sacred Scripture. It meant hard work for John, along with his other duties, but he was accepted. He can be left at his studies for the moment.

NICHOLAS ROLAND: A MAN IN A HURRY TO RENEW THE CHURCH

Nicholas Roland⁶, as already figured significantly in De La Salle's life. It is time to see his important role in Rheims and his further influence on the young canon. **Roland** was a man of enthusiasm who took wholeheartedly to the movement of reform in the French Church as soon as he encountered it. He was born on 8 December 1642; Matthew Beuvelet, the uncle on his mother's side we have seen already, held him over the font. This Beuvelet had founded in his native town of Marle in Picardy a community of sisters to run a girls' school, and one of masters for boys, which merged with a community of teaching Brothers founded by the dean of Marle. These two local communities survived till the Revolution. Beuvelet joined the seminary of St Nicolas-

du-Chardonnet and died at the age of 31 'in the odour of sanctity'.

Nicholas, his godchild, showed early his intellectual gifts: at the age of five he learnt to read in four months. Later he studied at the Jesuit College in Rheims. Handsome, good-mannered, self-assured, he acted in all the tragedies staged at the College during his years there. He was of a very generous nature, open to ideals; he was also a lover of music and played the lute. After his studies he travelled widely in France and then sought to join the Jesuits in Paris, but found the life was not for him. He studied in Paris and, still finding his way, joined the AA⁷ (*Assemblées des Amis*, or Meetings of Friends), founded by John Bagot, S.J., a discreet association favouring the pursuit of perfection and missions in China, Cochinchina and Tonkin. (These two latter names designated what are now areas in the south and north of Vietnam.)

He became a canon of Rheims in 1665 with the special duty of preaching. He was ordained priest at a date unknown, and left his family home to take up residence in the Rue du Barbâtre, in the poor quarter of the town. He felt the need to go back to Paris in 1668 and visit the seminaries of St of the Lazarists (Vincentians) and Saint Sulpice. From there he went to see Anthony de la Haye, a parish priest in Rouen, having heard in Paris of his holiness. De la Haye was as tough with others as with himself: "I've no room for you - unless you want to sleep under the stairs!" And so Roland lived with him for six months. He became aware of the efforts of the Poor Board in Rouen to create schools for boys, and of a new society of Sisters just then being organised under a Fr Barré. It was there that he read a copy of Charles Démi's *Remonstrances addressed to the Provost, Aldermen and principal inhabitants of the City of Lyons concerning the necessity of schools for poor children*. (Démi will be seen later.) Roland there and then determined to set up schools for the poor on his return to Rheims. It is interesting to note how he travelled to see how others were doing for the clergy and for the schools, and how ideas on how to run schools for the poor spread because people were in contact with one another and borrowed from one another. The concern and initiative shown by Bourdoise, Barré and Démi spread through the network of cells of the Company of the Blessed Sacrament.

We saw Adrian Bourdoise only in the light of his pioneering work for the clergy. But he was also one of the first to see that reform in the schools had to go along with reform of the clergy. There were, in truth, schools for the poor in Paris in his day, but often badly run, the masters being recruited without selection or preparation, attracted merely by the chance of earning a little money. In 1649 he and Monsieur Olier agreed to start among their seminarists the Association of St Joseph as a 'league of prayer' to ask from God 'masters who would work at this occupation as apostles, not as mercenaries'. Seventy-two seminarists joined and eighty other people, but the Asso-

ciation did not outlive a few years. Most would not have the conviction of Bourdoise. He wrote:

It is easy to find among the clergy people ready to become curates and parish priests, but to find people who have the piety and qualities needed for running a school and fulfilling this occupation worthily is a very rare thing. Whence I conclude that to work at forming such masters is a work doubtless more useful to the Church and more meritorious than preaching all one's life in the most considered pulpit in the kingdom.

Because parish schools are poor and run by poor people, people imagine they are nothing. Yet it is the only way to destroy vice and establish virtue, and I defy anyone to find a better. I reckon that if Saint Paul or Saint Denis were to come back at present to France, they would take on the condition of schoolmaster in preference to any other.

I've known the work of the ploughman for fifty-seven years, and all that time I have never seen anyone so thoughtless as to sow fields without having well manured and well ploughed them. Similarly, it is by means of Christian schools that one prepares hearts to receive the word of God. The school is the novitiate of Christianity.⁸

Jacques de Batencour, one of his community in the parish of St Nicholas wrote, in the light of his own experience, a remarkable text: *L'Escole Paroissiale*, on running a fee-paying parish school.

A new community in Rheims for the education of poor girls

Back in his own house, Roland began to organise discussions between priests, following what had been Bourdoise's practice. Word about them got round, for even the archbishop and the bishop of Châlons are known to have attended. He also helped young clerics training for the priesthood, went preaching missions around Rheims, and planned to have a community of priests running a parish, but died before realising the project. He decided in 1669, when he was only twenty-six, to put all his effort in setting up in Rheims free schools for girls. He had got to know at this time of the orphanage run by Mme Varlet that had raised the hackles of the Poor Board. Coquault wrote of her: "She takes the children of this begging rabble who eat everything, to bring them relief, then makes them a charge on the public."

For the 'right-thinking' bourgeois - the 'good inhabitant' as he saw himself - educated, well-provided, successful through using his brains in commerce - these beggars, the illiterate, the unemployed, orphans and children of illicit unions were to blame for their plight, and needed to be forced to make themselves useful to society. Here is Coquault's comment more fully: "The riffraff is always complaining in spite of our General Hospice... After five hospices have been set up by us (in addition to the General Hospital) we have as many

of this begging rabble as before... The five hospices are: the Daughters or Community of Magneux (these were the Ladies of St Martha, known familiarly as 'Magneuses' because founded by the widow of the lord of Magneux); the two of the charity board, boys and girls; the poor of St Marcoul; this General Hospice; and now a hospice for orphans that a certain Brisset, widow of Georges Varlet established on her own authority, and takes in children of this begging rabble to eat everything, to bring them relief and then make them a charge on the public. I think her intentions are right, but these sorts of people are maintained and emboldened by her."⁹

John Maillefer the elder was much harsher: "Layabouts and vagabonds... They are the dregs of the people, the excrement of the town, the pest of states, fit to adorn the gallows and whence come thieves, murderers, and galley-slaves." Nevertheless, although he would do nothing about it, he did remark where the remedy lay: "The fact is that many children without a father or mother are taught and pushed on by nobody."¹⁰ These are the sour tones of older, settled burgesses. De La Salle would certainly feel no sense of solidarity or concern for what to his class was a social nuisance. But he began to notice them as a consequence of his contacts with the work of his warm, energetic friend Nicholas Roland. Even then he did not at all see himself as having to get involved with them.

To return to Madame Varlet. After being forced to close a second orphanage, she sold the house. From the sale she paid for the purchase of another house by the Ladies of St Martha and herself. This time she was given freedom to make of it *The Orphanage*. But with all her good will she was not an organiser, and the orphans were not in good shape. Roland, who lived in the same street, often came to visit them over the next few years. For him, the real answer was to make a school of the project. He was invited to Rouen to preach during Lent in 1670. It gave him a chance to see how things had progressed since he was last there two years before. He saw free schools for the poor using a class method for teaching, not an individual one, and teaching catechism, reading, writing and arithmetic. He came back to Rheims exhausted and had to rest in the country. On October 15th he informed the Corporation that he was willing to take on the administration of the orphanage. They refused, not feeling sure he had the means to run it, especially if he intended developing it into a school that would cater for many children. If he ran out of financial means, the burden would fall on the General Hospice and so on them. He did, of course, intend the work to grow; but he kept his counsel to himself. Out of his own pocket he provided clothing, meals and books, and was able to get inefficient staff replaced.

While in Rouen he had discussed with Fr Barré how to copy in Rheims his work in creating the Sisters of the Child Jesus of Providence, as he had

named them. On 27 December 1670 two of these Sisters came to Rheims on the orders of Fr Barré to help the work forward. They were Françoise Duval and Anne Le Coeur, and they had the Council's backing this time, although it maintained the house would come to it should the enterprise fail. Five days previously, Roland had bought a larger house in the same Rue du Barbâtre, separated from the Canonesses of St Augustine by a street that came to be known as the Rue des Orphelins. Madame Varlet, who now wanted to concentrate her efforts on another orphanage near Rheims, readily handed over the running of the house to Françoise Duval. Roland celebrated his first Mass there on 11 January. He was now in charge, but he handed over the administration to another priest, so as to give his full attention to the instruction and spiritual guidance of the Sisters. Another of Barré's Sisters now came from Rouen, and a woman from Rheims joined them. The Precentor, Canon John Roland his uncle, who was also Scholiaster, authorised him to open two classes in a separate part of the building for day girls of the poor wishing to learn reading and the catechism, and he even took young women who were willing to learn. He travelled several times to Paris and Rouen to see how Barré's Sisters there were doing so well, and he asked for some more experienced Sisters to be sent to Rheims. Barré sent them from Amiens, Paris, Honfleur and Orleans (1673-78), and four new mistresses joined from Rheims itself. From 1670 to 1674, 19 all told entered the community.

The Charity Board had in mind to hand over to the Sisters all the children they had placed with foster-parents, and so save money. Roland was caring for young children, not running a nursery, and he refused. The Board then demanded that the orphanage should be annexed purely and simply to the General Hospice, as had been done with all other hospices. Roland appealed to the archbishop, who sided with the canon.

By this time there were several classes attached to the orphanage. The townspeople could see this new community of Sisters developing, consisting mostly of outsiders - and they were teaching free of charge. Who was going to support them? This new venture would at least be in competition with the existing relief institutions, they thought (teaching the poor was seen only as public assistance), and have to be subsidised by the municipality. Would not the sums presently being given to Canon Roland be diverted to run the day classes? There was an outcry. Roland used the influence of his relatives to calm the Charity Board and the Corporation. His uncle, Canon John Roland, the Precentor, gave the necessary authorisations in 1673, and the vicar-general spoke favourably of the work to Le Tellier, who in 1675 gave his authorisation to run these classes, thus declaring his rights in the matter of Christian education, which came under him as bishop, not the Charity Board. The real position of a school was beginning to clarify.

Soon the Sisters were going daily from the orphanage to four small schools in the town where girls and even women, aware of their ignorance of the faith, came to learn. These schools, therefore, were something in the nature of Barré's mission schools (that we shall see more about later), concentrating on bringing back to the faith and instructing in it. But there was also, within the community house, a social, caring side to the Sisters' work. Roland, with the archbishops' support, felt freer now to explain all he had in mind about the new Institute. It was very much based on what he had seen in Rouen. Very likely, Barré had thought Roland was extending the work of his own Sisters to Rheims; instead, Roland developed a parallel congregation. He gave it several aims: to form schoolmistresses to teach religion and form to Christian living, free of charge; to form some mistresses to teach girls in the countryside under the direction of a good village parish priest; to admit people of piety for retreats; to look after orphans, provided the number was limited. In other words, Roland saw his work as all of a piece with the current renewal in the Church and as complementing the reform of the clergy. The pre-condition was a reformed clergy. His Sisters were something in the nature of female auxiliaries for the clergy in evangelizing girls and women. For him, there was common ground between training country schoolmistresses as helpers of the clergy, making the house in Rheims available for retreats, and keeping schools where girls were helped to preserve their baptismal innocence and were prepared to receive the sacraments.

Roland gave all his time and spent all his wealth on his new Institute. His fellow-canons blamed him severely, claiming he was not taking seriously his canonical duties. He was the canon-theologian to the Chapter and was expected to reside in the cathedral house and preach every Sunday and holyday. They pointed out that looking after orphans, teaching catechism as he did to a group of children and wanting to catechise and confess in rural towns and villages cut into the time he was obliged to give to the Office and to his duty as theologian. It was a matter of a different set of values: he saw that the canonical function was not enough and needed to break out into the missionary work of the Church.¹¹ He gave his Institute a permanent basis by obtaining the protection of the Corporation and of the archbishop. To give it more stability, he accepted the principle of the Sisters making simple vows, although he died too soon to see this realised.

Roland was the founder, in the sense of originator, of this Institute, but he was so, too, in the financial sense of funding the venture with the necessary capital. He saw to it that a capital providing 3000 livres annually was invested at the outset. The considerable capital needed was provided by his mother and several benefactors by 26 December 1677. To make a principle of endowing foundations from one's own funds means limiting new projects to the

funds available, and trusting to pre-established financial security. The way that De La Salle later followed, of waiting to be called to run a school and then having to negotiate conditions and a salary, meant depending on Providence. If a parish priest or other inviting authority wanted to terminate his services, he would simply have to pack his bags and go. It meant working within the Church with all its risks.

A wrong turn for De La Salle: Roland persuades him to enter into negotiations to give up his canonry in favour of a parish ministry

When John had only just begun his formal studies for the Licentiate in 1676, something happened which was out of keeping with his understanding of how his life should be shaped, but which turned out to be, as often, a clarifying experience.¹² Roland was of a nature to forge ahead with minimum delay with plans he thought worthwhile for the reform of the Church. He was aware, as De La Salle's spiritual director and friend, how interested he was in pursuing a personal life in keeping with the Gospel, of his growth in holiness and of his natural gifts. Under Roland's guidance or, since the latter was often absent from the city, under that of Claude Bretagne, to whom Roland referred his clients, John had begun to find more time for personal prayer and to take himself more seriously in hand. To overcome his difficulty of rising in the morning and to find time for meditation before his younger brothers were up, he instructed his valet to wake him and make sure he got up. He even turned to using logs under his mattress. And he dressed more simply now, less fastidiously.

Faced with such progress in his friend, Nicholas shared his ideals and plans with him. He may be seen as the first one who really stimulated in the young canon an awareness and desire to meet the spiritual needs of others. Nicholas, ready to wear himself out travelling and learning what were the best ways of serving the Church, felt that John was not following as useful a life to the Church in his quiet life as a canon as he might be. He pointed out to him the good that could be achieved if he took over one of the city parishes. It is quite possible that Roland had in mind that with such a man as parish priest, both saintly and respected, he could begin to realise his hope of setting up a community of priests; and again, of having John's full support if he wanted to found a school in his parish.¹³

It so happened that Andrew Cloquet - whose name is a homonym of the one who died in 1661 - was looking for a chance to give up his parish if he could count on obtaining a benefice to support him. (This Andrew Cloquet was in charge of St Symphorian's parish from 1648 to 1671, then of St Peter's - the other Cloquet's former parish - from 1672 or 73 till 1703.¹⁴) Nicholas strongly urged John to give up his canonry to Cloquet, and to apply for this

parish. In the eagerness and generosity of his twenty-four years, John agreed. One thing we will continue to notice about him is that he was never frightened of a new situation in itself, though he might hesitate a great deal over the social consequences for himself. Cloquet now raised difficulties, for he was unwilling to have to go to the cathedral several times a day. He was looking for a simple benefice, one with no obligations attached. Fortunately, from Roland's point of view, a close friend and helper of his, Remy Favreau, held a chantry benefice at the cathedral. He was very willing to become a canon, and so Nicholas arranged a three-cornered deal in which Favreau would cede his benefice to Cloquet, Cloquet would be replaced as parish priest by De La Salle, and he would sign away his canonry to Favreau. A most satisfactory arrangement! A deed would be drawn up by a canon lawyer who would seek the required authorisation from Rome. To keep matters quiet, all four met the notary at Châlons and there, on 20 January 1676, the three involved signed the necessary petition.

But de La Salle was only a sub-deacon. Part of the agreement was, therefore, that he should become deacon before the plan was ratified, and bind himself to seek ordination to the priesthood within the year. It was all imprudently hasty: had he thought of what it meant in Rheims to cease being a canon? Of what losing his prebend would mean to family finances? Surely it was all against his concern not to rush into the priesthood unprepared. Or was John Baptist De La Salle someone who could grasp optimistically at an ideal, especially coming from a man of energy he admired? Was he the type from whom the vision of a good to be achieved brought out a response that was both generous and over-buoyant?

Somehow, probably from a word in their ear from one of the cathedral Chapter, John's relatives got wind of the affair. To step down from the metropolitan Chapter was clearly not done. To give the canonry to an outsider was unthinkable. To let the canonical prebend go was a loss of revenue; and what was John Baptist doing, acting independently while still a minor (even if close to his majority, which was not attained till the age of twenty-five in those days)? This wider family, possibly after a meeting with Louis's family council, got word to Archbishop Le Tellier, no doubt through a relative on the Chapter again. John meanwhile, unaware of this, hoping to win the archbishop over, actually travelled to Paris, where he was as usual, to see him. Once he had involved himself, he certainly had drive! He got a clear No for his pains. It was contrary to Pope Paul IV's injunctions to upset a stable parish by changing its incumbent unnecessarily, though the more mundane family motives would weigh more with Le Tellier. It did not help that Canon Roland was often criticised by his colleagues.

At this point Andrew Cloquet, realising the archbishop might let him feel his

ire when he got to know he had been a partner in the project, got himself off the hook by pulling out and then making sure the archbishop knew he had done so. On 2 March, before a notary, he signed a deed saying he was withdrawing from the scheme on the grounds that the other three had not offered him an untied benefice, and the next day he had copies sent to the archbishop, his grand-vicar, Favreau and De La Salle. It was Jacques-Joseph who on 3rd, opened the door of the hôtel Sainte-Marguerite to the notary's messenger. This manoeuvre of Cloquet's put the other three in the wrong. Roland appeared too hasty, Favreau was made to appear a man on the make, and young De La Salle someone too blindly following a director with great ideas. John came out of it with something to live down with his family and peers.

Looking at this mistake now, we can see that it was providential Roland's desire did not succeed. John had blundered; but it was not the end of the world. And he learnt from the experience. He was clearer in his mind on one point at least. He admitted more than once later that "several times since, he seemed to hear an interior voice that told him he was not called to be a parish priest."¹⁵ And on the other hand, he also had in mind since that time to quit his canonry, persuaded he was not called to be a canon either. It was a process of discernment brought about by events and an inner lead of the Spirit, confirmed by events and the certainty he gained at least as to where he should not be looking. He was still waiting and seeking...

He had also learnt something about spiritual direction. Directors in those days made decisions for their clients, and Sulpician teaching had taught John to follow them unhesitatingly. But he had now experienced inner disquiet when obeying Roland's call, followed by peace and certainty that his inner conviction was right when events confirmed it and the inner conviction became clearer. From now on he would bring much prayer to important decisions, consult and accept a decision, yet wait for a confirming sign in external events before putting it into execution. And he would come back to his guide or superior with new arguments when he was sure that his proposed action was right. When later on he did see beyond all doubt that he had been called to found something new in the Church, something no longer a matter of his own spiritual state and in which directors had no competence, he prayed at great length, read and consulted with those involved in a similar work, and discussed everything with his Brothers.

His licentiate. Preparing for the priesthood

John had to get over this upset and concentrate on his various tasks. Preparing for the licentiate required each student once a fortnight to deliver an oral 'thesis' on a topic checked in advance by the professors, lest anything be said to offend the king or the Church! So presumably John had to catch up

now on his second thesis. In his second year he and the other four students found that the customary right of licentiate students to take part in all the testing and final examining of candidates for the B.D. fell to them. It turned out that in this year 1677 John had to confront Philip Maillefer - future brother-in-law of his sister Marie - who discoursed brilliantly and then invited his fellow-students, as was the tradition, to his house for a celebration. It was the grand house of his father, John Maillefer the elder, into which the Queen Regent and young Louis XIV had been welcomed thirteen years earlier.

To return to January 1676: John De La Salle's other two concerns were preparing for the priesthood and seeing to his duties towards his family. Almost immediately, in fact, he applied for the necessary permission to be ordained deacon. He obtained the required papers on 13 March, but to be ordained he had to travel to Paris again. There, in Archbishop's house, he was made deacon by the bishop of Bethlehem, (a tiny bishopric south of Champagne) on 21 March, which was Laetare Sunday in Lent. And he reached his legal majority on 30 April. It was a good moment to rethink his position as legal guardian. He would soon have only two brothers to look after. Jacques-Joseph would finish his years at College in four months' time and intended joining the Canons Regular of St Augustine (the Genovevans). He went to their novitiate in Paris. He made his solemn profession in 1680, renouncing, as was required, all his goods, in favour of his brothers - something like 80,000 euros today. At 29 he was professor of theology and philosophy at Blois; he died in 1723 aged 64. For John, looking after the family was not a problem and certainly not a burden: right down to his last will and testament he looked after his brothers and sisters.

What did eat into his time was the care of properties, granting loans and recovering payments on loans. Keeping accounts and similar matters he would be glad to be relieved of since the time for his ordination as a priest was approaching. For four years, from the age of 21, John had carried out his duties as family trustee. But now the licentiate and his ordination were only two years away. He went therefore through the necessary formalities to secure authorisation from the family to be released from his charge. On such an occasion he was required by law to present a full statement of accounts covering his whole period of responsibility. It took four months to draw up. This work was unknown till it was discovered by Brother Leon de Maria Aroz in the Archives of the *Département* of the Marne at Châlons on 24 September 1964. It fills six thin ledgers and totals 230 sheets measuring 33 by 22 centimetres. It is written in a very careful hand, the work of a notary's clerk writing out John's own registers of accounts kept over four years. John read over the whole when it was finished and made many alterations.

A RECORD OF FOUR YEARS' EXPERIENCE IN BOOK-KEEPING

Thanks, then to a legal requirement of four hundred years ago, and a discovery in a thousand last century, we have a new view of John Baptist De La Salle the accountant.¹⁶ He had found the work onerous enough, biting into the pursuit of things he had set his heart on. Flung into it four days after his return from Saint Sulpice, still shocked by the loss of his parents, he must often have wondered what it was all about and been at times despondent at the way things had turned out. Yet even in this unwelcome administrative work he was being prepared for the future. What he now had to tackle and master with his youthful energy developed in him skills that he would find useful and necessary later. We shall see him, almost immediately after this, handling competently similar matters as Roland's executor; then we shall see him many times involved in lawsuits, sales, investments and leases in his work as Founder of a new society. It gives a new, down-to-earth facet to his trust in Providence. Passivity, lack of know-how or of foresight had no part in it. In his own personal life he had to learn something new: to find time for prayer and for the thought of God in the midst of activities. That also would matter when he had to help his Brothers to find God in the classroom.

In those six ledgers the account of De La Salle's administration is set out under five headings:

1. Receipts from the sale of the goods of the deceased (his father);
2. Common expenses for his brothers and sisters, including copying and registering contracts on their behalf and taking procedures against tardy debtors;
3. Expenses for his father's illness and funeral, and for the end-of-year Mass for both his parents;
4. Receipts on moneys invested. As soon as sums or interests were repaid in sufficient amount, it was the trustee's duty to put them to use by investing them in local business concerns or in property: houses in Rheims, farm lands outside. We find people entering into contracts with him in order to have in hand an often modest capital for their business. They included: a master-baker, a gardener, a goldsmith, a master-chef, a manual worker, several vinegrowers, an innkeeper, a notary royal and a royal attorney. The practice with such investments was for the capital not to be recoverable: you received an annual *rente* or interest. It was a form of taking shares in a business. John's records show that he failed to recover many arrears or current payments on sums invested in this way, some going back thirty years. There were insolvent debtors and deceased debtors, and there are also references to defaulters being prosecuted: he was legally bound to pursue them on behalf of his wards.

5. The specific expenses incurred on behalf of each of his brothers and sisters. This is for us the most interesting section. The family lived together in the Rue Marguerite until 23 June 1672, the end of the financial year. The following year's expenses had to be budgetted; this included declaring the money allowed for food for each of the family. Since Marie and Jean-Remy now went to live with their grandmother, their allowances were made out to her. Rose-Marie was catered for in the convent, so that John had with him only his three brothers for whom he retained the food allowance. He was also responsible for seeing to their education and for all household arrangements and for maintenance. By 1676 when John gave his statement of accounts, the family fortune came to what Brother Aroz estimated in 1964 as corresponding to five million francs. John and each of his brothers and sisters received one sixth of this, mostly invested. But it is in fact difficult to make an estimate in terms of our money: cost of living expectations are different: housing costs, cars, television and so on are new factors.

Some details

Under the second heading: common expenses for his brothers and sisters, John noted costs of maintenance: paying invoices from masons, a glass-maker, a locksmith, a carpenter; for employing in the house as needed a cooper, a mattress-maker, a dressmaker, a baker to bake bread and dry fruits. Presumably the domestics would draw attention to what was needed, and Mary and her grandmother or her aunt Rose would be often in, aware that where there were only boys a female eye would be needed. Besides these recurring needs, John paid taxes, had letters registered and saw to Rose-Marie's dowry payments. Along with various accounts connected with his father's illness and funeral, he records paying for several recent bills incurred by his father and for other payments still outstanding: he paid the grocer, a watch-maker, a printer; he paid for a pair of shoes; he paid John-Louis's former nurse for coming in to help for three days, and the lady called in to shave the deceased's beard and cut the children's hair.

Trying to recover on behalf of his brothers and sisters the interest on capital sums paid out was a duty that took most of his time as family trustee. He finally took to court one man who lived in Châtillon, twenty miles or so to the southwest. John and three others engaged in a long lawsuit over a mill near Fismes, 17 miles to the west, part-owned by his father and three others, and bought in good faith. Only, they discovered later that a Premonstratensian abbey had claim to it since 1483. Proceedings had already been started in 1671 and John continued them to 1675, when he actually visited the mill on 24 May. As plaintiff he lost the case with costs. A convent that owed Louis 5000 livres refused to pay his successors. Twice John hired a horse and rode out to

see them; finally, he had the official debt-collectors sent to them and they paid up. Sometimes he had to have a defaulter's goods seized or held as a security. Several times he had to ride out of Rheims again to face his father's debtors. On one occasion he made the round journey of 44 miles into the valley of the Aisne to the village of Beaurieux. He linked another visit to this village with a visit to three others, making a round trip of 80 miles. This was in winter, around 6 February 1673, and twice he did the 120-mile return trip to Saint-Quentin, one of these on 18 June the same year. These excursions took him from his studies and he would not relish facing older and perhaps wily people who would try to overawe him. Riding across the undulating plain of Champagne and across the gentle valleys of the Aisne and Oise may not have been enjoyable in winter, but in summer it could have been a diverting experience, a welcome change from his occupations. You can imagine him at 22 or 23 galloping on horseback.. Back in his office he was limited, unlike today, to his quill pen and a bottle of ink. There are so many aspects of his young, early life that we need to bring to life.

Louis De La Salle's parents, as we saw in the beginning, bought for him the royal post of member of the *présidial*. It was a post that could be passed on in the family. Only the matter was not quite so simple. There was a tax of 3000 livres payable when the post was handed on: the sale of offices was one of the great royal means of obtaining money. It was also open for a third party to bid for a vacant post. The standard procedure therefore was for the family to pay another person to go to Paris as a stand-in in the eyes of the *Parlement* until the family had decided to whom to offer the post, and see if he was prepared, besides paying the tax, to pay John an agreed sum as a way of recouping what Louis's parents had originally paid out. The post was eventually secured by a cousin of John's for 6000 livres, which was far less than had originally been paid. Young Canon De La Salle never imagined himself caught up in this kind of negotiation.

In his accounts under the heading: specific expenses for each of his wards, he has 150 entries that in some cases might cover several items bought on the same occasion. Since he himself was not a ward, we unfortunately do not know what he spent on himself and that would give us some idea of how he lived. For Rose-Marie, whom the family called Rosette, we have an entry as early as April: a sheath for her knife and thread. Although by entering the convent in May Rose-Marie forfeited her civil status, John provided for her in the form of a twice yearly payment. But he also met many a need of hers. He must have often met her in the convent parlour, or she might send him a note through some relative. In July 1672 John sent her gooseberries and two pots for jam and sugar. In 1673 he paid a sum to his aunt Marie to buy Rose sugar, oranges and orange peel, and a box and two punnets to put them in. This was

for a New Year present she wanted to make to the community. Other purchases included a piece of fustian to make herself a bed; at her request John bought books for her; once she bought a writing-desk and John paid for it. Another time, it was a pair of warm stockings for winter and an iron bed-warmer - a useful gift in those days. Finally, he provided her with a small annual income as pocket money from an investment of 30 livres.

As for Marie, understandably she had the lion's share in these detailed expenses, being a young lady of social graces and desiring to appear well in society. Expenses over the next four years included payments for a number of pairs of shoes, a trailing gown, some open lacework (guipure) for black taffeta, a black dress and payment for embroidering handkerchiefs.

Jacques-Joseph had been attending College since 1669. John now took over seeing to his expenses: textbooks and monthly college fees, shoes and shoe-mending (items that recur!). From 1675 when he was sixteen, John allowed him more pocket money at an age when he had to observe social etiquette and also show himself to advantage. We know, however, that he was thinking of joining the Canons Regular of St Augustine. The next year, when he had to sit for his final examination, there was quite an outlay on a new suit, on examination fees, for engraving and printing 200 copies of his 'thesis', 20 sols (one livre) for the college porter, and 3 sols to the tapestry-maker as Jacques-Joseph's share of the cost of having the College hall draped with tapestries for the occasion.

Jean-Louis was eight years old when his father died. He went to the Bons-Enfants in 1672, six months after his elder brother had taken legal charge of him. His expenses were similar to Jacques-Joseph's during his first years at College. Pierre was only six; there is mention of a child's 'bonnet' or woollen hat for him, and of a hat, shoes, stockings; from October 1675 the usual items show for his attendance at College. For Jean-Remy, only sundry small needs are noted.

An example of legal proceedings against a neighbour

Here is one example of John getting involved in a dispute with neighbours. It was about roof damage. In 1675 he had invested family money in buying a house further along the Rue Marguerite, occupied by a certain Menesson, a master-cooper, and his family. This Nicholas Menesson had been a tenant in this house under the previous owner for eighteen years with his wife, and now he had two daughters, one aged 17 and the other 15. De La Salle continued the tenancy in return for the usual rent. In the other half of the house lived a Madame Jobart, with a part-wall between the two. On the other side was the corner house belonging to Andrew Malot, a master-cooper and vinegar-maker. The house owned half-and-half by De La Salle and Madame

Jobart had two gable-ends facing the street, and the rain from their roofs ran into the common runnel between them and had always emptied itself into Malot's yard, sited at the back of their two houses. Drainage being what it was in those days, this was part of life. But in December 1676 the rain-water began to empty into Madame Jobart's yard. Someone, without consultation, had tampered with the runnel. Mme Jobart drew De La Salle's attention to it, and together they asked the bailiff of Rheims to hold a judicial review against a neighbour. This was held on 13 February 1677.¹⁷

The four Menessons were called as witnesses. Questioned separately, they all declared that water had always flowed into Malot's yard, and that two months back he had climbed on to the roof of De La Salle's house one day when his tenant Mr Menesson was out of town. Menesson's wife came back from shopping, heard a noise and went up to the loft, from where she saw Mr Malot sawing a piece of wood. When she challenged him he said: "I'm doing no harm. Besides, if I damage anything, I shall put it right." But tiles and laths were broken. The elder daughter testified that she had seen him earlier go up go the loft. He was there a long time and then came down and asked her 'to go and ask for nails at his house and tell his daughter to bring them.' The younger sister also was present and he asked them both, rather foolishly, not to tell anyone, especially Mme Jobart and Canon De La Salle. Of course, as soon as their mother returned from town they told her.

Two couples, one of them living in an adjoining house, were called. The husband in each case was a master-boiler, and both couples had shared the tenancy of Malot's house for 16 and 17 years respectively, and had given up the lease only in 1675. Both testified that in their time the water fell into Malot's yard. Finally Claude Lallement, a master-roofer, had worked at his trade for six months in Mme Jobart's house, and was quite definite that all that time the rain-water had fallen into Malot's yard. When Mme Jobart had first noticed the water falling into her yard she had called him in, and he found that the runnel had been diverted and had also been lowered by fifteen inches. Malot must have had enough of this water cascading into his yard. We have the minutes of the judicial review. Malot was condemned on 26 March 1677 "to repair the trouble caused by him to the plaintiffs" by removing the runnel in question to the same state in which it was before...to indemnify the plaintiffs and to pay costs.¹⁸

Handing over his guardianship

At the beginning of such detailed accounts, presented as a legal obligation before relinquishing his guardianship, John wrote: "The Trustee (i.e himself) having recognised that he had taken and accepted this guardianship while a minor and that it was very burdensome and that he could not attend to his

studies and his functions in church, found himself obliged to obtain letters royal in order to be relieved..." It shows how much Bourbon kings had been able to centralise the legal administration of the kingdom that John had to apply to the Lord High Chancellor, Keeper of the Great Seal of France, for a first authorisation to proceed. His reference to his minority must mean that he felt his total inexperience (his successor was a man of 61, versed in affairs). It was unusual for a minor to be a guardian. Civil law at the time forbade it, and ecclesiastical law forbade John as a cleric to engage in administration. However, customary law in Rheims always supported the father's choice of a guardian and in consideration of the purely family nature of the administration, a dispensation had been easily granted by the archbishop. But it did put a burden on a young man recalled from seminary life. His father, perhaps, should not have asked him. Still grieving over the death of his wife, aware that Jacques-Joseph and Jean-Louis were thinking of the priesthood, he may have felt deeply now that the eldest son would not be carrying on the family name. Making a decision which meant the end of John's studies at Saint Sulpice may have been a hint in that direction. Yet, knowing of the affection between his children, and counting on John's native abilities, it was perhaps for him the best choice he could make.

John communicated the letters royal to the procurator fiscal, who called his relatives to a meeting on 9 June 1676. Sixteen turned up, accepted John's arguments and nominated as his successor his great-uncle on his mother's side, Nicholas Lespagnol, Controller of the *Election* of Rheims, who would be sixty-one on the seventeenth of the same month. He refused the nomination, perhaps on account of age or of having his own properties to administer. But he was nonsuited by the others and obliged to accept. John thereupon went through the legal formality of summoning him to be present when he read out his account before the bailiff of the ducal archbishop of Rheims. He likewise summoned his sister Marie to the same audition. The legal order for him to render account was made out on 30 July, and he fulfilled his obligation on the first free day, which was not till 2 October.

In preparation for this day, the contents of the six ledgers were dictated to a clerk by the family attorney, based on John's careful accountancy over the four years. His day book, his journal, his cash book, his ledger and his investments ledger, on the basis of which the final statement was drawn up, have not come to light. Very likely he destroyed them at some time. He put all this together in rough, calling in the family attorney several times to help him arrange matters. When the clerk had finished the final write-up, John read it through, making marginal notes or additions to the text, and checking and re-checking the totals in the margin. Yet Brother Aroz has detected 73 errors in calculation! Arithmetic, which he had not been taught, was not, it seems,

John's strong point. But neither must it have been of those who checked and accepted this statement.

Besides the permanent gain in administrative skills and shrewdness in drawing up future contracts concerning schools, what a wealth of experiences, good and bad, his trusteeship must have brought him in terms of relationships with other people! He was also learning to find God in absorbing activities. One of De La Salle's key thoughts, which he handed on to his community was: "Do not discriminate between the duties special to your profession and those which refer to your salvation and perfection. Be convinced that you will never effect your salvation more assuredly, nor acquire greater perfection than by fulfilling well the duties of your state, provided you do so with the view of doing God's will."¹⁹

CANON DE LA SALLE ENSURES THE PERMANENCE OF ROLAND'S WORK

If we look back at the various strands in De La Salle's life during the period 1672 to near the middle of 1676, those years will appear to be emotionally charged, very busy and very formative for the young canon, whose life had been sheltered so far. Thereafter the drawing up of his accounts kept him busy till October. He had to interrupt them to see to all that concerned Jacques-Joseph's qualifying for the *Maître-ès-Arts* that July and to attend the ceremony. Soon after he had to think of the preparations and farewell parties for his brother's departure in October for Paris. This meant another wrench, another emptiness in the house left to him and his two remaining brothers. After October, he could look forward to a quieter time of study and preparation for the priesthood, but in fact it made him free to take up a very important task, quite significant for the main work God was to call him to shortly after. This is how it came about.

Canon Roland seeks letters patent for his community

Early in 1677 an important legacy was left to the Sisters of the Holy Child Jesus of Rheims, as Roland's community now called itself, for their orphanage. The Charity Board contested it on the grounds that the community, being without letters patent, did not exist legally and so could not receive the legacy. It should therefore come to the Board. The matter was brought to court, and the judge of the case, an official of the archbishop as feudal lord, adjudicated half of the legacy to each contestant. This was quite unjust, but it would not have happened if the Sisters had had legal status. Clearly, to avoid future losses of this kind, letters patent must be obtained. Yet the possibility had to be faced that in the enquiry that had to be made, the Charity Board and the Council might claim that there were enough hospices and religious communi-

ties in the town already. Roland and the Sisters therefore agreed that if the work had to close down, sums and legacies made out on behalf of the orphanage and its schools would go to the City Council, but that any given to the Sisters as a community to support themselves should go to the Foreign Missions in Paris - a pointer to the evangelizing nature of Roland's work. Remy Favreau was a partner to this agreement. He had come out unfairly in the incident of De La Salle's canonry. He was, in fact, very committed to renewal in the Church, and he appreciated what Roland was doing. So much so that he generously sold several properties he held in and out of Rheims and gave the proceeds to the new community. This was in order to provide the financial security which would have to be proved in order to obtain letters patent. He made the stipulation that if legal status were not accorded and the Sisters were not allowed to continue in Rheims, the money he had given should be used by them to start schools elsewhere; and if the new Institute disappeared, then the money should go to the Foreign Missions.

The long-drawn-out negotiations were to wear Roland out. On 3 March the first contacts were made at court in virtue of obtaining the *lettres de cachet* that would command the king's procurator in Rheims, the mayor and council, the parish priests of Rheims and the superiors of religious houses to meet in the presence of the lieutenant-general of the city. After discussion, they were to draw up a statement as to the advisability or otherwise of giving legal foundation to the community of the Sisters of the Holy Child Jesus. Nothing happened. At the end of November Roland went to Paris himself, hoping to get support from the Chancellery. He was months there. Several letters he wrote back to Rheims for support remained unanswered. The Corporation just stalled.

Canon De La Salle a Licentiate. He is ordained priest

During this time, at the end of 1677, Canon De La Salle sustained his examination for the Licentiate in Theology. He had to defend two theses publicly before three doctors. Their verdict, which had to be unanimous this time, depended on part on whether the audience, which had the right to join in argument with him, responded with enthusiasm or boredom to the orator. John received a unanimous verdict. At the beginning of January 1678, an invitation was addressed to the cathedral Chapter, to the *présidial*, to the Corporation and other bodies, to attend the ceremony of conferring the Licentiate, which would take place on 26 January at one o'clock in the afternoon in Saint Patrick's Hall. Previous to this, De La Salle made a ten days' retreat under the direction of the superior of the major seminary, Jacques Callou, who was looked upon as "incomparable." The other four students who had begun the course with De La Salle two years before had all passed.

The ceremony in the college hall consisted of their being praised in Latin in a three-part speech made by the professor of philosophy. The Chancellor then announced the date on which the doctors of the faculty would meet to grade definitively the five candidates. Secret ballots were placed in an urn that had three locks. It was opened by the Chancellor, the Dean and the Syndic, each opening a lock in the presence of two doctors and then counting the votes. Customarily the results were not promulgated till Shrove Tuesday, which fell that year on 23 February. We do not know how De La Salle was placed, but it appears he was not the first. He had very intelligent competitors, and he also had had demands on his time the others did not have. All of them had now the right to teach theology.

John, on the whole, had been free of his time since the end of December to give more prayer and thought to his coming ordination. On Holy Saturday, 9 April 1678, when he was not quite twenty-seven, he was ordained priest in the cathedral by Archbishop Le Tellier. The next day he said his first Mass with his immediate relatives present in a side-chapel of the cathedral. Tradition has it that this was the Lady chapel. As it was Easter Sunday, with High Mass and other masses going on all morning, it had to be a restrained celebration, something he would have preferred in order to concentrate better on the sacred action. This was the day he had prepared for ever since a first call he had experienced in childhood and that so many had helped him to appreciate. He was forever a model priest, ready to serve the Church in its renewal. Yet he was not clear, as we have seen, how his priestly life should be employed. He was waiting, open to the future, with the assumption it would be within his bourgeois circle. In that openness, the Holy Spirit began to work through new contacts and ordinary events. John was not ordained a fortnight when the Spirit's lead, still unrecognised by John, began.

Canon De La Salle becomes Roland's executor

Still in Paris, Roland had by March gained the assurance that the desired lettres de cachet would be despatched to Rheims. He accordingly wrote to notify the authorities there. Attitudes were divided, and the mayor held a meeting of the Council on 7 March to consider the matter. It delegated four of its members to form a committee - another way of postponing a decision - and bring the matter to a conclusion. A month passed and nothing happened. Roland wrote to his aunt 'Councillor' Roland (so called because her husband was a Councillor): "The whole intention of these gentlemen (of the Council) and even of the reverend Precentor, is nothing else than to let things drag." He returned to Rheims on Maundy Thursday, 7 April, two days before De La Salle's ordination, and handed a memorandum to this committee. Several of his community had been struck down in an epidemic of purples, and he cared

for them day and night. On 19th the Council agreed to wait for the arrival of the lettres de cachet - in other words, they stalled again. But Roland was worn out. He fell ill the same day and after a few days more, realising he would not recover, he sent for De La Salle and another close friend of his, the deacon Nicholas Rogier, and asked them to be his executors with regard to his work. He made out his will on 24th and entrusted to his young friend a lengthy memorandum setting out his intentions. It could have included a copy of the constitutions he had drawn up for the Sisters. Roland died on Wednesday 27 April, aged only 35. He had burnt himself out in the service of the Church and of the poor. He died without seeing his work established, yet serene in the sure faith that his friend Canon De La Salle fully agreed with his ideas and had the influence and ability to obtain the survival of his foundation. As for John, he had lost a friend and counsellor.

Archbishop Le Tellier, on hearing of Roland's death and of these arrangements, requested of his executors a copy of his will "so that I may know what he prescribed concerning the community he wanted to found and establish in Rheims under my authority." He had been made aware of Roland's plans long before De La Salle and Rogier and intended to keep the matter in his hands. He made Rogier the Chapter theologian in place of Roland, and confirmed that De La Salle should be the one to negotiate with the Town Council. He then notified the royal court that he was in favour of the work. Being the brother of Louvois, he had within the week the lettres de cachet, dated 9 May. He handed them to Mayor Coquebert in person on 23rd. There was a general agreement in the Council. Their committee of four applied to the archbishop to see the constitutions Roland had given him. They objected to the disposition the late canon and Favreau had made that in the event of the work failing, certain invested capital sums should benefit bodies or places outside Rheims. That was the sticking-point.

De La Salle now approached Favreau and also Roland's mother and the other benefactors who had provided the initial founding capital and suggested they make the necessary changes as to the destination of these sums. Half would go to whoever took over the orphans (presumably the Charity Board) and half to charities in Rheims as determined by the archbishop. Since the purpose of the change was to facilitate the granting of letters patent, which seemed assured now it had Le Tellier's backing, it was merely a paper change, but it pleased everybody and cleared the atmosphere. It was agreed to by the benefactors, who must have noted De La Salle's shrewdness, and was given legal form on 28 May.

But the Council was still in no hurry, and on 19 July Le Tellier wrote from Paris expressing his annoyance. It sent him a delegation to settle matters. Meanwhile De La Salle and Rogier agreed with the Council on the conditions

for establishing the new Institute. The deputation came back from Paris on August 8th, which taking into account communications and travelling times, shows diligence at last. It brought the constitutions of the new congregation signed by Le Tellier. The decisive meeting between the committee and the executors was held under the chairmanship of John Béguin, the King's lieutenant of the bailiwick, on 11 August 1678. De La Salle and Rogier pointed out, among other things, that one thousand girls were being catered for in the four schools; that the number of Sisters to look after these and the orphans would be between twenty and thirty; and that they were catering for orphans between the ages of three and eight, the numbers being limited to thirty. The decision of the committee was in favour. They recognised that a real service was being rendered the city by the "Community of lay sisters under the name of the Holy Child Jesus, to instruct (in religion, that is) poor girls, to bring them up in the fear of God, and to teach them reading and writing." What counted most with them was that order was being brought into the populace and that it was costing the city nothing.

The next day John had to meet the parish priests and the religious superiors of the town under the chairmanship of the mayor, to hear their views. He read out the points agreed to by the Council's committee, but, very shrewdly, introduced an addition. The day before, he had mentioned the upper and lower age limit of the orphans, but not that of the school children. He knew that the Council thought in terms of nine as the upper limit in their case, expecting them to be put to work after that and ready to see idleness in those who stayed on longer. But Roland had had a 'missionary' view, wanting his community to be free to keep the girls longer and even to take into the community house older girls and even women, to teach them "reading and writing, catechism, piety and good morals." It was this whole picture that De La Salle gave and wanted approved by his audience, and he succeeded.

His work was not yet finished. He had now to work out with the Charity Board the dividing line between what would be seen as its responsibility and what that of the Sisters. 1.Orphans under three years old would remain the responsibility of the General Hospital; 2.From 3 to 8 years old, the Sisters would take in as many as room allowed (in fact, up to 30); 3. In their eighth year the orphans would be taken care of in the General Hospice or in some suitable institution; 4.Whatever was collected for the orphans belonged to the Community, not to the Board. If the Community withdrew, half the funds would go to charitable works indicated by the archbishop and half to those who took over the care of the thirty orphans. The net result was that De La Salle and Rogier, championing the Sisters' cause and the role of the archbishop, had moved their orphanage and schools out of the control of the Charity Board and even of the City Council, and more in the direction of the

archbishop as general protector in case of conflict. John had learnt something about bureaucracy and love of power and narrow views. He could see that Roland's work of religious instruction of children and of reaching out to the lapsed was a work of renewal of the Church, and that it came under the archbishop. The experience helped him for the future.

Le Tellier was now approached to obtain the long-delayed letters patent. He had no difficulty. They arrived in February and were registered by the *Parlement* at his expense on 17 February 1679. The archbishop handed them to Canon De La Salle, who gave them to the Sisters' Superior, Françoise Duval. His immediate task as Roland's executor had succeeded. In the memoir on the life of Canon Roland written by his aunt (a Beuvelet), wife of the Councillor Gerard Roland, she says: "This community owes its origins to Canon Roland, it owes its progress to the painstaking efforts of Canon De La Salle, and its stability to Mgr Le Tellier." The Sisters now chose their ecclesiastical superior and had him approved by the archbishop. He was William Rogier, Nicholas's brother, and at 35 of the minimum age required by the Sisters' Constitutions to accept the office. He gave up for this his parish in Mouzon, about sixty miles to the northeast. De La Salle remained a friend and welcome counsellor to the Sisters, and often stood in for Rogier. He had rendered brilliantly a tremendous service to Roland's Congregation. All the experience of his trusteeship came to fruit. And again he learnt much about people.

Take, for instance, the meeting he had had six months earlier with the parish priests and superiors of religious communities. It had taught him something about how far these people could be counted on when it came to coming to a decision. With his natural perspicacity he had quickly noted the reactions of each. The Rector of the Jesuit College was ill at the time, but he went on 22 August to assure the mayor of his support. John was able to see that his theology professors, his colleagues on the Chapter and most parish priests and the various priors for the most part did not have schools for the poor anywhere in their sights. But he noted understanding on the part of Claude Bretagne, prior of Saint Remi. Among the parish priests, four were positive, yet he noted one that wasn't liked by his ecclesiastical superiors and therefore would not get far with them when authorisations were needed. Another was a nephew of the bishop's official and would easily comply with his views. Another was a good man but not likely to stand up to anybody. And finally there was Nicholas Dorigny, parish priest of St Maurice's, who both favoured the poor of his parish and knew how to defend his rights. Only a month after letters patent were granted, John's insight was to prove useful.

Temporal administrator for the Sisters' community

John's work for the Sisters of the Holy Child Jesus was not over. For two and a half years, from Roland's death to August 1680, he looked after the temporal administration of their community as his executor. All the laborious work he had done for his own family now stood him in good stead. For instance, two of the Sisters had had a legal guardian prior to entry. On their entry, their guardian had made out a statement of accounts similar to John's own. John checked and approved it. A longer task was to draw up the inventory of all the houses, lands, or funds given or bequeathed to the Community, and of the revenues due from leasing out or investing them. It was necessary in order to prove to the Council that the Sister's work was financially secure. As Roland had died before being able to see to this task, De La Salle now drew up and signed this inventory. He worked on this till 31 October 1679, when he himself was beginning to be caught up in the work of schools for the poor. It meant going through all the relevant papers and bills, working out the current interest and arrears due and investing liquid moneys. The result makes a book of ten pages, 34½ by 27½ centimetres, neatly and regularly written by De La Salle himself, with figures indicating capital sums and the interest written in the margin. It is now in the Archives of the city of Rheims. John, used to it now, invested the major part of Roland's liquid assets and used some of the remainder to buy a house for the Sisters. He renewed the lease on another of their houses and sold them one of his own pieces of farm land.

We have another autograph document of his arising out of his accountancy for the Sisters. In August 1679 he drew up a statement of the goods belonging to the Sisters and of their income. It consists of two pages neatly written in small, precise handwriting.

For several years Canon De La Salle said Mass in the Sisters' chapel. They put out for him Roland's vestments: they are still kept in their house in Rheims, a double reminder of two Founders. Nicholas Roland was declared a Blessed by the Catholic Church on 16 October 1994.

Canon De La Salle and Roland's spiritual legacy

In going through his friend's writings, De La Salle experienced for himself the value of his teachings, many of which, though modified and added to, he passed on to his Brothers. Canon Roland left behind quite a variety of material. There was the list of main regulations followed by the Sisters and which De La Salle had to read and sign and, as executor, see they were being observed. Roland's community, these regulations say, is a secular Institute, meaning in those days that it was not a 'regular' community, cloistered and with solemn vows - the only form of life qualified as 'religious' in the Canon Law of the time. It was composed of people living in community yet 'in the world'.

Besides a copy of the daily regulations, Canon De La Salle was given a copy of the Constitutions as drawn up about 1678. They were not approved by Le Tellier till 1683, and he could have modified them. De La Salle at the time was already living with a group of poor schoolmasters. He would have studied these Constitutions to see what help they could give him. In fact, he did not accept nor adapt them: his work demanded its own spirit and guidelines. But he must have known Roland's mind well enough to recognise changes in the original Constitutions he was acquainted with that did not represent Roland's mind. He never sought approval from Le Tellier or any other bishop for the rule of his community. He never used any terminology that might indicate that here was a religious community in the sense that it would require the bishop to appoint an ecclesiastical superior over it and examine its rules. He saw in Roland's case that his new creation became a diocesan institution, whereas he saw his own work as a work meeting a need for the Church over a wider field.

The Sisters of the Holy Child Jesus of Rheims first took religious vows on 8 February 1684. Thirteen Sisters signed, but not their Superior, Françoise Duval. She may, like Fr Barré, have been opposed to vows. On 11 March she revoked the donation she had made to the community on 27 December 1681 of the "four hundred and fourteen livres eight sols" she had inherited from her father. Some time after she left to help the foundation of the Sisters of Providence of Lisieux. After two years she returned to Sotteville to teach the poor. She died there. She was a very holy woman who kept perpetual abstinence. She seems to have had difficult relations with her Rheims community, who once tried to send her away. She had possibly come on the understanding that this was to be a new community of Barré's Congregation. She is nevertheless listed as the first of their Superior Generals, with the dates: 1670 to 1684.

Marie De La Salle's wedding

Once he was clear of the task of helping to secure the grant of letters patent to Roland's Sisters, Canon De La Salle intended to go forward to his doctorate in theology, which required certain formalities but no further course of study. He could have applied as early as mid-1678 immediately after his ordination, but for this new responsibility to his late friend. He intended after the doctorate to take on again the family trusteeship. In the meantime he had the joy of assisting at his sister's wedding.²⁰ On 20 March this year, Marie De La Salle, aged twenty-five, married John Maillefer, who was twenty-seven. It was a socially desirable match, but in fact, as John was to relate later, they had fallen in love with each other. John lived till 1718 and so was almost a contemporary of his brother-in-law, John Baptist De La Salle, of whom he was already a distant cousin by marriage. Canon De La Salle, of course, was

present at the wedding and signed as witness with three others. It is strange to us that although he was ordained and a canon, and the bride's brother, he did not or was not allowed to preside at the wedding. At the dinner which followed, there were only four dishes "because of Lent."

It was probably after this that Jean-Remy was sent back to his own home to rejoin his three brothers. He was not yet nine; he was probably often back in his grandmother's house or at his sister's. Marie and John had set up home at no. 40, Rue de l'Université, 'at the sign of the Silver Eagle.' Of the ten children of her marriage, five boys and five girls, four died young and another died at birth. Of the three surviving boys, two became monks at St Remi's, and the other became a canon of St Symphorian's and a doctor in theology. Marie was a beautiful and accomplished woman, always cheerful and encouraging. She wore only woollen clothes instead of the silks and velvets her class often wore; she was skilled and active with her hands. She followed up the boys' studies, spending a long time in the evenings making them recite their lessons. She taught the eldest Greek. She was a model wife: she showed love and gentleness and shared all her husband's projects and worries. We have all these details from her husband, for when she died on 23 March 1711 he was crushed by her death. He struggled with his loss and with his faith for four months, and eased his pain by writing down his memories of her. This John Maillefer was a wholesale trader in finished cloths, an indefatigable traveller who became judge and alderman of his native city, among other posts of public service. He loved his children, yet he let them follow their call to the religious life. A daughter entered St Peter's convent but later left and married in 1714. The other surviving daughter remained a spinster.

Marie's first child was born on 6 December 1679. Her brother John would certainly be round to celebrate, but the child did not live. Her surviving eldest is the third John (Jean-François) Maillefer in our story, the one whom she taught Latin and Greek. She was hoping he might become a priest, which he did, and later became rector of the University. He was deeply spiritual and cared for the poor, but in 1715 he refused to accept the Bull Unigenitus and was excluded from Faculty meetings by lettres de cachet in 1723 and died that same year. François-Hélye was born in 1684, joined the Benedictines at Meaux in 1702, and in 1723 was sent back to Rheims, where he stayed till his death in 1761. He was a great scholar, and because of his fine voice he led the monks in choir for several years. He was appointed librarian and in 1723 wrote, as we have seen, a life of his uncle, John Baptist De La Salle, which was never published. He wrote a modified version in 1740. The first manuscript seems to have been lost, although there is a copy of it; the second escaped the fire of 1774 which destroyed most of the library. His account is "sober, objective, without padding, easy to read", yet he modified certain of

the memoirs given him to suit his Jansenist views, as he admitted himself: "I made it a duty to suppress certain secret intrigues where personal interest had slipped in, in order to spare the reputation of several persons of merit (he means Jansenists) who, for reasons one has not wanted to go into, caused pain to M. De La Salle."²¹

DE LA SALLE: THE MAN AND HIS MAKE-UP

Between the granting of letters patent to Roland's Sisters and the first in a series of events that were to change his life, John Baptist De La Salle was not quite twenty-eight. Perhaps it is a suitable moment to try to picture what kind of man he was.

Canon Blain warns us at the beginning of his biography²² that we have little direct written material to go on about La Salle's personality. His spiritual directors who may have felt free after his death to speak of his virtue had all died before him: Barré, Callou, Tronson, Roland, Baüyn, Baudrand,... We have nothing from his own hand "about how he made mental prayer, nor in his communications with God, nor on the gifts of grace he received." Nor, we have to add, on the crises he went through and how he surmounted them. "It is not known that he made the least self-revelation to others." Though, in fact, one or two have come down to us. It is risky, then, to write on what kind of person he actually was; it is easy to fit him into a preconceived hagiographical or psychological pattern.

The memoirs the Brothers wrote on him after his death must reflect the man as they saw him towards the end of his life as a revered and loved Founder, and it is not easy to see what he was at twenty-eight on the brink of his great change. We have to make do with statements, some of which cover his whole lifetime.

A physical and psychological portrait

From his early biographers we get a brief physical portrait of De La Salle, and an attempt to describe his qualities of mind and heart.²³ In build he was of a slightly above average height, well-proportioned with a slim waist. He had curly chestnut hair above a broad forehead and large, lively blue eyes; his hair turned grey over the years, adding a venerable aspect to his appearance. His nose was large and fine without being aquiline. It was a lively face, in colour somewhat ruddy, later tanned by his many journeys. His voice was always firm and distinct. He was courteous, well-spoken, warm-hearted and generous. It was this aspect of his character that people seem to have remembered most. His nephew, Dom Hélye Maillefer, writes: "He had a certain unassuming air. His kindness and concern for people was tender and supportive. His

conversation was pleasant and polite. He was cheerful, sociable and of a behaviour that offended no one." With his handsome, open features and his care to be neat about his person, he presented well.

We are less definite about his mental make-up and his gifts of personality. Judging by his position among his fellow-students at College, and by the firm clarity of his writings, he had an intelligence above the average. He once dropped the remark that he had only to hear a person say half a dozen words for him to know what kind of person he was. He was quick and keen in thought, open to new ideas from others. His perceptiveness helped him later, when he had crossed the great urban social divide, to see how the mass of its poorer dwellers was deprived of civic rights and powerless, and where the remedies lay.

He had a mind of his own. Maillefer says "he was by nature firm and fearless, made up his mind with reflection and held to it when he believed it was in accordance with the will of God; always ready to undertake the most difficult things for his glory." "He was by nature gentle and firm," says Blain, "lively and active without rushing things, and he was not one to give way in a cowardly fashion." In discussion he was self-assured, and did not yield in argument if he was sure of his reasons and no good counter-argument had been made. With the utmost courtesy he would come back to have his views accepted. Some called him stubborn.

Some spoke of him as having been delicate in childhood, but he had, in fact, a considerable stamina as shown by his ability to make long journeys on foot, his mortifications and the vast amount of work he undertook for his Institute. The observation reflects perhaps in him a great emotional sensitivity. He may have been a sanguine type, quickly caught up by the prospect of some worthwhile undertaking. He warmed to a challenge that called on his gifts of organisation and willingness to undertake independent action if need be. And conversely, failure or delay depressed and discouraged him. Because he was very perceptive of people's attitudes and reactions, he would be very aware of and sensitive to good and bad opinion, and because he was very loving of his family he felt very much the opposition and criticisms that were levelled against him on the occasion of his great decisions. He certainly in those occurrences was in "indetermination" and "perplexity",²⁴ but once his mind was made up, he stuck to it. Through seeking counsel, not in order to evade a decision but to be confirmed in where God's will lay, through prayer and total docility to the Holy Spirit, decision-making meant steps forward in his faith-journey and in the work to which he was called.

In similar fashion he also set to work on his own limitations. He had to struggle like the rest of us to keep his emotions balanced and his reactions under control. He did so to the point that he reached a serenity that people

took to be part of his nature. But it seems he felt failures and betrayals deeply, as well as his Brothers' inability often to share fully his understanding of what this work of God entailed. A quality the Brothers of Rouen singled out in their statement of 1723 was his compassion. His natural affability and his caring for his brothers and sisters developed under grace into a great love for the poor and a practical and life-long determination to meet their needs. But this is looking beyond 1679.

Indications of his spiritual growth after his return from Saint Sulpice

At this point in the story Brother Bernard and after him Canon Blain try to give us some idea of Canon De La Salle's spiritual progress. They have some facts for the period, and Blain is able to quote from relatives.²⁵ After his stay at Saint Sulpice his adoption of the ideals advocated by the reforming group inevitably made his attitudes and life-style something of a contrast with the traditional Catholicism of the bourgeoisie. We have seen that the young John De La Salle was very particular how he dressed. "Some people found something to say about his fastidiousness; and one of them went so far as to tell him that society considered him as a man who went too far in dress and who seemed very full of himself. Our virtuous canon profited so well from this little criticism that he began from that time onwards to neglect his appearance, without however letting anything in himself appear unseemly. Subsequently he let it be seen how little he was attached to being finely and too correctly dressed since he was seen to wear the same kind of clothes as those of the Brothers of his institute and shoes of the roughest make, like those of peasants and carters."²⁶

We have noted that he was a heavy sleeper and not used to being told when to get up nor to keeping too regular hours. He learnt at Saint- Sulpice the value of order in one's life as a requisite for allowing time for serious prayer and for more effective pastoral work. "Quite young as he was then," writes Blain, "he began to look upon sleep as an obstacle to his perfection."²⁷ "What shall we say," Brother Bernard says, "about what he did to overcome sleep, which he himself admitted was his greatest enemy because it was the reason why he was not in time for Matins, for he had to be awakened several times, but in vain; for he always fell asleep again against his will, a thing that distressed him."²⁸ "And so," adds Blain, "he ordered his manservant to come every day to wake him up at the time indicated, and to oblige him by continual insistence to open his eyes and to win over himself the first victory of the day." Brother Bernard adds that "he had to fight to the death this enemy which is however so necessary for nature to restore the strength which it has lost during the day. And the efforts he took to fight it were not useless for him, since later on he many a time spent the entire night seeing to the affairs of his

Institute or in composing books.” This first victory led on to another: keeping himself awake during what was now his time for daily morning meditation, when drowsiness overtook him and closed his eyes. He took strong means: “When he wanted to prevent himself falling asleep during his mental prayer he used to put a pebble on the prie-dieu he was kneeling at, placed in such a way that when he fell asleep his chin fell on this pebble, causing him a sharp pain.”²⁹

De La Salle gained such an appreciation of the value of an orderly life that it was cited later as one of his characteristics. This is not the same thing as a time-table mentality, a conformity for its own sake. He saw for himself, and then acutely for his first schoolmasters and for progress in school that external order is a necessity in order to be free to be creative. Building his day around punctual attendance at the divine Office in the cathedral, he gave himself definite times for meals, and for spiritual reading. He would certainly need order to deal with his trusteeship obligations. He seems to have left himself reasonable time for socialising, for it was only later that friends reproached him with not being available.

Setting up a time-table in his house meant that his younger brothers would have to fall in line. Since they had to go to college, they may well have appreciated this. In any case, John as their guardian saw it as an improvement in their lives. He even had some spiritual book read at meals- one supposes only for part of the meal. The exact impact of that may fail us, but this kind of time-table was normal in institutions - seminaries, hospitals, hospices - and many devout persons would accept this way of life. Books were less at hand than now. Blain, moreover, tells us that with his winning ways and affection for his brothers, they had no difficulty in accepting the change. With musical instruments in the house and a garden for recreation, and with John’s sociable character, order did not have to be synonymous with day-long regimentation. The biographer makes no mention of what was likely, namely, that the brothers played music and sang together, and took part in other pastimes, and that they would often be joined by their friends.

The bourgeoisie might complain about and disdain the poor, yet the medieval respect for the poor as the suffering members of society and images of Christ in his poverty had not been entirely lost and had been revived by figures like St Vincent de Paul. Brother Bernard³⁰ records De La Salle’s new charity to “assist the poor, to give them alms and to visit them...He let slip no occasion of doing good to the members of (this) amiable Saviour, without being put off by the inconvenience he might meet with. This appeared particularly when he went to see a sick person who upset her broth over his surplice, which did not at all annoy him; he went back home in that state.” Blain adds³¹ that the poor “either are in his house or he goes to theirs. He

speaks to them of God, he instructs them, prepares them for the Sacraments, counsels patience..." This is still very different from what he had later such a strong aversion to: actually living with poor schoolmasters. The carriage entrance of his house in the Rue Sainte-Marguerite led into the courtyard round which the hotel was built; he may have assembled some poor there. But this was already a considerable change of attitude.

When these changes in his ways got about, they were enough to stick in the throats of his peers in society. They began to hit back at what they felt as a comment on their own behaviour by criticising him. He was not showing the sense of importance proper to a canon of Rheims; he was not spending money as he should to appear well in society; his door was not open quite so freely to the right sort of people, and he was seen to feed beggars and take them into his house rather than turn them away. "If he does not want to have dealings with society, why does he stay in it?"³² Now that he was no longer affected in dress, they found things to say about every item of it: his coat, his hat, his collar. But he had made up his mind to keep to this new way of life, and he held his ground with the stubbornness of a Champenois, and with his usual charm and civility.

Perhaps about this time, encouraged by Canon Roland who used them, he began forms of corporal mortification recommended for many centuries as a form of generosity in taking oneself in hand, and of which more needs to be said later. He certainly took them up when he felt his call to a new vocation and was determined to take his bourgeois second nature in hand as well as his personal failings. To these he added fasting. During the last three days of Holy Week, in accordance with the early Christian practice, he "attempted several times", as Bernard tells us, "to eat nothing at all from Maundy Thursday till Easter Sunday, contenting himself with a single bowl of soup a day; and he began to take food again only on the Sunday evening. But this kind of penance weakened his stomach so much that he was constrained to reject his food as soon as he had eaten it, so that whoever would have wished to follow him in the streets when he went to church, would have no great trouble, for the way he took was marked enough by his continual vomiting."³³

References

1. Maillefer, CL6, 20-28; Blain I, 126-147; Poutet I, 356-378.
2. Aroz, CL26, 222; CL41(1), 154.
3. Aroz, CL26, 205; CL41(1), 165-8.
4. Aroz, CL26, 191-204; CL41(1), 158-64.
5. CL28, LXI; CL26, 198.

6. Poutet I, 535-622; Aroz, CL:39; Rigault I, 107-71.
 7. Poutet II, 353-372.
 8. *Le Créateur de l'Ecole populaire*, Fr Mélage, Ecole Saint-Luc, Tournai, xxx-xxxi.
 9. Poutet I, 127.
 10. Poutet I, 127, n.106, quoting Maillefer's Memoirs, 120.
 11. An observation taken from Michel Sauvage's paper: *Tricentenaire de Nicolas Roland, 1678-1978*.
 12. Maillefer, CL6, 22-24, 26; Blain I, 234-6; Poutet I, 370-372; Aroz, CL26, 245-259.
 13. Rigault I, 116.
 14. The dates are from Bro. Yves Poutet's letter to the author, May 20th 1988.
 15. Blain I, 136.
 16. CL28, 29, 30, 31, ed. Aroz. These numbers of *Cahiers Lasalliens* give every page of La Salle's accounts in facsimile, the same text in print and a modern French version, accompanied by notes. There is a lengthy introduction.
 17. The proceedings are reproduced in full by Aroz in CL32, 144-149.
 18. Aroz, CL52.
 19. In his *Collection of Short Treatises*. Borrowed from the Jesuit Julien Hayneufve See CL16, 58.
 20. Poutet, I, 27.
 21. CL6, 15.
 22. Blain I, 112.
 23. Maillefer, CL6, 258/259; Blain II, 177.
 - 24.. Blain I, e.g. 171, 176, 182, 188-9, 195-6.
 25. e.g. Blain I, 228.
 26. Brother Bernard, CL4, 19.
 27. Blain I, 144 fin - 145.
 28. Bernard, CL4, 20.
 29. Blain I, 144.
 30. Bernard, CL4, 0.
 31. Blain I, 145.
 32. Blain I, 145.
 33. Bernard, CL4, 20-21; Blain I, 145.
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Chapter 5: The inspiration from Rouen. Initiatives for poor schools elsewhere

SCHOOLS FOR THE POOR IN ROUEN

Rouen holds a vital place in our story.¹ Canon Roland's Institute in Rheims was almost an offshoot or in many ways a reproduction of the work of Father Nicholas Barré, in Rouen, and his various visits there made him aware of a fairly complex development of care for children of the poor. In the story of that development figures a Mr Adrian Nyel, who for 22 years devoted himself without stint to the education of poor boys in the town. On a visit to Rheims in 1679 he would have a chance encounter with Canon De La Salle that started the chain of events leading to the latter's conversion to the education of the poor. In two crucial moments of that decision-making period Fr Barré was to have an important affirming role. Finally, nearly thirty years later De La Salle's Brothers were to come to Rouen and carry education of the poor there much further.

This city had a long tradition of help for the poor, but we have to see the spirit and conditions in which it was administered. A Poor Board was set up in 1521 by the Parlement of Normandy to look after the needy. Its members came from that body and the town council. Its Presidents were the Archbishop of Rouen and the President of the Parlement. In 1555, the Board used a legacy to set up four charity schools 'at the four points of the compass', run by priests who would be lodged at the General Hospice and would teach the children mainly their religion but also reading and writing. The priests had in mind to train helpers at high mass, weddings, funerals and the like. The Board's problem was to keep them off the streets. In a time of general illiteracy and when books were still rare, the development of the children in itself was not much considered. Schooling, such as it was, was intended to be a preparation to avoid idleness and learn to be honest workmen. This would be to the advantage of the bourgeoisie and for the benefit of law and order, the children remaining in their state of life. Here we have the established clerical and bourgeois attitudes as to what instruction the poor should receive and who should give it that De La Salle and his Brothers were to replace gradually.

Ever since the first legacy to the Board in 1555, donations and legacies were never wanting. The unsolved problem was the recruitment of suitable teachers. Clerics saw teaching the 'rudiments' as a waste of time compared with the priestly functions. Laymen were called in, but not having Mass stipends, nor higher wages to compensate, and not being keen on living in com-

mon in the General Hospice, and having little knowledge of their faith, gradually the schools failed. After fifty years, several were restarted in 1645.

At this time his Grace Archbishop Harlay reissued, on 27 February 1641, episcopal statutes concerning the little schools and charity schools. For the latter it was decreed that “all the poor, orphans and other needy persons who have not the means to pay masters will go to the schools for the poor...and will be obliged to have a mark attached to their hat or stomach where there will be printed on a piece of parchment of four or five square inches: *Pauper of the town of Rouen*, with the name of the child over our seal or that of our subdelegate.”² Here again was the principle of segregation of the poor that De La Salle never countenanced, even against vested opposition and legal condemnation later in Paris. This stand and that of his Brothers and the character of their schools marks the foundation of popular education.

In 1654 a meeting of representatives of all the authorities concerned, under the President of the Normandy Parlement, decided that poor boys and girls from the age of eight should be taken into care by the General Hospice and taught their religion, reading and writing and practical skills. Two priests were appointed to teach religion in addition to a writing-master.

In line with a development of this period in the towns of Western Europe, the General Hospice had now become a poorhouse and workhouse. It took in the poor of all ages: the sickly, the deformed, the unemployed, and those beggars who by law had to be taken off the streets: young orphans, abandoned children, tramps. Six to seven hundred such paupers lived there in 1676, and it also gave relief to almost 1900 families.³ If conditions around 1700 in the General Hospice of Caen, which housed 500 to 600 poor, are comparable, the diet of mainly bread and peas could result in rickets and skeletal deformities, while the long hours of work the children were given meant their spinal columns were completely bent. Lack of vitamins made them vulnerable to scurvy and infection.⁴ In 1705 De La Salle, against his principles, had to allow his Brothers for a time to do a turn of duty morning, midday and evening, in the Rouen hospice-workhouse, in addition to a full day's school work.

It was influences from elsewhere than the Board that led gradually to the permanent establishment of charity schools in the town. One influence was the Company of the Blessed Sacrament, an organisation already noted in Chapter 3. It worked to displace Reformed schools by Catholic schools. Two mistresses ran a Reformed school in Rouen and were exempt, like all Protestant schools, from inspection by the Chancellor of the diocese. In 1647 they were forbidden to teach outside a Protestant place of worship. When another Reformed school was planned close to Rouen in 1653, the Company worked hard to prove it wasn't needed by helping the development of Catholic schools.

Every two weeks they met and gradually worked round obstacles or won over the right people. One of them gave money to the General Hospice. One or other in time became a resident administrator of the Hospice itself. They helped an orphanage and a hospice for girls out of their own pockets and obtained religious Sisters through their contacts in Dijon to come and run them.

Another organisation we need to know of is the AAs, the *Assemblées des Amis* or Meetings of Friends, the ultra-secret group of the most committed within the Jesuit Congregation of Mary. The Congregation began in Paris and attracted clerics and lay people striving to increase their devotion to Our Lady. Many of its members held official positions or were concerned with schools for the poor. Thus Peter Lambert de la Motte, who comes into the story now for quite a while, and was resident administrator at the General Hospice, and already a member of the Company of the Blessed Sacrament, had joined the Congregation of Mary and its AA in 1656. We can note already that when De La Salle sent Brothers to Rouen in 1704, it was to be at the invitation of the leader of the Company at the time, strongly backed by the President of the Parlement who was also in the Congregation. And the Congregation as a body contributed to the expenses of the school the Brothers opened in nearby Darnétal.

It is interesting to notice that while parish priests were beginning to be concerned about the education of their poor - a development of the Tridentine reforms - as we shall see, for instance, in Paris, there were also influential groups of committed laymen ready to give support. It was a climate that made De La Salle's communities of teachers opportune. Yet these bourgeois could be blind to the real interests of the poor and to the conditions they accepted in the general hospices now become workhouses. It needed someone who could listen to the poor, see the reality and meet their needs, even against traditional views.

The Peter Lambert de la Motte mentioned above was a remarkable person. He belonged to the Norman nobility and had an immense fortune. He had as his spiritual director the rector of the Jesuit College and communicated daily, which was something unusual. He was an orphan and eventually became a priest. He provided most of the funds to build the major seminary in 1658 that was to be run by the Eudists. He became administrator of the General Hospice and felt called to cater for the Christian education of all the children in Rouen and its suburbs. In 1657 he persuaded Laurence de Bimorel, also administrator at the Hospice, and his brother Francis, to live with him and form a lay community and "to give some of their money and all of their application to the poor." It was at this time that Laurence de Bimorel led Adrian Nyel to bind himself with the General Hospice to devote his life to schools for

the poor. De la Motte also got two Daughters of the Cross - we shall learn about them later in this chapter - to come from Paris to teach the girls of the Hospice.

De la Motte founded near Louviers the Carmelite monastery of La Garde-Châtel, and started the AA within the Congregation of Mary among the students of philosophy and theology at the Jesuit College. He became interested in the Foreign Missions. In 1660 he was consecrated bishop and went out to Thailand where he died in 1679, the year Nyel went to Rheims.

Adrian Nyel, a lifelong organiser of schools for the poor

In September 1657 the Poor Board appointed an outsider originating from near Laon, to teach reading and writing and catechism to the boys of the Hospice and to be a sort of general prefect, supervising closely the personnel, the teenagers placed out as apprentices, and the children in the hospice. He had to be in the dormitory, the refectory, and to be about at break times. He had no regular holiday and his contract was permanent, meaning he could not leave the post. It was an onerous one, meanly paid: 100 livres plus his keep, against 400 given to the two priests. The man's name was *Adrian Nyel*; he was 36 at the time. He must have had tremendous stamina, powers of organisation and control, and love of poor children.

The original schools set up in the four quarters of the town no longer existed. Laurence Bimorel decided to start two up again and turned to Nyel to find and train masters like himself. On September 10th, 1658, a new contract was signed by which Nyel would be fed and clothed throughout his life by the Board, that he could not be changed from his post, and that he would maintain two free schools in the town. The Board drove a hard bargain again, something De La Salle and his Brothers were to experience in their turn. Nyel found two worthy teachers for the proposed schools, one in each. The condition was that these teachers would accept nothing from the parents of these children because they would be given sufficient wages or upkeep. This time, priests were not mentioned. The training of such teachers was not solved, however, and obtaining the right people could not be guaranteed. In fact the contract stated that if the Board failed to find suitable persons, it should close the schools and use the money for the poor. That they did not fail is due to *Adrian Nyel*.

For twenty years, from 1658 to 1678, he was the chief one responsible for the progress of the poor schools of Rouen, choosing and training masters for such a hard work. Fr Barré came to Rouen indeed, in 1659, but it was first as preacher and confessor that he became known. It was only about 1662 that he put his influence behind the school movement. He directed some of the women who sought his guidance towards the schools, and gradually the Com-

munity of Mistresses of Charity Schools of the Child Jesus came into being. But Nyel was in action with his schoolmasters already. In 1661 rooms above the funeral galleries of the parish of St Maclou were allowed by the church wardens to be used as a school. Nyel had a teacher available. This was the first of Bimorel's two schools. A similar one was opened in St Vivian's parish - Nyel's own parish - in 1663 in a similar situation. Bimorel had better premises built at his own expense and he donated them to the Board in 1666. In the document drawn up on that occasion, Nyel and his teachers are called 'Brothers', that is, they are seen as an association like the 'Brothers' of the nearby hospice for the homeless poor, or like the confraternity of 'Brother tailors'. Nyel was given 200 livres a year to distribute to the poor who slept in St Vivian's Hospice. It had nine beds, and the poor were allowed to sleep at night only, and only for two nights at a time. Nyel had to go in at rising and at bedtime and lead prayers in French, and remind them to behave when they left the hospice. The fact that this work was coupled with his work for the schools emphasises that both were looked upon as forms of public assistance and for keeping the poor off the streets.

De La Salle never envisaged taking on welfare work in this way. He never worked with the confined poor, looked down upon and brought up strictly by those who knew what was good for them. His schools were public Christian schools preparing mainly the urban poor for a better Christian and urban future. Thanks to further donations, Nyel was authorised to open a third school in one of the towers of the ramparts. Bimorel died in 1669 and left a considerable sum for the schools. A fourth one-class school was opened in 1670. So four schools for boys now existed again, run by four masters who lived in the General Hospice with Nyel and were directed by him. One assumes that with his other very demanding work in the hospice, he could not follow them closely. This was something he must have accepted, for he acted likewise later in Rheims, with most important consequences for our story. These five lived in community, celibate but without vows, lodged and fed and with very modest wages. It would have been easy to drop out, as no doubt some did, but some were very good men. One of them, Brother Le Vasseur, was there forty years, and retired only in 1707 when one of De La Salle's Brothers replaced him. Two others are known by name: Hilary Le Maréchal and Le Gagneur. It says much for Nyel's ability to choose men and inspire them. The location of their classes in cemetery buildings or in a disused tower show how little was spent on school accommodation for the poor.

Stimulus from Charles Démia of Lyons

Roland, it will be remembered, spent six months in Rouen in 1668 and came back determined to set up schools for the poor of Rheims. The work of Nyel

under the Board, and the community of schoolmistresses Fr Barré was setting up inspired him, but he was particularly moved to do something about the poor by reading the *Rémontrances* of Fr Démia.⁵ Charles Démia was a priest born at Bourg-en-Bresse, some fifty kilometres to the north of Lyons, on 3 October 1637. He studied with the Jesuits of Lyons then spent the years 1660-1663 at the Paris seminaries of Les Bons-Enfants, St Nicolas-du-Chardonnet, but mainly at Saint-Sulpice. These were the years when Nicholas Roland was in Paris, and they must certainly have met. Ordained in 1633, Démia joined the *bons amis* ('good friends', or the AA) of Fr Bagot, with whom Roland had stayed, and went with them on a three weeks' mission tour. He felt called to evangelize country people, the poor and especially young people 'of the lowest class'. He took as motto: *Pauperes evangelizare misit* (He sent me to give good news to the poor). In November 1663 Bagot's group founded the seminary for the Foreign Missions. Démia returned to Lyons in 1664, but he always kept in touch with this missionary group.

He was sent next year to visit the northeastern areas of the diocese and came back convinced of the need for schools, and that he should begin with Lyons itself. In 1666 he wrote his *Remonstrances to the city councillors and leading men of Lyons* about the need for schools for the poor in the city. It fell on deaf ears. Nevertheless, he met with some former members of the Company of the Blessed Sacrament (now outlawed) who clubbed together to provide a school to be run by a cleric. It opened in St George's parish on 9 January 1667. He considered this date to mark the starting-point of all his work. It did not depend on the Poor Board. Being run by a priest, it came more under Church supervision for its standard of teaching religion. The members of the Company now made moves to obtain municipal funds and encouraged Démia to print his *Rémontrances* in 1668. They posted parcels of it to other groups of theirs. This is how Roland could read a copy of it in Rouen. In Lyons the Town Council decided at last on 30 December 1670, to provide 200 livres annually for a school set up in St Marcel's parish.

To return to Rouen: what continued to be done there owed nothing to Démia. The initiatives of Bimorel and Nyel began ten years earlier, and Barré's work, simultaneous with Démia's, was an independent initiative. In 1670 Démia had only one school functioning for boys and none for girls, whereas Rouen already had the Sisters of the Holy Child Jesus training mistresses, and in Rheims Roland was organising a similar community with the help of two of these Sisters from Rouen. Training masters and mistresses was being attempted in some way by Nyel and Fr Barré before Démia. This is not to belittle his work. It will be looked at more fully later. He made his mark in Lyons and around, and stimulated by his *Rémontrances* existing works and new ventures in Rheims, Paris and Rouen. It is interesting to note that he and others

(through the Company of the Blessed Sacrament) shared and studied one another's ideas and adapted them to local situations and possibilities.



NICOLAS BARRÉ

FATHER NICHOLAS BARRÉ (1621-1686)

Nicholas Barré⁶ was born at Amiens on 21 October 1621. He spent the usual nine years at the Jesuit College in the town. At 19 he entered the friary of the Minims in the town, attracted by their poverty and austerity. The Minims are a branch of the followers of St Francis of Assisi founded by St Francis de Paula, who take the vow to observe a perpetual Lent, abstaining from meat, eggs and milk products. Nicholas was sent for his novitiate to their house at Passy, then outside Paris (the present church of Notre Dame de Grâce is on the site), where he made his Religious Profession on 31 January 1642. From there he went to their house at Vincennes, on the other side of Paris, to study theology, and then to their much better known friary just north of the Place Royale (now Place des Vosges) in September, 1643. He was ordained three years later. He was so successful a student and so genuine a religious, that he was made professor of philosophy for the younger friars, while he was still 24, and given the chair of theology two years later.

He was a preacher of great depth, familiar in style and powerfully sincere and convincing. He soon found himself very much taken up with spiritual direction. He took pains especially to convert sinners, but he also guided many in the way of perfection. His Superiors freed him from other duties so as to concentrate on this one. For more than twenty years also, he taught scholastic and mystical theology, and was judged by the Provincial Chapter as "highly competent in both". In November 1653 he was made co-librarian. From 6000 the number of books in the library rose to 20,000. The concerns of the Minims were not only theological: Mersenne, a member of this friary, was well-known for his work in mathematics. Barré became aware of and was touched by the ignorance of the people and the plight of the uninstructed young, and was one of the first to join Bourdoise's association of prayer.

His very busy life together with considerable mortifications led to a breakdown in health; he was sent to Amiens, probably in the summer of 1657, to recuperate. After two years he was still not well enough to attend the night Office, and was excused from not being sent as Superior elsewhere on those grounds. He was sent instead to Rouen in 1659. He took up his pastoral work again of preaching, confessing and giving spiritual direction. He became the vigorous spiritual director of a number of notable people who became his friends and supporters. They included members of the Parlement of Normandy, and several clerics, including Anthony de la Haye and Edmund Serviens de Montigny, son of a royal paymaster in the Generalité or tax-region of Rouen and just a year younger than Barré. He became his right-hand man

and later his successor. As he looked out on the Rouen of his day, where there was so much religious ignorance still, the Minim felt an immense need to save sinners: "We must spare nothing to drive sin from our neighbour." All his pastoral work was aimed at that. Now, it was going to take on a new development.

He calls on women volunteers to run mission classes for the lapsed

In 1662 he was asked to preach a mission in Sotteville, a poor suburb on the south side of Rouen, to maidservants, washerwomen and the like. He saw that sermons were not an easy way to reach them, so he copied the practice of the early Church whereby deaconesses helped the clergy where women were concerned, by asking for women volunteers to help him. Two, Françoise Duval and Marguerite Lestocq, came from Rouen and, helped by local young women, opened classes or meetings, one in the morning and one in the afternoon. They lasted a year, and practically the whole suburb was converted to an active faith. It was a temporary set-up, therefore, aimed at preparing the young and not so young for confession, communion and conversion of life. They had varied audiences, young and old, and taught reading, writing, catechism and prayer. They brought help in a sector that the clergy could not so effectively reach, if at all.

Back in Rouen Anthony de la Haye, parish priest of St Amand's, who was about forty at the time - the one who was to give a blunt reception to Roland in 1668 - wanted to copy in his parish what had been done in Sotteville. A Madam de Grainville offered three rooms of her house, situated in his parish in the Rue Saint-Hilaire, for this purpose. Françoise Duval, Marguerite Lestocq, Anne Le Coeur and two others joined in this work while living at home, holding morning and evening sessions and meeting women in their homes in the evening. They kept the school going from family funds: neither the children nor the Board had to pay anything. Two other rooms were rented for the purpose a short distance away by 1670. There were thus two places for meetings that were becoming more like schools rather than mission centres. Unlike the Board schools, the aim was not to get idle people off the streets and into an institution, but a missionary endeavour to bring back people into contact with the clergy and the Church. It aimed at making them better Christians and parishioners. These women were therefore ready to move beyond Rouen. We shall see that they spread rapidly. Theirs was not the preoccupation with urban skills and educating in a Christian spirit for urban life that was from the start specifically the aim of De La Salle's schools. Girls did not have to prepare for trades or the range of employment open to men. The emancipation of women was still far off.

By 1666 Barré was guiding this group of women to follow a certain mode

of life. "We were four or five scattered sisters," Marguerite Lestocq wrote in her memoir of November 1681, "The Reverend Father Barré came every so often to Mme de Grainville's to give us talks and a plan of life. The spiritual exercises were fixed. We taught primary classes from 8 o'clock till 11. Then we took the children to holy Mass to the number of 130 and over. From noon till 2 o'clock we had the older girls and taught them reading and the catechism, and then the younger girls till 5 o'clock...We taught catechism on Sundays and holydays...It happened that the parish priests wanted to create difficulties over our Sunday catechism, saying that we were doing what they were supposed to be doing...We answered them so wisely that from then on they approved our teaching and gave us full freedom to teach..."

When Roland made that visit to Rouen in 1668 and stayed with de la Haye, the latter together with Fr Barré and Mme de Grainville had agreed to his plan to have Françoise Duval sent to Rheims to train mistresses for this kind of school. When de la Haye died in 1670, Barré carried out this promise and in December sent both Françoise Duval and Anne le Coeur to Rheims, as we have seen. Very likely, the school they had at Darnétal was opened a few months before, endowed by a certain Madame de Maillefer. As the various mistresses directed by Barré had not yet formed a community, and he had not yet given it statutes, we have two linked but distinct communities developing, one in Rouen and one in Rheims.

Barré gets his schoolmistresses to form a community

Things developed in Rouen between that December and Easter 1671. On Barré's suggestion, those who had not done so already left their families - and so relinquished any reliance on them financially - and came to live in community and to form others to this life. Barré put the challenge to these mistresses, as Marguerite Lestocq tells us again: "Do you want to live in community, on condition that you will have no security? You will have only the necessary, very sparingly, and if you are ill, you will be sent to the hospital. You must be ready to die in the shelter of a hedge, abandoned by all... See," said his Reverence, "what you have to answer." We answered very willingly: "Yes, we do want, and we abandon ourselves to divine Providence in total disinterestedness." No sooner said than done...we entered into community.' Marguerite Lestocq was the 'first mistress' and led the community exercises, without there being any vows, while a Mme du Buc agreed to take on the temporal side of the work, seeking donations and giving advice to Marguerite, who was still very young.

It seems that it was Anthony de la Haye who, by promoting a permanent 'mission' school in his parish, helped to give a definite turn to what had been a temporary mission. He died too soon for him to be much remembered, but

Marguerite Lestocq wrote in her memoir: (after Sotteville) “the schools were established in the town of Rouen near the Reverend Father Penitents, at Mme de Grainville’s...The supervisors were the V.R.Fr Barré, a man all divine, and the late parish priest of Saint Amand, who gave all his strength and consecrated his life to converting sinners, so zealous was he.”

That Lent, these Sisters had an extraordinary success, visiting houses and preparing people to make a general confession. About 400 came back to the Church in this way. Marguerite Lestocq says of these early times: “The ignorance in Rouen was so great that most people knew nothing about God. We gave catechism lessons on Sundays and holydays. So many people came that we had to knock down rooms and break down walls in order to make room...That is pretty much how the (Barré) schools in Rouen began.” Soon, about twenty girls wanted to join the community so that it became a training-centre for forming new mistresses. Several well-known persons provided discreetly for their upkeep, and one of the Councillors of the Parlement offered his services to keep a register of receipts and expenses, and readily advanced running expenses from his own pocket. Another benefactor was a priest, Lespinay, and there were others, especially Servien de Montigny. They paid out sums from contributions every quarter, but this was not satisfactory. Things remained somewhat undefined because Fr Barré absolutely refused to give a financial foundation to his community. In September 1672 his superiors recalled him to Paris to teach philosophy, and although he was always consulted, four of the benefactors, who were administrators of the Poor Board, signed a contract on 17 July 1674 to deposit a substantial capital with the Board, its only part being to pay out an annual interest to the Sisters. They took charge of the Sisters of the Child Jesus, as the new community called itself, seeing to the use of the funds and gifts made on their behalf. The Sisters were required to look after the sick of the Hospice, but were allowed to live in their own house.

In 1674 Barré was Superior (or Corrector) again of the Minim community in Rouen and so was able to take up again the government of the Sisters. The need for Financial security led his benefactors to press him to apply for letters patent. But Barré was not keen about this, and several influential persons he consulted agreed: the new work would be freer if it trusted in Providence alone. His community began to be known familiarly as les Barrettes or Barretines. They were trained in Rouen, but sent into the suburbs and surrounding villages. In fact, apart from the school annexed to the community, their schools were outside the city, in Darnétal and beyond, in areas still marked by Protestantism, which had a fair hold in Normandy. They were missionary in intention, going outside the diocese into many parts of France, and eventually beyond France.

**POOR BOARD SCHOOLS FOR GIRLS. SOME TRAINING BY NYEL OF
THE MASTERS IN THE BOARD SCHOOLS**

Mademoiselle Houdemare and the Poor Board schools for girls

There was at this time a development under the auspices of the Poor Board for poor girls in the town. Prior to the general meeting in 1654 that led to Nyel being appointed three years later to direct the education of boys taken into care by the Board, the latter had, since Easter 1646 taken in not only abandoned girls but all those of needy families (all those registered as such) from the ages of 6 or 7 to 18. They were taught by mistresses known as the Black Ladies or *Daughters of the Hospice*. These had a 'first mistress' in charge of them who also had the post, like that of Nyel for the boys, of general bursar. These women became involved in a new scheme. A certain Mademoiselle Houdemare aimed at opening four charity schools for girls in the four quarters of the town as had been done for boys.⁷ In 1669 she was able to obtain from Francis Bimorel, now administrator at the General Hospice, that several Black Ladies should be detached from those working in the Hospice to run a school in Mlle Houdemare's house. They went back to the Hospice every evening. They opened two classes in another parish in 1670 and two in another parish the same year. In 1674 they had a fourth school, thus realising Mlle Houdemare's dream.

By then, returning to the Hospice every evening had become burdensome, and that year the Board allowed them to live as a community. Three administrators of the Hospice were put in general charge of them to see to their upkeep and the upkeep of the buildings, to choose a spiritual director and nominate an eventual new superior. They were therefore under a fairly close external control, and one of the administrators was given the title and function of First Director of these schools, 'to mark their dependence on the General Hospice'. They moved these Sisters from school to school as they thought fit. This was the beginning of the Sisters of the charity schools associated with the General Hospice of Rouen. They took the name of *Grey Ladies*, to distinguish themselves from the Black Ladies who taught only in the hospice. They were 13 in number in 1681, and were in existence till 1714 when a local religious congregation was called in.

To clarify at this point: by 1674, under the Board, the Black Ladies looked after girls within the Hospice while the Grey Ladies catered for poor girls of the town in their four schools. For boys, Nyel coped with both areas. Independently of the Board, because performing a different work to all these forms of assistance, Barré's Sisters were holding classes mostly in the suburbs and in nearby villages, as a missionary endeavour that included teaching reading and writing. In 1675 Barré was definitively recalled to Paris, as preacher

and confessor. We have to see his important work there, and, later, his influence on Canon De La Salle.

More on Nyel's activities. He teaches other masters

Nyel had some contact with the recently-formed community of Barré's Sisters of the Holy Child Jesus. It would seem that from October 1670 to February 1671 he advanced interest on the capital deposited with the Board with which the school at Darnétal, four miles east of Rouen, had been founded. From that time on Mme Maillefer, who comes into De La Salle's story eight years later, seems to have provided the necessary financial support. In the same township, a one-class school for boys had had its rent paid for a few years now by Laurence de Bimorel, and when he died in 1669 he left a legacy to pay for the lodgings of the master, and which was officially accepted by Nyel in the name of the Board and the poor of Darnétal in May 1670. In December, as we have seen, Barré sent two of his Sisters to Rheims. Mme Maillefer, who came from Rheims, wanted to do the same for boys in her home town as she had done for Darnétal, but it was not till 1679 that this became possible. To realise the plan, she could do no better that year than arrange for Nyel to be freed by the Board to go there. And that brought him straight to Canon De La Salle. But that is anticipating.

The masters of the four Board schools for boys in Rouen and their replacements - when some left for other jobs or got married - were trained by Nyel. For we find that for the school year 1674-5 he was being helped to instruct "poor men and boys in care" in the General Hospice by a "a teaching brother", and by two the next year. In 1677-8, "five masters of the poor schools" were being paid a modest salary: this would include the four masters in the schools and only one other in the hospice. For 1678-9, the accounts show that there were six "masters of the public schools of the town", plus an extra one taken on because Nyel was going to Rheims in March, 1679. He was also able to get together money to invest with the Board so as to provide himself with a modest life annuity, which also points to the fact that he was planning to move. He had relatives engaged in commerce in the town who may have helped him. During his absence in the Rheims area till 1685, we find recorded from 1681 to 1685 that twelve or thirteen "Brothers" were receiving a small pay from the Board. They included an infirmarian, a buyer, a tailor, a shoemaker and eight or nine "school Brothers". The implications are that there was a pool of extra masters, one, two or three at most (since there were six classes after 1678), that were being trained Nyel's way: learning to read and write, completing their religious instruction, and observing another master so as to learn how to teach.

Madame Maillefer

Mme Maillefer came from Rheims. She was a Jeanne Dubois who married Ponce Maillefer, a cloth merchant. She was distantly related to the De La Salles and to Dom Maillefer, John's nephew and biographer, who wrote of her: "Born in Rheims of rich and pious parents, she had acquired within her family the sentiments of virtue which led her to undertake good works as soon as the opportunity was created for her. Tender towards the poor, she looked on them as her children and put all her care into bringing them the temporal and spiritual help she had at her disposal. Obligated by her state of life to follow her husband to Rouen where his business required him, and where he had his usual residence, it was in that town that she attached herself more positively to exercising her works of charity...This won for her, rightly, the title of mother of the poor."⁸ The author's concern was to show the kind of person Mme Maillefer had been in Rheims, where there is no mention of vanity or extravagance.

The picture, however, Canon Blain gives of her in Rouen is one of limitless vanity prior to a certain 'conversion' resulting in the ultimate in humility, poverty and love of the poor.⁹ He owed his lengthy account to "the virtuous Mademoiselle de Montville, aged 85 years,...to Sister Marie-Anne of Darnétal (one of Barré's Sisters) and to several other people who saw her and knew her." Poutet,¹⁰ however, points out the inaccuracies and uncertainties in Blain. Aroz also recommends caution.¹¹ Blain writes in scandalised tones of Mme Maillefer's keeping up with the latest expensive fashion, her using a tailor's dummy - a statue he calls it - (her husband was in the cloth trade) to see how her clothes looked; her showing off at the theatre and at balls, her fine fare, her late rising and her callousness to the poor.

She is said to have been converted when she had a beggar turned away. Her coachman gave him shelter in the stables and he was found dead next morning. She fired the coachman on the spot and hastily gave a table-cloth to the servants to bury the corpse. Fearing her wrath, they put it back, washed and folded, without facing her. When she saw it, and no one owned up, she took it as having got there by itself and, struck with remorse, changed her life. Poutet suggests this interpretation. Blain admits not knowing when she was converted nor much about her new life-style till the death of her husband. This gives a period anywhere between their marriage in 1648 and his death in 1681. Blain subsequently says: "Judging the beginning by what followed...". In other words, all he says of her behaviour from her 'conversion' to her husband's death is a reconstruction, and it looks also as if her unconverted period and the later one are each blown up to make a contrast, in the interests of edifying hagiography. What is not an unreasonable life of a woman whose husband would expect her to be well-dressed according to their place in soci-

ety is seen all out of proportion.

What she seems to have changed from is a life of comfort, not of evil, and, understandably, she could not follow her new love of poverty until her husband died. Even her driving a beggar away has to be seen in context. The municipality had ordered beggars, as a result of campaigning by the Company of the Blessed Sacrament, to be denounced to the General Hospice-cum-workhouse, and the police condemned those giving them shelter. Her earlier attitude of giving charity to the poor while seeing them as inferior, idle and dangerous non-citizens, was that of her class as a whole. When she changed to loving the poor, “in her husband’s lifetime,” writes Dom Maillefer, “she was satisfied with taking on works of mercy that could fit in with the care of her domestic staff. But when she saw she was free of the marriage-bond by the death of Mr Maillefer, she gave herself without reserve to her fondness for alms-giving...” She died in Rouen in 1693, aged 70, of a contagious disease she contracted at the hospital while serving the poor. She passed the greater part of her day in prayer, slept on planks and usually ate only bread. She was another example of a member of the bourgeoisie converting to the poor. It was this commitment that started the chain of events that was to bring Canon De La Salle to throwing in his lot with poor schoolmasters himself.

FR BARRÉ’S WORK IN PARIS: A LOOK FORWARD

Nicholas Barré had been recalled to Paris in 1675. From the friary near the Place Royale, Barré was able by January 1676 to start a community of his Sisters and a school. This was in the parish of St Jean en Grève, near the Place de la Grève, now place de l’Hôtel de Ville, in one of the densest quarters of the town. (That parish and its church have now gone.) He was helped by Marie de Lorraine, Duchess of Guise, who had her palace, the Hôtel de Guise, in the nearby fashionable Marais area. This palace is now part of the Archives Nationales. By 1680 he had seven schools north of the river. To the one on the parish of St Nicholas-des-Champs he transferred the one feeder community in 1683. Marie de Lorraine, charmed by the good effect of these schools, wanted Fr Barré to start schools in her domains. He sent Sister Marie Hayer and others from Rouen in 1679 or 80. In eighteen months, she started six schools in and around Guise, and there were ten by 1681. One of them was at Liesse, started in 1680. It still exists, the oldest surviving house after the one in Paris. By 1687, the year after Barré’s death, his Sisters had schools in a hundred places, mainly in the north and east and in Languedoc. These latter were asked for and subsidised by the king and Mme de Maintenon, in order to teach the ‘new Catholics’, i.e. those ‘converted’ under more or less pressure, from Protestantism. We shall meet with them later.

In Paris, Barré acquired in 1678 a house in the parish of Saint-Sulpice as his novitiate and training-centre for his Sisters. This street, or lane as it was then, off the Rue de Sèvres, not far from where the Brothers' Lasallian Centre now is, was called Rue Saint-Maur; whence the Sisters came to be known as the *Dames de Saint-Maur*. The road is now Rue de l'Abbé Grégoire, but the house, which they regard as their mother-house, still stands at no. 8. Fr Barré recalled Sister Marie Hayer from Guise in order to put her in charge. She became the first Superior-General. Soon she had opened several schools on the south bank, including two or three in the parish of Saint-Sulpice. Mme de Maintenon asked for Sisters to teach in her College of Saint-Cyr, where Barré sent in 1685 twelve of "the best Sisters of his Institute". They left it in 1694. Louis XIV showed his gratitude by providing their central house with an annual income of 500 livres. Barré also sent Sisters on request to share their ideals and organisation with the Sisters of Providence of Lisieux and Charles Démi's Sisters of Saint Charles.

Barré's Brothers of the Holy Child Jesus

The year that he acquired the house in the Rue Saint-Maur, he began a training-centre for men to do a similar work, calling them *Brothers of the Holy Child Jesus*. This was in the Rue de la Mortellerie, now Rue de l'Hôtel de Ville, still today a narrow street just north of the river. They spread into several regions of France. In Rouen, in 1681, Michael de Lespinay, one of the four who had provided a foundation investment for Barré's Sisters, now provided funds for these Brothers to open a school for boys near the Sisters' school. He had got Fr Barré to come from Paris early in that school year and again in April 1682 to give his advice and see what kind of school he would envisage. There is evidence of these Barré Brothers (*Frères Barratins* as they were called) being sent from Rouen and teaching in Paris from 1682 to 1684. One of these was sent in February 1684 to teach poor boys in the hospice of Dijon, but he died after two months. There was already at Dijon one of Barré's Sisters in 1682 and perhaps a Brother or two. Barré wrote to this Sister in November 1682: "We will do our best not to put up in our Institute with either Masters or Mistresses who do not try to be really meek and humble of heart; by doing so, it is Jesus rather than our brother Masters or sister Mistresses who teaches."

The Brother who died in Dijon was immediately replaced by a Brother Jacques Yvelin, who must have been working elsewhere in the town to take over so soon. As Barré had taught his Brothers, he accepted to be satisfied with board, lodging and no other salary, but the incidental expenses he began to ask for grew until he was granted a modest salary. Barré died in May 1686, after which Yvelin seems to have lost interest, for about September 1689 he

packed up and returned to Rouen. It was the end of the Barré Brothers in Dijon. The *Chambre des Pauvres* (Poor Office) found successors to Yvelin up to 1710 - clerics whose main interest was not in teaching. (In 1705, La Salle opened a parish school in Dijon independently of the Board.) In terms of dates, if Barré had founded a male branch of his Institute in 1681, De La Salle had, the preceding June, taken a group of schoolmasters into his house; but in terms of living with men teachers and training them, Nyel has the lead. After Barré's death, one of the four benefactors, Edmund de Montigny, a priest, took charge of the Brothers' side of the Institute. He and his Brothers will appear again, but these Brothers of the Child Jesus eventually disappeared. Fr Barré as a Minim had obligations that did not allow him to live with his Brothers, and they easily gave in to the temptation to get on elsewhere. He had wanted them to live on their own, working singly in a place, in total abandonment to Providence. But left to themselves, even with his correspondence to encourage them, they faded out. It was an example that De La Salle was careful not to follow. Nor did he understand trust in Providence the same way.

Brother Bernard comments: "The schools he (Barré) had established for boys in several places, and especially at St Gervase's (in Paris), where there were six masters, did not have such a happy effect (that is, as De La Salle's). The masters deviated so much that they fell into disorderly behaviour and left one after the other."¹²

The government Barré arranged for his Institute. It split into two congregations

It is clear, from Barré's own experience and that of others that it was much easier to set up communities of women than of men. Women had no clear careers ahead, not even that of badly-paid textile workers, no guild to belong to, no looking across to the clerical status they could never have. They were looked upon as the weaker sex, meant to have a dependent role. It was easier for them to accept community life and to work in dependence on the parish clergy. Barré tells them:¹³

"They must show perfect dependence and undertake nothing except in agreement with the parish priests. They should fit in with their mood and their attitudes as far as can be done reasonably, so as to encourage them to give their backing to God's work." Their work, in fact, was to take off the parish clergy the work of recalling to the Church and instructing in the faith girls, women and families of the neglected working-class, the "poor". The new type of parish-priest, better trained but also very conscious of his role, looked askance at any grouping not strictly emanating from the parish and his authority, whether confraternities or religious communities working among the

public. They also saw these lay Sisters as doing what they considered to be their own work (even if they themselves were not doing it well for women), and did not necessarily take kindly to their wish to have a parish room on Sundays to teach older girls and mothers their religion.

Because of the extent of his ministry as a Minim, Barré had had to find in Rouen people who would look after the administration of the house and community while he concentrated on its spiritual guidance. To succeed him, he foresaw a spiritual director in charge of the whole congregation, to be chosen from some religious order or even from the secular clergy, purely on the basis of his suitability for the position. Each community was to have three carefully chosen laymen as directors or administrators, and with these if possible an “associated lady” who had some influence in society. This was the case with the one central house in Rouen from which the Sisters radiated to their schools. He gave the directors extensive control over the community. They proposed or changed its spiritual director, its confessor, its “associated lady”, the superior and the Sisters, and they gave the Sisters their appointments. The directors and the associated ladies of all the houses were to meet occasionally with the superiors of the communities, to discuss the general good of the Institute.

Each community was to have a spiritual director. Barré recognised that it is very rare to have the right kind of person. “Until this man of God comes to them from heaven”, the directors are to use the confessor, and invite a suitable priest or religious to give occasional talks to the Sisters. The three administrative directors saw to the temporal needs of the community. They agreed to provide the money for its upkeep, to receive alms on its behalf and to invest any considerable donation. They chose the superior of the community each year, changing her each year if possible, but never appointing her beyond three years. Although Barré laid great stress on the directors, there is no sign of this organisation when he started houses in Paris. It was clearly not helpful.

Barré’s Institute eventually split in two under this heavy outside local control. His recall to Paris in 1675 meant he had to leave the organisation in Rouen in the hands of the administrators he had appointed. One of the four, the priest Servien de Montigny, accompanied him to Paris and took charge, as we have seen, of the training of the Brothers of the Holy Child Jesus. The three others gradually took over full control of the Sisters in Rouen, and considered themselves their founders. Meanwhile, Barré wished the Paris community in the Rue Saint-Maur to be regarded as the centre of the Institute. This was accepted on both sides in 1686 shortly before Fr Barré died. He was succeeded, at Fr Barré’s wish, by his Superior, the Minim François Giry,

and two years after by Montigny (till his death in 1699). The tendency for Rouen to go its own way became a virtual break-away, and in 1690 Montigny appealed to Louis XIV. The king's decision was, in view of the two different attitudes, to place the houses of Normandy and Brittany under Rouen, and those of all other provinces under Paris. In spite of an attempt at reunion, the Sisters centred on Rouen became a diocesan congregation known as *The Sisters of of Rouen*. In Paris, the Sisters came, after Montigny's death, under the direction of the Priests from the Foreign Missions, whose seminary in the Rue du Bac was not far from their house. These Dames of Saint Maur, or *Sisters of the Child Jesus*, to give them the name they have recently reverted to, are now an Institute of pontifical right, distinct but now federated with their counterparts centred on Rouen.

THREE NEW COMMUNITIES OF WOMEN WHOSE WORK NICHOLAS ROLAND SAW COMPARABLE WITH THAT OF HIS SISTERS

It is surprising how new communities were springing up, in this case catering for the children of the poor in the town or in rural areas.¹⁴ If Roland's Sisters had failed in their application for letters patent and had not been able to continue in Rheims, there was a plan that rather than disband and give up their commitment to the lapsed poor, they might join any of three communities in Paris that did have letters patent and were pursuing similar aims to theirs.¹⁵ Their activity shows that De La Salle's innovations were preceded by several models of Christian education of the poor as well as of the training of village teachers, though mainly for girls. They tended to include a certain spread of undertakings of a missionary nature. The specific education of boys for urban life and a serious training of country schoolmasters had still to be provided.

The Daughters of Saint Genevieve

In the famous parish of Saint Nicolas-du-Chardonnet, a community of fifteen *Daughters of St Genevieve*, founded in 1631, taught daily 300 girls in three classes. Their aim was to help the priests of the parish in the Christian education of girls and women, and see families that the clergy could visit less appropriately. But they were now also running a training-school providing schoolmistresses and helpers for the rural clergy and also looking after the wounded in the villages "that the misfortunes of the time" had increased. (One can think of **Louis XIV's Dutch War** of 1672-1678.) They were taught to do blood-letting and to prepare the dying to receive the last sacraments.

They also trained older girls for a few months to teach in rural parishes. Meetings were organised for women who wanted to learn about confession and communion and about baptising children who were stillborn. Sometimes the Sisters travelled to villages to meet women there for the same purpose,

and also to visit the families and look after the poor who were sick. They also washed and mended priests' vestments. From 1678 they trained grown-up girls in housekeeping, to help them when they got married or to find a job in a bourgeois household. They took in women for four- or five-day retreats, whether as residents or as day attenders only. These Sisters, therefore, saw their role very flexibly, and responded creatively to new needs as they recognised them, but they had a basic similarity with Roland's and Barré's Sisters. It is interesting to note, considering the times, how extensive a role these Sisters were playing.

Their Rules stated that enclosure is incompatible with their many activities, and that they will always keep to the secular way of life and to secular dress. And by doing so they will show by their example of good works that one can aspire to perfection outside the cloister. It would seem that they took inspiration and encouragement from what the Sisters of Charity were doing by the wish of St Vincent. Some of their work was similar.

The Daughters of the Cross

The second community that Roland's Sisters might have chosen to link up with was that of the *Daughters of the Cross*. Peter Lambert de la Motte had called in two of these Sisters to teach the girls of the General Hospice of Rouen when he was its administrator in 1657. Roland would have got to know them during his six months in Rouen in 1668 or again during his visits to Paris. Canon De La Salle would have heard of them when he was at the seminary in Paris, for M. Olier had had a part in their foundation, and the seminarians used to teach catechism to their pupils. These Sisters began in Vaugirard in 1641; M. Olier, it will be remembered, had just started a community of priests there. Their constitutions were approved by the archbishop in 1675. Their main house in Paris was a training-centre for mistresses for schools for the poor, therefore before that of Barré's, for he was then opening his first school in the capital. Barré's Sisters must have taken some ideas from them, for they have in their archives a manuscript copy of those Sisters' original regulations. An interesting and important difference in their aims from those of the Sisters of St Geneviève lies in this declaration: "In so far as carrying out the work of the said Sisters demands continual assiduity and care to meet the instruction of youth as well as of older persons of their sex, it requires residence in their house to the exclusion of all going out elsewhere, whatever good intention is the pretext, even if it were the service of the sick and the assistance of the dying." Later on, the reason De La Salle was to give as to why his Brothers should not be priests was that the work of the school "demands the whole man." These Sisters recognised the importance and demands of schooling, and that may have led Barré to think more about the

school in its own right.

Barré's Sisters have in their archives another manuscript of the Daughters of the Cross entitled: "Salutary advice for souls who intend at some time to give instruction (meaning religious formation) in the countryside." The Sisters could be sent to a rural area for a while to organise this instruction, train local girls and then hand over to them. This booklet was intended to share with them and any others intending to take up the work, the Sisters' aims and methods. Barré, we have seen, aimed at sending mistresses to open 'mission centres' in small towns and villages beyond Rouen, and Roland similarly planned to do likewise, once his Sisters were coping with the four schools in Rheims. The vision was that of a local apostolate radiating from an urban centre. De La Salle very quickly had in view the work of urban schools only.

The Daughters of the 'Christian Union'

The third congregation that Roland had noted was the one known as the *Daughters of the Christian Union*, founded in Charonne, but transferred to Paris in 1684. In Charonne a certain Marie Polaillon had been led by her spiritual director, Fr Le Vachet, former pupil of the Jesuits of Grenoble, to care for girls of the poor class. St Vincent de Paul and Jean-Jacques Olier supported the idea, and the community of the Daughters of Providence resulted. It began in 1630, it seems, but took firm community shape only in 1650-52. The first article of their Constitutions gave their aim as being the imitation of Jesus Christ in union with him. This led to the idea of a 'seminary' for preparing young women and widows to work in communities "in all the provinces of France and even in foreign countries" to convert Protestants and then instruct the new Catholics of their own sex, but also to teach them "reading and writing, the skills of suitable work and all things useful in whatever state Providence called them." They called themselves the "Christian Union", but it was not established till 1661, four years after Mme Polaillon's death.

The Daughters of the Christian Union took the three simple vows while remaining secular, together with a vow of union or association in order to maintain the community character of their institute. This vow was seen as a "foundation and bond of their society". Hence they were "obliged to cultivate with an extreme care the truth which gives it its true character, and which gives its name to the Institute, namely, Christian Union, brotherly love." It was based on the Gospel, and their evangelizing outlook came from a climate created by the Foreign Missions and by the priests linked with the AA. These Sisters were not thinking in terms of expanding around a central urban training-centre or in one diocese. They clearly had a missionary view. To work "in all the provinces of France" gives the impression of something venturesome,

for it was often the equivalent of moving into a separate country. But they were ready to go further afield still.

Twenty years later, De La Salle was visiting his community in Mende, in the Cevennes at the entry into Languedoc, a province very different from Champagne. On that occasion he helped a Mlle de St Denis to draw up regulations for the Christian Union there - and this was in Huguenot territory. His Brothers also took a vow of association, but not to maintain the community - that was taken for granted, and lay communities of women were commonplace by then - but for the purpose of establishing against all difficulties schools for the poor as he intended.

Nearer Rheims: the 'Teaching Ladies' (*Dames régentes*) of Châlons

It is interesting to see how all these communities sprang up with a fairly common purpose, and how much cross-fertilisation there was. There was another interesting creation at Châlons, twenty-five miles to the southeast of Rheims. A seminary was begun there on Bourdoise's lines. Once something was being done to provide suitably trained clergy, thought was given to setting up schools for the poor in view of providing for their religious instruction, and so continuing the renewal of the parishes. About 1664 we again have an initiative taken by women for this purpose.¹⁵ A group of young women and widows set themselves up as a lay community of schoolmistresses, and soon ran four schools in the area. They called themselves the Teaching Ladies (*Dames Régentes*). Their superior trained mistresses from the villages while others ran the town schools. A 'seminary' or training-centre for village schoolmistresses existed therefore in Châlons before 1676. The pupil-teachers were boarded and were given practice in the school attached to the centre. Sisters would go with them when they found employment in a village, and would see them settled in. These Sisters formed a diocesan group depending on the bishop and on the parishes. They do not seem to have been successful in giving training at any depth, and there is no mention of their training-centre after 1688.

The bishop of Châlons of the day, Vialart, was very concerned about the instruction of the young. He defended the work of women in the Church by reference to St Paul, to the Fathers and to the Fourth Council of Carthage. He drew up regulations for the Teaching Ladies in 1672 and obtained letters patent for them next year. He appointed an ecclesiastical superior with considerable authority. This superior chose confessors, presided over the election of a superior, approved the obediences given to the Sisters, checked expenses and, as his main duty, saw to it that the rules were observed exactly. The next bishop, de Noailles (1680-95), confirmed these arrangements in 1685. You can see the attitudes De La Salle had to face not very much later

in developing communities of lay schoolmasters.

For boys there was in the diocese a good set-up of parish schoolmasters, married or not. Instruction was limited to teaching the catechism, as well as training to piety and virtue and serving in church. In 1676 Vialart instructed all the masters to attend the seminary for a five-day retreat. He drew up daily regulations for them, including morning prayer, spiritual reading, daily Mass with their pupils, and an edifying life. These masters served Mass, sang the Office, saw to the cleanliness of the altar, helped in the administration of the sacraments, and got their pupils to sweep the church once a week. They were allowed to wear a surplice and cope. There was no provision for their training apart from the annual retreat. The first teaching duty of the master was to teach the diocesan catechism, to teach the boys how to serve Mass and assist at other liturgical ceremonies. One lesson a week was given on this. The teaching of profane subjects was not seen as part of a ministry. Plainly there was hard work ahead when De La Salle's Brothers introduced a different concept of Christian schooling. Advice similar to that given to the teaching Ladies was given these masters: "They will welcome the children of the poor with as much affection as the rich, and will take particular care of their instruction."

THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE WORK OF CHARLES DÉMIA

Charles Démia, who was seen briefly earlier, was the founder of charity schools in Lyons.¹⁶ His career was affected by the reform of the clergy, for in 1660 he entered the seminary of St Irenaeus of Lyons, which had recently been linked with Saint Sulpice. He had further experience in the Paris seminaries of the Bons-Enfants, Saint Nicolas-du-Chardonnet and of Saint Sulpice. Back in Lyons in 1664, he found the children of the masses wild and unprincipled, and determined to spend all his time setting up schools and having religious instruction given.

Long-standing attitudes of the bourgeoisie of Lyons towards the poor

Already in the sixteenth century, crowds of abandoned children and runaways from home or workshop were to be seen begging in the streets of Lyons. They were joined in hard times by hundreds sent out to beg by working families no longer able to make ends meet. The comfortable citizens were upset. In 1530 they complained about children howling all night from hunger and cold, and causing annoyance round the churches, disturbing the devotion of the people. The danger of riots led the magistrates to set up an *aumône générale* or poor relief committee, distributing donations coming mainly from the merchant class. Since, in fact, this prevented riots, the rich silk merchants

found in poor relief a means of social control of the impoverished masses, and further saw in it the means of having an available cheap workforce. Etienne Turquet, a rich Piedmontese merchant, rector of the relief committee, proposed in 1536 to introduce the silk industry to Lyons. The committee used a donation from the Town Council to “hire several houses, set them up as workshops and pay the wages of Italian silk specialists whom Turquet recruited to train the children of the maintained poor. From the moment the children were sufficiently schooled they had to go into the service of craftsmen installed in Lyons by Turquet and his associates. In the following decades, the merchant-rectors of the aumône systematically carried out this policy.”¹⁷

When begging still continued, attitudes hardened. These children, it was said, spread idleness, loose behaviour and impiety. They should be taken off the streets and confined in workhouses, where they would be submitted to two disciplines: learning reading, writing, grammar and Latin as the rectors of the Poor Board thought fit, as well as being taught their religion and taken to funerals. Then they would be placed them with master craftsmen as a source of cheap labour. Some trades were taught in the hospice, to provide a workforce for manufacturers.

Démia innovates by setting up a School Board for the whole diocese

One understands that in spite of his Rémonstrances, Charles Démià’s plans for ‘seminaries’ for training masters and mistresses took time to be realised. Barré and Roland were both beginning to train mistresses by 1670, and Adrian Nyel had masters living in with him at the General Hospice of Rouen. Démià was not able to launch his St Charles’s Seminary before 27 May 1672, and in 1678 he was still “trying to see if schoolmistresses could live together.” But in December 1672 the Archbishop of Lyons made him director of all the primary schools of the diocese, and he immediately obtained authorisation to set up a School Board for founding schools in the diocese. It comprised the ecclesiastical and lay notables of Lyons.

Only those parish priests had a say in the administration of schools that Démià appointed to the Board, alongside magistrates, lawyers, publishers... It was a great move forward compared with the many individual attempts of parish priests in the country to have their charity schools. It was again one of the ultimate developments in the reform of the French Church, but again, it depended on one individual throwing himself into the work. Démià was very much supported by the Company of the Blessed Sacrament. In 1679 the Board was confirmed by the Archbishop, and in May 1680 it gained civil personality through the grant of letters patent. Démià had behind him the Archbishop, the bourgeoisie and clergy. This was a profoundly different posi-

tion to what De La Salle's would be.

Démia's School Board was a sort of ministry for primary education. A decision of the Council of State in 1674 had laid down that no school could be opened without the express approval in writing by the Archbishop, which for Lyons meant in fact Démià's and the Board's. As a result, free schools began to be created for the poor. Démià, to set an example, endowed one from his own pocket, and the Archbishop invested a large sum to provide a permanent income so as to ensure the poor would be taught to read, write, learn the catechism and arithmetic. He called these "little schools" (*petites écoles*), although they did not prepare for the colleges. Where Démià differed from De La Salle's later principle was that he absolutely refused to admit into these charity schools any but the certified poor, who were always less than the real numbers of the poor.¹⁸ And on the other hand, fee-paying schools (the "rich schools" Démià called them) were controlled by the Board and constrained to follow as closely as possible the methods used in the schools under the director-general. When Démià died in 1689 at the age of 53, there were 16 charity schools in Lyons with 1600 pupils.

In his Rémonstrances, he stressed repeatedly to the trading class and the administration drawn from it the social and utilitarian value of these schools as a guarantee of order and a means of preparing a workforce. "The principal means to complete the splendour and magnificence of this great city is to set up Christian schools..." Where will security be, where the public welfare "if individuals do not carry out their duties to God, their country and their family?" "Young people badly brought up fall into idleness, whence follows that they do nothing but run around aimlessly, that you see groups of them talking at the street corners where they engage mostly in loose talk...that they become, in short, the most depraved and factious of the commonwealth..." if the whip, the galleys and the gibbet "did not remove from the earth these venomous serpents that would infect the world." Even apart from rebellion, these wretched people beget more wretched people - at the expense of the collectivity. Better to spend public money on schools than more or less effectively on the hospital and the public relief fund (the *aumône générale*). In the charity school, he went on, the children learn that they are called to a virtuous and useful life, and learn to read, write and sum in order to be able to work in most of the professions, "there being none in which these rudiments are not a great help forward to advance in the most considerable occupations."¹⁹

His ideals limited by the vested interests of those whom his Board represented

He put forth those arguments that coincided with their interests, yet he ran up against the clear intentions of the ruling class, whose views the Board

represented, that the poorer classes should not learn too much. They were to learn to keep their place. Under pressure from the Board and the relief committee of his day, Démia cut down on the schooling he had planned to provide. It was said it would encourage idleness and argumentativeness. Démia says that although he has answered this objection elsewhere in his *générale*). he assured the magistrates 1) that the children “would be taught to avoid idleness, arguments and squabbles; 2) that there would be no intention of advancing them towards perfect writing and much less Latin; but rather of inspiring them with love of work and the means to sanctify themselves, making them work in these schools at certain hours at buttons, knitting, lace-making, etc.; 3) that these children will be kept in school only until they are ready to learn some trade.” He claimed that there were some among the populace whose talents, through prejudice, were overlooked. “Often you meet with gold in this mud,” he said. He suggested an elite could rise from the masses, but agreed that the masses as a whole would remain a pool of useful labour. This was yielding to a principle of selection coming from those in power and authority, by which a handful of the clever would be creamed off, to the neglect of the rest.

Démia went on to say that “they (his schools) would further be, if you wish, like information centres and labour markets, in which the people within easy reach could come and take some to serve in their houses, others to be employed in business some even to study more.” In other words, they would be treated as a workforce. The time spent on “buttons, knitting and lacework” will have got the children used to physical effort and prepared them for their jobs. As soon as they are old enough to start an apprenticeship properly so-called (i.e. at the age of 8 or 9), “they will no longer be kept at school.” Démia was concerned with the condition of the children of the poor - both their spiritual plight and the burden on the administration and their threat to good order. He wanted them to do good, to be good Christians, but in other respects he yielded to the views of the powerful ruling and trading class of this great silk-manufacturing city.²⁰

His, in some of its expressions, was a very different language from what De La Salle’s would be. The mass of the poor would not be “mud” for him; he never envisaged that children “better disposed for the arts, science and virtue” would be singled out for a better education, while the majority remained a mere ignorant labour force. On the contrary, he and his Brothers would stand selection on its head. Their Rule would say: “They will show an equal affection for all their pupils, more even for the poor than the rich, because they are much more charged by their Institute with the former than the latter.” Against vested interests, and in spite of repeated condemnation by the courts, his schools would teach the children to write “perfectly”, that is, to the

technical perfection the master-writers claimed they only should teach. To learn to read and write perfectly and to count, children would attend his schools to the age of twelve and even beyond, and it would be the parents, not the employer class, who would decide when the child should be put to work, the Brothers encouraging them not to curtail their schooling. All this comes very much into his life later.

The sixteen rectors of the School Board met periodically at Démia's house. On his admittance to the Board, a new rector made the following declaration: "I, ..., prostrate at the feet of the holy Child Jesus, in presence of his most holy Mother and of all the heavenly court, intend with the help of heaven to apply myself, as far as I shall be able, to support the progress and perfection of schools for the poor under the instructions of their director and according as the Company and the Board judge it necessary..." Nobody could start a school from now on unless the board agreed. Inspectors were sent round. Masters were called to give an account to the rectors, standing and bare-headed unless they were clerics. On the first Sunday of each month, the masters and mistresses of Lyons met for a retreat. On 26 April 1683 the vicar-general started among the masters of fee-paying schools the Confraternity of St Charles Borromeo. For the others, Demia preferred to gather them separately on the last Sunday of the month.

St Charles's Seminary. The Sisters of St Charles, 1680

Démia was concerned about having good teachers and therefore about their training. His answer was to prepare men for the priesthood in a seminary that along with the usual course of studies included some pedagogical training. He began the seminary of St Charles in 1672, financed and controlled by the Board. There he maintained poor priests intended for the schools and who would at the same time be curates in the parish. At one time, when he was short of money while he was training his clerics, he rented a house for them and used up all his own furniture, even sleeping on a straw mattress. In his seminary, theology and philosophy were taught in preparation for ordination, meditation and prayer were catered for, and the regime was one of poverty and mortification. Celibate laymen were accepted, but Démia had mainly future priests in mind. After ordination they stayed on to form a community. A contemporary²¹ spoke of 24 priests: twelve masters each with an assistant, going out twice a day to the different parts of the town to teach boys gathered in rooms rented for the purpose.

In 1686 he managed to start a community of schoolmistresses supported and controlled by a "Ladies' Assembly". They became the *Daughters of St Charles* in 1680 and they began training novices in 1686. Barré's *Statutes and Regulations* of 1677, just published in 1685, served as guide for this

training, for D mia asked Montigny to send one of his Sisters to take charge of this training-centre, and this was done. By 1687 there were 28 of these mistresses. The community was financed by the School Board. This teaching congregation still remains.

As for his clerical schoolmasters, teaching was seen only as an accompanying function of being a priest. D mia's Regulations for the Schools of the City and Diocese of Lyons stipulated that letters of appointment "will be only for one or three years, and may only be continued for three years more, whatever the pretext, and this prolongation will not be given before being decided at a full meeting of the Board."²² He might allow a third period, but teaching remained only a temporary stage. The school would be a 'novitiate' on the way to the priesthood, "because in teaching the little ones they would learn how to instruct grown-ups." Although this did ensure that a flow of clerics with some training would go into the schools, it was very different from the lifelong dedication that children's education required and that we have seen in the case of many Sisters' communities and as we shall see in the case of De La Salle's Brothers. D mia still held to the traditional view that schoolmasters of boys had to be clerics. His system did not survive.

D mia's hopes and achievements. A comment

D mia was also concerned about villages and small towns, and got his archbishop to lay down that every priest in the diocese had to serve in a country post before aiming at a town one. His seminary provided both parish priests and curates for market towns and villages and from it also people left to become schoolmasters or tutors. Only a quarter of those who came stayed more than a year, half not more than four months.²³ By the end of the century clerical formation predominated.

D mia was aware of the necessity of schools for the poor in all the towns of France. In 1685 he prepared for the coming Assembly of the Clergy a paper on the need to set up "a kind of junior seminary for the holy education of young boys destined for the most important and neglected functions of the diocese, such as those of curate, schoolmaster and catechist." The Assembly opened on 15 July. It took serious note of his R monstrances and discussed propositions concerning setting up "training schools for masters who would in future teach young children throughout the kingdom." But "as France was almost exhausted on all sides from providing immense sums to contribute to the cost of war (the Dutch War of 1672-79), the matter remained undecided and without effect."

D mia intended, when the Assembly was over, to retire to the Foreign Missions, and had handed over his work to another with that intention before leaving Lyons, but he came back to Lyons in October after barely a fort-

night's residence there. He now had tracts printed and widely published. His intermediary in Paris for remailing them to several seminary directors was M. Compagnon, the priest in charge of the schools of Saint Sulpice. Démia died on 23 October. In his will he wanted his seminary professors to be chosen preferably from his own native place.²⁴ Although he had envisaged schools for the poor throughout France, his work never went beyond his diocese: he would accept priests from elsewhere, but he never let those trained in his seminary go to other dioceses.

In Lyons his work was accepted, and as director of schools he was able to get existing ones to adopt his regulations. Thirty-one did so by the end of the century. Building on *L'Ecole Paroissiale* and his own experience, he drew up detailed guidance for teachers in his School Regulations.²⁵ Although he was not the first to train masters or mistresses, Charles Démia was the first to begin an overall organisation at diocesan level and to have a Schools Bureau, with a well-organised system of inspection of the schools. Members of the Board did the inspecting. Once a year also, they went with the masters to visit the families.²⁶

On Démia's work Chartier, Julia and Compère comment: "A typical product of the French Catholic reform, Démia's creation helps to take better measure of the radical and for long disquieting Lasallian novelty."²⁷ The stress after Trent on reforming the clergy led in France to an estimate of the priestly ministry that overlaid the New Testament truth that the Church, the Body of Christ, is built up by a whole variety of ministries or forms of service. The work of De La Salle's Brothers was an affirmation of this truth. He himself later in his life set out his understanding, based especially on St Paul, of the ministry of the Catholic teacher. The existence of his Society and the character of its work upset traditional views and even challenged a trend of the reform.

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PART II

CONVERSION TO THE CARE OF TEACHERS OF THE POOR

1679-1688

Chapter 6: “God is not in the habit of forcing the inclinations of men...” 1679-1682¹

Dom François Elie Maillefer, one of De La Salle’s first biographers, tells us of him that looking back, “he found himself charged with it (i.e the establishment of the Christian schools) by ways so simple and unforeseen that he could not refrain from admiring the finger of God which guided his steps. He was himself surprised to the point of astonishment.”²

Some fourteen years after those opening events, De La Salle wrote for the benefit of his little society a record of its beginnings. Brother Bernard writes:³ “This is how the Institute of the Brothers of the Christian Schools came to birth. Our servant of God himself made out an abridged account in a manuscript that was found, written in his own hand, that he kept hidden more than twenty years and that was happily discovered....Thus it will be from this manuscript that we will take all that we are going to say up to the fourteenth year of its institution, for he did not go further in his writing.”

The story begins in 1679 and takes us to 1693. Most regrettably we no longer have the manuscript although it was used by the first three biographers. They quote from it only at times. At least, we no longer depend mostly on dates officially recorded in family documents and on looking at the background alone. We have the recorded experience of the saint himself; yet this still gains from being placed in its context.

After February 1679 Canon De La Salle was on the whole free of his time to be a scholarly priest and canon. He had not yet, as we have seen, come to a conclusion about his life-plan. He was unsatisfied with being merely a canon yet persuaded that a parish was not for him. At least, with rooms to spare in the hôtel in the Rue Sainte Marguerite, he was putting up priests coming into Rheims from the country. It was a way of continuing Roland’s work with the clergy.

A man sent from Rouen

Some time in March, it seems, John de La Salle had occasion to call at the Sisters’ house in the Rue du Barbâtre. **As he came to the door**, he saw there a stranger much travel-stained, wearing a black robe and white bands, his hair cut short, though clearly not a priest. With him was a boy of about fourteen. When the door opened, Canon De La Salle was surprised to see the recognition and warm welcome Sister Françoise Duval gave to the two. He was led into one parlour while the two strangers were ushered into the other.

The man was Adrian Nyel, the one we have already heard so much about. Here was a little coincidence that marked the beginning of those events through which the Holy Spirit was to move so gently M. De La Salle.

What brought Adrian Nyel to Rheims - he who had a life-contract with the Poor Board of Rouen and had been the lynch-pin of their schools for twenty years and was now well into his fifty-eighth year? In Rheims, Nicholas Roland had concentrated on the upbringing of daughters of the poor because "mothers and the eldest girls of families and servants are usually put in charge of the education of the children more than the fathers." But he did plan around 1678 to obtain one of Barré's Brothers to begin something for boys. Barré, however, was back in Paris by then and Anthony de la Haye was dead, so nothing came of it. But Ponce Maillefer, the cloth merchant from Rheims who had settled in Rouen, and his wife (née Jeanne Dubois) of whom we have heard the story, and who had shown their concern for the poor of their adopted city, did decide to fill the gap. They were related to Roland: their son Simon had married in Rheims a grand-niece of his. Mme Maillefer, having provided since 1671 for two of Barré's Sisters to run the school in Darnétal - even donating the house to them - was eager to do the same for girls in her native Rheims. But Roland had already done this in 1674. A certain Mme Daubin or D'Aubin, who was possibly the administrative superior of the Sisters of Rouen from 1674 to 1677, was sent on a fact-finding mission to Rheims. She found that by now ten other women had joined Françoise Duval and Anne Le Coeur, but that nothing had been done for boys. On being informed, Mme Maillefer got in touch with Roland and in 1677 she and her husband agreed to give financial backing for the boys' school that Roland so much wanted. His death next year was a set-back but it did not discourage her.

The need was to find, not just two or three young men willing to be masters, but a man of drive, able to relate to the authorities, and who would supervise the project. Canon De La Salle might have been the man, in view of what he had achieved for the Sisters. He must have been approached, but he did not see himself as the one to get involved. Six months went by, and then Mme Maillefer turned to Nyel and offered him an annual salary of 300 livres if he moved to Rheims and used his skills to recruit and train masters to start a new school there. He accepted. To be free of his obligations to the General Hospice, from which he drew 100 livres a year plus his keep, he found enough capital, as has been noted already, to deposit with the administrators. They in return agreed to give him a life pension of 100 livres a year and to allow him to end his contract. The agreement is dated 23 September 1678.⁴

He could have introduced his successor to the work or he could have gone immediately to Rheims. It is generally said, however, that he did not travel till March. Françoise Duval may have advised him to wait till the future of her

community had been decided by the grant or refusal of letters patent. Since these were granted in February, it fits in if Mme Maillefer, on receiving the news, arranged at once to send Nyel with letters to Françoise in the first place as the one who understood best Roland's intentions. Nyel was to take up lodgings with her brother Christopher Dubois, uncle of Roland's niece Charlotte.⁵

Nyel travelled from Rouen with a boy of fourteen whom we only know as Christopher, and who may have been one of the orphan boys Nyel taught till they were fourteen, when he had to find work for them. And so he arrived at the Rue du Barbâtre. While he was discussing the matter of the school in the parlour of the Sisters' convent, Sister Françoise called in Monsieur De La Salle, introduced him to Adrian Nyel and explained the plan Nyel had in mind. It was based on his experience in Rouen: he would contact the Charity Board, reveal Mme Maillefer's offer and count on their backing to open a school for poor boys that would cost them nothing to run. The Canon realised that, in view of Mme Varlet's and Roland's and his own experience, this was about the last thing to do. Nyel would have to rent premises or be offered available space. But the Rheims Board, controlling by now all the hospices of the town and having had to climb down when Le Tellier championed Roland's plan, would oppose any foundation that might attract a share of public donations. The Corporation would also object to any charity scheme that might fail and leave them to pick up the pieces. Another scheme for the numerous and despised workers would raise many hackles. M. De La Salle recommended extreme caution. For this stranger of the lower class to stay at the Dubois's would be noticed at once and questions would be asked. "Why not come with me?" De La Salle asked graciously, "Country priests are known to lodge with me; your dress resembles theirs, and you will not be noticed." It was agreed that a week or so would be sufficient to recruit masters and secure premises, after which Nyel would make, as he wanted to do, the pilgrimage to the little church of Our Lady at Liesse, fifty kilometres to the north and then return and begin teaching. He was delighted to accept the hospitality of a canon so praised by Roland's Sisters.

The opening of Nyel's school is successfully negotiated by Canon de La Salle

De La Salle next accepted to get quietly in touch with the various people who had previously given their backing to his negotiations on behalf of the Sisters of the Child Jesus, hoping they would know how to go about the matter. One of the first people he contacted was Dom Claude Bretagne, who had a sound understanding of the affairs and people of Rheims. He was all in favour of the enterprise, but advised caution so as to ensure that what steps

were taken would guarantee success. The week ran out with no solution in sight. Various other persons, separately and discreetly consulted, made suggestions that all had their difficulties. Again, as in his negotiations for the Sisters, it was the Canon who proposed a way out. Why not get the school sponsored by a parish priest of the town? The Council of Trent and succeeding Canon Law had made it a parish priest's duty to see to the religious instruction of children, and this had been confirmed in local law. If he decided to open a school for the purpose in his parish, no one would have anything to say, and the archbishop would back him up.

Canon De La Salle quietly called a meeting at his house of the various people already consulted in order to put the idea before them and ask their advice on the parish priest to approach. Four names came up; three were put aside for reasons coinciding with De La Salle's quick sizing-up of them at that meeting of August 11th the preceding year. He was the one to put forward finally the name of Nicholas Dorigny, parish-priest of the Church of Saint-Maurice. This was a church situated in the little Rue Saint-Maurice that linked the Rue du Barbâtre with the Rue Neuve, in the heart of the poor working-class area of the city. That Dorigny was related to the Coqueberts and the Maillefers might help⁶, but the main reason was his known devotedness to his parish and his ability to defend within his rights anything he undertook. The Jesuits, whose College ran alongside his church, had the right to nominate its incumbent, along with other claims, but Dorigny was able both to keep on good terms with them and to uphold his own prerogatives. Everyone agreed that De La Salle's choice was a good one. Nyel, with whom the final decision lay, was delighted to accept. The present church of Saint Maurice incidentally, was badly damaged by fire in 1943 and has little but the Lady Chapel that De La Salle would recognise. But as you leave the church, you can notice inside the door on either side, half-size statues of St De La Salle and Blessed Roland.

De La Salle, appropriately, was the one who arranged an interview with Dorigny and presented Nyel to him. He found that Dorigny was already thinking of starting a school in his parish and was looking for some cleric to take charge of it. A cleric would have some benefices and other sources of remuneration and would be thus no charge on the parish. In a poor parish this was crucial, apart from the fact that it was normal to think first of a cleric. It made all the difference to the discussions when Nyel could say he was guaranteed 300 livres a year. De La Salle's sponsorship of this stranger also mattered. Nyel was a good communicator ("the most suitable man alive to negotiate", says Blain⁷) and was able himself to give the background to the scheme and reveal his own long-standing commitment to schools for the poor. His dress also and his short-cut hair, at a time when there were in this field no diplomas

and no professional backing, gave the impression of someone serious in a permanent way about the work. Dorigny was elated at this gift from heaven for him, and offered a place in his presbytery across the street to Nyel and his young companion, and promised that the room in it he had planned to use as a school would be got ready. He asked as a guarantee that the 300 livres should be sent annually to himself, from which he would deduct food costs, but otherwise he was happy to lodge them rent-free. The school opened shortly after, we do not know when; the traditional date given is 15 April. Easter that year fell on 2 April, so that the week after Low Sunday seems a suitable time. The presbytery in which the school functioned was situated where No. 14 Rue Saint-Maurice now is. De La Salle was pleased with the outcome. He may have continued to show interest, perhaps calling at the presbytery now and then, for it was only a few minutes' walk beyond the house of Roland's Sisters, whose affairs he was still concerned with. But his relationship was that of a kindly and discreet bourgeois canon. His own house was also back to normal again. Yet that day in April 1679 was significant in his life.

Nyel opens another school. Madame de Croyères

Nyel must have been a devoted and remarkable man. At 58 he was able to control and win the hearts of ragged children who had lived too much on street corners, teach them in unhygienic conditions and with limited materials in a crowded classroom, and be still ready to plan new projects and be on the move visiting the right people. He must have got from Dorigny and Françoise Duval a good idea of the needs of the town, and would see for himself the usual idleness, the gambling and the fighting among the children in the dirty streets. He had been sent to open only one school, but he felt very much the need to repeat in Rheims what he had achieved in Rouen through the Poor Board: to open several schools in the poor quarters of the town. He had picked up from De La Salle that the best way to proceed in Rheims was to find someone who would provide the necessary funds and then approach a parish priest. It was a great relief and a new, refreshing experience not to have to work through the heavy control of the Poor Board.

He made enquiries, in the first place from the Sisters of the Child Jesus. Françoise Duval immediately thought of a benefactress of her community, Catherine, the widow of Anthony Lévêque, known as 'des Croyères' from the lands he held. She had donated 1000 livres to the Sisters and had in mind to endow a school in her parish, St James's. Nyel wasted no time calling on her. Very likely Françoise Duval went with him and introduced him. But from then on Nyel's ability to sell a project came into play. He explained to the widow his ideals and gave her his background. With Sister Françoise to corroborate, it was sufficient to make Mme des Croyères eager to get a boys'

school started. When Nyel mentioned Canon De La Salle, it gave her new assurance, and she asked to see him. For she had already met him and had experienced his courtesy and concern about Roland's schools. When he was negotiating about getting them approved by the Corporation, she had been one of the benefactors he had approached to accept the agreement that, in case of the work failing to get legal recognition, her donation would go to the town's General Hospice. She rightly felt now that in the negotiations over her project De La Salle would be the right one to take the lead.

This was a godsend, Nyel thought, and lost no time in going to see De La Salle at his hôtel to tell him of Mme des Croyères' intentions and of her desire to see him. He urged him to accept the responsibility of being the negotiator. The canon was taken aback. Nyel's brief had been to open one school for the poor, and that had been done. But here he was, moving out on his own and counting on De La Salle to back him up. This was the third time he would have his name involved in the matter of schools for the oppressed home-worker that his own class and the Town Council had no time for. He was beginning to see it as a good work for people like Nyel to do, and that he himself was doing the right thing in using his diplomacy. But it looked as if some direct responsibility was coming his way, and he shrank from it. He did, however, meet Mme des Croyères: in courtesy, he could hardly refuse. She told him she felt she had not much longer to live. She wanted his promise that if she provided for an annual sum of 500 livres, he would see her parish-priest and secure the establishment of a school with two masters in perpetuity. She also pleaded with him that he would accept some responsibility, not for finding teachers or running the school, but in keeping a priestly eye on their behaviour and application. In cooperation with Nyel, the man really in charge, his role would be to see that the school was really giving a good religious instruction, for that was the main object of her foundation. Under pressure from her, and from Nyel, De La Salle consented: he felt that here was a small area of discreet pastoral care that as a priest he could hardly refuse.

If it was not his greatest in the sequence of decisions he was to make that took him to where God was leading him, this one marked nevertheless a first turning-point. He had given no thought to looking after schools for boys, and had it been put to him starkly he would have refused. For one thing, his mind and some of his gifts were in other directions. He was still thinking, for instance, of his doctorate. Again, he had been given, after his ordination, powers to preach and hear confessions throughout the archdiocese, and would be given on 16 October 1682 the power to absolve even reserved cases. On 27 December 1678, after preparing her, he received the abjuration of the Huguenot Suzanne Périeux. In 1684, at the beginning of April, therefore nearly two years after moving to the Rue Neuve, he preached a mission somewhere

outside Rheims. He had therefore gifts with penitents that were recognised. People were beginning to come to him for spiritual advice. The other obstacle to his taking up schools for the poor was his instilled repugnance for any close contact with the large mass of the ignorant and dirty poor. But here he was, promising to keep an eye on two masters from this same class. We can see the progression to this small commitment as an example of the Spirit working through ordinary events.

Satisfied that all would now go well with the school, the ailing widow made over to De La Salle that Easter the first annual payment of 500 livres, intending to finalise the arrangement in her will. She died before being able to do so, but her heirs fully honoured her promise. Nyel looked around for teachers. With his experience, he had a good idea of what was the best he could get, but Dorigny and Sr Françoise must have helped. The two classes in the Rue Saint-Maurice were full and an extra master was needed, so that he had to find three new teachers. He was likely to leave Christopher to initiate two new masters as St Maurice's school while he himself started the new school in St James's parish with a new master. The house in which the two classes were located was somewhere close to the church, but we cannot be more precise. The church, apart from the stained-glass windows, is almost as St De La Salle knew it, combining several architectural styles from the end of the twelfth to the sixteenth century.

Nyel gathers his teachers in a community. And opens a third school

Nyel's next step was eventually to make all the difference to De La Salle's attitude to his work. The three new men, being all from Rheims, could easily have stayed at home, but Nyel knew by experience the advantage of having them together. He could help them in their difficulties by having the time to discuss them, and they would be better off for their work than in their crowded homes. The other reason was that in Rouen, as we have seen, he had adopted for himself and the other teachers a simple Christian structure to their lives that he valued. If they were young and unmarried on entering, they may have intended to serve in the schools for a few years before marrying. Whether they would then be replaced is not clear, but we have seen that two or three of Nyel's team in Rouen were still teaching and celibate when La Salle's Brothers took up their task in 1705. Whatever his understanding of community, Nyel asked M. Dorigny to take in all his four masters. Since the usual meagre salary for a charity school teacher was 150 livres, another 450 was needed in addition to the 300 Dorigny was receiving so far, and Mme des Croyères's legacy could be drawn upon to cover 300 of that. But Dorigny could justly claim lodging fees from masters coming from outside his own parish, poor as it was, and he asked for a total annual payment of 1000 livres.

Canon De La Salle personally guaranteed to make up the difference. It did not mean that all of this, if any, would come from his own pocket. When Mme Maillefer heard of the success of the scheme, she would surely send more funds, and she would easily prevail on her brother and son, Christopher Dubois and Simon Maillefer, both living in Rheims, to contribute. De La Salle was the go-between who perhaps made up for any shortfall. Meanwhile, since people knew of him but knew nothing of Nyel, it was De La Salle's name that was being linked with this rather unwanted appearance of new charity schools.

So Nyel, free of all financial worry, was happy to guide all four masters now lodging with him in St Maurice's presbytery. But it was not enough for him. In his ambition to open new schools, he was often out, no doubt seeing the Sisters and calling on people they might suggest as good contacts. He often went to see De La Salle to speak of the work and try and get him interested. The canon began to see more and more the value and need of the work; Nyel's long commitment would help him to see that. He would see it was consonant with Christ's love of the poor and lowly. But he was still living in a purely benefactor's role. "I had imagined," he wrote later, "that my responsibility for the schools and teachers consisted of seeing to their upkeep and seeing that they acquitted themselves of their duty with piety and application." So it was at the moment.

Both the schools were proving their worth in the eyes of the parents of these poor children, and so many were being sent that five masters were not enough. Here was proof of Nyel's pedagogical skill and love of the poor and his ability to inspire his masters. Yet there was no more room in the presbytery, nor would available finances cover new outlays of money for more masters. Nyel discussed the matter with the canon and asked him what ideas he might have concerning the financial problem. De La Salle gave it positive consideration. He had some obligation to the late Mme des Croyères; he felt that he could not let Nyel down in his enthusiasm for these schools that were producing such good. Yet he wanted no direct part in them: that was unthinkable. He found a solution that in fact was another minor involvement. He would rent a house that was available on the edge of the bourgeois quarter at no great distance from his own, "renting a house," Bernard says, "behind Saint Symphorian's, near the rampart."⁸ This makes it about as far on the other side of St Symphorian's church as the church was from his - about 150 to 200 yards in either case. The masters could live in it and he would have their food prepared in his house and taken to them by a servant. It strikes one as the awkward solution of someone who is willing but is trying not to get too drawn into the situation. He took out a lease on the house on one of the recognised days for leases to start: December 24th, halfway through the financial year. He took it out for a year and a half. It was a welcome Christmas present for

Nyel and his community of young men. One fact strikes us from this arrangement: whereas De La Salle could have suggested as a solution to the financial problem to let the teachers live at home, instead he accepted the soundness of Nyel's wanting to have the masters with him under one roof. Unknown to himself, he was preparing his own community. But for the moment, he could relax.

1680

Except that, as he was to continue finding out, this arrangement led to another step he hadn't foreseen. Nyel quickly realised that with a room or two to spare in the new house, he could approach the parish-priest of St Symphorian's at once and offer to start a one-class school in premises that would cost him nothing. The parish-priest agreed to find funds for the salary of one master. He had been edified to see all the other masters at Mass and Vespers in his church; some went to him for spiritual direction. Nyel would have to see Monsieur De La Salle for his agreement to this new use of his house. Again, the proposal must have taken him by surprise, but he could say he was not concerned directly, and schools for the poor he was already beginning to appreciate. He would have to keep an eye on this one, too. Where was it leading him? One can reasonably suppose that Nyel put Christopher in charge of the new school and found a replacement for him at St Maurice's. He could look back with great satisfaction, even surprise, at what he had achieved in a new town within a year: three schools functioning, and everything going well.

Canon de La Salle obtains his Doctorate in Theology and takes back his trusteeship

These events were still peripheral to De La Salle's life. His normal activities and preoccupations had not changed. At Easter 1680, as he had intended, he applied for permission to proceed to the Doctorate in Theology. No new reading was required, no new thesis; it was a question of prestige in part, and a question of money. The directors of the Seminary of Saint Sulpice advised against the expense of being made a Doctor in Sorbonne in a spirit of humility and detachment, especially as a Bachelor was said to know as much theology as a Doctor. Better to spend the money on books, they thought. In Rheims, where far fewer people that mattered had to be invited, costs were less, and John went ahead.

In preparation for his doctorate he was required to have printed, in six columns, a list of 'theses' - more like themes or topics - that he planned to expand on in public at an academic occasion known as the *Vespéries*. These

topics covered the whole field of his theological studies. For two hours two BDs who were in the second year of their Licentiate put questions to him. Then he himself developed his list of 'theses' in presence of two Doctors who challenged him if necessary. He went through this procedure, satisfied his two examiners and was declared competent to be a Doctor. He was given a day when he would be incorporated among the Doctors of the University of Rheims. The intervening time was spent sending out invitations and having St Patrick's Hall lavishly decorated at his expense. All the BD's and Licentiates attended the ceremony, which was presided over by the Dean and the Doctors. The Dean made a eulogy of the candidate, who responded modestly and briefly, and then swore the usual oath to defend the Catholic faith and the rights of the University. The Chancellor now placed the four-cornered Doctor's hat on the candidate's head, and the new Doctor exercised his magisterium by sitting in the president's chair and listening to a candidate for the Licentiate arguing his thesis.

Canon John Baptist de La Salle, priest, Doctor in Theology, had attained so far a high point in terms of his priestly ambitions. He could have become a lecturer in theology, a spiritual director in the seminary, or be called on to take on diocesan responsibilities. He might have become a sound spiritual director and a priest gifted in reconciling lapsed sinners and Protestants. Like several of his colleagues at Saint Sulpice he might have become a bishop. If his formal studies were now ended, he never lost his readiness to learn, and kept up his library.

On 18 July he took back, as he intended, the legal trusteeship of his brothers. He did so, he said "in order to bring comfort and relief to his brothers and to take care of their possessions." This seems to imply that Nicholas Lespagnol, their great-uncle and trustee in their brother's place, had not well seen to either. He had been unwilling in 1676, and at 65 as he was now, an old man for the times, he may not have been really interested in nor able to understand the needs of a young boy now about ten, and two others in their teens. Food allowance was catered for, but they had to get other expenses from their great-uncle. It wasn't easy for them to go to him, although he lived close by in the Rue de Tambour that ran from the Cornmarket to the Town Hall Square, to ask him about shoes and clothes and for extra pocket money for special occasions. The family council agreed to John's request and the Lieutenant of the Bailiwick ratified it. On 18 July Nicholas Lespagnol was asked to prepare his statement of accounts for 1676 to 1680, and this was done by 28th. It took less time than in John's case since it was he who had straightened out the accounts during his own trusteeship, and also because there were fewer people in the family to cater for. For the same reason John had a much less onerous task as trustee than previously. He was happy, in any case, to look

after his three brothers.

Adrian's mobility forces De La Salle to a decision

For seven months now Nyel and his community of masters had been living in the house the canon had rented for them, and were running three schools. But things were not going too well. Supervising three schools was not enough for Nyel. He was on the go again, doing much visiting in the hope of starting a fourth school. One would almost say that exchanging the bureaucratic control he had lived under in Rouen for the ideal support he had in Rheims had given him a new lease of life. When De La Salle went now and then to see the masters he would often find Nyel away, and when they told him of their difficulties, he advised them as best he could. On how to run a class of these boys he knew nothing, but he could see clearly that if the masters had no order in their own lives there was no hope of establishing it in their schools about which complaints were beginning to come back to him. These were well-meaning young men, willing to teach and live together, having their keep but receiving no wages. Brother Bernard⁹ says these masters had begun to observe fixed times for retiring, for personal prayer, for going to Mass and for meals. "But as Monsieur Nyel was often visiting, was almost all day at his school of St James's, and on Sundays and holydays took his pupils to Mass and was almost never at home, there could not be, among these teachers, a real community life such as there ought to be....they spent the whole morning on holydays and Sundays running and going about as they liked".¹⁰

There was nothing basically wrong in this, but it was against the *esprit de corps* that Nyel himself believed was right for schoolmasters but seemed unable to impose. The house was becoming more like a hostel. De La Salle saw deeper than that. He already perceived that beyond mere external order, if these young men put more self-control and Christian depth into their lives, they would command more respect from their pupils and influence them more. Following Mme des Croyères's wishes then, and in agreement with Monsieur Nyel, he made out a somewhat fuller time-table for the masters. It was not more than what Poor Boards, for instance, would lay down for their staff. Presumably the arrangement supposed a more frequent presence of the canon at their house. Nyel would appreciate this, but it also meant he could be freer than ever to move around.

The matter, in fact, could not stay there. The canon's own sense of order, whether rediscovered or gained in the last ten years of more controlled Christian living, made him regret there was no one with the schoolmasters long enough to give them some steadiness of life-style by his presence and encouragement, no one to fill their own ignorance of the faith they were supposed to be teaching, none to help them to reflect over their teaching methods

and improve them. "As he said himself, he could endure only with much pain that the masters should continue to live and behave as badly as they were doing."¹¹ Bernard here seems to be quoting from De La Salle's memoir. Something in the canon was leading him to find an answer. The parish priests sponsoring these schools must have come to him and asked if he could do something, and he must have been sensitive to the fact that it was he who had suggested the parochial solution in the first place.

The decision that began to thrust itself upon him was this: he had taken one step so far of renting a house for these young men. Should he not now take them into his own house where he could exercise a direct influence on them? But it was an enormous step to take, and he hesitated. It would mean being personally and directly involved, but most of all it would arouse the indignation of his family and of the whole bourgeoisie; and for him living with these men was unthinkable. "If I had believed," he wrote in his memoir, "that the care I took of the schoolmasters out of pure kindness would ever have made it a duty for me to live with them, I should have given it up." But things were not at that stage yet. There were spare rooms in the house and empty servants' quarters. For most of the week these masters would only be in for meals. The presence of one or two priests from the country that he often took in, would help in inhibiting their too coarse manners. But he hesitated, and this went on till Christmas, when he had to think of arranging for the lease on their house to be renewed the next June, or let it lapse and take them into his own house. Hesitation implies he is not rejecting the idea. Socially it was a huge step to make that would bring comment and endless criticism. We can say that the Holy Spirit was gently enlightening and prompting him and that he was praying and seeking God's will.

Canon Blain records¹² as happening a couple of years later something of which, he says, the memoirs do not give the exact date, and which may better fit in here. If Monsieur Nyel was to be so easily on the move, needing to be replaced by another master fairly frequently, leaving them eventually all on his hands, De La Salle realised that the best thing to do was to find replacements. "But this plan had consequences that the pious Canon feared: to take on himself to provide the empty schools with masters meant taking over a work that he valued and loved but of which just then he wished to have only a free and voluntary supervision, without commitment and without obligation... In this dilemma, he determined to make a retreat in order to implore God's light and to be informed of his holy will. In order to do so with greater recollection and silence, he hired a very isolated garden near the Augustinians and close to the town ramparts, and which was the first witness of his transports of fervour and of his mortification. (This is evidently Louis De La Salle's garden that in fact now belonged to John. He had leased it out some time

after his father's death and eventually sold it in 1683.) After giving his orders for the house and seeing to the Community of Schoolmistresses that M. Roland had entrusted to him, he retired there in solitude in order to give his mind to prayer without distraction, and his body to penance without sparing.

Whatever we make of these few days spent apart, they show both that the canon took time to make up his mind on something that went completely against family and public opinion, and that he was determined to seek and follow the will of God.

He consults Fr Barré in Paris. His decision-making crisis

He had to travel to Paris on some business before Christmas. He profited by it to go to the Minims' friary near the **Place Royale** (now Place des Vosges) to consult Fr Barré. This was De La Salle's first meeting with the man he had heard so much about from Canon Roland and his Sisters and from Nyel. It was about this time, in 1680 or 1681, that Barré's Brothers of the Holy Child Jesus opened their first school in Paris. "He gave him an account," writes Bernard,¹³ "of all that was going on in Rheims concerning the behaviour of the schoolmasters. This worthy son of saint Francis de Paula, full of experience, did not hesitate in such a situation and at once advised Monsieur De La Salle to get the masters to live with him... It was no doubt after many fervent entreaties of this holy religious that our zealous canon finally decided to lodge with him all the schoolmasters. For it was on that alone that the edifice of the society of the Brothers of the Christian Schools depended, and it was there that a start should be made to lay its foundations."

The canon, by sharing his state of mind with a man known to present the Gospel without compromise, and who had involved himself so much in schools for the poor, was clearly not running away from his problem. Following the Minim's advice would open up a commitment of which he could not see the end...Nyel was ageing: what then? But he accepted that it was God's will for him. It confirmed what interiorly he felt he was being asked to accept, and that must have brought him inner peace. But he would wait for the circumstances that confirmed it.

One might, because of all his hesitations, see in De La Salle a very undecided, weak-willed person, dominated by human respect. Blain several times says he was "very perplexed", a phrase he must have got from De La Salle's memoir and which were expressions of honesty. He was in a crisis and he was facing it. He possibly left in his memoir a record of his state of mind, of a sequence of possible evasions and victories, of his awareness and discernment of successive inspirations of the Holy Spirit, if Bernard is drawing on it in these lines:¹⁴

“This servant of God was in great distress, not knowing how to make up his mind. For on the one hand, the desire he had of the spiritual good of these masters and of the schools that depended on them, and the love he had then and that he has always kept for regularity and good order attracted him very much to putting into execution the advice of the Reverend Father Barré. On the other hand, he had a great repugnance for bringing the masters into his house, and he had an extreme anguish to bring himself to it. And what increased his distress was that he foresaw the consequences and how much he would suffer for them, he who till then had conversed only with distinguished persons, both by their civility and by the rank of honour they held in the Church or in society. In addition, he had with him three of his brothers, whose well-being, behaviour and education he was charged with. He foresaw well ahead that associating the schoolmasters with them would in no way please his relatives, as being quite incompatible, and could cause them much unhappy feeling, as well as all his friends....All the difficulties just mentioned... made him remain three months in uncertainty and indetermination.”

What we see is someone who was no fanatic short-cutting his own nature in coming to a decision, but one who, once he had made it, never turned back. The effect on his life is summed up by Brother Bernard :¹⁵ “When he realised that such was the will of God, he devoted himself to it with such a great zeal that nothing was capable of making him give up his undertaking: hard work, obstacles, persecutions: none of these was able to put him off from doing the work of God.”

Hurt in a snowstorm

It seems that it was towards the end of this year 1680¹⁶ that he had an accident that left a deep impression on him. He had been out in the country near Rheims, and as he was on the way back, it began to snow heavily. A stiff wind blew the snow into drifts, covering ruts and pot-holes. As he plodded forward in the dark, not far from the city he fell into a very deep rut or perhaps down the steep bank of a little stream. For all his struggles he found it impossible to get out. He shouted out for help, but there was no one around to hear. He really felt in danger of his life. He turned to God in prayer, and then renewed his struggles, and finally managed to drag himself out, though in the effort he pulled a muscle that troubled him all his life. He never spoke of this again except with great thankfulness. It may have been an experience that deepened his relationship with God.

A preliminary welcome to the masters. Death of Rose-Marie. Nyel leaves him in the lurch for a week.

With his mind made up, Canon de La Salle waited for the best opportunity to act without causing more opposition than needed. Lent came round. It was a good time to ask his brothers, aged now 17, 15 and 10, if they would accept the inconvenience of seeing these masters in the house. The latter would not live in, but come round only for the midday and evening meal. This limited presence would also ease things for the masters. Coming into a bourgeois house would show up their awkwardness, but most of the time they would be in their own residence. And so this preparatory arrangement was tried out.¹⁷ It was very painful for De La Salle. These young men, whom he then ranked below his manservant, would have shocked him by their lack of manners and lack of conversation. He would have understood the reactions of his brothers. He felt uncertain again. How was he to go on with the idea and take them permanently into his house? Once more something occurred that helped him to make up his mind because he saw it as providential.

In between, there occurred a very personal loss. His sister, Rose-Marie, died suddenly on 21 March after only ten hours' illness.¹⁸ She was only twenty-five. She was the victim of poisoning from a badly-prepared medicine. It was a potion that included a laxative made from senna-pods, which in this case seem to have been in bad condition. Four Sisters had been ill very recently for the same reason, and Marie-Rose and others had been very near to death on 9 February 1675. She was buried in the cemetery of St Stephen's Abbey to which she belonged. We know of it from the memoirs of John Maillefer, father and son, who were present at the interment. So, of course, would be all her immediate family and many others. She was it seems, a sweet and gentle person, beloved of them all. This was for John one more emotional break with the family that would make future decisions easier.

The canon was still suffering from the seemingly disastrous experiment of having the masters coming to his house when Nyel, in his visiting, found out that the town of Guise, some eighty kilometres northwest of Rheims, was looking for a master to run a proposed charity school for boys. This was something De La Salle would not be at all ready for, but to Nyel, having come all the way from Rouen, a possible move to Guise offered no problem. The amazing thing was that at sixty he was so ready to start again. Moreover, the journey would take him through Laon, the town he had lived in before moving to Rouen, and he must have had some desire both to see it again and to provide it possibly with a school. Marie de Guise, the Duchess of Lorraine who was the last of her line, had the year before confirmed her intention of endowing her town with funds for a hospice and for the religious instruction of children. Barré's Sisters in Paris were contacted for the girls; matters

were still undecided for the boys. Nyel, hearing of the project, wanted to go and offer his services to run a one-class school. De La Salle advised against getting involved. For one thing, de Montigny, Barré's second-in-command with regard to his Brothers, had had a training-centre for them in operation in Paris that year, and it was better for both schools to be under the same guidance. De La Salle had probably been told of the situation by Barré when he went to see him.

Much more relevant for himself would be the fact that if Nyel's hopes were realised, the teachers he had gathered in Rheims would be left on his hands, with nobody supervising the running of the three schools. It may be that Nyel by his absences was dropping hints to the canon that he would not always be there and that he should take his place. It would secure the future of the schools in Rheims, while he could indulge his skill in starting something new elsewhere before he had finally to give up the work. Did it dawn on De La Salle that when Nyel did give up the work, the whole care of it would fall on him?

The schools in Rheims closed for Holy Week and Nyel went off to Guise. Counting the travel on foot and a minimum of negotiations, he would certainly be away for a week. With the masters having nothing to do, it was the worst time for him to go. De La Salle, not yet convinced that the time was ripe to go the whole way by taking in the masters permanently - and he wouldn't want to make the decision in Nyel's absence - organised a week's retreat for these men in his own house. It was a perfectly acceptable thing for Holy Week - the kind of thing the Jesuits and the Mendicants would offer laymen. These young men went along with the proposal. They would still sleep in their own house. Early rising at five was current practice. So this week, after a time for personal prayer, they went to the six o'clock Mass, and then came to the hôtel in the Rue Saint Marguerite where the Canon kept them till seven in the evening, apart from times attending the Holy Week liturgies. He quickly noted the habits that came from lack of education. He tried to improve their manners as well as their attitudes. Presumably they were used to eating out of a common dish. He now had each one served separately, and had a book read during the meal.

He takes the masters into his own house. The family reaction

Nothing came of Nyel's visit to Guise and he returned empty-handed, but still hoping. He noticed the difference in the masters, and urged the canon to take them permanently into his house, pointing out that he needed to be free to try again at Guise. De La Salle, recognising Nyel's gift for getting schools for the poor started, and that he would be back in Guise as soon as he heard of something favourable, agreed in his own mind to let him go. In his prayer

he saw that here was the situation calling for a decision from which there was no return. Once the retreat was over and classes resumed, he continued receiving the masters into his house for meals only. But he began to have accommodation prepared for them, and when the lease on the house they were using expired on 24 June he formally ended it and invited Nyel and his men to live with him. From that date in 1681, the masters lived with De La Salle under the same roof. It was a decisive act. From now on he consciously accepted as God's will that he should be the guide of a Christian lay-group dedicated to teaching the poor of Rheims.

"As soon as people were aware," writes Bernard,¹⁹ "of this unexpected novelty of seeing six or seven schoolmasters who had nothing striking about them according to society, being very simply dressed, having at the time only a little black outfit with white bands, without mantle or cloak, each one talked about them according as his fancy took him." One can imagine the reaction of the family. They would soon have quizzed Peter, who may have aired his adolescent reactions and Jean-Remy, who wouldn't have understood. Jean-Louis admired his brother and stood by him. The family assembled at the hôtel in the Rue Ste Marguerite - about fifteen of them, not counting the children²⁰ - for the meal they used to arrange from time to time in order to keep a sense of family unity. They were shocked to see for themselves these uncouth young men about the place, specimens of what they would consider to be the scum of the town and whose rightful place was among the hovels of the Rue Neuve. Some, however, may have noticed that the attitude and manners of these young men showed more signs of self-mastery and consideration than they had supposed.

The masters would not be present at this family meal, but the occasion was nevertheless very tense. Criticisms began to be levelled at the young host. Some said he was doing a very odd thing for one of their class; some pitied him, others blamed him. A few recognised the good he was doing but kept quiet about it. Some accused him outright of dishonouring the family name, of putting his brothers and these men on the same plane, and of driving well-bred people from visiting him. John had feared this all along, but now that his mind was made up he had a peaceful serenity and a determined will. This meal was the first of several difficult gatherings.

An aunt of his who was present at these occasions and survived him, wrote: "Monsieur De La Salle being the eldest, the family met sometimes at his house for a meal, to keep the union between them...The man of God, who took first place there, needed to arm himself with all his patience to withstand all the things that the family said to him during those meals on the folly they claimed he was committing in undertaking to train masters for the schools to the detriment of his family...When they began to tackle him on that score, he

quietly folded his arms, listening patiently to the reasons they alleged from one side or another so as to get him to desist from his undertaking, and answered not a word." The results of this attitude were that several went away very edified, while most of them rated him as a most opinionated man whom no one could bend.

Some of them were disgusted at John's brothers being in the same house as these masters, and there was a move to take them out of his control. Jean-Louis had decided to go to Saint Sulpice the following year. He appreciated his brother's stance and was quite willing to stay with him. He saw in him a model of what he hoped to be. But the other two needed more of a home environment - which the family should have faced up to before now. Peter, aged 15, had two more years at College and intended to marry. He would be better with his married sister, Marie, who was lively and cultured. She would have amicably agreed on this; but her husband, John Maillefer, was one of those most against his brother-in-law's decision, took in Peter as a form of protest. Quite right, too, others of the family said: he doesn't know how to look after his brothers. It was a comment their eldest brother felt keenly, for he loved his family and had always looked after them carefully.

(Peter finished his College studies in 1683 and then, intending to follow in his father's footsteps, he studied law for two years at Orleans, joined the Rheims présidial and eventually became its dean. On 13 February 1696, at the age of 29, he married a Françoise Henriette of the Bachelier family. His brother Jean-Louis, now a priest and canon, conducted the ceremony. Jean-Remy, aged 25, was there, and his brother-in-law John Maillefer. Marie is not mentioned. She had children to look after, the youngest not being two years old. Of Peter's children, six died young or very young. One son became a Benedictine in 1717 and became an Apellant against the Bull Unigenitus. Two daughters joined the Congregation of Notre Dame. No child carried on the father's name. Though he had difficulty in appreciating his brother's decision in 1681, Peter came to value deeply the work which the Brothers he founded were doing in Rheims, and he became their protector.²¹)

As for Jean-Remy, aged ten-and-a-half, no one seemed in a hurry to take him in. He may have been a difficult boy. The family must have discussed his case. John kept him with him for a while and finally his grandmother placed him as a boarder with the Genovevans of Senlis, about 25 miles north of Paris. They had a college there within their abbey, run on more intense Christian lines than usual. It served both as a minor seminary for those wishing to join them, and a discouragement for those younger sons packed off by their families in the hope of finding an easy way into society by becoming one of their canons. Was this the vague hope, and was he sent so young from Rheims for this? The family had to think of his schooling in any case. To continue to

send him to the Bons-Enfants would mean that someone of the family would have to take him in. Did his conduct suggest he might not do them credit? John opposed the move but had to give way to the family council. While Jean-Remy was away Perrette, John and his brother-in-law John Maillefer saw to his properties. We know that in 1684 John advanced money to have his brother's vines looked after, and again to have his grapes harvested.²² (Jean-Remy had no vocation to the Genovevans and eventually joined the army and became sub-lieutenant in 1691 at the age of 21. But not for long. He was back in Rheims that same year and in 1698 he bought the royal office of legal attorney at the King's Mint in Rheims. He did not marry till he was forty, in 1711; the remainder of his story will be picked up then.²³)

On the above Brother Bernard writes:²⁴ "What only increased his relatives' annoyance was that there was but one table, that is to say, he and Messieurs his brothers ate in the same dining-room as the masters. The eldest (Jean-Louis) followed willingly of himself the rules that the schoolmasters observed and as far as his studies could allow him; and he did not want to part from Monsieur De La Salle for whom he had a great affection, even though he was prompted to leave him after the example of two of Messieurs his brothers who left him: the first of these two went off six months after all that we have just pointed out, and went to live with his brother-in-law, out of the disgust he had been given for Monsieur De La Salle; and sometime after the youngest was withdrawn from being with him so as to be boarded at Senlis with the Canons Regular." This brings us into 1682.

Brother Bernard is gentle with his Founder's relations: "God allowed, it seems, all these obstacles for two reasons. The first, to put to the test the virtue of his relations and to increase their merit; for, as they loved this servant of God tenderly, they were inclined to disapprove of his enterprise on account of the effort and fatigue they foresaw would result from it. The second was to increase the merit of his servant, who could not resist the grace which stirred in his heart exceedingly gently to put underfoot all the most pleasurable feelings of nature." The result of two of his brothers withdrawing left him with only Jean-Louis. But it also meant that he was free to work on the masters as his gifts and the Spirit were leading him.

1682

John Baptist de La Salle's gifts of gentle leadership²⁵

For the first six months after Nyel moved with the masters into the hôtel Saint Marguerite he saw the Canon suggesting what the group might do, what in their life they might work at to improve, without imposing anything. He was transferring to them the ways he had taken on as elder brother standing in as mother and father to his siblings. He discovered that he had that kind

of leadership. His nephew, Dom Maillefer, wrote : “He began to encourage and urge his disciples gently to acquire a spirit of control, humility, piety and of a boundless charity - all qualities that ought to be the foundation of the simplicity of their way of life. But as he had resolved to introduce nothing by authority and wished to give them attraction for virtue without constraint, he was content in these beginnings to lead them by the hand, making them relish the truths he taught them by his exhortations and still more by his example. He applied himself in this way all this year to accustom the masters to a set of exercises with which he made them familiar in a way they did not notice.”²⁶ In other words, over a whole year, he gradually introduced among them, with their consent, a set of spiritual exercises and forms of behaviour consonant with the pursuit of a deeper Christian life.

None of these young men went to him for confession and spiritual guidance, nor did he suggest it. He preferred to be in a position of guiding them externally and of being able to point out where they were wrong, without the risk of being accused of indiscretion. He encouraged them to seek spiritual advice from the parish-priest of St Symphorian’s. But the better among them found his advice too general. They went to another parish-priest, but this gave them a greater distance to cover, and sometimes, because of the number waiting their turn, they did not get back to the house till eight or nine at night.²⁷ Bernard continues: “It was the reason why the most virtuous among them, joining these reasons to their entreaties and to the affection they had for Monsieur De La Salle, begged him to hear their confessions. He was a long time without wishing to give them his agreement, but seeing that their frequent and earnest solicitations kept on, and they were sound, he acceded to their request.” Gradually all the masters came to him, and this became the normal thing, “and neither he nor several people with whom he discussed the matter found any drawback to it, although he asked them several times to tell him not to do it for the smallest reason they found against it.”

Canon Blain wrote:²⁸ “From that time on the Brothers did not want any other confessor but their founder....He lived among them as one of them....Affable, gracious, good, understanding, charitable, he won their hearts and got them to give him the key to them so as to open the door to Jesus Christ.”

THE PROSPECT WIDENS : AN APPEAL FROM RETHEL

A new set of events both left him unmistakeably as the leader of the new community and showed him that God was calling him, not just to take over the community abandoned by Nyel, but to further the creation of a number of schools for the poor beyond Rheims. It was as if God was only waiting for his

first basic decision to come into effect to signal that this was pleasing to him and to open up a new prospect that would gladden him and give new scope to his gift of enterprise.

The situation in Rethel

At the end of the school year 1681, a letter came to him from Rethel,²⁹ a small town 40 kilometres north east of Rheims. It came from the new parish-priest, Vincent Cercelet, who had been appointed the year before. He had till then been Le Tellier's chaplain and as such could not have failed to hear comment on Canon De La Salle and his involvement with schoolmasters for the poor. Whatever the negative opinions, it was also true that the parish priests concerned had high praise for the effects these masters were having. Cercelet himself had problems at the moment in recruiting a master for the small school for boys in Rethel. And so he wrote to Canon De La Salle, asking for his help. In the sequel, Rethel turned out to be the home of more than one project concerning teachers of the poor. It brought a new dimension to De La Salle's work and to his understanding of the vocation he was being led into.

Rethel, in the valley of the Aisne, in a strategic position against invasion from the east, had been made a county as far back as 1494. Henry III made it a duchy in favour of the Dukes of Nevers, whose successors sold it to Cardinal Mazarin. In 1661 Armand-Charles de la Porte de la Meilleraye married Hortensa, the Cardinal's niece, a condition being that he took the name of her uncle. And in 1663 Cardinal Mazarin obtained from Louis XIV the creation of a new duchy of Rethel-Mazarin for his new nephew-in-law, henceforth known as the Duke de Mazarin along with many other titles. With a population of five to six thousand, Rethel had still only one parish, served however by about a dozen clerics. Some of them were available to teach catechism to the young as they traditionally did. The town had its college, where the masters were required to follow the Jesuit curriculum and methods. There were also clerics and lay people who as home tutors were giving well-to-do children a preparatory education.

There had been many attempts before now to have a school in Rethel. The school itself was referred to by Archbishop Le Tellier during his pastoral visit of 1678, when he confirmed that no one could hold a class in Rethel without the consent of the parish given at a meeting chaired by the parish priest, and confirmed by a 'letter of institution' to be requested from the Archbishop. But there was no mention as to how the master was to be paid. The Duke de Mazarin, who considered himself responsible for the religious instruction of the children of Rethel, had from October 1668 paid 80 livres yearly to a teacher. But the latter left in 1676 and the school was unattended for a whole



year. The next master did not finish the school year, but from October 1678 another man took over and stayed till 1681. It was when he left in his turn that Vincent Cercelet remembered De La Salle and wrote to him. One thing stands out clearly, and that is the lack of permanency of the masters, and the consequent lack of continuity in the children's schooling.

Canon De La Salle, having only just begun to live with the schoolmasters in Rheims after a tremendous decision, and having only that situation in his sights, must have found this request introducing a new dimension altogether. However he first reacted to it - perhaps negatively and then, after prayer and reflection, positively to this new challenge and new development - he simply had no men to spare, and could only write back "promising some for the future." His answer only made certain he would be asked again. The parish priest discussed the issue as a matter of urgency with the town council and asked them to write to the canon. The Duke added his influence. De La Salle debated the matter with Nyel and it was agreed between them that Nyel should go to Rethel to investigate the affair. The prospect delighted Nyel. He had hopes of doing more than just investigate. In fact, he left the hôtel Sainte Marguerite indefinitely... "The good M. Nyel stayed there till the feast of Christmas 1681,"³⁰ and in January left for Rethel. From the point of view of the community he disappears and De La Salle is seen as the sole one to approach in the first place by anyone seeking masters or to join the community. His role as superior was being sealed.

In Rethel Nyel negotiates and starts the school

M. Cercelet would be only too willing to lodge Nyel in his presbytery. It seems that the latter, given his unwillingness to mark time, took on the one class immediately. This action would please everybody and give Nyel a favourable position when negotiating future developments with the authorities.

Very quickly, two hurdles were met with. To make up the master's salary from the 80 livres donated by the Duke to the usual 150, the parents, except those registered as poor, paid a small monthly fee, and as a result there were only forty children in the school. Nyel had never charged fees and neither would De La Salle. Nyel, who seemed to thrive on negotiating, had managed to see the Duke sometime in January or February and had obtained from him an additional contribution towards the school.

The bigger difficulty was that in his own mind the canon was already clear that community life based on the Gospel was basic to the masters running Christian schools: and therefore they must be at least two. Two masters would not only mean two salaries but also increased accommodation for them and their pupils. The town council was not prepared for this, and held back. Nyel reported back to De La Salle. John's family had relations in Rethel, and mer-

chants and other influential figures in Rethel had business contacts and relationships in Rheims, and he felt sure he would be able to find benefactors, and perhaps provide the money himself. Undoubtedly, he wanted this project to succeed. He notified Cercelet, who was also Dean of Rethel, and the latter informed the Council. On 18 February 1682 it recorded:

Monsieur De La Salle offers to provide funds to be used to buy a house which will serve as lodgings for the schoolmasters to teach without recompense poor children of the town, provided that funds for the food and upkeep of the said schoolmasters come from elsewhere; wherefore he begs the Council to be pleased, for the public advantage and for the education of the children, to agree to contributing to an establishment so advantageous to the public.

In writing 'teaching without recompense' De La Salle has in mind to send two from his community in Rheims. The matter was thrashed out at another meeting of the council, on February 26th, and their decision was expressed thus:

The Council begs the reverend Dean to thank Monsieur De La Salle for the affection he has for this town and for his liberality, that the said Council has been pleased to accept; and to carry this out, the aldermen will provide the said schoolmasters with 250 livres each year, while and for as long as the Council believes that the town is in a position to be able to provide it, and not otherwise."

The 250 livres is a carefully pared down salary for two masters, instead of the usual 300.

Presumably the lease on the one-class school ran out on 24 June, for now Nyel, working to his own plans, left Rethel for Guise. He would have the agreement and perhaps the enthusiastic support of De La Salle, who saw this leading to another school for the poor to which he could eventually send masters. On 11 June de Mazarin had paid out 80 livres. This was possibly payment up to 24 June of Nyel's six successful months in Rethel. It was equivalent to the Duke's grant for a year, and may have included the increase Nyel had secured earlier in the year and was meant also to offset the fees that Nyel refused to take.

Until the purchase offered by De La Salle could be arranged, premises would have to be rented for the two masters and two classes. Temporarily, therefore, it would seem, there was no school.

A certain Queutelot, a squire of the little neighbouring town of Château-

Porcien, now made available the lease of a house of his in the Rethel High Street, consisting of a kitchen, upper and lower room, attic, garden and out-houses, with a further option to buy it, judging by the sequel. The municipality took out a lease on the house. De La Salle sent two of his men who occupied the house while two rooms were prepared as classrooms.

As in Rheims when he met Mme de Croyères, Nyel had sung the praises of Canon De La Salle, so that de Mazarin wanted to see him. He informed him that he was coming to Rheims on a certain day and would assist at his Mass at six in the morning. He was very edified by the canon and his teachers, and visited him several times when he had occasion to come to Rheims between 1682 and 1688. It also led him very soon to discuss with him new projects.

Some drop out of De La Salle's community. Better ones take their place

Canon De La Salle had been optimistic in promising masters in the future. The fact was that some were leaving.³¹ They may have gone along with him for that retreat in Holy Week the year before, and found it novel to lodge in a bourgeois house, but not all found the new ideals and practices to be what they had bargained for. They began to drop out. A number must have left during the Christmas break, especially when they saw Nyel, with whom they had more in common and to whom they had given their first loyalty, disappear from the scene. By Easter only two of the original community remained, one of them being Christopher. Yet there does not seem to have been a crisis for the schools or for De La Salle, for new recruits began to knock at his door, and of a much better quality. Brother Bernard quotes the example of St Ignatius "who having formed an association of six companions to begin his Society of Jesus, they all left him in Spain; but God provided others whom he won over to his service when he was in Paris.

"The same thing happened to Monsieur De La Salle; for most of the masters,... wishing to live a freer and more independent life, withdrew a short while afterwards. He was even obliged to send some away who had neither the gift nor the vocation for teaching, although they had enough devotion, and had been taken on only through necessity. It was at the end of the first six months and at the beginning of the year 1682 that new subjects presented themselves who had a talent for teaching, a gift of piety as well as the readiness to live in community. It was then that a real shape of community began to appear in the house.

"It was also at the beginning of the same year that began what were in those days called the 'exercises', which are the same ones as practised today in all the houses of the Institute..."³² (Religious 'exercises' refers to such things as mental prayer, vocal prayer, spiritual reading, for which times were

set in the community.) Although he certainly gave them the idea of giving themselves a daily order of prayer together and other spiritual ‘exercises’, he left it to them to draw up a regulation, amend or add to it: “Their rules, their constitutions and all their practices were their own work. All that belonged properly to him was to have suggested them...”³³ “No doubt his suggestions came from what he had read, from what he had lived, but one would be on the wrong track to imagine that the masters’ contribution was negligible: they alone, in 1680-83, really knew the difficulties of popular teaching. It is fitting therefore to grant to this contribution of the first masters of the Lasallian community its full value as a source.”³⁴

Brother Bernard knew these community prayers and other practices virtually as they are in a copy we have in the Brothers’ Rome Archives of The Practices of the Daily Regulation, dated 1713. It comprises 21 pages of text that bear witness to what was done probably as early as 1682. It would be improved later. It contains repetitions, minute descriptions subsequently curtailed. Sometimes, among matters dealing with community life, are indications that would become part of the Brother’s teaching manual.³⁵ With a better human material, De La Salle was able quickly to make clear in its very time-table and regular practices that here was no group of young men simply looking for a job, but a Christian community looking for Gospel perfection because they were aiming to be genuine Christian teachers. It is striking how, once he had got past his trying time of decision-making and accepted the guidance of the Spirit and God’s will as discerned in events, he became clear as what kind of community he should shape, and was eager to go ahead with projects for the education of the poor. If we knew him better, we might say he was somewhat elated (as St Teresa was by her first projects), and that God was leading him forward by first successes.

This steady community life had a considerable effect on the masters’ work. Coming back from school, they would find someone to share their good and bad experiences, how the boys were responding, what their mistakes and difficulties were, and together they would gradually derive ways of improving their conduct and their methods. The canon also went into their classroom and saw at firsthand their difficult work and their reactions. Some of the new masters had had a college education, but most were of peasant stock, part of the poor working-class who were the majority of the population, or poor craftsmen whose clothes, second-hand and torn and patched, got them no respect from the boys, poor as they were themselves. De La Salle, who always had an eye for dress and looked askance at the peasant garb, provided them with a black justaucorps or jerkin, a kind of jacket taken in at the waist with a sewn-on lower half covering the upper thighs. He fitted them out a little too well as events showed later.

Things were settling down when a death occurred in this community. It was Christopher, Nyel's first companion, who had been running very successfully the little school in St Symphorian's parish. He died on May 14th, when he would not yet be eighteen. The hard work, the bad conditions and the frequent epidemics that swept through the poor area would explain it but also a bad constitution if he had been brought up in the Rouen hospice. He was buried next day³⁶ in St Symphorian's cemetery, where many notables of the city were buried, including De La Salle's parents. Christopher's death certificate described him as 'a schoolmaster at Monsieur De La Salle's.' When the news reached Nyel, it would mark the break of the remaining link between him and the Rheims community. Perhaps it determined him to leave the Rheims scene for good and abandon it to the canon, for he never returned. Christopher's death also meant that all those in De La Salle's community knew only Rheims, and only one remained who had worked with Nyel.

The Four Gallican articles of 1682

Two months before Christopher's death, the Assembly of the French Clergy gave its support to Louis XIV in his conflict with the Pope. In 1673 the king had extended the rights of regalia to the southern dioceses which for historical reasons had been exempt. The right of regalia gave the king the benefices of a vacant see until a new incumbent had been nominated. Since the king in France had the right of nominating bishops, he could easily delay doing so to his own advantage. Two southern bishops stood out and appealed to the Pope. In 1682 Louis asked for the support of his bishops. An extraordinary Assembly of the Clergy was asked to re-express the Gallican theses formulated by the Sorbonne in 1663. It did so in four articles.

De La Salle would have regretted the attitude: his fidelity to the Church and to the Pope were undoubted, and he never hesitated to make his mind on the matter very clear. This does not mean he saw the Church only as a structure. "The Church in general," he wrote in his catechism: The Duties of a Christian towards God, "is the society of all the faithful, both living and dead, who are all united in Jesus Christ." And speaking of its members he says, borrowing from St Paul: " (they are) fellow citizens of the saints and members of God's household; they form a building which Jesus Christ has built and raised on the foundation of the apostles; they become the temple where God dwells through his Holy Spirit."³⁷ Gallicanism quietened down later, then came a live issue again: La Salle had all his life to bear it in mind.

A school in Château-Porcien

Later in 1682 he was led to start a new foundation.³⁸ Only Blain refers to it, probably because it did not last long. Twelve kilometres west of Rethel lies the town of Château-Porcien. In De La Salle's day it had only about 1200

inhabitants. It soon got to know that its neighbour had now a provision for permanent schoolmasters on favourable conditions. Château-Porcien ranked as a little principality ruled by the Duke de Mazarin, and it felt it should not be behind Rethel in this matter. A pressing letter soon came to the canon from the parish priest, Pierre Faubert. The town (according to records dated 1676) had a parish priest, a curate and two other clerics, namely, a priest who taught the poor children, and a deacon who served as a cantor. The town ran its small Hôtel-Dieu or hospital, which cared for the sick and also served as a hospice for the poor and for travellers. But because of the lack of resources, there was only one room with four beds for the sick, and another room for itinerants.

It also had to provide for the instruction of the poor. For this, on the ground floor there was a room for the two schoolmistresses and a large room for a class of girls. Above were two rooms used for classes, one for boys learning Latin and another for the master who taught the poor. The buildings were in a bad state of repair. The Duke, as Prince of Château-Porcien, paid the two mistresses 60 livres a year, and in 1676 began to give 10 livres to the priest who taught the children. This priest was lodged by the Hôtel-Dieu and served as chaplain to the sick and to any travellers. He had a benefice. In addition, the usually monthly payments made by the parents of his pupils except the poorest and his Mass stipends would bring in about 100 livres a year all told, plus his keep. He was, then, comfortably well off without the little extra de Mazarin now gave him. For the master who taught the poor, the Duke paid out an annual subsidy of 30 livres.

This schoolmaster priest, François Poutrier, knew the Varlet family, for it had originated in Château-Porcien; and a girl from the town had gone to join Roland's Sisters in Rheims. Moreover John De La Salle, as trustee for his family, had invested a capital of nearly 2500 livres with the controller of the salt-office of the town, and was therefore being paid interest regularly by him. The town also owed him and his siblings conjointly a capital of just over 2500 livres invested with the municipality by three of his relatives recently deceased, and who had left it to them. So his name was not unknown in official circles. But the little town was in financial difficulties and had had to appeal to the Council of State in 1669 to have its debts officially reduced. In consequence, De La Salle was one of those to whom the municipality owed money in 1682 but in whom it was going to find, on the contrary, a benefactor. He responded positively to Pierre Faubert's letter, as he had responded favourably to Rethel. Among his new recruits, he now had men to spare. But he did not rush things: he waited for an official request from the Town Council before making a move, but on 20 June 1682 he replied in these terms to the letter from the mayor:

Rheims,
20 June 1682.

Gentlemen,

Even were I to take little interest in what concerns the glory of God, I would indeed be quite insensitive not to be moved by the urgent pleas of your Reverend Dean and by the courteous tone of the letter with which you have honoured me today.

It would be wrong of me, Gentlemen, not to send you schoolteachers from our community, in view of the enthusiasm and zeal you show for the Christian education and instruction of your children.

So please be assured that nothing is dearer to my heart than to support your good intentions in this matter. By this Saturday I will send you two school teachers, with whom I trust you will be satisfied, to open classes the day following the feast of Saint Peter. I assure you that I am very much obliged to you for your courteous remarks.

I beg you, Gentlemen, to believe that, with Respect and in Our Lord, I am, your very humble and obedient servant,

DE LA SALLE, Priest, Canon of Rheims.

This is a very beautiful letter. It is couched in the language of courtesy, but it also reveals a man in possession of his soul, and eager to move ahead. It is significant also that he speaks of “our community” in an official letter. His men themselves must have seen themselves as something more than teachers in their own city. They were prepared to go outside Rheims and away from their own families to teach the children of the working poor. This letter is the earliest we possess of John De La Salle, although only in facsimile.³⁹

From this year the Duke de Mazarin’s annual subsidy of 30 livres to the master of the boys’ school was paid out by his agent, not to anyone by name as hitherto, but to ‘a certain person...for having taught the young’. Through evangelical detachment already, these masters, representing the community in Rheims and not themselves, preferred to receive it anonymously. Only one teacher was still envisaged in this donation. The town paid another 60 livres, and so far the parents by monthly fees had found another 60 livres, giving a total of 150 livres for one master. But De La Salle, like Nyel, refused in principle to charge the families, and the parish priest had to let them have 60 livres out of his holy water dues. The two masters had to make do with this, besides their accommodation at the hospital. It was a very tight provision, and benefactors were needed to help out with exceptional expenses such as nec-

essary travel to Rheims. Canon De La Salle's personal fortune and the generosity of his friends were a kind of insurance against indigence. The call to rely on Providence alone had not yet come. For the moment, a public service in favour of the poor had been put on a new footing. There were two masters forming community with a defined way of life already, and there was an end to the fee-paying that excluded the majority of the poor.

THE FINAL BREAK WITH HIS PAST. LIFE AMONG THE POOR

Four days after he penned that letter, De La Salle carried out his most momentous decision, completing the one he had made just a year before. Several circumstances can be seen as coming together and leading him to this climax: his own growing love for the poor as he meditated on the Gospel and saw their needs; his own better understanding and relish for the work as it was now unfolding. Perhaps also he was given a period of great consolation after his recent sacrifice of himself and his past. And surely, the Holy Spirit was enlightening and powerfully prompting him. He would leave the family home for good; he would leave his wider relations and their worldly pressures, although he never neglected his brothers and sisters. In fact, he would be still meeting the family council on their behalf, though not for long. He would turn his back on the high bourgeois society he had always known. And, more positively as far as his work was concerned, he would go with his community to live among the poor. But another family decision at this time helped him to decide.

This event has been another remarkable discovery made recently by Brother Leon de Maria Aroz.⁴⁰ On 8 January 1681 - six months, therefore, before John took the masters into the family house - John and Marie Maillefer laid a legal claim to be given the fifth of the family properties in Rheims and lands outside it which Marie and her four brothers, heirs of Louis De La Salle, held conjointly. Since the property could not be physically divided up, the procedure by Rheims customary law was to hold an auction in which a property went to the last and highest bidder. It was the moneys from these auctions that were divided among the heirs. There was a legal routine to the whole process that is not without interest.

By 30 January 1681, assessors were appointed to visit the properties and declare the extent of the joint inheritance. Their report was not presented till 28 August and the same day the right to hold the auction was granted. This was confirmed by an order dated 15 March 1682. From the thirtieth of the same month, public notices announcing the auction were posted up outside the two parish churches of St Hilary and St Peter after the Sunday High Mass. This was repeated for St Symphorian's three weeks later on April 19th.

The bidding on the house in the Rue Ste Marguerite was spread over three

dates. It began on 3 July with only two contestants: John and his brother-in-law. It ended with John De La Salle's bid of 9,500 livres. This session may have aimed at setting a price. The auction was resumed a week later, on 10th, but this time there was an outside bidder as well, a François Favart. John Maillefer took the bidding to 10,000 livres. A fortnight later, on 24th, Favart went highest with 10,025 livres, and the house was knocked down to him. De La Salle was allowed to continue in occupation till Christmas Day of the same year, 1682. Bidding for other houses and for lands then followed, several persons showing interest. John De La Salle bought in this way two of the family vineyards. The sums paid by the bidders totalled 16,073 livres, and were divided between John, Marie, Jacques-Joseph, Jean-Louis and Jean-Remy, each receiving a little over 3,200 livres.

What motivated the Maillefers to call for a division of the family inheritance in this way? It was not part of the family's emotional response to the schoolmasters' presence in the house in the Rue Ste Marguerite, since the proceedings according to Rheims law were initiated six months before this event. Moreover, coming to a decision to sell off and divide the family holdings must have been mooted for quite some time before this and must have required at least one meeting of the family council. It was obvious since 1672 that to have four boys in a large house was hardly the best of arrangements. We have seen that already in that year, when Marie took Jean-Remy with her to her grandmother's in the Rue du Marc, John had tried to lease out the property.

Since then new factors had arisen: Jacques-Joseph had gone to the Genovevans' novitiate in Paris in 1676, while Jean-Louis had in mind to become a diocesan priest. In March 1679 Marie had married and intended to raise a family. One reasonable explanation for the auction is that Marie and John Maillefer wished to have possession of the house. John De La Salle would have fully agreed, and the family council would have given the idea its full backing. John Maillefer would have to find funds for the purchase, but that expense would be partly offset by receiving back one fifth of the house's value at auction, together with a fifth of the proceeds from the sale of the remaining properties. If such was his intention, he must have been very disappointed.

One could offer, however, a different conjecture. The fact that Favart bid only 25 livres more than Maillefer suggests a formality. The aim all along would have been a division of all the family assets into hard cash. Would it have been arranged with Favart all along as an interested purchaser, that he would put up the money to buy the main house?

The original family debates - that is, prior to 8 January 1681, the date when the Maillefers initiated proceedings - must have envisaged plans for the ac-

commodation of the four brothers once the house was sold. John's action on 24 June 1681 in taking in his schoolmasters changed attitudes and circumstances. As we have seen, Peter left his brother for the Maillefers six months after this and Jean-Remy was sent off to Senlis some time later (see p. 175). These were arrangements likely to have been carried out sooner or later, but they were precipitated by family disgust at the presence of these schoolmasters in the house. Jean-Louis opted to stay. Whatever arrangements had been planned for the canon and his brother, now, presumably, John was left to sort out himself where he would go with the masters.

He had, in fact, made up his mind. He did not even wait for the auction to begin. He left the house on 24 June, this being the legal date for starting a new lease on property.⁴¹ He had previously looked round for premises in the poor quarter of the city, large enough for a school that could expand, and for his growing community.

He knew of a fairly large unoccupied property in the Rue Neuve belonging to the Dame Abbesses of St Peter's Convent. The Rue Neuve had for centuries been just the path from the old city gate to St Remi's abbey. Then houses began to be built along it, and in 1274 we hear of it being called the Rue Neuve (New Street). An open drain on one side restricted its width. Among the age-old religious houses along it there was, a little beyond the former ramparts, St Clair's convent, dating from 1220, and next to it St Stephen's abbey, the one that Marie-Rose had entered. These religious houses, built originally in open country near the town, occupied large areas amid what were now the crowded tenements of the working poor. The property De La Salle had his eyes on was opposite St Clair's convent. It was a double house, with inner yards, cellars and a garden, and he took out a lease on it that would begin, as normal, on 24 June. We do not know on what terms the canon was able to lease it, but he would have to agree to pay the usual seignorial rights of cens (a negligible annual fee), rent and other dues.

These negotiations completed, he wrote that beautiful letter to the town council of Château-Porcien already cited, and set about with his community moving house.

On 24 June 1682, Canon John Baptist De La Salle and his small community left his house, walked down to the poor quarter and into their new premises in the Rue Neuve. This was the first community house, the birthplace of the future society of the Brothers of the Christian Schools.

With De La Salle and his community went his brother Jean-Louis and several of the clergy, who admired him and wanted to deepen their understanding of the priestly life with him. One seemed to be particularly keen to follow him and took on the education of poor students thinking of the priesthood, and

so started a kind of junior day seminary in a section of the same property. This was John Faubert, who came from Château-Porcien and was a relative of the parish priest there, Pierre Faubert.⁴²

It was three days later that two members of the community were sent on their way by De La Salle and the whole community to begin the new venture in that small town. Perhaps the two meant for Rethel left at the same time. but it could be later. The day after the first two arrived on foot at Château-Porcien they set to work, striving to bring to it the spirit and enthusiasm of them all. Exactly a month later, on 30 July, François Favart - he was a relative of the Canon Remy Favart we shall meet in Rethel - made the official purchase of De La Salle's family house.

The latter's home was now in the Rue Neuve. Back on this site, after being dispossessed between 1791 and 1882, his Brothers saw their school destroyed in 1917 and reopened in 1926. At present they run a large electro-technical school. The entrance is now round the corner, in the Rue de Courtrai, the street that runs outside the line of the former Gallo-Roman walls.

“God, who is not in the habit of forcing the inclinations of men...”

And so, from that chance meeting with Nyel in March 1679 and then through a succession of incidents and decisions till June 1682, De La Salle had turned his back on his past and committed himself to forming teachers of the labouring poor. His courage is staggering. But what he wanted his Brothers to remember most were the loving ways of Providence. Looking back, he was full of wonder and astonishment at the gentle ways of God. The section of the memoir where he records this has been preserved practically verbatim by all three of his early biographers. Here it is, as preserved by Canon Blain:⁴³

I had imagined that the guidance I was giving the schools and masters would be only an external guidance which would involve me with nothing more in their regard than providing for their upkeep and taking care that they carried out their employment with care and application...

It was through those two occasions, namely, through meeting Monsieur Nyel and through the proposal this lady (Madame des Croyères) made me, that I began to take care of schools for boys. I had not given it a thought before then, and it was not that no one had put the idea to me. Several of M. Roland's friends had tried to give me the idea, but it had not got into my mind, and I never had any idea of putting it into execution.

If I had ever believed, in fact, that the concern I had for the schoolmasters out of pure charity would ever have made it a duty for me to live with them, I should have given it up; for, as naturally I set below my

manservant those I was obliged, especially in the beginning, to employ in the schools, the mere thought that I might have to live with them would have been unbearable. I experienced, in fact, a very great distress when I first brought them into my house, and it lasted two years.

It was apparently for this reason that God, who guides all things with wisdom and gentleness, and is not in the habit of forcing the inclinations of men, wishing to encourage me to take full responsibility for the schools, did so in a most imperceptible manner and over a period of time; so that one involvement led me into another, without my having foreseen it in the beginning.⁴⁴

This is a movingly straightforward account of his feelings - one of the rare occasions when he lets us know them - and, though very lightly put, the effort it cost him. He reveals very clearly the polarisation between the bourgeoisie and the dependent working-class in his own attitude, which by upbringing he had “naturally” or as a second nature. If poetry is “emotion recollected in tranquillity”, those last lines are poetry like that of the psalmists, men who sang their gratitude for God’s faithfulness. Yet they are also a clear expression of the new experience he had of God in those beginnings.

He has gained both a personal knowledge that all history and all events are guided by a wise and gentle Father with love; and that specifically in his case that guidance consists in leading him to take care of the schools. It is a part of God’s plan of love for his people, it is God’s work as he will say later. He reveals also that other experience he has had of God: not only of his Providence, the word he constantly uses to refer to his guidance of events, but his way of dealing with us through the gentle promptings of his Spirit. He knows from his own experience, from the “imperceptible manner” God has used with him, that he “is not in the habit of forcing the inclinations of men.” The term he uses later for this is “the movement of his Spirit.”

Tested and fed from the Scriptures, this knowledge about God - the word which, borrowed from St Paul indicates for him the Father - and about the work he had given him, became the conviction that sustained him. Expressed in terms of a spirituality, it became the spirit of his Institute: the spirit of faith and zeal. It inspired his gentleness with his Brothers, their zeal and tenderness for their pupils. The will of God that he taught his Brothers to seek and follow came over to him not as an impersonal way of decreeing things, but as a loving, gentle guidance towards his plan of salvation for the poor, and in which he, John, was asked to cooperate at each step. His life would become a story of love and venturesomeness as he sought the Lord’s will in event and inspiration and carried it out.

References

1. Poutet I, 625-658; Bernard, 23-47; Maillefer, CL6, 33-47; Blain I, 159-182.
2. CL6, 28.
3. *id.*, 22.
4. Poutet I, 630.
5. Poutet I, 631 and n.38, quoting the will of Charlotte Roland.
6. Poutet I, 634, and n.55 referring to Aroz, CL28, 29, pp 34, 70, n.2.
7. Blain, I, 180 in fin.
8. Bernard, 35.
9. *id.*, 35.
10. *id.*, 35-6.
11. *id.*, 37.
12. Blain I, 182-3.
13. Bernard, 37.
14. *id.*, 38, 39.
15. *id.*, 22.
16. Maillefer, CL6, 40. Blain I, 167-8, situates it about the time of his doctorate, but wrongly puts this in 1681. Bernard, 14, places the event before De La Salle went to St Sulpice. See Poutet I, 714.
17. Bernard, 39-45; Maillefer, CL6,40-45; Blain I, 169-179.
18. Aroz, CL27, 43-44.
19. Bernard, 42.
20. Poutet I, 643, n. 116.
21. Aroz, CL32, 89, 90.
22. *idem.*
23. Bernard, 43.
24. *id.*, 39.
25. Blain I, 177-179; Bernard, 43-45.
26. Maillefer, CL6, 45.
27. Bernard., .44.
28. Blain, I, 178.
29. Poutet I, 646-653; Bernard, 45; Maillefer, CL6, 46-9; Blain I, 180-183.
30. Blain I, 179.
31. Bernard, 46-7; Blain I, 178-9.
32. Bernard, 46-7.
33. Blain II, 411.
34. Poutet I, 717.
35. CL25, 4, n.2; edited by Brother Maurice-Auguste.
36. Aroz, CL37, 30; CL41(1), 220, n.10.
37. MTR 7.3.
38. Poutet I, 653-8.
39. Original text in Félix-Paul, no. 111. For the latest translation and study of his letters, see "The Letters of John Baptist De La Salle", by Brothers Colman Molloy

and Augustine Loes, Lasallian Publications, Romeoville, Illinois, 1988, from which the above translation is taken.

40. Aroz, CL52, 39-48.

41. Aroz, CL37, 325.

42. Poutet I, 655.

43. Blain I, 169.

44. See also Bernard, 30, 33; Maillefer, CL6, 31.

Chapter 7: new calls and a first community identity, 1682-1685

Nyel strikes out on his own

Guise,¹ 75 km northwest of Rethel, was the capital of the once famous duchy of that name. It was in Nyel's native diocese of Laon, whereas De La Salle had few contacts with it. Marie of Lorraine, sole heiress of the duchy of Guise in 1677 was in 1679-80 having a dilapidated hospice in the town put back in working order to be a refuge for the homeless, the sick and for needy children. To help her in this she asked Fr Barré for one of his Sisters, for she had seen for herself in Paris his skill as spiritual director when she was in the *hôtel* de Guise (see p. 142). He had been recalled to Paris in 1674 or 75. He sent Marie Hayer from Rouen in 1679 or 1680. In eighteen months, as we have seen, very likely from Easter 1680 to October 1681, this Sister opened five schools for girls, the last one at Guise itself. Marie de Lorraine wanted to provide another school for boys, and turned to the man Sister Marie Mayer and Fr Barré would have recommended, namely, Adrian Nyel. As we have seen, Nyel went to Guise that Easter, but nothing came of it. But he was ready to try again, once the school at Rethel was running well.

In Guise, the instruction of the poor came under the hospital (*Hôtel-Dieu*). For boys there was a small school from before 1600, but then for twenty years the turnover of masters was considerable, and finally in 1635 the aldermen invited the seminary of St Nicolas-du-Chardonnet in Paris to keep the post filled. Priests would instruct the children, teach them plain-chant, and also comfort the sick and give them the Sacraments. This agreement fell apart owing to the troubles of the *Fronde*, and the priests returned to Paris. Country masters, driven out of various places through the movement of troops, attempted to settle in Guise, but the authorities, uncertain of their moral credentials, insisted on them having a licence to teach, and allowed only one or two at a time to function. So it was between 1650 and 1667, when a master was authorised "to teach the young to read and write, to serve and love God well, on condition that they attend all the parish services, notably on holydays and Sundays, both during Mass and Vespers, to oblige the young to be modest in the said church, and so that they commit no disorder or insolence."

The hospital was as decaying as the hospice at Château-Porcien. In 1677 the Council set money aside for its restoration, and Marie de Lorraine added considerable funds, both for the reconstruction and for the running of the establishment. In 1680 she drew up regulations for it. The Sisters of Charity were asked to take charge, looking after the sick, old people and abandoned

children, while Barré's Sisters of Providence saw to the girls' school situated on the first floor. For boys, the administrators of the hospital, representing Marie de Lorraine, wrote to Nyel in Rethel, inviting him to come and take charge of it. He found someone to replace him in Rethel, came to Guise and found an assistant. The Council provided them with a house, while the Duchess endowed the school which opened at the end of June or early July of that year, 1682. So Nyel, who had opened the school in Rethel only in March at the earliest, now left it, though provided with masters, for Guise. He knew, of course, that the Rethel arrangement was only temporary until De La Salle kept his promise to provide funds for a house for his Brothers. A few months later, he found another young man to take his own place at Guise and went off to start a school in Laon which opened the following October. He remained in charge of the school in Guise because De La Salle absolutely refused to take it on himself. Unlike for Rethel, he had no part in the negotiations, although Nyel must have kept him informed. But above all, it was a time when masters were leaving his community in the Rue Neuve and others entering,. He would not send masters without a minimum of training, and especially without being formed sufficiently to the life and ideals of his community.

The two masters Nyel left in Guise were not entirely satisfactory: they seemed to take lightly turning up in school on time and taking the boys to church. De La Salle was asked to send replacements, but only about 1685 could he send two Brothers who won "the esteem and consideration that their dutifulness deserved." It is not clear why Nyel was acting so hastily at the time. It did not seem reasonable to leave two new schools so quickly. He remained in general charge of the schools in Laon, Guise and Rethel till 1685, but he could hardly have seen much of the first two foundations. Perhaps he felt it right to be deliberately a trail-blazer for the much younger and gifted De La Salle who needed a stimulus to respond to. Perhaps, feeling his age, he had one last ambition, to start a school in the town he had known so well in his youth: Laon.

Marie de Lorraine died on 3 March. There were then still only two Brothers at Guise, for whom she left in her will a perpetual annuity of 400 livres, which continued till the Revolution.

Nyel opens a school on Laon

Laon,² 44 kms from Rheims and 34 from Guise, is built on a crescent-shaped bluff rising out of the plains of Picardy, and is only reached by long, steep climbs. Like his metropolitan of Rheims, the bishop of Laon was duke and peer of France. The **cathedral** (1160-1230) is astonishing. The stone had to be hauled painfully up those slopes by oxen; and since then, peering out of

the twin belfries, you can see the stone oxen put there in tribute to the slow sweated toil of these animals. The city had many monasteries, including the Premonstratensians and two Benedictine monasteries which had adopted the Maurist reform. Franciscans, Minims and Capuchins, too, had friaries in Laon. The chapter school became famous in the 12th century, attracting English and German as well as French students, drawn by a certain **Anselm of Laon**, one of whose pupils was Peter Abelard.

The town had fond memories for Nyel. He was born about 1621 at Beauvoir, a group of farms near Goudelancourt-les-Pierrepont, 20 kms northeast of Laon. The original family name was Niay. "Like most of the members of this family, except John Niay (his uncle, the canon) he was of modest condition."³ We know he was living in Laon by 1642 because his uncle, Canon John Niay, who died that year, bequeathed various things to "Adrian Niay, my nephew, living at present in the town of Laon."⁴ We know nothing of him before 1657, and by that time he was already in Rouen, where relatives had earlier migrated to that developing Norman port. He found they had changed their name to Nyel. He settled in the parish of St Vivian, where other Niays - now Nyels - lived, and there he died on 31 May 1687, aged about 66. After the death of his father, Noel Niay, in Laon, a lawsuit was begun concerning his uncle's will, and he probably went back to Laon to hear the solemn decision concerning it made by the city provost. When Adrian made his pilgrimage to Liesse in 1679 before beginning his first school in Rheims, he passed through Laon. His cousin Claud was at the time *sergeant royal* at nearby Dercy, and this cousin's son Noel was king's attorney to the *présidial* of Laon.

Laon was not short of schools. Master-writers were established in the town. The town governors subsidised a college near St Martin's abbey. The cathedral chapter was the largest in France, with 83 canons and 50 chantry priests. Before 1610, the municipality, seeing the profane instruction of children was being insufficiently catered for by the parishes, brought in the Minims of Epinal on condition that they both took over the collegiate church of St Julian's and instructed children. They were very zealous. Their work helped some among the dozen parish priests of Laon to realise that religious instruction alone was insufficient education for children idle most of the day while their parents were at work.

The Sisters of Our Lady of St Peter Fourier followed the Minims in 1624 and set up a free school for girls. As Canon Roland experienced in Rheims, there was strong opposition through fear of increased rates and of more collections being authorised to support the Sisters. The *présidial* decided there were too many monasteries in the town. But the bishop appealed to the *Parlement*, which quashed the decision. By 1669 there were 43 Sisters. It was from Laon that their convent in Rheims was founded in 1653, backed by

Canon Dozet. Besides the nuns, a deacon of Laon tried to train schoolmistresses. He bought them a house and tried to get letters patent, but the opposition was too great. He died in 1683.

For the most destitute, Cardinal César d'Estrées, bishop of Laon, had obtained letters patent in 1668 for a general hospice he had founded, run by laywomen (while the Sisters of St Augustine looked after the sick in the *Hôtel-Dieu*). Some of the inmates were children "that each one tried to look upon as the image of the child Jesus" (hospice archives). The president of the salt tribunal, seeing that the hospice was not in a position to accept any poor person coming into Laon, offered in 1682 a capital enough to provide for two children annually to be brought up in the hospice like any other poor children. There was much practical compassion for the poor in Laon. The vicar-general, who was secretary to the hospice "had such a tender love for the poor received and taught in the house that it was his delight to be with them", and he visited them everyday. A canon, a nephew of his, left money to the poor board. A relative of Nicholas Roland's left 14,000 livres, and an archdeacon left 5000.

There was a cathedral school to train boys to sing and serve at liturgical services, but a cleric also kept a 'little school' in the presbytery of St Peter-the-Old. In 1678 he was the one elected to the post by the churchwardens and paid 40 livres per annum. He ran his little school for ten years, till 1688. Under him the teaching had evolved to include teaching the children plainchant, the liturgical ceremonies, but also the basics of Latin. This little school, biassed towards preparing the children for church services, was therefore functioning when Nyel came from Guise, late in 1682. It seems that he wanted to start a poor school in Laon that he knew so well, and then retire to Rouen. Neither a parish priest nor the municipality had invited him. At this early date, De La Salle's work in Rheims, and the schools in Rethel and Guise would be unknown in Laon, so that Nyel was acting on his own, without prior invitation or negotiations.

How did he go about things? Laon was not an independent municipality, but a royal *prévôté*, and as such, subsidies were made only with the assent of a general meeting of the citizens. Every Easter Tuesday the city provost called a meeting of the burgesses to elect for three years three 'governors of finance', eight councillors and various officers. Without the approval of all these, Nyel could get no favour from the town. But in fact, he would have relatives and their friends on this board. His cousin Claud and the latter's son Noel owned a garden in the Rue Neuve of the town, and a small town house in what is now known as Brothers' Street (Rue des Frères), and Noel himself owned another one. Adrian probably stayed with them awhile, explaining his plan and getting their support. Both these relatives were influential. Nyel did

not go to any parish priest this time, but through his relatives he obtained from the *sergeant royal* of Laon a room in a house partly leased to another, Peter Bertay. He had the use of a cellar, a ground floor room to use as a schoolroom, and a room for himself above. For about a year from October 1682, Nyel taught boys, children of the poor, free of charge in his 'public school' and "with considerable fruit." (Registers of the Town Council.) The people of the town, as they heard of his school and its good results, were favourable.

The community in Rheims disappoints Canon de La Salle

Canon Blain refers to a second set of departures from De La Salle's community in Rheims on pages 184-5 of his First Volume, referring to it as Satan's attempt to scatter the community a second time.⁵ Bernard only seems to know of the first one, at the end of 1681, and which does not seem to have upset De La Salle unduly, while Maillefer speaks only of what happened after the developments in Rethel and elsewhere, and which depressed him considerably.

The rapid change of masters in Rethel and Guise could hardly have won his approval, but they were not part of his community, even though he had been involved in the setting up of the school in Rethel. The Laon venture was another cause for concern, for Nyel would make known his link with the Canon. This would mean appeals would come to him for trained masters and ultimate responsibility. He was, as we know, open to new projects, but not other than carefully negotiated. He determined to send no men who had not been prepared within his community.

It was at this moment that he had troubles in the Rue Neuve. He had made the first tremendous break with his past. Allowing for all its implications for him socially, the fact that he had made it and freed himself for the work of the schools which he saw as the work of God, must have been for him a source of great exhilaration. Yet soon events would slowly erode and destroy his buoyancy. With the novelty of the move to the Rue Neuve worn off, and even with the presence of the man they admired and respected, some had second thoughts. They had not come into an established community like the many that existed in Rheims, so that there was a variety of misunderstandings among them as to what they were committing themselves to. In his memoir on the habit, a document to be considered later, written at the end of 1689 or early in 1690, De La Salle himself writes:

"Several said they had no more obligation to follow the rules than outsiders, since they were distinguished from them in nothing...people came into this community as if into the house of a man who kept schoolmasters as you do domestics, without any idea of community. Several joined it so as to be trained and then show off. Several asked for wages, and several others thought that

people were very much indebted to them for being satisfied with their upkeep and dress. Most left with the dress that had been given them.” One can think of them meeting members of their families and their friends who would ask them about their life, their wages, and beg for money, or laugh at them...

His statement was very objective, but it hid a bitter deception for him at the time. He had given up so much for these men. After recording Nyel’s starting a school in Laon, Maillefer comments on this and other recent developments: “The success of these establishments made in such rapid fashion was, judging by appearances, a happy omen of what could be hoped for later. But by no means was M. De La Salle in a position to congratulate himself...The masters he had gathered in the same house so as to accustom them to the rule, began to slacken from their first fervour...M. De La Salle did what he could to rekindle (it)... But they had wearied so much of the life that he had to let them go and be witness of their departure....There were, however, some who, more faithful and more strengthened in their vocation, refused to follow these cowardly ones in their going astray.”

This diminishing group is worried about its future and challenges De La Salle on his financial security

It was perhaps at this time, when some of the masters had slipped away during the vacation period, that those remaining voiced a concern that deeply worried them.⁶ De La Salle, in his talks with them, had spoken of reliance on Providence, commenting on Our Lord’s words about not worrying about food and clothing. He had seen in his own recent past how things had happened in ways he could not have foreseen, and this trust in Providence was becoming one of the great supports and principles of his life. But he was as yet quite unaware of what the disquiet of the poor can be. Insecurity was their lot and that of their families. He would never have realised it if these masters, in their dialogue with him, had not put it bluntly; “You can afford to talk to us about Providence. Whatever happens to you, you have your own personal wealth as a member of the De La Salles to fall back on. When we are too old to teach, we have only the workhouse or hospital.” Their blunt words were a revelation to him. True, he was not using his wealth any more to live in bourgeois style, but it was always there....and whatever his family thought of his recent decisions, they could not let themselves ignore him if he fell into penury.

He had legitimate grounds for explaining, if he had wanted, that he needed to have money in reserve; for saying it would be demanding too much to ask him to live exactly like them and eat the same food that revolted him. It is likely so far that, because of the presence of his brother Jean-Louis, he had eaten with him more or less the food they were used to, and the masters would have wished this. To submit to eating their food, which he had no

desire to do and which would be a very humiliating change, would have put his brother in an embarrassing position, and Jean-Louis, seeing the agony and humiliation it meant for his elder brother, would have protested. But there is a difference between having legitimate grounds for not doing a thing and responding to the inner inspirations of the Holy Spirit to follow to the end the implications of living with the poor.

He took himself to prayer and reflection on his position vis-a-vis these young men and the Gospel. The masters' answer to his exhortation to trust in Providence created in him a certain inner turmoil.⁷ He had, indeed, done the unpardonable folly in the eyes of his family of going into the ghetto part of the city. But he had not yet thought about giving away his wealth. Thinking of it now, he knew that to give it all away meant insecurity for the masters and for himself. He was well aware what a bad harvest could do to bread prices and bring them to famine conditions...

His first thought was to meet the insecurity of his community by using his fortune to endow future schools. The new work had hardly begun, and his wealth could help it on. There was his personal wealth derived from being one of Louis De La Salle's heirs and from monies invested in his own name in properties in Rheims and lands outside of it, and from these he had a steady income. Should he not, as Roland had done, use his wealth to endow new foundations, so that there would be a permanent income for running the school and maintaining the community? But he felt within himself that he should give away all and trust the future of his work entirely to God since it was his work. It would mean rejoining the masters in their insecurity, since any new work could only come about with the agreement of parish priests and the support of benefactors.

And what of his prebend? To give up his canonry would simply mean the end of his benefice, with no profit to the masters. Should he therefore keep it? But on other grounds it had become increasingly clear to him that he must come to a decision about it. He could not combine his duties as canon with guiding his community, visiting the schools, training newcomers and being available for travel to places like Rethel - in other words, be founder of a new community. Roland had had a similar problem without solving it. But to give up a place on the Chapter of Rheims cathedral would be going against the archbishop and the whole of clerical and bourgeois opinion in the city. It was a fearsome prospect. He prayed long over the matter, came to accepting that this was what the Lord was asking of him, and then determined to seek the advice of Fr Barré on the whole question, knowing he would give the uncomfortable and uncompromising reply he both feared and at the same time knew corresponded to an inner lead. There was no question this time of travelling to Paris with a dwindling and shaky community on his hands. He wrote to Fr

Barré and was not surprised when he got this reply:

“Foxes have holes, and the birds of the sky have nests and hiding-places, but the Son of man has nowhere to lay his head. The foxes are the children of the world who cling to the goods of this world. The birds of the sky are the religious who have their cell as their home; but those who, like you, are committing themselves to instruct and catechise the poor should have no other lot on earth than the Son of man’s. And so, not only should you divest yourself of all your goods, but also give up your benefice and live in a general surrender of anything that might take from your attention to procuring the glory of God.”

He added that the thought of founding financially (endowing) the community ‘did not come from God’, but that its present way of being established ‘on the one foundation of Providence’ should be maintained. “To seek support elsewhere would be blameworthy.” These words were not new to Canon De La Salle. He had used them with his community because he himself had meditated on them already. But it made a difference when the words came from someone else endowed with spiritual wisdom and when they confirmed strikingly what the Spirit was saying in his heart. We are told that De La Salle “accepted Barré’s words without difficulty.” (Maillefer, in his 1740 version, CL6, p. 43, speaks of a letter and quotes verbatim, and also in his 1723 version. Bernard and Blain put it in the form of a conversation that makes Barré’s style unrecognisable.)

He sets about getting rid of his canonry

As was his practice, John De La Salle both submitted and argued the case of giving up his canonry with his spiritual director, Jacques Callou.⁸ One of his reasons for consulting Barré was to be able to show Fr Callou that there were good reasons, given by someone respected for his guidance, for the move. Callou refused. He was aware of the social and ecclesiastical implications and opposition, and was not yet ready to accept the determined position of his client. Canon De La Salle sought the opinion of several other persons among his friends in Rheims. They found his reasons very cogent, but still Callou refused his consent. Ten months passed by. It was a difficult time of waiting and facing public opinion. Moreover, it left him with nothing positive to show his community that he had taken their words seriously.

Jean-Louis’s departure. The canon forces himself to eat the common food

We are around the month of October. Jean-Louis was preparing to leave Rheims for several years’ training and study at the seminary of Saint-Sulpice and at the Sorbonne.⁹ He was only 17, and would not be 18 till Christmas. He

had sympathised with his brothers' efforts and admired his tremendous courage and his priestly sense of vocation, and would continually support his work in later years. But he was not called to the same vocation. It would be a relief to leave these men, so short on urban civilities. He discussed with his brother who was still his legal guardian, the preparations and expenses of the journey and the stay in Paris. John would have to pay his 400 livres boarding and training fees at the seminary, to which he added another generous 200 livres for his other expenses. There would be quite an outlay on clothes and on room furniture for this first occasion. Jean-Louis left at the end of October. It must have been a moving leave-taking for both of them. John would now be quite on his own as far as family connections were concerned, with no one to support him with deep brotherly affection or to be a buffer from full sharing of the life of the poor. (Jean-Louis entered the seminary on November 8th 1682 and stayed the full three years, leaving on 15 March 1686. He gained his B.D. at the Sorbonne that year. He stayed on in Paris, gaining the Licentiate probably in 1689. He became a doctor in Sorbonne on 19 October 1693. He then went back to Rheims and was made canon next year. He died not quite 60. We shall meet him again more than once.)

Apart from the group of clerics living in another wing of the premises, Monsieur De La Salle was now alone with his poor and dispirited masters. He made up his mind that from now on he would force himself to eat like the others. It seems that only step by step did the full implications of living with the poor dawn upon him. In the matter of accepting their food, he knew it would be a terrible experience. Instead of a trained domestic buying and preparing at home the dishes he had been used to, now one of the masters did the buying and the cooking, getting his purchases from the local market or the local shops. They ate rye bread instead of wheaten bread; palatable meats were replaced by salt pork and other meats and fish cured in salt; vegetables were cooked in water without the appetising sauces he was used to; in place of varied, well-garnished dishes, he had to face the greasy stews of the working masses. But he set about overcoming himself. Brother Bernard tells us that "he forced himself to swallow what his stomach couldn't take and that he was ready to throw on the floor." "It turned his stomach when he had to eat the broth in which salt meat had been boiled; it made him bring it up as he ate."¹⁰ The masters themselves took pity on him and wanted him to stop. But he steeled himself, and, determined to win, he fasted till he was so hungry that he was ready to eat anything. He is a tremendous example of identifying with the poor and marginalised, and perhaps also a warning : it is very demanding.

He is very depressed. New light and new recruits

While coping with the physical distress and the humiliation that submitting

to this food and in this way meant for him, he saw more masters dropping out, probably when the schools closed for the Christmas vacation. Failure like this was something he was very sensitive to, and this, coupled with his struggles over food, and perhaps the absence of his brother, brought on a deep depression. Maillefer writes again, evidently commenting on De La Salle's memoir:¹¹

"It cannot be denied that M. De La Salle was somewhat shaken at the sight of such a general desertion and that he was tempted from that moment to give up all his plans. It seemed to him that having had nothing but very pure views for bringing good about and contributing with all his power to the instruction of the poor, he had had reason to expect a better outcome. But the thoughts of men are too limited to penetrate God's designs."

He reacted and took control of himself. He spent a whole week in prayer in one of the remotest corners of the house. As he still had to go to the cathedral for the Office five times a day and that he could not leave his despondent handful of teachers on their own all the time, this needs interpreting. But this concentration on a silent retreat shows his determination and his trust in God. He came out of the experience his courage rekindled and with new enlightenment. Blain says,¹² actually quoting from De La Salle's memoir (the italic's are the biographer's):

"It appeared to him visibly *towards the end of the year 1682* (he says himself) *that God was calling him to take care of the schools; and that having the duty to be the first at all the Community exercises, he could not attend the Office as assiduously as his Director was insisting.*"

Nyel, rather than being a problem, was God's beckoning finger to go beyond Rheims. He would provide the means to respond to the challenge. What strength and what charisms the Spirit gave the Founder, as we may now call him, we do not know, but we deduce from the sequel of his life that they were very powerful.

1683

As if in confirmation of this inner conviction, at the beginning of 1683, 'when he was least expecting it' (this must be his own comment) several young men studying at University, some in view of the priesthood and in any case from well-to-do families, asked to join his community. Many younger sons of bourgeois families, as we have seen, were pushed into the priesthood solely in the hope of a benefice. Canon De La Salle's actions must have been the talk of the University and of the seminary. Some students, realising they were in the wrong place, were inspired to come to the Rue Neuve and ask for admission. Maillefer writes again, after referring to De La Salle's week of prayer:

"After having thought out the meaning of such a sudden and unexpected

event, he profited by the humiliation to rekindle his zeal; and, filled with a new confidence, he gathered together, with thanksgiving, the remnants of this scattered flock....

“God, who is pleased to bring back calm after the storm, poured out new blessings on his work, and, at a time when he was least thinking of it, he saw a number of subjects arrive who had good will, strength, fervour and piety. These men, joining those that had remained faithful, formed a new community that was more numerous and more complete.”¹³

“BROTHERS OF THE CHRISTIAN SCHOOLS”

He now discussed with these masters how they could give themselves an identity.¹⁴ The public often had the impression that here was just a group of teachers, and some of themselves had assumed that they were no more a collectivity than boarders in a hostel. Should they not take on a common name that would indicate that they were a community? It should express what they were about. Their aim was the Christian and urban rehabilitation of the poor of Rheims and elsewhere. It took place in schools, but theirs was a new type of school, different even from the Sisters’ schools, for it took specific note of the urban situation of their clientele.

“Christian Schools”

In the first place, it was probably De La Salle who saw that his schools should be called “Christian Schools”. It shows, in that case, how surprisingly quickly he saw the true nature of the work to which he had been called. On the one hand, this title contrasted the work of his teachers with that of the fee-paying “little schools” that were essentially preparatory to entry into a college. Existing mainly for the children of the citizen minority, they entailed inevitably a connotation of social selection. He saw that the great mass of the poor needed a more apt preparation for Christian life. That included a realism referred to below.

In the second place, “Christian Schools” denoted his refusal to let his schools run under the name of “charity schools”. This was a condescending title, implying an institution of welfare and of law and order of limited aim, open only to those whom the Poor Board deemed poor enough to attend, and therefore hardly scratching at the problem. His schools, on the contrary, were an expression of the local church’s concern for all those children roaming the streets because their parents were too poor or too busy, unlike bourgeois families, to see to their children’s upbringing themselves. They were not for a segregated poor. In seventeenth century Catholic France, “Christian School” would not be a denominational term. It would convey the idea of a school free

of all social labels, a parish school, having as sole *raison d'être* the formation of Christians.

Set in the poor quarters of towns, his schools received above all the poor by preference. People would have to learn and accept that his idea of their Christian education was the holistic one that sought to equip them to take part with dignity in the life of a Christian urban society. These children were educated in their own right, and not by what others thought good for them. The new teachers accepted with the utmost compassion first, all true poor, registered as such or not, then the children of the poorer busy artisans, and in fact, anyone with needs. The labouring poor were not to be shut off from the wider society nor from progress in it. The title set over the door of one of De La Salle's schools was specific to them. "Christian Schools" came to be known as *the new type of school* run by his communities.

"Brothers of the Christian Schools"

In consequence of this understanding of their work, his group of teachers, when considering in 1683 how to put a name on their community, suggested: "Masters of the Christian Schools." "Masters" however, did not suggest community, and might imply they were giving themselves a title. The word commonly used for any group or association pursuing publicly Christian aims, such as guild fraternities or, as we saw in Rouen, Nyel's group of schoolmasters, was 'Brother'. It was an indication of the relationship between them. De La Salle suggested to his men that they should call themselves simply: "Brothers of the Christian Schools." They saw the fitness of the title at once, and everyone agreed. "This title appeared to them more modest, more in conformity with the common life they had embraced, and more likely to sustain union between them."¹⁵ And, following up its implications, they decided to put everything in common, and to strive to have 'only one heart and one soul.' For outsiders, their new name proclaimed them as a new lay community with a defined aim. Those who enquired further would be told of their common life. The earlier vagueness about who they were dissipated. These Brothers would soon also perceive that 'Brother' happily summed up their relations with their pupils.

To turn to God in prayer for his community and its work became one of his great needs

It may be that his full acceptance of God's call to be the founder of this work whose meaning had now clarified, was followed by an exceptional gift and desire of prayer. He began to go to the abbey of Saint-Remi, twenty minutes' walk up the Rue Neuve, and spend nights in prayer before the shrine of the patron of Rheims. The monk who had been sacristan for 34 years, the

deep contemplative Paul Bayard, had died in December 1680. It was with the monk who was sub-sacristan that De La Salle made an arrangement to come in the evening on Fridays and Saturdays and to be left in the chapel of Saint Remi when he locked up, until he came to unlock the abbey church next morning. Canon Blain says that De La Salle went every day to pray before St Remi's tomb, and adds:¹⁶ "The holy Founder, in order to make the whole night a continual exercise of contemplation and prayer, made it a rule, the whole time he stayed in that city, to devote to this holy use the nights of the Fridays and Saturdays of each week, after having spent the days there. Returning to the house those days only to see how things were, after taking a little food" he hurried back." That represents an astonishing commitment to prayer. One would imagine that he often fell asleep in the course of it. Why did he go to the church of Saint Remi? Because he was the patron saint of Rheims, and the inhabitants of Rheims turned to him in their necessities. One of the great channels of grace on the new foundation then and for the future must have been this persevering prayer of Canon De La Salle.

AN INTERESTING SCHEME THAT NEVER GOT STARTED

The Duke de Mazarin sets up small centres for training country schoolmistresses

The Duke de Mazarin was still active concerning the provision of Catholic schools in his domains, especially where there were Huguenots.¹⁷ Till 1682, however, little of his donations had gone to setting up schools in the duchy of Rethel-Mazarin. But, after the two schools for boys that we saw set up in Rethel and Château-Porcien, he provided in the next two years, 1682-84, masters and mistresses in 27 country parishes, and wrote for churchwardens a set of instructions concerning them. He saw this not working too well, so late 1682 or early 1683, he began a project to provide some training for school-mistresses.

The man undoubtedly had ideas. He was also someone used to getting his way and assuming he had seigneurial rights in everything. It is difficult to sum him up. He was a man of great piety, austere towards himself, generous to the poor. He understood that he had been given Cardinal Mazarin's wealth, often ill-amassed, in order to use it for charitable purposes. He nevertheless created animosity. He lacked poise and judgment, it seems, and to work with him could bring success or failure. He had married at 29 the fantastically rich 'beautiful and little virtuous' Hortensa Mancini when she was only 15, and whose dowry was worth 20 million livres. Madame de Sevigné wrote of him: "He is mad...his devotion is all askew in his head."¹⁸ He was converted after

a youth lived in grand style. Saint-Simon, who bore him a grudge, could nevertheless write of him: "He is excellent company and very learned; magnificent, of wide tastes and in close familiarity with the King."¹⁹

In fulfilment of his new plan, at the end of 1682 or early in 1683, two mistresses were installed in a house in Rethel and the school began in April. There was now a girls' school besides the boys' school that Nyel had started. But the difference was that the house for these two mistresses was big enough to accommodate six people, and enough funds were given both to provide a six months' salary for the two mistresses, and to feed three pupil teachers for a term. About July 1683 three candidates were in fact welcomed, and by October there were four new trainees - for they were trained only for about three months at a time. This was already a great advance on the little or no preparation assumed so far. A longer period, moreover, would involve greater funds. In the following years temporary training-centres under the authority of the parish-priest were attached to schools in three other townships.

In all, about twenty mistresses were formed between 1682 and 1688 to cope with the 27 schools de Mazarin had set up 1682-3. When the centres had filled their purpose he closed them, presumably intending to start them up again as needed, though in fact this never happened. This initiative of the Duke's puts in perspective Monsieur De La Salle's involvement in a similar plan for village schoolmasters.

A project that failed: the attempt to train country schoolmasters in Rethel

This project²⁰ had nothing to do with the Duke in the beginning. It was in March 1683, that is, about a month before de Mazarin's training-centre for schoolmistresses was due to start, that we find De La Salle fulfilling the promise he had made in the February of the previous year to provide funds for a house for the schoolmasters of Rethel. On 23 March in the presence of a notary from Rheims, Canon Remy Favart handed over through his attorney a sum of 2,500 livres given him by a 'pious person' who wished to remain anonymous. On April 2nd, in the presence of Canon De La Salle, who had travelled up on foot from Rheims for the purpose, the deed about the purchase of this house was drawn up. The house was in Favart's name, but it was to be entirely for the use of Monsieur De La Salle in order "to run free classes for boys...and house the masters... and even to set up, if possible, a 'seminary' for country schoolmasters for the diocese of Rheims." This concern may have been originally Favart's. De La Salle agreed to it.

The document laid down that the masters using the premises were and would remain dependent "on the community begun in Rheims for free schools for boys". It was also specified that after De La Salle's death, those who

succeeded him in the direction and care of the said schools (of Rheims and Rethel) would have the use “entirely of the said house for this purpose.” The document concluded : “The which has been stipulated and accepted by Monsieur De La Salle, here present, who requested this present deed for use at the appropriate time and place.” He was familiar now with contracts and their pitfalls, and it was he who had insisted on these conditions and on being given a copy of the deed. On 11 April he was back in Rethel to acknowledge before notaries that he had taken possession of the house according to the conditions set out in the contract. Although Favart lent his name to the contract in place of the anonymous benefactor, De La Salle was legal owner of the house and its contents provided he kept to the conditions. The donor seems to have insisted that while the use of the property was to remain with De La Salle and his Brothers and their successors in the community, the ownership would pass to his family heirs. Would not this indicate a relative favourable to his work? Could it have been Jean-Louis? It could be noted that recently each of Louis De La Salle’s heirs had received a little over 3,200 livres in consequence of auctioning the family property.

Two Brothers must have been sent, replacing the two masters Nyel had recruited. Nothing was specified as to when pupil-teachers had to be accepted, nor how many, nor how they were to be provided for. It was a possibility envisaged and accepted by De La Salle. Once again, the idea comes from someone else, and he responds to it positively.

Only a limited concept of training was involved, similar, one can assume, to that followed for training de Mazarin’s schoolmistresses. Not more than one or two trainees could have been accommodated in the Brothers’ house in Rethel. It had only an upstairs and a downstairs room, attic, kitchen and outside shed. Two trainees could be taken on per term, to be then replaced by two others. It seems to suppose the sending of a third Brother to take charge of them.

In 1683, de Mazarin came into the scheme. As he was minded himself to do for schoolmasters what he had done for girls, he offered his support. He volunteered to pay De La Salle the equivalent of the yearly maintenance for two pupil-teachers at a time, which meant training up to six in a year. There were, it seems, two schemes here. The original one (Favart’s?) was to train country schoolmasters for the diocese of Rheims only. But de Mazarin, to judge by two further attempts in 1685 that will be seen in the next chapter, was thinking of providing schoolmasters for villages throughout the estates he owned in many parts of France, as he had begun to do for schoolmistresses for his nearest domains. It is not clear what happened after this. Something went wrong, connected with the Duke’s intervention. We are told that some people made suggestions that confused matters. Whatever they were, De La

Salle would not let himself be involved, and the project was never begun.

The original plan, nevertheless, was something he had bound himself to. In this year, 1683, he sent to Rethel his oldest and ablest Brother, Nicholas Vuyart. Was this in view of the original hope? It may be that one or two trainees for village schools were formed there, purely on the basis of sitting in on classes and then helping, and following the Brothers' life, but we have no information. Nicholas was there for a first period till 1690, but returned after a year or two in Paris till 1699. (See Chapter 9, p 287)

The idea of training country teachers was nothing new. The *Dames Régentes* of Châlons, as was outlined in Chapter 5, had had such a centre since 1666. The community of the Sisters of the Holy Child Jesus of Rouen had likewise been training mistresses since 1670-71, and the Sisters of the Holy Child Jesus of Rheims were allowed by their letters patent of 1679 to do the same. Well before these, St Peter Fourier and his Canonesses, and again the Ursulines, trained mistresses within their congregation as part of their novitiate. This context may have helped M. De La Salle to respond to Favart's offer as soon as it was offered to him. Events show that he came to see that this field of action was also God's will for him. It was to be in his thoughts all his life.

MONSIEUR DE LA SALLE SUCCEEDS IN GIVING UP HIS CANONRY

The new founder must have had his mind fully occupied in the first half of 1683. He was closely watching himself, forcing himself to abandon long-established bourgeois habits. He was spending his weekends in prayer at Saint Remi's abbey; he was training his community, visiting the schools in Rheims, travelling to Rethel and to Château-Porcien, and giving careful thought to the new project offered him. And all the time he was coming back to his spiritual director over his canonry.²¹ One of the clerics who lived at the Rue Neuve, seeing that canonical duties really conflicted with these new roles, took Fr Callou to task. He eventually agreed, and in July this year he authorised John Baptist to take the necessary steps. Now the trouble really began.

"He would have wished to keep the matter quiet," writes Maillefer, "but all his precautions were useless, and, the rumour of this news having spread in the town, one cannot express the stir it created. His relatives and friends were the ones most alarmed. The arguments began again with more vigour. Each one reasoned after his own fashion. Some said that too much concentration had weakened his mind; others said that he was only following his own bent which always went to extremes. That is how, people said, you find directors obliging enough to approve such a failing. People pointed out to him the disadvantages of the situation he wanted to reduce himself to and tried to get him to visualise a family up in arms, discontented friends, the unforeseen

accidents that could happen to him; to see that his foundation was a mirage that would vanish with all his plans; that his credit was too limited to parry the blows that could be inflicted on him. In spite of all this, the most convincing arguments only served to strengthen him.”

Giving up his canonry meant obtaining the consent of the archbishop. Unfortunately, Le Tellier was in Paris again. De La Salle made his way there only to find he had already left. Before returning to Rheims, he called on his brother Jean-Louis to see how he was getting on. He ran into his former lecturer, de La Barmondière, who was now parish priest of Saint Sulpice. He enquired about the reason for his presence in Paris, and De La Salle explained why he wished to give up his canonry and live a life of poverty. De La Barmondière fully appreciated and supported his views. He had evidently learnt from Jean-Louis about his brother’s work for schools for the poor in Rheims, and he got him to promise that he would send two Brothers to open a school in his parish.

John Baptist now made his way back to Rheims and sought an interview with the archbishop. Le Tellier, having heard what the topic would be, “was in no hurry,” Maillefer writes, “to give him an audience. He made to drag the matter out, in order to give him time for further reflection, because he hoped that a few days’ delay would make him change his resolution. So he let it be known that he didn’t have the time to listen to him. M. De La Salle understood well the motive for this refusal, and wasn’t put off by it.”²² He took another way round : he approached one of his colleagues on the chapter, Canon Philbert, a man whose views won credit and respect, and who taught theology at the seminary. More to the purpose, he was a grand-vicar whose opinion the archbishop trusted. If he won him over, he would have virtually won the case.

Canon Philbert listened, and agreed that the practical reasons were valid, but he wanted to spare family feelings and interests by suggesting firstly that De La Salle should transfer the canonry to his brother Jean-Louis, and secondly, to let people calm down by leaving Rheims and responding to de La Barmondière’s request. Since residence in Rheims was a condition for being a canon of the cathedral, he could give his move to Paris as a valid and acceptable reason for resigning. These were face-saving arguments trimming his resolve to the bourgeois society’s sense of saving its own values. It was pressure, well-meaning enough, in the wrong direction. He learnt that the archbishop was preparing to go back to Paris, and he determined to get an audience at whatever the cost. Maillefer writes: “Before presenting himself a second time, he went into the cathedral and there, prostrate before the Blessed Sacrament, he asked God with a new fervour for the light he needed at that moment to know his will, and the strength necessary to follow it. From there,

he went to archbishop's house to make another attempt, which turned out for him better than the first."²³

The archbishop consented to see him, but only to refuse his request. He had no intention of seeing him no longer a canon, and he had his own view about this rather independent character who had started up a new community, albeit just an association of schoolmasters, without telling him. He was aware of the reason why he wanted to pull out of the Chapter and was well informed of what he had done for the schools. It was parallel to what Roland's Sisters were doing under Le Tellier's authority. He had had their statutes in his hands since 1678 and had only just approved them after modifying them. He had made sure the Sisters were committed to his diocese. It seems that on this occasion he made a first offer to De La Salle to finance his schools if he agreed not to go outside the archdiocese - and remain a canon as Roland had done. De La Salle persisted and appealed to the positive view of grand-vicar Philbert. The archbishop had him sent for, and he admitted that he had accepted De La Salle's motives, but had suggested that if he wanted to resign his canonry, he should do so in favour of his brother. Le Tellier thought it was a neat solution, even though he was well aware that Canon Law was strongly against passing a benefice on to a close relative. He had no difficulty now in granting him permission, saying in broad terms that he could hand over his canonry 'to whom he liked', a formula that saved his responsibility while leaving De La Salle free.

John Baptist immediately wrote out his resignation in favour of a stranger to the family, John Faubert, one of the clerics staying with him in the Rue Neuve. He was a doctor in theology much appreciated in Rheims for his preaching and his regulated way of life, but he was not of the bourgeoisie. It wasn't the way Le Tellier thought he would transfer his canonry, and he asked to know why. He simply said that he thought God was not asking him to do otherwise. He was not going to go against conciliar and synodal decisions about nepotism. Moreover, Jean-Louis was at his studies in Paris for the next few years and could not fulfil the duties of a canon of Rheims. He probably would not want to be one at nineteen; he and his brother were likely to be at one, in line with the reforming movement among the clergy, in opposing nepotism and early benefices.

John's refusal to continue the nepotism that had favoured him, and his decision to give his canonry to someone who was worthy but without social status, was a stand of immense courage, perhaps his hardest decision. In an age of class consciousness and in such a clerically-dominated city, it meant quitting the clerical and social establishment, standing out against the opinion of one of the most powerful and politically influential archbishops of the country, turning his family against him and losing many friends in the Chapter. It meant

forfeiting for the future many kinds of support he could have counted on. But once his mind was made up in prayer and reflection and consultation he stood firm. There is no doubt that it cost him tremendously to make such a decision. From then on he would have to 'live it down' with his family, the clergy and the bourgeoisie, and accept the consequences for the rest of his life.

Nevertheless, he left archbishop's house with a tremendous joy and peace. But, as Maillefer writes : "The interior joy he felt on leaving archbishop's house was tempered by the anxiety caused by the pressure put on him by his friends. For the news of his resignation was no sooner spread abroad than it caused a new stir. People came to beg him to withdraw it while he still had time. They told him it would be paying court to the archbishop who held him in esteem; that he owed this mark of consideration to his family; or if absolutely he had made his final resolve, let his choice of successor fall on his brother or on some subject agreeable to the Chapter."²⁴

After granting the permission grudgingly, Le Tellier had gone off the next day with Canon Philbert, leaving the writ of resignation unsigned. It gave the Chapter, self-conscious of its dignity, time to express its anger at De La Salle's allowing a priest of no special status into their august ranks. Maillefer goes on: "Someone wrote to the archbishop who had gone back to Paris, begging him to delay sending the necessary papers so as to give extra time to M. De La Salle's friends to make their last efforts to change his mind. The prelate answered favourably, and ordered M. Callou, his grand-vicar and superior of his seminary, to see him on his behalf and find out his final decision.... M. Callou went therefore to see M. De La Salle...he recalled all the reasons that had been alleged to him to get him to give way. But M. De La Salle, after having put everything to him and answered him as he had already done those who had taken a hand in the matter, added that his mind was made up before God, and that he could not change. M. Callou seemed quite satisfied with these views. He congratulated him on his great detachment, and rendered an exact account of his errand to his Grace the Archbishop, who, on his testimony, sent the papers for the canonry to M. Faubert. He took possession on 16th August, 1683."

So, after nearly a year M. De La Salle had, with the grace of God, won the victory over his own need of approval, over all that the elite and secure bourgeois stood for, over public opinion, and, especially, over wide and powerful ecclesiastical pressures. He went to hand in formally his resignation at archbishop's house, and then returned to his community. There he gathered the Brothers in their oratory and together they sang the *Te Deum*. It was a great victory. He was free now to give all his time to them, and they knew he was all for them. The whole event is a tremendous story of formidable pressures and well-meaning advice and especially of De La Salle's conquest of his own

fears of these pressures.

An unfortunate sequel to his transfer of his canonry is an example of how the best-intentioned efforts can end disappointingly. The new Canon Faubert did not live up to the hopes placed on him. The honour of his new rank and the easy life going with it led him to give up his early fervour. De La Salle said he would not have offered him his canonry had he foreseen the outcome.²⁵

Spiritual direction in the seventeenth century

We are struck by De La Salle's submitting his interior growth and his decisions before God to a succession of spiritual directors as they were called then. "When you study the life of a Catholic of xvii century, you can be sure to come across very soon the name of his spiritual director."²⁶ This century was a great period for seeking spiritual guidance by a person of experience for one's spiritual life or journey. Growth in one's relationship with God had long been seen as having its stages, hold-ups and pitfalls, needing the help of a person of wisdom.

Yet a good director is difficult to find. Those called to guide others found help in the great writers of the 16th century: St Teresa of Avila, St John of the Cross, and many more in the 17th. Some Congregations were very careful to provide a training in spiritual direction, using St Ignatius's rules of discernment. Among the great directors of this century were St Francis de Sales, St Vincent de Paul, de Bérulle, de Condren, Olier, St John Eudes. The reformed religious orders provided many others. Most of all there were the Capuchins and Jesuits. Among the latter, Julien Hayneufve's works were used by De La Salle. Others were Louis Lallemant and Jean-Baptiste de Saint-Jure. Spiritual direction played a great discerning and stimulating role on 17th century Christianity. But it could become a restriction. Directors tended to make decisions for their clients instead of accompanying them as they tried to discover God's will and ways with them. Quietism has been seen as being in part a reaction to this.

One might get from Blain the impression that vis-à-vis his spiritual directors, De La Salle was entirely submissive and characterless, whereas he did not follow them blindly. It was outward happenings that led him to his decisions. It was not a question of a gift of reading into God's designs, but of finding them out by letting events and especially people speak to him. And he waited for more than one event to corroborate the train of thought started and the decision he thought he should take. This was not a sort of superstition for him, as if a certain sequence of events necessarily showed God's will. For instance, his close contact with Nicholas Roland's thought and school work did not lead him to think he should get involved. In deciding whether failure (for example, when he had to leave St Sulpice, or when he failed the first time

to give up his canonry) meant dropping a certain policy, or, on the contrary, that he should try again, he took several factors into account. These were the rights of legitimate authority, an objective knowledge of himself thanks to his spiritual director, and the knowledge and experience of other people. "One can therefore affirm that no one asked for advice more than De La Salle, but also that no one more than he humbly queried the counsels received. It was not enough for him to be right, he had furthermore to be sure that the others, in turn, were convinced of the value of his options".²⁷

Developments in Laon. De La Salle declines to send anyone from Rheims

All this year, Adrian Nyel had been running single-handed his little school for the poor of Laon.²⁸ The people of the town, as they got to know of his school and its results, appreciated it. At the beginning of the new school year, Nyel took the risk of signing with the *sergeant royal* a contract mortgaging his goods against an annual rent for the whole house of forty-seven and a half livres. P. Bertray had ended his lease on half of the house in June that year - perhaps a classroom of poor youngsters in the other half was too much for him! Nyel had possession from 1 October 1683. As part of the contract, to get better light and air into the school, the *sergeant royal* promised to replace the school door by a window admitting "as much light as could be", and to have another door made providing "as much air as could be". Nyel bound himself to the maintenance of the window and door. It looks, therefore, as if Nyel intended having the whole house, in order to open another classroom at least, as soon as possible.

With a year's reputation behind him, he applied in November to the 'governors' charged with the town's finances for support from public monies. He pointed out that he had been teaching children free of charge for a year now, that he could not continue without some public money, and that he was ready to move elsewhere where people were asking for him. Considering that he had just doubled the space available in his school house for more classes, and that he intended eventually to return to Rouen in any case, this seems like a piece of mild deceit. The committee discussed his request, and on November 19th they offered him a salary of 150 livres, "as from 1st October last." Incidentally, he was known to the people of Laon as Brother Adrian Niay, for that is how he signed the agreement, adding "Master of the Christian Charity Schools." It was a title he borrowed from Fr Barré. He may, to strengthen his position, have wanted to indicate he was one of a community that would later take over. Having left Rheims in January 1682, he was unaware of the name Brothers of the Christian Schools.

There is no mention in the agreement of the town providing schoolrooms.

So Nyel had to pay his rent out of the 150 livres. He had, of course, his 100 livres annuity paid by the Poor Board of Rouen. The preceding year he had lived on this alone, and perhaps on some resources inherited from his parents. In his own mind, it would seem that Nyel was preparing everything for two Brothers to replace him when he went back to Rouen. He made several journeys to Rheims for this purpose. He must have told De La Salle of his intention to return to Rouen, of the good to be done in Laon and of the goodwill people had there. But however much De La Salle understood that Nyel at 63 had done more than enough, he was not going to send one Brother only - which was all that was provided for. He was, moreover, still building up his little community. So things remained as they were throughout the school year 1683-84.

In Laon, the tenure of the school house was insecure, depending as it did on Nyel's personal guarantee. His contacts with the town authorities were purely personal also, and could be seen later as a piece of arm-twisting. For it could be judged that Nyel's threat to withdraw if he did not get a subsidy was a ploy to get two of De La Salle's community in permanently. There was nothing wrong in this strategy. Nyel had put himself out to set up a charity school that was a burden to no one. He had run it for a year on a meagre personal pension perhaps, and the committee had agreed that it had had "considerable fruit".

For De La Salle to make a move, he would need first a clear written request from a competent authority. Then negotiations could be safely undertaken. His years of trusteeship had taught him prudence. Nyel's school was backed by no parish priest, and in times of difficulty would come under the Poor Board. De La Salle, in difficulty already at Château-Porcien, and knowing that Nyel's masters left in Guise were not giving satisfaction and needed replacing, declined each time to meet Nyel's request.

It was fortunate that the travelling he had had to undertake relative to the school in Rethel took place early in the year. Because of continual plundering of Flanders and Brabant by French troops, Spain declared war (which lasted less than a year) in October. In the winter months of 1683, mercenary troops engaging French forces roamed over the region around Rheims, pillaging and demanding food.²⁹

1684

Early this year one of the Rheims community died: Brother Jean-François. And on May 24th Brother Cosme Boiserin was buried. These two deaths illustrate De La Salle's current difficulty in deploying more men where they were needed. For people who themselves may have had no great strength of

constitution through their poor upbringing, work in crowded and ill-ventilated classrooms was very demanding. There were never a great number in the Rheims community. Blain says that 15 entered between 1682 and 1688, but this must refer to those who remained in the Society. For eight or nine were needed for the three schools in Rheims; two went to Château-Porcien, two to Rethel, and later, two to Laon and two to Guise. Apart from those two deaths, most of the year 1684 passed without incident, and De La Salle could get on with the training of his community.

De La Salle thinks of moving to Paris. M. Callou dissuades him

M. De La Salle had intended, after resigning his canonry, to go to Paris to answer La Barmondière's request, as Canon Philbert had suggested.³⁰ It seems strange, however, that, having realised that he needed to be rid of his duties as canon in order to concern himself with his community, he should now think of leaving it and moving to Paris.

Maillefer writes: "He hoped that his absence and his being at a distance would calm minds upset over his latest step, and that as the first impressions faded gradually, people would get used to considering him with a more tranquil eye. This reflection was strengthened by the fear he had of putting his humility to too strong a test by the flattering talk of a number of persons of piety who never tired of admiring the excess of his generosity."³¹ Blain speaks of him being the talk of almost the whole town, which was shocked and scandalised faced with an act of perfection it could not agree with.³² He must have been constantly challenged, or disturbed by callers at the community house, and perhaps it was too much for him. It may be also that Barré wanted him to take over his work with his own few Brothers in tandem with de Montigny. He was certainly very keen for him to come, and appreciated that Paris was a better centre for De La Salle's work to radiate.

But Jacques Callou, having so long overlooked the situation, now pointed out to Monsieur De La Salle that his young community needed him. On reflection the latter agreed, and wrote to M. de La Barmondière to say that he was putting off coming to Paris "because the will of God was opposed to him going so soon to make this foundation, and that all a weak instrument like himself could do was to submit." He also wrote to M. Lespagnol, the priest in charge of the parish schools of Saint Sulpice. Lespagnol was very upset. The work was clearly beyond him. A year later, in 1685, he retired from the post and was replaced by M. Compagnon.

The one who was the most disappointed was Fr Barré, for when he heard of it he spoke of his dissatisfaction to several people. Yet the delay was important, and we would be right in seeing in it God's care of the new work. Had the now ex-canon gone to Paris in October 1683, he would either have come

under Barré's influence, whose charism was not exactly in the same direction, or have had to disagree with him or de Montigny. His Brothers needed time to realise their distinctiveness and to begin to develop supporting community structures. By the time they went to Paris they had a vow binding them to their Superior, and a dress that was distinctive enough to classify them as living a community life and not just a 'secular' one. Their specific work was already taking shape in schools in four towns and in their training of country schoolmasters. They were by then a strongly knit group under their superior, used to annual retreats and to assemblies in which together they built up their new society. Even then, his departure led to a crisis.

For De La Salle himself, the five years delay meant continually facing up to people in the close society of Rheims over the consequences of giving up his canonry. It is difficult to realise what that meant. It must have been one of his hardest trials. It would have strengthened his personality and made him able to face steadily the many adversities he was to meet with in Paris. He had also food for thought in that Barré's control of his Sisters' community in Rouen had slipped from him when he moved to Paris.

He hands back his trusteeship

He continued to train his community while considering when he should give up his patrimony. One thing he decided on, and it was to hand back once more and finally his trusteeship of the family property. His brothers and sisters were now entirely catered for: Jean-Louis, aged 20, was at Saint-Sulpice; Pierre, 18, was at his sister's, Rue de l'Université. He would finish his years at College this year and would leave Rheims on 20 October to study law at Orleans. Jean-Remy, 14, was at Senlis. The family house had been sold. John could hand over the remaining financial matters so as to concern himself wholly with his community. Accordingly, he approached the family council, and they perhaps were only too glad to transfer the trusteeship to a member of the family who had not let them down. They had no hesitation in agreeing to his request, and again nominated Nicholas Lespagnol to replace him. This was done on 16 August 1684 in the presence of an 'arbiter' representing both sides, namely another Nicholas Lespagnol, a gentleman in the service of the Dowager Duchess of Orleans, Charlotte Palatine. John Baptist would again have to present the account of his trusteeship. Unfortunately, this second set of ledgers has not been found.

However, the new trustee, who was now 69, died on 1 November 1686, and his heirs drew up and presented a statement of accounts on 14th January 1687 to the lieutenant-general of the bailiwick of Rheims. We have this account and fortunately, in many cases where an investment or lease made by John Baptist during his second trusteeship is concerned, this is written out

first and then any further receipts of money. So that we can make out a good list of the transactions made by him from 1680 to 1684 in favour of his brothers.³³ John Maillefer, his brother-in-law, accepted to be curator for Pierre and Jean-Remy and to handle matters concerning them.

We find, in the references to John Baptist in this statement of accounts, that as before, he had kept most careful track of loans and of rents and of interest due, whether on sums invested on behalf of his three brothers jointly or for each separately, even while he was taken up with his new community and with foundations in Rethel and elsewhere. In 1683 he gave money to reliable people at interest in order to provide a permanent income for his brothers.

But we find something new: between 5 August 5th and 31 January 1685, he ceded to his brothers jointly investments of his own amounting to a capital of almost 10,500 livres, annual interests amounting to close on 600 livres, and his share of the proceeds from the sale of a house he owned in the Rue Ste-Marguerite, and which he put up for sale after 16 August. All this surrender of temporal goods to his brothers was part of his break with wealth, his growth in dependence on Providence and his choice of poverty. It also set him free from family temporal concerns. Finally, it showed his wider family that his choice of living with poor schoolmasters had not been detrimental to his brothers, and that he loved them still. His generosity must have gone a long way to halting their criticisms. He remained a member of the family council and always looked after his own.³⁴

The winter of 1684-5. He gives away his wealth

He was obviously prepared to give away all he owned.³⁵ There was a difficulty as to how precisely to go about doing so. Although Nicolas Barré had strongly advised him to give away his wealth and not to use it to endow his schools, yet that is exactly what his saintly friend and counsellor Nicholas Roland had done, and as a result, his Sisters had now four sound schools in Rheims. It was what Roland would have advised him, and it was one sensible way of divesting himself of his wealth. In uncertainty before two possible good ways of following the Gospel counsel to give up all things, and needing to respond to the reproach his community had made him, he turned to prayer. Brother Bernard gives us the prayer he used during this period:

O my God, I do not know whether I should endow or not endow. It is not for me to found communities nor to know the way to found them. It is yours, O my God, to know how and to do it, in the way that pleases you. I dare not endow, because I do not know your will, nor if I will help in anything by endowing houses. If you endow them, they will be well endowed; if you do not endow them, they will stay without endowment. I beg of you, O my

God, to let me know your will in this course of action.

Brother Bernard goes on; “Such a fervent and disinterested prayer was not useless; for God, seeing the holy dispositions his servant was in, inspired him from that moment to abandon himself to him without reserve. And so he did, putting all the houses he had founded under the guidance of divine Providence.”³⁶ He wrote to Fr Barré again, perhaps to say that this was his conviction. The Minim strongly supported him, giving him the same answer as in the previous year. He now waited for the right moment to carry it out.

1685

The winter of 1684-5 was not the worst of the century, but it was nevertheless severe. John Evelyn records in his diary:

2 Nov. A suddaine change from temperate warme weather to an excessive cold raine, frost, snow, and storm, such as had seldome ben known.

1685. 1 Jan. It prov'd so sharp weather, and so long and cruel a frost, that the Thames was frozen acrossse, but the frost was often dissolv'd, and then froze again.³⁷

In France, what accentuated the hardship was the bad wheat harvest the year before which had sent corn prices rocketing, and this harsh winter sent up the price of all foodstuffs. Many died of hunger in the country that January. “The poor from the countryside coming into the Capital” (i.e. of Champagne, meaning Rheims) “to find help, and joining those of the town, made of Rheims one great Hospice. Most of the inhabitants having become beggars, (through the cessation of public works and manufactures, that high prices along with the rigour of winter, did not allow to continue) sought among the opulent the bread of charity.”³⁸

De La Salle responded with compassion to the situation and saw in it the opportunity to get rid of his wealth in a way that would cause least criticism and notice. Others in the city must have been helping: the mendicant houses, the Sisters of the Holy Child Jesus, the Poor Board. The town authorities could help by pegging and subsidising the price of wheat. Many individual bourgeois would practice Christian charity; one can think of Marie Maillefer. In the midst of all this, one man was going to give away all his wealth, in a quiet and organised way. He provided first for the children - some 2000 in the Brothers' schools and those run by Roland's Sisters. He also was aware of some bourgeois families who were ruined by the high prices yet too ashamed to beg: he provided for them discreetly. For **beggars in the street**, he organised a daily hand-out in the Brothers' dining-room, helped by the clerics living in his house. He profited by the good will this produced to give a little religious

instruction. "It was after celebrating holy Mass that he came to take part in it...Jesus Christ having become visible to him in his members, he would put himself at their feet, and he could be seen on his knees giving them charity with the marks of respect and joy he would have given if he had seen and fed Jesus Christ in his own person."³⁹

By the harvest of 1685, when things eased, he had "given everything away and kept nothing", as Maillefer says. Conditions improved, but the scarcity continued, if less severe, and throughout much of 1686 it was difficult to make ends meet. But the weather had improved at the end of 1685, and the harvest of 1686 was a bumper one so that wheat fell to a very low price, while meteorological conditions remained good until 1689.⁴⁰

In 1686, at the end of the two years' scarcity, De La Salle was able to say to his community that even without resources, their trust in Providence had not been misplaced: "Although we have neither founding capital nor income from investments, we have come through two trying years of scarcity. We have lacked nothing, we are in debt to no one...whereas we see several well-endowed communities ruined in spite of their great wealth, since they have been obliged to sell and borrow."

He takes the trouble to spell out the difference. Perhaps, after their original complaint to him about his wealth and their unprovided future, they had hoped he would use his patrimony to endow the schools and so guarantee their future financially. His actual decision, to trust in Providence, had taken them by surprise,⁴¹ and had been a tremendous lesson to them. To increase their trust in Providence, he points to the way God has cared for them in the last two years.

What amount exactly did he give away? The sale of properties was not involved. Those he held jointly with his siblings had been auctioned two and a half years earlier, leaving each with 3250 livres. His own assets he had already sold and he had shared the proceeds with his brothers and his sister. Most of his income from properties would have been placed as investments, the revenues coming in thereafter as unearned income that gave him the usual bourgeois security his Brothers never had. Some of these capital sums could have been recoverable, and it was possible even for perpetual investments for the creditors to buy them back, providing him with ready cash. Such sums could not be found immediately, and this may explain why Bernard says De La Salle distributed alms over two years.

His biographers estimate variously the amount he had available to give. One modern estimate gives 13,000 livres⁴² less the 4000 mentioned further. It is difficult to gauge the equivalent buying power today. It could be something like 180,000 euros. Bernard's estimate that La Salle gave out 200 pistoles of bread a day, apart from the pistole having a different value and purchasing

power in 1723 when he wrote, would imply something like 30,000 kilos of bread a day. All the bakers of Rheims could not have provided that amount! But the word also had the meaning of 'wealth' and so would mean that a great amount of bread was given out daily.⁴³

All that De La Salle kept of the placements mentioned above was one of 4,000 livres invested at 5% that Jacques Callou obliged him to keep to provide. He used it "in part for the long and painful journeys he undertook, and to furnish his library with books for his use and that of his communities; in part also for several other works of piety, such as church ornaments, sacred vessels and priestly vestments, things he was very careful to provide."⁴⁴ He was now poor among the poor. He would feel the pinch of poverty like the rest of his community in hard times. For the future of his work, he would have to depend on Providence, on whether or not other people asked him to open a school, and on whether someone provided the financing. He would not found schools, but provide a community of trained masters when asked. Benefactor-founders and parish priests, on the other hand would have to accept his understanding of the education of the poor and his Brothers' way of running the school. At the same time, his stance was not the complete refusal of financial means that Barré seems to have had: he did accept legacies that would help out meagre salaries, and allow him to rent or buy or extend a community house or provide for his novices. But those funds would have to come his way. He had none of his own to fall back on. Yet he did refuse large sums: "Our Brothers will last only if they are poor," he said. "They will lose the spirit of their vocation as soon as they try to obtain the comforts of life."⁴⁵

For himself, it was the beginning of a life of poverty and a love of poverty after the example of Christ that he cultivated all his life. "Having become poor himself by assisting the poor, he took, as having the rank of a poor man, a portion of the bread he was distributing to them, and ate on his knees in front of them.....He went in his turn from house to house begging out of charity for a few pieces of bread."⁴⁶

One of his finest meditations is the one he wrote, and so evidently felt, for his Brothers for Christmas Day:

The poverty which Jesus practised so strikingly at his birth should induce us to have a great love for this virtue, for it was to make us love it that Jesus was born in this condition. Let us not be astonished, therefore, when we lack something, even what is necessary, since Jesus at his birth was deprived of everything....

In choosing our present state, we should have prepared ourselves for abasement, like the Son of God when he became man, for lowliness is a characteristic of our profession and our employment. We are just poor

Brothers, forgotten by the world and esteemed of no consequence. Only the poor come to us, and they have nothing to offer but their hearts prepared to receive our instruction. Let us love all that is most humiliating in our profession, in order to share in some degree in the abjection of Jesus Christ at his birth.

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3. Cited in Aroz, CL28, 21.
4. Poutet I, 676.
5. Blain I, 184-5; see also Maillefer, CL6, 50-53; cf Poutet I, 717-718.
6. Bernard, 47-9; Maillefer, CL6, 54-57; Blain I, 185-196; Poutet I, 718-720.
7. Blain I, 188-9; Poutet I, 719, n. 24.
8. Bernard, 48-56; Maillefer, CL6, 58-65; Blain I, 197-210; Poutet I, 720-721.
9. Aroz, CL27, 79; Poutet I, 716-717; Bernard, 71-2; Maillefer, CL6, 73-5; Blain I, 226-8.
10. Bernard, 71.
11. Maillefer, CL6, 52,53.
12. Blain I, 193, after Bernard, 49.
13. See also Blain I, 223-224.
14. Poutet I, 718; Bernard, 47, Maillefer, CL6, 54-5; Blain I, 240-241.
15. Maillefer, CL6, 54.
16. Blain I, 229-230.
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20. Poutet I, 687-693.
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25. Blain I, 204-5.
26. Raymond Darricau, article *Direction spirituelle*, *Dictionnaire du grand Siècle*, Fayard, 1990.
27. Poutet II, 374-5.
28. Poutet I, 669-674.
29. Poutet, CL48, *Jean-Baptiste de La Salle ax prises avec son temps*, 38, 39.
30. Bernard, 57-8, Maillefer, CL6, 64-5; Blain I, 210-214.
31. Maillefer, CL6, 65.
32. Blain I, 210.

33. Aroz, CL32, Introduction and text.
 34. See Aroz, CL32 and CL42.
 35. Bernard, 58-62; Maillefer, CL6, 66-69; Blain I, 214-222.
 36. Bernard, 59.
 37. *Evelyn's Diary and Correspondence*, Cavendish Edition, Warne & Co., 1818, 460, 462.
 38. Blain I, 219-220.
 39. id., 220-221.
 40. Poutet I, 723, n.48.
 41. Maillefer, CL6, 66,67; Blain I, 221 ad fin.
 42. Poutet I, 722 and n.43, following Aroz, CL28, 29.
 43. Poutet's letter to author, Jan.21st, 1994.
 44. Bernard, 61.
 45. Blain I, 222.
 46. id., 221.
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Chapter 8: A sense of direction and vocation develops amid a variety of initiatives, 1685-1688

Owing to the way in which events and decisions fill up the years 1685 to 1688, this chapter may read rather fragmentedly. In these three or four years events pulled De La Salle in many directions, and brought a new sense of mission. The Brothers' need of a winter dress led to a distinctive habit fit for life among the poor. Three times the Founder was drawn to organise outside Rheims training programmes for country masters, leading to his own developed one in Rheims. Alongside, young men asking to become Brothers, were suitably guided. Nyel's return to Rouen marked the end of a period, leaving De La Salle facing his full role as a founder of a teaching society. Three of his Brothers died, causing him sorrow and staffing difficulties. He found it right to call an assembly of his little society, and to get a Brother elected as its head. That sound plan was soon frustrated. Then he was taken up with preparing at last to answer desperate appeals from Paris. Amid all this, he finds time for prayer and a retreat. Such was his life and that of his Brothers lived at a time of challenging beginnings and unforeseen occurrences.

The Brothers adopt the dress of the poor, modified to be distinctive of themselves as a community

In that cruel January of 1685, the Brothers shivered on their way to school and in their unheated classrooms. The jerkin they were wearing was totally inadequate to keep them warm. It is strange that De La Salle, caring as he was, had not noticed it. He wore the warmer clerical cassock with the long mantle. The "citizen's lieutenant" (Blain, writing in Rouen, an independent municipality, uses the term 'mayor'), either realised it or the remark was made to him, for he was the one, along with several others, who drew De La Salle's attention to it.¹ He suggested his teachers should wear what was commonly worn by the poor in winter, the thick cloak that people called the 'capote' with attached hood and hanging sleeves that were never used. "The only change he made to this kind of dress, which was current in Champagne at the time, and which was made of all kinds of cloth and in all kinds of colours, was to have them made in a very coarse wool and to have them died black, and to make it reach to eight inches off the ground."²

Soon after this, the Brothers replaced the jerkin by a 'soutanelle' or calf-length cassock, fastened from waist-level upwards, not with buttons, which were a luxury for the poor, but with hooks and eyes. "It was of twilled serge," says Brother Bernard, like the cloak, "in the same way as they are worn today",³ that is. in 1723. The standard white 'bands' - forerunner of the cra-

vat and tie that lay people wore - were reduced in length compared to the clergy, and the broad-rimmed hat of the country folk of Champagne was adopted, but with the rim even wider so as not to follow the fashion. They adopted as footwear the thick-soled boots of the peasant. Brother Bernard says these boots were "of rough make, like those of peasants and carters."⁴ Blain says they were made of "two big soles, strong and thick, like those that ploughmen wear."⁵ Their outfit was practical but also chosen so as not to give themselves status. At the same time it indicated that this was a group living together to serve the poor. Blain notes elsewhere about his hero: "Always neat and always poor, he no longer used anything except the cheapest cloth and rough-made clothes. Soon he was seen to put on those of the Brothers and, in the eyes of the public, to the regret of his friends and, if I may use the word, to the shame of his relatives and of his family, to wear a dress of disgrace; for so was the Brothers' habit looked on at first, and for a long time afterwards."⁶

In his *Memoir on the habit*, written at the end of 1689 or early 1690, the Founder describes the dress of the Brothers: "The dress of this community is a sort of short calf-length cassock. It is without buttons, fastened on the inside with little hooks and eyes from the top to towards the middle of the body, and from there to the bottom, sewn throughout. The end of the sleeves is turned down over the wrist and closed with hooks and eyes that do not appear. We call this dress a robe, so as not to term it a clerical habit; neither does it have quite its shape. What serves as mantle is a greatcoat or cloak without a collar and without buttons in front, fastened at the top by a large hook on the inside. This cloak is somewhat long because it covers all the short cassock and is about an inch longer.

"These greatcoats or cloaks worn by the Brothers of the Christian Schools were given them to protect them from the cold when they did not yet have the special short cassocks such as they have at present, but jerkins without pockets and quite becoming. Thus the cloaks came into use, and it was thought that they would be very suitable, useful and convenient for schoolmasters, specially for those who go to schools outside the house and in distant areas of the town for the commodity of the children; for these masters, using this cloak as an overcoat in the streets, use it in winter as a house coat when they reach their schools or the house."⁷

There was some doubt among the Brothers as to whether the clerical type of mantle should not be preferred to the cloak, but very quickly it was decided that the short shoulder cloak that priests in fashion wore was unfitting, and that the ankle-length mantle would be inconvenient. The Founder writes: "Then there was considerable hesitation as to whether they should not be given mantles rather than these kinds of cloaks that were judged to be very likely

looked upon in future as a special dress. But four considerations prevented this: First, these mantles would not help in school against the cold or would get in their way a great deal;" (he says further: "It has been remarked that with this habit, you are capable of knocking over most of the little children either side of you when you want to get them lined up.") "Secondly, that with the short mantles, they would look like courtier priests and it was feared they would take on their airs. 3, that they would have looked like clerics, dressed their way and against the order of the Church although they were not (clerics). 4. They would have taken with them the mantles as well as the jerkin at the first temptation that came into their mind and would have gone back home dressed like gentlemen, they who had brought with them when they came only the dress of peasants or of poor artisans,"⁸ meaning for the latter cast-off clothes bought secondhand.

When they first went out with their new habit, it was mocked by the crowds of idle children of the area who even threw stones at the Brothers. But that did not last long. It drew the affection of the poor because they realised that here was a group of men committed to the good of their children and expressing by their very dress that they shared their poverty with them. They might not always call them 'Brothers of the Christian Schools'. They might call them 'Brothers of the Child Jesus' because they were used to the Sisters of the Child Jesus, or just 'The Brothers', or, very often, 'The Little Brothers' (Petits Frères), as a term of affection. A Brother choosing to work among them with this dress, even if he had come from a better class family, was one of them. For the Brothers themselves and for anyone who saw them, this outfit, at a time when they had no sort of canonical or legal or any other recognition, strengthened the impression that here was a particular group, a community with a definite occupation. By the end of the year the Brothers outside Rheims also had this dress.

More evidence of De La Salle's prayer and contemplation. He interrupts them to teach for a while

After a while, some of his relatives and former colleagues on the cathedral Chapter began visiting him again. But he felt very strongly the need and call to prayer, and to avoid these visits he took refuge in an out-of-the-way pigeon-loft in order to seek the will of God for himself and his community.⁹ It was from experience that he gave this principle to his Brothers: "You must pray very much to know the will of God and to obtain his help. Prayer has little effect if it is not sustained by mortification." But he soon had to leave his retreat, for in addition to the two other deaths earlier that year, a Brother John Lozart died in Rheims on 26 June 1685. These deaths would point to the harsh winter and explain why he could not send anyone to Guise or to Laon

even if he had wanted to. In fact, there was no one to replace this third Brother in class. Whereupon, he made the tremendously courageous decision to take his place. Since his teachers now had a recognised dress, he put it on, knowing what his family and the well-to-do would say about it.

Twice a day people saw the former canon go across the town to St James' school, dressed in the rough cassock and mantle of the Brothers, the wide-brimmed hat and the thick boots, in order to teach these ragamuffins to read and write, to teach them the catechism and take them to daily Mass. Even the poor thought it odd and made fun of him, and several of the bourgeois, including some of his friends, thought he had gone too far and believed he was losing his mind. He did this very likely for just over two months, from 27 June to 31 August, since the school vacation was in September (unless he got himself replaced before his journey of 20 August recorded below). He would have had to learn everything about controlling and teaching such a class. Not only did he teach them during the week, but on Sundays and holydays (of which there were many then) he took them to high mass in the parish church and in the afternoon he taught them catechism in the school and then took them to Vespers. We are told that he "kept an eye on them all the time in the streets and in the church, placing himself for that purpose where he could see them easily...He made them take a long way round (the school and the church were very close to one another) so as to get them in better order."

Once this period was over, he returned to his prayer. But he had learnt by this experience how demanding on his Brothers was the work of the classroom. He restrained those among his community who were led to use forms of corporal self-discipline, and never made them part of their Rule.

A desperate appeal from Paris

It was while he was in difficulties through lack of Brothers and unsure when Nyel might return to Rouen and leave him with the problem of the school in Laon, that Monsieur Compagnon wrote in desperation from Paris¹⁰ in July 1685 saying he was crushed under the burden of teaching 200 boys, and could he send one Brother?¹¹ The Founder simply could not oblige, especially as he would need to hold one or two Brothers in reserve for de Mazarin's new project detailed below; so he answered, putting him off. Compagnon was so desperate that he set out for Rheims, only to find De La Salle absent, possibly in connection with his negotiations with the Duke de Mazarin, and so had to go back unsatisfied.

The step of going to Paris would be one of the most momentous so far and the most hopeful for the new society. Not only was there the prospect of answering the needs of the capital, but the whole church of France would be open from there. The Founder called together the community and let them

discuss the matter so that it would be their common decision and project. Their experience led them to come to the following principle for all future foundations:

*To hold invariably to the rule not to entrust a Brother with looking after himself alone, and to refuse even the most advantageous foundations if it was not the intention to place two Brothers there.*¹²

The foundation of success in the Christian education of the poor was already perceived to be community life and acting “together and by association” as they came to express it later. Two was a minimum for starting a community which would hopefully grow as its school developed.

Meanwhile, back in Paris, the weary Compagnon told the parish priest of the futility of his journey. The latter asked Jean-Louis de La Salle, who was still at the seminary, to write to his elder brother and “begged him to remind him of the word he had given in 1683.” John replied that it was a law among the Brothers that they should never go alone, but that he was ready, if the parish priest agreed, to send two masters and come with them if need be. This would be in September 1685. The answer came from Compagnon saying he would be well received with the two Brothers. But on what conditions the school would be run was not clear. The letter was not from De La Barmondière and, as Blain says well, people like Compagnon, keen on a thing, can easily promise things they have not cleared with their superior, or interpret too hastily what has been said. De La Salle wanted something in writing from the parish priest. Jean-Louis had come back meanwhile to Rheims for the summer break. His brother wrote back, therefore, at the beginning of October, saying Jean-Louis would soon be returning to Paris and would set out the whole project.

Jean-Louis de La Salle met M. Compagnon, but the latter seems to have lost interest and let two months pass by. To have two trained Brothers and their superior himself would be quite a new situation that might have been threatening to him. He did at last write in January 1686 and proposed a date. But it was now the Founder who did the waiting. He wanted a clear request from the proper authority in the parish. To run a school in Paris where there were so many claims to rights and jurisdiction, he would need to have his work clearly sanctioned by the parish priest. De La Barmondière himself seemed slow to become aware of things, perhaps because he was worried over the lack of funds for the new church. He did tend to be dilatory. During this period of waiting, De La Salle was involved in new projects with the Duke de Mazarin.

Here can be mentioned that towards the end of the preceding year on 18 October 1685, Louis XIV by the *Edict of Fontainebleau* revoked the *Edict*

of *Nantes*. This action had been asked for by bishops and members of the *parti dévot* in order to make an end of Protestantism in France. “We command all ministers and priests of the Huguenots to leave our kingdom within fifteen days, upon pain of being sent to the galleys. We forbid private schools for the instruction of children of the Huguenots. All children who may be born to Huguenots are to be baptised by Catholic priests...and thereafter to be brought up in the Catholic faith. None of our Huguenot subjects are to leave our kingdom or send their goods abroad, upon pain of being sent to the galleys.” John Evelyn describes the galleys: “The spectacle was to me new and strange, to see so many hundreds of miserably naked persons, having their heads shaven close and having onely high red bonnets (and) a payre of course (*sic*) canvas drawers...They are rul’d and chastiz’d by strokes on their backs and soles of their feet on the least disorder, and without the least humanity.”¹³ The royal decree gave rise to difficult situations into which the Brothers were drawn in the south of France some twenty years later.

The Duke de Mazarin’s new plan for country teachers, involving De La Salle

Duke de Mazarin’s project for providing schoolmistresses for the village schools on his domains has already been considered. He also intended, from about 1681 or 82, therefore, before he became aware of Favart and De La Salle’s plan for the school of Rethel, “to set up a house or community of young men in order to take from them, as from a seed-bed, the number of schoolmasters necessary for his domains.” He saw the advantage of joining up with the Founder’s scheme, and for some reason, as we have seen, it failed. He went into action again in 1685. He decided to have his own ‘teachers’ seminary’ at Rethel, to provide for the parishes in his domains such as in Champagne, in the Ardennes, and in Mayenne. He once more contacted De La Salle as the one most able to provide trained personnel.¹⁴ Although the latter was so short of men at the time that he himself was teaching in St James’s school in Rheims, he took on the new venture.

This interest of his, manifested early and persevered with all his life, even though all his attempts failed, shows his perception of a definite need that was not being met. Country children were often absent from the parish school of their village, looking after farm animals, put to helping in the grape harvest, bringing in the crops, picking fruit, feeding hens, rabbits or pigs. The parish priest, if the village was small, could manage to fit in the sporadic teaching that was the only one possible. There might be in a larger village another ‘cleric’, lay or otherwise, acting as sacristan and clerk of the village, and using the gaps in his time to take the children for instruction. The Founder saw therefore that if, in the towns, his Brothers’ form of service to the poor

was full-time teaching, for the villages a man needed to be prepared to be an efficient clerk and also a good teacher who would attract the parents to sending their children to school longer.

The present undertaking entailed travelling to Rethel and seeing the Duke before signing a contract before notaries on the morning of Monday 20 August 1685. The journey on foot required seven hours, so M. De La Salle left Rheims before noon the day before or two days before. Through mortification he did not eat with the community before leaving, but decided to go through the effort of begging on the way. It was customary to have the mid-day meal at eleven and supper at six. He needed, then, to leave between 10 and 11 to arrive at the community in Rethel at a reasonable time. On the way he begged for some food, and a kind woman gave him a piece of rye bread which "he ate on his knees, out of respect, with a joy that cannot be put into words."¹⁵

The formalities were gone through in de Mazarin's own house. He committed himself to putting a capital of 66,000 livres into the project. These funds came from someone 'wishing to make up for his failings', in other words, the late Cardinal Mazarin. They were intended by the Duke for a training-centre for teachers at Rethel. He found the Brothers' schoolhouse well situated and capable of being added to, and in order to have buildings put up capable of housing an extra Brother and seventeen young people in groups, he promised to make 3000 livres immediately available. For he specified the number of trainees: seventeen. The superior would be M. De La Salle, although he would not be obliged to reside in Rethel, but would oversee the conduct of the two masters in charge, drawn from his community in Rheims. He would select the trainees and de Mazarin would place them. The length of training was not specified. The opening date was set for 1 October, the beginning of the school year. Time was short. De Mazarin promised to provide the furniture without delay, and De La Salle was to let him know if the construction of the extensions was too slow. Finally, the Duke bound himself to pay 3000 livres annually to cover the boarding costs. It was quite a bold project, well thought out, with no doubt the Founder making a number of the practical suggestions. Both the Duke and he signed the contract. But once more, nothing came of it.

The contract spoke of "seventeen young men ...to go and instruct and bring up youth in the said townships....after the choice has been made by the said Lord Duke and his successors, with the approval of the ecclesiastical superiors." In law, schools came under ecclesiastical, not civil justice. The bishop often insisted on the right of nomination, not just approval, and certainly the right to revoke a person's authorisation to teach if he was unsatisfactory. Le Tellier, with the power he had as Archbishop-Duke of Rheims, and with his authoritarianism, would certainly insist on nominating teachers to their posts,

and would not simply accede to de Mazarin's intention of placing them himself.

There was another reason why he certainly was not going to play second fiddle to the Duke. The latter had asked in 1668 that one of his lands should be made into a parish, and the bishop's *official* had given an opinion in his favour on 15 May 1669. On 12 December 1673, the *Parlement* confirmed his decision, but it was up to the archbishop to nominate the parish priest. So far he had not acted. The Duke sent him a legal summons, saying that in view of the above, and in spite of his offer of 2000 livres to make up a suitable salary for the priest's board and lodging, if nothing was done within the month he would appeal to the *Parlement* of Paris. This lawsuit had not been undertaken by August: the Duke and Le Tellier were still at loggerheads.

Le Tellier also looked disapprovingly on Monsieur De La Salle. He remembered his first attempt to exchange his canonry for a parish. He did not appreciate his repeated requests to give up his canonry in 1683, against the wishes of his Chapter, and still less that he should let it go to a poor priest who would add no lustre to it. He had not sought the archbishop's patronage, as Roland had done, when he started his community. Nor had he agreed to accept the Archbishop's offer to endow his schools and obtain for them legal recognition if he confined his work within the diocese of Rheims. And here he was, planning with de Mazarin to provide schoolmasters for all the Duke's domains exclusively, even if some were within his diocese.

After signing the contract, de Mazarin accompanied De La Salle to Rheims (certainly by coach, perhaps in his private coach) in order to get Le Tellier's agreement. He bluntly told them they were "two madmen." "Excuse me, your Grace," De La Salle answered, "there is only one." It was an answer both of modesty and civility in order to defend the Duke. The archbishop made clear that it was not for De La Salle to select the trainees: the parish priests concerned would do this. And it was not de Mazarin's right to appoint the masters: that again belonged to the parish priests or the archbishop. The contract remained ineffective. It failed through a clash of personalities. But de Mazarin was not beaten. He was going to try again - and so was De La Salle.

Things look up in Laon

Parallel with events in Rethel, things were moving at last in Laon.¹⁶ For some time now, Nyel was caught in a time-trap. Having successfully started a school and having enough room for two classes, he was waiting for De La Salle to send two Brothers so that he could go back to Rouen. But he had neither the men, nor had he the intention of sending any under the present conditions. This must have been the longest time Nyel had stayed in any

place since he came into contact with La Salle! Since 1 June 1682, however, there was a new parish priest at St Peter-the-Old's. He was Pierre Guyart, a former disciple of Canon Roland when he held his talks for priests, and who had seen, opposite his own house in Rheims, Canon De La Salle taking Nyel's masters into the hotel Sainte-Marguerite. Pierre Guyart (1654-1736) was three years younger than De La Salle. In a letter he wrote to Brother Timothy, second Superior General, dated 26 October 1734 when he was 80, he said he knew the Founder "when he began to train the schoolmasters in a house opposite mine, and even when he invited them to live with him in lay dress."¹⁷

He wrote to him and asked him to send two masters to Laon that would give stability to the school and allow Nyel to return to Rouen. Guyard had two generous and influential families in the parish, the Marquettes (the Jesuit Jacques Marquette belonged to this family) and the Bellottes, who were distantly related to De La Salle. A Nicholas Marquette lived in Laon with his wife, a Rose De La Salle. A Bellotte was president of the salt tribunal. Another had been provost from 1642 till 1681 and was succeeded by his son-in-law. Two Bellottes were canons of the cathedral. Guyard, with the help of these and other influential friends, was able to convince the town 'governors' of the importance of having larger premises available for the education of the poor. The town had just bought a house that had come on the market, situated between his presbytery and the college and backing on to the Premonstratensian abbey of St Martin with which it had a party wall. The 'governors' authorised Nyel to move his school there. As the Premonstratensians had the spiritual care of the poor of the hospice, and Adrian's uncle had left a considerable sum to one of their priories, they offered to provide him daily with his midday meal.

Guyart was then able to write to Monsieur De La Salle assuring him that if he sent two masters, they "would have enough to live on"¹⁸ without having to draw on parish funds. As the town was providing the house, and 150 livres to provide for one master's subsistence, and as one substantial meal was being provided out of the customary two that people took daily, you could - stretching a point! - make out that two Brothers would be provided for. Guyart promised to pay the remainder out of his own means. Perhaps after a famine and in a time of continuing scarcity, he could make an offer that the Brothers would not want to discuss too much. Probably also the parish resources were depleted relieving the famine. But it would be a tough start. No fixed supplement was agreed upon: it was left to Guyart to keep his promise. The two Brothers, of course, would not come till the end of September to start the new school year. Meanwhile, that same month, the Duke de Mazarin saw De La Salle again.

If we look ahead: Pierre Guyart handed over the care of the parish of St

Peter on 11 September 1690 having been installed as canon on 28 November of the preceding year. His interest in the Brothers was continued by his nephew, who was parish priest from 1697 to 1722, so he knew the Brothers well. Two of this priest's nephews joined the Brothers: a Brother Roch, who entered in 1709 and died at Chartres, and a Brother Pascal, who entered at 15 in 1711 and died before 1716.¹⁹ The Brothers' community at Laon was always very poor. We read in the *Annals of the Community of the Brothers of the Christian Schools of the Town of Laon* for the period 1732-1738 that "during several winters the Brothers of Laon had no other fire than that of their lamp, for want of their being able to get firewood. It is true that now and then some charitable persons sent them help; and we must place in that number M. Guiard, former parish priest of St Peter-the-Old and at the time canon of the cathedral, and who was always their resource. One day this good canon said to Brother Exupère (Director of the community), "showing him his silverware: 'I would rather sell all that rather than suffer the community to be in want.' He died shortly after saying these words, and bequeathed 500 livres to the Brothers."²⁰ This was in 1734. In the letter he wrote to Brother Timothy this year he spoke of De La Salle as "a dear and intimate friend."

De Mazarin and De La Salle get round Le Tellier's veto²¹

If he could not appoint masters on lands he held within the bounds of the diocese of Rheims, de Mazarin had other lands, from Alsace to Poitou, that were outside Le Tellier's jurisdiction. And he still felt that he had no better source for training teachers than De La Salle and his community. In the discussions between them, it is clear that De La Salle was fully a contributor of ideas towards a solution and that he kept them from his archbishop who had no need to know. He was planning to send his two best men to Laon: Brothers Gabriel Drolin and Nicholas Bourlette. It is quite possible that he had originally intended to send these two to take charge of the project at Rethel that had just fallen through, and that they were now available for Laon.

The Duke asked M. De La Salle to come and see him at Ranwez, near Mézières, on 22 September in order to be present at an official rescinding of the abortive contract of 20 August, and at the drawing up of a new contract concerning training masters for the diocese of Laon. This involved a journey of ninety kilometres on foot, or a journey of four days, unless he linked it to other journeys in the area, visiting Rethel and Château-Porcien on the way. Alternatively, perhaps the Duke provided transport. This month also, he had been able to send two Brothers to Guise to replace Nyel's unsatisfactory teachers there.

De Mazarin's new contract declared the old one null because "for reasons known to them, the ecclesiastical superiors had not wanted to listen", and

“even if the ecclesiastical superiors consented to its rehabilitation in future.” The Duke would have no truck with opposition! His idea now was to start a new training-centre for the benefit of his domains at La Fère, a place twenty-five kilometres northeast of Laon on one of the Duke’s domains. It was within the diocese of Jean d’Estrées (who had recently replaced his uncle the Cardinal) and not of Le Tellier. The training-centre, however, was specified as being “at La Fère *or elsewhere*, at the will of the contracting parties.” The new contract declared that de Mazarin would provide a house “near la Fère or *in some other place* to instruct three young men in all that is necessary to make a good schoolmaster.” On the basis of only three months’ training as seen previously, this could mean twelve trained masters a year. The buildings would include a clean and adequate chapel, and with the rooms, furniture and other things needed to house at least six people. All this would be ready by October 1st 1686 at the latest. There would only be one person in charge of the training, not two as in the other contract, and he would “be taken from the community begun in Rheims.” Once trained, the new masters would be posted to the towns and villages of his domains in the diocese of Laon, according to a choice “made by the said lord duke or his successors with the approval of his lordship the bishop of Laon.”

The words *or elsewhere* were deliberately inserted to allow De La Salle freedom. If the centre were begun in la Fère, then the house was meant to cater for the Brother in charge and three trainees, and two other Brothers who would run a school. But a school at La Fère does not seem to have been planned. This *elsewhere* left De La Salle entirely free as to where he would have his training-centre, provided he trained in it three masters at a time for de Mazarin’s domains at La Fère in the diocese of Laon. The centre could have been attached to the school in Rethel, and that would mean fulfilling one of the hopes expressed at its foundation. Or even in Rheims, in the Brothers’ own residence.

Mentioning only La Fère and omitting all reference to the duke’s domains outside the diocese facilitated an interview with Jean d’Estrées or with his vicar-general, de La Tremouille. (The latter was later in Rome, from 1693, and became cardinal. In later letters, De La Salle mentions him as “a man without side, a little hunchbacked, that he had met formerly in Laon.”²²) So the Founder had had to make the journey from Ranwez to Laon, something like another ninety kilometres, surely by coach with the Duke. It gave him the chance to see Adrian Nyel for the last time, and to show his appreciation of all that he had done for schools for the poor, and how much good he had done to himself personally. He would also see Brothers Gabriel Drolin and Nicholas Bourlette if they were up there already.

The bishop of Laon agreed to the centre being set up and that De La Salle

should be the one responsible for the training through Brothers he appointed for this, and that the Duke should select where to send the trainees, subject to the bishop's approval. On 25 September the Duke signed an order to pay 400 livres "to buy a house for the charity schools of de Mazarin". But it was not to set up a centre at La Fère. Was it in Rheims? De La Salle had acquired there a little house adjoining the one he occupied in the Rue Neuve.²³ He bought it to leave the larger building to the new Canon John Faubert and the poor students he was preparing for the priesthood, but had to arrange with Faubert to take it back at the beginning of 1685.²⁴ This would suppose numbers in La Salle's community had grown or that he was preparing to take in three of de Mazarin's trainees the following school year.²⁵ But there is no direct proof. Rethel is the more likely venue.

ADRIANNYEL RETURNS TO ROUEN²⁶

By now Brothers Gabriel and Nicholas had arrived in Laon to take over from Nyel in October and run two classes for the poor. At last what he had hoped for had happened. He stayed a short while to see the school running well in their hands, took his departure of his relatives and friends and the town authorities, and at the age of about 64 *he left the region for good and returned to Rouen*. He was back there by 26 October, for on that date he was reinstated by the Poor Board of Rouen as superintendent of its poor schools.²⁷ The man seems indefatigable! For M. De La Salle, it was the end of an era of initiation into his calling as founder of a society of Christian schoolmasters.

An appreciation of Adrian Nyel

The Brothers of the Christian Schools owe a great debt to Brother Adrian Nyel. Brother Bernard writes: "Monsieur Nyel, seeing that everything was turning out well for him as he desired, and that everything was in good shape, was filled with joy, so that he could say with the old man Simeon: 'Now, Lord, you will allow your servant to die in peace...' This fervent personage then left to go back to Rouen whence he had come. He died some time after, in odour of sanctity, after having spent his life for the instruction of youth, and in the practice of virtues, and especially in his detachment from the things of the earth. It can be said that God made use of him to give a start to the institute of the Brothers of the Christian Schools, in that he led Monsieur De La Salle to do and to take charge of a thing to which he had given no thought. Finally, he was gifted with all the fine qualities that can be found in a simple layman such as he was."

Nyel, who had experienced the wisdom and holiness of Nicholas Barré,

and had seen how he had organised a new congregation of teaching Sisters, and then saw in Rheims the linked and parallel work of Roland's Sisters, must have realised that he had found in Canon De La Salle a similar man: an organiser such as he himself was not, and a man set on holiness but who needed to be drawn out. At the same time, he realised that he needed the Canon's support and influence, his steadiness and perception of men. Perhaps perceiving this, perhaps encouraged by Sisters Duval and Le Coeur, who were more aware of the Canon's evident gifts and wished he would take up for boys what Roland had done for girls, and realising he himself was no longer young, he somewhat deliberately started up one school after another, counting on De La Salle letting himself be involved.

In Rouen, he had been rather tied up with the General Hospice, looking after the inmates, according to the strict regulations of the administrators. The area left free to him was to recruit masters and summarily train them for the schools run by the Board. It seems he had a gift for making contacts, of selling the work of teaching the poor, of choosing laymen who were good Christians already, and inspiring them, on a modest salary, to take on this difficult work with some intention of staying in it. He was even able to form a community with them to some extent. It may be that the ability to get hold of new masters at short notice and give them a brief training lay behind his apparent flitting from one school foundation to another when he moved to Rheims.

The totally different relations he had in Rheims with the Sisters and the canon than he had had with the Rouen Poor Board seems to have released a taste for new ventures. When De La Salle opened up the idea of starting schools under a parish priest, it gave scope for his ability to persuade possible benefactors and recruit masters. For he certainly did succeed there, and the Founder's work would have never developed without it. He did not have a perception like his of the need for a Christian training in depth, and he had had enough of being tied down in one place. What he had no ability or taste for, he left to De La Salle. Whatever the exact thought of Nyel and how he evaluated his friend and support, he was the needle that drew the canon into taking some responsibility for the masters he had gathered together. And beyond Rheims, he was the trail-blazer that finally led him to recognise that God was calling him to found a new society for the good of the poor. In his wisdom, the canon might not approve Nyel's over-stretched projects, but he came to accept that it was God's wisdom for him and he responded totally.

To sum up, Nyel was a pioneer, a contact-man, the organiser of schools such as they were then. He was a man devoted his whole life long to the poor. He never joined De La Salle's community of young men as such: they were of another generation. He lived with them for six months, then he was

on the move again.

Perhaps Adrian Nyel's greatest significance was, that had De La Salle on his own, like Démia, been incited to do something for the education of the poor, his, too, would have been a clerical response. Nyel, a layman dealing only with laymen, created in Rheims ahead of him schools run by laymen to improve the skills of the poor, not to provide boys trained to help in church services. De La Salle and his Brothers built on that to provide a new type of schooling.

Consequently, to quote Maillefer: "When he" (De La Salle) "saw himself definitely tied to taking charge of the government of a number of Brothers dispersed in different towns fairly within reach of that of Rheims, he believed it was now the right thing to make of them a little congregation."²⁸ One thing he decided at this point - and here he differs from Nyel: he would take on no more schools until his men were better formed and this little society had found more about its identity. The next time he took over a school was when he went to Paris in 1688, in answer to De La Barmondière's long-standing invitation.

1686

DE LA SALLE AND HIS BROTHERS ARE RESOLUTE IN GOSPEL HOLINESS IN THE SPIRIT OF THE TIMES

We have, at the beginning of this year, one more sign of De La Salle's brotherly concern for Jean-Louis at the seminary. The preceding year Nicholas Lespagnol had sent him the 400 livres for the year's boarding fees at Saint Sulpice, plus 130 livres for his own expenses. Yet on 8 January 1686, Jean-Louis was short of cash and wrote to his brother asking him to advance the next 400 livres. He evidently had got no satisfaction from Nicholas, or, going by his previous experience with him as his guardian, he had not tried to ask. John sent not only the 400, but another 200 "for his other needs", but by 30th January, Lespagnol had paid him back. John was used evidently in the past to giving this extra more generously than Lespagnol. We know also that the trustee had to provide money for other necessary things. For instance, he paid 155 livres for furniture on 19 May. Jean-Louis had left the seminary four days before, and must have been in digs.²⁹

Now that the Founder had sole responsibility for all the schools run by his Brothers, we can look more at his community or little society. It was held together more than anything else by his kindness, his developing grasp of their mission and the impression of saintliness he gave them. At this point we may record how his first biographers saw his growth in holiness, and then look at this community and some members in it.

De La Salle's signs of holiness as his biographers judged it

Brother Bernard tells us: "He spent a good part of the day and of the night in prayer and contemplation, withdrawing for the purpose right to the top of the house, after the example of St Ignatius Loyola...He had chosen a little pigeon-loft where there could be only one person...And if any one desired to speak to him, it grieved him very much to come out of it...This love of retirement gave him such a dislike of making visits that he went out very rarely. And when he had to, it was always very briefly...This was also why he avoided going out to eat, even with his relatives, however much they requested and entreated him."³⁰

Nevertheless, among those who did see him some were very impressed by his holiness and his wisdom, "so that several kinds of people asked to be under his direction. But as he did not wish to neglect his Brothers by the excess of occupation these kinds of people might give him, he took charge of very few, among others several nuns..."³¹ It seems that in this case he communicated by correspondence, for we have several letters of spiritual direction addressed to women religious. It is interesting that he did not refuse spiritual direction entirely, and that he did not restrict his pastoral care solely to his Brothers. His gifts had a wider scope in the Church, though he did not want to use them in this way until "several persons of consideration" had begged him to.

The abbot of the Benedictine monastery of Saint-Thierry, eight kilometres northwest of Rheims, William Bailly, came one day to visit him with some of his monks. "As this abbot was on easy terms with him, he noticed one day the clothes he was wearing, and seeing that his cassock was of a stuff almost as rough as the Brothers', he asked him with a smile whether that was how a person of his profession ought to dress; to which the servant of God answered only by gentle smiles until the abbot changed the topic."³²

Besides his intense prayer, his early biographers speak of his corporal asceticism. Brother Bernard writes again: "This servant of God seemed to want to tear his innocent body with the bodily mortifications that he used, disciplining himself pitilessly with iron disciplines that you can still see in this house, to the number of five or six, that are frightening to see, there being one among others with rosettes of iron at the end, as well as iron belts and hair-shirts with which he tormented his delicate flesh in order to tame it."³³

The Brothers, aware of his extreme penances, did their best to find out the instruments he used and hide them. They did this on six occasions.³⁴ There are some ten of those instruments kept in the Brothers' central house in Rome today.

An attempt will be made later to set in the context of the times and assess

such asceticism. No one will deny that for health's sake, for sporting fitness, for study and other serious pursuits, people today discipline themselves. What we see here is a man determined to eliminate from his bourgeois make-up and natural reactions anything that could make him less responsive to accepting the will of God, to accepting his Brothers as they were, and to listening to the needs of the poor. The means he used were those recommended at the time as a discipline when seeking spiritual perfection.

One might wonder if such severity towards himself did not make De La Salle a hard man. Blain has recorded for us Brother Bernard's witness to the tremendous love he had for his Brothers: "He cherished tenderly all his Brothers and showed more affection to those who appeared less agreeable. He was always ready to listen to them in order to give them the advice they needed, and to console them in their sorrows. His occupations, even the most urgent, did not prevent him from giving them this satisfaction, and so this great goodness produced excellent fruits. For it sufficed for those who were on the point of leaving their vocation to have heard his gentle and charming words to go into themselves, and afterwards to advance with great strides in the way of justice."³⁵

The early Brothers

It is difficult to get a picture of the Rue Neuve community at this time. For a long time exact records were not kept, and there are gaps in the records of the entry of the first Brothers.³⁶ Of the earlier group, after the death of Christopher, only one remained, possibly the Brother Lozart of whom we know nothing. When early in 1683 new members joined, Nicholas Vuyart may have entered then, if not earlier. He is the first on a list of 12 Brothers making perpetual vows in 1694: his place indicates he has been the longest in the society. Possibly from that second group were the two Brothers who died as early as 1684: Jean-François and Cosme Boiserin, the latter on 24 May. The next permanent member of the new society after Vuyart was Gabriel Drolin, who entered from St James's parish about 1684. For once we have his date of birth: 22 July, 1664. Nicholas Bourlette also joined this year, and about this time also Brother Maurice. In 1685, Brother Lozart died on 26 June, leaving a gap at St James's school that the Founder so courageously filled. In September 1686 a John Partois joined, known as Brother Anthony; he was from St Loup's parish and was born on 20 August 1666. But Nicholas Bourlette died in Laon the same month, while the next month Jean Jaquot joined, from Château-Porcien, aged 14 (born 18 August 1672). The next year Brother Maurice died on 30 April. These entries into the little society and the deaths of permanent members up to this time may be listed as follows:

	Entries	Deaths
1679	Christopher , aged 14 Lozart ?	
1682		Christopher (14 May)
1682 late	(departures)	
1683 early	Nicholas Vuyart ? Jean-François ? Cosme-Boiserin? Paris (Joseph)	
1684	Gabriel Drolin c.1684 Nicholas Bourlette Maurice	Jean-François Cosme-Boiserin (24 May)
1685		Lozart (6 June)
1686	Jean Partois (Sept.) Jean Jacquot (Oct.)	Nich. Bourlette (6 Sept.)
1687		Maurice (30 April)

Of the 10 listed here, 6 died below the age of 30. Canon Blain writes: "From 1681 to 1688...of the fifteen Brothers that the Institute had at its birth in Rheims, Laon, Guise and Rethel, he lost more than six from a premature death below the age of thirty, not counting those whose languishing and ruined health forced to seek some relief outside the house." From 1688 to 1719, he adds, at least 45 died, of whom only 8 or 9 were above 30.³⁷

Yet the schools seem to have been rarely closed through lack of teachers. Laon had to send the children away for a few months after the death of Nicholas Bourlette. Many names are missing from the above list. There must have been, to replace so many deaths, something like three or four applicants a year who stayed, plus perhaps as many or twice that number again who did not stay. There was never a great influx into this new and austere group, and while several were from the lower bourgeoisie at least, the majority came from the oppressed and ignorant poor. It gives an idea of the task, courage and patience of the Founder as he trained these young men, and his belief in his calling and his faith in God. He had to work with what he had, until there were more schools of the Brothers, with a more developed pedagogy and skill in making of their schools Christian communities. Then he could hope for a better quality of recruit even from the poor. He had to trust in the future, and in a long-distant future.

In spite of what seemed a permanent time of crisis, with recruits coming and leaving and mostly of a type badly in need of externals to keep them in check and to impress them with a sense of identity,³⁸ the community in the

Rue Neuve, spurred on by the evident holiness of their leader, seems to have been one where the Spirit was acting powerfully in its beginnings. Blain has left us an account of some of the Brothers.³⁹ Unfortunately we learn from him nothing about these Brothers' ministry in the classroom: how they related to their pupils; how they discovered better ways of teaching. He does not really reveal the De La Salle Brother. Nevertheless, we get the impression of a community where there was a deep experience of God.

Brother Jean-François seems to have been one of those who joined at the end of 1682. He had had a fairly advantageous position in the town, enabling him to live comfortably. It may indicate some position such as a clerk in the administration. Yet he gave this up, attracted by the example of these new Brothers. He lived only eighteen months in the community. He was a person who endeavoured to control his thoughts and feelings so as to keep his mind on God and his will. He caught the epidemic then sweeping through the town and that brought him to the grave in a few days. In the delirium brought on by the fever, he was heard often exclaiming; "O beautiful eternity! How beautiful is your dwelling! Love, love, love, we are going to see love." Brother Bernard adds that he died in De La Salle's arms, singing these words in a melodious voice.

Brother Joseph, the one who did the tailoring, catering and other services with a keenness that belied his arthritis, is called by Blain, "Master of the Wardrobe of the poorest house on earth." "He gave the best of what there was to the others, and kept the most worn-out and mended things for himself. He was known as the Brother who prayed everywhere. "Wherever you saw him, you saw him praying; taken up with endless jobs in the house, he seemed to forget them so as to recall his mind to prayer; or rather, to do them all well, he did them in a spirit of prayer...Where duty called him, he had the secret of finding God." In 1688 M. De La Salle judged him able to be sent to teach at Laon, along with Gabriel Drolin and the one who had been sent to replace Nicholas Bourlette eighteen months earlier. In the eyes of the parish priest and the parishioners, he seemed by his self-control and piety to have resurrected the figure they had venerated as a saint.⁴⁰

Nicholas Bourlette was of a bourgeois family and quite well off.⁴¹ His parents were very fond of him, and keen about him having an assured and bright future. But he was drawn to this new community, and because he knew his parents would oppose his joining it, he went there without telling them. When they got to know they came to take him away, feeling totally dishonoured to have their dear son among these Brothers. But he stood firm. In the community, he put himself totally under the guidance of the Founder. In his personal prayer and after Communion, he was so affected by the love of God that he was in a kind of ecstasy that made his body tremble. When he was told of it

he was quite surprised, being quite unaware of it. To overcome the false esteem he may have had of himself by being of a bourgeois family, he wanted to put on a red doublet and a woollen cap and go round the streets of his own area to be made fun of, but De La Salle would not allow him. To remove him from the continual pleas of his parents, he sent him to Rethel, but his parents followed him there and renewed their efforts. Nicholas wrote to his Superior to tell of this and added: "My parents came to see me and ask if I didn't want to change; I said I was quite changed." He was now sent to Laon in 1685, as we have seen, with Gabriel Drolin. His father followed him even there, and begged him to come back. It must have been very trying, but Nicholas again remained resolute.

Brother Maurice also came from a very good family. Very quickly the other Brothers looked up to him as their model. He appeared to them to do all things well, and was particularly given to mental prayer. He achieved great control over his reactions and over self-will, and excelled in obedience. The Founder had a great love for him, and wanted only him to serve his Mass. These two Brothers took part in the assembly of 1686. Their holy deaths will be seen later.

Anger of the poor when their children were punished

The Brothers in Rheims about this time had to put up with the anger of the very poor whom they were trying to help. The children the Brothers were teaching came off the streets where they had been idle and getting into mischief and evil habits as soon as they were old enough to go out of the house. They were not used to being stopped and to disciplining themselves, though at home they were used to the brutality of the times (Le Tellier used to have his coachman whipped). Have fifty or more of those in an ill-ventilated room and you are going to have trouble. The Brothers had to correct them, and understandably in the beginning those Brothers, particularly if from the same kind of background as their pupils, were not used to controlling their first reactions easily and hit the pupils. The question of how to make punishments rare and the whole question of what went under 'correction' was carefully studied later and kept under constant review. At the moment, one could expect Brothers going too far.

When the parents heard their children's complaints they were extremely angry. Brother Bernard writes: "They flared up with a kind of fury against the Brothers because they corrected their children when it was necessary; and the children themselves, unable to put up with the charity shown them, were the first to insult them. And those who showed most passion in this encounter were the artisans and the poor, (he calls them further on 'the dregs of the people') who having been very badly brought up in their childhood, showed it

by the little gratitude they had for the trouble and the care the Brothers took to teach their children. Little by little these storms calmed down, and people always had afterwards a very great esteem for Monsieur De La Salle's work."⁴²

Death of Father Nicholas Barré

The news of another death must have reached the Brothers about the time of their assembly, considered below. On 31 May Fr Nicholas Barré died in Paris in the Minims' house north of the Place Royale.⁴³ His hope of seeing De La Salle come to Paris with two of his Brothers had not been realised. He also has the Brothers of the Christian Schools in his debt. While Nyel was an external stimulus leading De La Salle outside himself, Barré was the one who uncompromisingly confirmed that the canon's inner leads were truly in line with the Gospel. In so doing, he helped the him to take tremendously heroic decisions in the face of all his fears about what people might say. It is not that the Founder followed Barré blindly. He still waited for the event that confirmed his decision and gave him the best opportunity for carrying it out. And in terms of trust in Providence, his was not a ruthless and totally independent stance, but a decision to depend, not on established funds of his own, but on the arrangements and financial support, adequate or meagre, of those who funded a school and sometimes failed him or obstructed him. Nicholas Barré was beatified by Pope John Paul II on 7 March 1999.

After the death of Fr Barré, Servien de Montigny took his place as superior of his Sisters of the Child Jesus and of the remaining Brothers. In August this year, two months after our Bothers' first assembly next dealt with, the Admiralty made a request to Fr Tronson, Superior of Saint Sulpice: could he find a few masters to teach in Canada? Colbert was showing a limited interest in the territory at the time. Tronson replied that there were many of Barré Sisters in various parts of France and even in Canada, but that things had not gone so well with his Brothers, and de Montigny, who was in charge of both, probably could not spare any. Yet by October he was able to write again, saying that de Montigny had two teachers available.⁴⁴

DE LASALLE CALLS AN ASSEMBLY OF THE LITTLE SOCIETY

Although he had scarcely enough Brothers to run the existing schools, and in addition perhaps two or three being trained, and could not take on any more commitments, the Founder gave some thought to an assembly in which the Brothers would consider with him better ways of giving themselves a greater sense of stability.⁴⁵ They had a set of Regulations already. Adopting a name which defined their work had helped. So had the new habit, but all this did not stop some from leaving. External supports are not enough. A man stays be-

cause he wants to; because he has a vision that is worthwhile and takes on himself the responsibility of living accordingly. Some were living in this way magnificently, but many of the Brothers were in need of support, and collectively they had not yet discovered the specific spirit, derived from the Gospel, that they could all live by. The Founder himself, possibly, did not yet have it clear in his own mind, so he looked carefully at structures.

As an inner structure calling on each one's responsibility, he thought of vows. Barré, in his regulations printed in 1685, was against them, but Roland's Sisters had taken vows for the first time, as we have seen, on 8 February, 1684. These were the three vows of religion, together with the vow of stability in the community, and were for life from the moment of taking them. But De La Salle for the moment was working with a lay community with its own immediate needs. He never went in for great plans in advance of what needs and events indicated.

The schools closed for Pentecost week. He used this time to bring together all but the most recent arrivals among the Brothers for a week of prayer and deliberation. In a preliminary talk, he explained the need to give stability to the young Brothers, to give a stable form to the community and to work out what would be imposed on newcomers wishing to join the community. Maillefer writes: "He communicated to them in a very touching address the reflections he had made on the natural inconstancy of man and on the necessity there was to bind oneself to what is good by holy and lasting engagements. He added that so far they had been as though wavering and undecided in their vocation, and he asked them to consider if it would not be fitting in their situation to bind themselves by some vow to live in community according to the rules that had been observed in it so far. All the Brothers unanimously approved of the proposition and received it with gratitude. It was agreed therefore to make a retreat to ask the light of the Holy Spirit."

All the early biographers record this event, yet although they are using some common document, they disagree on dates. It is possible that Blain, besides the document followed by all three, had notes from someone (Gabriel Drolin?) referring to the assembly of 1694, and which he has taken as referring to 1684,⁴⁶ a date he wrongly takes as the date of the earlier assembly. Blain is the only one to say there was a first retreat-cum-assembly from the vigil of the Ascension to Pentecost, then a second one till Trinity Sunday. If Brothers from Guise and Laon had, before and after the assembly, to travel for six and four days respectively, that leaves their schools closed for quite a while. The assembly seems to have lasted only for the week of Pentecost in 1686, beginning 2 June, but it could have been at Pentecost 1687, beginning in that case on 18 May.⁴⁷

The Brothers first wanted to consecrate themselves entirely to God by

vows of obedience and chastity - perhaps the example of the Sisters of the Holy Child Jesus gave them an added reason. The Founder dissuaded them from making perpetual vows, and also from taking so soon a vow of chastity. He asked them to give themselves time to find out if this was the will of God.

They finally decided on the one vow of obedience, for that would create a stable form of community. Brother Bernard and Maillefer say they decided on a vow for one year, whereas Blain says for three. He seems to be right,⁴⁸ for all subsequent texts concerned with vows mention only 'a vow for one's lifetime' or 'for three years', and no other. If there was early on just an annual vow, there is no mention by anyone when it was changed to triennial vows. What may have misled the other two was that the Brothers renewed their triennial vows each year on Trinity Sunday, so that they became a kind of 'rolling' perpetual vows. To an outsider, they seemed to be renewing annual vows. This way of making vows satisfied Brothers eager to bind themselves definitively. Those not so disposed could simply not renew them the next two years and retire the following year, but a three-year obligation gave more stability than one. Brothers could remain in the society without vows: no one had to make them.

All this was true even after Benedict XIII's Bull approving the new Society in 1725. The Rules and Constitutions of 1726, pp 57-58, say: "The Brothers who have not reached the age of twenty-five years will make vows only for three years: they will renew them every year for the same period, with a new formula (that is, newly written out), until they are admitted to perpetual vows." And the General Chapter of 1787 expresses the tradition as follows: "This renewal will be a new commitment for three years, as has been constantly understood and explained in the society. The Brothers will not be pressed to make this renewal... This renewal shall be, as it has always been, the effect of the full and entire will of the Brothers who ask for it; the intention of the Institute being that they should be in no way inconvenienced in the matter..."⁴⁹

Although nowadays the Brothers at the appropriate times make or renew their vows canonically in the presence of a Superior of the Institute who receives these vows, throughout the Institute Trinity Sunday is still kept as the day when the Brothers make a devotional renewal of them.

Very early in the life of the new society, though we are given no precise date, the Founder took his Brothers on a pilgrimage to the ancient sanctuary of Our Lady in the small town of Liesse, seven miles or so to the northeast of Laon and some 27 miles from Rheims. "The holy priest did not fail at the beginning of his work to put it under the protection of the most holy Mother of God... He led the first Brothers of the Society in pilgrimage to Our Lady of Liesse in order to implore for them and for himself the credit of the Queen of the Angels, and to choose her as the Superioress of the Institute."⁵⁰ This

pilgrimage, if undertaken after Trinity Sunday, would take place at the expense of school time. Alternatively, since we do not know when it took place, it could well have taken place at the end of their annual retreat in September. They would have walked all night fasting, so as to be at the shrine for a morning Mass and spend many hours in prayer there. It would not be much out of the way for Brothers who had to travel to Laon or Guise. Blain adds to his statement that “this journey of devotion became fairly usual for him (De La Salle) subsequently; for when he went to visit the houses of Laon and Guise, he was careful not to pass through Liesse which is fairly near without paying his respects to his good Mistress who is very greatly honoured there.”⁵¹ And he speaks of him celebrating Mass there and then spending up to three hours in prayer. In 1902, a stained-glass window, presented by the Brothers, commemorated that first pilgrimage of the young Society. An explosion in a munitions dépôt in 1940 blew out all the windows of the church.⁵² The Institute one was the first to be replaced.



The Founder leaves Rheims to make a long retreat on his own

The Founder had done what he could to give stability to his little society. It was holding its ground with its existing commitments, but he had lost several excellent Brothers through their early deaths. Fortunately it seems, from what we know later, that if some of his best men (Vuyart, Drolin and Bourlette) were elsewhere, there was another man in the Rheims community who had the full confidence of the Brothers: Brother Henri Lheureux (Lheureux being his family name). At this time De La Salle had still not shown signs that he was ready to move to Paris. He was waiting for a clear official request which had not come when his brother, after gaining his bachelorship in theology at the Sorbonne on 1 May, left the seminary on 15 May. Fr Compagnon was strangely silent. Fr de la Barmondière eventually wondered why nothing had happened and enquired the reason. Then, instead of writing himself, he asked Fr Baudrand, his curate, who was Director of the Seminary, to write in his name and give the required assurances. (Jean-Louis meanwhile had returned to Rheims. He remained there more than a year, and there received the subdiaconate. He went back to Paris in October 1687 and stayed at the seminary while continuing to study at the Sorbonne.⁵³)

John Baptist De La Salle felt the need for a long period of prayer to seek the light of the Holy Spirit on what he should do next.⁵⁴ He left Brother Henri Lheureux in charge of the community, and then went away, without telling any one else where he was going. He must have learnt from Françoise Duval or from Nyel of the Carmelite monastery of La Garde-Châtel that Peter Lambert de la Motte had founded near Louviers in Normandy, for he arranged to go there.⁵⁵ “He made it (his retreat) in such great secrecy that he

concealed the knowledge of it from his own children (the Brothers). The only precaution he took to provide for his return, should anything extraordinary happen in his absence, was to tell the Brother whom he left in charge in the house in Rheims, to write to him. He left him his address, but this address did not give away his secret. For it was indirect, and did not indicate the place where the letter, sent directly to an abbess of Rouen, would come into his hands.”⁵⁶ He would have gone to Rouen first and quite possibly visited Nyel. He must have called at the Benedictine convent of St Amand where he had arranged for any letters for him to be sent there. Then he made another eighteen miles to the south, to the monastery of Discalced Carmelites situated in a forest a league from Louviers.⁵⁷

His strict secrecy was unusual. He may have had another reason than the need for prayer for leaving an inexperienced community alone. “This way of disappearing was not required by the demands of prayer alone. It was an act of government. As no Brother could apply directly to De La Salle, each of necessity had to have recourse to his stand-in. The means was radical for finding out whether the community would hold without its usual superior or whether it would fritter away. When all is said and done, this retreat at the Carmelites helped...to convince the Founder that the best thing for his Brothers consisted in their choosing one of themselves as superior.”⁵⁸

“The rules I have imposed upon myself”

It is very likely that it was on this occasion that he wrote down for himself a little detailed document entitled: *Rules I have imposed on myself*. Although we do not know when he drew up these resolutions, a very good case has been made out, based on a certain similar order of thought in the two documents, that De La Salle made out this plan of life during this retreat. He used as a guide a pre-1686 version of the *Considerations* of the Jesuit Julien Hayneufve based on the Exercises of St Ignatius. St Ignatius’s **Spiritual Exercises** are designed to lead a Christian who is seeking what to make of his life, to make an “election” or decisive option for the Kingdom of Jesus Christ. As his memoir told us, De La Salle had a clear perception at the end of 1682 where God was calling him, and that could have been a moment to make such a retreat. But he was then too much involved in trying to give up his canonry. Moreover, the varied events that followed must have spelt out anew what being founder of this work of God implied and demanded of him. It would be time to place himself before God under a retreat director.

The text of these personal rules is given in full in Blain II, 318-319. It is given here as Poutet has slightly regrouped it, and the introductory headings, here put in italics, are borrowed from him.⁵⁹

Principles : A good rule of conduct: not to make any distinction between the affairs of one's state of life and the matter of one's salvation and of one's perfection and to rest assured that one will never achieve better one's salvation nor ever acquire more perfection than in performing the duties of one's charge, provided they are accomplished in view of what God wants. I must try always to keep that in mind.

It is a good rule not so much to be concerned about finding out what should be done than doing perfectly what one knows.

Here he is virtually quoting Hayneufve.⁶⁰ He seems next to apply this principle to his new work as Founder.

I shall always look upon the work of my salvation and the foundation and direction of our community as the work of God. And so I will leave him the care of it, in order to do whatever in it is my concern only by his orders, and I will consult him very much on everything I have to do whether for the one or for the other; and I will often say to him these words of the prophet Habacuc: "Domine opus tuum." (Lord, it's your work.)

I must often look upon myself as a tool which is good for nothing in the hand of the Craftsman; this means I must wait on the orders of God's providence in order to act, without however letting them pass by when they are known."

He now considers what his relationship must be to the members of his little society.

As superior of the community: "When my Brothers come to ask me for some advice, I will beg our Lord to give it them. If it is a matter of consequence, I will take some short time to pray to him about it; and at least I shall be careful to keep myself during that time recollected, and to raise my heart to God for a little while.

When they tell me their faults, I shall look upon myself as being guilty before God because of my poor behaviour in not having prevented them, either through advice I should have given them, or through not watching over them; and if I impose a penance on them, I shall impose a bigger one on myself;...If I consider myself taking Our Lord's place in their regard, it must be with the view that I am obliged to bear their sins as Our Lord bore ours, and it is a charge that God lays on me in their regard."

Outside relationships: I shall not go out without necessity and without having taken a quarter of an hour of time to examine before God if the

necessity is real or only imaginary. If the matter cannot wait, I shall take at least the time of a Miserere for that, and to put into my mind some right attitude.

When I go to see someone I shall be careful to say only what is necessary and not to speak about social affairs nor about useless matters, nor to be there more than half an hour at most.

When I have to travel, I shall make a day's retreat to get ready for it, and I shall try to see to it that I can do at least, while I am on the way, three hours of prayer a day.

When some person, superior or other, will hurt my feelings in some way, and, naturally speaking, will shock them in some way, I shall be careful not to speak about it, and when some one speaks of it to me, I will excuse them and make out that they were right.

Here is a man, used in the past to going out easily to social occasions with his bourgeois friends or merely to drop in on them, now firmly controlling himself so as not to be taken away from his community. His comment about hurt feelings reveals how often people of his rank whom he met must have passed judgment on what he had done, how it did hurt him, how he was inclined to let his feelings escape. For he was inevitably the talk of the town.

Personal behaviour: I shall find time every day for the quarter of an hour that I must use to renew the consecration of myself to the Most Holy Trinity.

I shall unite at least twenty times a day my actions to those of Our Lord, and I shall try to have in them views and intentions in conformity with his. I will have for this purpose a little paper that I will prick as often as I have done so; and as often as I have failed each day I shall say as many Our Fathers, and kiss the ground at each Our Father, before going to bed.

In the morning I shall take a quarter of an hour to foresee my agenda for the day so as to act well in them; the occasions for doing wrong that I might have so as to keep myself from doing them; and I shall take measures for my handling of the day.

I must also not let a single day pass, except when I am travelling, without visiting the Most Blessed Sacrament, and even so, if I can pass by the church of some village, I shall kneel down to adore the Most Blessed Sacrament, and I shall do so as often as the chance occurs.

I shall see to it that I raise my heart to God as often as I begin any action, and whatever I undertake, I shall see that I do so only after praying.

I shall recite once a day the Our Father with as much devotion, attention

and faith as I can, through submission to Our Lord who taught it to us.

There is something of a paradox here. Apart from the time he spent in the house in prayer, he was now making his vigils of prayer every weekend at St Remi's. Yet he is tying himself to practices that seem in part those of a beginner. It is the paradox, it may be said, in the man himself: he was favoured with a gift of prayer and yet still had to work on temperament and the second nature of bourgeois upbringing in so far as it clashed with life in community and involvement with the poor. This appears also in the following resolutions.

Some defects to correct: Whatever different situations I shall be in, I shall always keep to an order and a daily regulation with Our Lord's grace, in which alone I trust for that, for it is something I have never been able to keep to, and the first thing I shall do when I change situation, will be to draw up a new one, and I will always make for that a day's retreat.

I must be well aware of the time I have lost, and be careful never to lose any: only a very great vigilance can remedy it; in fact, it seems that only a long retreat will secure for me this watchfulness.

I have in the past often failed to say the rosary, although it is a prayer of rule in our community; from now on I must not go to bed without having said it.

It is the rule of the community not to enter, either the house or one's room, without praying to God and renewing one's attention to him; I shall be very careful not to fail in this.

He has to cut his retreat short because of the death of Nicholas Bourlette

In Laon, Brother Gabriel Drolin fell ill in the latter part of August, so Brother Nicholas Bourlette, rather than close the school, tried to run both classes single-handed.⁶¹ Peter Guyard came to visit the sick man, and seeing Nicholas taking on so much, ordered him to close the school for a week or ten days, which would mean till the school vacation began. But Nicholas felt he could not do so without written permission of De La Salle and didn't want to leave these children without instruction. When the parish priest asked him how he hoped to look after two classes and see to the needs of the sick man, he answered: "Father, I have my right foot in one classroom, my left in the other, my thoughts with the sick man and my heart in heaven." After some days, Gabriel was well enough to get up and take his class, but it was Nicholas's turn to go to bed with a high fever. Gabriel must have written to Henri Lheureux, for "At the first news that the one standing in for the absent Superior in Rheims received, he set out in order to assist these sick Brothers who

had a great need of his presence. Yet however much he hurried, he arrived only to see one die who had already received Extreme Unction.”⁶² This refers to Nicholas Bourlette.⁶³ The fever took him off in a few days, and he died on 6 September. The hard work of the classroom, the meagre living conditions after the famine and his austerities, helped to ruin his health. People looked upon him as a saint. Because of his calm and simple unpretentious ways, they called him Brother Modest. For several years people came to his tomb to pray.

Brother Henri “was obliged to inform M. De La Salle immediately and to point out to him that his presence was absolutely necessary for his flock. The news was very distressing for the solitary...This (unforeseen event) having obliged him to leave at once for Laon, people were very surprised to see him arrive at the end of three days since the information had been given; still more to see him obey with such punctuality and fatigue a young Brother of twenty-four. After having debated what should be done, he gave the schoolchildren a two months’ vacation. Then, without granting any rest to a body tired and worn out by the fatigue of a painful journey, he set out again for Rheims with the Brother who had sent for him, and he travelled with him on foot all night, according to his custom, without taking anything else except a glass of wine and a piece of bread sometime before midnight in a small town twelve miles from Rheims. Arriving in that town very early, his first care was to send the Brother who had accompanied him to sleep and rest, while he himself went to pray.”⁶⁴ A possible explanation of his unexpectedly quick appearance at Laon is that he may have been in Rouen when the messenger arrived. Since he organised an annual retreat in Rheims for all the Brothers in September, he may have finished his own period of retreat at La Garde-Châtel and was on the way back and had called at St Amand to see if any letters awaited him.⁶⁵ Furthermore, instead of travelling via Paris he may have taken a more direct route to Laon by less used roads, and on horseback.⁶⁶

He takes in the first trainees from La Fère

The preceding events take us to near the middle of September. At the beginning of October, M. De La Salle accepted three trainees arriving from La Fère for three months’ training. The Duke paid quarterly boarding fees that totalled 600 livres for the school year, and therefore were adequate for four people: the three young men and the Brother in charge. In that year, De La Salle could have provided up to twelve teachers for de Mazarin’s schools, and perhaps another three for a further (short) quarter, in October and November 1687. By then, all the schools on the duke’s estates within the diocese of Laon would have been provided for. Hence, as far as de Mazarin was concerned, the contract of September 22nd, 1685 had been fulfilled, and his

accounts mention no further grants for this purpose after November 1687.

Rethel was the most likely place for this training. The project would fulfil one of the earlier hopes placed on that foundation, and Brother Nicholas Vuyart, the one in charge there, was a very capable teacher. What is certain, from the sums paid to him, was that De La Salle did run this centre, wherever it was, for sixteen months.

The original contract of August 1685 had stipulated that the pupil-teachers should be “instructed in all the duties befitting the profession of schoolmaster.” They should be able to spread in the villages “sound Christian doctrine and morals, and the first principles of civil life.” The reference to sound doctrine may imply that the conversion of Protestants was envisaged. It may be also that de Mazarin, a firm friend of the Jesuits and of Saint Sulpice, had Jansenism in mind. Plain chant was taught, for a village schoolmaster was counted on to fulfil the role of ‘cleric’ as cantor during liturgical services. Over a century later, Ichabod Crane, the schoolmaster from Connecticut described in Washington Irving’s *Legend of Sleepy Hollow* “completely carried away the palm from the parson” when he sang in church on Sundays. Two of the Brothers - but only one in the later contract - would be put to learn plain chant.

Apart from learning plain chant, there was a syllabus of profane studies that at first sight seems very limited: it was to learn to “read and write well.” Yet this had more implications than seems. The ability to read and write well meant acquiring a certain technical perfection that was very valuable for a man who would not only be the village schoolmaster, but the priest’s right hand man and clerk of the parish. He assisted the priest at all church services and accompanied him when giving sacraments to the sick, day or night. He cared for the village bells and clock, established the tax register, kept the parish records, read out publicly administrative acts, and could be called upon to write letters for people.⁶⁷ Besides reading and writing, there was the important matter of initiating the future masters into the art of Christian education, even if this would still not be very extensive. They were to be “formed in and taught the true maxims of Christian pedagogues” and “all the duties befitting the profession of schoolmasters”, which would imply some practical training. Interesting is the requirement that they teach the children “the first principles of civil life”, in other words, how to behave in society, even in a village.

Consequences of this foundation: a look ahead

It is significant that the original contract laid down that both parties would do all in their power to assure the continuation of the enterprise. We have no means of knowing whether fees were paid out by de Mazarin, up to his death in 1713, for extra trainees of his, or if others were trained after his decease.

Yet that is implied in the stipulation that De La Salle was to remain superior of the ‘seminary’ for teachers as long as he was the superior of the Brothers. Moreover, at his death or resignation, the community would elect his successor. De Mazarin was so keen for this work to continue, that if for any reason the Brothers disappeared, “the superior general of the Mission of Saint Lazare of Paris”, i.e. of the Vincentians, would choose “with his assistants a superior that in conscience he judged proper to govern the said house of de Mazarin.” The Vincentians were now well known for their work of running well-organised missions in country parishes, and de Mazarin considered that if the Brothers of the Christian Schools could be no longer available, they were the best to refer for training village schoolmasters.

1687

De La Salle’s own training-centre in Rheims for country schools

The Founder, seeing the importance of this work, began in the course of 1687 to take into the house in the Rue Neuve young men from the villages of the diocese of Rheims, chosen and sent by their parish priests.⁶⁸ Brother Bernard writes that several priests from country parishes learnt of the good that was being done by what were known as the “Christian Schools.” When Monsieur De La Salle made clear that he did not on principle send less than two Brothers to a locality, “several of these parish priests had the idea of sending him the masters and the young men they intended for the instruction of the children of their parish, for him to instruct them how to teach others well. This man of God received them charitably and housed them on the other side of the Brothers’ house. He gave them a Brother to teach them, both in piety as in all the other things necessary for them to fulfil well their duties in their parishes. And as they had to sing there, they were taught plain chant. God blessed so much the care his servant took to promote his glory that in a short time this second community was composed of twenty-five persons, among whom there reigned a singular piety, and of whom several took the habit” (of the Brothers), “and those who went back to their parish priests lived in the exercise of their ministry with a great piety and charity, always looking on Monsieur De La Salle as their real father.”⁶⁹

We have most fortunately a short account of the functioning of this training-centre by De La Salle himself, in that memoir he wrote on the habit: “(In this society) we apply ourselves also to train country schoolmasters in a house separate from the community and that is called a ‘seminary’. Those who are trained there stay only a few years until they are entirely formed both as to piety and as to what pertains to their work. They have no dress other than what is usually worn in ordinary life, apart from its being black or at least a

dark brown; they are distinguished from other lay persons only by bands and shorter hair. They are taught to sing, to read and write perfectly. They are lodged, fed and laundered without charge, and then they are found a job in some small town or village to perform the function of 'cleric'. And when they have obtained an appointment, they have no contact with the community, except one of courtesy. They are, however, accepted for making retreats there." It is interesting to note that, like the Sisters of the Holy Child Jesus and other communities we have seen, he is ready to accept lay teachers into the house for retreats. Spiritual growth was part of his understanding of the ongoing formation of a teacher.

A section for postulants develops in the same house

About the time when young men from around Rheims were being taken in and trained as schoolmasters, another group was forming. Young boys of fourteen - it would seem, therefore, those who had been taught by the Brothers and were drawn to their life - asked to join the community in the Rue Neuve. De La Salle did not discourage them, for he accepted, from his own experience, that God could call someone at an early age, and that his good intentions should be fostered and tested in a suitable way. This was the age, moreover, in those days for beginning an apprenticeship and an adult working life. We do know of Brothers admitted at fourteen or fifteen.⁷⁰

Brother Bernard gives a detailed account of this development.⁷¹ De La Salle's succinct account is as follows:

"We also bring up in this society young people who are well-meaning and have a disposition for piety, if they are judged suitable and that it is of themselves that they decide afterwards to enter the community. They are accepted from the age of fourteen and above. They are trained in mental prayer and in the other exercises of piety. They are instructed in all the subject-matter of the catechism and they are taught to read and write perfectly. These kinds of persons who are formed and educated in this community have house, oratory, exercises, meals and recreation separately, and their exercises are different and proportionate to the present capacity of their mind and to what they will have to do later on."⁷² A specific example is that of a boy of fifteen who about the year 1686 asked to join the Brothers. Because of his young age the Founder invited him to join the group of postulants, who were known as "the Little Brothers." This young man was of great simplicity and readiness for virtue. He was admitted into the main community two years later under the name of Brother John Henry (Henry being his surname). A few years later, he was made its Director.⁷³

It is from the existence of this postulancy that Poutet derives an explanation of De La Salle's statement that the trainee schoolmasters were formed

over several years.⁷⁴ The postulants of fourteen or so years would use their time as he Founder outlines, for one or more years - for “several years” as he puts it - progressing in reading and writing, religious instruction and personal development, according to a formation akin to that of the Brothers. Those who realised it was not their way but were drawn to going to a village as married country schoolmasters, had no reason to be put off: they could transfer to the centre for village pupil-masters. This would indicate that it was a more junior training-centre than De Mazarin’s.⁷⁵

In other words, in the light of his experience with the shorter training he had organised for the Duke, De La Salle may have seen that it was insufficient, that there was a groundwork to be provided. More than learning the tricks of the trade, the training of teachers for him included being perfectly qualified for what was required, and still more to develop a personality centred on the Christian ideal. This was what had moved him in the first place at the sight of Nyel’s first recruits. The life and work of his Brothers of the Christian Schools said this very clearly. He was free now to apply it to the training of village teachers according to his own genius. He required their presence at the centre for several years. He would have asked the rural clergy to send their candidates young enough for what he had in mind.⁷⁶ Their training, in its way, in its general time-table, would approximate to the training of the postulants.

On these communities that grew up on the premises of the Brothers’ house in the Rue Neuve, Brother Bernard can have the last word. It is in fact his own last word, the few lines that conclude the only manuscript of his that has come down to us: “And so, before this servant of God came to settle in Paris, there were in Rheims three communities, namely the Brothers’, that of the young men of whom we have spoken, and this last one that was called the seminary for schoolmasters; and these three communities contained fifty persons. Which shows enough what was God’s Providence over his servant, since having only what was needed for the upkeep of the Brothers, he fed and maintained these two communities, without what was purely necessary for them having ever been wanting.”⁷⁷

This training-centre in Rheims is looked upon as his first attempt, and a successful one, to cater for village schoolmasters. To have twenty-five students spread over several years, suggesting six to eight per year, was an achievement. But we have seen that he had been involved in three other attempts, the first one intended to be linked to the school at Rethel as early as 1683 and perhaps 1682, and the third one successfully carried out. Almost at the outset of his call to look after his community, he willingly involved time, travel and risks to take on this parallel work. His Rheims centre can be seen as the first occasion when he could put his own stamp on it. That he accepted it as part of the mission of his Society appears from his words quoted above:

“(In this society) we apply ourselves also to train country schoolmasters...” As in the case of his grasping the nature of his schools, here again he shows himself able to size up an issue very early on, and to respond to it perceptively. No other country schoolmasters had such thorough training.

The community at Château-Porcien disappears about this time

When speaking of the assembly of 1686 and of the one that took place in 1687 (see further), the early biographers except Blain speak of only three other communities outside Rheims: they have no knowledge of the one at Château-Porcien. It seems to have faded out around this time. The Founder gives the reason in his *memoir on the habit* when he is arguing that “those of this community should be distinguished by their dress from clerics.”

“They are every day in the parish churches, and their schools are usually close to them; they take the children there to assist at holy Mass and at the divine service. The parish priests would not allow them to be there in long mantles, but would oblige them to wear the surplice and would use them in church functions at least when they have need of their help. This need will happen often, because there are few clerics in most of the parishes in towns; often, there is only one parish priest or at most a curate with him. The masters will be proud to wear the surplice in the parish churches, to be there among the clergy and to exercise clerical functions. And so they would easily abandon the care of their children in the church, which is however the sole reason for their going there, and which of itself is very irksome to nature. Everything in this article is of experience: St James, Laon, Château-Porcien.”⁷⁸

Trouble may have arisen from the decision of the Assembly of the Clergy of 1685 that “schoolmasters, wearing their surplices, should be incensed in church and would take precedence over lay people and even before the lords of the parish themselves.”⁷⁹ In other words, they were considered as clerics in the wide sense of the term, denoting anyone having to do with church services. The independence of schoolmastering where men were concerned, was not yet seen. What exactly happened at Château-Porcien we do not know. De La Salle’s statement above seems to imply that the Brothers had their heads turned by these signs of dignity. This first failure must have led to the point of the Brothers’ Rule that they were not allowed to sing (that is, to be cantor in church) nor to wear the surplice nor to perform any function in church except serve a low mass.⁸⁰ This was already quoted in the Memoir of 1690 : “They cannot exercise any function nor wear the surplice in church.”⁸¹

There was evidently a similar problem on St James’s parish in Rheims, but being near at hand, and the community being a larger one in the Rue Neuve,

either De La Salle was able to settle matters personally, or his tremendous example of giving up the honours of his canonry was a powerful example for more impressionable Brothers. In Laon, Brother Gabriel Drolin would stand firm, and the fact that Pierre Guyart was a friend of De La Salle's would make it easier for him on some visit or by letter to get him to accept the importance of the teaching work of the Brothers.

Death of Brother Maurice

On 30 April this year⁸² he lost one of his best Brothers. Brother Maurice's was not a strong constitution, and the strict life of the Brothers and his own austerities weakened him. Sometime in November 1686 his lungs became congested and his condition became speedily worse. Another Brother fell ill at the same time. The Founder called in M. Etienne Dubois, the family doctor who had looked after his father in his last two days. The doctor told them that their work was doing them no good, and that they should leave the community and look for another job. Brother Maurice refused. His sickness lasted six months and towards the end became very painful. He found relief in continually turning his thoughts to God. He died at the age of twenty-two, and was buried next day, 1 May.

The other Brother, who was also affected with tuberculosis, went back to his family, who spoilt him with kindness. He died three months after leaving the Brothers. When, towards the end, he saw his mother's sad face at his bedside, he found it unbearable: "You break my heart," he said to her. "If I were still among the Brothers, instead of cries of sorrow, I would have prayers."⁸³

There were others who died in the flower of youth and with great joy to form, as Blain puts it, "a new colony in heaven". When the parish priest came to give them the Sacraments, he always wondered at these young Brothers so ready to leave this life for heaven. He once said, in the presence of several clerics to a father and his children who could not see why Monsieur De La Salle should put to work in the schools Brothers who were so young: "I do not know whom to admire most: Monsieur De La Salle or his Brothers. There are quite a number of people I have assisted at their death and to whom I have administered the Sacraments. It is an astonishing thing that I have never seen anyone, even at eighty, die with as much courage and resignation as these Brothers." He spoke from more than thirty years' pastoral experience.

The Founder spared nothing to restore his sick Brothers to health, but when God disposed otherwise, he showed by his calm and peaceful air that he was sure of their happiness. When he saw them die or the news was brought to him, he said; "Let us give thanks to God. There is one more in heaven." With so many deaths, it was not easy to keep the schools going. If

none was closed, then sufficient new applicants were knocking at the door.⁸⁴

THE ISSUE OF THE BROTHERS HAVING ONE OF THEMSELVES AT THEIR HEAD

De La Salle's giving away his wealth brought about a profound change in the nature of his relationship with the Brothers and of their obedience towards him⁸⁵. As long as he provided the funds for their subsistence, he was a rich man employing poor masters, and even if he used his wealth to endow their schools, he would remain in the position of an employer. But when he gave all his wealth to the poor he became as powerless as they to initiate any new foundation. He ceased to be the man whom the possession of wealth puts at the head of an enterprise, and became much more the leader freely chosen as spiritual director by reason of his qualities as a person. "Having become financially useless to the masters," writes Poutet, "he was, as a model to follow, more indispensable than ever. If he had decided to give up his wealth to endow schools, it would have been an evangelical renunciation for him, but would not have changed his relations with them. The stability of all profited by it to a degree it is difficult to measure. An obedience of employees was replaced by a submission in which the duty of justice gave way to admiration mingled with affection. A crystallisation of community spirit took place around the Founder." More than being a model, he removed the level between himself and the Brothers. He became one of them. Now he could train them. Now they would listen.

Prior to taking the vow of obedience on Trinity Sunday, 1686, the Brothers had elected the one whom they would obey. They chose De La Salle. In the light of the above, it was a free choice of a man of values, one of themselves. Equally, they could choose someone else, and if he disappeared, they could elect a successor. That was a guarantee for the future. This having one of themselves as superior contained important issues. De La Salle would soon be going to Paris, not just to take over a school, but to make it the centre of his little society. The community in Rheims would need a new dependent superior. That in itself would be a new development. But he already realised the importance of a Brother being the superior of the new society. Priest though he was, he was able to see that the work of the Christian Schools as he understood it, could not not be a clerical preserve, and called for a lay society governed by itself.⁸⁶

He must have prayed long round these matters during his long retreat. He then called the Brothers to a retreat-assembly very likely from Pentecost to Trinity, 1687, which ran that year from 18 to 25 May. (In the matter of dates, an alternative is possible, namely, that the first assembly was held then, and the second one the same year during the summer break, at the time of their

retreat.⁸⁷) The sole topic was the question of having one of themselves as superior, not just for Rheims, but for the whole of the little Society. The little assembly accepted the force of his arguments, and in the election that followed, Brother Henri Lheureux gained the majority of the votes.

Death of Adrian Nyel

The Brothers ended this retreat seemingly on 25 May and went back to their schools. On 31st, a year to the day after Nicholas Barré, Adrian Nyel died, aged about 66.⁸⁸ When he returned to Rouen in 1685, the measure of his capability was that in spite of his age he was re-employed, as already noted, as “superintendent of the poor schools of the town”. Apart from his care of the four schools, his work in the General Hospice, where he was helped by three masters, followed a tough time-table: rising for the masters at 4.30, for the children at 5.00. At 5.30 prayer, 6.00 Mass, 7.00 work classes (there was no breakfast for the children before the year 1753); 8.00 reading and writing, 9.00 study of the catechism, 10.00 - 11.00, work. 11.30 lunch, supervised by the masters. 1.00 p.m., rosary, recitation of the catechism while others read and wrote under auxiliary masters. 4.00 work, 7.00 supper, 8.30 night prayer in the dormitory.⁸⁹ It is not surprising that Nyel was worn out after nineteen months. He must have often looked back on his far more creative and roving life in Rheims and the other towns: Rethel, Guise and Laon. In his last days, he could have the satisfaction of knowing that he had indeed served the children of the poor all his life and effectively; that out there was a saint and organiser who would ensure that the work he started would continue. He could smile at the way he, Nyel, had dragged him into it all.

The news of Nyel’s death was brought to Rheims. Nyel had mattered very much to the Sisters of the Child Jesus there. De La Salle “having learned of his death, showed his regret over it, and had prayers said for the repose of his soul. He said them himself, in private and in public, for he had the church of the orphanage Sisters draped in black, and had a solemn Mass sung which he celebrated himself. He called all the Brothers to go to communion for the intention of the deceased, and to bring all their pupils. This was carried out with much fervour and decorum.”⁹⁰

Another name that appears around this time, at least in De La Salle’s correspondence, is that of Charles Démià, although the evidence is the other way round: De La Salle’s name comes up in Démià’s diary. The Founder had evidently heard of him, and would want copies of his Remonstrances and of his School Regulations. Démià notes in 1687 (his spellings of Rheims and La Salle have been retained):

“La Sale of Rins in Champagne has paid me for the purchase of books one quadruple “ (i.e. a Spanish doubloon, worth 80 livres). And later in the year:

“De la Sales, founder of the poor schools in Rhins, via Roger, has paid me a Spanish quadruple for the purchase of books I am to address to him through Fr Demarais (Paul Godet des Marais) at the Little Community of Saint Sulpice according to the list given to Comba” (a bookseller). He had ordered these books because he was preparing to go the following February to take over the school at Saint Sulpice. The Roger mentioned was a Paris trader who may have made contacts with Démia in Lyons or Paris; he was perhaps the Louis Rogier who served as go-between later when De La Salle was preparing to open in 1708 a training-centre for country schoolmasters at Saint Denis.

De La Salle pays Brother Henri Lheureux the utmost deference

Meanwhile, in the Rheims community, “One saw this holy priest submitting to a simple Brother,” writes Bernard,⁹¹ “but with so much humility, submission and respect, that all those who saw it were in admiration; ...This holy person was seen to subject himself to doing nothing except after having obtained permission from his superior; he would not have wanted to go out to say Mass without having obtained verbally the permission to do so. You saw him also offering to clean the rooms of the house; but they were not speculative offers, a thing so common today that people often only offer to do low things in order to be dispensed from doing them...One day, when the Brothers were in recreation after the meal, he heard someone tell the Brother superior that there was one of the vilest places of the house that needed cleaning. At once, this truly humble man in word and deed offered to go and clean it. And believing he had the permission, he went promptly to look for the instruments needed to do it, and already had them in his hands to work at such a vile job when the Brother superior came and told him very respectfully that no one had told him to do a thing so unworthy of his (priestly) character, and would he kindly not do it.”

“But this holy man was not content to edify his Brothers by examples of submission and of regularity: he practised continually acts of humility in their presence; he stooped even to kissing their feet, to asking their pardon and to serving them in everything and everywhere. They saw him prostrating himself at the feet of Brother superior to accuse himself of his failings, and to ask him for a penance. If he humbled himself in this way before his Brothers, he did it no less before his friends when they came to visit him, and did not fear to let them know that he could not speak to them without having obtained permission. This happened one day when several canons, friends of his, came to visit him. For they perceived that he did not want to speak to them before having obtained permission, a thing that astonished them greatly.”⁹²

He is obliged to resume the superiorship. The implications

Several others, who were very well known to him “complained openly about this behaviour, telling him that it was not for a Doctor and still less for a priest to submit to a mere Brother, to which the servant of God only answered by a gentle smile. The thing, however, spread around the town. Several people complained to the ecclesiastical superiors about M. De La Salle’s way of behaving, believing that he offended his character by lowering himself in this way. And so he was obliged by the grand vicars, to his great regret, to take over again the superiority that he had left with so much joy; which delighted the Brothers very much, and especially Brother Henry Lheureux, who was quite ashamed to see this holy person lower himself in that way.”⁹³

When the new Superior of the little society was elected, he was by the fact De La Salle’s Superior in what concerned the society. That was not just an academic satisfaction for him. He accepted the fact into his own life. He also needed to show his Brothers that the appointment of one of themselves as superior was no mere formality. And for that again, he took no half measures. It was humility in the sense of living the truth of the new situation. He was not a groveller, but humble he certainly was, or trying to be so. The type of punctilious obedience that he practised goes down badly with us today. It was in line with a monastic tradition of destruction of self that goes back to St Benedict and which was meant to counter the self-willed exaggerations of many of the desert monks. The matter will be picked up later.

When he was ordered to resume the superiorship, his plan of keeping separate the roles of spiritual director and head of the community came to grief through interference inspired by a sense of clerical dignity. “Le Tellier and his grand-vicars did not see it in this way. Their representative had to be not only the confessor but also the superior of the community. They were used to indicating the ecclesiastical superiors for feminine religious communities, and did not accept to treat otherwise the Brothers of the Christian Schools...

“The organisation of the government of the Brothers of the Christian schools was, then, paralysed in 1687 by the intervention of the diocesan authorities who, in liaison with the cathedral chapter, with the bourgeoisie and the nobility, were not concerned to go too strongly against public opinion for which the priesthood was a “dignity” irreconcilable with obedience to the superior of a community who remained a “mere” layman. This opinion, in the bourgeoisie, in the *présidial*, or among the town officials, hardly went along with the successive renunciations of the former canon. In Rheims, social pressure was too strong ever to allow a De La Salle, priest, doctor in theology, to ask permission from a commoner.”⁹⁴ He had impinged on no one’s rights, violated no point of Canon Law. A free, legitimate election in a small community of laymen had been overturned. His plans for his society were put back twenty years.

His austerity towards himself. And a piece of good news from Rethel

Blain records⁹⁵ with regard to De La Salle's own way of life: "the Brother who then slept in the same room saw him spend a part of the night in prayer, and the other on a door which was in the alcove, which served him as a bed, and on which he took a little rest and sleep, without a mattress, even a straw one, and with no other bedding.

"The same Brother being Director in the same house, asserts that he saw him spend Holy Week in a continual fast. From Palm Sunday to Easter Sunday he refrained from all food except for Maundy Thursday when, after celebrating the sacred mysteries, he took a piece of bread and a little water; for it was not his habit to drink wine, and it was practically not used at the time in the house in Rheims, the town of France where wine is in great abundance and is excellent.

"He spent all that Holy Week in contemplation and prayer, secluded in his room that he left only to say Mass. This place was so bare and devoid of everything that there was not even a chair to sit down. So that when he could kneel no longer, he had to sit on the edge of the wretched bare bedstead which was the only furniture in his room. The good Brother, witnessing the excessive abstinence of his Superior, did what he could to get him to mitigate it, but was unable to do so. Perhaps M. De La Salle regretted it on Easter Sunday; for when he came to the refectory with the others for the evening meal, his stomach that he had given so little consideration to, being unable to endure food any more, brought it up as soon as he had taken it."

On the first of July this year there was a promising piece of news from Rethel. A Monsieur Bajot (see Ch.10, p. 316) donated to De La Salle another house, adjoining the original one acquired by Remy Favart. It was a "house situated at Mazarin (that is, Rethel-Mazarin), rue de Mont Bouel, to be joined to the one awarded to Remy Favart, so as to make from the two houses only one, and to be employed for the same use, for the foundation of the Christian and free schools for boys."⁹⁶ Evidently the school was doing well under Nicholas Vuyart, and would now require another Brother. Another adjoining house was paid for in 1695, and De La Salle bought others, all adjoining, one in 1704 and two others in 1717.

He alters his plan: he will train Brother Lheureux for the priesthood

The fact that things were beginning to move concerning the Paris venture made it necessary for the Founder to arrange for a superior to take over when he left Rheims. Any Brother elected to take his place in Rheims, being

a layman, was in danger of meeting with clerical opposition and of being replaced by a priest. He therefore tried a line of action different from the one his experience of Nyel and of the work had led him to follow so far. He decided to have Brother Henri Lheureux trained for the priesthood.⁹⁷ There would be no occasion for the diocese to impose an outside cleric as superior and confessor. If afterwards, the Brothers elected another one of themselves to be head of the community for matters other than the direction of consciences, no one would mind. But, according to Blain, his intention was much wider: "In the plan for structuring his institute, the scheme of having a priest in each main house to confess the Brothers and say Mass for them had entered."⁹⁸

So far, he had been led forward, even against his inclinations, by people like Nyel and Madame des Croyères, or had fallen in readily with the schemes of the Duke de Mazarin. He had let Providence show the way. This time, he was, because of social and clerical pressure, trying out a plan of his own. Should he not have waited on Providence? The dangers were great. A priest in the community would all the more be tempted to abandon the unpleasant task of keeping in order and teaching children badly brought up. The emphasis laid at the time on the eminent dignity of the priest as distinct and above the laity would not help community life. But especially, it would be difficult for someone taught to value above all the administration of the sacraments to appreciate teaching the profane elements to poor children as part of a ministry of basic importance to the Church. One wonders whether the Founder was convinced that his new line of action was the soundest. But he had to do something in a situation dangerous for the life of his communities.

Brother Henri Lheureux was a man of many personal qualities, and a man of intelligence. He had been to college for only a short while, so that although he knew some Latin, he was not good enough to study theology which professors delivered in Latin. "This Brother was clever and had such an aptitude for learning that in less than two years he was ready to study theology, and to study it with such success that he astonished his other classmates."⁹⁹ De La Salle "sent him to study theology at the Canons Regular of St Denis's abbey in Rheims".¹⁰⁰ The Founder would be in Paris before this was over, and would seem to have intended him to finish his studies at the Sorbonne, since he later brought him to Paris "in order to receive holy orders."

A Brother at Guise is cured when the Founder visits him

The previous month - "in the greatest heat of summer" - an event occurred which reveals his kind of austerity, his will power and, perhaps, the power of his prayer with God. Blain gives the details.¹⁰¹ "In 1687, the first of the Brothers who ran the school in Guise fell into a mortal illness. After having re-

ceived the last Sacraments, despaired of and abandoned by the doctors, he waited only to give up his soul to God in peace; but before making the journey to eternity, he had an extreme passion to see his good father. The patient's desire was pious and legitimate, but it was not easy to satisfy: for it is eighteen leagues from Guise to Rheims, and it needed time to make the journey. The solution adopted to speed the patient's solace was to send someone to Laon, which is about halfway between Guise and Rheims, with a letter addressed to the Brothers telling them of the fact, and begging them to send immediately another messenger to their superior to inform him of the sick man's desire. The first messenger arrived about four o'clock in the afternoon. Brother N... who is still alive and one of the authors of the memoirs which served to compose this work left Laon at once for Rheims, and arrived there the next day at noon.

"With the same diligence M. De La Salle set out, and left in company of the same Brother at one o'clock in the afternoon, during the greatest heat of the summer, covered with the heavy cloak which was his dress all the time he lived in the town of his birth, and which he gave up in Paris only on the orders of the ecclesiastical superiors, to resume the long mantle. He had, of the same cheap and course material, a cassock that he never left off, and that he merely pulled halfway up his legs with his poor linen belt when travelling on foot, enveloped moreover in a prickly hair-shirt which was his usual garb, and which hampered him so much that he could hardly bend - as was seen by the difficulty he had in picking up his handkerchief when he dropped it on the road. And yet he made seven leagues on foot in this penitential accoutrement in the fiercest heat of a burning sun. He could at least have rid himself of the crushing weight of his cloak by giving it to his young travelling companion to carry; but he was not a man to seek comfort for himself, still less to get it at someone else's expense.

"During such a painful journey his blood caught fire so much in his veins and was so stirred about that he lost much of it through the nose. The only relief he sought was in prayer. The whole way he did nothing but sigh and lift his eyes to heaven. It was there that his heart bore his desires, and where he promised his body that he would make amends for its pains and fatigue. At the approach of a village where nightfall obliged him to stop, he recited the rosary out loud with the young Brother who was with him. After having taken a short rest in such a poor abode, he left it at three in the morning. But he did not reach Laon any the sooner, although it was only three leagues' distance from that town to the village where he had slept, because he took a long time to say his breviary, and to make devotional stops on the way. For, from time to time, he would stop near some tree and kneel down to pour out his soul before God and to enter into a greater union with him. Perhaps also the weariness

and exhaustion of the day before had left him in no fit state to go on. And so the Brothers, very fittingly, got a horse ready for him unknown to him, and while he was at the altar: for his first care on arriving in Laon was to go and say holy Mass. By the help of the horse he reached Guise without delay. The sick man was at death's door, but at the sight of his good Father who embraced him with tenderness, he seemed to come back to life. He actually said at that moment that he was cured. Indeed, a few days later saw him out of danger, restored in health and able to take his class."

1688

Archbishop Le Tellier tries to keep De La Salle's work in his diocese

While the Founder was waiting for a final clear request from Saint Sulpice, and preparing his departure, Archbishop Le Tellier got to know of it. He was well aware now of the good the Brothers' three schools were doing in Rheims, of the excellent school in Rethel, and the one in Guise. He had excellent reports from a number of his rural clergy of how well trained were the young men they had sent to the Rue Neuve. And he was impressed and no doubt ashamed by the holiness and singleness of purpose of his former canon. He cannot have felt that too authoritarian an approach was in order. He was strangely more diplomatic than on previous occasions.¹⁰²

"He sought a way of keeping him in his diocese, which was to offer him his services and money to found his communities, on condition, however, that he would not establish himself elsewhere than in the diocese. There was no insisting this time. "After the man of God had listened to the discourse and obliging offers of this great prelate, he expressed all the thanks he could, and thanked him very humbly for the kindness he evinced for him, but excusing himself in virtue of the promise he had made to the parish priest of Saint Sulpice, to give him two Brothers to run the classes in his parish, and the need he had to go with them".¹⁰³ Just as diplomatically, in other words, De La Salle was saying No. Le Tellier knew what he meant and had to leave it at that. After all, the Brothers would still be in his diocese and would be likely to expand. But in terms of getting his own way, he had failed.

And so to Paris again and definitively

Some time in the new year, the desired request to come to Paris arrived from Baudrand, De la Barmondière's curate.¹⁰⁴ Whereupon the Founder set out about 20 February with two Brothers and reached Paris on 24 February 1688. They were given lodgings in the school house. It seems a long gap between the first invitation in 1683 and the time of the actual departure. But the fact that he set out in midwinter shows he was ready to go once no

problems delayed him in Rheims. He sought for his new society a greater independence than if he stayed in that city, and he had hopes concerning the good his schools could achieve in the greatest parish in the capital.¹⁰⁵ And surely also, he had hopes that this work of God would spread from Paris. Eleven years were to pass before he would see that begin to happen. Had he known what awaited him courage would have failed him, as he said later, and he would not have touched the enterprise with his finger-tips.

References

1. Bernard, 69; Maillefer, CL6, 52-5; Blain I, 238-240.
2. Blain I, 238.
3. Bernard, 70.
4. id., 19.
5. Blain I, 241.
6. Blain I, 144.
7. CL11, 350.
8. id., 350-351, 354.
9. Bernard, 65; Maillefer, CL6, 72,73; Blain I, 258-9.
10. Maillefer, CL6, 80-82; Blain I, 285-6; Poutet II, 19-22.
11. Blain, I, 285, gives as date July 1687; on this see Poutet II, 20, n.15.
12. Blain I, 286.
13. *Evelyn's Diary and Correspondence*, Cavendish Edition, Warne and Co, p. 71.
14. Poutet I, 693-6.
15. Blain I, 221.
16. Poutet I, 672-4.
17. The letter is given in full on the very last page of Blain II.
18. Maillefer, CL6, 50; cf his later version, p. 51.
19. Aroz, CL26, 268, n.2, n.3.
20. id., 270, n.4.
21. Poutet I, 696-706.
22. Félix-Paul, 118, 124.
23. Blain I, top of 225.
24. id., 224-5.
25. Poutet I, 699.
26. Bernard, 68; Maillefer, CL6, 72,73; Blain I, 183, 231.
27. Aroz, CL37, 29.
28. Maillefer, CL6, 72.
29. Aroz, CL32, XXXI-XXXII and 78-79.
30. Bernard, 65.
31. id., 81.
32. id., 80; see also Blain I, 259.

33. Bernard, 62-3.
34. Blain I, 228 ad fin. This corresponds to the six instruments Bernard refers to.
35. Blain II, 375.
36. For the details, see CL 2 and 3.
37. Blain I, 250.
38. See the Founder's *Memoir on the habit*, CL11, 352, point [36].
39. Blain I, 251-8.
40. Blain II, Appendix, 69-71.
41. Bernard, 82-3; Blain I, 245-7.
42. Bernard, 82-3.
43. id., 70-71; Blain I, 283-4.
44. Poutet I, 522-3.
45. Bernard, 72-4; Maillefer, CL6, 74-5; Blain I, 271-8.
46. This is the clarification Brother Maurice-Auguste offers in CL2, 1-36.
47. Bernard and Maillefer in his first version (CL6, 74), say one week, from Pentecost to Trinity. In his 1740 version (CL6, 75), Maillefer copies Blain.
48. See Maurice-Auguste, op.cit.
49. CL2, 47, n.6, n.8.
50. Blain II, 489.
51. Blain I, 260.
52. Information given by Brother Emil-Noirez, Hôtel de La Salle, Rheims.
53. Aroz, CL27, 81, 79-80.
54. Blain I, 260.
55. Poutet I, 744, 493.
56. *Bulletin des Ecoles Chrétiennes*, April 1963, 78, from an article by Brothers Maurice-Auguste and Mensuet-Jacques.
57. Poutet I, 745.
58. Brother Gilles Baudet, *St La Salle's Retreat Resolutions* in *Lasalliana* No 20:1/ 1992, Rome.
59. Poutet I, 745-7.
60. See CL16, by Brothers Maurice-Auguste and Jos, Arturo, pp 58-9.
61. Blain I, 255.
62. id., 260.
63. id., 255.
64. id., 260.
65. Poutet I, 745, n.48.
66. *Bulletin des Ecoles Chrétiennes*, April 1963, 78.
67. From a hand-out at Brother Léon Lauraire's lectures at the International Session of Lasallian Studies in Rome, 1990-1991.
68. Bernard, 85-6; Maillefer, CL6, 80-81; Blain I, 278-9.
69. Bernard, 85-6.
70. CL3, 32.
71. Bernard, 84-5.
72. *Memoir on the habit*, CL11, 349-350.
73. Blain II, Appendix, 71.

74. Poutet I, 690, n.14.
 75. id., 705-6.
 76. Blain I, 279.
 77. Bernard, 86.
 78. CL11, 353-4.
 79. Ariès, 328.
 80. Chapter I, art.2, CL25, 16.
 81. CL11, 353.
 82. Blain I, 257; Aroz, CL29, 100.
 83. Blain I, 255 in fin - 257; Poutet I, 725.
 84. Blain I, 257-8.
 85. Poutet I, 734; Frère Jacques Goussin, *Construire l'homme et dire Dieu à l'école: Jean Baptiste De La Salle*, 35. 78, rue de Sèvres, 75341 Paris.
 86. Bernard, 74-9; Maillefer, CL6, 76-9; Blain I 201-7; Poutet I, 735-6.
 87. Bernard, 74.
 88. id., 68-9; Blain I, 282.
 89. Poutet I, 529-31.
 90. Bernard, 68-9.
 91. Bernard, 74-75, 78.
 92. Bernard, 74-5, 76-9; Maillefer, CL6, 76-9; Blain I, 264-7; Poutet I, 735-6.
 93. id., 78.
 94. Poutet I, 736.
 95. Blain I, 269-70.
 96. From the file on Rethel in the Brothers' Archives, Rome, quoted by Aroz in CL26, 273.
 97. Blain, 270-1; Maillefer, CL6, 98, 99.
 98. Blain I, 271.
 99. id., 271.
 100. Maillefer, CL6, 98, 99.
 101. Blain I, 276-7.
 102. Bernard, 83-4; Maillefer, CL6, 78-9; Blain I, 284-5.
 103. Bernard.
 104. Maillefer, CL6, 82, 83; Blain I, 287.
 105. Poutet I, 737.
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PART III

IN PARIS, 1682-1706

Chapter 9: First successes in Paris and a series of crises, 1688-1691

SOME ASPECTS OF THE CAPITAL AS THE FOUNDER AND HIS TWO BROTHERS SAW IT

Gamboust's plan of Paris drawn from 1649-52, includes a panoramic view of the city as might be viewed from the hill of Montmartre, then well outside the capital. Paris looks so small that Robert Mousnier sees it as "an urban blob in a sea of corn."¹ It still had largely the aspect of a medieval town crowded within its walls, with the spires and steeples of its many churches and monasteries marking its skyline.² Paris north of the river had in De La Salle's early years the shape of a semi-circle extending from the present Place de la Concorde to the royal arsenal south of the Bastille: about two miles across. South of the river, on the left bank, the walls of Philip Augustus still enclosed only the Latin Quarter in an arc running from south of the Louvre to the present Pantheon and then back to the river at the eastern end of the present Boulevard Saint-Germain.

On this south bank, west of the University area, what had been a market-town around the great abbey of St Germain-des-Prés was by now a suburb of the capital. To south and southeast were the growing suburbs of Saint-Jacques, Saint-Marcel and Saint-Victor, while east of the Bastille lay the faubourg or suburb of St Antoine.

Amidst its squalor and teeming streets, Paris had seen new royal buildings and many palaces of the nobility arise earlier in the century. They were still gleaming white when the Founder first went there in 1670. John Evelyn, the diarist, who visited Paris in 1642 and 1650, was full of admiration for the noble buildings he was shown. Paris was "one of the most gallant Cityes in the world." From 1661 to 1715 Paris was further embellished, mainly to glorify the king, while new palaces were built by the rich in more spacious properties in the suburbs; its inner core changed little.

The "Ville", "Cité" and "Université"

The central area of the *Ville* or commercial area north of the river, beginning at the *Châtelet*, was one of narrow, stinking streets of fishmongers, fruiterers, craftsmen and traders, of abattoirs and shops of butchers who themselves were rich and lived in good, clean, well-furnished houses. Here was the famous *Cour des Miracles*, or miraculous courtyard, one of the many thieves' kitchens of the Paris underworld and described by Victor Hugo in his novel *Notre-Dame de Paris* (1831), set at the end of the fifteenth century. D'Argenson, the police lieutenant we shall hear more of, is said to

have cleaned it up, but it was still described in the eighteenth century as a great open square reached by a very long cul-de-sac, stinking, muddy and winding. Its name came from the practice of professional beggars, apparently blind or crippled or minus a leg, suddenly discovering the use of their limbs when they returned to this lair of theirs. There were other places in Paris where the police patrols would hesitate to go. To increase safety in the main streets, the lieutenant of police La Reynie began from 1667 to provide 5000 lanterns lit till two o'clock in the morning from 20 October till 31 March.

The **Louvre** (the meaning of the term is unknown), now the art museum, began as a royal keep and developed into a royal residence, but Louis XIV finally left Paris for good to go to Versailles in 1682. Northwest of the Louvre, on the Rue Saint-Honoré, Richelieu began in 1629 his splendid Cardinal's Palace. At his death in 1642 he bequeathed it to his sovereign, Louis XIV. Anne of Austria took it over in 1643, so that it has since been known as the Palais Royal, although its present sweep of galleries and gardens came later.

At the opposite end of the *Ville* not far from the Bastille, were the great town houses of courtiers and statesmen, their limestone fronts gleaming among the houses of the lesser bourgeoisie and the artisans. This was the origin of the very upper-class triangle known still as the **Marais**, "which had its greatest hours in the xviith and xviiiith centuries, with the driving of coaches, the clash of swords, the hum of 'salons' frequented by all the personalities owning famous literary or political names."³ Here Madame de Sévigné wrote charmingly about the dukes and nobility of the area. In De La Salle's day, the area was inhabited by the noblesse de robe and the great financiers.

At the eastern end of the island known as the *Cité*, where royal administrative and ecclesiastical power were concentrated, stood the cathedral of Notre-Dame, dating in its present form from the twelfth century onwards, and south of it Archbishop's house. Westwards came the old royal palace, for long the Palace of Justice, an area enclosing a great number of buildings housing the various royal departments of justice and finance, including the *Parlement* of Paris with its six courts or chambers.

The *Université* was still, at the beginning of Louis's reign, confined within Philip Augustus's crumbling walls. It had virtually the same aspect as in the fourteenth century, a packed area with its sixty colleges, its abbeys and churches, many of outstanding size and architecture, set in narrow streets. Richelieu's rebuilt Sorbonne chapel was resplendent in its limestone and huge dome. The Latin Quarter today, although still tightly built on, has little to remind us of how the Founder saw it. To reach the Sorbonne from the seminary of Saint Sulpice when he was a student there, he would have entered the Latin Quarter through St Michael's Gate (Porte Saint-Michel) in the walls, at a point on the present Boulevard Saint-Michel some way south of the Rue de Cujas. Of the build-

ings he knew then, the Revolution destroyed some and disaffected others that became the prey of demolishers and road-wideners throughout the nineteenth century and who have left practically nothing of the religious, architectural and artistic treasures of the area. The massive Pantheon - as it later became - built on the orders of Louis XV was unknown to De La Salle. But the beautiful church nearby of **St Etienne du Mont**, so rich in history, is virtually as he knew it, for it was rebuilt in the sixteenth century and consecrated in 1626.

Suburbs on the left bank: St Germain

The oldest by far and the most important of the suburbs on the left bank was that of Saint Germain. It interests us specially because its sole parish church was that of Saint Sulpice. When De La Salle and the two Brothers settled in the Rue Princesse, close to the church, they were only three minutes' walk away from the great monastery of **Saint Germain des-Prés**, of which only the great church and some abbey buildings remain. It was founded in the sixth century in open country outside Paris by Childebert, son of Clovis, king of the Franks, and became the burial place of the early Merovingian kings, which explains why it was donated with widespread gifts of land. It declined during the Wars of Religion, but after the Council of Trent it reformed and became the centre of the new Benedictine congregation of St Maur and the home of many scholars whose names are commemorated in streets of this quarter. Even some of the roads leading out of it have a Benedictine origin.

Its medieval annual fair had long become one of the events of Paris life. It was held from 3 February till Palm Sunday in a huge rectangular enclosure across the street from the north side of St Sulpice. It contained twenty-four covered market halls, the passages in between being covered by a very high wooden framework. It was only a stone's throw from the Rue Princesse and was in full swing when the Brothers arrived that February 1688. This was a high-class fair, offering silverwork and jewellery, objets d'art, lacquers, silks and porcelains from India and China. Cafés, tightrope walkers and acrobats, groups of musicians and actors of comic opera added to the attraction. The ordinary people crowded in during the day, but the upper class preferred to come only at night, their carriages parked along all the nearby streets. For several hours elegant women and their escorts toured the stalls lit by thousands of candles. Getting away in their carriages in the bottle-neck of the tiny streets took them into the early hours of the morning. Perhaps the tired Brothers slept through it all for the next few weeks. They could not but have known all about it, at least from the boys they taught, some of whom would have had a field-day as pickpockets.

The church of **Saint Sulpice** that had been built in 1211 on the lines of the

present St Severin's church was being replaced by a new one, begun in 1646, as we have seen. But when De La Salle saw it again in 1688 it was not much further advanced than in 1672, for the construction stopped in 1678 for lack of money and was not pursued till 1711. He and the Brothers therefore only knew it as having a chancel and side-aisles, and it was not finally finished till 1788. The chancel was the only part in use, and people crowded into it for Mass. On its northeastern corner is the small chapel of the Assumption with its curiously shaped roof. It was built for holding catechism sessions and was originally called the chapel of the Holy Child Jesus. The Founder often celebrated Mass there for the Brothers and their pupils. The seminary buildings were where the square and fountain in front of the church now are, with an interior garden on the south side, towards the Rue de Vaugirard.

Just across this road the Luxembourg Palace had been built for Catherine de Medici between 1615 and 1625. The public were allowed to take walks in it. The creation of a royal palace in the quarter meant that the great lords who served there found it convenient to build their great houses in the open spaces beyond it, along the Rue de Vaugirard and the Rue de Sèvres. They were built round secluded courtyards, presenting only the coach entrance to the street. New religious and charitable institutions were founded also at this time, each in its spacious grounds.

This developing quarter of St Germain also housed many high society foreigners who attended its horse-riding and fencing academies. There was one close to the Brothers on the Rue Ste Marguerite alongside the Abbey, now part of the Boulevard Saint-Germain. This was the area that Alexandre Dumas depicted as criss-crossed in Richelieu's day by his Three Musketeers, ever ready for a duel behind the Abbey or the Luxembourg. Those imaginary heroes were members of the picked royal guard that strode the streets the Brothers used, and swaggered into taverns and theatres.

As being the most elegant suburb, St Germain had many fashionable eating-places or cabarets. There were two hundred and four of the latter, some very high class. Cafés, meaning then shops where ready-made coffee was sold, first appeared in 1669. The **Café Procope**, now a restaurant, in the Rue de l'Ancienne Comédie, had as clients La Fontaine, and later Voltaire, Benjamin Franklin, Victor Hugo and others. The cafés were numerous around the theatres, especially around the Comédie Française. This had moved in 1687 to a site at the junction of Rue Mazarine and Rue de Seyne, in spite of the protests of De La Barmondière. Comedy was attacked by Jansenists and the devout party, and actors were excommunicated. The company moved in 1689 to a specially built round theatre, the best in France, seating 1500. This was in the Rue Neuve-des-Fossés-Saint-Germain, later Rue de l'Ancienne-Comédie, a few minutes' walk from the church of St Sulpice. Its facade still stands.

Social contrasts

John Evelyn's "gallant Cittie" was a city of the mainly poor. Two-thirds were immigrants from the countryside. In the area around St Sulpice to which the Brothers came, the poor lived in the same tenements as artisans and traders. The Brothers also became aware, as they got to know the area and walked daily to their schools, of the comfort, elegance, wealth and ostentation that others enjoyed. Even if they took their weekly walk into the country, they passed by the new *hôtels* of the rich and noble.

Trades and guilds were more diverse than in Rheims: there were one hundred and twenty-nine of them. The aristocrats among them were the Six-Corps or the Big Six: the drapers, apothecaries, haberdashers, hosiers, furriers and goldsmiths. The haberdashers' guild was looked upon as the noblest because they did no work with their hands: "sellers of all, doers of nothing." In 1691 Louis XIV grouped all the guilds into four classes. There was a vast social gap between the wholesale clothier who would be considered of the middle bourgeoisie and the shoemaker, the glazier and the cesspool emptier. It is worth noting that thirteenth among the guilds in the second class were the master-writers, because we shall certainly meet them again.

The urban workers of Paris were "without lands, without houses (all are tenants), almost without furniture and linen, they are the perfect realisation of an archaic type of wage-earner. Their pay constituted their sole means of livelihood: piece wages, rarely by the day, sometimes including some of their food, but always an uncertain wage like the job itself. In reality, a whole system of advance payments by the employers made of these workers of the Great City a class- for so it was - of perpetual debtors, entirely in the power of the bosses...a real exploitation, which often took on the aspect of a clever deceit over the merchandise, the length of the work or the nature of the pay (doled out in bits of stuff hardly saleable, in bad money hard to get rid of, and in wheat gauged with false measures) fell upon the urban workers. Usually, they worked at home or came each day to an employer." When unemployment and high prices hit them, usually together, "the workers, living on top of one another in their hovels, feeding on scraps and abandoned by everybody except a few doctors and priests, died like flies."⁴ Monsieur De La Salle and his Brothers were to find here the conditions in Rheims writ large.

Louis XIV's mark on the capital

Although he left Paris for Versailles in 1682, Louis XIV was interested in a capital that would reflect his greatness and maintain his prestige with the Parisians. He had the good fortune to be served by some very great architects. **Christopher Wren**, who did much to rebuild London after the Great Fire of 1666, came to Paris from 1633 to 1666; the Louvre for a time was his daily

study, where the activities in extending it, he wrote, “make a school of architecture, the best probably at this day in Europe.” Louis had the old walls of the capital pulled down; the ramparts or boulevards in front of them were flattened and made into long tree-lined avenues to which the name boulevard was transferred. This began for the eastern half of the northern walls in 1670, and was taken up again in 1684. The walls around the Latin quarter began to be pulled down in 1672, so that De La Salle would notice this remarkable change when he returned in 1688.

In 1670 also Louis had the open space beyond the Tuileries made into a wide tree-lined avenue that has become the Champs-Élysées. For the retired and wounded veterans of his armies he built the great *Hôtel des Invalides*, west of the suburb of St Germain. It was, in reality, an enforced residence in a building exalting Louis’s military victories, for wounded and sick veterans, to keep them off the streets. Prior to this, disbanded, maimed troops went around begging or might go about in gangs, threatening life and limb. The hospital wards were tended by Sisters of Charity. Everything was run on monastic lines. In 1685 the *Pont Royal*, linking the Louvre to the south bank, was begun. Because of the *Pont Royal* and the *Hôtel des Invalides*, Saint Germain came into favour, and the aristocracy moved there from Le Marais. Things were changing in this district; more people were coming in, there were more jobs of all kinds.

The atmosphere of public life and the administration of justice in the capital

The atmosphere of public life had also changed. When De La Salle took two Brothers with him to Paris, Louis XIV’s period of direct rule had lasted nearly thirty years. Court life at Versailles was artificial, boring and idle as the great nobles waited around hoping for pensions, posts and other royal favours. Yet it enchanted and dazzled contemporaries. It created a totally false atmosphere and led the aristocracy and the upper bourgeoisie to build in Paris and elsewhere palaces or town houses in keeping with their rank and wealth. The great thing was what rank of people you associated with, what salons you attended, whose notice and patronage you might get.

The Founder, from his own experience of social life, sensed more than the Brothers the false aura of adulation of the monarchy and the cult of status. He also soon realised - and to his cost and that of the Brothers - that since his student days in Paris the hand of the monarch over every sphere of administration had become heavier, and that people could not protest without danger of immediate imprisonment. Far more than in provincial Rheims, the power of the king was strongly felt, since nearly all the judicial and administrative departments of the kingdom were concentrated in the *Palais* on the island of

Notre-Dame. The next most important court to the Great Council (which sat in the Louvre) was the *Parlement* of Paris, with a jurisdiction covering the whole of northern France except Brittany. This Court registered and promulgated royal acts; it controlled all those in public functions in its area and had the overall responsibility for law and order, involving Paris and its suburbs. De La Salle found himself summoned to appear before it, but oftener was called to a more immediate centre of law and order for the Paris region, the *Châtelet*.

This lay north of the Palace, on the other side of the *Pont au Change*. Its name means a small castle or fortress, for as such it had been built in 1190. Now it was a centre of justice under a royal provost. It came to mean the body of courts and departments which operated there. It published royal decrees for the region; it was a court of appeal; it dealt with property leases and wages; it inspected markets and hostelryes. It had a crime section and a department for highway crime. It had several lieutenants, the most important being the civil lieutenant; 48 superintendents inspected the different quarters of Paris. Its criminal court dealt savagely, according to the practice of the times, with those caught red-handed.

In 1667 Louis XIV eased the burden of the civil lieutenant, but also brought the function under his control, by creating two new royal posts (that had to be bought): that of civil lieutenant dealing only with civil matters, and that of lieutenant of police, seeing to general policing of the capital. This meant its security and administration generally: seeing to law and order, the cleansing of streets and public places, controlling the capital's food supply and prices. He was responsible for religious, social and economic affairs and control of public behaviour; he was the judge in final appeal of beggars and people of no fixed abode. It was in fact a ministry for Paris. Kept in touch by his 48 superintendents, their sub-officers and sergeants, and by informers and spies, the lieutenant of police always knew what was going on. The post was made effective by its having two long-serving, able incumbents: La Reynie (Nicolas de La Reynie, 1625-1709) from 1667 to 1697, and Marc-René d'Argenson (Marc René de Voyer de Paulmy marquis d'Argenson, born in Venice 1652, died in Paris 1721) from 1697 to 1715.

These two often had a hard and cruel task to perform, for thieves, crooks and hired killers acted in daylight though especially at night, and hid in the suburbs. But they softened or even avoided carrying out some of the pitiless orders coming from the king, and from Colbert or Louvois after him. Nevertheless, when De La Salle came to Paris in 1688 he found that what was hardly organised when he was there as a seminarian, was now a well-organised, well-informed police force with powers of suppression that came from being able to employ directly the royal *lettres de cachet*. These bore the king's name, but carried a signature imitated by a special secretary. These

letters were issued for matters in Paris by the Secretary of State and ensured a more rapid execution of royal justice and hence of administration, and were very much used. When the post of lieutenant-governor of police was created in 1667, the Secretary of State delegated to him this function. Reynie in turn had the work done by a private secretary, and gradually organised an Office of *lettres de cachet*. D'Argenson developed it into a ministerial department.



The Bastille

The most ominous symbol of royal despotism was the Bastille. You could be sent there by decision of the king himself, or because you were accused of being in some way 'seditious' to the royal mind. De La Salle and the Brothers at one moment were close to being sent there. The Bastille was the only one remaining of a number of square forts (called 'bastilles') built into the medieval wall. It was seen in seventeenth century as the state prison that gave meaning to the *lettre de cachet*. Many Jansenists were kept there and many Protestants, especially between 1685 and 1700. Many preferred to die in prison rather than win freedom by accepting Communion from a Catholic priest. Spies were housed in the Bastille; so were noble courtiers, like the two who quarrelled in the king's drawing-room and were confined for a few days "for having lacked respect for my apartments."! Such persons could be given a spacious, heated room, good meals with two bottles of wine, and be received back at court with good grace. The Bastille was not a symbol of cruelty but of the overriding power of the Bourbon kings to take away your liberty by decree and confine you behind three locked doors.

Anybody who might be considered seditious or who simply spoke against the royal power could be incarcerated: taverners, pedlars and especially gazetteers or publishers of gazettes, for journalists were considered especially dangerous. (A gazette was a newsheet or a pamphlet. Many could be scurrilous or satirical.) Many printers and booksellers were sent to the Bastille for publishing lampoons revealing too great an independence of mind with regard to the royal power. Anything to do with religion could be treated as dangerous. In 1681 several priests were sent to the Bastille for the clandestine publication of an attack on the character of the archbishop of Paris. A bishop found that applying for a *lettre de cachet* was a very convenient way of exiling or imprisoning a priest he disagreed with.

There was cruelty in the way people could be left in prison indefinitely. When Louis XVI came to the throne a man was released who had been detained for forty-seven years. His house had gone, his neighbourhood had all changed, his wife had died thirty years before. He asked to go back to the Bastille. Blain tells us this story, but without any date: "One day someone came on behalf of a priest imprisoned for several years between four walls,

where somehow he had heard of the great virtue of M. De La Salle, asking him to come and hear his confession.” Maillefer says the request came from the governor of the Bastille.⁵ De La Salle went and found the priest in a deplorable condition “dressed in a cassock that was falling apart, and wearing a shirt that was torn, black, filthy and crawling with vermin.” After hearing his confession, he proposed they should exchange clothes, which the other priest accepted, and the Founder returned to the community “decorated”, as Blain has to put it, “with the spoils of the victory over himself.” The priest died a few days later, he was told.⁶ It is surprising that Blain got away with this description, for everything was kept secret about the Bastille. Those who were released had to sign an agreement not to say anything about prison life. So imagination could run riot as to what took place there.

IN THE PARISH OF SAINT SULPICE

In February 1688, for De La Salle and the two Brothers, the threat of the Bastille from the Cardinal Archbishop of Paris was still far away. There were more immediate problems to face up to.⁷

The Founder had acted wisely in accompanying the two Brothers. It would not be easy for the parish priest to see much in them other than two devoted employees in a school that was his. He would not be aware that these two were part of a group that already had a diversified organisation in Rheims. He could not be expected to see what was clear to the inner conviction of De La Salle, that they represented a new if humble community that was the work of God. As a former student at the seminary, now a priest, and a doctor in theology, he would carry more weight than the Brothers.

His leverage, however, in Paris as a whole was limited. He was an outsider, a “priest from the diocese of Rheims” starting a work that many had a hand in already. The cathedral Precentor oversaw the schools of the city and authorised their teachers. The cathedral Chancellor, also chancellor of the University, controlled the little schools, while parish priests were in full charge of the charity schools they founded in their parish. Servien de Montigny was superior of Barré’s Sisters and Brothers who were operating in Paris. Except for the latter, all these, moreover, were concerned with Paris only. They had no interest in or might oppose his training men in view of sending them to schools beyond the capital.

The priests of Saint Sulpice, after their concern for a well-trained clergy, were convinced that one of the pastoral aims of a parish priest was the provision of schools for the poor. Schooling would be a remedy for idleness and religious ignorance. They aimed therefore at getting the children to come to school, and at training them in conformity with Gospel teachings. When he became parish priest (1642-52), M. Olier, the founder, as we have seen, of

the seminary, divided the parish into eight sectors and provided a charity school in each. He drew up regulations for them in 1652. He assembled a committee of volunteers who decided on admissions on the basis of the child's belonging to the parish, of being seven years old at least, and of coming from a family that was really poor. One member of the group made surprise visits to the school of a given sector in order to check on attendance and discipline. The teaching did not go beyond two years, after which an attempt was made to find the child a suitable job. After thirty years, only the one school in the Rue Princesse remained, and that was badly run. It was the usual problem, the inability to find suitable teachers.

Making a start

Travelling in February, the two Brothers and their Founder, even with their thick mantles, must have been fairly frozen after four or five days on the road. They would have entered Paris from Rheims by the northern Porte Saint-Denis, by then only a gap in the newly planted boulevards. Down the Rue Saint-Denis they would go, as far as the *Châtelet* and then across the island of the *Cité*. Their Founder led the way to the presbytery of Saint Sulpice where they called on De la Barmondière. They were then shown to premises rented by the parish in the narrow Rue Princesse nearby to be their community home and school and in which they would find they did not know quite what. The noise from the nearby Fair would arouse their curiosity. They picked their way down the usual dirty street and stepped through the doorway that still exists, up the stairs to their rooms above the classrooms. They would live there with a hosier and a boy of fourteen, while Monsieur Compagnon, the priest whom we know ran the school, stayed at the presbytery.

The premises rented by the churchwardens as classrooms and lodging for the masters were in a five-storey building that was part of a block of crowded tenements among the dark alleyways north of the church. They occupied what are now numbered as no. 16 and 14 of the Rue Princesse. At ground level was a workshop and at the same level were three classrooms. The school was 'at the sign of St Anne', but the sign has disappeared. As the number of children increased, no. 12 was added. The coach entrance to no. 12 is still there, and the staircase with its wrought-iron banister that De La Salle and the Brothers used to go upstairs to their poor quarters. At the back was the yard, overlooked as usual by the neighbours. In such cramped quarters, everybody knew everybody else's business. There was little air and not much peace. The two Brothers were given a few days to rest and find their feet.

The morning they first went down to the classrooms to begin their work, the Brothers had quite a shock: there was no order. The doors opened at five



o'clock, in the dark. The children turned up as they liked - some two hundred of them eventually. You can imagine the first few arrivals drifting in as they were sent out of the house once their parents were at work, huddling together for the next two or three hours of darkness round the lamp in the classroom, sleeping, chatting or playing cards and eventually playing, fighting or gambling in the yard. The children were dismissed at ten o'clock, and the doors reopened from one till four. These boys were given some training in reading and writing by M. Compagnon and his young assistant, and then learnt how to knit stockings, gloves and the like under a Mr Raffron. He sold the articles they made, partly for his own profit, partly to help the poor. Now and then Compagnon gave a religion lesson. There was no attempt to stop those who were idle, before and in school, from gambling with cards and dice.

The two Brothers at first changed nothing and criticised nothing, but fitted in as best they could. Compagnon soon pulled out of direct teaching. The two Brothers and his assistant each took about sixty boys. M. De La Salle did not teach, but often walked between the benches, gently encouraging the boys, and he gave them religious instruction. Soon, more parents were sending their children, and one Brother fell ill from overwork. The Founder, as he had done in Rheims, took his place. Compagnon asked him to take charge of the school, but on taking advice, he declined. The Brothers, meanwhile, were getting tired of not being able to get to grips with proper teaching. De La Salle's patience was a great strength for them. He did not want this state of affairs either, but he wisely saw there was nothing he could do at the moment. He waited for Providence to show him the way out. In April La Barmondière paid a visit to the school. Although things were better, there was still lack of order. De La Salle was discreet in answering the parish priest's questions on the matter, but he did point out that more masters were needed. De la Barmondière offered him 250 livres for every master he sent, and asked him to take the school over. With the offer coming from the parish priest, De La Salle accepted, but Compagnon was annoyed. The Founder was well aware of this, which was why he had been in no hurry to take over, and he tried not to hurt his feelings more than was possible.

He and the Brothers were now free to organise the school as they wanted it. The school door was opened at a fixed time. We are not told when, but in the *Conduct of Schools*, the text in which De La Salle and his Brothers set out their teaching methods, the rule was to open the doors at 7.30 and to begin school with morning prayer exactly at eight. The doors were then locked, and anyone coming late stayed outside. In this way the point was made, and there was order in the school. Instead of sending the boys home at 10 o'clock, they were taken to Mass at 10.30 if possible (if not, at nine o'clock or thereabouts)- "a new spectacle for Paris", Blain writes. (He probably has in mind

only boys: Barré's Sisters, at least, would be already doing it for girls.) Then they were dismissed. Afternoon class was as before. Religious instruction was given daily. Time was left for the workshop to operate, but it was reduced. De La Salle would have got rid of the workshop. De la Barmondière believed in it as being very important to get the children used to work. But in fact it prepared them for no trade most of them were likely to do. It was not a real training or apprenticeship and took away the time for developing their reading, writing and arithmetical skills, as a means of access to a better job. Again, the Founder waited.

But he was not idle. He used his contacts to obtain books that would help his Brothers in the classroom. In April he ordered more books from Charles Démia, for the latter has in his diary: "I have received from him a bill of exchange for 80 livres payable to Berthe and that I must reimburse to Comba, bookseller, for the said Mr la Sale (sic) my debtor - 1688, April. De la Sale de Rhins, at present in Paris, has to pay out 80 livres to Mr Berth for the Hospice of the 15.20 (standing for Quinze-Vingt, literally Fifteen-Twenty, the name of a hospice for the blind in Paris, founded by St Louis) moneys in part received, and the rest to come: 14 livres only out of the said 80 livres." M. Berthe was a Vincentian in Paris. Démia has one more entry on De La Salle, on 27th August that year: "Comba, for Lasale of Rhins who has paid Berthe 80 livres."⁸ The Founder in other words, looked round for textbooks where he could find them, just as the Brothers must have consulted for the detailed running of their school the excellent *L'Escole Paroissiale*, The Parish School. Its author was unknown until Brother Yves Poutet, by a clever comparison of texts and of data within them, deduced that it was Jacques de Batencour, one of the priests of the seminary of St Nicolas-du-Chardonnet, and who had been teaching reading and writing, arithmetic and Latin grammar to simple people and to children in that parish since about 1636.⁹

Compagnon's underhand manoeuvres against De La Salle

The reduced time given to the workshop meant fewer articles being produced. Reasonably Raffron could have put the difficulty to De la Barmondière, but he used it as a complaint against De La Salle. Knowing the parish priest's keenness on having the workshop, he took for granted that he would insist on things being as before. But he found that De la Barmondière, pleased that overall the school was far better run, was not particularly concerned. His next move was to put pressure on his employer by resigning, so closing the workshop. He hoped that the parish priest would have to call him back, in which case he would make it a condition that De La Salle and his Brothers should go. Unfortunately for him, De la Barmondière did not appreciate being pressurised. Raffron found himself permanently out of a job, and found no

one would employ him. De La Salle offered to take over the workshop as soon as he could have a Brother trained in knitting. He offered to pay Raffron a daily sum if he would teach him. He was glad to accept, and taught the Brother in three weeks. The Founder now brought from Rheims a third Brother who was knowledgeable in the manufacture of woollens (he probably had been a serge-weaver), and the workshop started up better than before. In addition, the whole school was under the one management.

M. Compagnon had been behind Raffron. Although he was no longer in the school, he was in general charge of the schools in the parish. He was also much liked by the group of women giving charity to the poor. At one of their meetings in July, which happened when De La Salle had gone off to Rheims to get another Brother, he complained strongly about the school, and these women expressed their mind to De La Barmondière. Strangely enough, he believed them, and showed a coldness to De La Salle that went on till September. The hint was that he should go, but the parish priest couldn't get himself to say so directly. He asked M. Baudrand to handle it. They discussed it, and Baudrand suggested the best thing was to withdraw quietly during the summer vacation rather than be told to go.

This was the end of his hopes about Paris and the development of what he was convinced was the work of God. He would have to go back to Rheims and have Le Tellier trying to control him. It would mean facing again in his native town the unpopularity he had roused, particularly after resigning his canonry. He went with Baudrand to take leave of the parish priest. De La Barmondière felt less certain when faced with a man of undoubted holiness and competence and who was not complaining or attacking anybody. He discussed the matter with Baudrand and let it be known through him that he would think about it. Baudrand remarked that he would "take three years to think about it." In short, things remained as they were.

Compagnon did not give up. He went into the school telling the boys that De La Salle and the Brothers had been sacked, so as to unsettle them. Then, knowing that De La Barmondière said an early Mass and liked plenty of people to be there, he went round asking for alms for the school children, and then gave them out to those who agreed to go to this Mass. This created havoc with the time-table and the atmosphere of the 10.30 Mass. Had De La Salle tried to stop the children, Compagnon would have made it a matter of personal ill-will towards De La Barmondière. It was an impossible situation, but with great calmness and wisdom De La Salle advised the Brothers to recommend the early Mass to the children, but to put no pressure on them. As some distorted version of these events got to de La Barmondière's ears, he sent one of his priests to inspect the school. The latter came back astonished at the good order in it and the patience and silence of the Brothers.

Before he could improve the situation, however, the parish priest resigned his position in favour of M. Baudrand in January 1689. Baudrand was De La Salle's spiritual director and knew his merit. He took his time to size up Compagnon; he had also to handle him carefully. At Christmas that year, the priest in charge of training the altar-servers died. It was an important post for such a big parish, even if there were few altar-boys. M. Baudrand named Compagnon to take over, to his great pleasure. And so the matter was solved, and the school now really took on more the character de the Brothers intended it to have.

1690 - 91

M. Baudrand asks De La Salle to open a second school. He makes a journey to Rheims for more Brothers

It soon became over-crowded, such was its success, and more Brothers were needed. M. Baudrand was so impressed with the improvement that in 1690 he asked De La Salle to provide Brothers for another school at the other end of the parish, at the northern end of the Rue du Bac, not far from the Seine and the Pont Royal. De La Salle had already suggested this to De La Barmondière, possibly in order to distance himself from Compagnon, but this had not yet been followed up. Nothing is left of the school, but it was on the left side of the Rue du Bac as you face the Seine, between the actual Rue de Lille and Rue de Verneuil. The Seine, like the Thames, until it was provided with embankments, overflowed in its flood periods and created marshes along its banks. The area near the Pont-Royal was known as the Frog-pond (*la Grenouillère*) for this reason. Here lived a population of bargees, porters and others engaged in a variety of occupations connected with trade on the river. The Seine presented a busy spectacle with long trains of timber floating along it. There were water-coaches and many boats carrying hay and wheat. Hay for horses was equivalent to the supply of petrol (gas) in our days. There were little ports along the river that gave activity to a whole host of people, and the carts moving in and out created endless bottle-necks.

If, as was probably the case, the school opened in January 1690, the Founder must have travelled back to Rheims some time previously, or written on the basis of previous arrangements made. This could be when he took the two Brothers with him during the summer vacation for the annual retreat with all the Brothers. That would have been a break for them, and a great joy for the little society to meet up again. There were twenty-nine Brothers at this time, eighteen of them in Rheims; and from the group of 'little Brothers' or young people hoping to join the community, there must have been a number receiving the habit each year. De La Salle was able to release four Brothers to go

back with him to Paris. He took Nicholas Vuyart from Rethel to direct the new school, and with him a Bernard Legentil. He also took two others to help out at the Rue Princesse. Probably also he transferred Brother Henri Lheureux at this time to Paris, to begin courses at the Sorbonne. He would have had to be there by October, whereas the other four would move at the Christmas break. This made a community of seven Brothers in the Rue Princesse.

The visit to Rheims, useful and pleasant as it had been, had also given him grave cause for disquiet. The Brother, whose name we do not know, whom he had put in charge of the community in February 1688 in place of Henri Lheureux who was studying with the Canons Regular, turned out to be excessively strict, and eight Brothers had left.¹⁰ Blain surely has his time span wrong. 1688 would be the time when the trouble began. De La Salle could not have travelled to Rheims in the latter part of 1689 to take several Brothers back to Paris and Henri Lheureux as well, if things had been very bad. He installed as Director in Rheims a very holy Brother who was only nineteen, which may imply shortage of men. He was Jean Henry, who for long has been blamed for the mistakes of his predecessor. But when the Founder moved to Paris in 1688 this Jean Henry was still a postulant. He had applied to join the Brothers when he was only fifteen, and had been placed among the "little Brothers". It was Henri Lheureux who had given him the habit and transferred him to the main community when he was only seventeen, while De La Salle was in Paris. He does not seem to have been gifted intellectually, but he was of remarkable piety and kindness. Later, as part of his policies for building up the society, after the crises now being described, the Founder called him to Paris to be Director of novices. Blain has five and a half pages on his life at the end of his second volume.

According to him,¹¹ things were not going too well, either, with the training school for village schoolmasters. Blain says that as soon as De La Salle's supporting presence was removed, the training-centre for country schoolmasters faded away. But just as for de Mazarin's scheme, would not a regular filling of village posts reduce the demand to train others? Whatever the precise situation for these trainees, the community of postulants does not appear to have been in good shape, for De La Salle brought those remaining to Paris. The year 1690, in spite of the new start at the Rue du Bac, was to be a year of crisis, both in Rheims and Paris.

In Paris, we can visualise Brothers Vuyart and Legentil walking each day to their school. This did not take long if they went past the Abbey and along the Rue de Sorbonne. Here they would pass many a fine new town house of the wealthy. But the alleyways they went through were very narrow; even the main roads were only 15 to 25 feet wide. Tenements rose up on either side to five or six stories, housing up to twenty-five families. Rarely did they

have latrines or rubbish pits. People threw their rubbish into the streets and emptied their chamber-pots out of the window. The streets were therefore stinking and muddy. Yet with only one or two rooms to live in that were very stuffy in summer, and having to work in confined workshops, the families of artisans and odd-jobbers lived outside as much as possible. Houses were not numbered, and were recognised by a figure, usually of a saint, carved into the stonework above a doorway, often with a lamp. Craftsmen and traders put up huge wooden signs, up to fifteen feet long and two feet deep over their shop-front. There was poverty and hardship in these streets, but also friendliness and warmth, as well as bickerings and insults. Picking their way through these streets the two Brothers would pass the small traders yelling out their wares, selling herbs, fruit, rags, sand and brooms, fish, water, and the like. These were “the cries of Paris”. The poet Nicholas Boileau gives a vivid account of street life in the capital in his Satire VI: “Les embarras de Paris.”

People of all classes walked through the streets: city councillors, the many magistrates and law officials with a page to hold the train of their cloak clear of the mud, soldiers in bright regimental uniforms, (the King’s Musketeers - successors to those celebrated by Dumas - had recently been provided with barracks almost opposite the new school), crowds of lackeys or page-boys in brown or black if they were running errands for merchants, but in brighter colours if belonging to nobles and great lawyers. Clergy went on foot: the secular clergy in black, but not necessarily yet using the cassock, and members of religious orders in their different colours. Among the women, only the Sisters of St Vincent de Paul would be seen and also by now a number of Barré’s Sisters dressed in black. The working-class people themselves were poorly dressed, in dull colours. They got their clothes from second-hand dealers. Among this variety of dress, either deliberately or inevitably indicating your social status, the Brothers’ dress, somewhat outside the fashion even for the poor, merited no social respect.

To complete this picture of street-life, add the flocks of sheep or herds of cows being driven to drinking-places on the Seine or to the slaughter-house; horses and carts bringing food supplies from the country; horses hired for travel, and the increasing number of sedan chairs, horse-drawn cabs (*fiacres*) and private carriages in this fashionable quarter, driven at speed when the rare chance allowed. The area round the school, where all this activity concentrated, with people trying to get in and out of the little port or force their way to the bridge, must have been a perpetual chaos, the filthy streets awash when the Seine rose.

The two strangers from Rheims must have aroused mixed feelings at first, but soon they would be looked upon with affection. The two classes they ran prospered. (Vuyart was sent back to Rethel after a year or two and remained

there till 1699.¹²) The success of the two schools was not long in bringing trouble upon the Brothers, first from the association of the “little masters” and then from the powerful master-writers’ guild. This went on till 1706 and was repeated, less dramatically, in other towns. To understand what the conflict was all about, and especially why De La Salle stubbornly resisted them, and what that says about the mission of the Brothers of the Christian Schools, it is necessary to look at the history and position of these bodies. The little schools will be seen here, the master-writers at the appropriate moment in the story in 1705.

ELEMENTARY EDUCATION IN PARIS AT THE TIME

The little schools¹³

Until the 16th century at least, there was no elementary teaching in the vernacular. The young had only the Latin or grammar school. There the children learnt liturgical prayers by heart, repeating them in chorus without understanding them. Then they learnt to read the Psalter and finally began learning grammar, that is, Latin at a very elementary level. These schools, intended for future clerics, run by one or two masters, were tolerated by the cathedral chapters besides their own school, provided they kept to an elementary level of Latin. But in time a whole series of such grammar schools developed, some taking the whole range of liberal arts. The Colleges in fact, were grammar schools going as far as philosophy.

But at the end of the sixteenth century a new type of school developed: the *petite école* or “little school” the origin of the primary school, on which De La Salle and his Brothers were to have the most influence. During that century, under pressure from the municipalities, the number of little schools increased. They introduced a new set of aims. The concern of the aldermen, who were from the bourgeois class, was to curb the unruly youth of their towns by having them taught their religion, especially their duties, how to behave and the habit of due reverence to the corporation and its laws. They took fright at the crowds of children on the loose, ignorant of their faith. And so the corporations engaged masters in view of bringing about the social reform to their liking that the chapter schools had been too few to achieve. A small fee was required that children of the lower bourgeoisie and of the artisans could afford. For the children of the wage-earning poor, continually increasing this century through influx from the villages, this was no answer. For beggars and the homeless, the town hospice developed into the workhouse. (On this development, see the Appendix to this chapter, p. 311.)

The supervision of these schools and the authorising of teachers remained with the bishop or his deputy, even if the town authorities would have pre-

ferred otherwise. (We saw Le Tellier reasserting his authority vis-à-vis Canon Roland's schools.) Had they taken charge, the purely clerical orientation of the schools would have changed sooner. On the other hand, these would have been municipal schools, Christian certainly, but that would have limited the learning of reading and writing in order to have a workforce that knew its place.

In Paris, the little schools were under the approval of the cathedral Precentor, and the *Parlement* supported this situation. The Precentor gave or sold letters permitting masters and mistresses to keep school. He looked after their common interests, fixed the time-table and prevented competition by determining the number of schools per district. In Rouen at the time, the regulations imposed by the Archbishop stipulated that schools were to be at least two streets or fifty houses apart, "to prevent the children from learning vice from one another and fighting one another going to and from the said schools." And a priest (the assumed teacher) is "forbidden to teach the art of reading and arithmetic unless there is no master-writer."

In Paris, over the years, new schools (a school meaning one classroom) were allowed as needed, different ones for boys and girls. In 1672 the statutes of the "little schools for grammar", as they were still called, of Paris indicate that the capital was now divided into 166 school districts, each having a boys' and a girls' school. A teacher would need an average of about 60 students to make a living that would be threatened when bread prices rose and parents could no longer afford to send their children. For these were paying schools: five sols a month when you were only learning to read, ten sols when you began writing. If numbers were about equal in each category, and schools were open eleven months in the year, a master's average salary would be about 250 livres a year. This supposes he had about 60 students, but in fact he was often allowed far less, and tried to make up by private tutoring and other work.

If we assume that Paris, with a population of about half a million, had the same regular age-pyramid as was true of the country as a whole this century, the number of boys aged between six and ten might be 40,000. If the bourgeoisie and the independent artisan groups made up a quarter of the population, then the 166 little schools, had they their full clientele of about 10,000, would be catering for most of the bourgeoisie and the more well-to-do artisans. But many were not so catered for, while many had private tutors, the children of the lower artisans joined the vast numbers of children of the working poor left to roam the streets.

Joly often limited the little masters to a dozen students each, leaving them to supplement their income by private tutoring. "According to the registers of the Chapter, each master was often authorised for six or twelve students

only; that was necessary because of the teaching mode which was individual and not simultaneous. The least gap in their classes diminished their resources.”¹⁴ The little masters could have increased their clientele had they made the effort to learn how to teach a class simultaneously. The quality of those teaching in the little schools varied greatly. There must have been many who did their best, but there was criticism - possibly negatively selective - of Claude Joly, the Precentor at the time, for authorising “second-hand clothes dealers, proprietors of cheap eating-houses, barbers, puppeteers and lackeys”¹⁵ to open a school.

The teaching in the “little schools”

Curriculum and methods took shape. In 1654 Jacques de Batencour, a priest of the community of St Nicolas-du-Chardonnet already referred to, (Ch. 2, p. 57; Ch. 3, p.70) wrote in his *L’Ecole paroissiale* (The Parish School) practices possibly already customary but described from his own eighteen years’ experience. He was running a fee-paying parish “little school”, preparing possibly up to one hundred boys (in which he was assisted by another master) for entry into college. He wrote an abridged and modified form of his book in 1685. De La Salle and his Brothers used, developed and gave a new inspiration to his methods.

The teaching of the little schools showed its various origins. The little medieval Latin grammar school had its influence. Before De La Salle no one thought of teaching to read first in French. The children were first taught to read and spell in church Latin, using quite a range of liturgical prayers, psalms and hymns. What is still in mind is the education of the future cleric. Before reading French they were to read Latin “in all sorts of books”. Plain-chant was looked on as equally important.

Civility was studied in handbooks on good manners, written in French in Gothic script, and which also served as reading books. Civility might not be part of the medieval school tradition, but it went far back. Good manners was practically the only teaching a young non-cleric learnt as an apprenticeship for a life of chivalry. A practice of the Middle Ages was to place a young child in another respected family to learn Christian courtesy by being with older people. This learning was taken into the little schools, and became one of its key elements.

After learning to read well, the boys learnt to write. In these schools, rather than a means of expressing thought, writing meant much more learning skills that would get you a post with a merchant or a civil servant. The guild of master-writers considered teaching these skills their monopoly, preventing, if they could, anyone else teaching it. But the schools gained some rights in the matter. Batencour taught from only several lines of models, but also gave

practice in copying bills, leases, etc., “so as to form them to secular business.” Even this was encroaching on the master-writers’ domain. While the colleges were not much interested in writing, limiting it to hasty note-taking badly written, in the little schools it was looked upon as a useful skill, the beginning of a craft. The children learnt to write Gothic, Roman and italic characters. Associated with writing was the *jet* or a special way of calculating with counters (*jetons*). This also was part of their training in “secular practices” or business, if only to get round the money system of livres, sols and deniers (similar to the former English system of pounds, shillings and pence).

Since the basic purpose for creating these schools was to teach the children their faith, especially their duties, religion had a marked place in the school time-table. There was daily Mass and daily prayer. Each day there was a fifteen minutes’ catechism lesson and all Wednesday and Saturday afternoon the study of the diocesan catechism. The curriculum of the little schools at its best, exemplified in Batencour’s school, included therefore: religious instruction, reading Latin, plain-chant, reading French, study of a treatise on civility, writing learnt as a skill, and arithmetic. Batencour’s school in the parish of St Nicolas-du-Chardonnet, was a parish school, still fee-paying. It would need a master with some commitment to follow a way of running a school like Batencour, sustained as he was by the ideals of the community of priests that Adrian Bourdoise had founded there. He may have taken ideas from the Daughters of St Genevieve, who, as has been seen, taught 300 girls in three classes in his parish. Other congregations of sisters ran parish charity schools in the capital. How well the individually run little schools were managed, we do not know. The wasteful method of teaching individually seems to have still prevailed.

Charity schools for the poor

There was concern from above for the ‘religious depravity’ of children left on the streets, in some areas because they were the children of Calvinists. The very orthodox and bourgeois Company of the Blessed Sacrament sought to impose, as Catholics admittedly, their view of order on the masses. It was people such as these collectively, or individuals through legacies, or the churchwardens who administered the parish funds, who helped parish priests to provide a master or mistress or two and hire premises for the free schooling of the poor.

The tendency always was to reduce the financial demands of such charity by limiting admission to the destitute, certified as such by the parish priest. Those far more numerous other poor were discounted who had some form of employment, but were quite unable to pay a little master. So also were some

able to pay from the poorer guilds who might wish to come to the parish school. The result was that the majority of the poor were still not provided for, and that those who were, received schooling as a form of welfare. The 'charity school' segregated the needy and kept them apart. "It was still the Christian idea of free schooling; but interpreted in a period of social inequality. The Middle Ages opened the same school to all, rich and poor, without demanding anything of anybody. The poor, in the seventeenth century, are put separately: learning is given to them as an alms."¹⁶ In the stratified French society of the day, not many would wish to set their children among the ragged and flea-ridden poor. But if other parents suffering hardship were willing to send their children to join the poor, the parish did not refuse. The little masters were ready nevertheless to protest if any such were allowed in. As to the teaching, it was given by untrained teachers, usually clerics in minor orders, but they could also be lay people. The curriculum followed that of the little schools. The children in such schools could be numerous, as in the one the Brothers took over at St Sulpice, so that there were problems of learning and discipline. There were difficulties in keeping masters, apart from death and illness.

If we take into account both paying schools and parish charity schools, there were, then, in the late seventeenth century, very many schools teaching the elements, while the parish schools were also trying to provide religious instruction. De La Salle did not appear in an educational desert. But the curriculum was not geared to the real needs of the children, and almost all the working poor still roamed the streets. There lacked a clear aim as to what a suitable education of Catholic urban children involved, and above all there lacked the influence of stable, highly motivated and trained teachers committed to making a Christian education accessible to the poor. There was a lack of vision and will to break with the past.

THE CATHEDRAL PRECENTOR AND THE MASTERS OF THE LITTLE SCHOOLS WAGE A CAMPAIGN AGAINST THE CHARITY SCHOOLS. THE BROTHERS' SCHOOLS BECOME A TARGET

In the capital a number of parish priests had set up charity schools for the working poor. Joly was outraged because such parish schools were set up without reference to his jurisdiction. He did not like the clergy's argument that it was their right and duty. And these schools, as we saw above, were never limited to the wretched poor. He complained that as soon as they opened, children of the more comfortably well-off - artisans, merchants, bourgeois - attended, to the detriment of the paying schools. There could have been very few attending, but it was an argument made the most of. It was true of some girls' schools - those of Barré's Sisters and of some other congregations.

The Precentor had the right to visit schools outside his jurisdiction, usually

through a 'Promoter'. The latter had been indignant to find a girl's school in a parish where there was nothing but cleanliness, instead of the dirt and rags that he looked for as the sign of down-and-outs. Another school held two hundred tidy girls, so that the schools dependent on the precentor were "deserted". If the Sisters drew a few away from the little schools, it was because they taught well, not individually but as a little united staff. The mistresses in the district schools were not willing or able or allowed to change and teach better. It should be noted that girls attended school for only a short time, and their schools did not call for attack. Even boys were not kept beyond the age of eight, the age after which those who could and wanted to do so, went to a college, and the others were expected to find useful jobs, or simply roamed the streets.

The Precentor's was an old-fashioned control, centring on his rights, not on the children. He claimed that no little school could operate without his consent, and he insisted that parish charity schools were such schools. Thus Claude Joly quoted a deed of 1646 to claim the right to approve a parish poor school provided he appointed the teachers, who had to request a renewal of their permission every year. No child was to be accepted who had not a certificate of poverty from the parish priest, and every three months a list of the pupils had to be sent to the Precentor's office so that the situation of the families could be checked. It was, as Rigault says, a very 'draconian' regulation. "You can imagine the vexations that resulted from such clauses. Reporting, formal enquiry, house check, after more or less well justified complaints from the masters of the paying schools always ready to cry: "Thief!" when the defection of a pupil made them lose fees."¹⁷ On 5 January 1665, the *Parlement* had forbidden any one to open a little school without the authorisation of the Precentor, under pain of confiscation of the "things used in school" and a fine of 500 livres.

Parish priests objected to this, wanting to be masters in their own house. Charity schools increased in Paris, helped by the teaching congregations, and the priests, joining forces, decided enough was enough and appointed teachers themselves. Claude Joly published in 1678 a work with the quite formidable title of a *Historical Treatise on episcopal and church schools, for the rights of the Precentors, Chancellors and Scholiasters of the cathedral churches of France and especially of the Precentor of the Church of Paris, over the schools entrusted to them, against the initiatives of those who disturb the ancient canonical order which must be maintained for the good education and instruction of youth. By the Reverend Claud Joly, Precentor and Canon of the Metropolitan Church of Paris, Appointer, Judge and Manager of the Grammar Schools or Little Schools of the town, suburbs and district of Paris.*! He wrote it in 1678 because in

February that year the University had won a lawsuit against him. Delving into the past to back up his rights, he attacks the University, the Master-writers and the parish priests. He complains there are so many charity schools that you would think the parish priests had concerted their action to ruin the “district schools” that were his domain. He says that their duty to instruct their parishioners can apply only to faith and morals.

The quarrel went on, but the parish priests were able to have their way in practice. On 20 September 1684, Archbishop Harlay gave the following decision: Future parish priests must obtain letters from the Precentor in order to run their schools. Actual parish clergy will continue to run their schools without these letters. The parish priest appoints and dismisses teachers. Over the school door must be a notice: ‘Charity school for the poor of the parish.’ Only those may attend who are on the parish register of the genuine poor. The precentor and other Chapter delegates may visit the schools in the presence of the parish priest¹⁸.

Only where a school was being neglected or no longer supported by the parish priests could the little masters hope to stem the tide, and even then by calling in the master-writers they feared. Joly was an elderly man looking to his privileges and to the past. In his *Advice and Regulations for the Schools* in 1678, he insisted that the masters in his “district schools” should begin reading with Latin syllables. With no training, his masters would follow his advice and keep to the traditional and fight back when new approaches left them behind. People like Joly were perpetuating an old system to the ultimate detriment of the masters they claimed control over and whom he failed to train in new ways. It was important for De La Salle and his Brothers to be informed of the value of these claims to jurisdiction in order to avoid mistakes and unnecessary friction, and yet to stand firm for the rights of the children once they had sized up the situation and found it wanting.

The success of the school in the Rue du Bac draws charges by the little masters, backed by the Precentor

To return to the situation at the beginning of 1690: under the guidance of Nicholas Vuyart and his companion, the new school in the Rue du Bac was soon full, with the reputation of being well organised and of having a remarkable effect on the boys. The new school benefited, evidently, from the reputation of the one in the Rue Princesse. Between the two, five hundred boys were being educated. With their exact time-table, their well-planned teaching, the discipline and silence, and their large numbers, these schools stood out above the others. So much so that some of the artisans of the lower crafts, seeing the progress in reading and writing and sums that the poor were making, began sending their sons there; so too, it seems, did some of the

lower bourgeoisie.

The little masters were alarmed.¹⁹ They claimed the school had no right to be there because it had not the express authorisation of the Precentor of Notre Dame. They maintained that some who could afford to pay were going to this school so that it was no longer a charity school for the poor. It was not for the Brothers, however, to demand a certificate of poverty of their pupils - that was a matter for the parish. Usually, any family allowing its child to sit alongside the certified needy was assumed to be in poverty and the boy was allowed in unchallenged; so also were any shameful poor. The better-off would avoid the humiliation of letting their children mix with the 'rabble'. Very few other than the poor - official or not - had begun to attend the Brothers' schools. But here were two schools that showed up the inefficiency of the little schools, and Monsieur De La Salle seemed to have an inexhaustible supply of men to draw upon. It was jealousy as much as anything else that moved the little masters to act. The ultimate question, which would arise as the Brothers' schools increased in number and reputation, was whether the backward methods and the privileges and the fees charged by the few were to hold up the education of all the children of the artisans and of the poor, thus confining free education to the few officially recognised as needy by the parish.

The little masters had formed the guild of the *Masters of the Little Schools*, recognised by Joly. As such, if any other person taught without authorisation of the Precentor, they had the right to seize the furniture needed for the school. On such an occasion, the four masters at the head of the guild wore a robe of office to emphasise their position and the legality of their action. It did not take the Masters of the Little Schools long to act. Sometime in February the four masters did come solemnly in their robes to the school and had all its furniture taken away, and followed this up by an official complaint to the Precentor, who on 23 February passed sentence against De La Salle and his two co-defendants and ordered the school to be closed. The school in the Rue Princesse existed before the arrangement of 1684 and could not be attacked on the basis of not being authorised. But Baudrand, the new parish priest, may have overlooked this for the new school, about which de la Barmondière had begun negotiations. The matter could have been settled by reminding him.

Joly's claims against parish priests' rights after Trent were wearing thin, and M. Baudrand urged De La Salle to take up the matter and appeal, which meant going before one of the courts of the *Parlement*. De La Salle disliked fighting people in this way; he knew how ignorant some men of the law could be. The examinations for these higher courts were a farce, and the most ignorant candidates were admitted.²⁰ (There is the true story of three stu-

dents who travelled to Orleans in July 1651 and arrived at the door of the Faculty of Law at ten o'clock at night. Three Doctors who were in bed, on being informed that the candidates had their fees with them, came down with their doctor's hat over their nightcap and put some questions to the candidates. Next day they celebrated their new status as lawyers.²¹) He knew also how long drawn out a case could be, and that a formal decision would create a lasting enmity. But if he did not appeal, it meant the children of the poor were on the streets. Baudrand, as his spiritual director, made it an obligation for him.

Accordingly he prepared his case. Before it was due to be heard, he and the Brothers went early one morning fasting to the church of Our Lady of Virtues at Aubervilliers, six miles to the north. This beautiful fifteenth century Gothic church of what was then a little country town was a popular place of pilgrimage for the people of Paris; de Bérulle, St Vincent, Fr Olier had been there. The Brothers assisted at the Founder's Mass and continued for three hours to ask Our Lady's intercession in the crisis. They ate only from one loaf shared among them, and then returned to their community. De La Salle remained fasting till the evening meal. His appeal was fixed for 18 March. He presented it with such strong arguments that he convinced the Court. The *Parlement* overturned Joly's decision, and he acknowledged that the Brothers' schools were true charity schools depending on the parish priest of Saint Sulpice. The defendants had a right of appeal to the *Parlement*, which they made on 22 July but their appeal was not upheld. On the same day, the *Parlement* gave its final decision, requiring the Masters of the Little Schools to restore on the day after St Andrew's feast the papers, books, tables and benches they had seized. De La Salle and his two co-defendants Brothers Vuyart and Legentil (we know their names because they were cited by the Little Masters) were required not to accept payment for their teaching.

The decision leaves De La Salle and his Brothers without legal rights. He secures the necessary recognition from the Archbishop

By law, then, the parish priest had the right to say who taught in his schools and when they should leave - to hire and fire, in short. De La Salle had in law no such right. If he and the parish priest should disagree, he had no redress. In law also, it was the parish priest and the Precentor who had the right to visit the classes, check on the quality of the teachers, pay their wages, reprimand them if need be. One has to remember, too, that the parish bore all the financial charge of the school: upkeep of the personnel, of the buildings and the furnishings. Baudrand was very generous to De La Salle - as he had reason to be - but as a superior of the community, the Founder seemed to have no right of control over the school nor over the changes in the commu-

nity.

Legally, the Brothers were a team of parish workers paid by the parish priest. But they were also, albeit without legal existence as such, a society of Christian teachers with their own identity, already serving in several towns. The Rue Princesse was a base for De La Salle's Institute in Paris, and it might become its permanent centre, as the house in Rue Saint-Maur had become for Barré's Sisters and the house in the Rue de la Mortellerie for his Brothers. The little society needed to develop within itself its own patterns of formation and its own ongoing formation or spirituality. It needed its own strong community life and identity; it needed its own superior to unify and guide it.

The Founder set about making his position as head of the community clear to the archbishop, to the Precentor, to the parish-priest of Saint Sulpice, and, when it arose, to any other parish priest who might ask for Brothers.²² Church law forbade any community or confraternity to be established in any town without the written authorisation of the Ordinary. This he already had, through M. de la Barmondière. But here was a question of gaining recognition of who was the superior of this lay group. Since breaking with his past he had striven to avoid any notice of himself, and it cost him in that sense to take the step of writing to the archbishop of Paris, his Grace François de Harlay, asking him to recognise him as superior of the masters known as Brothers of the Christian Schools.²³ It was granted, though in what terms we do not know,²⁴ but it must have given him rights that could be challenged only by going to the Archbishop. The parish priest's position vis-à-vis the school, and De La Salle's as superior with regard to the community, were now clearly distinguished. In addition, for the Brothers to be mentioned in a positive way in a document - even though at the moment they had no legal existence - meant in that century a certain recognition beyond mere tolerance. De La Salle was given no other ministry in the diocese: this community running two schools and possibly more later, was judged important enough to have a priest delegated to look after it.

With this assurance, he knew the superiorship was saved for Henri Lheureux and that his community's identity and proper spiritual growth were safeguarded. But ultimately the Society depended on the Providence on which they were founded. At the moment things were going well; the schools were bursting at the seams, their good effect was remarked by all. The Rue Princesse was beginning to become a novitiate and training-centre. We know in fact of at least one 'little Brother' or postulant at the Rue Princesse in 1688. He was Pierre Narra, baptised at Charenton, five and a half kilometres southeast from the centre of Paris, on 6 October 1677. He lived in the house in the Rue Princesse from the age of ten, according to the Brothers' Archives, and took

the habit on 8 December 1695, when he was eighteen, with the name of Brother Paul. He died in the Brothers' house of Saint-Yon, outside Rouen, in 1751.²⁵ His family must have moved into Paris looking for work. The age of ten brings him to 1687-88; possibly he was a boy in the school when the Brothers came in February 1688. He may have asked and been admitted to live with the Brothers at the end of that school year, when he was approaching eleven.

It is an example of a young boy being attracted to a vocation very early in life. The Founder took time to let him see if his call was genuine. However, the delay till 1695, when he was eighteen, before inviting him to join the community may have depended on the crisis to be described later. Circumstances at the moment seemed so favourable, with M. Baudrand giving warm support, that De La Salle moved his group of postulants from Rheims to Paris.²⁶ As M. Baudrand took over the parish on 7 January 1689, it was probably in that year that he brought them over, along with new Brothers and Brother Henri Lheureux. Either the postulants were not being well prepared in Rheims or he felt the need to train them himself. Brother Henri Lheureux was a thorough and brilliant student at the Sorbonne, if the impression he made at St Denis's in Rheims is anything to go by. In discussions he was very slow to answer, so much so that his fellow-students called him the great ox. But when he spoke, his answers were so much to the point, that he seemed to have the sharp eye of the eagle.²⁷

To ease the crowded state of the classes in the Rue Princesse, the Founder negotiated on 28 June 1690, a rent for thirty livres a year for the use of an adjoining yard that had been used to store firewood, charcoal and other materials. (Four years later, he had this sum made part of the overall rent of the house which was then 600 livres.) His real need now was for another property for use as a novitiate, but he had no funds, and had to wait on Providence.²⁸

TROUBLE, ILLNESS AND CRISIS

Monsieur Baudrand wants to change the Brothers' dress for a clerical one

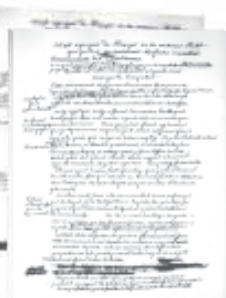
The very question of the community's right to exist in its own way that he had sought to safeguard arose when Henri Baudrand, some time in 1690, it seems likely, took objection to the Brothers' dress.²⁹ It was, as Blain points out, so plain and so unusual, that it attracted the ridicule of the masses and the disdain of society people. Many would have agreed with Baudrand that it should be changed ("the public thought like Baudrand"³⁰) even if they might not go along with his proposition that the Brothers should adopt clerical dress. As Baudrand's request is mentioned after the opening of the new school, it

could be that since the two Brothers walked a fair distance to their school and back twice a day, comments began to come to him about the dress of these employees of his.³¹ While the Brothers lived and taught in the Rue Princesse, they had been less noticed. The parish priest thought he had the right, as employer of the Brothers, to request the change. He probably did not raise the matter till the lawsuit over the new school had been settled. It can be said not to be a question of animosity. It arose from a point of view a parish priest might not think of querying until someone forcefully presented the other side of the case. The Founder, much as he might dislike it, and much as he respected Baudrand, knew he had to defend the independence of the community as such, for this was the point at stake. He also knew, from past experiences, the attraction that the clerical state and its eminent position in parish and local civil life had for Brothers compared with their work among the poor. One can add that he was virtually obliged to give an answer, since, as he says in his memoir below, Baudrand had been airing his views for some time.

Had he yielded here, then either the Brothers in Paris would dress differently from those in Champagne, or he would have to impose clerical dress on them, which was not his way. He would also have to give way when parish priests or other employers elsewhere asked for some other change, and the central control he saw necessary for his society to function would be lost. To accept the cassock meant accepting that the Brothers, like other masters, would be seen as clerics in the wide sense, and would be liable to be asked to do certain clerical duties similar to those expected of the village schoolmaster in a parish short of 'clerics'. He therefore composed very carefully that *Memoir* on the habit quoted from earlier.³² It would seem from what his biographers say, that he showed his draft to some persons of authority at the seminary. In particular, he showed it to someone whom he terms a very wise person, and whom Blain identifies with Monsieur Tronson. It may well have been him, but he was very discreet about the affairs of other communities. Considering that the discussion is about a community and about attitudes to its dress, De La Salle might have consulted the superior of the Jesuit novitiate close to the seminary, or the Vincentians. He refers to both these congregations in his *Memoir*. With the support of such people, he then showed his document to those opposing him on the question of the habit. These would include Baudrand and some of his confreres, unless the plural, (as later on Blain uses with his successor, who was much more determined to alter the government of the Brothers' society) is a discreet way of avoiding obvious mention of one man..

An outline of his defence

We still have, in the Brothers' Archives in Rome, the original draft that the Founder made of this document, with numerous corrections and deletions.³³



His final version has not come down to us. One could ask: why a memoir at all? Could he not have seen Baudrand personally? If he went public in a limited sense, it must be because a certain number, presumably among the clergy of St Sulpice, had the same idea as Baudrand, and this is what the biographers imply. A careful answer that could be passed round was necessary. He opens his defence by making of Baudrand's request the point at issue:

Whether it is a good thing to change or keep the dress that the Brothers of the Christian Schools wear at present. He then deals with it under several headings.

1) *What is this community and who are those that compose it?* His intention is to make clear what is the origin, purpose and present organisation of the total community or little society that has already spread into Champagne. He wishes to bring all this to the knowledge of his group of readers with the implication that had the parish priest known the whole situation, he would not have made his request. He intends to make clear that the community (i.e. the whole little society) of which the Brothers in Paris are only a part, has its own identity and has already diversified its activities, prior to Baudrand meeting them.

This Community is ordinarily called the Community of the Christian Schools, and at present is neither founded nor endowed except by Providence. People live in it according to rules, with dependence for everything, without any property and in an entire uniformity. They are occupied in this Community with keeping schools free of charge in towns only, and to teach catechism every day even on Sundays and holydays. He then explains how (in Rheims) this society trains country schoolmasters, and has another section for training boys of fourteen and over who want to join the community. He has already been quoted on this in Chapter 8.

Those who make up this Community are all lay people, without studies (indicating college and further studies usually undertaken only by those entering the Church or studying law or medicine) and at the most of mediocre intelligence... They do not make such studies 1) because college studies are not necessary for them; 2) because later on they would be an occasion for leaving their vocation; 3) because community exercises and the work of the schools demand the whole man.

Refusal of college studies is not an anti-intellectual stance, but a level-headed recognition that the courses leading to the degree of Maître-ès-arts had no bearing on the work of the little schools. The Brothers studied what fitted the real needs of their students. That this was no negative thing is

shown by their creation near Rouen of a new secondary education for the commercial class of this developing town with a very broad range of subjects studied and practised (See Ch. 13, p. 464).

2) *What is the form of the habit worn in this community?*

He describes the Brothers' dress in detail. He shows it had a very practical origin. When deciding whether the heavy cloak should become their distinctive dress as a community, or be replaced by a short mantle, rather like that of clerics, the mantle was rejected for four reasons quoted further back (see p. XXX), some practical, others because they would be wrongly wearing clerical dress, or because they could be tempted to disappear with a smart dress at the first temptation.

3) *The danger of introducing change of any kind into a community.* This is commented on below.

4) *The danger of changing the dress of a community*, with particular reference to his own community.

He speaks of religious communities being most careful to keep unchanged the shape, colour and quality of the cloth, and the dimensions of the habit. The Brothers' dress has been accepted now for five years in five towns of Champagne, and he says fairly bluntly: *The Brothers of the Christian Schools have been employed in Paris for nearly two years with this same dress, and no one during that time has spoken of it by way of complaint, except that for some time now the parish priest of Saint Sulpice has spoken out fairly strongly about it. It seems that if this dress should be criticised, it should have been when the Brothers of the Christian Schools came to Paris and before they were employed in the schools. They should have been told then that they would not be allowed to keep schools with this distinctive dress and they would have to take a more customary one. They would then have to see what should be done about it.* Since the habit was adopted early in 1685, his mention of five years helps to date his memoir.

5) *Reasons for adopting a special dress.*

He now gives at length the reasons for adopting this distinctive dress and which favour keeping it. These were seen in an earlier context. Broadly, he is saying that for people like his Brothers, who are *for the most part uneducated, without elevation of mind and without college studies, and acting usually only by their impressions*, something is needed to make them realise they are a community and to help them to stay in it. It is an argument from

immaturity, but he makes the most of it for the purpose of his memoir, extending it over twelve points.

6) *The disadvantages of a clerical dress for lay people.*

Finally, he marshals all his arguments against a change that would mean adopting clerical dress. It doesn't fit men who have not had the college and university studies and who are lay people; their wearing it could rightly be objected to by bishops. Wearing a clerical dress, they would be expected when need arose to put on a surplice and help in church functions. *This need will often arise, he says, because there are few clerics in most town parishes; often there is only a parish priest, or at most a curate with him.* Note his use of the term 'cleric' in the wide sense. The Brothers would be tempted to look down on their difficult work with the children (as was noted earlier with reference to the problem in Château-Porcien) if they were to take on various 'clerical' functions, and might think of being tonsured and studying for the priesthood. He ends with some practical points about a flowing clerical mantle being on the one hand cumbersome in school, and at the same time ineffective, compared with the Brothers' heavy cloak, to keep them warm in winter in the classroom.

To sum up: very politely, but very firmly, through selective argumentation, De La Salle is safeguarding this little congregation of lay schoolmasters, the "work of God" that he has been called to take charge of. The message of his *Memoir* can be summed up: "hands off", expressed with charity and diplomacy, and spelt out through arguments to which Baudrand and his supporters would be susceptible.

For this is a document of special pleading. We do not have to take such a paper as giving us his founding principles for his society. What stands out, for instance, is that three times he makes out the Brothers to be uncouth, of average intelligence, very impressionable, kept in order by the habit.³⁴ Yet he knows that some men from well-to-do families had entered, that some were very capable, such as Lheureux and Vuyart, both known to Baudrand. The majority would be from the poor classes, rough and ready perhaps, but that did not make them stupid, and some were well advanced in holiness. You do not get here his loving dedication to them because it is not that sort of writing. What he is saying is: "Surely you do not expect such men to don clerical dress!"

In this memoir he shows himself a man objecting to change. Yet to accept that he was a man opposed to innovation is to fly in the face of his courage to promote change through his whole life-work. He was aware of what the reforming movement was achieving and in which he worked. Finally, he writes

as though the habit did everything to make people Brothers: *They need something that makes an impression on them, whether to encourage them to enter or to keep them there and make them observe the rules.* He knew himself that Brothers left in spite of the habit. Much more than that, he knew that although structures help, the sense of vocation and dedication were basic. When he came later to list the essential supports of his society, it is the Brother's own spirituality that he highlighted and certain community practices, not the habit. He says nothing here, out of prudence, about the vow of obedience the Brothers were taking since 1686; yet this had much more to do with the Brothers' dedication and unity.

The document was aimed at people like Monsieur Baudrand. The latter could well have drawn up a counter memoir, defending changes. He could have cited the whole reforming movement and in particular, Vincent de Paul, Olier, Barré and others, and even De La Salle against himself. But the Superior of the Brothers had his facts too well marshalled. One could not miss the point he was making. Unfortunately, the parish priest was unable to admit that he was perfectly right. He could not accept the distinction between his role as employer within the parish of Saint Sulpice and De La Salle's as superior of a society already having its own organisation. Instead, he manifested a certain coldness towards him and he began to get the reputation of being stubborn.

The adoption of the Brothers' habit arose at a certain time and place. It was in part determined by the bitter winters of that century. At another time and elsewhere it would have been different, even in a place no further than the south of France. But the Brothers themselves begged him "to give them a habit that distinguished them altogether from people in society."³⁵ What it should be was discussed in the manner noted earlier. It was not particularly distinctive, since it resembled the dress worn by the trainee country masters. This was one *usually worn in society, except that it is black or at least dark brown, and (they) are distinguished from other lay people only by bands and shorter hair.*³⁶ This was the kind of professional dress other teachers would wear. It had been Nyel's dress. It is, down to the hat, that of the "poor man", the seventeenth century wooden figure in St Alban's cathedral, England. In the context of that century with its literally hundreds of social distinctions marked externally, "the dress usually worn in society" (by schoolmasters) undoubtedly means here "the dress appropriate for this category of lower class people". Not for them the plumed hat, the doublet and hose, the buckled shoes. Even so, while dressing like poor schoolmasters, the Brothers differentiated their habit sufficiently and regardless of fashion, for it to be distinctive of themselves only, so that it symbolised their community and what it stood for. The memoir contrasts the country teachers *who stay only*

a few years and have no other dress than the one usually worn in society with the Brothers who stay in community for the rest of their lives and are marked off by a different habit. This was useful in an age which looked at how you dressed in order to judge where you stood socially.

CRISES

A crisis in Rheims and failure of the postulancy after its transfer to Paris

By the year 1690, La Salle's work in Rheims was in danger of collapsing and the postulancy or novitiate failed in Paris itself, partly for different reasons.³⁷ We have already seen that one local postulant was admitted in 1688, probably after the summer break. The postulancy "survived in Rheims for about two years after M. De La Salle left. Once he was established in Paris, he judged it opportune to bring it under his eyes, and he gave the Brothers' habit to some of those who belonged to it." Unfortunately, M. Baudrand put pressure on him to let these boys serve Masses in church during the morning. It was against what he would have preferred, for they were in the sacristy till midday, waiting their turn and killing time before or afterwards. For a time, all went well. In turn they would don a purple cassock and serve Mass, and then return silently to their place in the sacristy.

But being too long away from the atmosphere of the community, they slipped into misbehaviour. It gave Compagnon, whom Baudrand had made sacristan at Christmas 1689, the chance to cause more trouble and to estrange these young boys from De La Salle. Whatever the causes, they began to leave the postulancy. After a few months, he withdrew from Mass-serving those who were left, sent away those no longer interested, and gave the habit to the remainder. We have the record of a Charles Frappet of the diocese of Rheims, who took the habit with the name of Thomas on 5 August 1690 at the age of nineteen. His name will figure often later. Another from the Rheims diocese, Jean Boucqueton, entered May 1691 at the age of eighteen, with the name of Brother Jean François.³⁸ For a serious postulancy, given the present atmosphere in the parish and the cramped quarters of the Brothers, it was imperative to obtain premises elsewhere but not too far away. The Founder was still waiting on Providence.

On top of all these troubles, he had the astonishment and sorrow to see the two Brothers he had first brought with him to Paris turn against him.³⁹ When Nicholas Vuyart and others joined the community by January 1690, he placed one of the newcomers at the head of the community. Quite reasonably, it would have been Vuyart, especially if he destined him also for the priesthood. The two Brothers couldn't take having a newcomer, even if he was one of the longest in the society, as their Director. They had come to see themselves

having a sort of primacy. They argued with the Founder about it, and were not prepared to accept his decision or the reasons. They began to flout his authority and make life difficult. Before the end of that year one of them left the Brothers. De La Salle felt deeply his departure as one of the community, apart from his gifts and qualities. He was “tall and well built, a good penman, skilled in bringing out young people, zealous to instruct them, pious and irreproachable in his conduct”, but unable to “tame his pride.” His departure must have saddened and disturbed the community; and it left one place less in the school. Because of the problems in Rheims and with the postulants in Paris, there was no one available for several months to take his place. The Founder, once more, filled the vacant role. It did not prevent the other disaffected Brother in the community from continuing to be a thorn in his side for a couple of years more.

De La Salle falls gravely ill

It is not surprising that towards the end of 1690 his health began to give way.⁴⁰ It showed itself first by exhaustion. Blain blames his usual severity towards himself, including sleeping often fully clothed, on a plank or on the bare ground. and making his journeys on foot. One can think of the severe winters, but one can also think of strain and the depressing effect of his situation. Yet instead of listening to himself, he undertook another journey on foot to Rheims, to deal with problems there. Then, although he felt unwell, he wanted to return to Paris. But his weakness was too great, and he had to go to bed. This was so new in their experience, that the Brothers were alarmed. “They regretted the consolation they had of having him in Rheims. They would have preferred him to be in Paris and to know he was in good health.”⁴¹ What he seemed to need was plenty of rest and nourishing food. The Brothers in their poverty did their best for him, and prayed constantly for his recovery.

His grandmother, Perrette Lespagnol (or Madame Moët de Brouillet, to give her her married name), was still alive and seventy-four at the time. She was very fond of him, and when she heard he was ill she did not shirk going into the poor quarter of Rheims to see him. She took for granted she could go up to his room, but he had her delayed in the parlour, struggled to dress and went down to see her, trying also to hide how ill he was. She was indignant that she could not have gone up to his room. But he explained that while there was no real reason why she should not, his gesture would strengthen the rule about no women being allowed in the house and none, not even close relatives, in their community quarters. It seems exaggerated to us, but it was something that would not be forgotten by these impressionable young men. The recent desertions were a proof of how fragile they could be, and power-

ful examples of this kind spoke louder than words.

Once he felt better, he thought of returning to Paris, against the advice of the doctors. He did set out, arrived thoroughly exhausted and ill, and had to go to bed immediately. After six weeks, the illness led to a retention of urine that brought him to death's door. It was the turn of the Brothers in Paris to be alarmed and to resort to intense prayer. But they also sought help from one of the best doctors in Paris, the Dutchman Helvetius. He proposed a remedy, but warned that it could go either way, and that his patient should receive the holy viaticum or holy communion given before one's final passage from this world. M. Baudrand himself brought the Blessed Sacrament in procession with several priests, either from their house in Rue Guisarde or from the seminary staff, carrying lighted candles. Jean-Louis De La Salle, who had often been at his brother's bedside during these six weeks, would certainly have been among them. Many other people followed - though this was usual - and the doctor himself came. The Brothers were in tears and so upset that M. Baudrand did his best to encourage them, and to promise his support. But no one could take the place of De La Salle if he died. They gently asked him to give them his blessing and say a few words. On the prompting of M. Baudrand, he gave way. In a very feeble voice he said: "I recommend you to have a great union and a great obedience." A priest had to help him to make the sign of the cross. Then, sitting up, and wearing a surplice and stole, he received his Lord with great reverence. Helvetius remained behind to perform the operation after the others had withdrawn, and then left his patient for a while.

M. De La Salle did not know whether he would survive or not. He had had time over these six weeks to see how the hopes he had brought with him to Paris two years before were now replaced by the crumbling of the work in Rheims. If he died, there was no doubt that, humanly speaking, the work would die with him. His trust in Providence was tested to the full. But the conviction was with him that this was the work of God.

The operation turned out to be successful. After a few days, the patient was able to eat and soon was on the road to recovery. In his humility, and so as not to be a burden to the Brothers, he asked to be sent to the Hospital of Charity. This was a hospital in the Rue des Saints-Pères consisting of three immense wards run by the Brothers of St John of God, brought to Paris by Marie de Medici in 1602. She had this hospital built, equipped with four-poster beds. The Faculty of Medicine now stands on the site. If the great *Hôtel-Dieu* near Notre-Dame, looked after by 200 sisters, doctors and priests is anything to go by, food was abundant, but hygiene was not, and deaths were frequent. Blain calls a hospital "that last refuge for human wretchedness." The Brothers would not hear of De La Salle's going there, and contin-

ued to look after him to the best of their ability. He seems to have got back his strength, thanks to this care and his strong constitution. It is not clear where this illness fits in with other events. Working carefully on the memoir on the habit, perhaps late at night, may have helped to bring it on. The document could have been handed in before or after his illness.

Death of Brother Henri Lheureux

The affairs of the community in Rheims required attention again. One hopes that the Founder was wise enough and the Brothers insistent enough for him not to travel till he was perfectly restored and the weather favourable. Before he left, he appointed Brother Henri Lheureux to replace him as overall Superior. He counted, on his return, on preparing him himself for ordination. But he had hardly reached Rheims when a letter came saying this Brother was ill.⁴² As he had left him in perfect health, he paid no attention. Another letter came, and then another, saying the doctors had given up hope. But Henri Lheureux was of such a strong constitution that he put this correspondence down to over-concern about something they could see to themselves. But then he got a letter reproaching him with not having taken the others seriously, and telling him that the Brother was dying. What had been a small fever turned into a raging one that brought on delirium. He was staggered by the news and set off at once. But so rapidly did Henri Lheureux decline, that he had only time to make his confession and receive Extreme Unction (as the sacrament of the sick was long called) before he died.

He had been buried two days when the Founder arrived at midnight after three days' hurried travel. It was terribly painful news for him: "It is thought that never in his life did he receive a deeper wound in his heart.." He actually shed tears and had to let something like a quarter of an hour elapse while he was so moved with deep sorrow. Then he took hold of himself and told the Brothers that he accepted this as the will of God. But the "Why's" must have arisen in his mind for some time yet until he could absorb and accept it fully. At the same time as he was moved by these feelings, he grasped with clarity the providential meaning of this Brother's being taken away. He declared there and then that there should be no priests in his society.

He must have come to recognise already that his plan to have a priest as Superior of his society and also "of having a priest in each main house to confess the Brothers and say holy Mass for them" was not what God was asking. This may have become clearer as he wrote that memoir for Monsieur Baudrand. His plan had been to interpose priests who would be the spiritual directors of the community as a sort of shield between that community with its 'Brother Director' and faulty attitudes in the Church around him. But it did not arise from the inspiration he had received from Nyel and through subse-

quent events, and he must have realised it. He wrote much later to Brother Gabriel Drolin: "As for myself, I do not like to commit myself in anything... Providence must lead the way first and I am satisfied. When it appears that I act only by his orders, I have nothing to reproach myself with, whereas when I do the undertaking, it is always me, and I do not expect very good results from it, nor does God usually give it a great blessing."⁴³ Perhaps he judged this as being such an occasion. His was to be a lay community centred on a new conception of ministry to the children of the urban poor. He would have to rely on and work with Providence again and wait for his society to be recognised in the Church in God's own good time.

There is some uncertainty as to the dating of Henri Lheureux's death. The biographers place it after the Founder's two illnesses and his subsequent visit to Rheims, and so indicate a time near mid-1691. But the insistence in the memoir on the habit that no Brothers undertook the university studies that led candidates to the priesthood would have no weight if Henri Lheureux were still there.⁴⁴ One can bear in mind, however, that it envisages his community teaching in Baudrand's parish. Nevertheless, when the Founder said, in what could have been his last recommendation to the Brothers: "I recommend to you a great union and a great obedience", he did not refer to Henri Lheureux as being the one to whom they should now transfer that obedience.

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Appendix: the development of the workhouse system in Paris under Louis XVI¹

The Middle Ages had a very high reverence for the poor man who was so involuntarily or by choice. The *ancien régime* preserved from those times the idea of help for all, of private almsgiving and distributions of food on special occasions. In most places there would be a hospital-cum-hospice, as at Château-Porcien and Guise. There was a great current of compassion throughout the century, inspired by St Vincent de Paul.

But now, in the dominant and commercial classes this Christ-like view gave way to a negative image. Town authorities and members of the bourgeoisie saw in all beggars a nuisance and a danger, “vampires of the people and of society”, as we saw in the case of Rheims and Lyons. For mercantilist writers, the poor were useless, for they were not producing wealth in an age when the national production became an essential value in competition with other states. “Deemed crude, ignorant, depraved, rebellious and, above all, lazy, the wages of the lower class had to be held as low as possible. Thus were the poor kept industrious, while the country gained competitive advantage in international commerce.”²

There was a first effort, by religious and municipal leaders combined, to get the adult poor back to work on construction sites or in artisan workshops, and the children into trade apprenticeships. Poor relief committees were tried out in Paris, Lyons and Rouen. They were public services run by lay people, centralising donations that were no longer given out personally but through a board and subject to justifying one’s need. Here again we have seen Rouen, Rheims and Lyon with its *aumône général*. The registered poor had to come at a set time for their alms, and bear a distinguishing mark: a lead badge in Lyons, a yellow cross in Rouen, a red or yellow cross on the shoulder in Paris. This reform expressed the ideal of order and social stability more than charity. The poor must be disciplined and set apart in an essentially urban, civilised and orderly society.

After 1640 political reasons (law and order) under the guide of religious and moral principles, replaced economic arguments. The reason for this change of aim was that the many rural and urban uprisings up to and especially during the *Fronde* led the aristocracy and the monarchy to work together to keep

the lower classes in check.

The idea grew that the unemployed begging poor should be removed from public life, confined and made to work. Poverty must be kept out of sight. Need was punished like crime. The Company of the Blessed Sacrament was the driving force in this field. Most of its members were nobles and magistrates. It waged an unflagging campaign, amongst other things, against the “disorders of the poor”, especially begging and vagabondage, which reached proportions in this century unknown hitherto. At the same time, it saw it as a solution to the problem of religious instruction of the poor. Instead of the scattered efforts of lay people, of zealous bishops and reforming clerics and of municipalities, it looked to the workhouse, regulated by the state and funded from what state, Church and towns could provide. It was they who persuaded Louis XIV to encourage the founding of *hospitaux généraux* in the towns “in order to contain beggars and to instruct them in piety and the Christian religion.”

Such a hospice for Paris was created by royal edict in 1656. It amalgamated several existing institutions of different types and was given the power of compulsory internment for all beggars, who were to be worked hard. When it opened in 1662, 4000 were confined there in a climate of coercion rather than of charity. This huge building, the *Hôpital de la Salpêtrière*, is now behind and part of the modern hospital of La Pitié/Salpêtrière, alongside the Gare d’Austerlitz.

In 1662 Louis issued an ordinance encouraging every town to set up its own General Hospice, to deal with all types of urban poor. The result was to put all beggars, enforced or not, at the margins of society, and to be liable to be rounded up. In 1700, to be caught twice begging meant the galleys. Not all the unemployed could be locked up in this way, but the very existence of the workhouse would terrorise the poor, and make them prefer working for the least possible wage.

There was still the view, promoted especially by Colbert, that providing an extensive, cheap and docile labour force would enable the nation’s wealth to be used to the full. But in fact, either as workshops or training centres, the *hospitaux généraux* had little impact.

“Repression, mercantilist insistence on productive labour, and Christian charity were conveniently rolled into one. Illusions about the Paris *hôpital général*, however, were soon dispelled, as resistance to the *archers* (this means the town police) who were supposed to round up the poor increased, and as rumours spread that some of the inmates were deported to America. Deportations did occur regularly till about 1720. By the end of the seventeenth century, of the 10,000 or so inmates that the various sections of the Paris institution housed, the great majority were unfit through age, disease, mental disturbance or

because they were too young to work. The workhouse had become a prison, a dump for misfits or the superfluous.”³ It was a place where most died, where, reared apart from families, apart from society, they discovered no self-identity and, if they survived, returned to society as strangers.

Among both the ordinary people and the well-to-do, other forms of welfare persisted and competed against confinement: direct almsgiving, creation of welfare hospices, care of the sick, of prisoners and of loose girls, and the foundation of free schools for the poor.

The Brothers of the Christian Schools never served in general hospices, except temporarily and under pressure in Rouen. Their aim was the Christian, social and economic liberation of the poor as valued members of the Church and of society. The poor were not looked upon from above as a problem, but were lived with and loved.

There was some similarity of intention in the two ways of dealing with the poor: improving behaviour and ensuring salvation. But what a difference! The Christian Schools were never for the poor alone- a segregated poor. As part of their understanding of bringing them redemption, De La Salle and his Brothers provided them with the means of escaping from subsistence-level insecurity and hard poverty through gaining skills far above what the workhouses or, indeed, anyone at the time taught them. When members of the Company of the Blessed Sacrament came to see the value of the Brothers of the Christian Schools in taking children off the streets and Christianising them far more effectively (and much more cheaply) than a workhouse, they had to take the whole package that these Brothers believed in. Being religiously minded if biassed men, they would tend to accept. We began to see in this chapter that in Paris in particular, there were vested interests that did not.

References

1. See Pierre Goubert et Daniel Roche, *Les Français et l'Ancien Régime*, Vol. II, Armand Colin, 1984, 93-99; C.Lis & H. Soly, *Poverty and Capitalism in pre-industrial Europe*, Harvester Press, 1979, 116-124, 129; Thomas Munck, *Seventeenth Century Europe 1598-1700*, Macmillan 1990, 195-7; Arlette Farge, *Vivre dans la Rue ... Paris au xviiiè siècle*, Gallimart/Julliard, 1979.
2. Lis and Soly, op. cit., 117.

3. See quote in William Mann (ed.)'s *John Baptist De La Salle Today*, De La Salle University Press, Philippines, 94, taken from John Boswell's *The Kindness of Strangers: The Abandonment of Children in Western Europe from Late Antiquity to the Renaissance*, First Vintage Book Edition, 1990, 433, 444.)
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Chapter 10: The Founder recreates his little society and develops new means for sounder growth: 1691-98.

He faces the crisis

The death of Henri Lheureux, although a cause of deep sorrow and shock for De La Salle personally, was not a crisis for his society, since it helped to clarify its identity. There was instead a general predicament threatening his work within and without.¹ There was no novitiate, and only one candidate presented himself before 1692. The 'seminary' for country teachers in Rheims was close to folding up. There had been many Brothers who had left. The work seemed no better advanced than seven or eight years previously. In addition, many of those remaining were exhausted and some were ill, and the defections must have left them dispirited. None of this was helping either their work or their spiritual life. A real revitalisation of the society was needed, both in terms of each one's relationship with God, and with effective provision for the future of the work.

"He found himself then no doubt in a great perplexity."² He was reaching forty, a time when men often go through a crisis when the value or futility of their career so far comes across to them. Was all that hard turning his back on his social origins, his giving up his canonry and all that this meant, the persecutions he had accepted, the tough lifestyle he had chosen to adopt to make of himself God's willing instrument, to come to nothing? With his total involvement in the work and his sensitivity to success and failure he may have felt very low as he had been in the Rue Neuve when his second batch of masters largely withdrew. But he clung to his faith that this was the work of God. He found hope in the fact that the majority of the Brothers (for we have to remember those in Paris, Laon, Guise and Rethel) had remained faithful, and that the results of their work in the schools were already visible. With his own plan for the government of his society abandoned, he put his faith in the Brothers God had given him.

He associated with him the two Brothers he trusted most as having the best spiritual understanding of the work and the longest experience of what it meant: Brothers Nicholas Vuyart and Gabriel Drolin. He must have moved the latter from Laon during the summer vacation of 1691. He thus had two counsellors with whom he could share his faith, his vision of the work, and with whom he could pray, discern and plan for the future, and whose objective counsels and encouragement could support him. "After many reflections on the means to prop up an edifice which threatened ruin,...he was inspired to associate with him the two Brothers he believed most suitable to support the nascent community."³ Together they were able to measure the problems and

try and mend for the moment what could be mended.

They put together a plan of action that they hoped, with God's help, would restore the life and mission of their society. Since Vuyart and Drolin were taken up with schooling, De La Salle would be involved in much of the research and execution. His, moreover, was the special founding charism. As no one for the moment was offering to join the Brothers, the first tasks concerned those in exercise, by catering for those exhausted and ill, and for deepening the spiritual life of all, particularly of those who had been only a few years in the society.



The house at Vaugirard: a second birthplace for the nascent society

For quite a while he looked around for some property within his means, in the country but not too far out, to which he could call these Brothers.⁴ Beyond the Rue de Vaugirard as it left the Paris of his day for the south-west and became in open country the Grande Rue (the whole is now the Rue de Vaugirard, one of the longest roads in Paris), he found, about three kilometres from Saint Sulpice, a long, narrow property at right angles to the Grande Rue, extending along where there is now the Rue Copreaux as far as the present Rue Blomet. Fields and gardens surrounded it; the area was well known for its country air. Crowds of Parisians walked out there on Sundays. It was just within the boundary of the parish of Vaugirard, a village some twenty minutes' walk further. It housed mainly innkeepers and vinedressers, for the vine was still a main crop around Paris. The Lesser Seminary, a provision for clerics of small means, had its summer house near the parish church. Its director was Fr Baiÿn, who had been such an inspiring friend to De La Salle. The future Canon Blain would have been here, too, in the summer vacation, for he was a seminarian at the time. The main seminary had its summer house in the village of Issy, some two to three kilometres further along the road to the southwest, so that M. Tronson would be there, too, in the summer.

The Founder seems to have obtained the lease of the property just considered for a very modest sum. It was in poor state, with ill-fitting doors and windows, and broken panes. He got together a few benches and a few straw mattresses and blankets. Then he invited the Brothers in Paris to come and spend Thursdays and Sundays there. Fortunately, it seems to have been at a warm time of year. Just to rest, to walk down country lanes, to sleep in quiet, were great restorers for these young Brothers, and they would be there all the summer vacation. The name Vaugirard conjures up for the De La Salle Brothers the memory of the second birthplace of their Institute, a place of primitive fervour. As a novitiate in particular, its lack of comfort recalls the image of the stable at Bethlehem.

Armand Ravelet, in his *Saint Jean-Baptiste De La Salle*, takes us along

the road the Brothers would have followed in those days to go to Vaugirard: "Setting out from the Rue de Vaugirard level with Saint Sulpice, M. De La Salle would go alongside the Luxembourg gardens in the direction of our Rue d'Assas. Opposite, in the midst of vast planted grounds, was the Carmelite monastery. A little beyond the Luxembourg gardens among those houses which today come before the Rue Notre-Dame-des-Champs, was the convent of the Annunciades, a big house that the Saint was to live in later. The city ended there. The Rue Notre-Dame-des-Champs had buildings only on one side. On its western corner was the convent of Saint Thecla; then the open plain began, and extended along both sides of the actual Rue de Vaugirard as far as Vaugirard and Issy." Some distance further on, beyond the new southern boundary of the city - still an unfinished boulevard - you passed on your left a windmill, and a short mile further out on that side you could see three or four others. "On the right, the great Rue de Vaugirard was also bordered by fields." Apart from two convents, there was no building till the one at the limit of Vaugirard, rented by M. De La Salle. It was long after still called the "Brothers' House" even though it had become a well-known hostelry. "This house, the first of the village, then stood on its own; next to it was a boundary stone bearing the arms of the domain of Saint Geneviève. So far, you had been in the parish of Saint Sulpice; but on one side you were adjacent to the territory of Grenelle, a fief belonging to the abbey of St Geneviève-du-Mont (the one in the Latin Quarter), and on the other to the village of Vaugirard."⁵

Here the Founder called the Brothers from all the communities once the schools had closed in September, to renew together in a month-long retreat their diminished fervour. The fidelity of some to his call was nothing short of heroic. For instance, the Brothers from Rheims, Guise, Rethel and Laon were asked to meet at the Swan, a hostelry outside Soissons, to wait for one another so as to proceed to Paris together.⁶ One of them was that Brother Joseph, who had acted as tailor and jack-of-all trades in Rheims, and in 1688 had been sent to teach in Laon, presumably because one of the two Brothers who went to Paris was transferred from there. He made the thirty kilometres to Soissons in great discomfort from asthma, and also from a monstrous wen on his knee, as big as his head, that he had gained from praying so much on his knees. He had to hold it up with a leather strap. He was twenty-nine at the time.

Brother Jean Henry suffered worse. He could only have been twenty-one, but he was affected with sciatica such that as he walked his body swung from side to side and set it in violent agitation from head to foot. In spite of medical attention, he was like a "decrepit old man". Yet he set out bravely from Rheims with five other Brothers to do the almost sixty kilometres to

Soissons. The other Brothers took it in turn to support him by the armpits, and so he arrived at the rendezvous. Brother Joseph was so evidently in need that they forced him to take the river-coach along the Aisne and the Oise as far as Beaumont, with some Brothers accompanying him. Jean Henry was able to give the impression that he felt better after a night's rest, and the others let him continue on foot with them. He struggled on another ten kilometres or so and then collapsed. They then half supported, half carried him, stopping as he had to every four or five steps. He often fainted. Over a few days they carried him some eighty kilometres in this way until close to Paris they were able to hire a cart. The driver threw a few bundles of hay in it and they gently placed Jean Henry in it. The other Brothers were so worn out that the driver offered to take them as well, free of charge. Some accepted, some went ahead to show the way, and some went on by a different route. All the way through Paris the little procession of Brothers in their still unusual dress drew the yells and insults of idle gawkers "from St Martin's Gate to the parish of Saint Sulpice", where no doubt those who knew the Brothers soon stopped them. Brother Joseph arrived sooner, although he had still had to do another forty kilometres after landing at Beaumont. Yet he was eager to take part at once in the exercises of the retreat.

De La Salle must have been full of pity, admiration and astonishment on seeing the state and the courage of these Brothers. He had not been aware of these ailments, and, used himself to travelling on foot, assumed that these mainly young Brothers, from a tough background, coped easily. He said that in future Brothers who found travel difficult in this way should go by stage-coach. "M. De La Salle, taught by all these adventures...that it was necessary to provide coaches for Brothers who were indisposed, for them to travel, saw to it in future. (He had) not even given it any attention for the more than twelve years he had been working at the formation of his Institute."⁷ At the end of the retreat, he saw to it that the two infirm Brothers travelled back in this way. Brother Joseph was told that he should not travel any more. Back in Laon, he developed a wen on the other knee. Yet he still struggled into class. Three years later, in 1694, one of the bigger boys in the school, for some reason, fixed a penknife into the Brother's chair. He sat down on it and was cut to the bone. He died after three days, on 1 March. He was buried along with Brother Bourlette.⁸

The retreat at Vaugirard lasted a whole month. Residence in a country property, however spartan, was a balm for the Brothers. They were uplifted by the Founder's talks on communication with God in prayer, the life of faith and their mission to the children of the poor. He encouraged them strongly to take on the necessary self-denial to safeguard it. He must have felt, from their reactions, that by the grace of the God his Society had taken on new life.

From now on, it was decided, the annual retreat would take place in this country spot, and the rest of the month spent sharing the novices' training.

The youngest Brothers are retained for a further year

As far as the youngest entrants were concerned, De La Salle and his two counsellors considered that a longer period of this 'in-service training' was needed. Those who had joined the Brothers in the last four or five years had lived through a depressing time for the Society. They could only be few in number, but several, it may be recalled, had received the habit in Paris after the collapse of the postulancy and had been sent to various communities. He determined to keep these few youngest members with him at Vaugirard for a whole year.⁹ There was the problem of how to replace them. "Fortunately", writes Blain, belying what he had said previously, "he had at his disposal outsiders that the 'Seminary' at Rheims for country schoolmasters had provided him wit. He was able to use them to replace the Brothers he kept back at Vaugirard. In this way all the schools in Paris, Rheims, Laon and elsewhere, carried on as usual". This implies possibly half-a-dozen Brothers needing replacing, and at least as many schoolmaster trainees available to take their place. It may have been the last batch, waiting to take up posts in their villages. If so, they received an unexpected bonus in teaching practice.

This "novitiate" opened on 8 October 1691, with a ten-day retreat. During it, De La Salle learnt of the death of his grandmother who had died on 7 October, aged seventy-six. At the end of the year, perhaps he saw these young Brothers as he wished them to be. He now followed up this period of renewal by asking them and all the Brothers to write to him every month to say how they were progressing or not, so that he could send back his advice. He was a gifted spiritual director of great kindness and discernment. How unfortunate that of the several thousand letters he must have written to his Brothers, only some 120 have come down to us, the earliest dated 15 May, 1701.

What we have in the above developments is a sound strategy for what we call nowadays ongoing formation: finding a suitable site; giving all the Brothers an extended retreat; catering more for the recent entrants; planning an annual retreat in this spot; initiating the practice of monthly spiritual direction by correspondence. It was not adhering to a prefixed pattern so much as seizing on new possibilities that one initiative suggested as its follow-up. They would be prayed on and discussed in the light of faith and adopted with courage and prudence. For this was how this little inner group of three had acted so far. It was ready to move into things new, to decide appropriate measures on the basis of a common discernment. But beyond them it was for the whole Society to become alive to and to decide together their common project: the

establishment of the Christian schools. Once a novitiate was functioning - the key piece in their strategy - a general assembly would have to be prepared and called.

These same concerns are still alive today. The present Rule of the Brothers says: *The life of an Institute is a continual challenge to be creative while remaining faithful to its origins. It can sometimes call for difficult commitments, as John Baptist De La Salle discovered at various points in his life. The life and development of the Institute depend primarily on the mystery of grace. By the gift of freedom, however, the Lord has willed to place the destiny of the Institute into the hands of the Brothers who are committed to work together so that it will prosper and remain faithful to its mission. It is above all to Jesus Christ, to his gospel and to his Spirit that the Brothers are faithful.*¹⁰

THE HEROIC VOW OF 21 NOVEMBER, 1691

Early in the extended session for the youngest Brothers, the three came to a decision. They had had time to listen to all the Brothers now and review the whole situation. To recognise and promote this Society's inner life-drive arising was the primary task. They came to understand it as a constant striving to have the mind of Christ in daily events so as to share it with his poor. The Founder termed it the spirit of faith and zeal. To run their schools well, to counter long-entrenched views on schooling and current attitudes towards the education of the poor were also basic aims. They wished to make of their schools Christian communities prepared specifically for urban lay life. At present all there was to achieve this was a tiny and one might call convalescent society. All the Brothers needed to be brought into this project by a process of consultation that De La Salle, against the absolutist and authoritarian trends of the times, had begun in Rheims at the outset. At some time, an assembly of the Brothers would need to be called for them to discern and decide collectively.

It was fitting, for their project of lay Christian education to be carried out, that their society be composed exclusively of laymen. It provided maximum awareness and concentration and unity on the issues involved, and removed as a hindrance the current clerical trends towards status, benefices and outdated views on education. These were coloured by the belief in the need for Latin for learning plain-chant and helping in liturgical functions, and by the dominantly clerically-directed schooling in the past. It is not that there were no clerics - after all, the Founder was one, and before him Bourdoise and Barré and again Démià - who could see what the real educational needs of the poor were. But they were mainly from the bourgeoisie, and rare were those who could give up their pre-conceptions and stand out against their



clerical world. For them, moreover, the priesthood provided a genuine ministry. They could not see a ministry, still less a basic ministry for the upbuilding of the Church, in a function where the major part of one's time was employed in teaching the elements. A lifetime in such work was not for them. Jacques de Batencour is a great exception, and there were others, but even they could not break free from certain traditions. It was a matter of knowing and loving the children as they were, of learning their needs by living among them, of discovering together for them ever improved ways of educating them. Through this understanding of their work, the Brothers would discover the theology of the new ministry given them by God for his Church. When, in a distant future, their schools throughout the kingdom made the new attitude to schooling accepted and self-evident, no one would want to go back. But how many barriers to pass through, and how much time, before that happened!

The corollary to lay membership was that the government of the society should be in the Brothers' own hands. This seems self-evident, but because at that time religious communities of men involved the priesthood and priests as Superiors, and that communities of women were given an ecclesiastical superior, a male community that was lay was a novelty in the Church hard to accept. Its not having the priestly character meant its members were looked down upon. That they forwent also the study of Latin and the humanities only weakened their position.

The vows the Brothers made were private ones within the community. Had they wanted to make the usual three vows of religion, it would have to be in some way by a public profession and the bishop - unless it were first recognised by the Holy See - would first have to authorise the community as such after seeing and approving its rules, and that might include changing them and confining the new society to his diocese. Moreover, a royal edict of December 1666 had forbidden "any founding of colleges, monasteries, religious or lay communities... without express permission from us by letters patent", preceded by an enquiry taking in the views of the civil authorities, parish priests and superiors of religious houses. Communities attempting to exist without authorisation would be incapable of accepting or acquiring any property or of performing any civil act. It was a case of either letting every authority in the town say how you ought to be organised, if at all, or of remaining legally defenceless. This is how, in fact, the Brothers were and how De La Salle saw they must be, for the moment. One can recall how Canon Roland was worn down by such procedures.

The other serious and basic question where he and his two counsellors foresaw trouble - had it not already occurred? - was: "Who were the clientele for their schools? Who were the poor, and should they learn skills only as far as the dominant class thought fit?" We have already seen skirmishes

round these issues. They will return and lead to a protracted struggle.

In short, for the foreseeable future there would be a long haul of trial and of opposition to the young society from the forces of inertia. And so the three decided to commit themselves by a consecration to God sealed by vow, made only by themselves personally before offering it to the whole society. We call this *the heroic* vow that surely can rank among the many great decisions of renewal groups in the Church. Having worked out and prayed its terms together, the three chose 21 November 1691, feast of the Presentation of Our Lady, to pronounce this consecration in turn on their knees:¹¹

Most holy Trinity, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, prostrate in a profound respect before your infinite and adorable majesty, we consecrate ourselves entirely to you, to procure with all our power and with all our care the establishment of the society of the Christian Schools in the manner that appears to us to be the most agreeable to you and the most advantageous to the said Society.

And for this purpose I, John Baptist De La Salle, priest; I, Nicholas Wiart, and I, Gabriel Drolin, from this moment and for always until the last survivor, or till the establishment of the said Society has been completely achieved, make the vow of association and union to bring about and maintain the said establishment, without our being able to abandon it, even if we were to remain just we three in the said Society, and that we were obliged to beg alms and live on bread alone.

In view of which, we promise to do unanimously and with a common consent, whatever we believe in conscience and without any human consideration to be for the greater good of the said Society.

Done this twenty-first of November, the day of the Presentation of the Most Blessed Virgin, 1691, in faith of which we have signed.

The document is formal in tone. It bears the mark of the Founder: commitment and abandonment to God, clear grasp of the aim of the society and a calm determination to work towards it through all obstacles, with the help of God. It marks almost a refounding of the Society: two Brothers share in the original inner commitment of De La Salle, who himself renews it with a new intensity. It is a tremendous act of faith that God has given this work a future. It is an event of which the Brothers of the Christian Schools can be proud. For the first time the words *association and union* appear. They will continue to appear as one of the hallmarks of the Brothers because they are a constituent of their consecration to God. "This commitment by two Brothers that M. De La Salle regarded as the columns of his wavering Institute was the sole resource on which he founded his hopes at the time. In case death

should forestall him before he had consolidated it, he entrusted to the zeal of his two main disciples the care to achieve what he had begun.”¹² In spite of the solemn opening, there is a trusting faith, a two-way relationship underlying the commitment. We want to act in the way, they say, “that will appear to us to be most agreeable to you and the most advantageous for the said Society.” In other words: “We have faith that what we have discerned together in unity in your presence on behalf of all your little Society and to its advantage, comes from you and will be accepted by you.”

We may have in this consecration an example of De La Salle taking inspiration from others. In this very village of Vaugirard in 1641 Jean-Jacques Olier and two other priests began community life, the idea being to work towards the establishment of a seminary in spite of the collapse of a previous attempt by the Oratorians at Chartres.¹³ “To judge according to the rules of human prudence, this foundation seemed completely unreasonable. It was quite rash to go and attempt such a difficult work in a dilapidated village, without any temporal support...”¹⁴ “The three ...resolved to join together in (God’s) service and form a Society. As the aim they set themselves was to procure the glory of the most holy Trinity, by the means of priests,” they decided to take as the model of their society that of the three divine persons, taking divine love as their sole bond, without any vow, as Father de Condren had recommended.

Accordingly, the three went on a pilgrimage to Montmartre (which was then outside the capital) and consecrated themselves to the most blessed Trinity with the promise to stay together and work for the instruction and sanctification of the clergy. They did so in these terms:

“Three priests, finding themselves called in unity of mind to the service of God and of the holy Church, to train for him ministers to serve his greatness worthily, believe that in honour of the divine society of the three Persons...they should unite by a holy promise never to leave one another nor to give up the plan that it has pleased God to show them...”¹⁵

The wording of the consecration, here abbreviated, is more fulsome than De La Salle’s, for he has a sharper concentration on future action. That comes in part from a longer experience; his work has already been functioning.

1692-1693

Baudrand opposes a novitiate at Vaugirard

The first struggle and disappointment concerns M. Baudrand’s opposition to the opening of the novitiate.¹⁶ There seem to have been some postulants ready, whether in different communities or housed temporarily at the Rue

Princesse. We know of one boy, Jean Police, aged fifteen, from Soissons, who was admitted to the Brothers on 2 September 1692 and took the name of Brother Philip. (He died at Avignon in 1752).¹⁷ De La Salle had taken up his residence at Vaugirard; he would have told M. Baudrand about his plans. The parish priest would be happy to see the Brothers working in his schools coming back refreshed from their visits there. But when the Founder spoke to him of his intention to start a novitiate that would cater for the needs of all his existing schools and hopefully for other ones, M. Baudrand opposed it, and his refusal effectively stopped this project which was vital for the society. It is not clear why he could stop it, for one thing, nor his motives for taking such a stand. Blain can only guess. De La Salle was not asking him for funds. He was apparently going to stretch the small enough subsidy (500 livres) he was receiving from the parish for the upkeep of himself and six or seven Brothers. He had done so already to feed his earlier postulants. For the rest, he would trust in Providence.

But Baudrand may have foreseen that a considerable number of novices might come to Vaugirard and somehow fall to his charge. Perhaps he had enough sensitivity to the frequent peasant disasters to judge he might soon have an increased number of beggars at his door without these novices to cater for. One can sympathise with that point of view. The parish, indeed, was already in financial difficulties. When work on the new church was halted in 1678 through lack of funds, it was found that Bretonvilliers and the churchwardens had heavily overborrowed and were in debt to the tune of 530,000 livres. Two commissioners appointed by the king sold all the property owned by the parish and set a tax on the parishioners to cover the remainder of the debt. This tax was paid between 1689 and 1699.¹⁸ There may have been another reason: already the Barré Sisters had a large novitiate and training-centre in his parish that sent out Sisters to several other parishes in the capital and to places well beyond. Twelve of these Sisters were teaching in Madame de Maintenon's College de Saint-Cyr, near Versailles. Perhaps he felt what he considered his hold on the Brothers was loosening, too. He may have had a parochial view, wishing to limit De La Salle's work to his own vast parish and having no intention of supporting, as he had been willing to do in the past, his work elsewhere.

But these possible motives do not explain how Baudrand could actually stop the project. If the Founder had opposed his parish priest over the habit because of the real principle of the independence of his society being involved, how much more would he not see himself bound to follow him now. Perhaps he had to consider Baudrand giving a negative opinion to the archbishop. There may also have been a recognition on De La Salle's part that the hostility of the parish priest of Saint Sulpice and his withdrawal of support

would only make more difficult the struggle he foresaw with vested interests over his decision not to limit his schools to the registered poor.

Baudrand made clear his attitude was a final one. The Founder was thereby thrown into a spiritual dilemma. It was clear to him that a careful novitiate training corresponded to God's will; yet through events God was saying no. It was an invitation to him to come before his Lord in prolonged, humble and trustful intercession. To that he added fasting and also penance. Once again the depth of his prayer escapes us, and the intensity of his penance frightens us. "For the space of almost a year that this opposition lasted, he fasted every day, he prayed almost all night in a remote room, and he only ceased when in spite of himself sleep came and closed his eyelids and took away the use of his senses. And so, obliged to give in, he fell to the ground and slept there. It was on this bed of beaten earth where he did not fail to catch cruel rheumatic pains ...that the Brothers found him lying cold and frozen when they went to speak to him in the morning on some matter."¹⁹ The Brothers who were following their "second novitiate", worried about the effect on him of all this, begged him to stop. But he continued and increased the use of disciplines, hair-shirts and the like. M. Baudrand got to hear of it, and sent one of the Brothers to tell him to stop, because a novitiate was not God's will.

Yet early in September 1692 he let De La Salle know he had no further objection. "(Baudrand) was forced to give way to the strength of the prayers of the servant of God, who took the precaution of obtaining from Mgr Harlai Archbishop of Paris, the necessary permissions to give the House he occupied the form of a Community, so as to avoid all the difficulties that could have been raised against him."²⁰ This is similar to his move the previous year to get recognition from the archbishop for himself as superior in the Rue Princesse. This authorisation would entail, as for the Rue Princesse, the right to receive new members, and Baudrand could hardly appear to be in opposition with his bishop's approval. The joy and gratitude to God the Founder experienced offset the departure of the second of the two original Brothers from the Rue Princesse, who one day went so far as to strike his Superior in the face, and then left.

From the Founder's concentration on prayer and penance one might gather that he was dead to the world. Yet on 30 July 1692 he arranged through notaries the sale to the Sisters of the Holy Child Jesus in Rheims for the sum of 350 livres of a number of arable strips of land from which he had gained rent, situated near Rheims. Possibly this was to have in hand some funds for the novitiate. On 1 September 1692, he acquired another house in Rethel donated to him by a Mme Bonvarlet, but which had a tenant, a certain Monsieur Past, who paid an annual rent of 68 livres, "to be used for the subsist-

ence and need of the little Masters of the said Schools.” The negotiations had occupied him before that time. The large house he originally bought for the community and school in 1683 he leased to the municipality for use as their school (run by the Brothers) for 220 livres. As already recorded, on 1 July 1687 John Bajot, a chaplain at the hospital, had sold him for 600 livres an adjoining house.²¹ The school and community in Rethel must have been growing. His waiting on Providence, as in the case of the novitiate, might test his faith, but he also responded diligently when means to support the schools were offered him.

The tough life at Vaugirard

On 1 November 1692, he gave the habit to six novices, one of them entering to be a serving Brother - a new interesting development that was meant to benefit community life. For Brothers teaching in school had also to see to shopping and cooking and the maintenance of their house. In their packed day it interfered with due time for community spiritual exercises and overworked them.²² We also know of a novice from Mézières, François Blin, who took the habit on 25 May 1693 with the name of Brother Ambrose, at the age of twenty-one.²³ The Founder was Director of novices the first seven years, as well as being bursar and caterer, not that these two functions took much of his time in the poverty in which they lived. For several months he also took on himself to wake up the community at four-thirty, but because of his short sleep, he several times failed to hear the alarm on the clock, in which case he ate kneeling during the midday meal a piece of dry bread.

Canon Blain has concentrated at length on the rigours of the winter and still more on the extremes of penance and mortification practised in the house. His is a grim picture of the novices' life. Prayer and its times of consolation, brotherly love and community virtues do not figure in it. He has, moreover, no place for the training the novices had as future teachers. His selectiveness may indicate what he and those of his times looked for in 'holiness'. We depend on him for our picture of Vaugirard. It does not do full justice to the Gospel ideal and mission that the Founder and his Brothers expressed in their Rule. Yet is not the effort of new beginnings in the Church often pitched very high, and were not penance and mortification and flight from the world stressed in De La Salle's writings?

There was no doubt that life at Vaugirard was tough. "They had for bed only a bolster stuffed with barley straw and a poor and very hard straw pallet, set on planks resting on two trestles, without mattresses, without curtain, a simple blanket and sheets of the coarsest cloth."²⁴ But the poor were used to this. However, it might do in summer, but the novitiate started in November, and throughout De La Salle's lifetime the weather was colder than now:

“Especially 1650-1720 AD, a cold period occurred. This is referred to as ‘the little ice age’, and not unreasonably, because glaciers in Europe, Iceland and elsewhere did advance as a result.”²⁵ In 1692 the Seine froze over. At Vaugirard, the novices woke up to find the moisture from their breath frozen on their sheet, which was stiff as a plank; those near the windows might be soaked with rain or covered in snow. “Changing linen in this house was another painful mortification. On Saturday evenings, each one, finding on his pallet throughout the winter a stiff and frozen shirt, which had not been able to dry in a time of frost, was obliged to take it as he found it.”

Blain goes on at length about the mortifications practised in the house. “After night prayer, he saw himself surrounded by Brothers; some of them asked his permission to take the discipline, others to stay up in prayer and meditation until eleven o’clock or midnight, some to sleep on the ground...One of the Brothers who was sweeping the room where he slept, found one (a discipline) dripping with fresh blood recently shed, wrapped in a paper that was stained with it.”

If the biographer is to be believed, there was never any cooking in the house the whole seven years it was in use. The bread, soup and food such as the poor ate were brought daily the two miles from the Rue Princesse in a basket carried on the back, and reheated only. The contents consisted of the leftovers from the table of the community of the priests of the parish of St Sulpice and of several other poor communities, together with “tripe and cowheel.” Rain and bad roads could mean that the novices were kept waiting for their meal and sometimes, during the famine that befell next year, the carrier was relieved of his load on the way. One day the cook - if you can call him that - and who must have been the novice intending to be a serving Brother, found in the garden plenty of a certain plant that he presumed was good to eat and would do in place of other vegetables. He served it up, and the novices, as soon as they tasted it and found it terribly bitter, left it, saying it was poison. It was wormwood or absinth, a very bitter aromatic plant. They may have had a good laugh over it at recreation time. But the Founder had eaten his portion without apparently noticing - and he had it served up to them next day, until nothing was left. They would remember, too, the flies that dropped into their soup in the summer months - and of how their Superior ate all his with the soup, and how once, when he saw a novice pushing them to the side of his plate with his spoon, he made him a sign not to be so particular! Blain says he has “the testimony of a Brother who is still alive and was a witness to all that is reported here.”²⁶

He waxes descriptive over the miserably poor dress of the community. “All their clothes put together would have made only a heap of rags covered with vermin, fit to be thrown on the dung heap....When they had to go to the parish

church at Easter or on the feast of Saint Lambert who is its patron, they needed two or three days to tidy themselves up.” Even so, “the vermin which is rarely separated from extreme poverty left a great empty space round them in the churches.”

It is a pity we do not have the direct account of a former novice. It could be a very different story, with its funny side seen in retrospect. Blain, to do him justice, does also record De La Salle’s goodness towards his novices. “Gentle, affable, thoughtful, he opened hearts, he won confidence...His face always happy, serene, tranquil and gracious, he attracted the most timid and inspired them with an entire freedom.”²⁷ His manner would be the one he recommended in 1709 to a Brother Director: “You must not be alarmed over those who fall into faults, but you have to draw attention to them with winning cordiality, and particularly by doing so in a few words. This is very important. Do, please, try to have an engaging manner, and make it one of your chief occupations to bring about union among your Brothers.”²⁸

With the door open to anyone, even if they stayed only a fortnight, it is a mystery how he provided for so many extra mouths. Sometimes the homeless took up abode. Sometimes travellers used the house as a hostel for want of better. Some of these might be priests. They were left free to say Mass daily, to get up later than the community, to go in and out on their business. But apart from a measure of wine at each meal, they had to accept the same food as the Brothers. But because the house was convenient for them if they were travelling to Paris on any business, there were usually two or three who took advantage of it. They would say Mass for the novices if the Founder had to be absent in Rheims or some other community in Champagne. Some also, as his reputation grew, came to make a retreat under his direction.

Among the postulants, true or feigned in these hard times, some came - perhaps only two out of every dozen - “that were led by the Spirit of God” as Blain says, and the number of novices rose to thirty-five. This number seems to mean either the total number of novices who in its seven years passed from the house at Vaugirard into the schools, or the total number in a year, including the many who did not stay long. The remarkable thing was that only one or two of them who became Brothers were from among the poor. Most of them were comfortably well-off. Blain remarks that this was De La Salle’s reward for having sacrificed his canonry and his patrimony. And he adds this valuable note: “ ‘Since I have left everything,’ he often said himself, ‘I have not known a single one who has been tempted to leave on the pretext that our Community is not endowed.’ It is with these words that he ended the memoir on which we have worked till now.”

It was Brother Bernard, we remember, who used this memoir very directly to cover the first fourteen years of the society, although what we have from

him only covers the Rheims period. Bernard gave his work the title: “The wonderful guidance of divine Providence in the person of the venerable servant of God, John Baptist De La Salle...” Surely he was merely modifying the Founder’s own title, for Blain writes that it was “a memoir written in his hand to teach the Brothers the ways in which Providence had given birth to their Institute.”²⁹ The time of crisis was perhaps over. Perhaps De La Salle considered it the moment to leave in writing his conviction that God had inspired and watched over his work. It meant, in all honesty, narrating his part in it; this is probably the reason why he kept it hidden until it was found accidentally twenty years later while he was in the south of France.

More financial transactions

During the first year of the novitiate, the Founder was again involved in receiving and laying out money. His grandmother’s estate, comprising houses and lands, was divided for three-quarters among her three surviving sons, and the remaining quarter among her four grandsons and granddaughter, children of Louis and Nicole De La Salle. The deed was signed on 23 June, 1693. John Maillefer, his brother-in-law, signed for John Baptist. (Later on, on 30 July 1695, the five grandchildren, Jean-Louis signing for John Baptist, transacted the division of their lot.) Each share must have been worth at least 20,000 euros francs today. As being an addition to his patrimony, he probably as usual had it divided among the other four of the family; but we have no document to that effect.

On 23 November, 1693, he bought another house in Rethel, in the Grande Rue (High Street) for 350 livres from a certain Miss Aubry.³⁰ (She had given him 300 livres to pay for this house, “next to the free school, provided it is joined to the said school” on 8 August 1685.) Besides these expenses we have to remember that he had rent to pay on the property in the Rue Neuve in Rheims, on the property in the Rue Princesse and on Vaugirard. We do not know how moneys came to him in the early days to help him to meet his expenses, but it was the done thing in those days even for the fashionable to help the poor.

A contemporary witness to life at Vaugirard

We have notes written up by a contemporary to confirm to some extent what we know of the novitiate at Vaugirard. A Fr Leonard of St Catherine of Siena was a Discalced Augustinian who lived in Paris in the latter years of the seventeenth century and the early years of the eighteenth. He had wide contacts and a wide correspondence and picked up all sorts of gossip of the day, especially of a religious or literary character. These remain written up as his notes and also in his *Memoirs to serve the history of several persons*

illustrious by their piety and their virtue. What he writes on the house at Vaugirard shows what people were saying more or less correctly about De La Salle and the Brothers:

“*M. De La Salle, 1693.* In our neighbourhood there is something peculiar happening, it is at Vaugirard. Only recently a community of twenty men has gathered dressed in wretched short mantles that reach to the calves. They leave their house only in the morning, when they go two by two with an admirable modesty to a chapel. When they reach the door they remain drawn up in two lines until their Superior, having passed between them, enters and makes them a sign to enter...During the mass they stay as if in ecstasy, some having their eyes fixed to the ground, the others to heaven. ... They communicate with no one...It is said they only eat soup that one of them fetches each day from Paris. That is what common rumour repeats about this community.....Only four of his men have short soutanes, and even so the majority are full of patches and sewn with almost white thread...The rest are only peasants that he tries to train to make of them village magisters.”

All, then, wore the “wretched mantle” as a protection against the weather; but the novices received the robe or soutane only before going into a community (while still being novices) for their teaching practice.³¹ With the taking of the habit went a new name - the ‘name in the society’ - but they were part of the Society from their entry to the novitiate. As their numbers in Vaugirard were swollen by the many who joined temporarily, the picture becomes clearer: those without the robe or soutanelle are the novices, mistaken for peasants being trained for village schools. He also says that “several of these people destined to be schoolmasters go to the Sorbonne to take lessons in theology.” This is evidently a misapprehension. It may have been talk arising from Henri Lheureux’s attendance at the Sorbonne. The four mentioned as wearing a robe may have been Brothers, either from the Rue Princesse, or Brothers needing to recuperate. “The principal occupation of this virtuous cleric,” Fr Leonard goes on, “is to train schoolmasters. He used to live in the suburb of Saint Germain, but now at Vaugirard...He intends to set up in Rome. With all that, good-looking, well built.” Not the grim, emaciated man one would expect from Blain’s account.³² The statement that “M. De La Salle intended setting up in Rome” is significant. The fact that this had got to Fr Leonard’s ears meant the Founder had not kept it secret. He had let it be known that he would seek the protection and approval of the Holy See for the work to which God had called him. It was a bold and far-reaching plan when he was hardly out of a crisis.

The famine of 1693-94³³

He would realise that intent as soon as possible. Meanwhile he was put in great difficulty by famine. In 1693, after a bad harvest, the price of bread increased fourfold and many of the dependent workers in the towns were thrown out of work, while, as usual in a calamity, starving peasants flocked to Paris and elsewhere. This famine was one of the three severest “crises de subsistence” of Louis XIV’s reign (the other two being in 1661-2 and 1709-10.) “There were frequent riots in the market squares of Paris, particularly in the Place Maubert, where on several occasions soldiers, acting like ruffians, carried off food from the stalls at the point of the sword. Within a matter of yards from the Brothers’ house at Vaugirard eight soldiers attacked the baker’s wife and her son when they were taking a cartload of bread to Paris at six o’clock in the morning, relieving them of forty loaves.”³⁴ Several times the Brother bringing the community’s food was attacked, and as this kind of violence was increasing, the Founder judged it best to go with his novices to the Rue Princesse for some months. This would be his second batch, still around five or six in number, who would have to live in cramped conditions for a while.

They lived, like everyone else, in famine conditions. Yet, although the Founder had to weigh out meagre portions carefully, and at times there was nothing left to eat, he had a tranquil trust in providence. And this at the very time when “both rich and poor were gripped in a well-founded fear of lacking bread”, when “you saw in Paris a mutinous people demanding bread in a spirit of revolt and sedition; when you saw some trying to find in the rubbish tipped outside the gates something to get their teeth on...others wandering about the countryside looking for a few herbs good enough to eat.” You heard the pitiful cries of the starving and dying, you saw mothers unable to give milk to their babies, people too weak to stand, or to utter a plea for alms...These accounts by Blain tally with what we know otherwise of the times. Yet De La Salle remained in peace, and when there was no food, he turned to his heavenly Father with humility and trust. At some point Fr Baudrand failed to pay the annual 500 livres for the upkeep of the two Brothers who ran the school in the Rue du Bac. But apparently the community had received from Baudrand some extra alms, perhaps because of the presence of the novices.

Blain attributes the stopping of this payment to Baudrand’s annoyance over De La Salle’s stand over the habit and the novitiate, while saying at the same time that he was of a great and charitable heart. He must have been at his wits’ end trying to provide both for the numerous wretches in his vast parish and those who swarmed in from the countryside just beyond it. He had thirty assistance boards in his parish, yet people were dying of hunger. The Founder continued to trust in Providence. But there were days when grace before

meals was followed at once by grace after, or after a mere herb soup. Once, expecting nothing, the Brothers found a small amount of black bread that their Superior indicated was just for them, not himself. No one would touch it till he took a small piece. The Brother bursar had gone round begging and had received this piece of bread as an alms. As hungry days succeeded one another, the Brothers found it difficult to accept, doubting their motives and seeing the extra mouths to be fed, that new postulants should be taken in. There must have been a lot of tension among young people with nothing in their stomachs. As for the Founder, "nothing troubled him, nothing frightened him" in his trust in God.

One day, at the end of 1693, when there was only a four-sol coin left in the house, the Brother bursar went out to buy a few cabbages, and saw a crowd being given alms outside a rich lady's house. He joined them, and stood out by his height and his robe. The lady was surprised, called him in and asked why he was there. He explained the situation, and told her they had been starving for quite a while. She was one of those who helped generously the poor of the parish, so that when she told Baudrand he needed to do something for the Brothers he soon saw to it and sent a little money to the community. But in January 1694, "at the cruellest time of the scarcity", the parish priest said he would give nothing further - presumably he had nothing to spare - but it seems a little mean for him to say he would count the small sum he had given at the end of 1693 as an advance on the Brothers' allowance for the current year. But he may have been desperate. The Founder took himself to prayer. Blain says he added fasting; one wonders what this could mean when he was nearly starving.

On 24 January, the vigil of the Conversion of St Paul, he went to the church to pray for help, and was inspired to go there and then to Fr Baudrand and express his need. The parish priest had just received a sum of money from the king to help the poor of the parish. He gave him 200 livres on the spot, told him to forget about what he had said about that "advance" and promised 200 further livres in two or three weeks' time - which he did in fact give. These 400 livres did not last long when the price of bread had quadrupled, and by mid-May De La Salle was again at Baudrand's door. The latter received him kindly, and, at his request, gave an order to the baker to provide a certain quantity of bread, expecting it to last longer than it did. When at the end of July the baker presented a bill for 800 livres, Baudrand took fright and refused to pay it. He said it was De La Salle's business, and put it all to his account, saying the 800 livres were an advance payment of his annual grant to the Brothers (which seems to imply he had raised it - from 500 - during the famine).

There was a sudden drop in the price of wheat - in other words, the current

year's harvest had been better - and, with far less burdens on the parish, Baudrand generously gave the Brothers an extra 100 livres a month for the remainder of the year. Perhaps he felt better about things because De La Salle was no longer there. He had gone back with his five or six novices to Vaugirard probably in May. But the bread bill for the community still came to fifty crowns or 150 livres a month. One can understand how harassed Baudrand must have been. One can also imagine the patient humility of the former bourgeois canon coming so often cap in hand, not knowing how he would be received.

**THE ASSEMBLY OF THE TWELVE SENIOR BROTHERS OF THE SOCIETY,
30 MAY TO 6 JUNE 1694**

The Founder was wide-awake to the needs of his society in the midst of this penury and localised stress. He wanted his novices as quickly as possible back to the calm of Vaugirard. His mind was also fixed on further means to stabilise his society. He wanted to call very quickly *an assembly of the leading Brothers of the society*.³⁵ He had three objectives in mind.

Submitting to them a new draft of the Rule

Already he had been putting the finishing touches to a new draft of the Brothers' Rule. There was little in it that was new, nothing that was not known to the Brothers. The daily regulation had been practically finalised in the years in Rheims. Over a dozen years, behaviour in the school and community life had benefited by common experience. The aim and composition of the society had clarified. The need remained to put into clear words, if it had not already been done, the spirit that made of the Rule for busy schoolmasters a guide to living a genuine form of Christian life.

The Founder prayed long over that Rule, but he also extensively consulted the Brothers. He submitted it to those in Paris before intending to submit it to a wider group of Brothers. He gained inspiration from the Rules of the established orders: of St Augustine, of the Benedictines of Saint-Germain, of the Jesuits, whose novitiate was close to the seminary; of the Vincentians; of the Sisters of the Child Jesus of Fr Barré in the Rue Saint Maur. He knew from close experience Canon Roland's rules. When he travelled to Rheims, he could easily contact religious communities where he had so many relatives, and in particular St Peter Fourier's Canonesses of St Augustine. He meditated on their commitment to following Christ and at the same time discussed with his Brothers the schoolmaster's life. He was led - and, we can say, was guided by the Holy Spirit - both to construct a life-style that would safeguard tranquillity, prayer, meditation, spiritual reading, relaxation, class preparation and study, and also express the fitness for Christian teachers to be inspired by

the single dynamic of living by faith in the Gospel.

He planned to submit his draft of the Rule to an assembly of the principal Brothers in the society. But this little gathering was important to his mind for another reason. He and his two counsellors intended to extend to a wider body that responsibility and commitment by vow to the establishment of the society which they had made three years earlier. He wasted no time. Even before the end of 1693, when the famine was severe, he planned to hold this meeting at Vaugirard during the school break at Pentecost in May 1694. This was a quick, bold move.

Three vows, specific to the mission of the Brothers of the Christian Schools

This assembly would be eight years after that important one in 1686, when the principal Brothers made a triennial vow of obedience renewed annually. Since then, some Brothers had been asking to take perpetual vows. The Founder had deliberately made light of such requests, preferring to see how solid was their likelihood of perseverance. We do not know what vows they had in mind: the three vows comparable to those of Roland's Sisters, as they had asked for in 1686, or just the vow of obedience? They were unaware of the secret vow of 1691. Whatever their attitude on the matter, the Founder and his two advisers considered preparing the directors of the communities and other senior Brothers, not for taking the three usual religious vows as they seemed to want, but ***three vows directed specifically to their mission of extending the kingdom of God through education***. This was a significant and inspired change. He made sure these Brothers had the time to make a responsible decision concerning it.

At the beginning of 1694, he told the relevant Brothers in Paris that he was giving them four months until Pentecost to give serious thought to the matter. He then wrote to the senior Brothers of the four houses in the provinces to do the same and to pray very much to know God's will. Between January and Pentecost, he called each of the Directors or older Brothers in turn, twelve all told, to Paris to make a retreat, both to let them pray and reflect without distraction, and also to talk at length with each one to have his views on the matter and judge of the depth of his commitment. It was very thorough ground-work, based on providing those concerned with time for prayer, discussion and serious decision-making.

Finally, he called all twelve to Vaugirard for an assembly that was also a time of prayer, lasting from Pentecost, 30 May, till Trinity Sunday. This was not a general summoning of all the Brothers - that was done for the summer retreats.³⁶ He had either shown the draft of the Rule to the twelve already, or he now made it available, intending to ask them to decide on it at the end of

the assembly. He would make any changes they might agree upon; but to help them to decide wisely - for it was still a young group - he said he would change any point if they could find three superiors of religious communities in Paris who would agree with them.

He then revealed to them and explained at length the main purpose of this assembly, but he also had times of long discussion and deliberating sessions. It was in fact, a Chapter, and was reckoned subsequently as the Brothers' *first General Chapter*.³⁷ These twelve saw more clearly that in God's plan of salvation for the poor, they were being called upon to meet their Christian and human needs. This involved a life of schooling that was difficult and that had strong opposition. Yet they saw it was their means of procuring the glory of God. They would respond by a free consecration to him to which they would give reality by taking three vows. These were: the **vow of association**, or the vow to work together to set up and run their Christian schools; the **vow of stability**, or the vow to stay in the Society for this purpose; and the **vow of obedience**, or the vow to obey their Superiors and accept any work in any place in the Society to which its Superiors put them. These vows they made with a lifelong commitment. More than this, they added the decision to work together to establish Christian Schools even if they had to beg and live on bread alone.

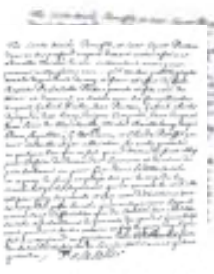
As with the vow of obedience in 1686, these vows were also made on Trinity Sunday, 6 June, 1694. To keep them purely private, the Founder took the twelve to a room on their own, and made them promise to keep the matter quiet. The secret vow taken by the three in 1691 had been consented *among themselves*, to act "unanimously and with a common consent." This time, the twelve are choosing to *bind themselves to the Institute*: "to do in the said society what I shall be given to do, whether by the body of the society or by the superiors." The consecration to God's glory has acquired a vital commitment that is its true expression for the Brother of the Christian Schools. Brothers after them could seal their service of God in the Institute by this same profession of vows.

There was no compulsion, however, no formal timing for taking these vows, no declaration that the Brother of the Christian Schools was not fully so without these vows. They were not part of the Rule. This discretion, of course, like the secrecy of the vows of the twelve, was necessary to avoid episcopal or royal investigations with results he did not want. Another possible reason was, that while the Founder built up his communities to be, in lifestyle, 'religious' like the existing Orders, but in a private and lay way, he did not want it to be thought that a religious profession made the Brother. You were a Brother of the Christian Schools by the fact you entered the Society, were accepted by it and agreed to live its life and work for its purposes. These vows which

marked a definite consecration to the same purposes could be taken freely if a Brother wished and he showed signs of attachment to his vocation.

The text of these vows

On this first making of the vows by the twelve, Maillefer writes: “He began the ceremony by the mass of the Holy Spirit at which the Brothers received Communion, and was the first to pronounce the vow of perpetual obedience (Maillefer is not aware of all the vows taken) with a candle in his hand, and then the Brothers, coming forward one by one, made the same vow.”³⁸ The Founder made this consecration with a piety that moved them to tears.³⁹ This is his text:⁴⁰



Most holy Trinity, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, prostrate in a most profound respect before your infinite and adorable majesty, I consecrate myself entirely to you to procure your glory as far as I am able and as you will require of me. And for this purpose I, John Baptist De La Salle, priest, promise and vow to unite myself and remain in society with Brothers Nicolas Vuyart, Gabriel Drolin, Jean Partois, Gabriel-Charles Rasigade, Jean-Henry, Jacques Compain, Jean Jacquot, Jean-Louis de Marcheville, Michel-Barthélemy Jacquinot, Edme Leguillon, Gilles Pierre et Claude Roussel, to keep together and by association gratuitous schools, wherever they may be, even if I should be obliged in order to do so to beg alms and live on bread alone, or to do in the said society what I shall be given to do, whether by the body of the society or by the superiors who will be in charge of it; wherefore I promise and vow obedience whether to the body of the society or to the superiors, which vows, whether of association or of stability in the said society or of obedience, I promise to keep inviolably all my lifetime. In faith of which I have signed, done at Vaugirard this sixth of June, feast of the Most Holy Trinity, in the year one thousand six hundred and ninety-four. Signed : De La Salle.

One of the great treasures in the Brothers' archives in Rome is his formula of vows on this occasion, written entirely in his own hand. With it is a small black book, the *Livret des Premiers Voeux*, or Record Book of First Vows, in which all the thirteen formulas of vows, including therefore, another of De La Salle's, are written out by a single hand, that of Brother Michel-Barthélemy Jacquinot, except for the name of the one making the vows and the words from “all my lifetime...” to the end of the formula. These were written in by each one on his own copy.

The structure of government in the Society

One interesting fact emerges from these deliberations and from the formula: the government of the society was confirmed or clarified. We do not know what levels of authority existed when the assembly of 1686 was held, beyond that of De La Salle himself. But now we have clearly: the body of the society, its superior and other superiors. These are spelt out in the commentary on the vows drawn up probably soon after they were made in 1694 but not known to us earlier than the printed version appearing in the 1711 edition of the *Collection of Short Treatises*. This was written by De La Salle for the use of the Brothers shortly after re-drafting the Rule. Relative to obedience it says⁴¹ the vow obliges “to obey first, the superior of the society chosen previously and him or those who will be so hereafter; secondly, the individual directors who are or who will be given hereafter by the superior of the society; thirdly, the body of this society, whether the said body is represented by several, whether superiors or others, assembled in the said name.” The directors were those in charge of each community. Even if there were only two in a community, one of them had this function. The body of the society is not precisely defined, but even if seeming flexible, its composition must have been clear; it consisted of “what portion of its members was qualified to represent the entire body and command in its name.”⁴²

Some time at the end of this assembly, the Founder asked his Brothers their views on the draft Rules. They corresponded to what they had always practised and to their aspirations. They approved them unanimously. We have this text in a manuscript copy made in 1705 and now kept in the Avignon municipal library.⁴³

The election of a Superior: De La Salle is re-elected. A proviso

De La Salle's third objective was vital, but the attitude of the Brothers might thwart it for the time being. On Monday, 7 June, he called the twelve Brothers together for a meeting he had carefully thought out. Now that they had consecrated themselves to the consolidation of the society, he wanted them to consider electing one of themselves as their Superior⁴⁴, as he had tried to do in 1686. Since it was clear to all that they should be an entirely lay community of schoolmasters, it seemed right that one of themselves should be superior, and that they should learn to take upon themselves full responsibility in accordance with what they had just vowed. It certainly suited his humility, but that was not the fundamental point. He made them one address, and then one even more urgent and appealing. The twelve Brothers, knowing his great holiness, his governing ability, his gifts of spiritual direction, his power of holding out against various pressures, had no intention of voting him out a

second time, as they had done in 1687. It does not mean they should not have looked at and did not look carefully at the importance, for the structure of their society for the future, of providing a superior from among themselves. But his gifts as founder made it at the moment unthinkable.

To please him, they agreed to proceed with an election, and he thought he had won his point. He spoke to them of the need to choose well, and left them to pray for half an hour. They then proceeded by secret ballot, and to a man they elected him. He was so taken by surprise and upset at it that he almost lost countenance, whether because he considered that they had balked the issue involved, or through humility, thinking they could not have failed to find someone better than him. Fearing there had been collusion in that election, he tore up the papers, according to Maillefer, and asked the Brothers to pray again for half an hour and make another choice. To a man, they elected him again. He really felt cornered, for he, too, had promised obedience to the Society. Then they explained to him gently that he should see this as the will of God. They needed him; they promised that once the society was out of danger and well-established, they would reconsider the matter. He accepted, but he also got them to draw up a declaration stating that there would never be priests in the society, whether as superiors or otherwise.

They had this declaration written into the Book of First Vows immediately after the transcription of their vow-making, and all signed it:

ACT OF ELECTION OF A SUPERIOR

We, the undersigned, Brothers Nicolas Vuyart, Gabriel Drolin, Jean-Partois, Gabriel-Charles Rasigade, Jean Henry, Jacques Compain, Jean Jacquot, Jean-Louis de Marcheville, Michel-Barthélemy Jacquinot, Edme Leguillon, Gilles Pierre and Claude Roussel, after having associated ourselves with M. Jean Baptiste De La Salle, priest, to keep together and by association gratuitous schools, by the vows we made yesterday, acknowledge that in consequence of our vows and of the association we have contracted through them, we have chosen as Superior M. Jean-Baptiste De La Salle, whom we promise to obey with an entire submission in virtue of our vow, as well as those who will be given us by him as superiors.

We declare also that the present election we have made of the said Monsieur De La Salle as superior will set thereafter no precedent, our intention being that after him, in future and for always, no one will be received among us, nor chosen for superior, who is a priest or has received sacred orders, and that we shall not have or accept any



superior who is not associated and has not vowed like us and like all the others who will be associated with us hereafter.

Done at Vaugirard, the seventh of June of the year one thousand six hundred and ninety-four.

Eleven signatures follow (Edme Leguillon's is missing, the reason being, it seems, that when the book was bound, the pages were cut a little too closely.) De La Salle was forty-three at the time; the ages of the Brothers ranged between twenty-two and thirty. One could hope much from their still young years. After 1694, there is no tier of authority such as 'counsellors': they have merged with the twelve as persons on whom he could count for collaboration and advice. "The twelve Brothers who had made vows of obedience and stability, and that the pious Superior had chosen as his twelve principal Disciples, were by him dispersed in the five houses of the Institute, to be their foundation stones and firm support. Of those he had called to him from the provinces, he kept back some who were not enough established in virtue, and he replaced them by others of a superior piety."⁴⁵ This was clearly part of the policy of consolidation.

Although no other General Chapter was called till 1717, it would be astonishing, knowing the Founder, if there were no meetings in between. It is very likely that these twelve and others were called to meetings in Pentecost week more than once informally to discuss how the society was shaping. There would be little scope for their vow to work together to the limit if something like this did not happen. They may have shared experiences that were then used by La Salle in writing various works for the use of the Brothers. (see Ch. 18, p. 762). Blain, in fact, seems to refer to such a meeting in 1710 when he says De La Salle established from 1696 till 1710 a daily rota in each community for Brothers to fast and receive Communion in turn, in order to obtain worthy Directors. "After that, following representations by the senior Brothers assembled in Paris, this fast was fixed by M. De La Salle to Fridays for everybody..."⁴⁶ Gabriel Drolin may have been sent back to Laon after the Assembly, for Brother Joseph, we remember, had died on 1 March this year.

The twelve had now decisively, by making association, stability and obedience so clearly constitutive of their mission, established themselves firmly as a society. Hence the use of the word five times in the formula of their vows. It becomes the usual term now for designating themselves instead of the word "community" largely used so far. They are the "Society of the Christian Schools." Their consecration is a model to offer to the other Brothers of the society. If these choose to take these same vows with the same obligation to live on bread alone, their formula of vows is written in full into this booklet.

There are twenty-three of them between 1695 and 1705, when possibly another booklet was begun that we no longer have. In his formula, each one promises “to unite myself with and remain in society with the Brothers who are associated together to keep...”. In other words, he joins with the original twelve and with all those who had made those vows since.

These private vow were free from regulations as to when to make them

The Founder limited these vows to those who were at least twenty-one. They need not, however, to have let even their first triennial vow of obedience elapse before making their perpetual commitment. Nine made it less than four years after entering, including their novitiate. Brothers made their perpetual vows at Vaugirard or in whichever house became the central house, if possible. Sometimes this was done in community, because it was convenient to wait till the Founder passed that way. Sometimes they made them in summer during the retreat, often on the feasts of 8 and 29 September (the Birthday of Our Lady and the Feast of Saint Michael). But renewals of vows always took place on Trinity Sunday and in one’s community - just as a renewal of devotion is still made on that day in each community today.

The obligation “even if I were obliged to beg and live on bread alone” disappears from the formula sometime before 1716, even though an explanation of the vow in this sense is retained till the 1886 edition of the *Collection of Short Treatises*. The urgency that called up this commitment had disappeared. Yet even in those challenging days, not all the Brothers held on in the face of difficulties. Of the twelve who made that vow, only six persevered, three being still alive when Blain was composing his work.⁴⁷ They were: Gabriel Drolin, who died in 1733, the year Blain’s work was published; Jean Partois (Brother Anthony) who died in 1743, and Jean Jacquot (Brother John), who died in 1759.⁴⁸ One of the great trials of founders, in addition to all the others, is to see their followers either not able to see their vision clearly enough, or going back on their commitment.

In this Society, as has already been pointed out, vows would be offered and taken freely, with no fixed initial moment and no regulations about having to take them at all. A Brother Paulin seems to have written to De La Salle, probably in 1705, to be allowed to make his first vows. He answered: “I am quite willing that you should make vows for three years. Prepare for that for when I come to Rouen.” To a Brother Hubert, the Director in Laon, aged twenty-three, he wrote in 1706: “Concerning the vows, it is not for me to make up your mind for you in the matter. You must make up your own mind. As you ask me for my opinion, I should say that I see nothing in the way on your part.” About a Brother in Chartres, he wrote in 1710 to Hubert who was

now Director there: "If Brother Quentin wishes to make vows, you must make him do so. Perhaps, however, it would be good to test him a little longer."⁴⁹ The obligations of the vows were clearly defined, but the only criterion was sufficient maturity and generosity, and the Founder might see that in persons of young age.

How did De La Salle visualise his Society? What did he wish to have approved by the Holy See?

For the work of the Christian School, he had been led by Providence to create a society of communities of Brothers with a lifelong dedication to the education of the poor. The work called for laymen working together in the spirit of faith or the daily pursuit of living by the Gospel, a faith that became activated as zeal in the presence of the needs of the children. In time, he and his Brothers had evolved a way of life fitting this vocation.

In doing so, they had taken in part as models the usages of the religious orders of the day, models that would not necessarily be permanent. In his *Memoir on the habit*, the Founder compares the Brothers' practice with that of the religious orders. His *Collection of Short Treatises for the Brothers* begins with St Bernard's nine fruits of the religious life. Did he have in mind that his Brothers should take the three vows of the consecrated life?⁵⁰ Clearly not in their present situation of not yet being approved in the Church, since he proposed a different set of three vows. Even taken privately, a lifelong vow of chastity, if dispensation should ever be required, could only come from the Holy See, and a vow of poverty could have civil complications. Moreover, the result of vowing the three evangelical counsels, which all religious orders took, could be to obscure in favour of the contemplative side of Christian life, the new mission of this Institute, which was equally a share in the mission of Christ. The novelty he was led to formulate, then, was that his Brothers should take, not the three recognised vows, or not yet, but three that bore directly on their form of work for the Kingdom of God.

It does seem that, in God's own time, when his Institute had shown its worth to the Church and its true nature, he would want his Society to become a religious Institute in the Church. Recognition by the Holy See would be the confirmation of his conviction that this was a work of God: Christian schoolmastering could be professed in the Church as a way of Gospel holiness. Yet for a purely lay Institute of schoolmasters to ask that this way of life as it stood be raised to being a form of consecrated life was asking the unusual. It could either not be accepted or the Rules and vows of the Institute might easily be changed and standardised. Prudence might therefore indicate that the best was to stay as a private society of common life, with its ideals enshrined in its three specific and purely private vows. De La Salle, however,

was not a man who was inspired merely by prudence. His sending in 1702 two Brothers to Rome and his letters to one of them, Gabriel Drolin, show that, through the good name of the two schools that were founded in Avignon, and Gabriel's presence in Rome, he hoped that influential prelates who had been in Avignon would take in hand the recognition of his Institute.

The sequel

The Institute of the Brothers of the Christian Schools was, in fact, approved by Pope Benedict XIII in 1725, and chastity and poverty were added to the Brothers' vows. The freedom in the Institute to take or not take even these vows remained, until Canon Law in 1918 brought the Institute in line with all Institutes professing the simple vows of religion.

The present form of the Brother's consecration is as follows:

Most Holy Trinity, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, with profound respect before your infinite majesty, I consecrate myself entirely to you to procure your glory as far as I shall be able and as you will require of me.

For this purpose I,..... promise to unite myself, and to remain in society, with the Brothers of the Christian Schools who are associated to conduct, together and by association, schools for the service of the poor. I promise to go wherever I may be sent and to do whatever I may be assigned by the body of the Society or its superiors.

Wherefore, I promise and vow chastity, poverty, obedience, association for the service of the poor through education, and stability in the Institute according to the Bull of Approbation and the Rule of the Institute.

I promise to keep these vows faithfully (for a period of...year/s) all my life.

In testimony thereof, I have signed. Done at... on...in the year of Our Lord.....

Signature.....

1694-98

CONTEMPORARY NATIONAL AND LOCAL EVENTS

The Founder kept himself aware of contemporary events, as his later letters to Brother Gabriel show. The priests who stayed at Vaugirard for a while would keep him informed. He would know of Louis XIV's extravagance and wars and of events across the Channel leading to King James II taking refuge in France. One minor consequence, but valuable for us, was that De La

Salle and James II met face to face. Within France, Jansenism was causing trouble again and the Gallicanism of many bishops saddened him.

Louis was at the height of his power in European affairs in the 1680s, while the peasantry in particular was ruined paying for his wars. 1688 marked the beginning of his decline.⁵¹ He had the Pope and the Emperor and indeed all of Western Europe opposed to his policies. William of Orange, Prince of the United Provinces, and his permanent enemy, had designs on England as James II's tactless moves on behalf of Catholicism alienated the country. William, who had married James's daughter Mary, landed in England on 5 November. James fled to France on 23 December. Louis gave him the palace of Saint Germain-en-Laye as his permanent residence, with an annual pension of 600,000 francs (or livres).

The Nine Years' War or *War of the League of Augsburg* now began. As part of it, Louis financed an attempt by James II to create a diversion in Ireland. The king landed at Kinsale on 12 March 1690, but the campaign ended with the *Battle of the Boyne*, three miles west of Drogheda, on 11 July, 1690. James escaped to Paris and permanent exile. Several thousand Irish, mostly untrained, were sent after him, intended as part of an invasion force meant for England, but nothing came of it. James now seemed to give up hope and settled down at Saint Germain. Most of the Irish troops enrolled in the French army. The presence of some of their children in Paris had a sequel for De La Salle at the end of 1697 (see Chapter 11). Meanwhile, the famine of 1693-4, added to his extravagance, exhausted Louis's resources for the war. By the *Treaty of Ryswick* in 1697 he lost all the territories he had annexed over the last ten years.

In France itself, Louis's glory seemed undimmed, but some were beginning to criticise. Bishop Fénelon of Cambrai wrote a public *Letter to the King* in 1694: "For thirty years or so, your chief ministers have undermined, indeed overthrown all the ancient maxims of the state in order to stretch your authority beyond all limit, an authority which is theirs since they have been allowed to exercise it. No longer do they speak of the state and its laws; they speak only of the king and his pleasure. They have increased your revenues and your expenditure to an enormous degree. They have exalted you to the skies ...in order to impoverish the whole of France..."⁵²

Some change came into Louis's life through his secret marriage, six months after the death of Maria Theresa, with *Mme de Maintenon* in July 1683. She had great influence on him and on the political life of France. He seemed to regret his past excesses, and the moral tone of the court improved. Mme de Maintenon was a born teacher, fond of children. She is known most for her school at Saint-Cyr, near Versailles, founded in 1686 and endowed by the king and catering for 200 girls.

Louis at this time was in trouble with the Pope. Back in 1682, as we have seen, an Assembly of the French Clergy consisting of thirty-three bishops and thirty-eight theologians, had given final form to theological Gallicanism in what were known as the Four Articles. Innocent XI had retaliated by refusing to give bishops their canonical investiture after being nominated by Louis: there were thirty-five vacant bishoprics in 1688. In the near-schism mentality of this Gallicanism, one can understand better why De La Salle wanted his society to be approved by the Pope and be seen as unmistakably serving the Church under its Head.

When William of Orange came to the throne of England in 1688, Louis tried a rapprochement with the Pope, but Innocent remained silent. Innocent XII (1691-1700), however, aimed at pacification; and Louis revoked the Four Articles in 1693.

Mystical exaggerations

Meanwhile there were disquieting religious trends. An Oratorian priest, **Pasquier Quesnel**, published in 1671 his *Moral Reflections on the New Testament*, which was Jansenist in tone. It was used by many for their meditations long before it was condemned. He published an enlarged and more Jansenist edition in Brussels in 1687 and again in 1692. Jansenism was in the public news again, and would continue so beyond De La Salle's lifetime. He had to warn his novices and Brothers against it.

A different current of spirituality was also arising, a somewhat exaggerated mysticism taught by a certain widow, **Mme Guyon** (Jeanne-Marie Bouvier de la Motte-Guyon). She belonged to the lesser titled gentry. She had had a somewhat neglected childhood, spent in several convents. She felt led to spread ideas on prayer known as *Quietism*. She was suspect both as to doctrine and morals, and was put in a Visitation convent in 1688. But eight months later Mme de Maintenon had her set free and she became a centre for the *parti dévot* at Saint-Cyr. Her *Short and Easy Method of Prayer*, published in 1685, was well known among them. "She has been called half saint, half lunatic, good in heart but weak in mind, and these characterizations appear to be a fair summing-up. Although many pages of her writings might find a counterpart in orthodox works (as she was wont to emphasise), the marks of delusion are plain on the whole."⁵³

She taught that perfection consists in a continual act of contemplation and love of God. All distinct considerations, as on the mysteries of Christ, must be suppressed as contrary to repose in God. The soul must be indifferent to all goods, temporal or eternal. She would have created less stir had she not met **Fénelon** (François de Salignac de la Motte-Fénelon), bishop of Cambrai in October 1688. He came to befriend her and became dominated by her influence.

About this time in Rome **Miguel de Molinos**, a Spaniard whose work had influenced Mme Guyon, had published in 1675 *A Spiritual Guide* which offered an easy way to contemplation. This calls for total abandonment to the operation of God in the soul to the point of getting rid of all attempt to act virtuously or even to repel temptation. The Holy Office for two years examined him on his *Spiritual Guide* and 12,000 letters in his possession. He admitted to a list of sixty-eight errors in 1687.

The trial created hostility to mysticism in France. Mme de Maintenon was accused by her enemies at court of spreading Quietism. She therefore removed Mme Guyon and Fénelon from Saint-Cyr in 1693, and had the former's writings examined by Bossuet, who had no knowledge in the matter. He condemned them in 1694 and Mme de Guyon therefore demanded a more precise examination. Her work was submitted to the scrutiny of Bossuet, de Noailles and Tronson in 1694-5, none of whom was really competent, and their work led to nothing. Bossuet did, however, write a lengthy pastoral instruction on the topic which he sent to Fénelon in 1696. He rejected it, and the conflict between the two bishops became a common topic.

For De La Salle, these dubious ideas and this controversy added to his problems. Since a number of young men presenting themselves to join the novitiate were from well-to-do families, they must have been aware of the whole affair, and some must have read Mme Guyon's book. In the novitiate, where they were free of normal responsibilities, it was easy for candidates full of generosity to be attracted to ideals of pure love and to ambition mystical contemplation. The Founder had to keep them away from excesses and yet show them that by fidelity to their duty, by proper self-denial, by fidelity to the inspirations of the Holy Spirit and by spiritual guidance, they could co-operate with God in arriving at a deep relationship with him. The way after that depended on God, and needed spiritual direction and discernment.

He trained them carefully, but he closed no doors. *Keep always*, he wrote, *through a humble opinion of yourself and in a spirit of regularity, to the ordinary method and ways of prayer; unless God gives you some attraction, which should be well examined, and not followed without taking counsel of those who have the mission to enlighten you. Do not seek after feelings in prayer; attach yourself to what is of faith, and which prompts you to hatred for and destruction of sin, to detachment from all created things, to the imitation of Jesus Christ and to the exercise of the virtues he practised, striving to imitate him as perfectly as possible.*⁵⁴ He wrote for them meditations, and especially, he wrote a remarkable guide to mental prayer. They were published only after his death since anything written on prayer in his day was liable to misinterpretation.

Some events at Vaugirard

We have some unconnected events recorded for this period.⁵⁵ A young rogue came from Paris and with a very cleverly feigned air of sincerity asked to join the community. Three times the Founder interviewed him before accepting him, but even he was taken in by the young man's winning airs and apparent piety. He gave him the day and time to present himself to enter definitively, allowing him time to make his arrangements and bring any clothing. The young man turned up punctually and played the perfect postulant. He explained that he had had to pawn his belongings and that he needed seventeen livres to take them out. As a sign of good faith, he handed over what he said was a gold watch. In the poor light (he had probably been told to arrive early in the morning), De La Salle accepted it and gave him the seventeen pounds. And that was the last he saw of him. The watch turned out to be only a worthless copper one. He commented, with a note of humour: "Thank goodness he didn't ask me for more, for the inclination I had for him, and the sincerity with which he seemed to me to speak would have prevented me refusing him." And: "It would appear that this young man needed money, and it was need that made him play a trick of this kind." De La Salle had warned to a plausible young man. What now of his claim in earlier years that six words from anyone enabled him to judge his character?

Another day, when there was no money in the house, he gave the bursar a letter for Brother Ponce Thiseux, his opposite number in Paris, asking him to give his confrere a certain sum of money he had in his safe keeping. Ponce simply refused, saying he would take no notice of the order. On his return, the bursar told the Founder in the presence of several others, and he simply said: "God will not bless him." The Paris bursar fell ill almost immediately. He listened to the doctor no more than to his Superior, and let some misguided people persuade him that the remedy was gold powder. Gold powder he must have, whatever the cost. His Superior tried to reason him out of it, explaining that it could become a poison in its effects, but to no avail. And so, instead of throwing the book at him on poverty and obedience, the Founder told the novitiate bursar to go out and buy the remedy. This Brother, realising the expense, tried to explain: it would cost seventeen livres, enough to feed the community for a week; but he nevertheless obeyed. Brother Ponce also paid dearly, for the gold powder brought on an extraordinary swelling that could have killed him. De La Salle ordered one of the ordinary remedies to be given him, one costing not more than four or five sols that the community doctor prescribed for people with small means. He recovered. "Poncelet Thiseux was blunt, and, apparently, fairly domineering; these failings, the obverse of the coin, were those of a man of quick intelligence, strong-willed, good at creating order."⁵⁶

One day a boy aged fourteen or fifteen was brought in whose head was so eaten away with ringworm that the pus coming out of it put off by its smell those who were furthest away from him in the room. The Founder undertook to see to him. To begin with, he offered to cut off his hair and clean up his head. It was no easy matter, for the scabies, the pus and the hair made one foul cap on his head. In spite of his courage he couldn't help feeling sick, and one of the Brothers offered to do it instead, suggesting that hands that every day handled the consecrated host should not be defiled by touching such a rotting mess. De La Salle answered that Jesus had touched the most repulsive sick people and sinners, and continued his work with renewed courage. When he had finished, the boy's head seemed one incurable open sore, but the Founder simply placed a piece of cloth over it and it was cured within a few days.

Canon Guyart came once from Laon to make a retreat under his direction. He related himself that while he was there, someone - the serving Brother, one supposes - came to tell his Superior that there was nothing in the house for supper for its many inmates. His Superior turned to God in prayer, and there and then someone came with a large donation. Guyart added that De La Salle's great principle was abandonment to Providence.

The Brothers were not short of stories of this kind about Vaugirard. One day, there was not even means in the house to make a broth for the sick. The Superior told one of the Brothers to get a clay pot and come with him. He went into Paris to the seminary of Saint-Sulpice and, telling the Brother to wait at the door, went in and asked the Superior, M. Leschassier, if he could out of charity provide soup for his sick Brothers. It was a great act of humility. M. Leschassier not only provided the soup then, but for several years afterwards. The community "was in fact so poor that although it was made up of seventy people, it spent on meat only forty sols a day. It spent even less on wine, since water was the sole drink."

The following story is grouped with those on Vaugirard, although the location is not stated. The Brothers were moving house, and the bursar was seeing to the transport of the furniture and to repairs to the house. When the time came to pay the workmen and carters, he found there was no money. These men needed to be paid at once. The Brother went to De La Salle and explained the situation. He replied that he had nothing to pay them with, and told him to pray. The Brother counted much more on the Founder's prayers, and asked him to pray, too. A day went by, and the bursar asked him if he could do something about it. He got the same answer, so he went back to his work and De La Salle again turned to prayer. The Brother had carefully checked and emptied every piece of furniture and put it out in the yard for it to be loaded on the carts. There was one cupboard that had been out there several days,

open and empty. He had an inner urge to look into it again and found there forty crowns, just the amount needed to pay the workforce. Such stories continue to be reported in the Founder's life; they indicate his tremendous faith.

The Founder delays making new foundations

The good reputation the Brothers' schools had and the tales of their Founder's holiness led several bishops to want Brothers in their diocese. Requests came from several of them. His old friend of seminary days, Paul Godet des Marets, had been consecrated bishop of Chartres on 31 August 1692. He was very concerned about religious instruction in his diocese, and made a first request for Brothers in 1694, and often repeated it. But the Founder was not in a hurry to start a new foundation, eager though he was to see the work of God spread, and excused himself, saying his novices were not properly prepared yet. Since he had made it a rule, as part of the care of his society, to visit each house once a year, new communities would also mean he would be on the roads longer. He wanted to concentrate on the novitiate training, before appointing a replacement as director of novices, and he had now some time in hand to compose works that would consign to print the ideals and teaching practice of the society.

Moreover, the number of men he might have available for a new foundation was constantly varying. For one, deaths were not infrequent in a century of hard winters. When the plague swept through France between 1688 and 1719, forty-five Brothers died, of whom only eight or nine were beyond thirty.⁵⁷ The first Brother after the Twelve to make final vows on Trinity Sunday, 29 May 1695, Pierre Raimbault, died the same year on 29 October. In addition, many Brothers left. Of the two hundred who entered between 1684 and 1 January 1724, sixty-eight left and nine were sent away. Of the sixty-eight, only seven had "made vows for always", three had made triennial vows; the other fifty-eight may not have made vows⁵⁸, so that presumably they had left during the novitiate. The life was certainly not easy, even if life in general was not easy those days. Perhaps those who left, having generously tried a life they found not for them, carried their improved Christian instruction and their ideals into their married and working life, or took up teaching in some parish school..

A new friend: the Count de Charmel

Sometime in this period De La Salle found a new friend and admirer of his Brothers in the Count de Charmel.⁵⁹ He had a place near the Observatory where he could be in solitude. (The Observatory, built from 1667 to 1672, is situated south of the former Port Royal abbey, and was then in the country.)

He spent much time in prayer, and went to La Trappe, especially in Lent. His family Hall was in the village of Charmel in the diocese of Soissons, near Château-Thierry, nine leagues or forty-five kilometres from Rheims. On one occasion the Founder was sending three novices to Rheims to join the community there. They had to go through Charmel and they called on the parish priest and asked for hospitality. He was charmed by their simple reserve and spoke of it to the lord of the village. The Count asked them to be introduced to him and enquired all about their way of life and about their society. He was so well impressed that he asked them to stay with him. He prayed with them first in his chapel and then put them up with all kindness. He charged them to beg Monsieur De La Salle on his behalf to make his manor a stopping-place for his Brothers in future whenever they passed that way. The next time he went to Paris, he went to see their superior, and to show his esteem, he presented him with a very rich frontal and chasuble. From that time on he kept in contact with De La Salle until his death. "A man of continual prayer" was how the Founder saw him. It seems he was Jansenist. Since they did not form a sect, but belonged to the Catholic community, they were not necessarily recognised.

A painful remedy. More trouble with Monsieur Baudrand

You do not seem to be able to go far in De La Salle's life without meeting with trouble or pain. As a result of spending much of 1692 in vigils praying for a novitiate and sleeping on the hard floor, he became crippled with rheumatism to such an extent that he was in extreme pain or even could not move his limbs at all, and was unable to celebrate Mass. It seems that on Sundays the pain diminished a little, and that he got to the chapel with two Brothers holding him under the arms, eager to celebrate. But something had to be done if he was not to become useless to his society. A doctor suggested a remedy, of the kind "you would only recommend to an enemy."⁶⁰ He was stretched on chairs arranged like a wooden grill and covered only with a mattress and blanket. Two stoves filled with burning charcoal were pushed under him and juniper leaves thrown on the coals. The fumes were supposed to penetrate the pores and "produce the transpiration of the serous fluids or, by consuming them, to strengthen the nerves and other parts of the body." The little room where he was soon became an oven so full of smoke that you could scarcely breathe. The Brother looking after him could hardly think of complaining. At one moment he was curious to know if the chairs were not burning, and put his hand to them: they were too hot to hold. All De La Salle said repeatedly was: "God be blessed!" He was not rid of the rheumatism at once, and at certain times of the year it came on more painfully. It meant that more than once he had to undergo this torture. And, in fact, rheumatism became some-

thing of a permanent affliction for him. Yet he kept the novitiate going, and as soon as he could he went round visiting the communities.

The winter in the early months of 1695 was a severe one. John Evelyn notes in his diary: "13 Jan. The Thames was frozen over....20 Jan. The frost and continual snow has now lasted neere 5 weekes....14 April. After a most severe and snowy winter...the weather and wind now changed...and there was a remission of cold." For the Brothers in Paris, on top of this, the parish priest refused to pay the rent on their community house from 1694 included. The reason was that Baudrand wanted the Brothers to move into a house in the Rue Guisarde, the street which made a T-junction with theirs. To leave them no option, he ended the lease on the house they were in. But when De La Salle came up from Vaugirard and saw the new house it struck him as quite unsuitable. Was it because of its general arrangement or its lack of privacy or was it too near a tavern? Or did life in the Rue Guisarde fit the following description: "You have to hear them pitching their voices over the roof; their throat dominates the noise and din of the crossroads:...the water-carrier, the seller of old hats, the rag-and-bone man, the seller of rabbit skins, the woman selling the latest catch.... Yet domestics can distinguish from the fourth floor, and from one end of the street to the other whether it is mackerel or fresh herrings that are being sold, lettuce or beetroot. It is an unintelligible cacophony for anybody else."⁶¹

Whatever the reason, the Founder realised the place was not suitable and preferred to face the annoyance of the parish priest. But what was he to do next? He took advice, and was told he should himself continue the lease on the present house, if the owner was willing. It was no small house, and the annual rent was 600 livres (Blain says 700). What guarantee had a near-starving community to offer? De La Salle, however, made the approach, and to his own astonishment, found it was accepted, without written contract. In other words, he would pay when he had the money. We have in fact a document signed by Nau (Leonor-Jean Nau, the proprietor), and on the back, in De La Salle's own hand: "Bill, in the form of an unspecified lease, bearing the price of renting the house in the Rue Princesse, 9 July, 1694."⁶² When Baudrand heard of the lease he called De La Salle and attacked him for refusing to move house. But since he was paying the rent, Baudrand had no argument; but he gave way to the outburst that M. De La Salle "was stubborn and had always wanted to get the better of him in everything, and of M. de la Barmondière." He paid the Brothers nothing for the first six months of 1695. Was this out of spite, or did he have money problems still?

During the summer vacation period, those forming part of the "little seminary" of Saint Sulpice went to their country house in Vaugirard itself. Fr Jacques Baüyn was in charge, and often came to see his friend, who had

also taken him as his spiritual director. But he always enquired whether he was at prayer or other exercise where his presence was needed, in which case he merely asked how he was and went off. But if he was told he was free, he waited in the garden in prayer. During the summer of 1695 when the feast of Saint Lambert, Patron of the parish, was being celebrated, the Blessed Sacrament was exposed in church. Fr Baüyn took the seminarists there and likewise Fr De La Salle took the novices and the Brothers who would be at Vaugirard during the holidays. When the seminarists enquired who this priest was who so impressed them by his graciousness and virtue, Baüyn spoke of his holiness and told them that what he admired most in him was his abandonment to Providence such, that if his work should be overthrown, he would remain trusting in the divine will. Baüyn celebrated Mass first and gave Communion to his seminarians, followed by De La Salle who did likewise for the Brothers. It is said to have been an inspiring occasion to see these two celebrate the sacred mysteries.⁶³ Monsieur Baüyn died on 19 March 1696.

A new archbishop and a new parish priest

The year before, the archbishop, Francis de Harlay de Champvallon, died on 6 August, and about the same time Henri Baudrand, having had a stroke, gave up his functions as parish priest. (He died in 1699). **Louis Antoine de Noailles**, whom we last heard of as bishop of Châlons, was appointed to succeed Harlay on 18 August and took up his functions in April 1696. He was the son of the first Duke of Noailles, and as bishop of Châlons had become a peer. His brother, Marshal de Noailles, was at the moment leading French armies into Spain. "Unlike his brother, however, he was no courtier but a bishop of exemplary life, constantly occupied with the care of his flock, and noted for his assiduous residence in his diocese. Both at Cahors and at Châlons, where he had been before his elevation to the see of Paris, he had been revered. He had paid no visits to court and the King knew nothing of him. He owed his appointment to Mme de Maintenon, who esteemed that 'the first church of the kingdom ought to possess a prelate of pure morals, distinguished for wisdom, moderation and true piety.' Even so, it had required an express order from the Pope to make him accept it."⁶⁴ Without delay he set about making improvements in his diocese.⁶⁵

Two months before him the new parish priest of Saint Sulpice had been installed. He was Joachim Trotti de La Chétardye. He was born in the region of Limoges (in the Limousin) in southwest France, in 1636. He went to the seminary of Saint-Sulpice in 1657 and joined the Company in October 1663. He lectured in moral theology at the seminary of Le Puy. There he helped another priest to organise a congregation of women teachers, the *Daughters of Instruction*. In 1679 he was made rector of the seminary at Bourges, and

at the same time looked after a parish nearby. In 1688 he had published the *Catechism of Bourges*. When he was appointed to Saint Sulpice, he had not seen Paris for thirty years⁶⁶.

He came with a well-deserved reputation of knowledge and devotedness. He was in his sixtieth year, but robust enough to lead the parish for many years. Louis XIV in 1702 offered him the bishopric of Poitiers, in the west of France, but he gave his age as “sixty-six reasons” to decline, preferring to continue looking after his vast parish. Louis wanted him to become his confessor in 1709, but again he declined. “He was, in effect, one of those great parish priests in Paris whose empire over their flock was quasi episcopal. In himself he was detached from all selfishness and from all pride. In his parish undertakings, he was enterprising, generous and tireless. In his relations with those he ministered to and notably with the lowliest, he was of an accessible and welcoming goodness that showed at its best in the great calamity of 1709.

“He had a very high idea of his ministry. He wanted to be a leader sure of being obeyed, and judging that a parish such as his was a vast enough field for Christian activities, he did not like what went beyond and that seemed to evade, if only partially, his control. When this squire from the Limousin after a strict, calm, relatively solitary and quite provincial life took over from M. Baudrand, he kept the sharp edges of his character, the abrupt and definitive opinions of the dogmatist sheltered from the world, certain narrow horizons, a dominating attitude and a forcefulness that charges unrelentingly against an obstacle. In short, a fine, powerful figure.”⁶⁷

“The saintliness of La Chétardye, to which all his contemporaries bear witness, was the result of an unceasing struggle against a vigorous temperament that the spirit of independence and self-confidence marked above all else. At Saint Sulpice everyone knew of it and was wary of it. Thus, on 28 June 1664, when he was a seminarian, the Assembly of the Consultors (of the Company) had decided that while Leschassier would prepare his licentiate in theology, “La Chétardye, whom they had obliged to miss the licentiate” - so interrupting his studies in Sorbonne for two years - “would also come back in order to prepare for his coming licentiate.” The reason for the postponement was: “so that he could strengthen his piety lest he should lose it if he began his studies before having much mortified himself.” La Chétardye came back to Paris, therefore, from the Solitude d’Avron (the Sulpician retreat-house) but his attitude did not still seem quite satisfactory. On 19 January 1665 “the conclusion was, that since one still saw in him attitudes which gave reason to fear that a licentiate might do him great harm, it would be better if he did not take it.” Louis Tronson had signed that exclusion. Concerning his catechisms, Tronson had written to M. Simon recommending him

not to hesitate to praise La Chétardye when what he does is good - "it encourages him and it is kindness to give him this consolation," implying it was not all too frequent. But he also expressed surprise that he had printed his catechisms without letting Tronson, who was Superior General of the Company, know first. He seems to be an excellent man with whom one could have difficulties.⁶⁸

The same month that La Chétardye was installed parish priest, the Founder's brother, Pierre De La Salle, was married in Rheims on 13 February, 1696. He was twenty-nine, a brilliant barrister who became a member of the *présidial* of Rheims like his father. He married Françoise-Henriette Bachelier; she was thirty-one, daughter of a family of magistrates. His brother, Canon Jean-Louis, conducted the ceremony, unlike John on the occasion of Marie's wedding. Jean-Remy, aged twenty-five, was there and his brother-in-law John Maillefer. Marie is not mentioned. She had children to look after, the last born being less than two years old. Of Peter's children, six died young or very young. One son joined the Benedictines and became an Appellant against the Bull Unigenitus in 1718. Two daughters joined the Congregation of Notre Dame. No child carried on the father's name. Peter had by now overcome his first reactions to his brother's taking the masters into their house, and we shall meet him again, supporting effectively the Brothers' work in Rheims.⁶⁹

The need for better premises for the novitiate. A new school. A last clash of rights at Vaugirard

La Chétardye took up residence with the priests of Saint Sulpice and took stock of his parish. Its needs were great. He handed all his income over to the fund for the needy, retaining only enough for his keep and that of a servant. He quickly saw the importance for his parish of the work of the Brothers. He valued their excellent effect and the good name they gave his parish. What a fine parish organisation to have directly under his authority! He would go ahead with a projected third school and spare neither money nor contacts to make them all more flourishing. He went to see M. De La Salle at his novitiate in Vaugirard.⁷⁰ Three things struck him: the poverty and dilapidation of the place, the fervour of the community, and the overcrowding. The number of postulants had increased considerably, and the meals were still being brought with increasing difficulty from Paris. It was becoming too difficult for De La Salle as Superior to look after the temporal and spiritual needs of the novitiate and of the Paris community. A bigger property was needed, and nearer the Rue Princesse.⁷¹

The Founder was aware that at the southeastern edge of the suburb of Saint Germain, at the corner of the Rue de Vaugirard and the Rue Notre-Dame des-Champs that marked the beginning of the open country, there was

a fine vacant property measuring about 175 by 195 metres, covering 5 acres (2 hectares). It is not certain which corner it was on. Since the broad Rue de Rennes was cut through this crossroad to open up the new Montparnasse railway station in 1853, this area has become just one more busy, built-up area of Paris. The property was very close to the Luxembourg gardens. It was “out of the way, on its own, large and spacious, enclosed on all sides by strong doors and a good surrounding wall, embellished with walks and large gardens.” Several communities of nuns had used it, and it was known as “Our Lady of the Ten Virtues”, or more simply as “La Grand’Maison” (The Big House). It was said to be haunted, and that is perhaps why the owner was only asking for a rent of 1600 livres, although the property was worth much more. But that sum was out of the reach of De La Salle. Yet the site ideally met his requirements. He prayed and trusted in Providence, and then discussed the matter with M. de la Chétardye. The latter was astonished at his bold idea of leasing it, seeing that he had no funds, but he fully backed it and, to help, increased by 50 livres the annual grant to each of the eight Brothers teaching in his parish. Maillefer says he paid the rent, which may come to saying the same thing.

This was soon increased by another 600 livres a year, for in January 1697 at the latest, the third school was opened⁷² on the corner of the Rue Saint Placide and the Rue de Sèvres. It was in a populous area, and began with four classes. There were now twelve Brothers in the community at the Rue Princesse.

While he could look forward to leaving Vaugirard soon, he had one more disagreement, this time with its parish priest.⁷³ The new Archbishop had begun visiting his diocese, and had noticed the excessive number of private chapels: anybody of some worth wanted to have one in his country domain. It was to one such chapel close by that De La Salle had been able to take his novices for daily mass. De Noailles suppressed them all. This meant that the novices would have to make the daily walk to the parish church. It was only a matter of twenty minutes each way, but the road could be virtually impassable in winter and in bad weather. At the early hour at which they went to Mass, that road would be crowded with carts bringing vegetables and hay from the country, cows and sheep would be driven in. Still more, on Sundays and the many holidays, people flocking into the country crowded the road and the parish church on those days. They would be a noisy, merry crowd, and some of the youngsters would make remarks to and make fun of the novices. Too bad if their own former playmates were among them. It would not help the novices just beginning to control their impressions and learning to be mindful of God’s presence. In spite of the prohibition, therefore, the Founder sought an audience with the archbishop and explained his need: would his Grace

allow him to make a room in the novitiate into a chapel, and give him the faculty to say mass there? De Noailles had heard while he was in Châlons of his work for the poor, and all Champagne knew of what he had abandoned to work with poor masters. And now he knew of the work his Brothers were doing in Paris.

Consequently he granted the permission readily. It is dated 27 March, 1697. The Brothers' Archives have a copy of it written in De La Salle's own hand. He kept careful track of documents validating the Brothers as a community, or their houses, and handed them over to his successor the year before he died. The authorisation read: "We grant you permission by these present letters to celebrate or have celebrated by priests approved by us the holy sacrifice of the Mass on a portable altar and in a low voice in the chapel of your house situated within the extent of the parish of Vaugirard by Paris, in which you apply yourself with care under our authority to instruct and train masters for the little schools... the which permission shall be valid only for all the time you will remain in the said house with the said schoolmasters, parish rights and offices being safeguarded. We give however commission to the priest in charge of the said parish church to bless this chapel above all things in the accustomed manner." In fact it was one of his grand vicars who came to bless it. Although the permission was specifically about having a chapel and saying Mass, it did contain a recognition and approval that De La Salle was training schoolmasters under episcopal authority. It was a useful document for forthcoming confrontations. But the archbishop is in no way saying this is a religious community, which it was not. He refers to the novices as masters being trained for the little schools.

When the parish priest of Vaugirard no longer saw the novices at Mass, he was up in arms. He had said nothing about that private chapel the novices had been to so far, nor about them not coming to his church then. But now he came to see De La Salle and complained that he was breaking church rules, that he was encouraging others to do likewise and depriving his parishioners of the edification given by the novices. The Founder had good reasons for not giving in, and could show the archbishop's authorisation. He tried nevertheless to calm the parish priest and promised to take his community to his church on the first Thursday of every month, when there was exposition of the Blessed Sacrament and a sung Mass. On the first occasion, M. De La Salle carried the Blessed Sacrament in procession and celebrated the Mass. During it he was partly lost in ecstasy, for the deacon had often to draw his attention to what he should be doing next. This and the fervour of the community made the parish priest more insistent that they should come regularly.

The very day of the Feast of Corpus Christi De La Salle kept the novices in the house and celebrated Mass there. The Mass and procession in the parish

would be a very crowded and noisy affair. A procession was something quite frequent in those days, done with great solemnity. Only, the schoolchildren lined up to take part saw it otherwise. “We see these children running about during the procession like donkeys let loose, sometimes, four, six, ten or twelve together, shouting, yelling, fighting against one another, parish against parish, throwing stones, using sticks and other weapons...”⁷⁴ Nevertheless, the parish priest rushed to the novitiate and burst into the house, loud with complaints. “To listen to him, everything in the Church of God was turned upside down because the novices had not turned up to follow the Blessed Sacrament. At that very moment they were singing the Office, and their attention to do it holily shut their ears to the unheard-of clamours in that place of silence. The parish priest, still more annoyed that his voice was drowned by those who were singing the praises of God, redoubled his shouting.”⁷⁵ The young novices must have been hard put keeping a straight face. The parish priest went off more furious than when he came. Fortunately, the Founder had kept his calm, and bit by bit they became friends again. He took the novices to the parish on the great days. Very soon, of course, the house would be empty.

The years at Vaugirard were coming to an end. The Founder took over the Grand’Maison some time in 1697, a date supported by a quote in the next chapter. He moved the novices on 18 April 1698, so that it was now quite a full house. But the furniture brought from Vaugirard was so little in quantity and so wretched, that when La Chétardye saw it, he sent one of the Brothers to Madame Voisin, wife of Daniel-François Voisin, Councillor of State and an *Intendant*, and a friend of Mme de Maintenon. She was well known for her alms to the poor of Saint Sulpice and to the communities in Paris. She at once gave 400 livres, and promised to make it an annual donation. But when the parish priest gently pointed out the vast needs of the novitiate, she immediately gave 7000 livres.⁷⁶

The house could now be furnished. It was “fitted out with beds, curtains, straw and flock mattresses, linen, and the necessary furniture,...the most necessary kitchen utensils and even pewterware for the refectory: magnificent furnishings for a place into which there had never entered anything but the cheapest and coarsest clay crockery... With this help, the great house...took on a new face, and made the pleasantness of its situation and advantages felt.”⁷⁷ But water was still the only drink, and the food the same as before.

Vaugirard had undoubtedly been the centre of the renewal and consolidation of the little society. It also became the place where the Founder began what may be viewed as a writing ministry, and a considerable one, namely, the provision of texts as a further support for the Brothers’ spiritual and professional life. The value and need of this may have been suggested by the

Brothers themselves.

The years at Vaugirard were outwardly uneventful for De La Salle and his Institute: the little masters in Paris had been silenced, and, apart from the school in the Rue St Placide, there were no new foundations. Yet we know De La Salle was very busy devoting long hours to writing texts for his Brothers. From 1691 to 1699, as we have seen, he had more time for writing than would occur for some years. This writing ministry developed considerably. All his school texts except the Handbook for schools were in print by 1706. He continued working on the others as time offered. He had some time in 1705 and again after 1712, especially his last three years, but he was then worn out, in pain and often in bed ill. One wonders how he found the time to do all he achieved. Blain was aware of this writing activity:

“After M. de La Salle had arranged to his liking in a body of rules the practices and usages of the Community, he thought of enriching it with several other works very useful for the Brothers and their schools. Among them are Christian Civility, instructions on the Holy Mass, how to follow it well, and how to approach in holy fashion the Sacraments of Penitence and of the Eucharist, Catechisms of all kinds, small ones for the children, other ones for the Brothers, fuller and deeper and more scholarly mingled with moral teachings and pious practices. ...He composed also Meditations and other books of piety for the particular use of his Brothers.”⁷⁸ From 1714 “He was nearly always in his room praying or writing and composing Meditations for the particular use of his Brothers.”⁷⁹ In those last years also “his love for this holy exercise (mental prayer) put pen into his hand to praise it and give attraction for it by the description of its advantages and excellence. He tried in this little work to smooth the way by developing the manner of doing it well, under the title of explanation of the method of mental prayer.”⁸⁰

The school texts, whose subject-matter reflected his Brothers’ experience in the classroom, were all printed in his lifetime, except the greatest, the *Conduct of Schools*. His spiritual writings, on the contrary, except for one, were not printed till after his death. This was partly because many notes on some of these would be taken by the novices into community, and partly also because printing them meant submitting them to outside inspection at a time when discretion was better. On some, moreover, he was working till his last years.

The full list of his works

His spiritual works comprise:⁸¹

The *Common Rule of the Brothers of the Christian Schools* (1694/1705/1718).

The *Collection of Short Treatises for the use of the Brothers of the*

Christian Schools (1705; printed 1711.).

The Rule of the Brother Director of a House of the Institute.

Meditations for all the Sundays of the Year and for the principal Feasts of the year.

Meditations for the time of the Retreat.

Explanation of the Method of Mental Prayer.

His works written specifically for the Brothers' ministry in the schools include:

The Conduct of Christian Schools. A copy dated around 1705 exists in manuscript form. A first printed edition appeared in 1720.

The dates when De La Salle sought approval of his texts and permission to print show how soon they were ready, and the very considerable work he achieved from late 1691 when Vaugirard was in operation.

Exercises of Piety which are made throughout the day in the Christian Schools. They were approved in 1696 and printed by 1702. 122 editions are known, most of them partial editions bound with the *Duties of a Christian*.

In 1698 permission was given to print:

Instructions and Prayers for Holy Mass.

Methodical Instruction for teaching how to go to Confession. These two were printed in one small volume of 152 pages, but were reprinted separately in 1706.

Instructions and Prayers for Confession and Communion. Though intended for the children, they were written with the hope of reaching the parents. From 1734 these three works were printed under one cover, totalling 282 pages, and of this 37 editions are known.

Teaching French Syllables was also approved this year. It was published in 1702 and again in 1705. It had many editions. Those after 1800 are very different, and indicate a step backward on De La Salle's approach.

M. De La Salle submitted for approval on 2 November 1702 a batch of six considerable works:

The Rules of Christian Politeness and Civility. As the manuscript had already the main text in Gothic characters, the printing was completed by February 1703. The book had a Preface of 7 pages, 252 pages of text and 4 for the Contents. 176 editions are known by 1955.

The Duties of a Christian towards God and the means to be able to fulfil them well. This was in continuous prose, comprising a Preface of 10 pages, 494 pages of text and a Table of Contents of 8 pages. It was published in 1703. 270 editions are known by 1928.

The Duties of a Christian towards God, in question and answer form. This developed catechism was planned in three parts, of which two appeared in this volume: *Part I, on the duties of a Christian*; *Part II, on the means to carry them out*. There was no new Preface for this Volume. It comprised 305 pages of text and 5 for the Contents. As it was put into the hands of the pupils, few copies remain, and most re-editions were of the previous volume.

Of the Exterior and Public Worship that Christians are obliged to render to God. The Third Part of the Duties of a Christian towards God, in question and answer form. This was printed by July 1703. One copy of this first edition remains, as reprinted in 1705, with the *Spiritual Canticles* added. The catechism took 301 pages, with 5 pages of Contents; the hymns took 117 pages with 3 for the Contents. They were printed separately in 1705 (124 pages). Several editions were printed along with the *Exercises of Piety*.

The Large and Small Abridgments of the Duties of a Christian towards God. These were in question and answer form, of 125 and 36 pages respectively. Permission to reprint was given in 1703 and they were published before 1705.

Spiritual Canticles for the use of the Christian Schools (Edited only) (1703).

David's Psalter and the Office of Our Lady (Edited only). This was printed in 1706. Being in Latin, the Psalter was intended for pupils who can "read French perfectly". Later editions changed considerably.

The main works of the Founder will be given consideration in Chapters 11, 12 and 16 of this book.

References

1. Blain I, 312-313.
2. id., 312.
3. id., 312.
4. Maillefer, CL6, 92-95 (he is less sure of dates and the order of events); Blain I, 311-315.
5. Armand Ravelet, *Saint Jean-Baptiste de La Salle*, Paris, 1933, 140-142.
6. Blain II, Appendix, 72-4.
7. id., 74.
8. id., 70-71.
9. Blain I, 315, 317.
10. *Rule of the Brothers of the Christian Schools*, 1987, articles 149, 142.
11. CL2, 39, n.2.

12. Blain I, 313.
13. This parallel and its quotes (here given partially) are owed completely to a memo by Brother Gerard Rummery, General Councillor of the Brothers of the Christian Schools, of which a copy was kindly given to the author in 1991.
14. E. Letourneau, *La mission de Jean-Jacques Olier et la Fondation des Grands Séminaires en France. 1ère Partie*, 72-73 et seq.
15. M. Faillon, *Vie de M. Olier, 1ère Partie*, 347-349.
16. Blain I, 315-318.
17. CL3, 32.
18. *Les Eglises Parisiennes, Vol. II*, Amédée Boinet, Editions de Minuit, 1982.
19. Blain I, 317.
20. Blain I, 317-318. See CL11, 55.
21. Aroz, CL26, 272-4; CL41(1), 315-317.
22. Maillefer, CL6, 94, 95; Blain I, 325.
23. CL3, 32.
24. Blain I, 318.
25. *Guardian* newspaper, London, 15th April, 1988.
26. Blain I, 326.
27. id., 332, 358.
28. Félix-Paul, 316.
29. Blain I, 167.
30. On the Rethel purchases, see Aroz, CL26, 41, 42.
31. Brother Maurice-Auguste, CL5, 309.
32. *Bulletin des Ecoles Chrétiennes*, April 1911, 139-141; Poutet II, 154; Aroz, CL40, 95.
33. Maillefer, CL6, 110-113; Blain I, 333-339.
34. W. Battersby, *St John Baptist De La Salle*, Burns and Oates 1958, 125.
35. Maillefer, CL6, 112-115; Blain I, 341-344.
36. See CL2, 83, n.3.
37. Maurice-Auguste, CL11, 57.
38. CL6, 75.
39. Blain I, 344.
40. CL11, 57.
41. id., 57-58.
42. CL2, 60.
43. CL25.
44. Maillefer, CL6, 114-117; Blain I, 344-348.
45. Blain I, 356.
46. Blain II, 146.
47. Blain I, 343.
48. CL3, 32.
49. Félix-Paul, 263, 187, 210-11.
50. On the whole question of the early status of the Brothers' Society, hardly touched on here, see CL2,3 and 11, written by the canonist Brother Maurice-Auguste in 1960 and 62. The titles are: 1) *Les vœux des Frères des Ecoles Chrétiennes avant la bulle de Benoît XIII; première partie: les faits et les textes*. 2)

- Idem.: *Deuxième partie: les documents*. 3) *L'Institut des Frères des Ecoles Chrétiennes à la recherche de son statut canonique: des origines (1679) à la bulle de Benoît XIII (1625)*.
51. Details in any history of the period. e.g. Robin Briggs, *Early Modern France 1560-1715*, OUP 1977, 154-6, 162-5; E.N. Williams, *The Ancien Régime in Europe*, Pelican 1972, 185-8. The text of the *Four Articles* in Mallia-Milanes, cited below, 68. Details of William of Orange's landing in England and James II's flight, John Evelyn's diary, 523ss.
 52. Parts of the translated extract in *Louis XIV and France*, by Victor Malia-Milanes, Macmillan 1986.
 53. *New Catholic Encyclopedia*, McGraw-Hill, 1967.
 54. *Collection of Short Treatises*, 1711. CL15, 67.
 55. Blain II, 262-3; 376-9.
 56. Rigault I, 282.
 57. Blain I, 250.
 58. CL2, 93, n.5.
 59. Maillefer, CL6, 107; Blain I, 328-9.
 60. Maillefer, CL6, 120, 121; Blain I, 331-2; 338-9.
 61. L.S. Mercier, *Tableau de Paris*, Amsterdam, 1783, 12 Vols; Tome II. 113. Quoted in *Vivre dans la Rue à Paris au xviiiè siècle*, présenté par Arlette Farge. *Collection Archives*, Gallimart/Julliard, 1979.
 62. Aroz, CL42(1), 261, 265.
 63. Blain I, 329-330.
 64. Battersby, *Life of St John Baptist De La Salle*, 131.
 65. Blain I, 348.
 66. See Battersby, op. cit., 152.
 67. Rigault I, 209-13.
 68. Poutet II, 340-1, n.26.
 69. Aroz, CL27, 112-114, 135-139.
 70. Blain I, 356.
 71. Maillefer, CL6, 124-7; Blain I, 359-361.
 72. id., 126/7.
 73. id., 128-131; Blain I, 361.
 74. *L'Ecole Paroissiale*.
 75. Blain I, 352.
 76. id., 360.
 77. id., 360, 441.
 78. id., 341.
 79. Blain II, 125.
 80. id., 164.
 81. The texts of all his works, except his syllabary, have been reproduced in various *Cahiers Lasalliens*: nos 25, 15, 12, 13, 14, 24, 18, 17, 19, 20-21, 23, 20. See also CL48, 164-170. For English translations, see *Lasallian Sources: The Complete Works of John Baptist de La Salle* as listed in the Introduction to this work.
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Chapter 11. Consolidation continued: De La Salle provides texts useful to his Brothers

The present chapter presents with some comment four texts which reveal the essential character of the Brothers' life and work. Their *Rule* is this life, in seventeenth century trappings, put into writing as a reminder to themselves and as a guide to new entrants. The *Collection of Short Treatises* brings together De La Salle's own thoughts and those of others relative to their spirituality that the Brothers could continually reflect over. Two sets of *Meditations* covering the Church's year show the high level of Christian life and of their vocation to which he wanted them to aspire.

THE RULE OF THE BROTHERS OF THE CHRISTIAN SCHOOLS.

The earliest text we have of the Brothers' Rule is that of 1705. It was never printed. It was unsafe to print, given the royal decree against new communities, before letters patent had been obtained. The one extant copy is a handwritten notebook of 83 pages, kept in the Avignon municipal library. This seems to be identical with the text drawn up by De La Salle in 1694: no reworking of the text is referred to before 1717, when the Brothers decided to leave a final revision to him. He finished this in 1718, the year before his death. This text also remained in manuscript copies. In the Brothers' Central House in Rome there is a copy of 114 pages, sent to the Brothers' community at Troyes and signed at the foot of each page by "Brother Bartholomew, Joseph Truffet", the new Superior General. A new edition was required after the Bull of approbation of 1725, containing two new chapters concerning the vows, and some additions and modifications. Since letters patent had been granted in 1724, this text was printed in Rouen in 1726. The one who saw to this edition was the most senior Brother of the Institute, the faithful John Jacquot.¹

Although De La Salle worked within the Catholic tradition of consecrated life in community and for the service of others, the specific work of his society resulted in a novel spirit and life-style compared with existing forms. As being a French late seventeenth century experience, it shows the weight of monastic tradition as it was still felt then, and the influence of the stern Catholic revival and of Berullian spirituality. These make some of the Rule's prescriptions and even of its attitudes out of tune with today's better understanding of the human person and of interpersonal relations. It is, notwithstanding, an objective and remarkable expression of the Brothers' experience of life with Jesus Christ for the children of the poor.

The main provisions of the Rule of 1694.*The purpose of the Institute.*

The *Rule*, whether of 1705, 1718 or 1726,² begins with a clear statement as to the purpose and necessity of this Institute:

The Institute of the Brothers of the Christian Schools is a Society in which profession is made of keeping schools gratuitously.

The members of this Institute will be called Brothers.

They cannot be priests nor aspire to the ecclesiastical state; nor are they even to sing, or wear the surplice, or exercise any function in church, except to serve a Low Mass.

We have seen the kind of event and current attitudes that led to this last statement. Negative in form, it is saying that there is a positive content to the Brothers' vocation and ministry, namely, undivided dedication to the profession of Christian teaching.

The end of this Institute is to give a Christian education to children; it is for this purpose the Brothers keep schools, so that, having the children under their care from morning until evening, they may teach them to lead good lives, by instructing them in the mysteries of our holy religion and by inspiring them with Christian maxims; and thus give them a suitable education.

The necessity of this Institute is very great, because artisans and the poor, being usually little instructed, and being occupied all day in gaining a livelihood for themselves and their children, cannot themselves give them the needed instruction nor a Christian and respectable education. It was with a view of providing this advantage for the children of artisans and of the poor, that the Christian Schools were established.

The wording "artisans and the poor" and "Christian Schools" contained, as we have seen, an educational affirmation and challenge. The title "Brothers of the Christian Schools" was itself a manifesto.

All disorders, especially among artisans and the poor, usually arise from their having been in their childhood left to themselves and badly brought up. It is almost impossible to repair this evil at a more advanced age, because the bad habits they have acquired are overcome only with great difficulty, and scarcely ever entirely, no matter what care may be taken to destroy them, whether by frequent instructions or the use of the Sacraments. As the principal fruit to be expected from the institution of the Christian Schools is to forestall these disorders and prevent their evil

consequences, it is easy to conceive the importance of such schools and their necessity.

De La Salle, a priest who throughout his life had a remarkable ministry with the lapsed, admits that the priestly ministries of the word of God and the Sacraments have limited effect if the basic ministry of Christian education has not been done well by parents or educators. The Brothers' conviction that they exercised this ministry called forth the appropriate Gospel way of life. This is what the remainder of the *Rules* spelt out. For convenience, Chapter numbering is taken from De La Salle's revision of 1718; it is not found in the earlier version.

The spirit of this Institute. (Chapter 2)

The Spirit (or inner motivation) of this Institute is first a *Spirit of faith* which should lead those who belong to it to look upon nothing except with the eyes of faith, to do nothing except in view of God and to attribute all to God...

To live in this Spirit the Brothers of the Society will have a very profound respect for Holy Scripture, and in evidence they will always carry about them the New Testament and pass no day without making some reading in it with an attitude of faith, respect and veneration for the divine words it contains.

The Brothers of this Society will animate all their actions with attitudes of faith...

They shall so act as to perform all (their actions) by the guidance of God, by the movement of his Spirit and with the intention of pleasing him.

They shall pay as much attention as they can to the holy presence of God and take care to renew it from time to time...

Secondly, the Spirit of this Institute consists in an ardent zeal for the instruction of children and for bringing them up in the fear of God, inducing them to preserve their innocence if they have not lost it, and inspiring them with a great aversion and horror for sin and whatever might cause them to lose purity.

In order to enter into this Spirit, the Brothers of the Society shall strive by prayer, instruction, and by their vigilance and good conduct in school to procure the salvation of the children confided to their care, bringing them up in piety and in a true Christian spirit, that is, according to the rules and maxims of the Gospels.

Chapter Two is a unique definition of the spirit of faith as being the spirituality of the Brother of the Christian Schools. It is his concern to develop continually a Gospel vision of life and to purify his motives so as to act habitually by views of faith. It is a dedicated sharing throughout the day in the life Jesus led in presence of his Father and in the power of the Spirit. De La Salle asks his Brothers: "With what attention and interior spirit do you do all you have to do in your vocation and in your work? Do you unite all your actions to the actions and purposes of Jesus Christ?"³

And this is in view of evangelisation. De La Salle himself explains the appropriateness for a community of Christian educators to live by faith:

Faith should serve as light and guide for all Christians...It is for this reason that it is of great consequence that the Brothers of the Christian Schools, the aim of whose Institute is to bring up the children confided to their care in the spirit of Christianity, and to strive to bring it about in them, should be so penetrated and so abundantly filled with the spirit of faith, that they look upon the attitudes and practical teachings of faith as the rule of their actions and of their whole conduct, and the spirit of faith as the spirit of their Institute.⁴

To help them to become almost subconsciously familiar with Scripture, the Brothers read a passage of it daily at the beginning of their evening spiritual reading. More reading of it was prescribed for Sundays and holidays and retreats. On Sundays, after Mass, there was, for about an hour, the reading out of a chapter of the New Testament and an explanation of it followed by discussion or sharing of ideas. There are indications that the explanation consisted in reading comment on the chapter from the Fathers of the Church.⁵ The novices learnt by heart a passage of the New Testament daily.

Chapters Three to Six: "The spirit of community in this Institute."

These concern the main activities in community.

Chapter Three begins by stating that in this Institute a true spirit of community will be shown and always preserved. But instead of being defined, its quality and details are spelt out in this and the next three Chapters covering daily spiritual exercises, exercises of humiliation and mortification, and how recreation times are to be spent. Because of the limited accommodation provided and the practices of the time, the Brothers slept in a common dormitory and would have only one room where there would be a fire or a charcoal stove.

Stress is put on having a great love of mental prayer, as being the first and main daily exercise: the Brothers day by day try to put on the mind of Christ so as to reveal him better to the young. And "they will have a very special

affection for Holy Communion,” which they approached twice a week - against the Jansenist and rigorist trends of the times - or oftener if allowed. The Brothers went to Mass daily and also said the Rosary daily as a sign of devotion to Our Lady.

Against the tendency of the times and because classwork was wearing and demanded great self-discipline, the Rule specified: “There shall be no corporal mortification of Rule in this Institute.” What were left were some practices of monastic inspiration: fasting on Fridays, abstinence on Saturdays from Christmas to the Purification; daily brief accusation of exterior faults in the evening, with, as “penance” given by the Brother Director, namely, some prayer to say or some reflection to make; and the Chapter of defects each Friday, when the Brothers kindly reminded one another of failings in community life. These practices were meant to help the Brother to see himself better, but they contained no aspect of affirming him. They became in time formal and unhelpful, and are replaced today by a more open community life.

What was called recreation would surprise us today. For about three-quarters of an hour after the midday and evening meal, the Brothers walked up and down and talked. The Rule cut out mere curiosity or criticising or refusing to take part. But in addition it laid down a whole list of purely spiritual topics on which to talk. It was based on a similar Jesuit list. (See further under *Collection of Short Treatises*). Games such as skittles or chess were not envisaged. One reason for this was, apart from lack of room, the fact that free talk or such games led to arguing and quarrelling, if not to violence! It was a very rough age when feelings were given spontaneous outlet.⁶

Chapters seven to Eleven: Gospel holiness through the teaching role.

It is the first time in the history of religious communities that the teaching ministry is set out as being by itself a way of Christian perfection. The only point of a Rule is to express what living the Gospel means for a given vocation in given circumstances. The Brothers’ Rule is in fact saying: You will come to Christ and find Christ and give Christ not only in purely spiritual occupations. You will do this in the classroom, whether you are developing the children’s natural talents for the glory of God, or teaching religion, as well as in all your relationships with them and with your colleagues and others, if all is done in a spirit of faith and zeal.

The relevant Chapters are entitled:

7. How the Brothers are to act in school towards their pupils;
8. How they are to act when they may have to punish their pupils;
9. How they are to behave in school with regard to themselves, their Brothers and persons from outside;
10. The days and times they will keep school, and the days when they will

give holidays;

11. On the Inspector of Schools.

Chapter 7 fills out the brief definition of zeal given in Chapter 2 and itself refers for detailed method to the *Conduct of Schools*, a developed text that will be seen in the next chapter of this book. “The Brothers will keep school in all the houses of the Institute except in the novitiate house.” So there is no doubt what their ministry is. And further: “The Brothers will keep schools everywhere free of charge, and that is essential to their Institute.” But in 1718 this second text begins the Chapter. It was a clear statement on behalf of the poor but also against any kind of discrimination on financial and therefore on class grounds. After what De La Salle and his Brothers had gone through between 1694 and 1718, this was a determination and almost a defiance.

The Brothers’ concern is to teach methodically and well both profane skills and especially religion. It is essential to their ministry that the schools run well and that the teaching is done effectively. There is a firmer phrasing in the 1718 *Rule* than the earlier: “They will pay continual attention to three things in school: 1. During the reading lessons to have all the words corrected that the pupil who is reading says badly; 2. To make all follow who read in the same reading grade; 3. To make the pupils keep silence throughout school time. They will teach all their pupils according to the method prescribed and which is universally practised in the Institute, and they will neither change nor introduce anything new.” Since they had developed the best method at the time precisely because they had innovated, this seems strange. Innovation in fact was not ruled out, as we shall see in the *Conduct of Schools*. But generally speaking, because this method was the most effective, it was to be followed. A Brother could move from Calais to Marseilles, and with this method, soon have a well-run class. This remark was for the individual Brother. We have seen that De La Salle met some of his leading Brothers annually, in order to discuss the progress of his Society.

“They will teach the children to read: 1st French, 2nd Latin, 3. Handwritten letters (so far they had more easily read printed texts) and to write. They will also teach them spelling and arithmetic, the whole as prescribed in the First Part of the *Conduct of Schools*. They shall, however, make it their principal care to teach their pupils prayers..., the catechism, the duties of a Christian and the maxims and practices Our Lord has left us in the Holy Gospel.”

Although building up the children’s faith is the Brothers’ main task, the teaching of profane skills takes up most of the teaching time: the Brothers were running schools in the modern sense of positively preparing the whole

person (within the limits of the possible at the time) for the chance of a better life in an urban society. And that meant good teaching and a well-organised school.

Another important aspect to the teacher's presence "from morning until evening" is his attitude and influence as a person.

"They will love tenderly all their pupils, but they will become familiar with none and will give them nothing out of special friendship but only by way of reward or encouragement. They will show an equal affection for all their pupils, more even for the poor than the rich, because they are much more charged by their Institute with the former than the latter. They will strive to give their pupils by all their exterior and all their behaviour a continual example of self-control and of all the other virtues they have to teach them and get them to practise."⁷

Chapter Eight: Correcting children in the spirit of the Gospel. Good order in crowded classrooms.

A notable feature of the Brothers' spirituality is that it takes in attention to misbehaviour. "The Brothers will have all the attention and vigilance possible over themselves so as to punish their pupils only rarely, being persuaded that this is one of the principal means to run their school well and establish a very great order. When the Brothers have to punish a pupil, what they shall be most careful about is to do so with a great moderation and presence of mind and with the conditions that are laid down in the Conduct of Schools, and for this purpose never to proceed to carry them out under a sudden impulse nor when they are annoyed." They are reminded never to call the pupils names nor to hit or kick them or push them roughly or to pull their ears, nose or hair. In those crowded, ill-ventilated classrooms, in a rude age when feelings were easily at the surface and given way to on both sides, especially in young teachers, these things must have happened. "All these ways of correcting must never be practised by the Brothers, being all very unbecoming, opposed to Christian charity and gentleness." This Chapter on punishments was not put together clearly till 1718 by De La Salle himself, and was therefore the fruit of experience.

Corporal punishment was still found necessary, although De La Salle would have preferred to do without it. The Brothers increasingly did reduce it. The considerable thought they gave to this matter will be seen in the next chapter. Compared with masters in a one-class school, the Brothers had arrangements among themselves that prevented regrettable hastiness.

A Brother's behaviour with regard to himself concerned punctuality, orderliness, politeness and self-control, and especially silence if any serious progress was to be made in these crowded classes of children who lived on the streets.

The children were in school for only four or five years, and it was necessary for them to be able to move steadily through all the stages of reading and writing to perfection, if all this was to help them later on to better their position. Perhaps not yet with an inexperienced Brother, yet soon (since a beginner had as tutor his Director or Inspector for six months) silence became a mark of his classroom; he only spoke to correct a mistake in reading when another pupil could not do so, and in the catechism lesson or for the little talk he gave at morning and evening prayer.

As schools were set up in ordinary houses, there were no corridors: the children entered from the street by the one and only door, and passed through other classes to reach theirs. The Rule laid down that the doors between classes were to remain open throughout school time; although a Brother was not to take particular notice of what went on next door, it did provide a certain check on noise, for instance, and if a Brother did notice something wrong in the next room, he informed the Director (who was head of the school at the same time). Relations with outsiders were those of discretion, of not talking more than necessary to them while the lesson was in progress, and of referring them to the house if the visit was not on school matters.

Chapters Twelve to Twenty. The evangelical motivations of a life-style.

So far, the Rule has stated the finality and spirit of the Institute and outlined the specific activities and practices of the Brothers' life. The next section of the Rule looks at permanent attitudes to be aimed at in living the Gospel. They reflect a monastic model and also the times. They deal with relations with the Brother Director, with one another, and with outsiders, and then the virtues of poverty, chastity, obedience and silence. It is clear that it is a 'religious' style of life, prior to any official recognition by the Church.

Although the Brother Director is told very clearly that his is a role entirely subordinate to that of the Superior of the Society, yet by their Rule "the Brothers will always see God in the person of their Director and will take care to speak to him only as clothed with God's authority." St Benedict told his monks: "As soon as anything has been ordered by the superior, they receive it as divine command and cannot suffer any delay in executing it." (Rule, Ch. 5) The monastic tradition was that, to follow Christ one had to give up one's own will since only by our own will can we do wrong. Since it is hard for us to see and admit our failings, the monk accepted the discipline of community life under a superior. In that understanding, the abbot took the place of Christ for you.

The chapter of the Rule of 1705 about the way the Brothers are to behave towards one another can be summed up in its first article:

The Brothers will have a cordial affection for one another, but they will give to none of them any sign or token of special affection out of respect

for Our Lord whom they must honour in all equally as being animated by him and living by his Spirit.

In these words we see the depth of his living faith. The Brothers were to make it a singular pleasure to render one another service, yet not without permission, and they were to speak to them with simplicity, respect and without affectation. Since they were not to speak to one another without permission, and the day was tightly regulated, there could not have been community life in the way the Brothers live it today. Yet was it not also true for them, with their commitment to brotherly love and support, that, as their present Rule says: "The community is for the Brothers their home."

*The character of this Rule. The Rule today.*⁸

The Rule as evolved by De La Salle and his Brothers spelt out living the Gospel in their vocation and according to their ministry. The Gospel is not a code, but the Good news that Jesus Christ is God among us who reconciled us to his Father by his death, and by his resurrection has begun a new work among us by his Holy Spirit. It is a call to conversion and continuing conversion and growth in this new life. In the same way, the early Rule was a commitment to grow, a planned living out of an aim. The text condensed the Brothers' experience of what they were, what was the ministry they were called to, what was the corresponding Gospel response. By agreement they adopted the most appropriate mode of life at the time. It necessarily reflects their times so that many details - and details are important in community life - lost meaning in time. The Rule is always relative to the life and mission, to the dynamism it is trying to express. The Rule of 1705 was a brilliant presentation of the Brothers' identity, *raison d'être* and spirituality. And inevitably in a seventeenth-century mode.

Today, practices and a time-table that no longer serve their purpose have been dropped, and so has the monastic model. Living the Gospel according to the Brothers' own mission and charism takes the full stage. It is the adaptation and renewal of religious life as called for by Vatican II : following Christ in our day; listening to the needs of today's young. Furthermore, adaptation to local reality is made in provincial chapters and again at the level of each community.

The following quotes give an idea of the new tone of the Rule and its fidelity to the charism of the Founder:

It is by faith that the Brothers learn to see in every happening and in every person, especially the poor, a sign and a call of the Spirit...They strive continually to purify their interior motives and to achieve a measure of self-mastery so that they may accomplish all their actions by "the

guidance of God, by the movement of his Spirit and with the intention of pleasing him.”

The distinctive character of the Brothers’ community is to be a community of faith where the experience of God is shared... Dedicated as it is to the apostolic ministry of education, the community realises that its mission needs constantly to be discovered...The community is for the Brothers their home. It is there that they live together. It is there that they experience each day anew the friendship, the esteem, the trust and the respect that they have for one another.⁹

The ordinary way in which the Spirit is revealed is through a community working together to discover the needs of the world and of the Church. Each member of the community ought to be heard, since the Spirit speaks and acts in each Brother. It is the responsibility of the Brother Director to make the final decision concerning them.¹⁰

The new model for obedience does not take away the value of one-to-one confiding nor of spiritual guidance.

The Institute is concerned above all for the educational needs of the poor as they strive to become aware of their dignity and to live and to be recognised as human beings and children of God. The Institute establishes, renews and diversifies its works according to what the kingdom of God requires...In their educational activity the Brothers seek to integrate the effort for human advancement with the announcement of God’s word. They are convinced that any education that respects the human person is a way to open people to God’s grace and so dispose them to accept the faith.¹¹

This Rule was approved by the Congregation for Religious and Secular Institutes on January 26th, 1687.

THE COLLECTION OF SHORT TREATISES.¹²

The one spiritual work of De La Salle printed in his lifetime is the *Collection of Short Treatises for the use of the Brothers of the Christian Schools*, usually referred to by them as *the Collection*. It is not known to us before its two printed versions, a short one and a long one, appeared in Avignon in 1711, although there is evidence that a section of ten pages in the short one was printed by 1705, and that both versions were approved that year by the Inquisitor General at Avignon. The first 72 pages were the original text, and were augmented to 260. But both were used simultaneously and were referred to as the ‘little’ and ‘big’ Collection. Perhaps the shorter was reserved

for postulants.¹³ The work is a set of various considerations that offer a spirituality on a level with that of religious Orders, having the spirit of faith at its core. It is noteworthy that De La Salle begins the Collection with St Bernard's list of the nine fruits of the religious life.

Three sections in *the Collection* are borrowed and adapted from official Jesuit sources.¹⁴ The Directory for giving an account of how the Brother has led his life takes the general idea and some points from a similar *Instructio* used in the Society of Jesus. The list of topics to be used during recreation is very close to the Jesuit *Instructiones ad Provinciales* on the matter, and his Rules of Modesty (or of appropriate moderate behaviour), are a free and somewhat augmented translation of St Ignatius's *Regulae Modestiae*. These borrowings touch only certain structures of religious life. A lengthier section of the Collection, more concerned with living the religious life, and entitled: On Considerations that the Brothers must make from time to time, and especially during their retreat, is taken, with little change, from a Jesuit writer, P.J. Hayneufve.¹⁵ Other sources are M. Olier¹⁶ and, as we have seen already, Canon Roland. De La Salle was well-read both in monastic sources and current authors. There is, however, never just borrowing. With his eyes on his Brothers, he takes, adapts and adds. And there are sections composed by himself.

This compilation would seem to correspond to a first formation in the novitiate.¹⁷ The novices would take notes and would take them with them into community. When the Brothers became numerous enough, De La Salle had the whole printed. Some of the items he took later into the Rule. The first three main themes are: the method of making mental prayer, how to give in detail a personal account of oneself to one's Director, and the nine conditions of obedience. For someone coming new to community life with its monastic overtones, these were formative practices.

We next come to the heart of the Brothers' spirituality: the spirit of faith, this time explained point by point as for beginners, followed by an anthology of passages from Scripture that can be recalled to help us to do our actions in a spirit of faith. It seems to assume one can pull oneself up in each minor action to recall a text from the Bible, something hardly natural or possible. But it is a question of training beginners to try, at first rather woodenly, to make views of faith habitual. One wonders also at the choice of text at times: if you are inclined to laugh, think of "Woe to you who laugh, for you shall mourn and weep"; when teaching writing: "Lord, you draw up bitter indictments against me." Do these really reflect faith, or a certain negativity of the times? In contrast, one reads, for example, that a passage good to recall before making mental prayer is: "God is a spirit and he wishes those who adore him to adore him in spirit and in truth," or when punishing a pupil: "You

will be measured with the same measure you have measured out to others.”

Next in the Collection is a list and brief commentary on the different steps to becoming ‘interior’, or in control of oneself in view of coming closer to God. These reflect the teachings of the mystics expressed in clear attitudes and practices. The level to which De La Salle wishes to lead the novices and Brothers in their faith journey can be gauged from this quote:

A soul that is really God’s should live and be stirred by the spirit of God, and an imperfection is a similar obstacle to the outpouring of God’s Spirit as a little stone is to the outflow of water from a pipe into a canal. It needs very little to sadden God residing in a soul who is or who wishes to be his: ‘You have,’ says the bridegroom in the Song of Songs, ‘wounded my heart with one of your hairs’, as if he were saying that a single hair badly arranged is capable of wounding the eyes and lessening the love of the bridegroom.

The next set of texts consists of a general statement on how to do one’s daily actions, above all in union with Jesus Christ, and then ten are taken and covered succinctly. Christian conduct in community is then considered more widely under the heading of eleven virtues, beginning with the virtue of faith:

Always recall these words: The just man lives by faith. Let your first care be to act by the spirit of faith and not by whim or fantasy or mood, nor by inclination nor by the custom of men and of the world, nor even by reason, but by Faith and by the word of Jesus Christ, making it the rule of your conduct. Attach yourself universally to what is of faith, shun novelty, follow the Tradition of the Church. Receive only what she receives, condemn what she condemns, approve what she approves, whether by Councils, whether by the sovereign Pontiffs. Give her in everything a prompt and perfect obedience....

The first effect of faith is to bind us strongly to the knowledge, love, imitation of and union with Jesus Christ....”

His reference to reason does not mean despising reason. He uses it very much in his writings. But reason does not provide the ultimate Christian motives.

In a concluding section, the time of the retreat is covered by a set of considerations on the Brothers’ vocation and mission and on the spirit of faith and the main actions that mark the life of the Brothers. This is the portion of the book that owes very much to Julien Hayneufve. The Considerations of his that De La Salle borrowed from are full of gentle wisdom that he is happy to pass on to his novices and Brothers generally. Two examples:

Do not make any difference between the matters proper to your

profession and the matter of your salvation and of your perfection. Be assured that you will never save yourself better nor ever acquire as much perfection as by acquitting yourself well of the duties of your state, provided you do so in view of God's order.

Be satisfied with what you can do, since God is satisfied with it; but do not spare yourself in what you can do with grace; and believe that provided you want it, you can do more with the grace of God than you think.

This compilation of texts in the *Collection* is not to be compared with the strong, unified sense of expressing the Brothers' life and its inner dynamism that we find in the Rule. But it does give clearly the impression that it is to help the members of a community to live the 'religious' or consecrated community life in the light of the Gospel.

HE GIVES A METHOD OF MENTAL PRAYER

In this *Collection of Short Treatises*, De La Salle gives his Brothers already a finished outline of the method of making their daily personal prayer.¹⁸ When in his later years he wrote out the commentary that he had surely given orally many a time already, he did not change that outline. The method was suited to the aim of prayer and to the lives of the Brothers; the explanation initiated the novices into it. When he had this explanation in the form he wanted it, he had it printed.¹⁹ Presumably it was a limited, private printing, for we have no specimen remaining. And the oldest edition we have, that of 1739, carries no name of a publisher, no royal privilege to print. Again, it must have been purely for the Brothers' use.²⁰

According to their Rule, the Brothers at five o'clock in the morning made "a short quarter of an hour of vocal prayer followed by mental prayer until six o'clock." In the evening they made mental prayer from six to six-thirty, and this was preceded by half an hour's spiritual reading²¹ done in the spirit of the "lectio divina": placing oneself in God's presence and stopping now and then to appreciate what one is reading, most especially if it is Scripture.²² This reading allowed one to relax after a busy day and so come better prepared for mental prayer.

No more than in his educational achievements can M. de De La Salle be seen in splendid isolation in shaping the pursuit of Gospel perfection to the life and mission of his communities of Christian educators of the poor. This is certainly true of the method he composed as a help to mental prayer. A brief look at the history of such prayer in the tradition of the Church helps to place and evaluate his method.²³

Personal prayer in the Church.

The Fathers and the monks of the early Middle Ages engaged each day in long periods of *lectio divina* or the meditative reading of Scripture that led them easily to God and to contemplation. But times of more attentive mental prayer were prescribed or recommended, and for these from the 10th century, ready-made meditations and prayers had a great vogue, particularly those of St Anselm (d. 1109).

From the early 12th century, the analysis of the different parts of mental prayer began, beginning with the reading of a Gospel text. It was St Bernard, the greatest spiritual master of 12th century, who taught to centre one's mental prayer on the mysteries of the life of Christ. The Cistercians took to this more concrete way and in the following two centuries the Franciscans, inspired by St Francis's meditation on Jesus poor and crucified, spread it among the people. A collection of a hundred meditations written by an unknown Franciscan at the beginning of 14th century and written in a warm style, carefully pictures each scene of Christ's life and what he said or did, encouraging the one who prays to "consider yourself also present as if you heard them with your ears and saw them with your eyes" and even to be caught up in conversation with Jesus. "By frequent and assiduous meditating on the life (of Jesus), the soul attains to a familiarity, a trust and a love towards Jesus such that it disdains all else."

The liking for analysis of the process of prayer developed and reached its limit in the methods of prayer of the '*devotio moderna*' at the end of 15th century. The general spiritual decline led to a movement beginning in the Low Countries towards relying less on people being formed by the Christian environment and practices and more on personal decision and repeated effort. For this, meditation on the Gospel leading to practical resolve was essential. This led in the spirit of the times to systematisation, with the danger of reducing prayer to meditation.

In the 16th century new Congregations arose committed to work for the reform of society: Jesuits, Minims, Oratorians, for whom the spiritual life had to be rethought in view of the active life. The leisurely approach to prayer could not be theirs. Each one needed to be helped to concentrate his mind quickly and to train to live his active life "in a spirit of prayer." St Ignatius's famous Spiritual Exercises (written between 1522 and 1526) though not a textbook on mental prayer, embody its use with more than one method. Yet the discursive method according to the three powers (of memory, understanding and will) was declared in 1574 and 1578 by their General to be the method to be followed by Jesuits, as opposed to the 'affective' method (see below). Resolutions on virtuous action displaced St Ignatius's intention of finding and following God's will under the banner of Christ the King. There

has since been a return to the Founder's authentic thought, but clearly De La Salle did not find a satisfactory view of mental prayer in the official Jesuit writings in his day.

Affective mental prayer.

The traditional way of mental prayer, meanwhile, developed about 1550 into 'affective' prayer. It seems to have originated with Luis de Granada, who says in his book on mental prayer and meditation: "Seek less to let speculation dominate in mental prayer than expressions from the heart (affections) and attitudes of the will...Reflection revives the flame of prayer when it is used with measure; it stifles it when it becomes excessive." True affective prayer was taught by **St Teresa**, the mistress of mental prayer. She defines it as "an exchange of friendship in which you speak alone with the God you know loves you". "The important thing is not to think much but to love much." She calls this prayer the prayer of recollection that under the movement of the Holy Spirit can gently become passive recollection or acquired contemplation, disposing for **infused contemplation** if God so wills it.

Seventeenth century spiritual masters were mainly French. The greatest (though not French) was **St Francis de Sales**. "You will pray well, my dear daughters," he wrote to the Visitandines, "if you stay in peace and tranquillity near Our Lord or in his sight, without any other desire or claim than to be his and to please him." Others called it the prayer of silence, or prayer from the heart, or of simplicity. There was at the same time a less simplified method, inspired by de Bérulle's sense of adoration and of union with Jesus. M. Olier formulated it, but Tronson added to it, making it almost a discursive meditation, and this was how this Method of St Sulpice, as it was known, came to be practised.

Considered as a key element towards making the whole of an active day Christian, a daily time of mental prayer was considered vital. To use this time best and minimise distractions, a method was worth following, provided its temporary value was understood. Within that understanding it may be possible to give some idea of what De La Salle wrote for his Brothers.²⁴

De La Salle's teaching on mental prayer.

His practice of prolonged prayer and, as far as we can judge, his gift of infused contemplation, gave him competence in knowing the path along which to lead his Brothers and its pitfalls. But he also realised how much a precise method was needed when, at the age of fifteen or sixteen, young people began their novitiate and had to curb their lively thoughts and crude reactions. He planned out for them a sequence of twenty-three 'acts' for conceiving and expressing attitudes towards God which they would gradually simplify.

His outline in the *Collection of Short Treatises* begins by making clear what this personal prayer is all about: "Mental prayer is an interior occupation and an application of the soul to God" Further on he says: "Do not look for anything sensitive in prayer. Hold to what is of faith and which leads to hate and destruction of sin, to detachment from created things, and to imitating Jesus Christ...as perfectly as possible."²⁵

This prayer in its practice is meant to be affective and practical: "Give more time to affections and resolutions than to reasoning and considerations. Do not make merely vague and general resolutions but always make precise ones, and take the proper means to carry them out." He wants his Brothers to persevere even in periods of dryness and temptation. He wants them to advance and knows that the Holy Spirit can lead them in a way suited to them. So that while he knows of the dangers of illusion and of Quietism and says: "Keep...to the ordinary method and ways of mental prayer, unless God gives you some attraction that should be well examined, and not followed without counsel and without the order of your Director".²⁶ In his meditation on St Teresa, he writes: "Such is the fruit of frequent and fervent prayer: to enjoy God by anticipation as far as a lively faith can, in this world, obtain this happiness. If you love God, prayer will be the food of your soul, and he will come into you and make you eat at his table...and you will then have the advantage of having him present in your actions, and of having no other view but to please him."²⁷

In his *Explanation of the Method of Mental Prayer* he stresses that mental prayer "is not simply an occupation of the mind " but something done with "all the powers of the soul...in the inmost part of the soul... If it was done purely in the mind ...it would easily be subject to human and distracting impressions that would hinder its fruit." Its aim is not introspection, but relating to God: "Mental prayer is an interior occupation because the soul is occupied with what is proper to it in this life, which is to know God and love him and to take all the necessary means to attain these two goals. But the principal occupation of the soul in prayer which is truly interior is to fill itself with God and to unite itself inwardly with him, which is for it a kind of apprenticeship of what it has to do really for all eternity."²⁸ But that is firstly the work of the Holy Spirit. As he says elsewhere, "The Holy Spirit who dwells in you should reach the depth of your souls. It is in the interior of the soul that this Spirit communicates with it, and lets it know what God requires of it."²⁹ To be "interior" is to be in a state of readiness for this action. De La Salle's own conclusion therefore, on prayer for his Brothers, is in line with the tradition of inward prayer in the Church down to his day.

The first part of his method: applying oneself to the presence of God.

The first part of mental prayer he calls, like St Teresa, recollection, or pulling back from externals and gathering oneself together. For De La Salle, the means for this is to apply oneself to considering God's presence. What marks his method of prayer, indeed, is the time given to placing oneself in God's presence and conversing with him. It is a way of by-passing what easily comes to the surface from the activities of life.

"The first thing, then, to be done in prayer is to penetrate oneself interiorly with the presence of God, which should always be done through an attitude of faith founded on a passage drawn from Holy Scripture." That brings us back to true Lasallian spirituality. As he puts it well: "the words of God...have of themselves a divine unction, of themselves they lead us to God, they make us relish God..."³⁰ The result is affective prayer, and practised daily, it helps to live one's day before God in the spirit of faith, that is, with the mind of Jesus.

De La Salle offers beginners a choice of considering God present in one of six ways, only one, of course, to be taken at a time and leading very likely to preference for one. In each case, he looks at and comments on a passage or two of Scripture and considers the gain from considering God present in this way. He then offers an example of the way a beginner can express this to God and ask for the grace to profit by it.

In presenting, for instance, the thought of Jesus present among us, he writes: "One can consider God present in the place in which one is because Our Lord says in the Gospel in Saint Matthew, ch. 18, 'that every time two or three persons are assembled in his name, he will be in their midst.' Is it not a great happiness, when one is assembled with one's Brothers, either for prayer or for any other exercise, to be assured that one is in Our Lord's company and that he is the midst of the Brothers! He is in their midst to give them his Holy Spirit and to direct them by him in all their actions and in all their conduct. He is in their midst to unite them together..." The whole text is a remarkable comment on the Gospel text, applied to his Brothers.

He takes the trouble of suggesting an example of affective prayer based on this presence of Jesus. This is typical of his care to help the beginner:

How happy I am, my God, to pray with my dear Brothers, since, according to your words, we have the advantage of having you in our midst. You are there, O my Jesus, to pour out your Spirit on us, as you say by your prophet, and as you poured it out on the Apostles...Grant me the grace...to have an intimate union of mind and heart with my Brothers and to enter into the dispositions in which the holy Apostles were in the Cenacle, so that having received your divine Spirit according to the fullness you have destined for me, I may let myself be guided by him to fulfil the duties of my state and to let me share your zeal for the instruction of those you

will be willing to entrust to my care.

He points to simpler prayer.

He tells the learner already that there is an easier way of affective prayer than continuous reflections. He says that ways of considering God in this manner “tend to have the presence of God in only a passing way, because they bring about the presence of God only by reasoning and frequent reflections... An easier way...is to bring to one’s mind a passage of Holy Scripture which recalls the memory of the presence of God...and then to make a reflection on this passage without much reasoning...And then, to remain as much as one can in the simplest attention, and, at the same time, the most lively possible, on this passage.” He does not want this to be done in a way that tires the mind. One should pass on instead to a similar affective reflection. In this way “one may acquire imperceptibly facility for applying oneself to the presence of God by simple attention.”

He does want beginners to know of and desire this kind of prayer, for he has several pages on it. “Applying oneself to the presence of God by simple attention consists in being before God in a simple interior view of faith that he is present, and to stay thus for some time, a half-quarter of an hour or a quarter of an hour, more or less, according as one feels occupied and drawn interiorly.” Here again, he is not talking about philosophising, but about meeting Someone. “It happens even to several souls...that God grants them this grace that they lose rarely or even lose not at all, the presence of God, which is for them an anticipated happiness and a foretaste of the happiness of heaven.” He stresses that to enjoy this advantage, they need to have kept their innocence all through life, or to have been a long time faithful to God; to be freed, not only of venial sins and any attachment to them, but to have mastered natural inclinations. Finally, “that the will of God, acting in it (the soul) is established as the principle of its actions.”

It is worth pointing out, he says, with regard to application to the presence of God, that one should not dwell on it for a short time only, since it is this that contributes most to obtaining the spirit of prayer and the interior application one can have to it...One should not apply (the mind) to another topic until it is no longer able to pay attention to this one.

Hence he offers a sequence of nine different acts that help to prolong this affective attention.³¹ The first three acts, of faith, adoration and thanks are inter-connected, but he takes the trouble to spell them out for beginners. Next he invites us to look at ourselves, again in God’s presence and in a view of faith. This leads to acts recognising our unworthiness before God, of confusion at being in such a state, and of sorrow and a plea for forgiveness. And then he comes to a happier dimension by proposing three acts in which we

turn to Our Lord to make up for the possible imperfection of our sorrow, unite with his attitude when he prayed to his Father, and ask him to pour out his Spirit on us so as to be guided in our prayer only by him. He phrases this prayer thus for beginners:

I unite myself, Oh my sweet Jesus, to your interior disposition when you prayed. You were then truly in your Father and your Father was in you...Grant that I may think of him only through you, and that I love him only in you.... and he thinks of the vine and the branch as in John 15. Recalling Pentecost, he says: My Saviour Jesus,...grant me the grace of giving me today this Holy Spirit...who will make my prayer rise towards you like a sweet-smelling incense...and keep alive the fire you kindle in me during this time...

The main part of mental prayer: conversing with Jesus around one of his mysteries, virtues or teachings.

De La Salle, after saying this second part is the time to apply³² oneself to a mystery of our religion, especially from the life of Our Lord, goes on: "By mysteries of Our Lord are understood the main actions that the Son of God made man did and performed for our salvation...Each has a spirit proper and peculiar to it", in that certain virtues stand out in it that astonish us, and that Jesus practised for us to imitate, and for which he gives the grace attached to this mystery. For instance, the spirit of Our Lord's nativity is the spirit of childhood, "consisting in simplicity, docility, purity, and in contempt for worldly riches and greatness...The spirit of the mystery of the Transfiguration is the spirit of prayer and mental prayer". And so on. This presentation clearly derives from Bérulle.

Acts of faith, adoration and thanks follow, around Scripture passages that tell us of this mystery. De La Salle is less given than others to an imaginative reconstruction of the scene, for however useful it may be, it is our imagination that is at work and not the direct exercise of our faith with regard to what Scripture says and for what purpose. He wants the Brothers to begin with this act of faith and within it to come quickly to affective prayer with Jesus (which can include use of the imagination) and to taking this mystery into their lives. He has many fine examples of these prayers for beginners.

Yes, my God, I believe that you became a child for love of me. You were born in a stable in the middle of the night and in the depth of winter. You were laid on hay and straw. Your love for me reduced you to an unheard-of poverty and need, and so extreme that nothing like it had ever been heard of till then. I believe, my Lord, all these truths that

faith teaches me about your love for me. You could have been born in an abundance of wealth....Your infinite wisdom judged that it was much more advantageous for me to give me in your adorable person the example of the life I should lead in order to attain true glory ...This is what I am resolved to do, O my loving Saviour, whatever it may cost me....Help me, I beg you, O my God, in my weakness...Please increase, Lord, my faith which is very weak.

Here, too, he recommends simplifying one's meditation. Following on this conversation built on faith, he proposes three acts referring to ourselves that are parallel similar ones in the first part. But they include this time an "act of application... considering before God the great need one has to enter into the spirit of this mystery; paying attention to the occasions when one should do so; taking for this proper and specific means..." This means making resolutions, although they may be made at any time during the prayer. And these resolutions should be for the day itself, precise, and effective. But the real power and hope for change come not from our willing but from the action of Jesus and his Holy Spirit in us. Hence the next three acts. In two of them we unite with Jesus and his dispositions and ask him to give us a share in them, and then we turn to our Father and ask him for this grace through his Son. There is a final act of asking Mary and Joseph, Patron of the Society, and other saints, to join their prayers with ours.

De La Salle now goes over the whole process in order to show beginners how to make this kind of mental prayer around one of Our Lord's virtues. He does this a third time with reference to one of his 'maxims', that is, his practical teachings in the Gospel.

Method should not get in the way.

Then once more he encourages the beginner not to let the method get in his way, and makes practical suggestions. He can make the acts of the first part in abridged form; he can put them all implicitly in one act, perhaps for the length of a Miserere (the time it takes to recite Psalm 51). This is a form of simple attention, he says, easy for one "who is truly interior, who walks as much as possible in God's presence, who is strict about silence, who only busies himself with what concerns him, and is well resigned to being obedient." A third way is to put oneself in God's presence, make an act of adoration, and then go straight to the second part. Conversely, one could make only two or three acts of the second part, or even only one, making the others in succeeding periods of mental prayer. This has the advantage of giving a better understanding of what each act is about. Finally, he has this piece of guidance:

When one feels drawn interiorly and gently to something one had not intended doing, this attraction should be followed according to God, faith and the perfection of one's state. It should be followed, I say, as long as it pleases God to occupy us with it, being a sign that God requires that then. This is noticed if one leaves mental prayer with a new attraction to doing well one's duty for the love of God and to please him.

The Brother, before he leaves mental prayer, is asked to make a brief review of what he has done during it, to thank God for his help during the prayer, and to offer him his resolutions and his whole self "with all our actions and all our conduct during the day." Then "mental prayer concludes with placing all one has done, thought and resolved under the protection of the most Blessed Virgin." For this he offers a model:

Most holy Virgin, most worthy Mother of God, and who are also my good mother and my advocate, my refuge and my protectress, I turn to you with profound humility as to her in whom, after God, I place all my trust, asking you to be willing to receive into your protection my prayer, my resolutions and all the thoughts I came to during it. I ask you very humbly to give them your holy blessing and to obtain for me that of your very dear Son...

This *Explanation of the Method of Mental Prayer* is written with the easy confidence of experience and an affectionate lending a hand to encourage beginners. True to Scripture and theology, it is free of Quietism and Jansenism. Because it had beginners in mind we do not find there all De La Salle knew about mental prayer. More evidence of this appears as the topic offers in his series of meditations for Sundays and saints' days. For beginners, there is for the moment a concentration on themselves and God, and on making the break with all that 'life in the world' and the novice's own involvement in it has created by way of wrong dispositions. An inner conversion is necessary in order to go back to serve the world with the mind of Christ. To Brothers who are in the schools educating the poor he offers the wider view of the whole Gospel:

It is your duty to go up to God every day by personal prayer in order to learn from him all that you must teach them, and then to go down to them by adapting yourself to their capacity in order to instruct them about what God has communicated to you for them, whether in prayer or in the Holy Books.³³

MEDITATIONS FOR SUNDAYS AND SAINTS' DAYS*The faith-journey of a community of teachers.***Introduction.**³⁴

De La Salle used his time at Vaugirard and again in his last year at St Yon, among other things, writing meditations.³⁵ Two likely sources of his New Testament quotations in these meditations pre-date 1707, and that would make possible that he did write some at least of these meditations at Vaugirard; equally, some or even all could have been written later.

Somewhere between 1726 and 1731 Brother Timothy, who had succeeded Brother Bartholomew as Superior General, published the *Meditations for all the Sundays of the Year with the Gospels of all the Sundays. By Monsieur Jean-Baptiste de De La Salle*,... There were 77 of these meditations. But under the same title, as a "Second Part" appeared also his "Meditations on the main feasts of the Year." There were 108 of these. This makes a considerable work. In his Foreword Brother Timothy writes: "The warm welcome given to the Meditations for the Retreat ...encouraged us to work with more keenness at having printed the meditations that this holy cleric also composed for all the Sundays and main Feasts of the year...so as to produce with blessing the fruits this holy man aimed at by occupying himself with this work in the last years of his life, having, for this purpose, employed a great part of his time." A commentary is here offered very hesitatingly, first on his Sunday meditations and then on the principal saints of the year as an effort to bring out something of the spirituality contained in them.

The Meditations for the Sundays of the year.

De La Salle uses the Gospels of the Sundays of the year not to comment on them directly, but in most cases merely as a peg on which to hang considerations on the Brothers' life. It is seen as the pursuit of the perfection of love of God and neighbour in a community of those who have consecrated themselves to procuring the glory of God through the salvation of the young. In Meditation 6 he says: "God has placed you in retreat and in a holy place, and in his very house where he gathers those he has chosen to be his. If you leave it, it should only be because God wills it and orders it for you to keep the life of Jesus Christ in the hearts of those in your charge, or for some other need." Seeking God in view of their mission is the theme of these meditations. They suppose persons who have made a first conversion and with varying degrees of openness have opted for God and are willing to go forward. St Teresa in her Interior Castle traces the path of spiritual growth for her contemplative Sisters. In a more fragmented way through his Meditations, De La Salle

traces the path of spiritual growth for his Brothers.

He begins by stressing total generosity, not only for growth in openness to the Holy Spirit, but for the ministry of Christian education.

His opening meditations for Advent emphasise a strenuous breaking with the past, with total generosity. Nevertheless, right from his second meditation he holds up St John the Baptist as the model of the Brothers' single vision of life: the need to sanctify themselves in order to be able to "prepare the hearts of others for the coming of Jesus Christ." Like John, they are only a voice, unable "to say anything of ourselves that is capable of doing any good in souls". Yet in a sense they are prophets: "It is also by the movement of the Spirit of God that all those who announce his kingdom still speak today...Ask God to impress so deeply in you (what you ought to teach others) that you have grounds to be and to look upon yourselves, as Saint Paul says, only as the ministers of God and the dispensers of his mysteries."

From the first Sunday after the Epiphany till Lent he stresses obedience to one's superior as being to God himself. Meditations 19, 21, 57 and 72 deal with the same theme. In these Meditations he teaches a blind obedience that is petty and oppressive and that cuts out all initiative. One can only say that this was the attitude at the time, that in the Founder's life you will find that in following God's call he makes own judgements and decisions, and that today obedience is contributing to and accepting the common discernment of a community and the final decision of the Brother Director.

Help in interpreting the experiences seeking God may bring.

His meditations for Lent begin with a new call for generous effort: adopting a "true spirit of penitence", defined as a renunciation of whatever could distract us "and interrupt (our) conversation with God" (M. 16). But he is perhaps now giving guidance for those advancing in the spiritual life and meeting with various situations they need to understand. One of these is to find oneself assailed with various temptations. "Are you not surprised when some temptation befalls you?" "Do not, then believe...that you are abandoned by God when you are tempted; on the contrary it is one of the greatest signs you can have that God has a special care for your salvation." (M. 17)

But then he explains (M. 18) that "God's ordinary way is that after temptations and interior trials,...he takes care to support a pure soul with spiritual consolations... It is on souls who apply themselves much to mental prayer and who love this holy exercise, that God pours out his consolations. Tepid and weak-willed souls, little attracted to mental prayer should not then be surprised if they are not of the number of those whom God cherishes specially and to whom he communicates himself even to familiarity." But he does

warn that they should “take this little relief in a simple view of God’s good pleasure” and not be attached to it.

At times, people given to prayer will find it loses all attraction and meaning. If their spiritual guide’s help is of no avail, they should trust in God and continue with courage and patience, “either to suffer as much as it pleases him, or to be freed from this trouble by such means as God will judge to be the most advantageous for you, without burdening your mind in order to put yourself at rest by your own efforts, which often would be useless.” (M. 20)

During Easter week he speaks of interior peace and of those who do not have it (M.31). He describes persons who “are the most pious and most devout in the world in appearance, speak very well and willingly of interior things; they often have the presence of God in mental prayer. But say to them one word louder than the other, do something that displeases them, and immediately they are put out; and they lose peace because they are not solidly founded in virtue...” In contrast, he describes a person deeply living by faith. “A soul penetrated with sentiments of faith is so elevated in God that it knows only God, has no esteem but for God and relishes only God...It is the disposition Saint Francis was in, when, completely penetrated with faith and on fire with the love of God, he repeated all during his life: My God and my all.” (M. 32)

He comes back again, on the fourth Sunday after Easter (M. 35), to the right attitude to consolations and interior trials: “Those who have given themselves to God often believe that the felt presence of God is the only thing that can support piety, and that once they fell into aridity and interior trials, they would utterly fall away from the state of holiness God has raised them to. And it seems to them that having lost a certain taste for mental prayer and facility in making it, all is lost for them and that God has entirely rejected them... (Yet) It is sometimes more profitable to be deprived of spiritual consolations than to have them...for the more one is detached from what pleases the senses,...(the more) the Spirit of God comes into a soul and fills it with his grace.”

In the midst of these considerations, he draws a fine picture of the Christian teacher who, like the Good Shepherd, knows his pupils and they know him. “More gentleness is needed towards some, more firmness towards others; there are some who require having much patience, others to be urged on and stimulated. It is necessary with regard to some to reprimand them and punish them so as to correct them of their failings. Some are to be found over whom one must watch continually to prevent them from being lost or straying. This way of acting depends on the knowledge and discernment of spirits. It is what you should often and earnestly ask of God, as one of the qualities most necessary for you for the guidance of those in your charge.” (M. 33)

Persevering in prayer for the holiness their ministry requires, and for the needs of their students.

In four meditations before Ascension Thursday, he insists on the need of prayer and to pray with faith: “God wants to give you more than you want to ask him; he has more compassion on your wretchedness than you have desire to be freed from it. Stir yourself up, therefore, to believing him who urges you so strongly.” (M. 38) Among the things the Brothers should pray for particularly he gives three: “Beg him earnestly that nothing may make you displeasing in his eyes, being obliged to instil his love in the hearts of those you teach.” Secondly, “Since you are called, in your vocation, to bring about the sanctification of your pupils, you must be holy with an uncommon holiness. Ask him for it every day with urgency and have it so much at heart that you do not cease to pray till you have obtained it.” The third request is union of mind and heart with their Brothers. “Urge therefore the God of hearts that, with yours and those of your Brothers, he may make but one in that of Jesus.” (M. 39)

One of these meditations (M. 37) is wholly concerned with “the obligation we are under of praying for those we are charged with teaching.” He sees these children, deprived of a proper Christian upbringing or led astray by bad companions as poor and abandoned orphans entrusted by God himself to the Brothers to provide what is missing. “And as he knows you have by yourselves neither enough virtue nor enough power to give all these things...he wishes you to ask him for them often, fervently and insistently.”

The Holy Spirit in the life of the Brother.

Already in the previous meditations the Founder shows he is aware of the work of the Holy Spirit in us (M. 2, 3, 4, 35,). Openness to the indwelling Spirit and trust in his power and gifts in dealing with the children underlie De La Salle’s teaching and the spirituality of his Brothers. In four meditations around Pentecost he considers this topic carefully, and again in Meditation 62. “You need the fullness of the Spirit of God in your vocation, since you should neither live nor act in it except by the spirit and light of faith, and only the Holy Spirit can put you in this disposition...You are in an occupation that puts you in the obligation of touching hearts. You will be unable to do so without the Spirit of God. Beg him to give you today the same grace he gave the holy Apostles, so that after having filled you with his Spirit to sanctify you, he may communicate him to you also so as to bring about the salvation of others.” (M. 43, Pentecost Sunday) See also, in Chapter 16, Meditations for the Time of the Retreat, 3, 4 and 9.

The feasts of the Most Blessed Trinity and Corpus Christi.

It was on Trinity Sunday that the Brothers who had taken vows in the early years of the Society renewed them. It is still a day of devotional renewal. De La Salle on this day stresses adoration before this impenetrable mystery, in keeping with Berullian spirituality, but he does also have a reference to the sanctifying presence of the Blessed Trinity within us: "(The children you teach) have, just as much as you, been consecrated to the Holy Trinity from baptism. They bear the seal impressed on their souls, and they owe it to this adorable mystery that the unction of grace is poured into their hearts... You should, on this day...devote yourselves totally to the most Blessed Trinity, in order to contribute, as much as you can, to spreading his glory throughout the world" (M. 46).

For the feast of Corpus Christi and what was then its octave, he has the nine meditations on the Holy Eucharist mentioned in Chapter 3. A few extracts show him countering Jansenist views and setting out the true fruits of holy communion.³⁶

"Some say...they are not worthy to communicate often. They must not expect that they will ever be worthy. All who approach the holy table, no matter who they are, declare themselves unworthy before receiving. Others allege that they are so full of defects that they dare not go to communion often. If you wait till you are free from defects before going to holy communion, you will never go in your whole life. The fruit of frequent communion is precisely to prevent you falling into graver faults than those you already commit...We communicate, not because we are already holy, but because we wish to become so." (M. 55.)

"Jesus does, indeed, live in those who receive him, for when we approach the sacrament of the Holy Eucharist in good dispositions, he takes possession of all the faculties of our soul, vivifying, guiding and directing them by his Holy Spirit, by whom he acts and lives in them. How happy is a man to be able to partake of such a food, and that as often as he wishes. Partake eagerly and lovingly of this bread, and as often as you can." (M. 48.)

"The soul may say with the spouse of the Cantic of Canticles: 'He is all mine, my true love, and I am all his.'...It should be your aim so to act that holy communion may produce a constant union between Jesus Christ and yourself, and that you should never be separated from him." (M. 49)

He wrote other Meditations on the Eucharist for Maundy Thursday and Christmas Eve.

Meditations for the Sundays after Pentecost.

As opportunity offers, he uses the Gospels of these Sundays figuratively in order to provoke reflection and a response of conversion and desire to do better. A number of meditations pin-point faulty attitudes. He describes, for instance, those fixed in mediocrity (M.64); those who have lost the grace of their state and are tempted to leave it (M.68); those who have unrealistic views of community life and the spiritual life (M.73). On converse with God or the lack of it he writes:

We only learn to speak to God by listening to him; for to be able to speak to God and converse with him can come only from him, who has a language all his own and which he communicates only to his friends and confidants, on whom he bestows the happiness of conversing often with him... You who are charged with teaching children should make yourselves skilled in the art of speaking to God, of speaking of God and of speaking for God; but rest assured that you will only speak well to your pupils to win them over to God to the extent that you will have learnt well to speak to him and to speak of him” (M. 64).

On those who are unrealistic about spiritual progress, who “ask for miracles and prodigies”, he says:

They would like to do everything well and without reproach... But as soon as they have to do themselves violence to achieve this great plan, they become out of breath, so to say, at the first step they make in the way of perfection. They would like God to carry them there without having to walk or to make any effort to go from one end to the other, which would be certainly a great miracle (M. 73)

The theme “house of prayer” (Mt 21: 12-13) gives him the opportunity of saying uplifting things on the Brothers’ life.

“You are here in a house of prayer: it should be your principal occupation in it... Your bodies themselves are houses of prayer. In fact, do you not know, says Saint Paul, that your bodies are the temples of the Holy Spirit who dwells in you... Abandon yourself entirely to this divine Spirit so that he may ask of God for you all that befits you for the good of your soul and of those in your charge, and that you act only by him.” (M. 62).

In his meditation on trust in Providence (M. 67) he speaks from the heart, for he founded his Institute and his whole life on this attitude of faith. His Brothers’ whole concern, he says, is to

let God reign by grace and by the fullness of his love in your heart... the very life of God should be the life of your soul. You must also... occupy

yourselves as much as possible with his holy presence.” This should be the care of “souls consecrated to God and that seek to do his holy will, to love him and get others to love him...Have you then so little faith as to fear that in performing your duty and applying yourself only to making God reign in your hearts and the hearts of others, you will lack anything necessary for you as to food and clothing?

He draws attention, particularly in Meditations 65 and 74, to community life. He is very clear about the need for brotherly love in a community and realistic about its difficulties.

It is not possible for several people to live together without having to suffer from one another...But the means to maintain union in a community, in spite of all these various characters, is to bear charitably with the defects of each one. It is to be ready to make allowance for others as we want done to us: it is what we commit ourselves to necessarily when we undertake to live in community. Think well on it today and for the rest of your life.” (M74) He speaks quite feelingly of those who have the gift of gentleness, of winning over others, whether it is a natural disposition or one acquired by the help of grace. “They make their way so gently into the hearts of those they converse with or deal with that they win them over gradually and obtain from them whatever they wish.”(M. 65)

These Meditations today.

They do not cover the whole spectrum of Christian thought and practice and cannot have the insights gained in our day. Yet they are still a rich addition to spiritual writings in the Church, for they teach the openness to holiness of the teacher’s mission. De La Salle’s Brothers were a religious community called to express in a radical way the value in the Christian Church of this lay ministry.

The meditations on the principal saints of the year.

Models for the Brothers’ life and work.

De La Salle worked carefully on these meditations. He followed the most reliable authors of the time. He had three main sources: François Paris, one of the curates at St Etienne du Mont in Paris, who wrote a Martyrology in 1691; Pedro de Ribadeneira, a Spanish Jesuit, whose *Flos Sanctorum* or lives of the Saints, written in 1599 and 1603, was first translated into French in 1609. De La Salle very likely used the edition of 1687. Finally, the Roman breviary, from which he took most of his New Testament and patristic quotations.³⁷

Brother Timothy, in his Foreword, says that De La Salle “had more in mind...to instruct and exhort his Brothers than to teach them to make aspirations, affections and colloquies, having provided for this by giving them a method on the manner they should make their mental prayer.”³⁸ He never merely copied texts from his sources: he selected what he wanted and reduced it to something briefer, now and then introducing his own comment. The concluding paragraph of each point, in which he directly speaks to his Brothers, is entirely his own composition. The amount of work and reflection involved reveals again his capacity and determination for sustained and prolonged work, even over long interruptions.

The saints of the year around whom he chose to build his meditations were the more outstanding and well-known as indicated by the rank of their feast in the liturgical calendar of the time. He wrote briefly, giving the facts as best he knew them around a choice of three themes chosen from the life of the saint. His teaching is necessarily more occasional in this set of meditations, but he can make it more concrete because he examples to refer to. When we insert this series into the preceding one, making a total of 185 meditations, each with three distinct points for consideration, we see that throughout the year both the personal life and ministry of the Brothers are being constantly commented on.

The themes that come through most are those of personal prayer and fidelity to God’s inspirations, mortification, involving control of the senses and even hatred of the body (comment has been made on these two already), withdrawal from the ‘world’ seen as corrupt, love of suffering, acceptance of persecution, love of the poor and of poverty. If we eliminate what was overstressed at the time, we find that the aim of life they hold up is again union with God and working against whatever opposes it, and that it is constantly shown as a condition for success in the Brothers’ mission.

Some examples.

There is no doubt that De La Salle sees the Brothers’ vocation as anything but a call to mediocrity. In his meditation on St Michael the Archangel, he says:

Enter today this disposition of wanting nothing but God and of being completely his, for our heart, says St Augustine, cannot be at rest until it rests in God. Are you attached to nothing that you can say it hurts you to give up? Do you value one created thing more than another?...Do you have a liking for personal prayer and for the exercises of the interior life because they lead to God? Do you occupy yourself willingly with thinking of God and speaking to God?...Do you prefer, in your work, the care of

inspiring the children with piety to any other whatsoever? (125.3)

Of St Teresa of Avila he says:

Such is the fruit of frequent and fervent interior prayer: to enjoy God by anticipation as far as a lively faith can, in this world, obtain this happiness. If you love God, prayer will be the food of your soul, and he will come into you and make you eat at his table, as says St John in the Apocalypse. And you will then have the advantage of having him present in all your actions and of having no other view but to please him. You will likewise always be hungry for him as says the Sage; for, according to the expression of the Prophet King, you will have your fill only when you enjoy his glory in heaven. (177.3)

The feast of Saints Simon and Jude gives him occasion to speak of the opposition the Brothers were meeting with:

You will never do anything that can contribute to your salvation and to that of your neighbour without the world opposing it. Endure with courage its contradictions, and remain firm in the practice of good in spite of all the obstacles you may meet with...Do not worry about pleasing those Jesus Christ did not please, and who are his declared enemies. Say often with Saint Paul: If I pleased men, I would not be worthy to be a servant of Jesus Christ. But it does not suffice to be true servants of Jesus Christ. You are also obliged to have him known and adored by the children you instruct. To this should tend the care you should have of your perfection. (182.1,3).

Here is the first point of his meditation on St Francis of Assisi, on love of poverty and of the poor:

Saint Francis loved the poor so much that he willingly gave them an alms on every occasion, and could not refuse it to any of those who asked him for it, because he saw Jesus Christ in their persons and because he was persuaded that the good he did them was done to Jesus Christ himself.

This love for the poor was also the reason why this great Saint applied himself to teach them rather than the rich, because he knew that that was what Jesus Christ applied himself to on earth with his holy apostles. That is why he answered Saint John's disciples who asked him what they should say to their master: Tell him, replied the Saviour, that I preach the gospel to the poor...

You are charged by your work to love the poor, since the function you have is to apply yourself to instruct them. Look upon them, with Saint Francis, as images of Jesus Christ and as those who have the most

dispositions to receive his spirit abundantly. And so, the more you have affection for them, the more you will belong to Jesus Christ. (173.1)

The feasts of the Magi, of St Paul and of St Augustine prompt him to stress the importance of following inspirations given in prayer. He is clear that in genuine personal prayer, there can be light and promptings from the Holy Spirit:

Do we render ourselves attentive to the inspirations we receive from God, and are we as prompt to follow them as these holy Magi were to let themselves be led by the star which served them as guide? It is often on this prompt fidelity to grace that the salvation and happiness of a soul depend.” (96.1)

On St Paul’s enlightenment on the Road to Damascus and yet his waiting to know from Ananias God’s will, he comments:

It is thus that God wills you to act when he inspires you with some good to be done. He simply wants you to know by these heavenly lights that he is asking of you something you are not doing. But he does not want you to act by yourselves: he wishes you to have recourse to your Directors and Superiors that he is careful to instruct about what you should do.” (99.3) He comments on St Augustine’s delayed conversion: “Does grace not urge you to live according to the perfection of your state? Do you not have from time to time strong inspirations to do violence to yourself in order to practice some considerable act of virtue? Do you not find it hard to be faithful to them? Do you not even resist grace sometimes?...Oh how many people are there consecrated to God who are not entirely given to him, and live in sluggishness and negligence? Say at least with David: Today I want to begin to be entirely God’s. (123.1,2)

As Brother Timothy remarked in his Foreword, “This holy priest without thinking of it has expressed in this book the true spirit that moved him and which served as guide in all his actions. He always tried to imprint this on the hearts and minds of all those that divine Providence committed to his care.”³⁹

A conclusion.

De La Salle’s spiritual writings show clearly where the Brothers’ resources lay: not in political or clerical power nor in social leverage, financial means nor an ideology. their service to the poor sprang from their faith in the God who called them to his work. One might wonder what effect these high spiritual ideals could have on school practice. Their work in eleven or twelve schools so far was in actual reality the evangelisation that De La Salle had been called to provide. What they steadily achieved “together and by asso-

ciation”, by their accumulation of insights in the process, and their feedback to him were basic to the whole project. Exclusive attention to De La Salle’s part in it and to the profound spiritual training in Vaugirard can obscure this continuous dedication of all the Society out in the field’ to the mission.. If we unfortunately cannot see the school Brothers at their work, we have written evidence of it in their *Conduite des Ecoles* or Handbook for Christian Schools, a quite remarkable text which is the subject of the next chapter.

References

1. Poutet, CL48, 155-8.
2. The three editions are printed side by side in CL25.
3. *Collection of Short Treatises*, CL15, 95.
4. id., 38-39.
5. See Maurice-Auguste, *Pour une meilleure lecture de nos Règles communes*, 28, n.9; CL5, 348, n. 103.
6. Blain I, 340-1; Blain II, 136-145; CL25, 28-35; CL15, 31-38, 77-78, 105-6.
7. CL25, 36-37.
8. This section borrows ideas from the lectures of Brother Michel Sauvage at the International Session of Lasallian Studies, Rome, 1990-1991.
9. *The Rule of the Brothers of the Christian Schools*, arts 48, 54.
10. id, arts 36, 37.
11. id., arts 11,12.
12. Text and introduction by Brother Maurice-Auguste in CL15.
13. op.cit., Introduction, p. IX.
14. See the whole of CL16, by Brothers Maurice-Auguste and José Arturo.
15. The Considerations of Julien Hayneufve appear in his *Meditations for a retreat of eight or ten days*, published in Paris in 1685. See CL16, 52-54.
16. See quote on first page of CL16.
17. CL15, IX, n.3.
18. CL15, 7-16.
19. Blain II, 287.
20. Rigault I, 479-80.
21. CL25, 96, 101-2.
22. CL15, 74-5.
23. The following section is based on Annexe 1. pp 615-640 of the detailed study of De La Salle’s method of mental prayer, by Brothers Miguel Campos and Michel Sauvage, published as CL50 in 1989.
24. For a detailed commentary, see the whole of CL50..
25. CL15, 67.

26. CL15, 67-8.
 27. CL47, 466.
 28. CL50, 3-4.
 29. M62, 3.
 30. CL50, 39-44.
 31. CL50, 45-77.
 32. CL50, 384-536.
 33. MTR6.1.
 34. This is very much indebted to Brother Jean-Guy Rodrigue's Introduction to his work on the Meditations for the Main Feasts of the Year, CL47, 1-51. The original text of the Meditations appears in CL12.
 35. Blain I, 341; II, 125.
 36. Translation taken from W. J. Battersby's *De La Salle: Meditations*, Waldregrove, London, 1953.
 37. CL47, 10-14.
 38. CL13.
 39. CL12.
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Chapter 12: the Handbook for Christian Schools: *La Conduite des Ecoles Chrétiennes*

The earliest texts.

This remarkable text was first printed in Avignon in 1720, as an in-octavo of 238 pages. An in-folio manuscript copy of 303 pages, somewhat hastily done (one has to think what copying that length of document entails!) of the text as it was around 1704-06 exists in Paris at the Bibliothèque Nationale. Both texts are reproduced, facing one another throughout, in *Cahier Lasallien* 24, allowing one to see the improvements over the years as well as the copyist's errors in the earlier version.¹ Although De La Salle must have worked on a first text at Vaugirard, the Paris manuscript is our earliest remaining one. The text of the Avignon edition was the one emended by the author shortly before his death, incorporating improvements suggested by the Brothers themselves.

A study of both these texts at this point means considering a developing pedagogical practice spanning some twenty years. They both show detailed methods already largely worked out, and are also a sign of the Brothers' constant readiness to improve. In terms of translation, "Running the Christian Schools" corresponds to the French title, but it is not easy to find a term when constantly referring to the book. "Conduct of Schools" or simply "the Conduct" is handier. In practice, "Handbook" may serve.

In an opening letter, not signed, to the 1720 edition, the second Superior General, Brother Timothy, writes: "My very dear Brothers, the ardent zeal you have shown till the present in the exercise of the ministry with which God has honoured you obliges me to exhort you to continue to perfect yourselves in a work so holy and useful to the Church such as yours is; nothing is greater, my very dear Brothers, than to work at giving children a Christian education...Referring to the Founder, he says: "You are witnesses, and God knows it, with what attention and what charity he sought, with the most experienced of the principal Brothers, the means of establishing among you a holy uniformity in your way of teaching youth. He put to writing all that he thought suitable for that...However, as some things were found that could not be practised, the Brothers of the Assembly which was held to elect the first Brother Superior, represented to Monsieur de De La Salle that it would be expedient to make several corrections; he approved of their proposition and so it was put into a better state than it was." He goes on to say that as time lacked to have all the necessary copies of the new text made and sent out "especially as often an infinity of mistakes creep in through the lack of accuracy of the copyists who often make changes", he (Brother Bartholomew) readily agreed to have it printed; "he read it through again with great attention, and had it examined with care so as to cut out anything that might be of no use." (Brother Bartholomew, the first Brother Superior, died on June 8th,

1720, while the printing was still in hand.)

The Preface of the earlier manuscript was written by De La Salle himself. In it he says:

This Conduct has been drawn up in the form of regulations only after a great number of discussions with the most senior Brothers of this Institute and the most capable of teaching well; and after an experience of several years; nothing has been set down that has not been well agreed upon and well tried out and of which the advantages and drawbacks have not been weighed, and of which the blunders and bad consequences have not been foreseen as far as has been possible...

This implies detailed and meticulous writing up, reworked more than once. De La Salle, whether at Vaugirard or later back in the parish of St Sulpice, had an unrivalled opportunity of getting feedback from a community of eighteen Brothers teaching a thousand boys in the parish. It was a unique situation. In addition, as has been seen, he apparently met leading Brothers from the Society as a whole, perhaps annually, to discuss all matters affecting them.

The preface continues: "Granted that this Conduct is not made out in the form of a rule, there being several practices which are only for the best, and which may not be able to be kept easily by those who have no great talents for schooling, and several of them being accompanied and backed up by reasons to make them understood and to indicate how one should act in using them," the Brothers should follow them strictly if they are to have order in their school. In some respects, therefore, the Brothers were still proceeding by trial and error, a situation less indicated in the Preface of the 1720 edition. But school practice was never meant to be static: we know of nearly 300 editions of the Handbook up to 1964, some of them completely revised. However, in the beginning it was important for young Brothers especially not to change according to inclination or fantasy what was the best method of the day.

The handbook is divided into three: 1) the day's activities; 2) the means of keeping order; 3) the duties of the School Inspector, of the one who trains new teachers, and of what the pupils must observe. "This part will be for the use only of the Brother Director and the trainer of the new masters." The 1720 edition indicates being "divided into two parts", although the Preface inadvertently says three. The 1706 Ms has three parts, but the section on training new teachers is wanting. At Avignon, among the Archives of the Département of Vaucluse, is an undated eighteenth-century manuscript copy of the Rule for the one who trains new Teachers. The last page carries the mention: *Training of new Masters or 3rd part of the Conduct of Schools.*

Brother Agathon, the Superior who saw the Institute suppressed under the Revolution, was preparing a new edition of the Conduct at the request of the

General Chapters of 1777 and 1787. He points out that the section on Inspectors and new masters had so far been passed on through manuscript copies, but that so many were needed now, and copyists' mistakes could mean such differences, that it would now be printed with the rest. About this section, he is the one who tells us that "We were occupied with this work when there fell into our hands, just at the right moment, a manuscript dated from 1696..." The Brothers had to disperse after 1792 and the project was never achieved. We know of another version of the guidance for new masters as part of the *Conduct of Schools* printed in Lyons in 1811 and 1819 (in other words, as the Brothers began to pick up again after the Revolution). It forms the third part of the text along with *Procedures for School Inspectors*. This third part continued to be printed as part of the main volume till it was replaced by *The Virtues and Qualities of the Teacher* from 1862, but then also continued to be published separately.

"L'Ecole Paroissiale" (The Parish School): a forerunner of the Conduct.

The early Brothers' teaching ideas did not all come out of their own heads. Adrian Nyel gave them the first lead, and then De La Salle would have picked up ideas from Roland's Sisters, from Barré, and also from Saint Peter Fourier's Canonesses of St Augustine. The Brothers were already developing a successful teaching method before the move to Paris. In terms of getting actual texts, we know that De La Salle was in contact with Charles Démiá before moving to Paris and for a time after. But he would get to know, as the best text available for teaching in charity schools, and one that Démiá followed, the text printed in 1654, written by a priest of the capital devoted to the instruction of the young. This was *L'Escole paroissiale...* (to give the ancient spelling of this earlier edition), "The parish School, or Easy Way for teaching in a Christian manner children in the little schools." It was written after eighteen years' experience. It may well have been used by Nyel, for it spread through France, and was reprinted till the middle of the 18th century. The author had completed a month or two before this text a book of *Familiar Instructions in Catechism form for all the Solemnities of the Year*. He brought out a revised and abridged edition of his main work in 1685 under the title: *Methodical Instruction for the parish school, drawn up in favour of the little schools*.² He remained unknown till Brother Yves Poutet, by a clever checking and interpreting of texts, showed in 1963 that he was Jacques de Batencour, a member of the community of priests in the parish of Saint-Nicolas-du-Chardonnet founded by Adrien Bourdoise.

What is clear from a comparison of *L'Ecole Paroissiale* and the *Conduct of Schools* is that De La Salle and the Brothers worked within an accepted

framework of schooling and in circumstances that were the same: crowded classes, children living largely on the street, unused to discipline and quiet, so that much effort in school was given to obtaining order and silence. *L'Ecole Paroissiale* is written for a master, whether clerical or lay, running a school for payment on behalf of the parish; and therefore having not just 15 or 25 pupils but 60 or more, even up to a 100, when he should have a sub-master who takes over the writing pupils. The aim is to prepare for College: "In the ordinary school one should teach (besides piety, civility and good behaviour) to read, write, count, "calculate with counters and with the pen", and the elements of Latin and Greek to those apt for them, to make them capable of entering some good College and to be the best of their class." The difference, then, with the Brothers' schools was that these schools were frequented by children of the lower bourgeoisie and better-off artisans, with only the occasional poor. One can note that these parish schools were already competing with those of other masters. The difference as to method is that although Batencour's work was in theory destined for all teachers of such schools, there is no provision for their training. One has not to suppose that all little schools had reached this standard by any means: the method could be followed only by the most experienced masters.

Chapter I of *L'Ecole Paroissiale*: the qualities of a schoolmaster or mistress.

In his Preface, Jacques de Batencour aims at making easier an occupation he recognises as being without glamour, without pleasure and without relish, yet a useful one. He hopes that the use of a good method will show some results, especially as regards the children's behaviour and salvation. For these children still retain "something of the abundant graces received in Baptism", and let you guide them. They are gentler, readier to obey than at a later age. He offers the method he has found fairly successful "in instructing the children I have under my care."

He begins by describing at length the qualities of a good teacher, taking as framework the three theological and the four cardinal moral virtues, and applying them to the master and his relations with his pupils. In fact, this section of the work includes advice which in the Conduct comes under "The means of establishing and maintaining order in the schools." He should pray before each lesson, representing to God the possible difficulties of the day. He should pray for his pupils and, before teaching Catechism, he should make a visit if possible to the Blessed Sacrament.

Charity towards the children includes using much patience, showing more love to the poor than the rich and never punishing through temper; for instance, because they have told something to their parents who have come up and made a scene. He does not listen to complaints about masters in other

schools: masters support one another as colleagues. He teaches the children to make up after quarrels and be ready to forgive and even ask the Master to let the other boy off his punishment. He should encourage them to visit sick classmates, and to share their bread with the poorer pupils.

Before taking up the function of schoolmastering he should think carefully and take advice to see if God is calling him, the signs being an attraction and zeal for “an office which is so looked down on in the world”. If he looks on it merely as trade to earn a living and not to “nourish them with the spirit of Christianity”, he is a mercenary and not a pastor. He should be satisfied with the children if they do their little best - although in the end, if a boy cannot learn to read, he should be taught the basics of the faith and sent away, so as not to waste the time of those around him. The master should be a model for his pupils, “for the children will take from him habits they will keep all their lifetime, whether for good or evil.” It will help him very much to guide these children if he knows well their natural dispositions so as to teach each one appropriately.

He makes the interesting observation that “Paris children usually eat much bread, a thing he (the master) should be aware of because this food dulls their mind and makes them often inapt at the age of nine to ten years to learn...All repletion is bad, but especially of bread, which is very harmful to the stomach.” “They are also fond of good food and fussy”. These are not the poor. A fee was paid monthly for this ‘grammar schooling’.

In terms of “modesty”, i.e. reasonable behaviour and dress, the teacher should be self-controlled and avoid ridiculous gestures. He should not be “dressed up, powdered, and decked out, or even dress above his condition.” He should blame the children who have “so many ribbons, feathers, ringlets and powder on their hair...as they easily tend to do after the example of their parents, notably in Paris and other towns..” (Again, his clientele are not the poor). He will teach the children self-control and reasonable behaviour, especially in making them keep exact silence in school, for “it is one of the most important things for the good government of the school and to preserve the master...” They should not be allowed to run, jump or play in school. ‘Observers’ should be placed in each corner of the room to call out the names of the talkers. The master will order the children to behave in the stairway, in the yard, and in the street going home.

He speaks of the need of fortitude in “the difficult direction of youth, where so much dissatisfaction is met with and almost never any satisfaction, neither from the parents nor from the children.” He needs patience with the parents who always blame the Master if their boy is not learning; and with the children, never getting in a temper with them but correcting them with great tranquillity of mind. Some try the master’s patience in different ways, and are to be treated or punished differently, according as it is through stupidity, laziness,

ness, or playing about. They have to be won over with great patience, “making oneself all to all for the sake of him who gave himself for us.” But patience is especially needed “to suffer the reproaches of the poor.” If you do not take their boy immediately, or punish him, or send him away, they believe it is because of their poverty, ‘because they are not Monsieur or Madame’. Ordinarily their children leave after two or three years, without saying good-bye except by fighting, to spite the master, and without paying what is still owing; and they make fun of the master and the school. The poor clearly were not at home in these schools.

Attitude to punishments.

Under justice, or fairness, he has a lot to say on punishments. The master “should be exact to chastise prudently...and moderate in the chastisements and corrections he will make. He will never beat them around the head, nor with the birch (i.e. striking them with it apart from a controlled punishment), nor with the hands. “New boys are to be punished more lightly in the beginning. If they are not used to it, they can be told off instead, or made to kneel down for quite a while, or stand on a bench. But those who are hardened “and do not cry at all, neither before nor after, must be chastised more strongly. We should also try to reach these children sometimes by love, sometimes by fear, and make them fast in order to move them to good, rather than treat them more harshly.”

Before punishing, a master will

- 1) see if the accusation is true or not, and not believe easily parents who complain about their child, for they are often moved by passion. (The Brothers’ rule, if the incident occurred out of school, was politely to request the parents to give the punishment themselves);

- 2) examine the fact and render justice, whether in punishing or forgiving;

- 3) get them to admit their fault, and, if possible, that they deserve punishing, “for the greatest evil that can befall a pupil and the master is to chastise a child without reason, a thing they remember all their lives”;

- 4) prevent them shouting out during or after the punishment. If someone refuses to be punished, “let the fire of his anger cool down, pretending not to notice; then an hour or a lesson later, make him realise his fault and make an example of him before all the others, and then make him ask pardon on his knees from God, the master and all the pupils he has scandalised; and afterwards, for all the faults, even small, that he makes, he must be humiliated, to bring down his courage, for a fortnight.”

Children brought up at home softly, such as an only boy, need to be checked very gently and punished only when there are several others, “because the consolation of the afflicted is to have the like with them.”! For the hard-headed, who boast after being punished, “sometime afterwards, make them

do something they like, without it appearing you are trying to get round them, such as sending them to serve Mass, giving them a higher place in class that they will think they have gained; and when you see their face a little tranquil, let them know their fault and promise not to punish them if they do not do it again, and point out that they are the cause of it.”

People who merit it should be shown regard, such as certain children “because of the piety, sincerity and virtue of their parents along with the qualities they possess; it being quite reasonable to spend more effort and work towards those who will handle the duties of public office or of a numerous family.” Children in school should also be rewarded for merit. They should be placed in the order of merit and knowledge, by means of tests every fortnight, and still more by daily oral competitions. Good workers should be praised publicly, and some reward given, such as pictures of varying size and quality. The master should make his gifts seem worth having, “imitating in this a small haberdasher who boosts his wares which in themselves are not worth much.”

As to actual punishments, he has toned down his earlier text. In 1654 he wrote that the ordinary punishments are:

- “1) to give the stick on the fingers to make them get down to study;
- 2) the birch on the hands;
- 3) on the buttocks, more or less according to the gravity of the fault;
- 4) the prison (which must mean some dark room) in which they are shut for the space of 2,3,4,5 or 6 hours...;
- 5) the place of the donkey, putting on him the donkey’s dress, which consists of an old piece of cloth, a broom in the hand, an old box shaped like a donkey’s head on his head, a notice tied to his back, with the pupils making fun of him.

In 1685 he writes: “ Corporal punishment is fitting to correct faults of laziness or malice; depriving greedy boys of a part of their food, with discretion so as not to injure their health; the show-offs by making them feel foolish; truants should be kept in by force, either in their parents’ house or in the school.” He ends this section by counsels on humility : “It will lead him not to esteem himself more than the children, but in serving them as Master, believe in his heart that they are much better and higher before God than he...and be among them like Our Lord with his apostles, *sicut qui ministrat*, (as one who serves)...He will be very careful never to despise the other school masters...esteeming in his heart that each does his best.” One would have liked to have met Jacques de Batencour. His chapters on teaching method will be considered further, before summarising the corresponding section of the Brothers’ Handbook.

The Handbook for Christian Schools

The training of new teachers: Part III of the Conduct.

A young man entering the novitiate came in order to have his vocation discerned. In opening himself to teachings on Christian brotherhood and a spirituality of living by faith and zeal, he became strongly orientated to the humble work of the classroom. And already he had taken on the work of removing in himself the obstacles to the work of the Spirit.

But he still had to go through the experience of facing a class of boys. As circumstances made it possible, an initiation was made before the end of the novitiate - at the Grand'Maison in Paris, for instance. But in any case, for his first six months in community, he was followed by someone, usually the Director of the community, (which might run several schools) whose duty of looking after him came to be written out as Part III of the Conduct. He would thereafter act towards this Brother in his function as Inspector of Schools. At the end of each day, each Brother accused himself in community of his external failings; each week the community gathered to give him their view of his conduct. Each week he had a half hour's interview with his Director on his own situation relative to health, community relations, prayer, school behaviour, effectiveness and difficulties and his growth as a Brother in general. Every month he wrote on similar lines to his Founder. Once a year the latter met his Brothers for a week's retreat, half the time of which was given over to considering their ministry. And overall, there were those meetings the Founder had with the most experienced Brothers - in Pentecost week or whatever time - to pool their experiences for the general benefit, and leave it to him to write up the desirable texts. The new Brother was not short of support in his Society for his work of Christian education and for striving to measure up to it.

One can compare that very supportive initial and ongoing training with the possibilities the individual master had that Jacques de Batencour wrote for. This support shows in that text on The Training of New Masters of which we have the early eighteenth century manuscript copy, belonging to the Brothers at Avignon. Although the whole spirit of it is that of De La Salle, "the drafting does not seem to be from the hand of the author of the Conduct. It has something more alert and also more hurried, a more modern turn of expression, 'more youthful'".³

A young Brother may well leave the novitiate intending to lead his spiritual journey courageously; but he cannot wait a lifetime to correct those things in himself which will create immediate difficulties for him in class, nor to acquire those teaching qualities and skills he must use from his first day in the classroom. "The formation of new masters consists in two points," says the manuscript "1) to take from the new Masters what they have and should not have. 2) to give them what they do not have and that it is very necessary for them to have. What must be taken from new Masters is: 1) speaking (too

much); 2) (too much) activity; 3) thoughtlessness; 4) over-attentiveness; 5) rigidity and harshness; 6) impatience; 7) being against some, not others; 8) slowness; 9) sluggishness; 10) lifelessness; 11) a mind easily discouraged; 12) familiarity; 13) having favourites; 14) inconstant and changeable; 15) appearing distracted and lacking concentration, or looking in one direction only.”

Many a young master would tend to talk too much, giving the answers himself instead of training a boy to think; and he would also soon tire himself out talking to sixty and more boys. His tutor (Brother Director) would encourage him to try and say nothing for a quarter of an hour, and then gradually extend the time. When he speaks uselessly, he should be told at once or after school, and shown what he should have done. If a boy made a mistake in reading, the Brother should have clicked his ‘signal’ twice indicating the boy should try again; if he failed after two or three attempts, the Brother should have made one click on the ‘signal’ to draw everybody’s attention, and then point to one boy to say the word. This ‘signal’ was an ingenious little instrument invented by the Brothers to save their voice: it had a short wooden handle, moulded so as to grasp it easily, and a round head with a groove into which a thin slip of wood was tied in such a way that you could click it. One, two or three clicks meant different things, so did a firm rap with the head on the table; and the head, which had an ornamental point, was used to point towards an individual pupil. The tutor is recommended not to insist on new Brother keeping silence for too long a time, “because that would put them out and could scare them”. It would be good to give them as a ‘penance’ (that is, something to do to make up for a fault) to try hard to keep silence for a quarter of an hour next day, and after school, to invite them to say if they were faithful to it, and what they thought of the result.

This close and encouraging guidance marks the remainder of the manuscript. About the Brother who is too active and hasty: “Although it is not always a good idea to be like a statue in school...it is also not good to be too active and on the move...it takes away from them all their authority and draws the contempt of the pupils.” This Brother is to be encouraged to stay on his chair for a quarter of an hour, and learn not to be constantly on the move, turning his head from left to right thoughtlessly, and changing from one foot to the other. The tutor should be “as often as possible next to him to let him know when he does something that is not to be done, and even give him penances suitable for making him remember what he ought to be doing.”

After the defects to be “uprooted “ come the qualities that have to be acquired: 1) boldness; 2) authority and firmness; 3) restraint: a grave, wise and moderate exterior. 4) vigilance; 5) watchfulness over themselves; 6) a steady behaviour; 7) prudence; 8) a welcoming and winning air; 9) zeal; 10) facility to speak and express oneself clearly and with order and at the level of the children one teaches. “They should be given frequent practice in the no-

vitate at teaching. Before sending them into a class to teach, they must be obliged to enter with a deliberate and grave air, head high and looking at all the pupils in a bold manner as if they had thirty years' experience." "Firmness consists in having done what you want immediately, without delay." The master must never give way to a pupil, and the one training him will help him to find the means. There is little development in this section of the document beyond the first two points. It concludes: "One should try and see that the children always leave school pleased, so that they cannot take back to their parents anything that could pain them."

There is a section added on boarding schools which was not in the original *Conduct*. And of particular interest is a short final section that must go back to the Founder's time, since there was no training school for rural schoolmasters run by the Brothers after 1712. It speaks of "The different kinds of house in this Institute... To give all the extent necessary to the aim of this Institute, there will be three kinds of house in which the greater part of the Exercises will be different.

1) There will be a house in which those who present themselves to be admitted will be trained and formed in the Spirit of this Institute.

2) There will be School houses in which the Brothers will apply themselves to keep Schools free of charge.

3) There can be training houses in which the Brothers apply themselves to form for several years Schoolmasters for the parishes of small towns, the larger market villages and country villages."

The organisation of the school day.

A glance at the remainder of the text of *L'Ecole Paroissiale* will enable us to see how far the Brothers followed the best exposition of traditional method and where they improved and innovated, even radically.

School organisation and teaching method in Batencour's school.

After his first section on the qualities of the master, Batencour deals with the arrangement and furnishing of the school (having in mind one classroom), with admissions, and with classroom 'officers'. All this is his first part. His second part is on "(teaching) Piety". There was a daily catechism of fifteen minutes and two whole afternoons a week, Wednesdays and Saturdays, for teaching the diocesan catechism and having it learnt by heart "according to the order of Monsieur the Precentor, Superior of the little Schools of Paris." One can only say it must have been boring, and there must have been plenty of punishment.

On Sundays, there was school at eight o'clock, but only for the children to say morning prayer together before being taken to Mass. If there was no

afternoon sermon, the children met again at 1.30 for a pious reading followed by prayer and were then questioned on the morning's homily till Vespers, and there might be a parish catechism lesson in church afterwards! Confirmation is prepared for in five lessons the week before the day itself, and the day before, the children go to confession, mass, recite the seven Psalms and the Office of the Holy Spirit. Catechism on Confession is given in seven lessons; the children are encouraged to go six times a year, oftener after the age of 10 to 12. All the lessons in Lent are on Confession and Confirmation. Children are prepared for their first Communion after Confirmation, when they are at least 12.

There is a detailed section on serving Mass, but not specific instructions on the Mass and how to follow it. Then directives are given on how to take part in the Sunday procession into church and the more solemn ones on feast days. The author notes that if the procession goes beyond the parish to meet up with another, the master has to go ahead of the ranks to prevent an attack by children in the other procession (not by his, of course!). Processions are not dealt with in the Conduct. Organising them belonged to the parish clergy, and the Brothers did not accept to perform any clerical function. Batencour has in fourteen pages a set of prayers for use in school. For the Brothers, this developed into a separate printed text along with a collection of hymns.

His Third Part (85pp) is concerned with the skills learnt in school. Reading begins with learning to read Latin. The texts were the common prayers, the Office, Canticles and Litanies. For French, they begin with printed texts, dropping Latin once they can read French easily, and then they are given a manual of civility to read, and they are also given a text written in Gothic characters. For the teaching of writing, which is explained in detail, the children must bring quills, paper and ink. The master can, if he wants, make his own ink. He prepares models of handwriting for them to copy, and some of these can be bills of sale, receipts and leases "to style them in business practices". He next outlines teaching the basics of Latin and Greek (although nothing appears in Greek).

He then gives the daily routine. The doors are opened at 6.30. School 'officers' are there to supervise. Those learning to write must be there not later than 7.00, to get their materials ready. Mass is said at 7.15 at the latest, by himself if he is a priest, or by another. He calls at the school "about half a quarter of an hour after seven o'clock" to tell the officers to take the children to church while he goes ahead and finds out which altar is free. Mass time is taken up reciting a sequence of prayers (De La Salle would help the children to follow the Mass itself.) Back at school, the children recite to the 'decurions', or trim the quills or prepare their paper for writing; and the 'observers' take note of those who misbehave. The master must come in exactly at eight o'clock and stay till eleven "as ordered in the Regulation of Monsieur the

Precentor of Paris, Director of the little Schools”.

At nine o'clock, after the prayer at the hour, the children eat their breakfast. The master sees nothing is wasted, and notes the greedy and the impolite. He checks on the absent, and sends an 'officer' to their house, either then or after school. At 9.15, the 'almoners' go round bareheaded (the children otherwise kept their hats on in school) with a basket, for those who wish to give something. These take their caps off in doing so, for in giving to the poor they are giving to Christ. Then the master distributes the bread to the poor. In parishes where several Masses are said, when priests ask for servers, writers should not be sent, and the celebrant should be asked to send the children back at once and not let them waste their time in the sacristy. Afternoon school lasts, from Lent to All Saints, from 2.00 till 5.00, and in winter from 1.30 till 4.30. There is no school on Thursday afternoon, nor from September 17th till St Remi's day (October 1st), which makes for a very short vacation. There were, however, many holydays when there was no school.

The Brothers' day.⁴

Before we look at the Brothers' school day, it helps to run through their day as a whole and see what strong unity there was between their life and mission. They rose in all seasons at 4.30 (the poor bell-ringer had to be up at 4.15.) The Brother Director in a loud voice said: "Live Jesus in our hearts!" and all answered "Forever!" It was "the signal of the community" and was said after all their actions in common. They had a quarter of an hour to dress and make their bed, and then went down to the community room, where each one combed his hair, cleaned himself and then read in the *Imitation of Christ* till 5.00. They had a short quarter of an hour's vocal prayers and then mental prayer till 6.00. Between 6.00 to 7.15, they went to a parish Mass, and then practised writing or reading French or Latin or manuscripts. Breakfast followed, during which, from the first day of each new school year and again after Easter, the first two parts of the *Conduct of Schools* were read out by the Brothers in turn (the community was often of only two or three) consecutively. The remainder of the year, they read from some instructive book.

After breakfast, they went to the Oratory to recite the *Litany of the Holy Child Jesus* "to prepare themselves for school and ask the Child Jesus for his spirit so as to be able to communicate it to the children in their charge." Brothers teaching school in the house then said three decades of the Rosary; those teaching in schools elsewhere in the town said them on the way. They were in school from 8.00 till 11.00. including taking the children to Mass.

Back in the community, the Brothers made a little self-examination of themselves at 11.30 according to the method of St Ignatius, then made the public accusation of their external faults, and then had lunch, during which there were various readings from the New Testament and other books. Recrea-

tion, as we have seen, followed till one o'clock. The community then recited the litany of St Joseph "to ask his spirit and assistance for the Christian education of the children", followed by the Rosary as in the morning. Afternoon school lasted from 1.30 till 4.30, including half an hour's catechism teaching, followed by evening prayer, and then no more than six couplets of a hymn before dismissal.

On regaining the community, the Brothers went to the oratory to make a short examination of the faults they may have committed during the day. At 5.30 they had spiritual reading, and at six, after reading half a page in the New Testament, they made mental prayer. This was followed by a public "accusation of defects" at 6.30 and then supper, recreation till 8.00, and then a half-an-hour studying the catechism, which may have been in texts such as those suggested by Batencour, until De La Salle published his own three-volume text. Night prayer was at 8.30. The Brothers went to their dormitories at 9.00 and were in bed by 9.15. It looks a confined life-style. But there is a difference between looking at a time-table and seeing how the life was actually lived. It compared well with life in their own homes. There were times of quiet. Spiritual reading for instance, was a relaxing and refreshing link between an active day and evening meditation. Their food was of the kind they were used to; but it was regular and sufficient. As De La Salle wrote to a Brother Robert in 1709: "It is not our practice to weigh out bread for the Brothers to eat. They eat what they need." And, if they slept several to a room, at least they slept each in their own bed.

The school day in the Christian Schools: Part II of the Conduct.

The school doors were opened at 7.30, half an hour before the Brothers came. One of the best behaved boys was put in charge of each class by the Inspector or first master. He told the Brother afterwards what had gone on "without the others being able to notice." This use of boys to observe and report was current practice, and is notable in the *Ecole Paroissiale*. It has its disadvantages, and those put in charge would often hate it - and be hated - but it was that or the kind of disorder that ruined effective teaching. The *Conduct* pin-points what the children are to avoid, to do, and how to be occupied, far more than *L'Ecole Paroissiale* and this is the mark of the Brothers' approach throughout: "Care will be taken that the pupils do not make a pile-up in the street where the school is, before the door is opened, nor make a noise by shouting or singing. They will not be allowed to amuse themselves running and playing during that time in the neighbourhood of the school...

"When the door is opened, care will be taken that they do not all rush in...They will be encouraged to enter their classes with a profound respect in view of God's presence....While the pupils are coming into class, they will all keep such a strict silence that not even the slightest noise, even with their

feet, can be heard, so that you cannot even distinguish those who enter nor notice those who are studying....The masters will be careful to warn that those who speak or make the slightest noise in class in his absence will be punished severely and that he will never overlook faults committed against silence and good order during this time.”

When the Brother arrives, everyone stands up. He bows to the crucifix, kneels down in the middle of the room and says a short prayer, then goes to his place; then the boys sit down. If it is not eight o'clock, he reads in his New Testament, while keeping an eye on the class. At eight sharp, the Reciter of Prayers leads off in a loud and steady voice, “as indicated in the Book of Prayers for the Christian Schools.” After the sign of the Cross, he says: “Let us remember that we are in the holy presence of God.” Next they recited the *Veni Sancte*, a prayer to Jesus, the Angelus (but not the Litany of the Saints as in *L'Ecole Paroissiale*) and an act of faith on a different chief mystery of faith for each day of the week. It was a way of helping them to express from the heart what they were learning in their catechism lessons. They then said grace before meals, for breakfast now followed, not at nine, as in Batencour's school. The Book of Prayers referred to is a small collection entitled *Exercises of Piety of prayers that take place during the day in the Christian Schools*, that was drawn up by De La Salle and approved for publication on 21st March 1696. As it was a much-handled text and copies wore out, we have no edition earlier than 1760. It comprises 46 pages of prayers for the school day or for different times of the year, how to serve mass (expressed even more precisely than Batencour's), and the Latin responses at Mass. The prayers were either composed especially for the Brothers' schools or were the standard Christian prayers. These first prayers in school were said kneeling, then the children stood and took their breakfast in silence.

The Brothers to some extent rethought this breakfast period. In Batencour's morning, it was something of a break, which he also used to punish those who were not at his early Mass or for other reasons; and it lasted in theory only a quarter of an hour. For the Brothers, the school day had just started and they did not want this breakfast time to run counter to the order and silence needed and that they had so much insisted upon. During this brief meal, they had one boy (or two boys) standing in the middle of the class and reciting morning prayer. Everyone did this in turn on Monday and Tuesdays. On Fridays and Saturdays it was the section of the diocesan catechism they had to learn that week. In midweek, one boy recited the answers at Mass and the other made the corresponding actions of the server; younger children learnt how to say the Rosary. This recitation was quite an affair: the precise details cover six pages. So, although it was not a learning effort, but merely reciting what they knew, this practice prevented the children getting noisy. With regard to collecting alms for the poor, one has to remember that most of the children in the

Brothers' classes were poor. The recitations and the collection for the poorer were also made during the afternoon snack.

Between the 1706 and the 1720 edition of the *Conduct*, the tone softens and is more discreet. The children are to be explained that the Brothers want them (1720: 'prefer them') to eat in school so as to "teach them to eat sensibly, politely and with moderate behaviour, and to pray God before and after doing it." The 1706 text says the master must make sure each one brings his breakfast, unless they are too poor, and to make sure they haven't eaten it on the way, they have to hold it up after the prayer, and if they do not have it, are to be punished. They are not to bring meat (this is directed to the better off), and if they do, it is given to the poor. The alms-giving is brought too much to notice: although they are free to give or not, and must not give so much that not enough is left for themselves, the Brother "will encourage them, during the breakfast itself, to this act of charity...He will sometimes praise some one who has done this action in a generous way..." When the alms have been collected, the Brother takes one piece from the basket, makes the sign of the cross, then all the poor stand up, and the Brother makes the distribution. The 1720 edition simply says: "The master must see that the pupils bring every day their breakfast and afternoon snack, without putting pressure on them. A little basket will be put in an indicated spot, into which the children may put the bread they have left over and if they want to, in order to distribute it to those who are poor." The master simply gives out the alms, asking the recipients to pray for their benefactors. Breakfast finishes at 8.30, "as far as possible.", which gave the children about twenty-five minutes for this from the end of morning prayer onwards. The teaching session followed, lasting from 8.30 to 10.00.

Teaching method according to the Handbook.

The remaining 108 pages of Part I of the *Conduct* deal with the lessons of the day, and correspond to Parts III and II of *L'Ecole Paroissiale* (135pp). One can deduct from the latter, for purposes of comparison, the 44 pages given to the teaching of Latin, for De La Salle, against all the tradition, taught how to read French first, in the name of common sense. It is easy to miss the point, since the change-over seems self-evidently sensible. But when there is an ingrained habit, based on a past situation, whereby Latin was taught in the grammar schools, not as a language and literature, but to enable future clerics to take part in the liturgical services (and for that reason learned plain-chant along with it), and when people argued, as Batencour does, that reading Latin is the basis of reading French, and that French is much more difficult to pronounce, then they still began with Latin even with children of the struggling urban masses. There is still at the back of it the idea of the school being

mainly a seedground for future priests, without proper provision for the overall development of the majority as urban citizens and ordinary parishioners. Parishes also needed altar servers, so that their clergy were likely to let things remain as they were. Batencour, for instance, allowed children during the morning to leave school in order to serve some priest's Mass. The situation called for someone to take a stand, and to free education from this one-sided stress. This is what De La Salle did. The innovation gained headway as the Brothers' schools increased in number. It was this stand that liberated teachers from then on to look at the real needs of the children.

Teaching reading: a method of careful teaching and grading that encouraged progress.

The first twenty pages of the Brothers' Handbook deal with reading. The method has become far more detailed, precise and practical than with Batencour, who has only six pages on French reading (after fourteen pages on Latin reading). It does not mean method has yet attained the ideal. No more than Batencour were the Brothers aware of the psychology of child learning. Reading difficulties were rated according to a certain book logic: the alphabet must be learnt first, then syllables, then words broken into syllables...But what they did do was to create, more than others, an atmosphere in which the child saw himself as making progress and wanted to go on. The Brothers set nine grades of progress in reading (against seven by D mia, for instance). In a one-class parish school, all the children would have to wait on one another; a Brothers' school had at least two classes and could have up to five or six.

The children sat on long benches, and in each grade they were arranged in three 'orders' of progress, according as they were beginners, average or advanced, "easily distinguished from one another because of their place." As they progressed, they changed to places further up the section and so were conscious in a short time that they had improved. And the change of grade and even of 'order' in a grade, was not done casually: each month all were tested. "After this test, the Masters will mark on their register by pricking it with a pin before each name those they recognise capable of changing lesson." If they are doubtful, they make two holes with the pin. They then discuss the changes with the Inspector, who alone makes them. If some are kept down "for their own good, or because they are too young, or for the good of the class and this grade, so that someone can remain to give a lead to the others, they will make sure that these pupils are happy to stay...giving them an office such as bench leader "making them understand that it is better to be first or among the first of a lower grade than be last in a more advanced one."!

The Brother is told to remain at his seat, sitting or standing (incidentally, his

chair was not in front of the class, where the door to the next classroom remained open, but at the side, so that he saw the class diagonally). He must always show seriousness, but this “does not consist in having a severe appearance nor in looking vexed, nor in saying harsh words, but it consists in a great control over one’s actions and words.” These recommendations needed to be followed strictly by a beginner, especially as most Brothers then started very young, but would be handled in more relaxed fashion once they were at home with the situation. School, provided they did not give way to the familiarity they were warned against (otherwise “they will make a rag of him”, says the section on the training of new teachers) could become a very happy time.

For the first two grades of reading, namely, the Alphabet and Syllables, the children learn from two boards on which these are written, fixed to the wall, and the Brother is told in great detail where the children are to sit and how to teach these grades. He is told that unless the child knows his alphabet perfectly, “he will never be able to read well.”! After these first two grades, which occupy three months, the first written text - begun after Christmas, therefore - is a short syllabary, showing syllables with the same sound but spelt differently, causing difficulties “which are not small in French”. De La Salle himself wrote and published a French syllabary or book of syllables in 1698,⁵ so that this is the one referred to in the Conduct. It is a small book of 72 pages. It shows that De La Salle and his Brothers neglected nothing in working for the glory of God in their school ministry.

But it has another significance in being *the first French book of syllables that was thought out without dependence on previously taught Latin syllables*. The debate about which one should learn to read first, Latin or French, was in full swing, and protagonist on the side of the mother-tongue was De La Salle, and he and the Brothers in their schools won the argument for the benefit of posterity. The topic will be looked at on the occasion of a later event. The children studied this syllabary for at least five months, which took them to the beginning of June, when they received their first reading book. This was the text for practice for the next three months, bringing them to the end of the school year.

In the second year they have their second reader a book of Christian instruction for three months, followed by a third one, chosen by the Brother Director, for six months. At this stage, they are reading whole sentences, and also, twice a week, have a half-hour period learning punctuation signs (exclamation marks, etc.), accents, and the ability to read numbers, whether in French (i.e Arabic) or Roman numerals, up to 100,000 “at least”.

It is only in the third year that they learn to read Latin. The text used is the Psalter. We have seen that De La Salle had an edition of it printed in 1706. They are not learning Latin as a language, no more than in other little schools,

but simply in order to pronounce it. Once they are doing well, and are the third 'order', they begin to learn to write and are also given as advanced reading text the book of *Christian Civility*, the famous text written by De La Salle. "This book contains all the duties of the children, both towards God and their parents, and the rules of Christian politeness and civility; it is printed in Gothic characters, more difficult to read than French characters." Finally, after a certain progress in writing, they are taught to read manuscript papers and parchments, "*until they are able to read the most difficult writing that may be met with...*" These include assignations, receipts, agreements to buy and sell, etc."

The painstaking effort to teach the children how to 'write perfectly'.

There are some interesting things to note about the teaching of writing. The children must know how to read French and Latin well before beginning writing, and so, not till they were ten. But if a boy of twelve has not yet learnt to write but can read well in French, he skips the Latin, especially if otherwise he will not stay long enough at school to learn to write well. About writing paper and about pens (quills) and penknife (a word used here in its original meaning) and ink, the regulations are very similar to those in *L'Ecole Paroissiale* - since they deal with what one can call the standard equipment of the day. The children were required to bring their own paper from home, white, clean, not creased or dog-eared, and especially, that "doesn't absorb the ink easily, which is a great hindrance to writing." But whereas Batencour's children were required to bring a quire of paper, and in a folder, the poorer boys in the Brothers' schools were asked, when they were down to their last half-dozen sheets, to ask their parents for another half-quire. They had to have two large quills, and once they had learnt how to trim them, they had to have a penknife, and also a writing-case to keep them in.

Jacques de Batencour has a lot to say about the children bringing good ink, or clubbing together to buy a quantity, and still more on a recipe for making ink. In the Brothers' schools, the ink was given free. So as not to smudge their writing, the children in the fee-paying school had to pay a small sum for powder or fine sand to dry their work; in the Brothers' schools they were asked to bring a piece of coarse paper for the same purpose. Both texts explain in detail how to prepare a quill for writing, but the *Conduct*, in less words, breaks the explanation into more steps.

Both books go into detail as to how to teach handwriting, but the *Conduct* grades it far more thoroughly. Progress towards a more efficient method of teaching is noticed between its two editions. Thus, there are eight 'orders' for learning round-hand in 1706, but only six in 1720; five for learning Italic script in 1706, but six in 1720. The boys have an hour's practice morning and afternoon, and should be able to write at least two pages all told. There is a con-

cern that boys likely to leave school very soon should be given more time for writing. Their first writing models are taken from Scripture or are short sayings from the Fathers or books of piety. Those in the eighth order copy in the morning from some good and practical book, and in the afternoon from handwritten commercial papers, “especially bills of assignation and of distraint, of contracts, receipts, estimates and labour agreements, leases, various contracts before notary.” After three months of this, they will, twice a week, themselves make up such of these transactions as will be useful for them in the future. The details set out for patient teaching of these children how to write, and how to correct their writing are astonishing:

He will go behind them in turn...he will stand on the right of the one he has to correct, and will point out all the mistakes he makes in writing, whether in body posture or in the way of holding the pen and of forming the letters...The master will make sure the pupils are attentive when he is correcting their writing, marking with a little line the main mistakes they have made...He will take care at the beginning to draw their attention to only three or four mistakes, lest he should confuse them if he pointed out a bigger number....While the master visits and corrects the writing of the pupils, he will take care to have all the others always in sight. For this purpose, he will raise his head now and then to see what is going on in the classroom, and if he finds anyone misbehaving, he will warn him with a sign with his mouth (this being, perhaps, a ‘tth, tth’ sound made with the tongue).

Here is a full example of correcting a mistake with a pupil:

“To acquire lightness and correct the defect of heaviness in writing, the master will see to it that the pupils do not press on the paper and that they only touch it lightly with the end of the pen, almost without feeling it, and that they do not write with too great a slowness. He will point out that this mistake comes from having their arms as though stuck to the table and that they do not bend their fingers and do not give them the play they should have, or because they have their body too inclined or even bent over the table. To get a pupil to correct these defects, if he is slow, he should be encouraged to write quickly, without leaning his arm on the table, touching it only with the extremity of the two fingers that hold the pen, without seeing whether he forms the letters and words well or badly, being concerned only to get him to learn boldness and freer movements...

Here was the gentleness and the concentration on their progress that comes from a real love of these poor boys. It was the Christian teacher’s ministry in action.

Teaching them to sum.

Arithmetic was taught late in a boy's schooling, when he was in the fourth order of writers, and only for half an hour twice a week. Acquiring the skills of reading and writing was more vital. But the teaching was just as thorough. From what is said on this subject and on Spelling (taught later than Arithmetic), it seems that a small amount of homework was given in the top classes. The boys were required to have a little book in which, during class time, they wrote out, as practical spelling exercises, the kind of bills, etc., they had learnt to read and write well; or else they wrote out what they remembered of the week's catechism lessons. In this book also were worked out the arithmetic problem given at the beginning of the week along with "some others they have made up themselves". They brought all this to the master for correction on Arithmetic days. "The Master will then oblige the pupils whose work on spelling he has corrected, to write them out at home and make a fair copy, as he has corrected them." As for the arithmetic, the master gets the boy to think why a certain operation is made: "He will make them understand all their mistakes by reasoning, asking them for instance, with reference to addition, why do we start by the *deniers*? Why do we bring the *deniers* to *sols*, and the *sols* to *livres*? asking similar questions as he sees their need of them, and giving them a complete understanding of them." Their system was more complicated than for modern decimal currencies.

The concern for progress.

There is a thoroughness, not only in the actual teaching, but also in planning and ensuring progress that makes the Brothers' pedagogy quite remarkable. Proficiency is ensured through attention to the following:

1. There is a planned sequence of skills: a boy cannot pass to a higher level until he has mastered the lower one.
2. The children do not all learn at the same rate: adjustments are made for individual differences.
3. The class teacher and the Director take into account age at entry and the likely length of time a boy will be in school when planning out the ground he can cover.
4. The effect on other children is taken into account when a boy is promoted.
5. The class teacher must go by the experience of the Director in making decisions about promotion.
6. Great care has to be exercised so that boys who are not promoted will not be discouraged.

Prayers in the Brothers' schools.

The school day had a certain variety in it because of prayer-breaks. At a time when society was Catholic and religion taken for granted, frequent prayers together were not a problem. Any institution would have them. But trying to make of them moments of real contact with God was one of the Brothers' concerns. At the beginning of the reading lesson, one of the group says out loud, and the others in a lower voice with him: "My God, I am going to read my lesson for love of you; give it, please, your holy blessing. I will continue, O my God, to do all my actions for love of you." At nine and ten o'clock, and at two and three in the afternoon, there were prayers: "At each hour of the day, a few short prayers will be said, which will help the masters to renew their attention on themselves and to the presence of God, and help the pupils to get them used to thinking of God now and then during the day.."

This concern to be mindful of God's presence is very much a Lasallian characteristic, just as it marks De La Salle's method of mental prayer. The prayer consisted in the sign of the Cross and the recall: "Let us remember that we are in the holy presence of God", then "Blessed be the day and the hour of the birth, death and resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ. My God, I give you my heart. Grant me the grace to pass this hour and the rest of this day in your holy love and without offending you." Then a Hail Mary, followed by a different act of faith for each day of the week, which helped them to express from the heart truths they were learning in their catechism lessons. The Brothers had developed in the sense of two of their concerns, namely, the presence of God and exercising the children's faith, the prayers that Batencour already had for each hour. He had the sign of the Cross, then "O My God, grant me the grace never to offend you", followed by a Hail Mary.

At ten o'clock they said a fuller morning prayer, more capable of being reflective and personal in character, and marking a welcome change after a long period of application to the work in hand. These prayers take up six pages in the book, and include acts of faith, thanksgiving, adoration, each of ten lines or so. These have more chance of being personal than the Litany of the Saints, and lists of the commandments of God, of the Church and of the seven Sacraments, that feature instead in *L'Ecole Paroissiale*. Both add the standard Christian prayers, but a novel feature in the Brothers' schools is a set of five points about the value of this day and the importance of not offending God. The whole five are read by a pupil, but for each school day he repeats one of them in turn, "and then there will be a pause the length of a good Miserere during which each Master in his class will make a little exhortation on the subject of this reflection, according to the capacity of the pupils." This "reflection" as it was called, was a feature of the educational effort of the Brothers.

No other prayers were permitted than those laid down in the Handbook; this was probably to eliminate endless devotional prayers or prayers that could

be suspect of Jansenism. What De La Salle sought was to give exercise to a genuine faith.

These prayers and others to be mentioned may seem excessive. One has to consider, however, this mingling of what one might call the purely technical or apprenticeship aspects of the school with times intended to raise the human spirit, and raise it to God. It gave more play to a relationship between Brother and boys. De La Salle's composing of prayers expressive of faith, and of truths of faith that are not left at the level of concepts, is still a great practical insight. The atmosphere of prayer is carefully safeguarded: the master does not reprimand or punish during that time; his main concern is to be aware of the class, and not to do anything that will disturb concentration. These little children must have taken to these prayers, for some liked to recite them on their own. Apart from that, the other aim of these regular prayers at a young age was to give the habit of prayer and of frequently raising the mind and heart to God.

Going to daily Mass.

After morning prayer, the boys go to church for a Mass at ten-thirty. The *Conduct* spells out in the usual abundance of practical detail how the children are to go to church and how to behave there. They go in twos through the streets: "The master will see that they do not come too close to the walls, nor to the shops, nor to the stream." As this was the filthy water that ran down the middle of the street, you can imagine some of them ready to splash it over one another... But they had also to keep out of the way of carts and carriages.

Blain tells the story of a boy eight or nine years old who, on leaving with the others the church of the Theatines one Ash Wednesday was "knocked down by a coach which was travelling very fast, (and) found himself under the wheels which passed over his legs... Yet when he was picked up and seen by the doctor, there was found on him a wound so slight that it did not stop him coming next day to school." This church, opening on to what is now the Quai Voltaire, had an entry from the present Rue de Lille (then Rue de Bourbon). The children in question therefore were from the school in the Rue du Bac (see p. 286). "Another time when the Brothers were taking their students to church, through I know not what mishap one of them fell under a cart loaded with stone and drawn by four horses, which went over him, missing his head, from the shoulder, over his stomach and over the rest of his body. One can imagine that under such a weight he should have been broken and crushed to pieces. Yet he got up without any lesion, and went back to school in the afternoon as if nothing had happened." (Blain I, *in fin*, Abrégé, Ch 1, p.98.)

Most churches had benches, but these were reserved for parishioners who had rented them. The children had to stand. Hence they were instructed to

line up in twos in several parallel files down the church. They are taught to get themselves in position without being told, and then to kneel down. In winter, if they had a footwarmer - a receptacle containing live charcoal - it had to be placed beside them and left alone. Presumably they had brought it to school.

During Mass the youngest say the rosary. For each file there is the rosary-carrier, who brings rosaries to church and gives them out. Those boys given rosaries are to use them to pray, "and not to use them to play about with them." Those who can read are given the Book of Prayers for Holy Mass for the use of the Christian Schools.

The actual title is: *Instructions and prayers for holy Mass*. It was written by De La Salle, approved for printing on January 16th, 1698 and printed sometime before November 1702. Approved at the same time was his *Methodical Instruction to learn to go to Confession*, the two forming a small volume of 152 pages. Published possibly also at the same time was a third work in 108 pages: *Instructions and Prayers for Confession and Communion*. The earliest edition we have is that of all three together, in 1734, of which there is a copy in the Brothers' archives; the text is virtually that of the first editions.⁶ These writings are a model of their kind. In each case a foreword defines the pastoral aim, expressive of that new awareness of reform that came to the French Church after the Council of Trent. Then De La Salle carefully sets out the relevant doctrine and practice, and finally puts much effort in constructing a great variety of prayers that turn this doctrine into direct speaking to God. They are simply but maturely expressed, and, beyond the children, are aimed at the parents.

In his introduction to his book on the Mass, for instance, De La Salle says: "Few persons, however, assist (at Mass) with piety, and very few are instructed as to how to follow it well. This has given rise to drawing up these Instructions and these prayers.." It is intended to explain the excellence of the Mass, and the dispositions to bring to it. "Next, all the ceremonies of holy Mass are explained, and two kinds of prayers are proposed: one set drawn from the Ordinary of the Mass, and the other in relation to the holy actions that the priest performs; so that the Faithful, reciting now one, now the other, do not get bored, and that those who prefer the one to the other, can choose those they like best or that bring them more devotion." On these prayers he says: "Instructions and Christian practices have been inserted in these prayers: instructions, in order to enlighten the mind about several truths that are little known; and Christian practices to be put to use and exercised during the day. And so you have the aim the author has set himself." For the sacrament of reconciliation, as we now say, he gives a choice of thirty such prayers before confession and ten afterwards; for Communion, he offers fifteen before and sixteen after. Reading them, you realise how far he has studied to meet closely

a pastoral need. Here is one of the prayers he composed for use before Communion:

Another act of desire to receive Jesus and his divine Spirit in Holy Communion.

I do not know, O my Saviour, how I can dare desire your coming in me, since I am so full of defects and of imperfections that you can hardly endure me in that state. But when I think that my heart is consecrated to you and that your divine Spirit took possession of my soul in holy Baptism; when I think of the obligation I have to live and let myself be guided by this divine Spirit; when I am aware that if I cannot be confirmed several times to recover it after having lost it, I can go to Communion a great number of times and even every day, so that you can pour it out on me, this, O divine Jesus, prevents the sight of what is disordered in me discouraging me. Come, then, take possession of my heart anew and leave there your Holy Spirit as a token of your love, so that it may control all its movements, moderate all my passions, and leave in it only inclinations for good. I am looking forward to this precious moment; I hope you will give me this consolation. This compels me to say to you: Come, come and do not delay, for I need your help.”

Such prayers resemble those he composed for beginners in mental prayer. They are full of faith concepts, expressed from the heart and able to hold the attention and feed the faith and love of one still new to prayer. This prayer for Communion is also remarkable that while admitting our unworthiness, it has none of the current Jansenist holding back from approaching the sacrament, and from wanting to do so frequently and even daily.

Coming back to those boys assisting at Mass, we read in the Conduct that the duty of the Brothers is to keep an eye on their pupils continually “to note how they behave, the faults they can commit, and to prevent them chatting or passing things to one another, swapping books, pushing one another or doing some other similar thing which are only too common in children.” How true to life! But it does not mean there would be this endless concentration of the Brother at every Mass: once a good relationship was established, and the boys grew in piety, the atmosphere would change, apart from the inevitable one or two...The Brothers “must be persuaded that it is not for themselves they assist at Mass when they take their pupils to it (the Brothers had been to Mass already at six o’clock), but that it is solely to watch over them. It is also the only thing that they will at that time think of and pay attention to. They will not even have a book in hand during that time, and will content themselves with having a simple application to the Sacrifice.” After Mass, the children leave in twos: the Brother Director or Inspector or some other designated

Brother stands at the door. The Brothers can now go back to their community and relax a little. They had about two hours' break, but a controlled one, as outlined earlier.

Afternoon school

The boy 'porter' opened the doors at one o'clock, and school resumed at half-past one. It began with the prayer: "Let us remember that we are in the holy presence of God", followed by a few other prayers. The usual time-table ran: 1.30 to 3.30, reading and writing, with the usual prayers on the hour at two and three o'clock. From 3.30 to 4.00, a snack was taken, followed by the catechism lesson⁷ from 4.00 to 4.30. It began with a hymn and a prayer. The school day ended with a lengthy evening prayer, a hymn and dismissal. School therefore ended at about a quarter to five.

From November 1st to January 15th, according to the 1705 Conduct, but till January 31st by 1720, ordinary lessons ended at 3.30; there is no snack and the catechism was taught from 3.30 till 4.00.⁸ This was because of the poor light. The children could have their customary snack at home.

Religious instruction.

A topic was chosen each week from the catechism and was developed over the five school days. On Wednesdays, because there was no school on Thursdays, and on the eve of holydays, there was an hour's religious instruction to make up for the lesson missed next day, but the first half-hour dealt in turn with the principal Christian mysteries. Apart from this change, this meant that there was a defined set of topics over the whole year. On Sundays, the children had one and a half hours' instruction, one half hour being on the principal mysteries as they occur in the liturgical year, and the remainder spent finishing the topic of the preceding week. This was from one till half-past two. This hardly seems thrilling, but it was acceptable enough at the time, when there was not much else to do. In Paris the children might afterwards accompany their parents for a stroll in the Luxembourg Gardens or on a walk to the village of Vaugirard.

The Brothers did, moreover, try to make the lesson active and interesting:

The Master will not talk to the pupils during catechism as if preaching, but he will question them almost continually by several questions and sub-questions, so as to make them understand what he is teaching them. He will ask several pupils consecutively on the same question, seven or eight, or even ten or twelve, and sometimes even a greater number.

Questions on the principal mysteries were based on the smaller of the two Abridgments De La Salle wrote of his major catechetical work: *The Duties*

of a Christian. These main mysteries were often dealt with, so that even the slowest could learn them. In explaining them, “He (the master) will only use simple expressions in his questions and words very easy to understand and which do not need explaining, if possible, and will give the shortest questions and answers he can.” Between the half-hour on the principal mysteries and the hour on the usual topics, the prayer said in school at the hour was recited, and then the boys sang in full the hymn they had sung during the week. This provided a little break. In his instructions, the teacher “will not fail in each lesson to give the pupils some things to practice and to instruct them as thoroughly as possible on the things that concern the moral standards and the behaviour one should keep to in order to live as a true Christian.” He does not punish during this lesson; but the 1720 Conduct concedes that he may now and then have to give a stroke with the strap.

On Sundays and holydays when the Catechism lesson lasts three times as long as on the other days, he will choose a story that the pupils will like, and will tell it in a way that will please them and renew their attention, and he will do it with details that can prevent them being bored. He will say nothing in the catechism lessons that he has not read in some well approved book and that he is very sure about....The Masters will help the pupils to pay full attention to the Catechism lesson. This attention is not naturally easy for them and is usually of very short duration. They will use for the purpose the following means: 1) they will be careful not to put them off nor browbeat them, whether by word or in any other way, when they cannot give a good answer to the question put them; 2) they will encourage and help them even to say what they find hard to remember; 3) they will promise rewards which they will give now and then to those who have been the best behaved and the most attentive, and sometimes even to the most ignorant who have tried their best to answer...

There is almost an admission in these various prescriptions that the Sunday catechism lesson was too long.

Yet an indication of the popularity of the Brothers’ catechism lessons on Sundays and holydays was that outsiders were allowed in. The 1706 Conduct indicates they could be below or above 15 years old; they had to follow like the pupils, but they were not questioned like them, unless they seemed quite willing to be, nor did they have to stay for the prayer nor go to Vespers after with the class. “The masters will give them time to go out”, although they would encourage those who wanted to stay; and they would try to encourage them and give them rewards at times. The 1720 edition merely says: “Outsiders may be received into the catechism lesson, provided they do not disturb.” Here was an extension towards young grown-ups of the Brothers’ mission,

with a sensitivity in respecting young adults already at work, and in leaving them their freedom.

Home-time: prayers and dismissal.

The end of the school day was quite an event in itself. There was a lengthy evening prayer. There was an examination of conscience based on one out of a set of five points, a different set over four weeks. They are a pointer to some of the standards of behaviour the reform in the French Church was trying to change; for instance: "Have I not spent a great deal of time playing (i.e. at dice or cards)? Have I not played forbidden games? Have I not cheated or wanted to cheat the others?" The prayer-leader reads each day the whole article for that week, then repeats the one for the day; the Brother then makes a short comment on it. To conclude, "at most six stanzas of a hymn are sung. Two pupils sing each stanza, one after the other, and after they have sung one stanza, the others sing all together the same stanza."⁹

This use of hymns or spiritual songs is a novelty compared with the practice of *L'Ecole Paroissiale*, and served to alleviate this tough round of prayers. De La Salle had had the usual bourgeois acquaintance with music in his own family, and could appreciate the effect of singing in the liturgy. When the royal imprimatur was given on 13th April 1705 for the whole of De La Salle's school works, among them was the *Cantiques Spirituels* as a separate work. Of this, of course, he is the editor, not the author, selecting from existing hymns. The only known copy existing of this edition is one of 124 pages, approved by the censor on 5th January 1703 and later bound together with the 1705 edition of the *Duties of a Christian*.¹⁰ We have another edition of 86 pages, bearing no imprimatur date, bound in with the 1760 edition of the *Exercises of Piety*. About 20 of the songs are similar to those in the 1705 edition, but nearly 70 are newcomers. Some were dropped because they were too flat, too prosaic in expression; others because they forced the imagery: "Roaring with pain like a lioness, my heart, pierced through with an eternal regret, shoots a thousand darts at the foot of your throne..." There was no great value in these hymns, but they were practical as a means of teaching doctrine. The average number of stanzas was about a dozen; some had up to twenty.

They were put to the common tunes everybody sang: court songs, political satire, love songs and drinking songs. Quite a number were those of Pellegrin, an ex-Servite who wrote as equally for social occasions and for comic opera as for piety. The only one that might still be remembered today among those De La Salle borrowed from him is *Venez, divin Messie*. The composition of such songs developed in the 16th century to offset the success of Huguenot rhymed versions of the Psalms in the vernacular. The Jesuits gave the lead in their missions and in their colleges, and after that there were many sets put

together in the seventeenth century. One last remark: the Handbook of 1706 has a chapter heading: Concerning hymns, but there is only a blank page. The 1720 edition omits any reference to them. Since the children knew these hymns by heart, perhaps there was nothing to add beyond the usual remarks on behaviour at prayer.

Dismissal.

Dismissal was quite a ritual. It was far from being a mad rush for the door. In schools of three classes and more, the children of the lowest class began filing out before the hymn was finished. They came forward in twos to the middle of the class, arms folded and cap in hand, bowed to the crucifix and then to the Brother. They were given an appropriate companion so that they would be going home together, and the pairs were to be “a pike’s length from one another.” As soon as the hymn was finished, the Reciter of Prayers led the Pater, Ave and Credo for living benefactors, the *De Profundis* said in two choirs for deceased benefactors, and the *Miserere* likewise recited in two choirs for the faults they had committed during the school day!

As the boys leave the school, they stop praying aloud, but are recommended to walk home with due behaviour and the pairs are encouraged to say the Rosary together “which will keep them in bounds and will no doubt be of great edification.” This whole attitude might be called one of pious restraint, and the children seem to be reciting prayer upon prayer. However, these latter prayers in Latin seem to be in part something to say as the children filed out. Most of their school time, moreover, had been spent learning to read and write, and in silence. The first time they were in presence of ideas and knowledge and when they were encouraged to answer, was in the catechism lesson; and prayer-time was another occasion in which a different human response was possible.

A Brother stands at the school door, seeing that the children behave properly and “do not throw stones, run about and shout.” (This scene is beautifully depicted by the Swiss painter Benjamin Vautier in his “Children leaving school”, kept in the Victoria and Albert museum in London. It is reproduced as the cover of this book. A Brother stands at the door as the children file out into the snow.) They are recommended not to do their natural necessities in the street, but “in places where they will not be noticed.” Several boys are detailed to see what is happening in the nearby streets, especially those that many pupils pass through, and to report back. As the last pair of boys leaves, one of them makes a sign to the Brother that there is no one left. The Brothers now meet in one class and kneel before the crucifix. If their community residence is in the same house, the Inspector or first Master says : “Live Jesus in our hearts!” and the others answer “Forever!” Then they go into the community quarters. If the school is in a different area than the community

house, the Brothers start the Rosary and continue on the way back. In their oratory, they say the prayer to Our Lady: “O Domina mea” and then: “Live Jesus in our hearts!”

“Their first care”.

How to teach the many steps needed in learning to read and write takes up necessarily far more pages of the Conduct than how to give religious instruction. But evangelisation, religious instruction and Christian formation were at the core of the Brothers work to rehabilitate the depressed urban masses. Already, as you read the meticulous caring attention the Brothers gave the boys in teaching them useful skills, it strikes you that here is the mission of the Christian teacher in its dress at the turn of the seventeenth century. Through this care, through the more personal quality of some of the prayers, through their “reflection” morning and evening, and their way of relating to the pupils with respect and affection, and in their religious instruction periods, the Brothers were fulfilling the aim of their Institute, which, as their Rule stated, is “to give a Christian education to children...”

The great concern of De La Salle was, beyond learning the truths and duties of faith, that the children should live what they learn, should “live in a true Christian spirit, that is, according to the rules and maxims of the Gospel.” And that was done, not by drilling them into the children, but by warming their hearts to them. The means are the grace of God and the Brother’s fidelity to it: “by prayer, by instructions, by vigilance and by their good behaviour in school.”¹¹ ‘Vigilance’ means virtually being a careful teacher.

De La Salle’s catechetical works.

The other sign of his concern for the teaching of the faith lies in his considerable output of catechetical works for the purpose of helping the Brothers and the children. They are listed in this book at the end of Chapter 10.

These texts, of moderate format, total 1409 pages. If you add the 260 pages of the three works on the Mass, Confession and Communion, finished in 1698, the 263 pages of his book on Christian Civility, published in 1702, and a manuscript of some 300 pages of the Handbook for Christian Schools, you have over 2200 pages of careful composition. Add to these a couple of small works and the beginning in manuscript form of several spiritual works for his Brothers. and you have, on top of all his other work and preoccupations, a tremendous output between 1694 and 1702. Today he would have been fully involved in the educational media. One accepts Brother Bernard’s statement that his early efforts to overcome sleep meant that later on “many a time he spent whole nights seeing to the affairs of his Institute or composing books.”¹²

The means of establishing and maintaining order in school

The Second Part of the Conduct of Schools.

All the careful effort which has been described above would be nullified if there was no order in school. To have in one room morning and evening young boys who had always known the freedom of the street while their parents were at work, and who knew of no other discipline than to be given a beating, boys with the toughness and cunning of survival, was no easy situation. And yet, if you could succeed in relating to them, “they let you lead them as you wish,” as Batencour said, “they obey more easily than those who are at a more advanced age, their spirit is gentler.” The Brothers thought and rethought this question of order. It really means all those conditions that make learning and education possible. The fruit of their pooled reflections forms the second part of the Handbook.

Nine means of establishing and maintaining order are given. The first they call vigilance, meaning attentiveness, that is, as we have seen, good and careful teaching. It meant, with regard to the reading lessons, not letting any mistake go unchecked, making all those follow who were in the same grade, and insisting on silence. “While one reads, all the others in the same grade will follow; that is to say, they will read to themselves in their book what the reader pronounces out loud in his, without making any noise with their lips.” “Silence is one of the principal means of establishing and keeping order in school” Batencour had already said. The Brother must be the first to give the example, and when he does speak, do so quietly and in few words.

The second means follows on this: it is the maximum use of signs so that the Brother does not have to speak constantly when correcting mistakes, giving instructions, or reacting to what is going on in the classroom. And it certainly saved his lungs. The use of signs with the hand, and especially with the ‘signal’ are minutely recorded over nine pages: “To see if a pupil is attentive during repetitions, he will click the signal once to stop the one who is speaking and then will point to the other pupil with the end of the signal, as a sign for him to repeat what his classmate has just said...To tell someone or several not to speak so loud as they follow, or when learning by heart, he will raise a little the hand holding the signal, as though putting it to his ear. He will make the same sign when he hears any noise in the classroom: if it is on the right side that the noise comes from, he will raise his right hand; if on the left side, his left hand...To make a sign to a pupil to sit up straight, the master must look fixedly at him, and straighten up himself.” The whole thing could become Pavlovian, but again we are reading a text, not seeing a classroom reality; one can put a smile, or humour or encouragement into a sign; and an experienced teacher becomes the master, not the servant, of these methods.

Registers and reports.

The third means indicated for establishing order is the keeping of registers. The 1706 *Conduct* lists six: two kept by the Inspector of schools: an admissions register and one for changing grades; two are kept by the master: a register of reading 'orders' and another of the good and bad qualities of the pupils; two are kept by various boys: the head of each bench keeps a list of those of his bench who are absent or late; and 'visitors' who keep a similar list of boys from their own area, and are detailed to find out why they are away. The 1720 *Conduct* mentions only three registers: one for the Inspector for changing grades; and two for the classmaster: the register for 'orders' and a pocket register (not described). The register used for listing the children by orders according to the date they moved up an order, was also used to mark when they were absent or late or did not know the diocesan catechism. The 1720 edition gives a model of the first class of '..... Street School' (no town is mentioned), for the month of March 1722, As this is a date two years ahead of the edition, the details are fictitious and do not refer to children actually in school. The 1706 edition gives a model for the third class of the Rue Princesse in 1706.

The admissions register is not explained in the 1720 edition for a very good reason. Noting the father's profession was not required in the 1706 Handbook, but at a time when a given craft was practised in the same street or set of streets, the address alone showed it. Master-writers in Chartres and Dijon (where the Brothers opened school in 1699 and 1705) insisted on seeing these registers to find out how many children could pay.¹³ Three examples of the details entered are given in the Handbook of 1706,¹⁴ for boys aged 16, 6 and 12. The boy aged 16 (a fictitious character) is given the name of Jean Mulot, "Confirmed two years ago, was admitted on August 31st, 1706. Communion since last Easter. Son of Joseph Mulot, wool-carder (or comber)...Has been placed in the 3rd order of writers and the 1st of the Civility; must come at 9 o'clock and 3 o'clock." It would seem then, that he is working, and that young people in this situation were given their own time-table and helped to improve their job prospects. He has been to four different (one-class) schools. "He has left them, his parents thinking he would learn better elsewhere." This could be his fault, or the parents' presumption, or a tribute to the Brothers. This report, and the two others, are given as examples for the schools in Rheims, which gives an insight as to how material for the *Conduct* came from different places. Jean Mulot is stated as having left the school for three months in winter, and having left it finally on August 31st, 1706, which is evidently a slip. He did so "to learn the craft of sculptor, or to be a lackey, or to go to..."

"The craft of sculptor..to be a lackey..." This is an astonishing change in the economic and job expectations of the poor and a remarkable testimony to

the Brothers' education of them. This report, although fictitious, is representative of what actually happened. By coming to a "Christian School" even after starting work of the usual depressed kind (Mulot seems to be an example of a school drop-out wanting to make good), young people could so improve in reading, writing, familiarity with bills, receipts and the like, arithmetic and civility. They acquired besides Christian standards and the habit of steady and painstaking work. They would willingly be taken on by notaries, clerks and businessmen as lackeys, that is, uniformed messengers often seen in the streets and who fulfilled the functions of the mail and telecommunications today. At a time when new churches and town houses of the nobility were rising, it was such trained workers, even if they did not attend a Sunday Academy such as the Brothers ran in the parish of St Sulpice, that would be taken on by carpenters, masons, even sculptors as reliable and quick-learning apprentices.

The annual report book on the character and attainment of each pupil.

The register or report book in which were consigned observations on the character and attainment of each pupil is quite remarkable. "Towards the end of each school year," says the 1706 handbook, "all the classmasters will individually make out a list of their pupils in which they will note down their good and bad qualities." These reports were handed in to the Brother Director, who lent them for three months to the Brother who had that same class the following October, if it was a different Brother, "so that he can get to know his pupils and how to act towards them." Here is an example, made up as though referring to a boy, Francis de Terieux, attending the school in the Rue Saint-Placide, Paris, in 1706.

Aged 8 years and a half, has been attending school for two years; is in the 3rd order of writing since July 1st last. He has a restless character, little piety and has no self-restraint in church and during prayers, unless you keep an eye on him, but out of light-headedness. His particular vice is lack of restraint. He has a fair amount of goodwill; you have to win him over and encourage him to behave. Correction is of little avail because he is thoughtless. He has rarely missed school, sometimes without permission, because he has met some loose companion, and is easily led. He has often failed to come on time and applies himself to no great extent; often he just looks around and takes it easy unless you keep an eye on him. He learns easily and failed twice to be changed from the 2nd to the 3rd order in reading through lack of application. He knows the prayers well, he accepts punishment if you have authority and is awkward if you haven't. Yet he is not a difficult character: provided you win him over, he will do whatever you want; he is loved by his parents

and they do not like him being punished. He has been given no office because he is not very capable; he is alert to things and would carry out his duty well, were it not that he often comes late.

This model report covers practically all the points to be considered; it is followed by a shorter one written for a boy of twelve and a half years who has been four years in the school.

The fourth means recommended for obtaining good order was to give rewards occasionally. These were always objects of piety; the best were given for ‘piety’, meaning “piety and good behaviour in church and during prayers”, a practice we might question. Rewards for application were better than those for ability - a quite perceptive pedagogy. Giving presents to encourage learning is, of course, nothing new:

Laughing to teach the truth: What hinders? as some teachers give to boys junkets and knacks, that they may learn apace.

So wrote the Roman poet Horace, *Satires* i.1.24, as translated by John Milton in his *Apology for Smectymnus*, 1642. Encouragement and affirmation need to be often given.

How to make punishments rare.

The two matters concerning good order that the Brothers gave most thought to were the correction of pupils misbehaving, and how to make absences rare. Their aim was to attract as many as possible, for the sake of Christ’s Kingdom. To get children to come, they had to encourage the parents to send them by providing an excellent teaching in useful skills that they would appreciate. But they also had to make schooling attractive to the children. An atmosphere of punishment would not help. Yet the children at times needed correction.

The question of corrections takes up forty pages of the *Conduct*. Between 1706 and 1720, the foreword to this section consisting of one paragraph has become a careful study of five pages. The way it is expressed suggests it was put together by De La Salle. “The experience founded on the constant teaching of the saints and the examples they have shown us proves sufficiently that to improve those we guide, we have to behave towards them in a manner that is gentle and firm at the same time. Yet several have to admit, or at least they show it enough by the way they act towards those in their charge (is that gentle irony?), that they do not easily see how these two things can go together in practice. For if we act with a full authority and too much power (for example) towards the children, it seems difficult that this manner of governing (although proceeding from a good zeal yet which is not according to knowledge, as St Paul says, since we so easily are forgetful of human weakness) does not become too harsh and unbearable.

On the other hand, if one makes too much allowance for human weakness, and under pretext of having compassion for the children, they are allowed to do what they like, you will have in consequence pupils who are naughty, morally lax and out of hand." In short, much of the trouble arises from the attitude of the teacher, and De La Salle now spells this out.

A master's behaviour becomes unbearable:

Firstly, when he imposes too tough 'penances' (i.e things to do for having misbehaved), "arising often from his lack of discretion and judgment, for it often happens that the pupils have not the strength of body or mind to carry the burdens that often crush them."

Secondly, when he gives orders harshly and imperiously, "especially when this arises from some uncontrolled movements of impatience or anger."

Thirdly, when he insists too much on a boy doing something when he is not disposed to do it and he is not given time to calm down.

Fourthly, when he is as exacting for small things as for bigger ones.

Fifthly, "When he rejects out of hand the reasons and excuses of the children."

Sixthly, "when, not having a good look at himself, he does not know how to sympathise with the weaknesses of the children, over-exaggerating their failings, and when he tells them off or punishes them; seeming more to move or act on an instrument deprived of feeling than on a created being capable of reason."

He likewise spells out a teacher's behaviour that leads the children to become careless and easy-going.

First, when he concerns himself only about the main things that cause disorder and neglects others that are still considerable.

Secondly, when he does not insist enough on having carried out what has to be done in school.

Thirdly, when he easily lets the children not do what has been ordered.

Fourthly, when he has favourites.

Fifthly, when, from natural timidity, he speaks or reprimands so lifelessly that the children pay no attention.

Sixthly, when he speaks to the children too often and too familiarly.

The different forms of correction.

Punishments are called *corrections* in the Handbook, because the aim is to remedy a situation, not to be vindictive. The text spells out in fact the novel attitude to corrections that we have seen already to be enshrined in the Rule. Punishment by word is rare, since the Brothers try to speak little in school; but if they make a threat, they must keep it. The usual corporal punishments of the time are next dealt with; there is progression between what is laid down in 1706 and in 1720. One stroke on the hand with the strap, which is

only a foot long, including the handle, is given for playing about or not obeying first time, and never more than two strokes. For greater faults, the Handbook of 1706 speaks of the martinet or small whip of four or five cords, and of the birch. In 1720 the whip has disappeared. The birch was given for not obeying (in 1706 it was for “not obeying at once”); for making a habit of not following; for scribbling over their page instead of writing; for fighting; for misbehaviour in church or in the catechism lesson; for being absent without cause. The birch was given on the bare buttocks in a corner at the back of the class; only three strokes were to be given, exceptionally five. A child could be expelled, for instance, for persistent absenteeism, “but it should be an extraordinary thing to expel a boy.”

“If you want a school to run well and with a very good order, corrections must be rare.” The strap, for instance, to give a kind of guide, should not need to be given more than three times in a half-day (i.e. in the class as a whole). The birch should not be given more than three or four times in a month. It would mean very few boys were punished. “One should strive to act through shrewdness and industry to keep the pupils in order, almost without using punishment.”

Ten conditions are listed for a correction to be useful:

First, it should be disinterested, done purely for the glory of God and to accomplish his holy will, without any desire of personal revenge.

Secondly, out of true charity for the pupil and for the salvation of his soul.

Thirdly, it must be just: one must be sure one is correcting a fault, and fairly.

Fourthly, proportionate to the fault.

Fifthly, moderate and without precipitation.

Sixthly, peaceful, the master being perfectly self-possessed and the pupil receiving it in a peaceful and tranquil manner. He should delay giving it if he feels agitated.

Seventhly, prudent, making sure he does nothing that might have unfortunate consequences.

Eighthly, voluntary on the part of the boy, trying to get him to accept the punishment on account of the harm he has done to himself and to others.

Ninthly, respectful on the part of the boy.

Tenthly, silent on the part of the master (or speaking quietly if he is trying to get the boy to accept the punishment) and on the part of the boy, who must not cry out.

These conditions do make punishing difficult for the teacher! The defects to be avoided when correcting are the counterpart of the above.

Circumscribing and adapting punishment.

Giving a punishment merely because it will be useful for the class and not

for the boy himself is forbidden apart from evident necessity. If one can put off giving it, the matter must be referred to the First Master or the Brother Director. A Brother who is not yet twenty-one cannot use the birch without referring to the Brother Director or his tutor, who reports twice a week on the punishments given. The same applies to a Brother who is over twenty-one when he comes into community, during his six months' teaching probation, and for the whole first year after his novitiate. The Founder is well aware that not every teacher has an equal ability to impose himself and that in church, for instance, a beginner may have difficulty in getting the youngest to behave all the time. In that case another Brother should be put in charge.

Not all children are punished the same way. For lies, fighting, thieving, immoral behaviour and misbehaving in church, punishment is usually not forgiven (the 1706 Conduct says they are always punished with the martinet or the birch). Like the *Ecole Paroissiale*, and sometimes in the same phrases but again, more specifically at times, with more psychological perceptiveness, careful instructions are laid down as to the correction of badly brought up children, cheeky ones, and the thoughtless, stubborn, spoilt and shy, little children and new comers. If the teacher must get the better of some, he should yet find ways of winning them over. With others, light-headed children, for instance, who do not think and are soon in trouble again, he tries to prevent this happening by showing them affection, placing them nearer the teacher and between two sensible boys and giving them a reward now and then. Newcomers must not be punished: put them next to a good worker, remind them as needed what they have to do, and study their character. "Usually one should let a fortnight go by before punishing them". Equally, "a master who is new to a class must abstain from giving any correction until he knows the pupils." There are as much as nine pages of this sensitive handling of characters.

This careful circumscribing of corporal punishment could make us unaware that the most usual corrective action in the school was through 'penances'. These consisted in something to be done, not to 'make up' for the misdemeanour but to correct it. "The use of penances will be much more usual in school than corporal punishment: they put off the pupil less, hurt the parents' feelings less and are much more useful." The aim is "to humble them and put them in the disposition of heart to correct themselves of their faults; they will be medicinal and proportionate to the faults the pupils commit, so that they may help to make satisfaction to God and be moreover a preserving remedy to prevent them falling afterwards."

The punishment was meant to fit the crime, but in no vindictive way. For instance, if a boy comes late, he has to be among the first for the next week. If a boy doesn't follow the reading, he has to hold up his book up to his face for half an hour, without looking beyond it. If he hasn't worked well at his

writing, he is given a few words or sentences he has to fill a whole page with neatly at home. There was a ritual for imposing a penance that was an educative discipline for teacher and pupil: the boy has to kneel in the middle of the class, hands joined, then the Brother says, clearly and gravely merely what the penance is: "Because you have been lolling on the desk, you will stand up for half an hour", for instance. The Brother was to add nothing: the less said, the better the effect, and the Brother was prevented from giving vent to his feelings. This section concludes: "One of the most suitable penances and of the greatest utility, is to give the pupils something to learn by heart." It was never something meaningless.

This careful limitation of and discretion with regard to punishment still does not show the motivation of the Brothers and the class atmosphere it could mean. De La Salle expresses with compassion this aspect of the Brothers' zeal:

When you encounter some difficulty in the guidance of your disciples, when there are some who do not profit from your teaching and you observe a reckless spirit in them, turn to God with confidence. Earnestly ask Jesus Christ to make his Spirit come alive in you, since he has chosen you to do his work.

Consider Jesus Christ as the Good Shepherd of the gospel seeking the lost sheep, placing it upon shoulders and bringing it back to the fold. Since you are taking his place, look upon yourself as obliged to do the same thing. Ask him for the grace needed to bring about the conversion of the hearts of those in your care.

You must, then, devote yourself thoroughly to prayer in order to succeed in your ministry. You must constantly represent the needs of your disciples to Jesus Christ, explaining to him the difficulties you experience in guiding them. Jesus Christ, seeing that you regard him as the one who can do everything and yourself as an instrument to be moved only by him, will not fail to grant you what you ask.

It would be of little value to issue reproofs and corrections, if those giving them did not take the necessary steps to make them properly. The first thing that must be assured is that they are not undertaken except under the guidance of the Spirit of God. That is why, before undertaking them, it is desirable to become interiorly recollected, to give oneself up to God's Spirit, and to be disposed to make the reproof with the greatest possible wisdom and in a manner best suited to make them useful to the one receiving them. For human beings, even children, are endowed with reason and must not be corrected like animals, but like reasonable persons.¹⁵

How to reduce absences to a minimum.

Fourteen pages of the *Conduct* are given to a careful study of why some children are absent and how to minimise them. First, allowance is made for some children who ask to be absent regularly for the same period once a week, “on market days, for instance, in order to work there, or because of their job.” Some are allowed for the same reason to come only in the afternoon; those who have a job are even allowed to leave halfway through the morning, and even all those who are in the writing class (the top class), but all must come in the afternoon and stay for the catechism lesson. All this must refer to older boys, whose parents needed them to bring in some money. There are other absences not requested regularly: some ask on Sundays to be excused from Catechism in order to go for a walk or visit relatives: they will not be allowed to miss this lesson except perhaps in passing, at the request of their parents. If their father belongs to a craft guild, they can be absent on the feast of its patron Saint. Some can be away if their parents want to buy them clothing or even mend their clothes, and they have no other time. No permission is given on the two carnival days before Ash Wednesday. There was great realism in this flexibility about attendance.

The main attention is given to explaining why some boys often play truant and how to reduce truancy. The blame lies either with the boys themselves, their parents or their teacher. Some boys just do not think and “go off to play with the first one they meet”. This type will go on doing this now and then. Punishment does not help - “they’ll be away the next day, without thinking”. You have to win them over by kindness. There are those who lack a moral upbringing and can’t stand steady application: they want to be out gambling, and easily fall into vice. The teacher has to work hard to prevent this: try to win them over, make them a class officer, punish them when needed but show them great affection and reward them for very little.

We take school attendance for granted today, yet there is a fair amount of absenteeism for various reasons. At the end of the seventeenth century, although the number of primary schools was increasing, working-class people did not take school attendance as a matter of concern. It was not yet an established fact. There was no tradition of going to school regularly or of attending one school. This explains the various situations the Brothers tried to overcome, as detailed below, and the details asked when a child was admitted, to see if home background gave any hope or not of the child attending regularly.

Some get put off school because “it’s a new teacher who does not know how to act in school and immediately turns to punishing, or else is too soft and has neither order nor silence in class.” The remedy is not to leave him alone in a class “until he has been perfectly trained by some Brother of great experience in school.” There may be a Brother whom the boys dislike because he

is not encouraging and is always ready to punish, and this causes truancy: “The principal cause of frequent absences is the frequency of punishments.”

Parents may have no real concern to send their children to school and to see that they profit by it. “This is fairly common among the poor who show little interest in the school, persuading themselves that their children learn nothing there or very little.” The matter is looked at very carefully and reveals one of the aims of the Brothers’ schools. In dealing with these parents, it should be pointed out to them the harm they do their children by not seeing to it that they read and write, so that they will never be ready for any job; and also the harm they do by not having them instructed in their faith, something “the poor are often little concerned about.” Such families often receive alms from the parish; a list of those not sending their children to school should be given the parish priest, asking him not to give them alms unless the child comes to school. Everything possible should be done to attract these children. This often works because “the children of the poor usually do what they like” because their parents often idolise them, and so “it is enough that their children should want to come to school for them to be happy to send them.”

Coming back to the parents withdrawing their children while still young in order to put them to work, the *Conduct* wants them to be made aware that they are gaining a little and losing a much greater advantage. “It should be pointed out to them how important it is for a craftsman to know how to read and write, since, however limited he may be intellectually, if he can read and write he is capable of anything.” The importance of that last phrase is that the intention of De La Salle and the Brothers through their profane education, their training in these skills, was to make it possible for these exploited poor to improve their situation, from being poorly paid dependent workers to becoming independent craftsmen or obtaining clerical service in a business or in local administration.

Finally, it is again stressed that to give the parents no excuse for saying their boy learns nothing at school, the Brother Director or the Inspectors should take very great care of the Brothers in their charge, especially the less capable, seeing “that they teach with all possible application the pupils they are in charge of and neglect none; that this application be equal towards all, greater even towards the more ignorant and careless..” One is impressed that the initial training, probation period and ongoing training of the Brothers as teachers was a constant concern among them. It was a form of strong mutual support. Many details follow about granting leave of absence, punishing truants, seeing the parents. Then one-day holidays (on holydays, whence the term) and the summer vacation are carefully defined and have to be clearly announced. So important was good attendance for the Brothers to fulfil their mission, that boys persistently asking for leave from school might, with regret, be sent away, for, if one grants it to a few, many others will take their cue. “It

is better to send away this kind of pupil and have fifty working hard, than to have a hundred who are always staying away.”

The use of class officers by the Brothers.

At first glance, the system of class officers set up by Batencour and the one adopted by the Brothers are similar. But there is one important difference: Batencour uses officers to help him to run the school, besides giving them a situation where they can improve in responsibility, and as a reward. In a class that can go up to a hundred, he has over forty such officers. He has, among the eldest (they would be only eight or nine years old), two intendants or overseers with whom he often discusses matters: they are in charge of other helpers. Two observers supervise behaviour on the way to church and keep watch as the children leave school: they make out a list of those who misbehave. Four admonitors at each corner of the class, while doing their work, call out the names of those not doing the right thing. Twelve repeaters, two in turn for half an hour, pass down the class and make each boy repeat from his reading book what the master has read to them all.

In a Brothers' school, there are five who have duties covering the whole school: the clavier, or the boy with the key to the school door, the porter (there is only one door used for entering or leaving), the bell-ringer, and, when they go to church, the holy water carrier - a boy who stands with stoup and sprinkler at the door, and the rosary carriers. Apart from these there are only about seven per class, and some who see to order in the street as the children go home. The Brothers saw it as important for the education of the children that they should have as much contact with them as possible in their efforts to motivate them to live “in the spirit of Christianity.” As their Rule said: “having the children under their care from morning till evening, they may teach them to lead good lives..”

The reason given for having officers is “to perform several different functions that the teachers cannot or should not do themselves.” You can hardly call it a share in authority. The children were still young or very young, and society was only now beginning to recognise childhood as meaningful in itself. There was also a difference between what you could expect from the children attending schools like Batencour's and who had better living quarters and a less hectic home life, and those frequenting the Brothers' schools, at least to begin with.

Each Brother made out the list of officers for his class: on the first day of the school year, it is said in 1706, but “one of the first three days” in 1720, which does give time to know the boys a little. In any case, he had to discuss the list with the Brother Director or the First Master - a useful precaution for someone new to the class and who might choose the wrong characters. There were two prayer reciters, one for the morning and one for the afternoon.

These were appointed from the top class for a month at a time, and it is noted that “it helps very much these pupils to recite well the prayers in private, and they get to like saying them slowly and carefully.” The almoner who, as in Batencour’s school, collected any bread offered at breakfast time, appears in 1706 but not in 1720: things are done more discreetly and there is no collector. The boys with the holy water and rosaries have already been mentioned. The bell-ringer has to be a very punctual sort of person: he has to ring exactly on time for the beginning of school, for prayers, and at the hours and half-hours. In the writing class, one or two boys were in charge of giving out and collecting the writing sheets. Each class has a sweeper who sweeps the class every day after morning school, coming back from mass for the purpose; he sprinkles water first, if necessary (to keep down the dust).

In a less measure than in *L’Ecole Paroissiale*, boys are detailed to check on one another. Whenever the Brother has to be out of the room, and only then, a reliable boy acts as Inspector, that is, without leaving his place or saying a word, he notes any who misbehave, and is meant to show by example what should be done. He tells the Brother quietly and privately what has happened; but the Brother will think first, and check with some reliable boys, and will listen to complaints against the ‘Inspector’, especially if they come from boys who are not involved. Since it was important that this ‘officer’ should help to keep order and also should not accept bribes or ask for them, two other serious boys acting as ‘supervisors’, but not being called so and not being known to the ‘inspector’, kept a check on him.

“There will be also a kind of inspector or supervisor in the streets, especially in those where many pupils live, in order to notice how the boys in this area behave going home from school.” By 1706, but no longer by 1720, two or three boys in each class were detailed to be in charge each of a few streets of their area, to go after school to the homes of the absent, in order to enquire very politely why. If they are ill, they will visit them from time to time, even without being prompted, to cheer them up and “encourage them to bear their suffering in patience for love of God.” This checking of absentees seems either not to have been productive, or, as a Brothers’ school became appreciated by the parents, truancy diminished. What was never done in Brothers’ schools was de Batecour’s practice of sending ‘visitors’, two per neighbourhood, to go round the homes on holidays in the evening to ask about and note down behaviour in the matter of morning and evening prayers; greediness or lying; obedience to parents; and fighting brothers and sisters. In this way, he says, “a tight hand is kept on all the children, both at home and in school.” The parents of these fee-paying children seemed to be in favour if it, and would have time to give the ‘visitors’, who came in the evening. One can hardly expect poor, busy parents, who idolized their children, to give them any welcome. More to the point, the Brothers saw that what went on in the home

was the parents' responsibility.

The duties of the Inspector of Schools

The Conduct of 1720 ends with the list of The Twelve Virtues of a good master: gravity, silence, humility, prudence, wisdom, patience, restraint, gentleness, zeal, attentiveness, piety and generosity. There is no commentary, such as appears in de Batencour's opening chapter. It had been made elsewhere. There is, in this edition, no part III, which would have dealt with the role of the Brother Inspector and of the one in charge of training new teachers. But the 1706 manuscript develops in 60 pages the duties of the Inspector. They are so detailed, that they make a summary of all that went on in a Brothers' school. The cohesion and dynamism this inspection contributed must have been enormous.

This section begins: "In all the houses of the Institute there will be an inspector of schools, who will have the management of all the schools depending on the same house. The Director will be this inspector. If there are three or four schools depending on the house of which he is director, he may be given a Brother to help him.." His duty is to see to every detail of school furnishing: holy water stoup, soundness of the benches, cleanliness, sufficient brooms, books and paper available for the poorer pupils...He has to see that the Brothers acquit themselves of their duty in every way, that the children behave on the way to school and in school. There is an interesting commentary on the Brothers' commitment to work "together and by association" for the glory of God: "The attentiveness the inspector of schools must have for all these things, will not prevent that of the teachers to observe them or have them observed. Both must apply themselves to maintain good order in their schools, with common accord, dependently, and by a spirit of regularity and of exactitude to what is prescribed them and that God asks of them."

Only the Director or the Inspector in his absence, admits new scholars. The boy must be presented by a parent or a guardian in order to furnish the usual details as to name, age, his last school if he has been to one; his health, behaviour, religious practice and reading ability; what the parents intend for him... He must be sent to school in suitable and clean clothes, free from vermin and with his hair combed. He must be at least six years old. There are detailed prescriptions for those coming to school the first time, those who have been to other schools, those who have left this school or been expelled. One thing that would come across to the parents would be that this is a school clear, reasonable and firm about its standards.

It is the Inspector who assigns a boy his class, his reading grade and even the place where he sits. This he does "with order and prudence". He will, - to illustrate this - place the writers' tables by the windows; children with vermin

will not put with those free of them; a talkative boy is placed between two quiet ones, and so on. Classes should have about 50 or 60 pupils, and the school clientele should be distributed accordingly. He assigns each boy his reading or writing grade and his order in it. Finally, he decides, in conjunction with the teacher's monthly test, who should move up an order or grade. This means he needs to know every detail of the learning process of reading and writing particularly, throughout the school years. One would have liked to know what improvements in this masterly practice of inspection had been made by 1720.

A contemporary tribute to the Brothers in their schools.

"Some persons of distinction," Blain relates, "going to see M. de De La Salle in the Rue Princesse, where the classes of Saint Sulpice were then situated, unable to believe what they were told, that in this house, where they saw a profound silence reign, there were five hundred children in several classes, wanted to see with their eyes what they found hard to believe. Their surprise redoubled when, on entering, they saw the Brothers and this multitude of light-headed children as quiet as an audience at the sermon of an eloquent preacher. They remained whole hours motionless, attentive to seeing the pupils read and the Brothers' signs to note a mistake..."

"Often, in Paris or Rouen, little boys of two or three years old have been seen to leave their house or their mothers' arms, or leave their little games and run towards the Brothers with arms wide wanting to embrace them, crying out: "Here are our Brothers! Here are our Brothers!" Some in school itself have been seen, delighted with the silence, control, patience, moderation and the other virtues of their teachers, to make a sign to them to come to them as if to say something, and to throw their arms round their neck when they came to embrace and kiss them with tenderness without being able to give any other reason for such an extraordinary action in a school than this: 'I love you.' What is more surprising is that those among the pupils seemed most attached to the Brothers who had been best corrected, when the corrections have been made according to the spirit of the Rule; for it is true that the way of punishing as M. de La Salle has laid down, is proper to attract the affection and tenderness of the children; or rather the Brothers...know so well how to govern a school that they have no more need to use chastisement.

The great art that the holy Founder teaches his own... is to teach virtue by practising it...along with great evidence of gentleness, kindness, and charity to win hearts. Once a Brother has the esteem and affection of his pupils, he can do with them what he likes. Then punishments are useless, and if corrections are sometimes necessary, they are the product of charity: they win over the hearts of the children, far from putting them off...The Brothers have

found teaching with hardly ever using punishments so worthwhile that they are beginning to make it a law to banish them entirely from their schools... 'Why don't you do like the Brothers? They do not punish us like that.' So said a child in tears one day to his angry mother who was striking him with her feet and fists. This was the mother's naive admission to the Brother when, ashamed at her temper, she brought the boy back to school."¹⁶

The permanent significance of De La Salle's work: the creation of the Christian schoolmaster in community.

The Handbook, remarkable though it was, was bound in many ways to become out of date. The success of the Brothers' schools did not derive in the first place from having this remarkable text. It was only the outward expression at a given time of the true creation of John Baptist de De La Salle: the Christian master in community. What was indeed new and original were these groups of men living according to the tradition of religious life, applying themselves to seek God and at the same time to meeting the educational needs of the poor and not so poor.

They were inspired by both a consciously pursued Christian realism and a pedagogical realism to prepare these children for their future. This community broke through the isolation of teachers and became for them a source of enrichment and stimulus. It expressed its cohesion by association, a daily-lived reality in which each one committed himself to the common work, by stability or a permanent commitment to the work that allowed it to continue into the future, and by obedience to the body of the Society and its Superiors so as to be available for the purposes of the Society anywhere.

The members of this Institute were invited to bind themselves to these three commitments by vow. Besides being a consecration to God, these vows had a "functional" meaning in that they assured the necessary conditions that allowed, not just a particular school, but the whole Institute to function and fulfil its purpose. The real depth of this calling was repeatedly expressed by De La Salle in texts of which we have now seen the greater part. Of those still to be considered in Chapter 16, his catechisms and his text on civility were inspired by the desire to see the children become "genuine Christians", while his Meditations for the Time of the Retreat spelt out that inspiration for his Brothers. For they embodied his understanding of the vocation of the Christian teacher as a basic ministry in the Church.



References

1. This is the reference throughout. See also Poutet, CL48, *Jean-Baptiste aux prises avec son temps*, 140ss; *Conduite des Ecoles Chrétiennes*, edited by Brother Anselm, Paris 1951, 45.
2. For extracts from the 1654 edition of *L'Escole Paroissiale*, see the *Bulletin des Ecoles Chrétiennes*, 1939; for the entire 1685 text, a photocopy by Brother Jean Pungier, Rome.
3. Rigault I, 568.
4. CL25, *Pratique du Règlement journalier*, 95-102.
5. Blain II, Appendix, 98.
6. CL17, *Instructions et Prières pour la Sainte Messe*,...
7. CL18, *Exercices de piété qui se font pendant le jour dans les Ecoles chrétiennes*.
8. CL18, 24-36.
9. CL18, III-IV.
10. *Bulletin des Ecoles Chrétiennes*, 1952, 102-113; Rigault I, 551-2.
11. Rule of 1705, CL25, Chapter 2..
12. Bernard, 20.
13. Poutet II, 127.
14. CL24, 235, 256-7.
15. *Meditations for the Time of the Retreat*, MTR, nos 4 and 12.
16. Blain II, Appendix, 100-102.

Chapter 13: Back to Paris. Schools in Chartres and Calais. The Founder sends two Brothers to Rome, 1698-1702.

Fifty refugee Irish children in need of an education

So far, De La Salle had been the sole superior in Paris, a necessity if he was to uphold the identity and independence of the community. Now, with his responsibilities growing, he appointed one of the community in the Rue Princesse to be its Director. His choice fell on Brother Ponce, which surprises us.¹ Perhaps he had learnt from his previous intransigence and from the kindness of De La Salle. The latter knew of his administrative abilities and perhaps judged that a caring situation would bring out other qualities. A Director, moreover, had to report to him every month more in detail than the other Brothers. In any case, he never held a person's misdemeanours against him forever.

It was fortunate that he freed himself of this responsibility and that he had just moved to a larger property, for an unexpected request came to him from the Archbishop.² It was probably the reason why he delayed bringing the novices to the Grand'Maison until April in the following year. De Noailles had been approached by Louis XIV on behalf of some fifty children among James II's Irish followers. They would be from among those who came over after the Battle of the Boyne. From 3 December 1691 to 6 January 1692, thousands: priests, gentry and soldiers, landed at Brest and Morlaix. Many joined French forces at the Channel ports in preparation for an invasion of England to restore James. But when an expedition to Ireland in the summer of 1692 ended in the destruction of the French fleet, the Irish had to think of settling down in France. Many stayed in the ports or joined the army, or went to James's court at Saint-Germain-en-Laye, or went to Paris and elsewhere. James had to disband a large part of his army so that many, including officers, were without income.

In one house at Saint Germain-en-Laye, 71 of the Irish gentry were boarded from public charity, and were in great straits, while 35 girls all from good families, were lodged in another. The income per person was more than three times less than a schoolmaster's, and as a result they lived in great poverty. Widows of officers received a modest pension that left them in difficulties, and there were others listed "who have nothing and are in a very great need." The king-in-exile was hard put to pay those who served him at court: "When James could save a little money, he called favoured servants into his closet and gave them a few coins wrapped in little scraps of paper."³

While the Irish gentry and nobility might stay at court, others went to Paris hoping to find a job there. Charitable bodies began to look after them. Thus,

towards 1698, one of these bodies drew up a list giving the condition of Irish families in the parish of Saint Sulpice. A certain Mr Kennedy, an Irish gentleman and a disbanded officer, lived with his wife and two children in the attic of a house behind the Rue de Bussy (today Rue de Buci, opposite the Métro Mabillon), and so very close to the Rue Princesse. Worse off than he was a cousin of “Mr Plunket, archbishop of Ireland” (Blessed Oliver Plunkett, primate of Armagh, who was martyred at Tyburn on 1 July 1681). This cousin, with his wife and three children, slept on straw in the Rue du Gindre (this was one street back from the present Place Saint-Sulpice and is now part of the Rue Madame). In the Rue Canettes, the next street to the Rue Princesse, a Mr Delaroche (Roche?) lived in an attic opposite the *Dauphin*, with his wife and three children. In the Rue Bourbon (now Rue de Lille) and so very near the Brothers’ school in the Rue du Bac, one of the Irish gentry, a former lieutenant, “Mac Quemande” by name (McManus?) with his wife and two small children, shared a room with a soldier called McCarthy along with his wife and three children. Other Irish families in need lived in other parishes: McDonnells, McCarthys, McMahons and several O’Briens.

On Good Friday, 5 April 1697, James II came to the Church of Saint Sulpice to hear the Passion preached by the Superior General of the Oratorians. He was met at the door by M. de la Chétardye and all his clergy. He was able to see how the school children, boys and girls, followed the ceremonies under the guidance of the Brothers. The Founder would have been in the church at the time. It was after this that James expressed to Louis XIV his desire to see Irish children in the capital catered for. Louis spoke to de Noailles, who asked M. de la Chétardye if he could see to the matter. The Sisters of St Thomas of Villanova, who ran hospitals and also took in boarders and sometimes ran schools, had a house in the rue de Grenelle. At the end of 1697, La Chétardye put twelve Irish girls as boarders there and paid for their upkeep. He paid 150 livres for each in addition to their clothing, and paid for a mistress embroiderer to teach them embroidering “to perfection”, providing the “gold, silk, linen and all else that was needed.”

De La Salle is called on to meet the need

There were refugee Irish boys needing to be catered for at the same time. They required an elementary teaching that would quickly get them a job, and this called for teachers who were already giving it efficiently to large numbers. La Chétardye had no hesitation: he turned to M. De La Salle. And so we are told: “Towards the end of 1697, M. De La Salle, at the solicitation of M. de la Chétardye, opened his house to fifty young Irish boys, who had come to France with King James to preserve their religion and took himself a particular care of their education.”⁴ The house in question was the

Grand'Maison. M. De La Salle put a Brother in charge of the education of these Irish boys, but he kept a close eye on what was going on.

It seems, from the statistics available, that fifty would be the total number of Irish boys, whether in Paris or at Saint-Germain-en-Laye, old enough and fluent by now in French. These were all entrusted to the Brothers. One Brother could teach them effectively, following the developed method he knew. These boys would be taught to read and write French well, and perhaps to read manuscripts, besides being given a more organised presentation of their faith. Perhaps the intention was that they should obtain some clerical work at court or with French gentry or business men, and eventually set themselves up in business.

One compelling reason for turning to De La Salle was that he was not interested in profit, so that the cost would be minimal. There must have been funds to provide what was necessary. Mme Voison's husband, who was administrator of Mme de Maintenon's school at Saint-Cyr, must have contributed in some way, although the major part of the upkeep fell on the charity board of the parish. It did mean that the Brothers' work was coming to royal notice.

And so De La Salle was invited to come to the rescue of the poor, those who were refugees from defeat and from the danger of persecution. He was delighted to contribute to their rehabilitation and to developing their faith. "M. De La Salle strove to measure up to the trust his Prelate showed him. Through a motive of obedience to his Superior and through a motive of charity for the exiles, he boarded them all and filled his house. He himself took particular care of their education, without counting entirely on the vigilance of the Brother he put in charge of them. So that in a short time they were able to fill with honour the various places for which they were destined."⁵ Since only one Brother was appointed to the school, it could have been only for the teaching. Members of the Irish community and others would have already taken them in.

The school continued even when the novices moved to the Grand'Maison, which gives some idea of the size of the property - or did the poor novices have to rough it again? Simon de Doncourt, in his *Remarques historiques...* writes under 1 December 1698: "A considerable number of poor Irish boys have been placed with the Brothers of the charitable schools....Driven from their country for the faith, generally speaking they have to be provided with everything, and the right to hospitality has to be exercised fully, practising to the letter this word of Our Lord: 'I was a stranger and you took me in.'"⁶ The school is evidently in full operation and its closure is not in the writer's mind. If these boys came over with James II, they would now be beyond the usual age for starting school. They would stay at the Grand'Maison only the two or

three years required to achieve the desired standards.

We do not have to imagine these children living in rags. Dressing according to one's rank in society mattered in those days, and those providing for these children's necessities would keep this in mind as a matter of course. But they were still destitute and dependent on charity. We can be thankful that De La Salle responded immediately to this unexpected form of educational service of the poor.

Probably early in 1698 James II came to visit the Grand'Maison, accompanied by the archbishop and, evidently, by the parish priest. He was very interested in all that was done and with great kindness thanked M. De La Salle for the trouble he had taken and the good results of his care. The latter, with all courtesy, disclaimed any merit in the case, and certainly said nothing to gain royal favours. The Brothers, according to Maillefer, were less reticent. They profited by the visit to ask his Majesty to use his influence in Rome to obtain Papal approval to protect them against various enemies. They had already, he says, brought up the matter with their Founder at the assembly of 1694. This was not unreasonable, since he had let it be known before then that his intention was to set up a school in Rome. At that time "he had answered that they worried too much about it, that they should wait for the time indicated by Providence and that they should content themselves with following it."⁷ Nothing came of the request made to James II. He was not well, and died on 7 September 1701.



Other events in the Grand'maison, 1698

When the novices moved into the Grand'Maison on 18 April, the Founder appointed Brother John Henry, the saintly Brother afflicted with sciatica we have met already, to replace him as Director of Novices. He was twenty-eight. The new Director was so deeply taken up with the thought of God, that he was forgetful of bodily needs and the practicalities of life. To get him out of this abstraction, his Superior gave him some jobs to do, but he was able to preserve the same union with God. One of the practices of the Brothers borrowed by the Founder from the monastic tradition, was a daily accusation before the evening exercises of external faults against the Rule. The 'penance' for this was some short prayer, but for Jean Henry, who found difficulty in finding anything to mention in a life so perfect, the Founder was very strict. He might mention having left a door open, and was told to go and pray by that door; or having walked too quickly, and was sent to take the discipline.⁸

Whenever he was absent, De La Salle asked John Henry to preside at the prayers of the Brothers performing certain duties in the house. These might include several serving Brothers, one of whom would be bursar, another in

charge of sick Brothers or those with some infirmity. Serving Brothers would be needed to see to the cooking, the cleanliness of the house, the vegetable garden and the property in general.

There was, in the Grand'Maison, a little chapel that had been used by the different Sisters' communities that had lived there. The Founder must have obtained an authorisation from the archbishop to continue to use it for mass. But it was too small to take the novices and postulants and the serving Brothers, and he had it extended into the next room. So modified, he wanted to have it blessed and dedicated to Saint Cassian, a schoolmaster who was martyred under the Roman Empire.⁹ He is not a well-known saint. De La Salle wrote a short life of him based on an account by the Spanish Christian poet Prudentius (358-410), and a meditation for his feast on 13 August.¹⁰ Prudentius confuses St Cassian, the schoolmaster with a St Cassian, bishop. The one who was schoolmaster taught children the Christian faith along with the rudiments. He seems to have developed a sort of shorthand for his pupils. When he refused to sacrifice to idols, he was taken back to his school naked, his hands tied behind his back, and any children who wanted to avenge some punishment were encouraged to attack him with their styluses. In this way he died a slow, painful death.

The Founder was well aware of the difficulties the Brothers had in disciplining and educating in crowded classrooms children who had had little control till then, and of the wear and tear it produced. He used the life of St Cassian to encourage them to patience, not giving way "to the first impulse, either by hitting the pupils, which is contrary to the Rules and to all good order, or by giving corrections heedlessly or inopportunistly." He knew they received "insults, calumnies and rebuffs for working for the poor," and he adds: "Look upon your work as one of the most important and excellent in the Church, since it is the most capable of sustaining it and giving it a solid foundation."

In June the Bishop of Chartres came to bless and dedicate the new chapel to St Cassian, accompanied by one of the grand-vicars. He had been granted on 16th a licence to do this by de Noailles: the original is in the Brothers' Archives. In it the Grand'Maison is designated only as "the house of M. De La Salle (domus Magistri De La Salle)". It is not the official recognition of a community. Godet des Marets had come to arrange for Brothers to open two schools in his cathedral city. It seems that the Founder promised him six school Brothers and a serving Brother for October 1699. These would be the first foundations outside Paris for ten years. "However, the humble Superior wanted, before promising subjects to his Grace the Bishop of Chartres, to have the Brothers' consent. In a meeting he had with them, he declared to them the proposition of the illustrious Prelate; and after having praised his eminent piety and his ardent zeal for religion, he let them conclude and decide

as they wished. They vied with each other in offering themselves to their Superior to be given this mission.”¹¹

Life, for the moment, went on developing at the Grand’Maison. With room to spare after the departure of the Irish boys, De La Salle opened a class for poor children nearby, to serve as a teaching-practice school for his novices. In October, one of them would be sent to the school in the Rue Placide, for it had now increased from four to five classes. The Brothers had now over 1200 boys in their three schools in the parish.

A school opens in St Hippolyte’s parish

At the end of 1698, for the first time, a school was opened in another parish of the capital. On the southeastern limit of the city, in the suburb of St Marcel, St Hippolyte’s parish, situated between the monastery of Val de Grace and the abbey of Port-Royal on its western side, and the Gobelins factory to the southeast, had grown throughout the century. The parish priest, Michael Lebreton, a doctor in Sorbonne and a man of vision, after seeing the schools of Saint Sulpice, asked De La Salle for two Brothers to run a school in his parish, “to teach catechism and reading and writing to poor boys.”¹² This was at the end of 1698. He responded, and the school prospered. It was situated in the Rue de l’Oursine, now called Rue Broca, which crosses the Rue Saint-Hippolyte.

1699

The masters of the little schools strike again

M. de la Chétardye, even more than M. Baudrand, had energetically promoted schools in his parish. There were probably as many girls as boys being taught, mainly by Barré’s Sisters, the Dames of St Maur, although their schooling was shorter. The masters of the little schools saw themselves threatened, and prepared to attack. The Master-Writers, in case their rights should be threatened, had already obtained from the Council of State a confirmation of their statutes on 29 May 1696. Anybody who taught beyond a certain level the different forms of writing or developed counting into arithmetic - and that it just what the Brothers were doing - could now beware. But the little masters had the first opportunity to take action.¹³

Shortly before the school on the corner of the Rue Saint Placide opened, a four-page prospectus had been sent out by the parish in December 1687 praising the schools and other charitable works in the parish. It spoke of the good order in the schools, their financial needs and asked the parishioners to be generous so that they could develop further. A bell would be rung before class started, and at the end, to remind parents not to let their children hang around the streets. That bell was an irritant to the little masters. There was an

unfortunate reference to them in the prospectus: “If any schoolmasters or mistresses who teach children in the parish sufficiently well-off to give them some monthly fee, complain that children are admitted into the charity schools who are not poor, they have only to give their names; and if the matter is true, they will be sent away immediately, because it is not just that in wishing to do good to some wrong is done to others.” It was asking them to come into the schools and check! But it also ran counter to De La Salle’s policy of schools open to all.

However, on 18 May 1699, the dispute between the cathedral Precentor and the parish priests that the previous archbishop had temporarily settled in 1684, now reached a final agreement. On the simple presentation of their letters of appointment by the archbishop, parish priests would receive from the Precentor letters giving them the right to appoint or dismiss teachers in their charity schools. They were recognised as having sole jurisdiction over them, notwithstanding a ‘right to visit’ retained by the Precentor as delegate of episcopal authority. On paper, Joly had kept something of the pre-eminence he claimed from the past. In fact, the parish priests had a free hand, and were officially in charge of the teachers in their parish. There was a stipulation that could cause trouble: over the door of the houses where such charity schools were held had to be placed an inscription : Charity school for the poor of the parish. But ‘poor’ had always been interpreted widely. The masters of the little schools could no longer cite the Brothers to the Precentor, since they had been called in by the parish-priest.

But they had a loop-hole in civil law: they could take action against schools not legally established. Way back in the years between 1552 and 1665 the Precentor had had his right sanctioned by as much as six decrees of the *Parlement*. That of February 1554, for instance, “enjoined on the said Precentor to give order that outside the little schools that are and shall be designated by the said Precentor in this city of Paris, no other unauthorised schools should be kept,” though the real reason for this was to be able to check what doctrine was being taught in them. The new agreement between Joly and the parish priests was not ratified by the cathedral chapter till 24 July, 1699, and therefore was not yet in force after 18 May. Technically, then, on the basis of existing decrees of the *Parlement*, the new school was illegal.

Without delay, sometime between May and June, the community of little masters sent their four leading masters, dressed in their long robes of office, to make an inventory of the school furniture, declare it seized, and proceed to have it taken away. One can imagine the carts lined up to remove the furniture from a school of 300! De La Salle, warned about it, came over from the Grand’Maison and calmly said: “Here, take me while you’re about it!” But

the masters replied: "It's not you we are after, it's the Brothers." They took them to court. During the two months and more that the case lasted, the school remained closed, and the children were on the streets. De La Salle was ill part of this time. Perhaps seeing to the organisation of the Grand'Maison, the Irish boarding school, and now this disaster had exhausted him physically and nervously. He was by now also something of a chronic sufferer from rheumatism. The action of these little masters could have taken place a year earlier - there is uncertainty as to the date; but 1699 fits in better with other events.¹⁴

As the furniture had been provided by the churchwardens, and paid largely by benefactors, among whom were Mme de Montespan, the King's mistress, and Mme Voisin, and as the parents were complaining, matters were not left there. Mme de Maintenon was informed, and on 3 July (it could have been in 1698, whence the uncertainty of other dates) she wrote this note to the First President of the *Parlement*: "As, Monsieur, you are the protector of good works as also the leader of the *Parlement*, I have no fear in making you a recommendation today in favour of the schools of Saint Sulpice. There have never been any so useful or so disinterested. Yet the schoolmasters and mistresses disturb them at times, and although so far they have lost all the proceedings against them they have instituted, they often try again. I beg you, Monsieur, to bring peace to the parish priest of Saint Sulpice, who desires it only to serve God."¹⁵ (The Brothers are not mentioned because they had no legal existence.)

And M. De La Salle agreed to something he tried to avoid: to appear before the lieutenant of police, d'Argenson, though for a first hearing, it would more likely be before one of his deputies. La Chétardye persuaded him to go in order to accompany the five Brothers summoned to Le Châtelet. The masters did not summon the parish priest or De La Salle, but the Brothers as running an illegal school. These were not used to procedures in court and would not know how to argue their case well. The police lieutenant hearing the case, however, was more likely to listen to their arguments because of Mme de Maintenon's letter.

M. De La Salle was not listed to give evidence, but he profited by a moment of silence to ask to make a plea. He was shrewd. He did not attempt to speak in the name of the Brothers, since that would raise the question of whether he saw himself the superior of a non-authorised religious community. He made the whole argument turn on gratuity. The prospectus of 1687 had stated: "As only children of the poor who cannot pay any fees are accepted into these charity schools, they are taught free, without receiving anything from them, neither monthly nor annually, nor by way of a present or gratification nor under any pretext whatever. Even books, pens, paper, ink,

etc, are provided for the neediest, that is, almost all.” The masters of the little schools assumed it was not possible for a master in a charity school not to have accepted at some time a gift of snuff, or a picture or a newssheet (gazette) or whatever. If so, he was basically no different from themselves who taught for fees, and therefore he could be accused of poaching on their type of school. The Brothers, they said, were not as gratuitous as they made out.

To which challenge De La Salle, sure of his Brothers, made a devastating counter-challenge. He defied them “to give the slightest proof of their claim, and said he himself would subscribe to losing the case and closing all the Brothers’ schools if they were not gratuitous.” This challenge confounded the masters. The police lieutenant thereupon asked the plaintiffs “to give the proof that the Brothers sold just as much as they their services to youth.”¹⁶ They were quite unable; the case was dismissed, and the masters were ordered to put back things as they had found them. The Founder himself gave an account of the case to “a Brother in the provinces”, possibly Gabriel Drolin. The outcome of this case would matter much to a Brother who had made that heroic vow about establishing Christian schools for the poor. We no longer have the letter, but Blain quotes from it. The Founder wrote that he recognised the finger of God in the matter and saw the outcome as a singular mark of divine goodness. He said that “God seemed to have given him back his health only to conclude the case to the advantage of the Christian schools.”¹⁷ He rarely speaks of how he feels, but he did so more than once to Brother Gabriel.

Death of Brother Henry. A fourth school opens

Another event had taken place while the schools were closed: Brother John Henry fell ill and was soon near the end.¹⁸ On the day of his death, “M. De La Salle called them all (the Brothers) in the morning to the sick bay before mental prayer. His aim was to show them, by the evidence of their eyes, how much death is gentle and holy when life has been fervent, and to encourage them all to work at becoming saints by seeing one of their own die a saint...All the community having gathered under the eyes of this dying holy man, he bade them farewell in a manner so touching and so animated by the Spirit of God, that it was easy to see it was not him, but the Holy Spirit that spoke in him. Then, the tongue that had been dumb or so sterile during his life, and had not been able to hold a talk with his Brothers for a quarter of an hour, become the organ of the Holy Spirit, became so fertile that, to the great astonishment of M. De La Salle and of the whole company, he made an exhortation for almost half an hour, although he was at the gate of death and about to enter into agony. What the pious dying man had just said seemed so

precious and so worthy of being remembered by the Brothers, that M. De La Salle, so as to impress it on them the more, made it the topic of the mental prayer that followed, saying they needed no other.” To recommend Brother John Henry to the prayers of the other Brothers, he wrote simply : “Pray for Brother Henry who died with quite extraordinary sentiments of piety on 1 July 1699.”

One result of the attack by the little masters was that the Brothers were more popular than before. A number of wealthy people provided M. de la Chétardye with premises and funds for two Brothers to open a fourth school in the Rue-des-Fossés-Monsieur-le-Prince - Prince’s Fossway, if you like - one of the streets built along the line of the filled-in ditches that used to protect the approach to the old city walls, and therefore next to the Latin Quarter, by St Michael’s Gate. Very soon, as the school grew, two other Brothers had to be appointed.

M. de la Chétardye was keen on supporting and boosting all the schools in his parish. He had established the custom of visiting them all each month, both of boys and girls, accompanied by one or more of the charitable ladies who supported them handsomely by their donations. Mme Voisin often took him round in her coach. He liked to find out how well the children were doing, and left them many presents. On the first Saturday of each month he wanted all the schoolchildren of the parish to come to the high mass and procession in honour of Our Lady, instituted by M. Olier. Each boy or girl was given a lighted candle to hold. Blessed bread, provided for by Mme Voisin at the cost of 50 livres, was given out to them. The prospectus, the school bells, the procession...all this was a little ostentatious, perhaps not what De La Salle would have preferred. It only exasperated the little masters.¹⁹

Once when La Chétardye made a visit with Mme Voisin to the school in the Rue Saint-Placide, De La Salle came along to welcome them. Possibly it was through prudence, to show Mme Voisin that the Brothers had their own superior. By then there were 400 boys in the school. La Chétardye expressed his delight at seeing so many children off the streets and being so well catered for. He visited all the classes and at the end, gave the Brothers the sign of peace as a mark of his friendship and support. To have over a fifteen hundred boys so well cared for made a tremendous difference to the parish. Mme Voisin maintained her interest, and at one period, when the price of bread rose again, she had a pound of bread per pupil given out in the schools of the Brothers.

Her liberality is a reminder that De La Salle was often short of resources to maintain the novitiate and the Brothers teaching in the schools. The serving Brother who had accompanied him to the seminary to beg for soup for his sick Brothers (p. 337) also relates: “I was in the Grand’Maison in Paris, as

bursar, often lacking everything, sometimes of bread, other times of meat, or not having enough for all the community. So I used to let the good Father know, who told me in reply to serve up what God gave me, and his goodness would provide. And it did provide, for at the end of the meal, the remains were as abundant as on days when the portions had been greater. When that happened, the cook and the bursar who had not served half of what was needed to feed more than sixty persons, looked at each other in wonder, and asked each other if someone had not brought in secret the necessary food. This sort of marvel happened two or three times, and on such days the good Father spent almost the whole day in prayer.”²⁰

A school for postprimary vocational training

In terms of age and subjects taught, the Brothers’ schools covered what can be called primary education, even though in extent and thoroughness they achieved far more than what the little schools were doing. Once these children left school for employment, it became clear to the parish priest that something was needed for them to keep them out of taverns, to extend their religious education and teach them new skills in view of the new opportunities of employment in the building and furniture trades. Although Colbert had died in 1683 and the bourgeoisie never supported his financial schemes to any great extent, he had “firmly placed France on the map of world commerce.”²¹ His main aim had been to obtain a favourable balance in foreign trade in order to increase the wealth and therefore the power of the state. He promoted industry, for example, by bringing in Dutch and Italian textile workers for the royal factories. He established schools in naval dockyards to prepare sailors for the merchant fleet. He was keen on paupers being rounded up into workhouses and made to learn a trade - not, therefore, to promote them as persons or socially, but in the interests of his mercantile policy. The prosperity of the people was a by-product, not his concern, and the poorest never benefitted.

La Salle never went along with that view of the education of the poor. But Colbert’s policy to give France the lead in arts and crafts coupled with an extensive royal building programme that he had begun as Superintendent of Buildings, meant that there were many new opportunities, resulting in a great demand for workers with certain skills. When La Chétardye drew his attention to the needs of young workers and he saw their opportunities, he responded by new forms of training.²² He did, then, listen to other people who drew his attention to new needs and strove to meet them, not necessarily with the aims of the powers that be, but as part of a further human and Christian development of persons.

La Chétardye had in mind to have classes on Sunday. Such Sunday schools, mainly to give religious instruction but to which reading and writing might be

added, were numerous in Flanders, but this one would go much further and give some vocational training. The Founder discussed the project with his Brothers. The new school would be set up at the Grand'Maison. What we would call school drop-outs and those who had never been to school at all would be accepted, and would be taught to read and write. But the teaching was aimed mainly at those able to go further. The upper age limit was fixed at twenty. They would be taught the principles of geometry, draughtmanship and architecture. Two Brothers would therefore take courses in these subjects. And all would receive religious instruction.

And so we have the first postprimary Christian Academy, providing, not fencing and horsemanship as in Academies for the nobility, but for a further Christian and human promotion of the children of the poor. La Chétardye obtained the archbishop's permission, and one Sunday at twelve o'clock (i.e. after the midday meal which was usually about eleven o'clock), the new academy opened its doors. The courses lasted two hours, followed by religious instruction, and, to terminate the session, one of the Brothers gave what is known to them as a "reflection" or short inspiring talk. The numbers attending soon rose to 200.

A second training school for village schoolmasters

The parish priest of St Hippolyte's was so impressed by the good effects of the Brothers' school he had opened at the end of the preceding year, that he wanted Brothers to be sent to the villages around Paris; possibly his own native village came to his mind first. De La Salle explained to him that while he did not send Brothers singly anywhere, one of his most cherished projects was to train country schoolmasters. If Lebreton could get other parish priests interested, both to support the enterprise financially and to provide trainees, he would provide men to run it.²³ Lebreton was all in favour. He got in touch with some of his clerical friends from the nearby villages, and with some of the clergy in urban parishes who originated in the provinces, and who might be interested in providing well-trained masters for their home area. A number were ready to help: the parish priest of the neighbouring parish of St Martin contributed; and a Monsieur Lemoyne in particular rented for the purpose a house in the Rue de l'Ourcine, now Rue Broca, that another person had made available.

M. De La Salle put in charge of the project the most experienced man he had: Brother Nicholas Vuyart, whom he moved from Rethel, replacing him by transferring Brother Gabriel Drolin from Laon. Straight away very much the same arrangements as in the training-centre in Rheims were put into action. The school of two classes that had been opened in 1698 was moved into the same house as the training-centre. A second Brother, Gervase by name, ran

one of the classes, and the other was taught by the trainees in turn under his guidance. Most of the daily exercises of the Brothers were introduced into this training centre: rising at 4.30, retiring at nine at night; morning mental prayer, spiritual reading, examination of conscience. Most of the day was taken up learning professional subjects: courses in reading, writing, arithmetic and plain-chant - since these village masters would also help in church services, keep accounts, and otherwise help their parish priest. They brought and looked after their own clothes. Apart from this they were boarded and taught free of charge: all they were asked for was goodwill.

In 1719, after De La Salle's death, the parish priest of St Nicolas-du-Chardonnet wrote this letter: "Both myself and all my native district will be eternally in his debt. He had the charity to train for me, in the suburb of St Marcel, four young men for the schools, who took leave of him so well trained and so zealous that if they had found among the clergy of the area the means of developing the good dispositions in which he had put them, they would have started a most useful community for the district."²⁴ 'Pays', here translated 'district', meant in a rural context "a group of perhaps ten or twenty villages associated by similar geographical features and local traditions." It seems, then, that the parish priest of Saint Nicholas's was a provincial man in origin who had wanted to provide schoolmasters for his own area, and that these young men, serving closely-knit villages, had had thoughts of forming a lay community modelled on the Brothers.

Brother Gabriel Drolin in Rethel

It must have been a wrench for Brother Gabriel to leave Laon and its poor after fourteen years, marked as they were by poverty. But he found poverty and the poor again in Rethel. The Town Council had in 1682 agreed to pay the salaries of two schoolmasters, and De La Salle had honoured his promise of finding funds to buy a property in Rethel both to house the school and set up, if possible, a training-centre for country schoolmasters. There were now five Brothers in the community, of whom one would be a serving Brother. That would imply the others were salaried, and so in a position to provide for this extra Brother's needs. With the rise in prices due to Louis XIV's bringing on the Nine Years War in 1688, they were very poor and appealed to the municipality for help. The Council's answer implies that they consider only two still had a claim on it and that De La Salle was responsible for the upkeep of the others. But they made a one-off increase in the wheat allowance.

Brother Lucard gives the minutes of the deliberation of the Town Council:²⁵

Concerning the Little Masters (Petits Maistres) who teach poor boys free of charge in this town, they are in need and have not the necessary to live. It has been decided to seek information on the revenues they

may have for their upkeep, and of the number needed in this town to teach the said poor boys for they were only two when they were established in this town, and there are (now) up to five employed apparently by Monsieur De La Salle, their protector and founder, to whom the Council lets the complaints of the said schoolmasters be known to provide for them as befits, and, however, without making it a precedent and until they are provided for, the said schoolmasters will be given a septier of wheat to help them to live, in addition to what is normally sent to them each quarter.

A young man intended for a bishopric tries to join the Brothers²⁶

Relative to this period, there is a sad story concerning a novice in the Grand'Maison. A young Parisian of the upper class, not being the eldest of the family, found himself pushed very young into training for the priesthood in view of a benefice, even a bishopric. He had an uncle a bishop. This young man reacted by going against all the conventional behaviour his family expected of him, and in the end, at eighteen, they virtually had him shut up in the house of the Oratorians at the entrance of the suburb of Saint Jacques. But he was too smart for their vigilance. When they thought he was in bed or elsewhere in the house, he was over the walls or had managed to force the locks on the doors, in order "to run to the ball and comedy and drinking parties."

In despair, the Fathers turned to De La Salle because his skill with the young and with several difficult cases was being generally talked about. The Founder asked him to join the novices, but let him come with his manservant and gave them their meals separately. The effect was remarkable. There must have been more to the novices' attitude than the mortifications and toughness that was all the rage with them according to Blain. The Founder had many a long talk with the young man. Because he had once been of the Rheims oligarchy, the two had things in common to discuss. The young man must have been intrigued to know how this poor priest came to give up all that society admired. Whatever De La Salle told him, whatever the approach he took with him, the young man dropped his defensive behaviour in a short enough time, it would seem. He became one of the most fervent, happy to do the humblest jobs in the house, to kiss the feet of the Brothers, eat his meals kneeling on the floor, and so on. He sent away his valet and asked to eat like the novices.

He wanted to join them and become a Brother. The Founder reacted prudently: this could be a passing fervour. In any case, for a young person intended for the highest ecclesiastical dignities, the family's consent would have

to be sought, otherwise “all Paris would be up in arms at the cries of an illustrious family that would believe itself disgraced if it saw, beneath a Brother’s robe, a young man it intended to see wearing one of the richest and most brilliant mitres of the kingdom.” The young man tried all he could to gain their consent. He wrote letter on letter to his uncle, the bishop, but he got no answer. One of the family came one day to the novitiate on behalf of all the others and tried to reason with him, but in vain.

At last no one answered his letters, and the young man took this as acquiescence. He asked again to join the Brothers, and De La Salle agreed. When he was given the habit, he asked for the most worn one, and was happy to wear the hobnailed boots of the Brothers and to wear the hat “that his men-servants would not have wanted to wear.” De La Salle informed the family; they were humiliated by the decision. They bade their time, and then sent people one day to kidnap the young man and put him in another community. He died there after two years, “in the regret, as is believed, that he had not been able to end his days in the place they had snatched him from.”

BEYOND PARIS AT LAST. SCHOOLS IN CHARTRES AND CALAIS

Two schools open in Chartres

For the Founder, all the signs were that it was now God’s will that he should accept requests from further afield. “Several bishops, informed of the fruit that his new Institute was producing, urged him to set up schools in their dioceses.”²⁷ The bishop of Chartres had been asking for Brothers since 1694, and De La Salle had put him off, wishing to make sure his Brothers were well trained. Now at last, during the summer vacation of 1699, he sent six teaching Brothers to Chartres²⁸ to run two schools, with a serving Brother to see to the material needs of the community.

Chartres, 83 kilometres southwest of Paris, dominates by its **cathedral** the flat plains of la Beauce. At the time we are speaking of, religious instruction in the city and the diocese was sadly neglected. Godet des Marets was much concerned about it. Trained at Saint Sulpice, thoroughly orthodox, he was keen to evangelise. Prior to being made bishop, he had preached missions in various areas of France. In 1688 he had had to rest and take care of his health. He became Mme de Maintenon’s spiritual director in 1687. In 1690 he was consecrated bishop of Chartres. He was a great reforming pastor such as Trent had hoped for, yet without intolerance and intemperate zeal. His influence went far beyond his diocese. He kept close contact with his diocese and with his clergy. He opened four seminaries, encouraged popular education, held two synods and organised retreats and conferences for the clergy. He wrote a catechism for his diocese. He found Mme Guyon’s works suspect and condemned them in 1695. But he kept in friendly contact with Fénelon.

He continued to keep an eye on Quietism, and was very active against Jansenism.²⁹

In 1699 plans were already made in Chartres for instructing girls. The Daughters of Providence had run an orphanage in the house that would be given to the Brothers. A community of the Daughters of Christian Instruction had been approved in 1686, but the legacy that would have supported two of them had not yet been provided in 1699. It is strange that the bishop had not called in Barré's Sisters of the Child Jesus. Montigny died this year, 1699, on 16 July, but negotiations could have been made with him earlier. Perhaps there was some coolness between him and the bishop. The latter, certainly, was prepared to wait three or four years until De La Salle had Brothers ready. The religious situation was bad enough in Chartres for the parish priests to sign a joint petition to the bishop, asking him to provide for the religious instruction of the boys.

"After having conferred together several times, we have agreed that one of the great causes of the indocility, lack of proper behaviour and even of the ignorance and evident dissoluteness of the majority of the children of either sex came either from there being no free schools for the poor or because the masters and mistresses who have exercised this function so far, do not discharge it as they should for the good of the children. They are mostly of no fixed abode and (teaching) without the knowledge of the superiors, setting themselves no other aim in this profession than to earn a living.....With this in mind, having learnt that there is in Paris a priest of great piety who takes care to bring up and train for this exercise young people who have all the necessary qualities to acquit themselves of it worthily, and that he provides them in all the places for which he is asked for them, on condition that their subsistence and upkeep, which come to a fairly modest sum, are assured, they (the parish priests) felt obliged, my Lord, to have recourse to your Lordship to beg you most humbly to use your Lordship's credit and even alms to provide this town with such a powerful help in reforming the morals of its people."³⁰

On the face of it, that reference to young men trained in Paris indicates more de Montigny and his Brothers, for De La Salle had not since coming to Paris been able to send out Brothers beyond the capital. Perhaps there was confusion between the two. But Godet des Marets seemed to have preferred the Brothers of the Christian Schools, who were used to running as a community one or more schools of several classes each. De Montigny would be fairly well known as superior of the Sisters of the Child Jesus and of the Brothers; he had published an *Instructive Memoir* making known the work of these two groups, and Fr Barré's *Spiritual Maxims* had been published in 1697. But there were very few of his Brothers left in 1699. We last heard of him providing after some delay two for Canada in October 1686, and he was

also able about 1698 to provide one Brother for a school next to the monastery of Fontevrault, at the request of the abbess. On his deathbed he confided the Brothers and Sisters to the Foreign Missions. He might have thought of De La Salle, but the latter was called to found teaching communities in towns, not to provide isolated Brothers for villages. After Montigny's death, Madame de Maintenon and de Noailles put three priests of the Foreign Missions in charge of Barré's work, but it was really the end as far as his Brothers were concerned. It was in the year of Montigny's death that De La Salle agreed to open a training school for village schoolmasters: the field was now open.³¹

On 4 October Godet des Marets had a pastoral letter read out at mass stating his intention to provide a Christian education for the poor of the city: "Nothing has seemed to us more useful for attracting the people entrusted to us to the Gospel maxims which should serve it as rule, than to set up charity schools." He refers to the evils of ignorance, to the need to relieve parents of the burden of instruction they are unable to give; to his experience of the good done in schools founded in several parishes to cater for girls, and the king's interest in the matter (Louis had by decree made schooling obligatory, but this was really aimed at making Huguenots send their children to Catholic schools). He concluded: "To second his (the king's) pious intentions we have brought teachers well trained for such a holy occupation, and able to edify them by their example while giving the children the necessary teaching."³² He gave 12 October as the date when two schools of three classes each would be opened, one in the parish of St Hilary (later called St Peter's) where the one community residence was, in the Rue Muret, and the other in that of St Michael in the Rue au Lin.

The Brothers got on very well with the bishop. A tall man with unprepossessing features, he had no side to him and he impressed by a life that was faithful to his seminary training. He liked to come and visit the schools and the community and encourage boys and Brothers alike, and it delighted him to see the effect of the Brothers' efforts, in school, in the streets and in church. He saw to it personally that the Brothers were provided for, as to clothing and food, and that the schools were provided with the necessary furniture, books and rewards.

These Brothers still practised the mortifications they had begun in the novitiate. Some died on the job, it appears, unless Blain is referring to later deaths from the plague, and some fell ill. Des Marets came to see them, and to tell them they must not add to their hard work in the classroom, and should be less contemplative-minded. He hunted around their rooms to find their instruments of penance and also looked through their spiritual books, in order to take some away from those "who might lack discretion in using them." He

was surely right to counsel moderation. Even for the times, one wonders if the Brothers and even De La Salle were lacking in moderation in their penances. Godet des Marets, as an orthodox prelate, was also concerned about signs of Quietism in their concentration on the presence of God, and this may have been what he was looking for in their spiritual books.

Only this year, on 12 March, Fénelon had been censured in a brief of Innocent XII. The latter believed in Fénelon's orthodoxy, but under pressure from Louis XIV and from the cardinals, he gave in. But he drew up only a brief, not the bull that Fénelon's opponents had hoped for. He condemned, but without qualifying as heretical, twenty-three of the maxims in the bishop's *Maxims of the Saints on the Interior Life*. Fénelon totally accepted the brief in a pastoral letter of 9 April, which he had read throughout his diocese. The king, however, banished him from court for the rest of his life. The condemnation of Fénelon harmed the pursuit of genuine Christian mysticism. It was henceforth frowned upon in seminaries and novitiates. One understands, then, Des Marets's concern, extended, in the kindly fashion of a friend, to the Brothers.³³ What he saw of their life did not lead him to want to modify anything in it beyond some of their austerity. But we shall see in the next Chapter that he did try to change one basic aspect of their teaching method. Fortunately, he was a man who listened to reasoning and who had a great veneration for his fellow-student of seminary days.

When De La Salle came to Chartres to visit the community and schools, he of course went to pay his respects to Godet des Marets both as bishop and as an old friend. The bishop spoke with him familiarly, and always invited him to stay for a meal, but he always excused himself on the grounds that the Brothers only ate in community, and he must give the example. In the end, the bishop tricked him into staying by ordering the doors to be locked and obliging him to stay for a meal.³⁴ He had with him his Grand Vicar, Monsieur d'Aubigné, who was later archbishop of Rouen, for there was a reason for this action. The two of them used the opportunity to try and get this holy man to moderate the strict life of the Brothers and their mortifications. They went over all the details of the Brothers' life. Then, in the friendliest way possible, they took him to task, and pointed out his poor and patched cassock, his thick boots, his outlandish big hat, and especially his old mantle, all worn out and fit to be thrown away. The bishop had had a new one made for him, but to make sure he would accept it, he had it made of cheap material. In the circumstances, the Founder accepted it as an alms. But he did not have it for long. Some time later, in Paris, on his way back at night to the Grand'Maison, he was set upon by thieves who made off with it.

It was probably quite soon after the Brothers' arrival in Chartres that the bishop proposed to De La Salle that he should obtain letters patent from Louis

XIV, assuring him that he would be ready to use his own influence. He would have liked to see the Brothers become a regular religious community. We have seen why the Founder was not in favour. He thanked his Lordship for his gracious offer, respectfully making the point that he “did not think it was opportune to take any steps for the present, and that the Institute of the Brothers being the work of God’s providence, care of the letters patent should be left to him.”³⁵ Godet des Marets, who himself was not one of those bishops always at court, appreciated his stance. Not all in Chartres, it can be said already, were keen on having the Brothers. “The friendship of a bishop had decided the foundation of schools in Chartres,...in a social situation where they were hardly expected.”³⁶ The Brothers would find out that in some quarters they were not wanted.

1700-1701

A school in Calais, 1700³⁷

In Calais, on the contrary, where they had their next foundation, they had from the beginning the support of the civil authorities and the townsfolk. “Towards the end of 1699 or about the beginning of 1700, M. Ponthon, who was studying theology in Paris at the seminary of the Bons-Enfants, passing by chance through the parish of Saint Sulpice, was agreeably surprised to see under his eyes a multitude of children with a Brother at their head, assisting at holy Mass with an air of piety that lively youth hardly knows.”³⁸ This young cleric was due to replace his uncle, the aged Dean of Calais, and he wrote back enthusiastically praising the Brothers and saying what a fine thing it would be if they could run the school in his parish. The Dean became just as eager to have them, especially as his one teacher had just died. He wrote repeatedly to his nephew, asking him to see De La Salle. He was delighted with the offer, but he had to make sure it was solid and that the Brothers were guaranteed a subsistence. He needed evidence of wider support.

The Dean, impatient to see the matter concluded, approached the town council which discussed the matter and then wrote to the town governor, Duke Armand de Béthune-Charost, then in Paris. After its capture from the English, **Calais**, as a ‘frontier town’ facing England, had been under a governor who was a Peer of France and also lieutenant-general of Picardy. The town council asked him to approve of the proposition and gain royal support. The Duke was not only a man of influence, he was also a man of genuine piety. He asked De La Salle to come and see him at his Paris mansion. The latter set out early and went into a nearby church about six o’clock in order to pray. A mass was on and it was communion time. He noticed among the communicants a distinguished man wearing the blue ribbon designating a knight-

hood in one of the royal Orders of chivalry. When he went to the Duke's palace, he was agreeably surprised to find he was the one he had seen in church. It so impressed him that for once, he told the incident to the Brothers on his return. Armand de Béthune agreed immediately with the idea, and granted what De La Salle asked, which was to write to the town council a recommendation concerning the school, sealed with his personal seal. De La Salle chose two Brothers, Gabriel Drolin and Claude Fouquet,³⁹ and sent them to Calais; they presented the Duke's letter to the deputy mayor of Calais and two of the aldermen on 19 July, 1700. They were warmly received and given quarters in the municipal college. The little school opened with the goodwill of an open and generous-minded population.

Earlier this year, on 26 February, M. Tronson died and was replaced at the head of the Priests of Saint Sulpice by M. Leschassier. During the school summer vacation the latter was asked by the Sulpicians working in Montreal for a good schoolmaster. He contacted De La Salle, who refused to send one Brother, but offered to prepare a good schoolmaster in six months. On 21 September the Consultors of Saint Sulpice agreed on the necessary outlay, and presented a certain Anthony Forget to be trained. The Founder sent him to the seminary for country schoolmasters on the parish of Saint Hippolyte, to be trained under Nicholas Vuyart. Six months later he left for Canada. He kept in touch with Leschassier who, when he asked him for certain teaching materials, applied to Vuyart. In Canada, in the school founded by the Sulpicians, Forget set about introducing Lasallian methods, not without some opposition. But he succeeded by getting Leschassier and his Council to back him.⁴⁰ During these developments, De La Salle was busy at his desk completing and preparing his various texts for publication. He also kept in mind both his family's rights when needed, and new acquisitions of premises in Rheims as the Brothers' work progressed.

Financial and property transactions

On 2 February 1675, when legal trustee for his brothers and sisters, he had given a Vincent Geoffroi, vinedresser in the neighbourhood of Rheims, 600 livres in return for an annual payment of 30 livres, which added to the family patrimony. Geoffroi had defaulted the very first year and seems to have been irregular thereafter. De La Salle must have sent him many reminders. In the end, he wrote on 21 October 1699 to his brother Peter, who was now, like his father before him, a member of the Rheims *présidial*, empowering him to act in his name to recover the debt. The original of his short, official deed is in Rheims.⁴¹

Much more interesting as an example of his practical head for management was his handling of the property needs of the Brothers in Rheims. In the

matter of obtaining legal personality for his society, we have seen why he preferred to wait and trust in Providence. But trust in Providence did not have to mean sitting down and doing nothing. Since 1682 he had to find the annual rent for the premises in the Rue Neuve. It was a heavy burden, yet he had no means of buying the property, nor of buying adjacent properties for the purpose of opening a school there. He found quite a modern way of getting round the inability of his Society to hold property without being liable to legal action. Some time in 1700 he set up a board of four trustee-benefactors, including himself. The other three were his brother Jean-Louis, who, besides his family influence, was canon of the cathedral and thoroughly supportive of his brother's work; another canon, and a priest of the diocese. In passing, we may note that Louis had been made canon in 1694, and on that occasion Le Tellier made the quip: "I wanted to make good the folly of his brother who had given his benefice to someone else than his brother."⁴² He was recognised as a man of piety, hard work and sound knowledge, and was put in charge of the minor seminary.⁴³

All four trustees, acting as a group of purchasers in their own name, agreed to put money into acquiring the two houses rented by De La Salle for the use of the Brothers. They belonged to a notary royal and his wife, who sold it for 4900 livres. Two people who were tenants in the houses were to be allowed to stay a further year. They were Canon John Faubert, who still catered to a group of young people thinking of the priesthood in the larger house where the Brothers lived, and a widow who lived in the smaller house, each paying different amounts of rent. Legally, then, the four trustees were joint owners, but the other three, by private agreement, made out the properties to John Baptist De La Salle as superior of the Brothers. It all depended on the other three being reliable, and of this there was no doubt. They all, moreover, had been approached to become benefactors. Whatever the earlier general condemnation of John Baptist, especially in giving up his canonry, there were a number who came to appreciate the good his schools were doing and to be very willing to give financial support. De La Salle was to use this way of getting round the law more than once.⁴⁴

The next year, in fact, on 16 June, three of them (the priest is not mentioned, possibly through not being able to contribute) bought from a Rheims merchant for 950 livres a house in the Rue de Contrai round the corner from those in the Rue Neuve. It was one of several houses grouped round a courtyard that connected with the Rue de Contrai by a narrow passage. This position brought them close to the other premises of the Brothers. As the royal abbey of St Peter of Rheims had the feudal lordship of the property, certain nominal dues would have to be paid as well as a small annual charge payable to the General Hospice.⁴⁵ It is probably after this purchase that the

small school in St Symphorian's parish, the one started by Nyel, was transferred there, and is the origin of the school the Brothers have always had on this site since. It is now a large electro-technical school.

Nearer at home, the Founder had to deal with a common experience: a rise in rent. On 18 July 1701, he signed a new agreement with the owner of the community house in the Rue Princesse, Paris, of which he had taken over the rent - to the displeasure of Henri Baudrand - for 600 livres annually in 1695. Now the landlord, a certain Léonor-Jean Nau, a royal official who collected the tithes in the dioceses of Bayeux and Lisieux in Normandy and usually resided in Caen, asked for a new agreement. Accordingly, De La Salle signed a new contract promising to pay an annual rent of 680 livres for the next six years. The original, with his signature, is in the national Archives in Paris.⁴⁶

Financial support for the Brothers in Calais

Meanwhile, in Calais, it seems that the aged M. Ponthon had not provided permanently for the Brothers. He left to his nephew to use whatever fortune he had at death, to arrange for a permanent endowment. But the young man died a few months after his uncle, with nothing settled. Fortunately, the elder Ponthon had written before his death to Louis de la Vrillière, Secretary of State and uncle of Jerome Bignon, the intendant of the *généralité* or tax-area of Amiens, hoping for a royal subsidy; for since the Edict of Fontainebleau, wealth confiscated from the Huguenots could be distributed to Catholic establishments. La Vrillière had replied on 12 June 1701 that he would bring the matter to the King's notice at the first meeting of his council that discussed the new converts. Over the next two years, his nephew had the satisfaction of benefitting the Brothers by 450 livres derived from confiscations from the Protestants. Not a solution one can be happy about, but the Brothers may have known nothing more than that this was a royal gift. They received a similar favour through the Duke of Béthune in 1702. He spoke also to d'Aguesseau, councillor of State, who presented a request to the king. On 4 February 1702, the latter wrote to the mayor of Calais indicating that a considerable sum would be paid to the Brothers out of Huguenot property. Maillefer says they received from Louis XIV a regular yearly allowance of 300 livres, and the municipal council made up the rest.⁴⁷ But the governor had to remind the Treasury more than once to expedite the money.

De Béthune remained a great friend and supporter of the Brothers. Having married the only daughter of **Nicholas Fouquet**, the Superintendent of Finance who had offended Louis by his splendour, he was one of the richest men in France. One of his daughters became a Carmelite, another a Visitandine; a son became a priest, another a Knight of Malta. The Brothers do not seem to have benefitted by any personal benefactions on his part. This may be

because De La Salle never wanted the Brothers to accept gifts that would introduce too much comfort into his communities. The years 1700 to 1702 were, then, two years of peaceful development, during which he continued working on a set of manuscripts he was able to submit to the censor at the end of 1702. One can remark that he did not refuse moneys from the different authorities, municipal and royal, provided his schools were left free as to their work and that the Gospel poverty of his communities was not weakened.

A serving Brother makes his final vows

On 8 September 1700, a Brother Gilles made his perpetual vows according to a formula that became the one used by serving Brothers:

Most holy Trinity, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, prostrate in the most profound respect before your infinite and adorable Majesty, I, Pierre Cluse, consecrate myself to you and I vow to unite myself to remain in society with the members of the society of the Christian schools, to work in the said society at whatever I shall be employed, whether by the body of the society, or by the superiors in charge of it, even if I am obliged to beg and live on bread alone.

Wherefore, I promise and vow obedience, both to the body of the society and to the superiors who will be in charge of it, which vows of association and stability, and obedience, I promise to keep inviolably all my life. In faith of which I have signed. Done this eighth of September, day of the feast of the Nativity of the most Blessed Virgin, one thousand seven hundred. B. Gilles, formerly in the world, Pierre Cluse.

This formula is the 38th in the Book of the First Vows already referred to. The name Pierre Cluse is in another hand, followed by a cross. Only this probably is by Brother Gilles, implying he was illiterate or not very skilled at writing. There is no mention of “keeping together and by association gratuitous schools”, indicating that he did not teach, but otherwise he has parity with the other Brothers, being allowed to take the three vows for life. There is the distinction: school Brothers and serving Brothers, of necessity, but the formula of vows of the latter is copied out among the others. The serving Brothers sign, along with the others, the record of a visit by the Founder or Superior; prayers for deceased depend on their length of time in the society only, and if precedence is sometimes indicated by the Rule, it goes by seniority. At some time before 1718 serving Brothers were distinguished by a brown habit instead of a black one, for a chapter on “The dress of the Brothers of this Institute,” added by then to the Rule of the Brother Director, says: “The

robes and stockings of the serving Brothers will be brown in colour, the colour of the Capuchins' habit, of the same cut as those of the school Brothers."⁴⁸

The Founder, as was then noted, first accepted as a serving Brother a man who presented himself at Vaugirard in 1692. In the succeeding years he accepted others, and made this a permanent option, for it solved a problem. As Maillefer puts it: "Till then, the Brothers destined for the schools were obliged to provide for the food and subsistence of the community. This put them in the necessity of entering into details that appeared incompatible with their ordinary occupations and which were for them a subject of distraction that did them harm."⁴⁹ Some serving Brothers were late vocations, such as a Brother Hyacinth who entered at 32. Some proved gifted at handling affairs and men. Such was Brother Thomas, who became the bursar of the society. The presence of these Brothers and presumably the practical ability of most of them, led the Founder to develop his thought about their role: he wanted to separate completely the spiritual and temporal administration of the communities, by having a director and a bursar. This did not please all the Directors.

We have a letter written by De La Salle on 2 October 1710 to a Brother Hubert who was then Director at Chartres.⁵⁰ He had found there the serving Brother Hyacinth who had joined the Brothers on 4 May 1701 and made his vows on 3 June 1703, only a year after his novitiate, which implies sufficient maturity. Brother Hubert did not get on with him, and he was changed and replaced by another serving Brother, Hilary, whom he did not agree with either. Hubert wrote his monthly letter to his Founder. You can read his grievances in De La Salle's gentle but firm reply: "I realise, my very dear Brother, the inconvenience in serving Brothers dealing completely with the temporal side, but there are far more when the director handles it. My very dear Brother, we have had only too much experience in the past. If a director becomes outward-minded, all his house goes astray, whereas if a serving Brother goes astray, he is the only one to do so. A director must not stir from his spiritual exercises. You have no business to be in the kitchen...A serving Brother must always speak politely and with respect, and you must require him to do so...But these Brothers complain that you do things out of bad humour..They say it is because the serving Brother handles the money. Rest assured that that will be the case with your community and everywhere else. If there are a few houses where that is not so - that are few in number, it will not last much longer.

"It is not reasonable that when the bursar goes out he takes all the money he likes without asking. He must not even say: I want so much: he must ask how much he should take...There are not two masters, because in every religious house there is one who is in charge of the spiritual and of direction, and one in charge of the temporal....He says that when he has money, you

want him to give you some to buy whatever you want. On that point you are more difficult than I and others, and that is not sensible. He must not give you money, but he must buy whatever is necessary. That is right and proper. You must give him the money back. If he does not buy what is needed, let me know, and I shall certainly see that he buys it.”

A serving Brother could at that time be made a teaching Brother. In 1720 the Brother Hyacinth already mentioned was put in charge of the school in Mende by Brother Timothy, the Superior General, and was made Director at Saint-Denis in 1733. Brother Thomas took the school Brothers’ vows in 1725 and became Director in Paris and later in Marseilles.

Size of communities

Around this time the Founder had come to the conclusion that two Brothers only in a community was not a good thing. About 1700 M. Leschassier, the new superior of Saint Sulpice, wrote to the rector of the seminary of Le Puy, towards the south of France: “I have spoken to M. De La Salle to have schoolmasters. He has promised me that he will provide some for his Lordship the bishop of Le Puy. He estimates that in each house there must be three Brothers who teach and a Brother looking after the house. Generally speaking, he would like there to be four teaching Brothers.”⁵¹ He made this into a principle, even if in practice he could not always keep to it. In 1707 a priest who had met him at an audience with the cardinal (created so in 1700) wrote: “He says he had been asked for two Brothers only, but he had not wanted to grant what he could not grant without violating the prescription of their society which says that they will not establish themselves in any place unless there is room for four and a Brother they will give themselves (without further charge, that is) so as to be able to live in community.” La Salle did not like to give way and accept a foundation that required only two Brothers: “For he did not like these small places where two Brothers on their own, left to themselves, were in danger of going astray, and he began to take a dislike to these small establishments that had difficulty in maintaining themselves.”⁵² Yet when he died there were eight communities out of twenty-two that had only two Brothers, and only seven that had five and above.⁵³

Role of the Brother Director of a community. De La Salle strongly centralises his Institute, both administratively and especially to safeguard its spirit

Linked with this concern for his communities was his understanding of the role of their Directors. Blain informs us that “Towards the year 1700, he composed a rule for the Brother Directors, that he then sent in manuscript form to all the houses of the Institute.”⁵⁴ De La Salle as Superior kept in

touch with each house and each Brother by visits and letters and annual retreats, but most of the year they were on their own. For all their novitiate training, they were only beginners in a way of life that was demanding and that was novel. He must have seen the disadvantage for his Institute of communities managing too much by themselves. Both as to its educational aims, disquieting for some, and as to its standards of religious life and rejection of Jansenism, a small, isolated community of Brothers could come under various pressures. And he was well aware of what, for instance, La Chétardye was about. His answer to these dangers was to put in charge of each community in dependence on himself, a Brother who would see that the spirit of the Institute and its Rule were observed and that the school ran well; a man also who would be open with him and communicate with him regularly.

“M. De La Salle, after a long study of the causes of the decadence of the monasteries and of the disorders of the most flourishing communities, felt he was able to put the blame on the superiors...Convinced of this truth, the holy priest often said that the Institute was in the hands of the Brother Directors...He fasted and prayed continually to obtain from heaven Brother Directors of tested virtue, full of faith and the Holy Spirit.” He also established for the same purpose, daily fasting and Communion by the Brothers in turn “from about the year 1696 till the year 1710.. After that, following representations by the senior Brothers assembled in Paris, this fast was fixed by M. De La Salle to Fridays for everybody.”

Each Director was told by the Founder to have his Rule read out in the dining room on the first Thursday of each month and to make it his own spiritual reading on Sundays and Thursdays. “However, to accommodate it to human weakness and to make its practice gentler and easier, he changed a few terms that embarrassed timorous souls and filled with scruples those who were so inclined.” This must refer to the final check over the Rules he was asked to make by the General Chapter of 1718. In the Brothers’ Archives there is a manuscript copy of 14 pages, with Brother Bartholomew’s accompanying letter dated 3 October 1718.⁵⁵ It sets out very clearly the Director’s dependent position and his function.

It states: “Each of the brothers who are in charge of the individual Houses of the Institute will not be named Superior. But he will be called the Director of such a House, and he will not accept to be called otherwise, and the one who takes his place in his absence will be called sub-Director. The name director has been given to the brother director of each House of the Institute to inform him that all his care must be to direct under the guidance and authority of the brother Superior of the Institute, all that concerns his House and the Schools which depend on it and to direct interiorly the brothers who are under his guidance, and to make them advance in virtue and to lead them to

the perfection of their state, and of their institute by directing their conscience and to inform him that he is established only to direct under the guidance and authority of the brother Superior of the Institute, and not to rule and govern as head, having and not attributing to himself in everything but a relative and dependent authority.” (A long-winded and insistent sentence!) Conscience in this text refers not to the Brothers’ moral conscience but to his awareness of how he was living out his ideals as a Brother.

Five directories for sending in regular reports

To make the Director’s dependence a reality as well as to emphasise his duty to be an example to the other Brothers, the Founder gradually drew up for him five directories or lists of points spelling out the kind of monthly or two-monthly reports he required him to fill in and send to him.

Each Brother Director had to send the Superior every month a statement of receipts and expenses, and every other month an account of his own behaviour “whether external or internal”, followed by an account of how he had acted as Director. The other alternate months he had to send a detailed account on the running of the school or schools in his charge and of each one of the Brothers. That same month, the Brothers themselves also wrote individually to the Superior on their own personal behaviour, according to a similar directory.

This clear separation of reports and their alternation seems to have been in full running order by about 1710, judging by De La Salle’s responses to them in the letters we have. The directories, however, existed in some form some ten years earlier. They were printed in 1734, and are expressly stated as “having been composed by M. J.-B. De La Salle, Founder of the Religious Brothers of the Christian Schools.” They ranged in content from 3 to 7 precise articles, except the one on the Director’s own conduct, which ran to 18 articles.

Dating also from about 1700 is a detailed directory for each Brother to follow in his weekly one-to-one talk with his Director. It appeared in the more primitive section of the *Collection of Short Treatises* of 1711. It was a detailed guide to self-evaluation and self-disclosure and involved looking at both one’s performance and one’s motives in a close but healthy way. Article 18 asks, for instance, “which book he has read for spiritual reading; if he has read much or little each time; if now and then he had reflected on what he has read; how he applied it; if he drew any fruit from it, and what was it.” As usual, De La Salle spells everything out as for beginners so as to cover all the possible ground involved. But, as he says at the end of the Director’s list: “The Brother Director will pass over the articles on which he has nothing to

say.” He would not expect a mature Brother to stick to the wording no more than he would want him to stick to detailed reflections in his daily time of personal prayer; and he could add what he wanted. All this was an imposed one-to-one sharing that must have been acceptable enough to the Brothers at the time, certainly with their Founder, but which offends our sense of personal autonomy. Yet it must often have been that voluntary one-to-one sharing which with the right person is an excellent means of progress.

In the Director’s rule there are some interesting details reflecting on the times. In each house there must be a chest for money with two locks. The Director has the key to one, and a Brother nominated by the Superior has the other and he must know as well as the Director the receipts and expenses. The Director had to have the Brothers’ hair cut in the first days of January, March, May, July, September and November “in a circle all round and close on the head and not thick on the sides, and should not be longer than three fingers’ breadth over the ears... He must not work alone at any external job, even if it is only fixing a nail. He may however deal with it in some emergency when all the Brothers are working on it... He will see to it that the candles are all put out before a quarter past nine and that the doors of all the rooms of the house are always locked, and that all the keys are given back to him every day after night prayer, and he will immediately go round the main doors himself, especially those giving on to the street, to see they are properly closed.” Two quotes are worth highlighting:

He will have and show a very special affection and tenderness of heart towards all the Brothers who are under his guidance, and he will take care not to be annoyed in himself and never to show it towards any of them. His first care towards his Brothers will be to establish and maintain them in a true spirit of faith, and to make them see carrying out the will of God in all things as the rule of all their conduct.

The replies De La Salle sent to his Brothers’ monthly letters to himself give an idea of this relationship and concern. The first extant one dates from this period.

The earliest extant letters of De La Salle to his Brothers (1701-1702)

On 15 May 1701, he replied to one of these monthly letters, sent in by a Brother unknown to us. It is an example of a reply that at first sight is disjointed, but is a considered, fatherly reply to a one-to-one disclosure, encouraging the Brother to keep up to a Gospel standard of living. Here are extracts:

Be careful, my dear Brother, not to act only your way; that is not right, and God would not bless you if this is how you behave. You should not be upset because Brother Director tore up what you wrote; apparently it was because you had written it without permission...You did well to tell your trouble to your Director. Be faithful in this way to tell everything and God will bless you. Watch yourself very much so as not to be taken out of yourself, for this is very harmful and dries up the heart.

I pray God to give you his spirit and I am, in Our Lord, my dear Brother,
All yours. De La Salle.

This letter was lost at the time when preparations were being undertaken for the beatification of the Founder in 1835, and only a copy was known until the original was discovered in England in 1955 in a packet of letters of several well known persons. It is now at the provincial house of the District of Great Britain, in Oxford. A thorough study of De La Salle's letters by Brother Félix-Paul appeared in 1952 in the *Instructive and Administrative Circular no. 335* from the Superior General, and in his critical edition of the letters (*Les Lettres de Saint J.-B. De La Salle*, Paris). A very pleasing scholarly critical edition in English by Brothers Colman Molloy and Augustine Loes, the first volume of *Lasallian Publications*, Romeoville, USA., appeared in 1988.

For the year 1701 also we have a letter written by De La Salle on 30 May to a Brother Denis who had been appointed at short notice Director of the community at Rethel because of the death of the previous Director. The Founder is responding to the Brother's needs in this situation as revealed in his letter:

"It seems to me, my dear Brother, that you should not occupy yourself so much with the thoughts which come to you concerning your position, for the more you worry about them, the more trouble will they cause you. Have as much interior application as you can, for it alone is capable of sanctifying your actions. I beg you never to miss recreation. It is a thing that matters. There is no doubt you spend your recreation with Brother Claud while you leave the two younger Brothers together; that is very bad. (He must have learnt this from one of the other Brothers.) I am very glad of your abandonment to God and your indifference for any place whatever; it is also necessary in your community.....All yours. De La Salle, priest.

Brother Dominic: a notable story

The following story about a certain Brother Dominic can serve to conclude the record of events for the years 1700 and 1701.⁵⁶ "He was from the village of Villiers-le-Bel, in the diocese of Paris. Towards the year 1700 he came to

present himself, in order to enter the Society, to M. De La Salle, who had accepted his brother a year earlier. Both were tall and of a very robust constitution... He engaged conversation with the postulant and asked him news about his family...Four boys of whom one was then a novice with the Brothers, and a daughter with her father, living together in their village from the work of their hands, cultivating the vine and the fields with a singular edification, composed this family which stood out by a special devotion to the Blessed Virgin." The father had put her statue in a niche above the door. The tax collectors, who were Huguenots, threatened to increase the tax if the statue were not removed; but the whole family said they would put up with an increase rather than remove the statue; and increased it was.

"The young man we are speaking of was the last, but the most pious and virtuous of the four brothers: M. De La Salle opened with pleasure the door of a house where he wished to have them all: a satisfaction that God gave him shortly afterwards." His application to God and his efforts to acquire perfection were so great that his health, robust as it was, gave way and he had to be taken out of the novitiate and put in the hands of the one in charge of training new teachers. He taught him how to run a class and then gave him the youngest one (as being the liveliest), hoping that it would help him to come out of himself. But he lost none of his union with God. "The Inspector of schools having come into his class an hour after it had begun, to see how he was getting on and if he was in any difficulty, found him as if in ecstasy and beside himself. This Brother having then asked him if he was meeting with any difficulty, the new teacher, pointing to the children, answered him : I see only God." As the Brother's absorption remained and his health did not improve, he had to be taken out of class and put to manual work. His health picked up, and when he was strong again, he was made Director of novices. But this brings us on to 1704, when the story takes an interesting and in some way an unacceptable turn.

1702

Negotiations for schools in Troyes and Avignon

Troyes is a small town in Champagne about 130 kms south of Rheims. Negotiations were being undertaken there to provide a charity school, but the foundation and endowment of the school proceeded differently than in Calais. While people in authority in the latter town were providing financial support for a school staffed from the outset by Brothers, in Troyes the use of local people was first envisaged. De La Salle was eventually approached by a group of concerned bourgeois, backed by the bishop.

A minor seminary set up only in 1682, and now transferred to the parish of

Saint Nizier, had twenty-four students, and, to increase their number, the parish priest, Francis Lebey, who also ran the seminary, wanted to open a one-class school so that the children of the working class, the ‘poor’, could acquire sufficient instruction enabling those who wished to enter the junior seminary. He gained the support of two bourgeois from Troyes, brother and sister, who by then were residing in Paris in the parish of Saint Hippolyte, and another lady from Troyes, widow of the royal chronicler, who lived in the parish of Saint Sulpice. On 19 November 1700, these three signed a document in the bishop of Troyes’s Paris residence, part of which stipulated that they would provide an endowment to enable a schoolmaster residing in the seminary to teach poor children reading and writing, arithmetic and plain-chant.

The contract stated that “if in the town of Troyes there are to be found relatives of the founders who are of the required qualities to fill the place of the schoolmaster and the mistress in charge of orphan girls, they will be preferred to the others.” Lebey ratified this contract on December 17th, and the same day the widow mentioned above invested 2000 livres with the treasurer of the city of Paris at five per cent, and thenceforth 100 livres were paid each year to the seminary in Troyes. Similarly, the brother and sister guaranteed another 100 livres annually, gained from the lease of a house in Paris. Of these 200 livres only 80 were to go to the schoolmaster, since he would live in the seminary; 95 to the schoolmistress and 25 for prayers for the benefactors to be said on Sundays and feastdays after Vespers. The payments would begin in February 1701 (“the first Sunday of the coming Lent”).

We do not know if a suitable relative of the founders was forthcoming, but some time that year (October?) one Brother of the Christian Schools was sent there as a temporary measure. He was put up at the seminary and ate at the parish priest’s table. Presumably the 80 livres went to his upkeep. Further negotiations were to lead to two Brothers running the school, and according to their own curriculum, at the re-opening in 1703.⁵⁷

In 1702 also, in faraway **Avignon**, capital of a small papal territory under a cardinal vice-legate, the papal treasurer M. de Château-Blanc and his wife Marie-Anne de Siffredy were keen to provide the poor in the parish of Saint Symphorian with a charity school, close to their own house.⁵⁸ They were uncertain whom to choose as schoolmasters when “a certain pious person from the town of Lyons informed him that there was in Paris an Institute of Brothers committed to this work.”⁵⁹ The papal treasurer wrote to Monsieur De La Salle and letters passed between them. This was not the first invitation the Founder had received to send Brothers to places in Languedoc and Provence. There were people like former members of the Company of the Blessed Sacrament (such as the person in Lyons might have been) who appreciated his work and spread the news among themselves. But sending Broth-

ers to that part of France was like sending them to another country, and communications were lengthy. Yet now, to have a school in Avignon supported by the papal treasurer could be a great help in establishing a community in Rome. In the summer of 1702, therefore, the Founder was preparing to send Brothers to two projected foundations, and he was also putting the finishing touches to his group of catechetical works in view of publication.

An important and symbolic decision: De La Salle sends two Brothers to Rome

Still more, he was at last able that September to put into operation the plan people already knew of in 1693 and which meant so much to him and to the Brothers: he sent two Brothers to Rome.⁶⁰ They were the trusted Gabriel Drolin⁶¹ whom he took from Calais and another Brother whom Blain does not name. With Brother Nicholas Bourlette in Laon, Brother Gabriel Drolin was looked upon as a saint, and young men of 18 to 20 had flocked to their classes - an early example of adult literacy classes. Gabriel had later sent to replace Vuyart in Rethel, and was one of the founding Brothers in Calais. Yet the Founder did not hesitate to transfer him now to Rome.

In his last will and testament, he gives his motive for sending the two Brothers: "I recommend (the Brothers) above all things to have an entire submission to the Church and especially in these vexed times; and, as proof, to disunite themselves in nothing from the Church of Rome, remembering always that I sent two Brothers to Rome to ask of God the grace that their Society would always be fully submitted to it."⁶² It was a definite stand at a time when bishops, clergy, monasteries, the Sorbonne and *Parlements* were defensive towards Rome in the interests of the so-called "liberties of the Gallican Church." But the Founder and the early Brothers had also thought about getting the notice and encouragement of the Holy See for this new little society in the Church as it stood. He himself waited on Providence, ready to act when the circumstances seemed right. Now that the identity of the society was clear to itself and that it had proved itself enough for thoughtful persons in different places to request Brothers and that it had some goodwill in Church and state in places like Chartres, Calais and Avignon, he made his move.

His aim, basically, was not that the Brothers should make friends with people well-placed in Rome and approach the Holy See for a formal approbation, although he did not entirely exclude it. He wanted the Brothers to set up school in Rome if they could, - best of all, to be given a pontifical school to run - and by fidelity to their aims and life-style, to exhibit what this new community was and win in that way a true recognition.⁶³ We have twenty letters of his, written to Brother Gabriel between 1704 and 1716

that reveal his attitude, his occasional misapprehensions and the Brother's difficulties. One cause of the delay since 1693 in carrying out his intentions was that he did not have the money. And even when he sent off with his blessing and prayers the two Brothers in 1702, he could only give them 100 livres. They would have to count on charity on the way. It was a great adventure, perhaps a little risky, but they were travelling at the end of summer when it was not too hot and when they would have plenty of company..

Their journey took them two months. It would take them through Lyons and Chambéry, over the Alps by the Fréjus pass to Turin, and then by Placenza and Bologna. This was the best way to the Papal States as far as passports were concerned. They could now turn south through the Umbrian hills through Siena and Bolsena to Rome. One can imagine how they fared on 100 livres, sleeping in the open or in barns or the stables of hostelries, and receiving charity from monasteries.

The last stages of their journey must have been made in heavy rain. On the side of St Roch's church (S. Rocco) facing the Tiber across the via Ripetta, behind St Charles's church in the Corso, and so in the district Drolin stayed in for several years, is a record of the levels the Tiber overflowed in certain years. In December 1702 it rose 49 cms above the present street level. Brother Gabriel and his companion would have had to wade through muddy water as they entered Rome by the Porta del Popolo and looked around for shelter. Their spirits must have been much lower than those of Charles Dickens when he entered the Eternal City by the same Porta del Popolo in January 1845: "It was a dark, muddy day, and there had been heavy rain," which he was prepared for, but not for "the long streets of commonplace shops and houses..." (for he had counted on coming at once on the ruins of imperial Rome) "and I confess having gone to bed, that night, in a very indifferent humour, and with a very considerably quenched enthusiasm."⁶⁴ The two Brothers would have fallen in with other French people making a pilgrimage to Rome and once there would have been directed to the church of St Louis des Français.

Here they would be taken in free of charge for three days and would get information as to the whereabouts of Cardinal d'Estrées. They may have been sent on to the *Trinità dei Pellegrini*, between the Ponte Sixto and the Arenula. Here a numerous confraternity that princes and cardinals joined, looked after pilgrims; they washed their feet, gave them plenty of well-prepared food, and escorted them to their dormitories with candles and lanterns.

The stable population of Rome at this time was about 150,000, but there were always pilgrims in the city, travellers and people passing through of about equal number. This explains the great many inns and taverns, especially in the Ripetta area near *Augustus's mausoleum*, where people landed from the Tiber, and also around the *Piazza del Popolo* inside the Flaminian Gate or

Porta del Popolo (as Pius IV rebuilt it in 16th century), where crowds arrived by the **Via Flaminia**, the road constructed in 220 BC and running in a straight line for nearly 200 miles to Rimini. The piazza has recently been modernised.

Gabriel Drolin and his companion would meet with plenty of social life around the area where he later found lodgings and a room for a school off the Corso. The **Corso** was that part of the Via Flaminia within the city walls that runs straight from the Piazza del Popolo to the present Piazza Venetia for almost a mile. It got its present name when Paul II in 15th century made it into a course for horse-racing. All over this area were the palaces of the Roman nobility, each housing one or two hundred servants and lackeys. In the preceding century new churches and palaces had arisen, and throughout the city were attractive squares and fountains.

The lifestyle was the most luxurious in Europe. Young lords came from all the Catholic countries to live the high life. The French met in the inns around the **Piazza d'Espagna** and around the Farnese Palace, not far from Drolin's quarter, where the French ambassadors usually resided. There was much to attract an isolated Frenchman, who might well receive invitations from his fellow-countrymen and others once he became known and appreciated. In summer, apart from the oppressive heat, malaria was the scourge of Rome. It began in May and was worst in autumn, and people who could fled to the castelli Romani, the villages in the Alban hills southeast of the capital. The Pope lived on the Quirinal at no great distance east of the Corso. Here was the seat of the Congregations of cardinals. There were some 7000 priests, regular and secular in the city in normal times. The moral and spiritual authority of the Popes was very high in this period because of their concern for reform.⁶⁵

It is quite possible that De La Salle gave his two Brothers a letter for the Cardinal d'Estrées, who had been bishop of Laon till 1681, when he was replaced by his nephew. The Cardinal was in 1702 French chargé d'affaires in Rome, although he was visiting Italian courts when the two Brothers arrived. They were received instead by his vicar-general for the suburban see of Albano, Joseph Francis Gualtieri, who may have given them food and shelter among the domestics of his palace during the winter months.⁶⁶

A testimony to a healing performed through de La Salle

About the time when these two left for Rome, during the month of September, we have an attestation to the way the Brothers were already looking on the Founder as a man whose prayer was powerful with God. A certain Samson Bazin, from the parish of Saint Severin in Paris, entered the Grand'Maison as a postulant on 24 January 1700, became a novice and took the name of Brother Timothy. He was ready to be given his first assignment at the end of the

summer vacation, 1702. He later became the second Superior General of the Brothers, from 1720 to 1751. This is his statement about an event that occurred in that September 1702:

I, undersigned, Superior of the Institute of the Brothers of the Christian Schools, certify to every one that in the year seventeen hundred and two I had a furious wen on my knee, in which an incision was made from which a great quantity of pus emerged, which pained me all the more that I was destined to go from Paris to Chartres to keep school after my year's novitiate and a few months' probation in the schools. In my affliction, Monsieur De La Salle came to see me in bed. I asked him to give his blessing to my knee, which he did with his thumb. I left and set out on foot with the ointments, which I did not need, and I felt no pain in my knee, which was completely cured. I attest this is true and have always attributed it to the prayers and merits of Monsieur John Baptist De La Salle our Founder. In testimony whereof I have signed. Done at Rouen the third of April, seventeen forty-two.⁶⁷

References

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2. Maillefer, CL6, 134-5; Poutet's article *Jacques II, MacMahon, Kennedy* in the *Revue d'Histoire de l'Amérique française*, December 1967, to which this section is very much indebted..
3. *James II: a study in kingship*, John Miller, Wayland 1987, 235.
4. Simon de Doncourt, *Remarques Historiques sur l'église et la paroisse de Saint-Sulpice*, 59.
5. Blain I, 368.
6. Quoted in Guibert's *Histoire de Saint Jean- Baptiste De La Salle*, Poussielgue, Paris 1900.
7. CL6, 137.
8. Maillefer, CL6, 126, 127; Blain I, 361.
9. *Meditations*, Appendix II and Med.155.
10. CL12, Med. 155.2.
11. Blain I, 370.
12. Maillefer, CL6, 152,153; Blain I, 364; Poutet II, 103.
13. Blain I, 361-3; Poutet II, 88-91.
14. See Poutet II, 89-90.
15. J. Guibert, *Histoire de Saint Jean-Baptiste De La Salle*, Poussielgue, Paris 1900, 297-8.
16. Blain I, 363.
17. id, *ibid.*.

18. Blain II, Appendix, 75-76; Poutet II, 92.
19. Blain I, 363-4; Poutet II, 92, n.40.
20. Blain II, 263-4.
21. E.N. Williams, *The Ancien Régime in Europe*, 178.
22. Maillefer, CL6, 126-8; Blain I, 389-90; Rigault I, 218-19.
23. Maillefer, CL6, 152-7; Blain I, 364-7; Poutet II, 103-5; Rigault I, 233-237; Ravelet, 163-5.
24. Blain II, 180.
25. Lucard, *Annales de l'Institut des Frères des Ecoles Chrétiennes*, Tome I, 1883, p. 109, n. 1.
26. Maillefer, CL6, 136-41; Blain II, 346-9; Ravelet, 160-63.
27. CL6, 116, 117.28. 28.
28. Maillefer, CL6, 116-119; Blain I, 369-373; Poutet II, 153-153; Rigault I, 261-264.
29. Cf *Dictionnaire du Grand Siècle*, Fayard, 1990.
30. Blain I, 370-1.
31. Poutet I, 522-534.
32. Blain I, 371-2.
33. See Poutet II, 156-7.
34. Maillefer, CL6, 118-121; Blain I, 373-4; Poutet II, 156-7.
35. Blain II, 267.
36. Rigault I, 268.
37. Maillefer, CL6, 130-1; Blain I, 380-2; Poutet II, 52-53; Rigault I, 268-273.
38. Blain I, 380.
39. Rigault I, 269.
40. Poutet II, 342.
41. See Aroz, CL42, 256-60.
42. Blain I, 204; Bernard, 55.
43. Aroz, CL27, 84.
44. Aroz, CL37, 54-55; Chartier, etc., 63-64.
45. Aroz, CL37(1), 103-112.
46. Aroz, CL42, 261-268.
47. Maillefer, CL6, 132-3; Blain I, 383; Rigault I, 268-271; Poutet II, 63
48. Rigault I, 538.
49. CL6, 95.
50. Félix-Paul, 209-210.
51. CL11, 62.
52. Blain II, 55.
53. CL11, 62-3.
54. The early quotes in this section are from Blain II, 145-6.
55. The text is in CL25, 154ss., and this is now quoted from.
56. Blain II, Appendix, 76-80.
57. Maillefer, CL6, 132, 133; Blain I, 390-91; Poutet II, 164-66; Rigault I, 274.
58. Maillefer, CL6, 133; Blain I, 394-7; Poutet II, 173-7; Rigault I, 343-5.
59. Blain I, 396.
60. Maillefer, CL6, 212-13; Blain I, 392-3; Poutet II, 267; Rigault I, 311-13. On the date,

see Félix-Paul, 52-3; Maurice-Auguste, CL11, 67, 98, n.2; Rigault I, 315-317.

61. See Félix-Paul, 45.

62. Blain II, 173.

63. Maurice-Auguste, CL11, 95-98. See Félix-Paul, 53-4, *Bulletin des Ecoles Chrétiennes*, 1953.

64. *American Notes and Pictures from Italy*, in *The Oxford Illustrated Dickens* series, O.U.P., 265.

65. *Dictionnaire du Grand Siècle*, Fayard, 1990; *Michelin Guide to Rome*.

66. Félix-Paul, 53-54.

67. The French original is in the Brothers' Archives in Rome. Blain, writing in 1733, knew of it: Blain II, 495-6.

Chapter 14: a sad period with some light: late 1702 to the end of 1703

MONSIEUR DE LACHÉTARDYE PLANS TO GET DE LA SALLE OUT OF THE WAY

That October 1702, once the schools were in session again, the Founder began visiting the communities. He came back to find himself the object of an attack that threatened his Institute.¹ In 1697 he had made Brother Ponce, as we have seen (p. 335), Director in Paris in spite of a domineering side he had. In 1699 on the death of Brother Jean Henry, he had appointed to replace him as director of novices a Brother Michael, who seems to have been intemperate in austerities both to himself and to the novices. We remember how in Rheims he had appointed as Director when he left a Brother of whom we know nothing except that in a year, owing to his lack of tact, half the Brothers had left. Blain ponders over the way God sometimes lets his servants make mistakes and sees this in such choices by De La Salle. Whereas his Institute could have made a tremendous impact at this time, the imprudence of his two nominees in Paris brought on “such furious storms that for nearly twenty years his Community was threatened with ruin...This thorn remained planted in his heart all the time he lived.”² This is a good hagiographer’s remark, but De La Salle was a good judge of his men. He would know their strengths and weaknesses, and may have placed these men in authority just because they had to learn to act fittingly in a position of trust. These two men were not put in distant communities but where he would soon know if anything went wrong. Young, untried young men, almost youngsters some of them, would need a firm hand in the novitiate. The Paris community, running three or four schools, needed a good leader and administrator. One has to remember that De La Salle had only young men to draw upon, and had to make the best of those he had. There were directors in places like Laon, Rethel and Rouen who were quietly running their schools, and there were other men of great reliability in Paris.

The occasion

Moreover, the severity of the two Directors was the occasion, not the cause, of a crisis in the relations between La Chétardye and De La Salle. In his lengthy account of the crisis, Canon Blain is careful not to mention la Chétardye by name for some reason, very likely because he had clerical readers in mind, and many in his day had been through Saint Sulpice. One might at times think he is talking of two different persons: the parish priest of Saint

Sulpice, very keen that Christian schools should flourish in his parish, a man of great virtue who was offered a bishopric by the king; and someone who was prejudiced against De La Salle to the point of Blain's terming him his enemy. It was a procedure that did allow the Canon to say what he thought; but we have a letter which will be cited in full later, that identified la Chétardye as the trouble-maker.

The facts which gave rise to an unnecessary adverse reaction were these: while De La Salle was away visiting some communities, the Director of novices vented his bent towards severity on a few postulants. Brother Michael had more than once gone beyond bounds in the absence of his Superior; but as the latter had either tended to back up the authority of the Director, or encouraged the novices to accept this penance and humiliation, and all with such great kindness, they plucked up courage to go on. This time, in his absence, these young recruits went to the parish priest, the person they knew as closest to the work of the Brothers, and showed him the marks of their treatment. This seems to imply that the master of novices did not simply impose on them taking the discipline themselves, but made them bare their shoulders and himself whipped them. We find that horrific, but among the reforming element in the Church at the time, and when the influence of the Abbot de Rancé was a leading one, it would not be so viewed, even if it were considered unusual and unwise. People were familiar with public penances of monks in the past and would look upon them as admirable if not imitable. Canon Blain quotes several examples with approval.³

La Chétardye should either have had a word with Brother Michael or waited till his Superior's return. But in fact he had turned against the latter for some time and was looking for an opportunity to work against him. Blain sums up his attitude with a certain understatement: "Successor of the piety as well as the pastoral charge of Messieurs Baudrand and de la Barmondière, he surpassed them in benefits towards the Brothers, and seemed to envy M. De La Salle himself the honour of having given the Church such a necessary Institute."⁴

He got the postulants to put their complaints in writing and sign the document, so as to use it against De La Salle. He wanted him to appear as headstrong, severe on faults, and not of a broad enough mind to run a community. Would the Cardinal listen, however, - he who knew of De La Salle's piety and distinction of character and had so many good reports of his schools in Paris. Moreover, the blame attached to the Director of novices, acting in the Founder's absence.

Then another excessive correction was brought to the parish priest's attention. The Brothers of the Paris community joined the novices on Sundays. One of the novices doing his "teaching practice" came under the authority of

Brother Ponce for the purpose. He seems one Sunday to have treated this novice as severely as Brother Michael had treated the postulants. The young man, who was already shaky in his vocation, went to complain to the parish priest, and was able to show the marks left on him by Ponce. La Chétardye had now evidence he could use to argue that this severity must come from the Superior, or that he couldn't choose subordinates well. He got the novice to put his complaint also in writing, and from both letters he made a document, adding his own comments to the effect that De La Salle was not fit to be Superior and should be replaced. The Cardinal, impressed as he was by La Chétardye's virtue and age, nevertheless was not rushed. He directed one of his grand vicars, M. Pirot, a former lecturer at the Sorbonne, to make a thorough enquiry and draw up a report.

An enquiry. A new Superior is appointed

This must have been towards the end of October. M. Pirot took a whole month, coming to the Grand'Maison once a week. He gathered the Brothers, questioning each in turn and requiring him to raise his hand first as a sign he was on his honour. As Blain says, the Brothers, used to openness with their superior, and to admitting their faults before the community twice a day, did not need this ritual. The Founder came back meanwhile, in order to present his manuscripts to the censor in view of having them printed, which he did on 2 November. When Pirot appeared again, and perhaps another two times, he made no enquiry as to why he had come. Not knowing the background, he could see it as an inspection of his community on behalf of his Ordinary, and was humble enough not to ask questions. Pirot took down minutes of the interviews, and drew up a report which clearly did not corroborate la Chétardye's memoir. He was impressed by the order and unity among the Brothers. Yet he preferred the view of someone he had always considered above criticism, a priest of great reputation in Paris.

Some days later, De La Salle went to pay his respects to his Eminence, and thank him for his interest in his community. Or was it his way of finding out what was going on? The Cardinal received him with the usual courtesy, and then told him the stunning news: "Monsieur, you are no longer Superior; I have provided your community with another one." Blain rightly says that this was resorting to an ultimate penalty without first giving the accused the chance to improve in the way the Cardinal should have indicated. He also says so well that reaction to such a piece of news is a good indication of how far a man has conquered himself. The Founder made no protest at all, made no demand as to who was responsible for this. He went back to his community without saying a word to the Brothers so as not to rouse their legitimate indignation. That also is great virtue. Yet he knew it was not just a matter for

himself alone: a superior from outside imposed on the Brothers in Paris would be the ruin of his society.

The Brothers react to the attempt to install someone else as Superior

M. Pirot informed De La Salle through a discreet cleric of the day and time when he would come to induct the new superior. The Founder kept the matter quiet, as Pirot wanted, and asked all the Brothers in Paris to be at the Grand'Maison after Vespers on the first Sunday of Advent, even those who normally would have been out. At four o'clock, they heard the sound of a carriage in the yard, and were intrigued to see the grand vicar step out, followed by an unknown priest. De La Salle had had a large enough room arranged for the meeting. Pirot took his place at the armchair prepared for him, and the Brothers waited curiously to see what he had to say. He began by praising their Founder, to their evident delight. So far, so good. Then he indicated the unknown priest and began to praise him as their new superior.

It was the end of the matter as far as the Brothers were concerned. One of the senior Brothers approached Pirot and told him quietly and respectfully that they had their Superior and did not need another. Pirot gently pushed him aside and continued his speech. The Brother stood his ground and repeated his statement out loud. The others tried to maintain a respectful silence, but in the end, less patient than their Founder, they all joined in saying: "M. De La Salle is the only superior we want and we don't want any other."

At this point La Salle asked for silence, and got it immediately. He tried to get the Brothers to obey and accept the new man. But for once, they made clear they were not with him. Pirot at this point became more formal and read out the Cardinal's decision, signed by his own hand. There was consternation at first, then the Brothers wanted to know who had misinformed his Eminence, and were sure he would decide otherwise once he was correctly informed. The Director of novices, without admitting he had caused the trouble, tried to defend the Founder, thus protecting himself. Pirot turned on him: "Do you dare speak, a man unworthy of his charge?" Meanwhile the unknown cleric, M. Bricot, a young man from Lyons, very embarrassed and humiliated and quite clearly not wanted although he had been led to expect the contrary, suggested to the grand vicar that the Brothers should keep their superior.

Pirot couldn't walk out in failure, so he tried again to persuade them to submit. They argued with him for half an hour. The Founder joined in from time to time, begging the Brothers to obey the order. But they told him that their vow of obedience was a vow freely made to obey him, and that if another were substituted, they were free to go. Pirot saw he would get nowhere

and prepared to leave. De La Salle asked him to give him time to bring the Brothers to order, but they told him plainly: "We declared we would have no superior after you except one of us. If this man comes, we go."

Canon Blain has a very verbose forty-five pages on the whole affair and its consequences. It is as if he got emotionally involved himself in writing them. There is no doubt that when he came to read the notes of the Brothers while preparing his biography, he must have found their memories of the whole affair full of feeling. We have corroborating evidence in a letter, a copy of which, made close to the events, has come down to us and which adds important details. In his extract from it, Blain has left the name of De La Salle's opponent blank, but the letter here given in full itself makes clear it was M. de la Chétardye. This was the man whose name he had hidden, whom he had exalted to the skies and, alongside, made clear he was the one intriguing against De La Salle.

As the news got out to the other communities of the Society, there was concern to know exactly what had happened. The Brothers of Laon, for instance, asked Canon Pierre Guyart their parish priest, to find out for them. He wrote to another friend of De La Salle, M. Charles de la Grange, the parish priest of Villiers-le-Bel (the village Brother Dominic came from), asking him to make enquiries. At the beginning of 1703, he answered in the following letter:⁵

A detailed letter on the whole incident

"I was no less moved or less surprised than you, my very dear Monsieur, by the news you told me about M. De La Salle. As I honour and esteem him no less than you, I shared and still share as fully as can be the way they have hurt him. I gave myself the honour of going to see him; one cannot be more edified than I was by his attitude, his assurance, his perfect resignation and his entire abandonment to Providence. I am telling you nothing new in speaking of his eminent virtues; it is not from today that you know his rare merit.

"I have seen his Eminence the Cardinal, and M. Paulet, and I hope that in time his Eminence the Cardinal will reconsider the impressions he has been given against M. De La Salle. There is no question of Quietism. He is accused only of being too austere towards his Brothers, of practising too rigorous penances and of being too attached to them. There is a will to make him appear in the mind of the Cardinal as a man little capable of leading and especially as a man extraordinarily sticking to his opinion, who acts, and guides his Brothers, too, according to his own mind. His great crime, as far as I have been able to discover, comes from his not acting according to the mind of the parish priest of Saint Sulpice; he would like to get a hold on the government and interior guidance of his Brothers, and that is what M. De La Salle, so far,

has refused him. I don't really know how this matter will end, for you know well enough the kind of person the parish priest is. He is the main opponent of M. De La Salle. If he agreed with the parish priest, he would have no trouble at Archbishop's house.

"Two or three novices from M. De La Salle's community complained of the bad treatment they had received. M. of Saint Sulpice exaggerated their complaints, made further enquiries and drew up a memoir and presented it to his Eminence. Following on this memoir, his Eminence the Cardinal delegated M. Pirot, one of his grand vicars, to go and make a visitation of the Brothers and question them. In a second visit, he presented to them, on behalf of his Eminence, the Reverend Bricot, as their external, administrative superior." (But, as the letter further on and events showed, De La Salle was left only with the faculty of hearing confessions.) "At this word superior, most of the Brothers cried out that they recognised no other superiors but his Eminence and M. De La Salle. The grand vicar told them they must obey his Eminence, and, showing them the deed signed by his Eminence the cardinal, that if they refused to obey, they would be punished as rebels. The Brothers replied that they greatly honoured his Eminence, but they could not bring themselves to accept any other superior except M. De La Salle, that they preferred to die rather than accept another superior than him, that they were ready to go to prison and outside the kingdom, wherever it would please his Eminence to relegate them, and even to death.

"The grand vicar tried to pacify them and make them change their resolution by describing the good qualities both internal and external of this new superior. But the Brothers answered that M. De La Salle had not only all these qualities, but many others that were more excellent. And they began to list them and to say among other things that he was gentle and benign to others, but hard and severe towards himself; that he commanded and ordered nothing that he would not and did not do himself, and that none could be given them to equal him, either in the ability to govern or in all his excellent virtues and qualities.

"While the said Brothers were making these replies, M. De La Salle was there present, who begged them on his knees, with tears in his eyes and hands joined, to submit to the orders of his Eminence as indicated by the grand vicar. But they answered that they would obey in everything else, but that on this point they could not and would not. The grand vicar, seeing he could not win them over and that he could not get them to obey the Cardinal's orders, neither by his reasons nor by M. De La Salle's appeals, but that on the contrary he only irritated them the more and made them more and more determined, left with the reverend Bricot, the new so-called superior, all covered in shame and confusion, not only from the gathering of the said Brothers,

but also from their house. M. De La Salle saw them out with tears in his eyes on seeing the disobedience and stubbornness of his Brothers (if one can so term their zeal and affection for M. De La Salle, their firmness and constancy to maintain him in his authority as superior), asking him pardon and making endless excuses for them for their not having wanted to submit. For he would have wished to be relieved of superiority, and it would have given him an extraordinary pleasure and satisfaction.

Reactions to the Brothers' resistance

"The grand vicar had no sooner got back than he broadcast and praised the zeal and affection the Brothers had shown that they had for M. De La Salle, saying to his Eminence: 'If all persons in community, men and women, were as united and attached to their superiors as are the Brothers for M. De La Salle, you would not see so many disorders in Paris.' And then he gave an account of all that had taken place, and that the said Brothers did not want to hear any reason with regard to receiving the new superior. Which annoyed the Cardinal so much that there and then he sent to the Palace to see what remedy could be brought to this affair and punish the Brothers (a "handful of nondescripts as he called them"⁶ according to Maillefer), for the little submission they had given his orders." The Palace in question was the Palais de Justice, housing the *Parlement*.

De Noailles also realised that he had been manoeuvred into a wrong decision; and he was not pleased that Pirot should have given him one impression after his investigation only now to come back with the true one. (To put things into perspective, de Noailles, although he had signed the Gallican Articles of 1682, had been made, because of his excellent character and piety, Archbishop of Paris in 1695 and Cardinal in 1700. He had condemned several works on Quietism, which explains the surmise first made in La Grange's letter. The Cardinal was also known for his concern for the poor.) Meanwhile, La Chétardye never apologised for what he had done. On the contrary, seeing that things were not working out as he had hoped, he suggested to the Cardinal that De La Salle himself had instigated his Brothers' resistance. "A crafty trick" Blain calls it. It should have deflected de Noailles' animosity from the Brothers to their Superior, but it failed. But La Chétardye let the rumour get abroad, and there was some feeling against the Brothers and their Superior. "People even said at the time that the *Parlement* wanted to take cognisance of this affair in order to make the Brothers give every kind of amend to their first Superior."⁷

De La Salle found himself in a quandary: if a new superior were to be imposed, the Brothers would leave Paris and all that had been built up there would be ruined, with other unforeseen consequences for the permanence of

his society. He could not go along with the Brothers' loyalty to himself, for he accepted the Archbishop's right to act on reported abuses confirmed by his vicar general and to change the superior of a group that had no recognised status such as that he hoped to obtain from Rome. If, to make things easier for a new man, he went elsewhere, the Brothers would follow him. He prayed and, to soften the Cardinal's stand towards the Brothers, he took a heartfelt, brave and humiliating step. He went to see de Noailles, and in tears at his feet, he apologised for the Brothers' attitude, and begged him not to consider him as having inspired it: he accepted the new superior. The Cardinal, who was preparing to leave, walked out and left him there.

"A short time afterwards, the grand vicar came to tell M. De La Salle that if he did not make his Brothers obey his Eminence's orders, he had his Eminence's order to indicate his exile. M. De La Salle answered that he (the grand vicar) was well aware of the entreaties he had made them, and that he had got nowhere. As for his exile, he was quite ready to go wherever it would please his Eminence to send him; that what consoled him was that he would find God everywhere, and that he would be happy to suffer and that, for food and clothing, he could not have less than he had."

The Brothers decide to leave Paris. Manoeuvres to patch up the affair

"The grand vicar went back..without carrying out his threat, admiring his selflessness and indifference. The Brothers, having heard of this, decided to spend the whole day and night in prayer, without eating or drinking, imploring heaven's help in their anguish and affliction. The next day, they decided to leave the schools and give up their house in Paris. As they set about carrying out their resolve, the news was brought to the parish priest of Saint Sulpice, who immediately went to find M. De La Salle and begged him to dissuade them and do something to stop them." Blain, writing thirty years later, corroborates with an account that shows cleverness on the part of the Brothers of the Paris community. They knew La Chétardye had turned against De La Salle some time past, and that he was a strong and convincing personality who might sway them; but after their fast and having spent the night in prayer in turn, they decided to see him. As if they did not know his part in the matter, they explained that their minds were made up to leave Paris if they were given a new superior. Would La Chetardye use his credit with the Cardinal to have De La Salle left in place? "He was offended to the quick by this visit and talk, but he did not dare show it...They were asking him to destroy his own work...they were excluding him from a house where he wished to enter only to dominate."⁸ Blain, this time, is explicit.

Although he had kept la Chétardye's name out of the account so far, he

says at this point:⁹ “M. de la Chétardye had by then lost almost all esteem for a man he looked upon as a very devout person but attached to his own opinion and that he furthermore considered to be of a narrow and extravagant cast of mind, without nevertheless losing his liking and zeal for the Christian Schools. If it had only been a matter of the Superior of the Brothers, he would have abandoned him to the persecution and would have left him to extricate himself from the matter that had been raised against him; for, at bottom, he would not have been sorry to see someone else in his place who would show himself more human, less austere and less strict, more accommodating, more formed to worldly ways, more open to the advice that people wanted to give him on the good government of his house and the good of his work.”

Dom Maillefer's two accounts of this affair, in 1723 and 1740, help to confirm who was behind it all. When he first quotes from de Grange's letter, he replaces the original “not acting according to the mind of the parish priest of Saint Sulpice” by “the mind of the persons who are accusing him,” and earlier says “he (meaning La Chétardye) knew nothing about all this matter.” In 1740, he cuts out the latter statement, and in place of the other now writes: “according to the mind of M. xxx. He is the main opponent of M. De La Salle...”, where the original mentions the parish priest.¹⁰

“Meanwhile,” - to return to La Grange's letter - “his Eminence sent a message to the *Parlement* ordering them not to pass sentence of banishment, but to leave the matter as it was.” The *Parlement* promulgated royal decrees that concerned its region of jurisdiction. For Paris, orders would be passed to the Châtelet, which would in this case have summoned De La Salle. The Brothers, by giving way in their intention to leave but holding on to their identity and their vow to obey De La Salle, had won. But it was only a truce. Some way had to be found to save his Eminence's face and leave him the last word.

“...for a considerable length of time M. De La Salle and his Brothers were left alone. Nevertheless, during this interval, there were several exchanges and interviews with M. De La Salle and several of his senior Brothers at the grand vicar's and with several clerics sent on behalf of the grand vicar or the parish priest of Saint Sulpice to M. De La Salle's house, who spoke and discussed with each individual Brother.” The first need was to get the Brothers to accept the Cardinal's nominee. M. de la Chétardye chose, in order to win them over, a member of the Community of Saint Sulpice, M. Madot, later bishop of Chalons-sur-Saône. “He had an agile and insinuating mind, the talent of speaking well and the art of becoming the master of people's hearts. Four days after the visit the Brothers had paid the parish priest of Saint Sulpice, he came alone in a carriage at seven in the morning, the very day of the Conception of the most Blessed Virgin, to the novitiate at the Grand'Maison”

in order to sound out how people felt and make his plans accordingly. Instead of gathering the Brothers, he accosted them as he met them, and tried in every way to get them to submit, if he could, without conditions.

By eleven o'clock he had got nowhere, so now he tried his next step: "Nobody," he said, "is going to take M. De La Salle from you; it's a matter of form to accept the new man to cover you from being disobedient; he will have only the name of superior and visit you only once a month and leave your Rules untouched." Taken in by this clever move, one Brother replied: "Why didn't they say so when they brought that priest. And why have you yourself taken so long to say it?" Gradually he won over twelve of the Brothers, and, so that they would not have time to think back on it, he suggested they go with him immediately to the Sorbonne to apologise to M. Pirot and promise perfect obedience. In that way their house would be in peace. He had already got into his carriage with M. De La Salle and a Brother unable to make the journey on foot, when one of the others, realising they would be made to sign something without any positive promise being made to them, called on the others to think again, and make sure conditions were attached to the deed.

M. Madot had been brought to the point he had skilfully tried to keep out of sight: the conditions on which they would submit. To refuse now would give the whole game away, and he had to draw up a deed which satisfied them. With great relief, they went to the Sorbonne, ready to apologise as humbly as you like provided their conditions were maintained, namely, that their Rule would not be touched and M. De La Salle remained superior. Even here Madot was clever: he had a word with M. Pirot first, then made the Brothers kneel down in front of him. When the grand vicar asked Madot if these were conditions, the latter said no, they were favours they were asking. Most of the Brothers said nothing: the wording didn't matter to them provided the substance was there. But some Brothers saw that a favour is something granted by another and can be revoked. The Brothers went back jubilant; but Madot knew also he had got them to submit.¹¹

1703

The compromise that in fact leaves Bricot as official superior

La Grange's letter continues at this point: "Some eight or ten days later, the ninth of the month" (January, 1703), "the grand vicar and M. Bricot came back to M. De La Salle's, had the Brothers assembled, made them no end of promises and, among others, that nothing would be changed, that they would not take M. De La Salle away, but that they had to obey and receive the said priest as superior, that they would always have the consolation of having M.

De La Salle, that the said priest would go to see them only once a month. They received these conditions, or at least they did not resist as they did the first time; and if the proverb goes that silence is consent, they consented well and truly to this priest's election, since not one of the Brothers said a word." In fact, the grand vicar was talking mainly to the novices: most of the teaching community failed to show up. To conclude the procedure, he went through the farce of leading them to the chapel to intone the *Te Deum*. On the face of it, this procedure did "dissipate the storm which made so much noise."¹² It was still an unusual and unfortunate situation, with Bricot still being superior and M. De La Salle still being officially deposed.

The latter, in a wider context, was beginning to be referred to by some as 'superior general', a term he did not refuse since it implied there were communities beyond Paris and that this society was available for service anywhere. This title and position was not impugned, but only his superiority as far as it concerned the Grand'Maison and the schools in the one parish of Saint Sulpice, and which irked la Chétardye. The situation vis-a-vis the school and training-centre on St Hippolyte's is never mentioned. He had no rights and no pull there.

He does not seem, moreover, to have had the backing of the Community of the Priests of Saint Sulpice as such, even if he found some supporters among his clergy. M. Olier, the founder, had given as a basic principle not to go outside the Society's mission and not to get involved in that of others. M. Tronson was always circumspect in this matter. He might give advice, if asked, but he would not undertake or guide any negotiating himself, but left each one to his responsibility. In 1699, however, Leschassier himself took on the superiority of the Daughters of Christian Instruction, a community founded by Olier and Madeleine Leschassier, but only at the express order of the Cardinal. He made an official declaration that this was against their customs and that it was not to be made a precedent. Yet, when he became Superior of the Society of Saint Sulpice in 1700 and resigned as superior of the Sisters, he allowed a Sulpician - one of the parish clergy under la Chétardye - to replace him. La Chétardye broke further with the customs of Saint Sulpice, for he became superior of four communities of nuns in Paris without Leschassier stopping him. Either Leschassier was less firm on principle than Tronson, or it was awkward dealing with the elderly and formidable man in charge of the great parish. The latter found it easier than under Tronson to attempt "to govern personally, or through one of the priests of his parish, the community of masters teaching in his schools."¹³

The conclusion to the parish priest of Villiers-le-Bel's letter makes a fitting end to the sad story so far: "This is how things are at the moment. People do not think it can last. A first step has been made, with the intention of keeping

it so for some time; all that can be done is to profit by favourable occasions to try and disillusion his Eminence and to bring out all M. De La Salle's qualities. I have already worked on that and I shall keep it up on all the occasions Providence will bring my way. I owe him this justice, and, moreover, the part you are playing in it urges me to concentrate on it more eagerly." So far, we have reached January 1703. On 5th, De La Salle received from the censor the imprimatur for his manuscripts.

DE LA SALLE WRITES A MEMOIR IN DEFENCE OF TEACHING TO READ FRENCH BEFORE LATIN

The good effect of the Brothers' two schools in Chartres led Bishop Godet des Marets to make what seemed a good suggestion at the beginning of the school year 1702 (October), but which the Founder had to refuse. As anywhere else at the time, people in church were used to chatting, laughing, showing off the latest fashion and so on, without any regard to the place they were in. Whereas the boys brought to church by the Brothers had learnt to be quiet and respectful, and this gradually had an effect on the congregations of the two parish churches they frequented. The Bishop, concerned about the usual disrespect, was very much impressed by what the two parish priests told him and thought that if the seven Brothers were to go one each to a different parish for Mass on Sundays and holydays, their example would gradually make a difference. He had forgotten that this would leave the children in two parishes without most of their teachers. It is also somewhat odd for someone from outside it, to appear among a congregation ostensibly to be a model of how it should behave. Whoever's function it might be in those parishes, it wasn't the Brothers'. The change in the children had not come about mainly because the Brothers were with them in church, but from their being with them "from morning till evening" during the week, influencing them by a much more continual educational contact. That was the Brothers' work, and that was how it was effective. De La Salle, therefore, turned down Godet's offer, giving his reasons, as one friend to another; and the Bishop accepted his arguments.¹⁴

The Bishop took him up more strongly on another point this year. He objected to the Brothers teaching children to read French before they had learnt to read Latin.¹⁵ The traditional way seemed to him natural. As bishop, he saw Christian schools as a source of priestly vocations. A boy ought to know how to serve mass and help in his parish and in the cathedral. Chantry masses needed servers. The sooner he learnt Latin, the sooner he could be useful. Boys needed to get round the pronunciation of Latin early in order to learn to sing plain-chant before their voices broke. To teach how to read French first slowed things down.

The bishop saw education more in function of how it prepared boys to take part in liturgical services than how it developed the boy in himself and helped him to cope with working and urban life in a civil and Christian fashion. In their desperate need to be able to read bills, contracts, posters and the like, learning to read a language meaningless to them was of no help whatever for the poor. This was part of the entirely new concept of the parish school for the working poor that De La Salle had come to perceive. The Brothers' innovation did not prevent children aiming at the priesthood. On the contrary, their much higher level of learning to read and write, their much better religious instruction and above all, their deeper piety and improved behaviour, learnt from contact with the Brothers, would make them much better candidates. As for learning to pronounce Latin (that was all it was - not to learn it as a language), it was done all the more thoroughly once the children could read French. It is fortunate that Godet des Marets challenged his friend on the matter, for we have as a result an educational document from De La Salle, written with calm and objectivity and that took on the whole argument of those favouring the traditional practice.

In the memoir he addressed to the bishop, he justified the new approach in its own right, basing it on his own experience and that of his Brothers. "He quotes no precedent." writes Poutet. "He cites no authority. Even if others before him - and there were some - who taught their pupils to read beginning with French, it was not their example that led him in this direction." His and the Brothers' stand innovated a primary teaching for the masses that was never reversed, even if it took more than a century to become general.¹⁶ That is what this document represents. If it is no longer startling, it still marks an important advance in the history of popular education. The dispute shows that De La Salle and his Brothers, in defence of the poor, had to take on an ancient and powerfully-backed tradition of schooling.

The first in France to give preference to the mother tongue were the Huguenots, since they sang the Psalms in French and read the Bible in French. An ABC for children of theirs of 1544 was condemned by the Sorbonne because it was printed along with a Calvinist catechism. It was reprinted in 1620, along with other purely French syllabaries. On principle and as a reaction, bishops, parish priests and Precentors insisted on children learning as soon as possible the Pater, Ave and Credo, the Latin Psalter and Latin liturgical hymns. By insisting on Latin first, one was defending the 'church's language.' However, there are distinctions to make.¹⁷ For the rich, whether nobles or bourgeois, whichever language they began with, they would be familiar after years at college with Latin as a language. It did not matter, with this kind of clientele, if the Jesuits gave priority to learning to read Latin, the Oratorians and Port-Royal to French. Daughters of the well-to-do learnt Latin and Greek

with enclosed nuns. Since their boarders took part in Vespers, reading Latin was taught first. Yet even the new unenclosed congregations devoted to teaching the poor - Barré's, Roland's and Démi's Sisters, for example, and the others we have seen - kept to the old priority. Huguenot schools were closed by royal decree in 1680, and clandestine ones disappeared after 1685, so that only the 'Catholic' preference remained. *L'Ecole Paroissiale*, which was widely used, kept, we noted, this preference. For the Paris schools, Claude Joly insisted on beginning with Latin syllables¹⁸. Individual masters, teaching on their own to gain a livelihood and lacking any training that would open their mind to innovation, held to the traditional.

But there was a movement since the beginning of the century among some Catholic teachers in the other direction. Two works on French spelling and pronunciation appeared in 1609. Around 1640, the Oratory and Port-Royal took it as more reasonable to begin with French, but they are dealing with a very small number of young children, aged six to seven, from the rich classes, and the Port-Royal schools disappeared by 1660. Two works, in 1653 and 1676, have a bilingual approach, no longer placing Latin first. But these works aim at knowing how to speak or write the two languages, and are not conceived as texts for learning to read such as would be needed in the little schools. Others, dealing only with French, are more treatises than school handbooks. Nevertheless, the idea was gaining ground among the educated that French should be respected in its own right.¹⁹

The dispute as to which syllabary to use first at popular level - Latin or French - was won by De La Salle

The acute phase of the dispute erupted at popular school level. With the disappearance of the Jansenist schools and Huguenot schools, there was a little more possibility of looking at the question with less bias. Yet the Master Writers and masters of the little schools held on to tradition. As they made a livelihood from their teaching, they used every method to get more pupils. They encroached on the rights of the University by extending their teaching beyond the elementary level, and sued charity schoolmasters when they were too successful. We know how the masters of the little schools employed legal force in 1690 and 1699 against the Brothers' schools. But that dispute, although it arose from a clinging to tradition, was about gratuity, about who could attend charity schools free of charge, and it was not yet over. Here we are concerned with a division of opinion about the priority of Latin or French in the schools.

It was just now that it turned into a major confrontation. Two documents give us the opposing arguments. One was by what we might call an educationalist for the old clerical preference, Scipio Roux, "priest, doctor in Law

and schoolmaster in Paris.” He brought out a book entitled: *A new method for teaching children to learn perfectly Latin and French* (1694). Claude Joly on 31 July of the same year, warmly recommended it: “I exhort messieurs and mesdames schoolteachers under my jurisdiction, and all others, to use it in their schools.” It has the general approbation “of all the Masters in charge and former masters of the society of the Schoolmasters of Paris.” (Quoted in Roux’s syllabary.) “New” in his title merely covered up out-of-date methods. He does say the little schools should be divided into distinct classes, as in the colleges, but then he tries to demolish the arguments of “some masters who teach how to read French before Latin.” In fact, his text begins: “These gentlemen will gladly accept my answering here the two reasons they brought to myself.” He means the Brothers. Evidently they had been challenged on this since their arrival in Paris and before 1694, and their arguments had been studied. Roux is writing as if he were answering the Founder’s arguments.

He writes that admittedly it is easier to learn one’s natural tongue than a foreign one; but it is not true that it is easier to read French than Latin, - his main argument being that Latin is phonetic while French very often is not, the learning steps of the day otherwise being the same. Secondly, you may assume that teaching to read French is better than teaching to read Latin, but in fact you will not find any experience to prove that a child learns French sooner than Latin. If the two methods are equally good and equally well taught, it is certain that you will learn to read Latin sooner than French. He does admit De La Salle’s argument when he writes that “Perhaps you never see a child leave school, however long he stayed there, who can read perfectly Latin” - adding “and French,” which De La Salle did not say. Yet it did not make Roux change attitude.

De La Salle pinpoints the arguments

We do not have the Founder’s arguments in writing until the bishop of Chartres gave rise to it. For the second document, the document for the defence was this one written by John Baptist De La Salle in response to the bishop’s views early in the school year of 1702. We have the text “in substance” in Blain. There must have been an introduction addressed to bishop Godet des Marets he has omitted. He argues:

1. Reading French is of a much greater and more universal use than Latin.

This opening shot scores by its self-evidence.

2. The French language being the natural one, is incomparably easier to

learn than Latin by children who hear the one spoken and not the other.

3. Consequently, it needs far less time to learn to read French than Latin.

This is the point that masters like Roux, looking only at method, completely missed. What they have not considered is the child, his everyday experience and his future. Child psychology might not be far advanced at the time, but the Brothers realised that the language the children heard and spoke was easier to learn than a dead language: there is a question of familiarity and interest.

4. Reading French prepares the way for reading Latin, whereas Latin does not help for French, as experience teaches us. The reason is that to read Latin, you only have to pronounce everything, which is easy for those who can spell and read well in French; whereas you have to take a lot of time to learn to read French (that is, because it is not so phonetic) after having given a great deal of time reading Latin.

5. Why does it take a long time to learn Latin? People say the words are barbaric for those who do not understand them, that they find it hard to remember syllables and spell words of which they do not grasp the meaning.”

Here again, it is a matter of putting oneself in the place of the child, and realising they have no interest in learning what is meaningless.

7. (Blain gives no 6, either because he has omitted it or has made a slip) Of what use can Latin be to people who will never use it in their lives?

The child as he really has to live is again the consideration here, while Roux looks only at methods.

What use indeed can the young people of either sex who attend Christian and free schools make of the Latin language?

Here he is widening the front. He is not merely defending his own schools or a method, but arguing that the change should be introduced into all schools for the masses.

However that point and what follows could be a gloss by Blain:

Nuns who say the divine office in Latin do need to be able to read it well; but out of a hundred girls attending a charity school, is there hardly one who can become a choir sister in a convent? Similarly, out of a hundred boys in the Brothers' schools, how many are there who go on to study Latin? And even if there were a few, should they be favoured at the expense of the others?

“Brothers’ schools” is not a term used by De La Salle; and so far his arguments have been purely educational; but the argument would fit when he has one person in mind, Godet des Marets.

Nevertheless, point no. 8 would come well straight after the first sentence of point 7:

8. Experience teaches that the boys and girls who attend Christian schools do not continue coming for long and do not attend long enough to learn how to read Latin and French well. As soon as they are old enough to work they are taken away; or they can no longer come because of the need to earn their living. And so, if you begin by teaching them to read Latin, here are the disadvantages: they leave before having learnt to read in French or to read it well. When they leave, they can read Latin only very imperfectly and they forget in a short time what they knew; and the result is that they can never read either in Latin or French. Finally, the most harmful disadvantage is that they practically never know Christian teaching.

9. For, when you begin by French in teaching the young to read, they can at least read it well when they leave school; being able to read well, they can instruct themselves about Christian doctrine, they can learn it in printed catechisms, and they can sanctify Sundays and holydays by reading good books and by prayers well said in French. Whereas if on leaving the Christian school they can read Latin only and very imperfectly at that, they remain all their lives in ignorance of Christian duties.

This argument would carry weight with a bishop aware as Godet des Marets was about religious ignorance and keen to bring remedies. That remark about prayers “well said in French” instead of Latin implies that he saw good prayer formulas in the vernacular as helpful to piety. He composed many for Mass, Communion and Confession especially. He noted in the *Conduct of Schools* that boys chosen to recite class prayers gained a liking for saying them carefully on their own.

His final argument is one a good Latinist as presumably the bishop was, would respond to:

10. Finally, experience shows that almost all the boys and girls who do not know Latin, who have neither letters nor the use of the Latin tongue, especially commoners and with all the more reason the poor who attend Christian schools, are never able to read Latin well, and make a sorry show when they read it to those who understand this language. It is therefore quite useless to spend a lot of time teaching people to read well a language they will never use.

Godet des Marets gave way to such commonsense arguments. There was long resistance elsewhere. Blain, indeed, writing thirty years later, has to conclude: "It has been thought necessary to quote these reasons so as to silence many who find fault with teaching to read French in non-paying schools before Latin, *against the common practice*."²⁰

At the practical level, Roux added to his theory a book of syllables: for three years the pupils learn letters, syllables and words of increasing difficulty in Latin for the first three years, ending with words like *perhonorificentissimorum*! Only then do they begin with a French text written in "the shortest words of all." De La Salle brought out his French syllabary privately, as we have seen, in 1698. By the end of their first year, the Brothers' pupils were beginning to read words and meaningful phrases in French. In 1703, with Claude Joly dead, the Founder had his book of syllables published with royal permission on the open market. If *L'Ecole Paroissiale* continued to be used, Roux's work was not reprinted, and the book his publishers put out in 1710 advised teachers to teach French first. Not that the new approach took on rapidly, especially in country areas, but in towns where the Brothers opened schools the method was in use before 1720. The old method could still be found in the middle of the nineteenth century. The ones who really started the ball rolling in France were De La Salle and his Brothers. Whereas the traditional book of syllables aimed at teaching the prayers of the Church in Latin, his was concerned with an immediate social good: to teach the mother tongue, without omitting teaching to read the Psalms and hymns that for a long time to come would still be said in Latin in Catholic churches.²¹

Nine of De La Salle's works are published

The year 1703 saw developments favourable to the work of the Brothers. But it also brought much pain and sorrow: further opposition, the departure of several Brothers and difficulties for the Roman project.

Authorisation to print nine texts of his was given on 23 January. Royal approval was registered in Paris on 6 February. Most of these works were new catechism texts, but three were reprints of school prayers and of instructions and prayers for Mass and Confession already published. The *Methodical Instruction on how to go to Confession*, indeed, was in a new and extended version. In other words, De La Salle improved on his works. The final manuscript, *Instructions and Prayers for Confession and Communion*, was submitted on 14 January and approved on 16th. De La Salle was, at the time, no longer officially superior of the Brothers in Paris, yet he continued working for his Society as a whole. This list of nine books authorised for publication appears in a manuscript now in the Bibliothèque Nationale, Paris, giving a compilation of all books presented for approval between 1696 and

1704.²² It was a no mean feat to have produced so many works for his Brothers. It must have given him much satisfaction.

A Joseph Truffet enters the novitiate, 10 February

On 10 February a mature man, Joseph Truffet, entered the novitiate under interesting circumstances.²³ He was a day from his twenty-fifth birthday, having been born, one of twins, in a small town called Saint in the diocese of Cambrai on 11 February 1678. He was destined to succeed De La Salle as the first Superior General of the Brothers. For the moment, he was, by his maturity and sincerity and generosity, to become a consolation to him in these difficult days for his Society. The Truffets were a poor family. The father earned his living as a Christian schoolmaster, a profession that would not bring in much in a small town. After teaching his son Joseph to read and write, seeing he was gifted, he sent him to the Jesuit College in Douai, intending him to be a priest, which was also his own desire. He received the tonsure and continued his studies up to philosophy. The Jesuits advised him to go on to theology, which he did, although he was drawn more and more to leaving the world and abandoning the idea of being a secular priest. He slowed down in his studies, and the Jesuits, judging his intentions, warned his parents. The latter appealed to his affection, to their need of him in their old age. His father accused him of ingratitude and heartlessness. Joseph was naturally shaken. He resorted to prayer, and more and more he felt certain he was being called to the religious life.

He went to the Cistercian monastery at **La Trappe**, still under abbot de Rancé. The abbot, seeing he was a man of a somewhat delicate constitution, told him that life in his monastery was not for him, and that he was called to something else. Truffet went next to a priory of Canons Regular. The prior was trying to bring the community back to its primitive fervour, and finding in the new arrival a kindred spirit, they both tried by example to have a reforming effect. The older religious, nonetheless, were not to be moved from their easy life, and got the novitiate closed. The prior suggested that Joseph should go to another priory in need of reform, but bound to less strict observance, and therefore perhaps more willing to follow his example. He wanted, however, to live in a fervent community, not try to revive a lax one, something he felt beyond him. He expressed this view to the prior, and once more he went back into civil life, uncertain what to do next.

It was then that he heard about this new group of men dedicated to the education of neglected urban children and of the Gospel life they were living, their poverty and self-denial. He himself related that an interior voice told him: "This is where God is calling you," and he set out for Paris. On the way he felt a great interior desolation, strong enough to make him want to go back.

The Brothers' life now seemed impossibly severe. "This way of life," he said later, "which at first had seemed so agreeable, suddenly seemed unbearable." Their patched robes, their food, their strict way of life... how would he cope, with his delicate constitution? Then he turned to God and took a grip of himself. The temptation went away when he was almost at the gates of Paris.

He came to the Grand'Maison and was received with the Founder's usual great kindness. At the beginning of his novitiate, he experienced great consolation, but then the temptation returned. Prayer and openness of soul with the Founder saw him through this trial, and it was in this period of calm that he received the poor habit of the Brothers with great joy, and the name Bartholomew. The temptations returned. The Founder consoled and counselled him, and prayed for him, and realising that he was too intense, he sent him to teach at Chartres, presumably in October, even before he had completed a year in the novitiate.

De La Salle is quietly reinstated as Superior in Paris

When Joseph Truffet entered the novitiate, the Founder was still deposed as Superior of the Paris Brothers. Meanwhile, people like the parish priest of Villiers-le-Bel were working to put the Cardinal right. At the same time, M. Bricot had no desire to be in the false position he was in and turned up only once in the Brothers' community and that after three months. He made no act of jurisdiction. "As his charge left him nothing to do, his Eminence saw to it that he gave him work elsewhere."²⁴ Blain does not say De La Salle was reinstated, but since the Cardinal sent no one else, one can draw that conclusion. This would be about April, 1703.

We are told explicitly elsewhere²⁵ that the Founder, left in the awkward position of having the faculty of confessing not only his Brothers but anyone in the diocese, and yet having someone else as superior of his Brothers, handed back this faculty through a third person who could tell his Eminence that he did so willingly. "But the cardinal rejected this proposal and let it be known that his intention was that he should continue to govern his community as he had done so far." His Eminence, listening to those who spoke in favour of De La Salle, must have accepted that he had been led into a wrong decision. Yet he made no public reinstatement comparable to the way he had been deposed; he preferred to let things be. The Founder was therefore once more undisputed superior, after a tremendous test of his virtue. Yet further wearying trials were to come. La Chétardye had failed, and could no longer try to use the Cardinal, but he did not give up.

At this point it may be noted that with some texts already published and now reprinted or redrafted, and new texts appearing in print in the coming

month, the Founder's efforts to put his Society on a sounder basis that began with the heroic vow of 1691, had reached a first completion.

Negotiations early in 1703 in Calais for a school for sons of sailors²⁶

In the town of Calais, the chaplain to the sailors' quarter named Monsieur Le Prince was so impressed by the work of the three Brothers that he wanted to obtain other Brothers to run a school for the children of sailors. He spoke of the matter to M. de Thosse, Chairman of the town council, who liked the idea and gave it his full support. He lost no time in bringing up the matter at a meeting of the Council. He found it very happy with the project. Through the Secretary of State, Pontchartrain, it petitioned Louis XIV for help towards the cost of the school. As Calais was in the front line during the War of the Spanish Succession which was still on and in which England was allied against France, he gave the Corporation an area known as the Court-Gain, formerly occupied by a detachment of troops defending the town. He also made an annual grant from the Treasury of 150 livres for a master, and allowed a one-off tax to be levied on the inhabitants to cover the building costs of the school and of accommodation for the Brothers. For this, Pontchartrain wrote to Bignon, who immediately saw it was carried out. Pontchartrain also had the kindness to write to the dean on May 24th, 1703: "I received yours of 24 April.²⁷ I have explained to M. Bignon, *Intendant* of Picardy and Artois, his Majesty's intentions concerning the Brothers of the Christian Schools for the instruction of sons of sailors at Court-Gain. You have only to address yourself to him, and he will see to their subsistence." As the Corporation asked De La Salle for two teaching Brothers and a serving Brother, another master's salary had to be found and it petitioned Louis again, asking that half of what came in from buccaneer raids on enemy shipping should be used for this purpose. He agreed.

The school did not open till 1705. "Court-Gain", Blain tells us, "is a separate district of Calais over by the harbour, inhabited by sailors - people, as everybody knows, who usually in their youth have had neither education nor instruction; people who basically have religion, but a religion as coarse as they are themselves. Their children, used to the sea from a very early age, become men like their parents, men you would take as only half men, or animals that can speak, if you did not know they have an immortal soul." He goes on in this vein: "...as dumb about their religion as the fish they catch...Rarely do they have (religious) practices that are pure and exempt from superstition..."²⁸ Certainly the children the Brothers were meant for.

The Founder discourages corporal mortification among the Brothers

It was about this period that the Founder discouraged the Brothers from using corporal mortification. "He listened to the counsel of the wise, who advised him to do away with public disciplines, to suspend for a time the use of private ones, and generally to moderate all the other forms of mortification that give outsiders something to make a story of."²⁹ This mention of De La Salle allowing the public giving of the discipline is new. The phrasing may be an inclusive reference to what the Director of novices had done. The manuscript Rule of 1705 says: "There will be no corporal mortification of Rule in this Institute" - unlike some contemporary congregations. This may or may not have been added to the text of 1694, but it simply made explicit its having no part in the Rule.

Some elements of the Berullian spirituality we have seen favoured a negative attitude to the body. This was not new: the desert monks practised excessive austerities. There was nothing of the Gospel in seeing how far you could go in denying the body, and even competing in austerities. It was St Benedict who made obedience and humility, that is, interior virtues, the main pillar of monasticism. Yet public giving of the discipline was common in monastic establishments in the Middle Ages. The thirteenth-century statutes of the Collège des Bons-Enfants in Rheims prescribed the use of the discipline every evening! E. Allison Peers, writing of St John of the Cross, points out that "Such forms of penance, in an age in which life of all kinds was harder than it is today, were taken largely as a matter of course". But this saint makes little mention of them in his writings, and stresses mortification of desire. He speaks of those who "are most imperfect and devoid of reason; for they set bodily penance before subjection and obedience, which is penance of the reason and discretion, and therefore a sacrifice more acceptable and pleasing to God than any beside."³⁰

Likewise, interior steps to spiritual growth were what De La Salle stressed most. But he did practise corporal mortification on himself in no small way, perhaps in a determination to master his previous easier bourgeois habits. It is rash to try and delve into a personality of three centuries back, especially when he has left nothing of his private life to go on; but if he was by nature a man of high aspirations, the shadow side of that may have been strong self-criticism, which in those days led to taking it out on the body.

In a letter of unknown date, he writes to a Brother: "The mortifications that you are made to practise are just right to make you advance in virtue, my very dear Brother. For the love of God, then, try to become attached to them the more so that they concern only the mind and do no harm to the body...." However, to make up for certain faults he has mentioned, he tells him to take "twice twenty strokes of the discipline, and from now to the Assumption every time you meet Brother... you will kiss his feet and beg his pardon pro-

vided it is not in a public exercise.”³¹ When he suppressed forms of corporal mortification, there were Brothers who regretted this as opening the way to relaxation, but he simply said: “God has let us know that they should not now be continued.”³²

De La Chétardye appoints a trouble-maker to supervise his schools

Meanwhile La Chétardye continued creating difficulties. He could name one of his curates to deputise for him as director general of the schools, whether those run by Barré’s Sisters, by De La Salle’s Brothers or others. We do not know the name of the one he now appointed, but if we go by Blain his mission with regard to the Brothers was to get on easy terms with them and gradually turn them against the Founder.³³ He sometimes went to the novitiate to see what kind of training they were getting. With them and the other Brothers he referred to their poverty, their poor, patched habits. He made a reckoning of the money paid to their Superior by the parish for each teaching Brother, and wondered what was happening to it all. He hinted that De La Salle had no real concern for his men and could have spent more money on them. He remarked on the fact that they drank only water and suggested that under a different superior they could have plenty of wine instead. One Brother, tired of hearing him and shocked by the offer, said : “Monsieur, water is good, and it gives you a clear complexion.” From that time on, he was less direct. It would be a remark in passing, a joke to one, a pun to another...The Brothers got to know him, and disappeared when they saw him coming, or gave him short answers. But in the end, some of the weaker ones were taken in and judged he was right. “The unsettling of several of the main disciples of the holy priest was the fruit of death produced by the frequent visits of the cleric appointed to spy on all that was done in the Grand’Maison...”

Six Brothers leave

The following departures of Brothers, recorded in Blain, mostly lack dates and names.³⁴ Perhaps the Brothers who wrote out the accounts preferred to leave it that way. A Brother “whom M. De La Salle looked upon as his right arm” grew tired of the life and persuaded another to leave. They went off to a town where arrangements had been made for a new school and two Brothers were awaited. It could have been Troyes or Calais. They went along in their robes and were made very welcome. Unfortunately for them, as soon as the real situation was known, the grand-vicars of the diocese ordered the parish priest to expel the two. They had the nerve to go back to their community, but the Brothers refused to have them, and begged De La Salle not to give in to them.

The next one to go was Michael, the novice-master. He got tired of his job and asked to go to a certain school. The Founder refused, whereupon he and another fairly senior Brother climbed over the community wall at night and headed for the Cistercian monastery of La Trappe. The abbot was Rancé's successor and knew De La Salle very well. He refused to admit them without knowing how and why they had left their community. He wrote to De La Salle to know if they had come by his orders. The latter was in difficulty because he had no one to replace the two Brothers. He thanked the abbot for the information and asked him to send them back and not to accept any others in future without his consent. This was done, and he took the two Brothers back. Michael died three years later in Chartres of a painfully violent illness. But he did die in his vocation. The other man left the Institute a short time afterwards. We do not have to show the negative and revengeful spirit Blain shows in his judgment on these two.

Finally, we have the story of the two Brothers who had been put in charge of the Sunday "Christian Academy" in 1698.³⁵ It had been going very well for five or six years, a new advance in popular education and one of the great successes of the parish. La Chétardye and De La Salle were both let down by the two Brothers involved. There is nothing more disappointing when those default who are trusted to be competent and faithful. He had chosen the two men because they had aptitudes for this kind of teaching, and he had seen to it that they had received the necessary training. But their position and success went to their heads, and both left, one a few months after the other. One of them, who left "to earn money" failed in his hopes, spent his time looking for jobs and died in wretched poverty in 1709 in the parish of St Roch. This walk-out put their Superior on the spot, because it meant having to close the school, and it would take time to get two more Brothers trained. La Chétardye had the right to be annoyed.

The Founder sought out another Brother who could be trained and take on the work, but he had been scared off by the desertions. Teaching these more advanced skills was dangerous, he said; he preferred to stick to ordinary classroom teaching. He shared these ideas with the other Brothers, and they concurred. They drew up together a short paper on the matter, asking the Founder to read it, "having no doubt that he would back up their view with his approval, if he had the goodness to read it."³⁶

It is an example of good people being unable to move forward out of their present position, not able to keep up with their Founder. It is also possible that this new departure, suggested from outside, had not been given the time and discernment it required, even by De La Salle, if the Brothers as a whole were to see it as a true development of their current work. He did not lay down the law with those who signed the memoir, even though their attitude left him, as

Superior, in a bad position. He realised the Brothers had scared themselves off the project, and all he could do was to go to the parish priest and tell him of his problem. It is remarkable how the Brothers felt able to present that memoir to their Superior. It is proof that he let them express their opinion in assemblies and elsewhere.

La Chétardye was, understandably, in no humour to be pleasant. But instead of realising that De La Salle must have been at least as disappointed and let down as much as himself, he blamed him for the departure of the two Brothers, for the attitude of the others and for the closing of the school. As the two responsible for the failure were no longer there, it was convenient for his humour to take it out on the one who was. De La Salle remained calm, but there was little he could do. He hoped to help la Chétardye to see things better by going back to him again after a few days and showing him the Brothers' memoir and the difficult situation it put him in. All he got was an accusation that he had ordered this memoir to be written or had even drawn it up himself. He denied it, and La Chétardye, in a moment of impatience, called him a liar." It is with that lie, Monsieur," De La Salle replied calmly, "that I am now going to celebrate mass."

The parish priest showed his annoyance by reducing what he paid the Brothers. This would imply that those two Brothers were giving their services free and were not extra members of the community. Otherwise, this would simply be the case of no longer paying for the two who had gone off. However, the Founder was able to persuade one Brother to sacrifice his personal views and learn the required skills. He did so in a short time. The Academy reopened and became as flourishing as before. Another Brother must have joined him, for "more than two hundred students filled it, as usual. What is remarkable is that they were not bored being with the Brothers with whom they passed almost the entire afternoon, divided up between exercises of piety, and periods of practice in reading, writing, arithmetic and those other subjects."³⁷ Many changed their lives from idleness and drinking in the cheap taverns; some made a general confession and started afresh a more Christian life. M. de la Chétardye paid out the full allowance to the community once more, and the teaching of draughtsmanship that he had asked to be taken up in the ordinary schools flourished again.

Losing six Brothers was a real trial for De La Salle, especially as few new recruits were offering themselves. Unfortunately, another one left and went to stay with one of the bourgeois in Paris and put aside his robe. After the departure of the others, he was desperately needed, being a good writer and teacher. The Founder actually went to see him and went down on his knees before him. He returned, but ten years later, in Rouen, he was ordered out of the house by the *official* of the diocese.³⁸ These departures were heart-

breaking for De La Salle, as he revealed on a later occasion, (see p. 703), with regard to a certain Brother Isidore of Mende.

Brother Gabriel Drolin's difficulties in Rome

Amid these difficulties, another great disappointment befell De La Salle in the summer of this year. Brother Gabriel Drolin's companion was in Avignon on his way back to Paris.³⁹ Maillefer simply says: "One of the two came back to find M. De La Salle, but the other did not give up"⁴⁰. An explanation may be that there was an ongoing dispute between the little masters of Rome and the Clerks Regular of the Pious Schools, who were taking children in free. (See further, p. 511) Setting up to teach the poor was therefore out of the question. This meant that neither Brother would have anything to live on beyond what the Founder might be able to send them. One returned, but even so Gabriel lived for several years in great poverty until he obtained a papal school. He must have written before this to the Founder to let him know as soon as possible how things were, but the earliest letter we have of De La Salle to Drolin is dated 13 August 1704.

Although we shall hear of letters between them not arriving, the postal service was quite a good one.⁴¹ The administration of the French post was sold to businessmen for a fixed period. From 1691 to 1738 it was in the hands of two bankers and was well run within the country and even outside, allowing for circumstances beyond their control. Mail for Rome, for instance, was allowed to pass through the states of Piedmont (via Turin), Parma and Modena, subject to inspection and high charges. You could avoid this by entrusting your letter to someone travelling to Rome, a method De La Salle used several times, with the risk of search and confiscation. Another way was to use the papal mail service from Avignon. A courier on foot took the mail each week from there as far as Genoa, where he exchanged mail with the courier from Rome. It seems that only Drolin used the Rome courier, which costs 4 sols. De La Salle's letters, sent first to the Brothers in Avignon, were forwarded contrary to his wishes through the French mail office, which charged 20 sols. As the recipient paid, this was a heavy burden on Drolin. The Founder avoided this several times by paying in advance, in which case the postmaster wrote "franc" on the cover of a letter before forwarding it. A letter handed in Paris left the same evening and reached Rome via Lyons a fortnight later; it took one day less in the opposite direction. Letters through Avignon took twice as long owing to various hold-ups, so that the Founder could be answering one letter while the preceding one was still on the way.

This year 1703 had been a discouraging time in Rome. The month the two Brothers arrived, we may recall, there had been those great floods that had

raised the level of the Tiber by 30 feet, so that it had inundated the low-lying areas on either side of it. Then on January 14th an earthquake shook the whole of central Italy, ruining several towns. In Rome, a terrible quaking during the night sent people out in panic into the torrential rains. The two Brothers would be among them. On February 2nd another earthquake brought down the two great inner arches of the Colosseum.⁴²

Then the two Brothers lost their benefactor, Vicar-General Gualtieri. He was named bishop of Vaison in the Comtat-Venaissin in February, was consecrated in Rome on 4 March and took possession of his see by proxy on 8 June.⁴³ Sometime after this he left for his new diocese. But he was kind enough to recommend Brother Gabriel to Father Divers, the Procurator General of the Priests of the Missions or Vincentians. Gabriel often visited their house near the Montecitorio palace, now the seat of the Italian Parliament, and often said Mass there. The street alongside the palace is still called Via delle Missioni, but the Vincentian house and its chapel, that were at no. 24, no longer exist. Drolin's companion also left at this time. Yet he was without money and it was dangerous for a stranger to travel alone. How could it happen that he arrived in Avignon, which would not be on his route, and that there "M. de Château-Blanc and several other persons of piety, delighted to see him, delayed him for some time"?⁴⁴

The only reasonable answer is that Gualtieri took him with him along with his staff and servants, to Avignon,⁴⁵ and that the papal Treasurer, being told he was one of Monsieur De La Salle's Brothers, interviewed him and asked him all about the Brothers and their mode of life. That De La Salle had sent Brothers to Rome must have decided him still more, and he sent a pressing invitation to him through the one who was returning, whom he probably sent on to Paris at his expense. This must have been in July or August, for Blain adds: "The will of God then seemed so indicated to the holy man that he did not dare delay further to give in to the entreaties made him", and this, in spite of having lost several Brothers recently.

Two Brothers in Avignon. Two Brothers at Troyes

"He sent to Avignon", Blain continues, "two of his disciples who were received there with singular marks of esteem and affection. The pious Treasurer of His Holiness who had desired and asked for the Brothers with so much keenness, put them up in a house that was at his disposition, while waiting for the one he had bought for them to be in a fit state to receive them."⁴⁶ The archbishop at the time was Laurent Fieschi, who had arrived to take over the see on 30 May 1691. He had been named Nuncio Extraordinary to France on 21 November 1701 and as such resided in Paris.⁴⁷ The Founder may have presented the two Brothers to him before sending them to

Avignon, as he did with three he sent two years later. Château-Blanc's wife, who had been behind the whole project, left by her will of 1 August 1704 a capital of 6000 livres, to provide an annual interest of 240 livres for the two Brothers. She died on 20 September the same year.⁴⁸

Avignon was a papal state, "the other Rome", independent of the older papal possession across the river, the Comtat-Venaissin.⁴⁹ The Popes ruled from Avignon from 1309 to 1376 and bought it from Joanna, Countess of Provence in 1348. When the Popes returned to Rome it was administered by papal legates and from 1693 by a Roman Congregation through a vice-legate. Papal rule was light, but there was also attachment to the French crown. The city had much freedom of action as a municipality through a town council dominated by an oligarchy. When King and Pope were in agreement Avignon prospered, but twice, in 1663-4 and in 1688-9, Louis occupied it as a pawn in his relations with Rome. At the time the Brothers arrived, municipal autonomy was somewhat restricted by the Popes. Pontifical prestige and Roman cultural influence were very great, but French influence was rising. Avignon had a population of about 24,000.

Where were the poor in Avignon for whom charity schools might be needed? In 1689 30% of the working population was engaged in the textile industry, and that meant pittance wages. There would be people working round the port. Cotton cloth was being imported from India, but as the demand could not be met, there was profit to be made from smuggling from England and Holland. Tobacco plantations in the area began after 1620. Soldiers and ordinary people began to take to tobacco-smoking. When Colbert made the sale and distribution of tobacco a monopoly farmed out to businessmen, smuggling it in or around the country was a profitable occupation, accounting for half the amount used nationally.

In Troyes also there was, for the new school year, a regular community of two Brothers.⁵⁰ On 29 June 1703 the bishop of Troyes bought out the 1000 livres invested with the Treasurer of the city of Paris and with it made up a capital that he invested so as to provide an annual interest of 200 livres for the upkeep of two Brothers. This had evidently been previously agreed between De La Salle and the bishop. Finally, on 13 August François Lebey (superior of the junior seminary, with which the one-class school was linked) agreed with De La Salle "superior of the Brothers of the Christian Schools residing Rue de Vaugirard" on the following terms which the bishop ratified on 24th: 1. De La Salle or one of the Brothers in Troyes would draw an annual sum of 256 livres; 2. The one Brother there was not enough (this recognised a community of two). 3. De La Salle and his successors bound themselves to keep two Brothers in Troyes to teach, and therefore to send a second immediately. 4. The Brothers would get their pupils to say the prayers the benefactors had

stipulated to be led by the parish-priest in church. 5. The parish-priest of St Nizier (Lebey) offered his presbytery and its garden to accommodate the Brothers and their two classes until better premises promised by the bishop should be ready (the school was still in the presbytery in 1710!). Lebey lived in the junior seminary.

This arrangement shows the negotiating ability of De La Salle to safeguard his community and provide for its upkeep beyond cavil. It also shows how under his influence and the good impression of the first Brother, he had got those concerned to accept willingly that a small clerical school intended originally only to prepare a few poor children for the seminary, had become an independent institution catering for the needs of the children of the poor as the Brothers saw them. No restrictions were put on the new Lasallian methods being applied: the teaching of plain-chant disappeared, and reading in French was taught before reading in Latin and the whole of the *Conduct of Schools* would be applied. The bishop's signature to the founding contract which explicitly gave the running of the school to "two Brothers of the Christian Schools in perpetuity" was also a tacit recognition of the society and of De La Salle as its superior-general.

TROUBLE IN LANGUEDOC

While the two Brothers in Avignon were able to start work in peace and with so much support, the authorities would be taking keen note of what was going on in neighbouring **Languedoc**,⁵¹ where royal troops were burning down Calvinist villages. Languedoc comprised a northern hilly area, the **Cévennes**, where all the Brothers' schools would be, and an area in great part facing the Mediterranean, from Nîmes to Narbonne and then stretching as far west as Toulouse. Brothers would be sent to the Cévennes area from 1707, and would find great difficulties and tension. It may help to give in advance some ideas of the situation in the province.

A brief history of the region

In 12th century trade flowed from the Far East and the Levant northwards as far as England and the Baltic, and a babble of tongues was heard in its towns. A literary language took shape: the *langue d'oc*, very different from the *langue d'oïl* north of the Massif Central. The province was annexed by the French king in 1271 and flourished under a single rule. A States-General for Languedoc evolved in 14th-15th centuries, composed of nobles and bishops and the *consuls* or oligarchic rulers from the main towns. Mende, in the Cévennes, was Languedoc's most northerly woollen town. At Uzès a wretched and despised wage-earning population worked for the very wealthy woollen merchants who traded in serges with Spain, France and Italy.

Lutheranism from around 1530 spread via the Rhône valley, and by 1560 places like Uzès, Alès, Nîmes, had a greater number of Protestants than most places in France. In the Cévennes was the greatest concentration of rural Protestantism. About 1560 the Protestants came out openly against the Catholics, destroying and profaning churches. The Wars of religion affected Languedoc till 1598, after which the Protestants were mainly confined to the eastern and more prosperous side of the province.

From a local quarrel between Catholics and Protestants in 1620 the whole province was at war again till the peace of Alès in 1629 when freedom of worship was granted but the Huguenots lost the right to fortify their towns. Thereafter the Calvinists declined. Many converted in the towns, but the mountain people held firm.

The royal finance administrator, the *Intendant*, sent from Versailles, took over more and more control. Even so, the States and the *Parlement* or high court of Toulouse, were one with him in the persecution of Calvinists. Royal decrees of discrimination were called for by the Languedocian bishops themselves. Churches, hospices and schools were destroyed. Calvinists were excluded from the States and from local councils, their artisans from the guilds. This campaign received a much greater thrust when Nicholas de Lamoignon de Basville became *Intendant* in 1685 and ruled till 1718. He is the one that features when we come to seeing De La Salle's Brothers in the area. He billeted troops on Protestant families - a procedure that caused thousands to abjure rather than have this calamity inflicted on them. The municipalities of places like Montpellier, Nîmes, Alès, Uzès officially renounced the reformed faith, without having necessarily changed their sympathies.

The Camisards⁵²

From 1689 inspired prophets in the Calvinist villages took to the woods and the maquis. This was especially the case about 1700. Those in their teens, so called "new Catholics" were horrified at the apostasy of their parents. A revivalist movement broke out among them, marked by convulsions, prophecy and Bible preaching. As a precaution Basville had 22 royal roads built through the Cévennes, crisscrossed by secondary roads. Where there had been only mule-tracks, he could send cannons and carts. A fanatical parish priest, Francis du Cheyla, who used beatings and torture to coerce Calvinists was assassinated In 1702. It was the beginning of the war of the *Camisards*, the name given to the partisans either from the kind of white shirt (*camisa*) they wore over their clothes in night-raids to recognise one another, or from the *camisades*, the night attacks made by the partisans. Robert Louis Stephenson gives a vivid account of the fighting in his *Travels with a Donkey*. The peasants conducted a cruel guerrilla warfare in which Basville's

brother-in-law, marshal Broglie, was defeated in 1703. His successor burnt 80 people alive in a mill where they were holding a secret service. The *Camisards* now made proposals to England.

Basville then planned to devastate the Cévennes and transfer the population to the plains. On 14 October Louis XIV authorised villages to be set on fire. In 1704, however, an armistice was accepted. Spasmodic risings led to long lines of captives being sent to the galleys until the last leader was killed in 1710. Calvinism, instead of being wiped out, revived illegally and peacefully. It took on an attitude of resistance to authority, defence of individual freedom and a rigid morality. One can understand better now that when De La Salle's Brothers came to Mende in 1707, they met with a very difficult situation.

BROTHER GABRIEL DROLIN ON HIS OWN. GETTING TO KNOW THE COMPLEXITIES OF THE ROMAN SCHOOL SYSTEM

Drolin's problems

If we go back to Gabriel Drolin in Rome, he was now on his own and in difficulties over ways of keeping alive. He had no employment, for he was unable to get into the existing schools system. We have a testimony to his penury from a manuscript life in the library of the Arsenal, Paris, dated late 1710 or 1711, of Monsieur Divers, who died 19 November 1710 during a mission in the diocese of Orleans. It includes the following passage: "A French schoolmaster of the Paris Community founded by M. De La Salle went to Rome a few years ago in order to instruct children in the principles of their religion free of charge, teaching them at the same time to read and write; but this good man, finding himself out of money some time after his arrival, decided to give up this good enterprise and go back to France. M. Divers, to whom he spoke of this intention, neglected nothing to change his mind on account of the great good he saw him doing. He provided for his maintenance with the help of his friends until he had received a pension from the Pope for his upkeep. He still has the benefit of it, bringing up a quantity of young children that he withdraws from idleness by teaching them to read and write and that he places on the road to heaven whether by teaching them Christian doctrine or by passing on to them by his good example the love and fear of God."⁵³ That autumn Father Divers probably found him lodgings with the Théodons, friends of his. Jean-Baptiste Théodon was a French sculptor. A bas relief of his can be seen in St Peter's, Rome, under the medallion of Christina of Sweden and another: "Faith adored by barbarian peoples" at St Ignatius's altar in the Gesù.

The Founder was not aware that Théodon had been expelled from the French Academy in Rome in 1691 for drunkenness and debauchery, and that his wife was a militant Jansenist.⁵⁴

The organisation of catechetical teaching in Rome⁵⁵

Several difficult years had to pass before the school mentioned above became a reality. There was a well-organised provision for religious instruction and schooling into which Drolin needed to be accepted. These will be seen in turn. He also met with a religious congregation for teaching the poor, that still had difficulty in being accepted. How was he to witness to the Brothers' new answer to children's needs? Did it have a place in Rome?

Brother Gabriel seems to have been able early on to teach catechism. For that, Divers must have got him enrolled into the Archconfraternity of Christian Doctrine whose members taught catechism on Sundays and holydays. Everyone wishing to teach catechism had to have his name on their registers. This Archconfraternity and the Congregation of the Fathers of Christian Doctrine, which was a religious order dedicated to religious instruction, were two branches of the Society for Christian Doctrine. This controlled matter and teaching methods. The text to be followed was Bellarmine's catechism. By papal edict schoolmasters in Rome had to bring their pupils to such catechism lessons and give support to the catechist. This would happen for Drolin, so that he got to know many of them.

The Society of Christian Doctrine began in Milan in 1536 and developed into an association of catechists, the **Archconfraternity of Christian Doctrine**. It added writing and arithmetic to teaching the faith. It reached Rome in 1560. By the Constitutions of 1677, each master or mistress usually should have not more than 10 pupils, and the children were graded into three classes. The children and young workers who attended came to the church when they heard a bell being rung in the streets. A hymn and the Creed were sung by all, then they broke into their small groups for a three-quarters of an hour's lesson. Then all met again for another three quarters of an hour's contest on who could recite best. A prayer and a brief encouraging talk ended the session. The prior general of the Society had to be a priest but had a lay sub-prior.

When Henry Pietra, of the Oratory of St Philip Neri, became superior of the Archconfraternity, he encouraged the most fervent of the catechists to live in common in a house near the Ponte Sisto and devote all their lives to teaching Christian doctrine. Their schools were held daily, not just weekly. A rule of life was adopted. This community became the Congregation of Christian Doctrine (or the Doctrinaires). Paul V gave the Congregation his cardinal-vicar as perpetual protector. It included priests, clerics and lay people. The aim in teaching "reading, writing and also grammar to the children is to attract them to learn Christian Doctrine" say their Constitutions. De La Salle, we have seen, had a wider aim in teaching to read and write "perfectly." The title for his Institute compared with that of this Congregation showed the

difference. His disciple Drolin must open a school and make the function of his Institute known in Rome. How was he to get into the existing system?

The schools of Rome⁵⁶

Elementary teaching in Rome at the time was catered for in a variety of institutions: in the lower classes of colleges, in a small way in the “schools of Doctrine” mentioned above, in the schools set up in the fourteen districts of Rome and in the papal schools, besides what was done under the name of welfare in orphanages. The move to remedy ignorance in the faith after Trent was begun immediately here, unlike in France. The Society of Christian Doctrine, in fact, preceded it. Colleges to form Christians within a wider, humanistic education were founded by the Jesuits, whose **Roman College**, now the Gregorianum not far from the Gesù, was built in 1583, and by the **Somaschi** and by the **Barnabites**. But although colleges were usually free, their courses were of little use to the poor who worked all day, nor would their children be at ease among the well-to-do. The Jesuit College, founded for the poor, refused to accept beginners, limiting entrants to those who already had a primary instruction. To what extent were the poor catered for? The Society of Christian Doctrine, as we have seen, taught reading and writing free of charge, but essentially their work was religious instruction. But there was also in Rome a closely controlled network of what we can call elementary schools. They were the *district schools*, and there were also a number of *papal schools*.

District schools

Schools had become a sort of monopoly under the Rector of the University or Sapienza, which dealt with secondary and higher education. The Sapienza was in Drolin’s area, between the Pantheon and the Piazza Navona. To prepare for entrance into the University a grammar school was set up in each of the fourteen districts of the city under a *maestro del rione* or district master. These teachers were given their *patente* or licence to teach by the Rector and paid poorly by the Senate of Rome out of the revenues on wine, receiving a *paul* per working day, or about 150 French livres a year. The children brought a *baiocco*, equivalent to 1 French sol, every Saturday. This added only another 20 to 30 livres, since classes were often below thirty. The poor were admitted free, in theory, but few came: who would pay for pens, paper, reading books and catechisms? Where was the money to come from to buy additional tables or benches? Neither the Senate nor the masters provided them.

Gradually, since fourteen schools were not enough, private schools, under the overall control of the Rector of the Sapienza, began to teach the elements

in return for a fee. Hence the children of the poor were still left on the streets. **St Joseph Calasanctius**, visiting Rome at the end of 16th century and seeing these thieving, swearing children, created for them in 1597 the *Clerks Regular of the Pious Schools*, of whom more in the next section. But for the majority there was little change, especially when in 1644 the allowance paid to the fourteen regional teachers was transferred to the building expenses of the city.

By 1688 all the masters in each district were under a district master responsible for the good order of schools in his area, and were paid 15 livres a month. They were required to receive a few poor children whose parents paid one *baiocco* a week. No one could teach without obtaining from the Rector an authorisation to teach certain specified subjects, and that had to be renewed each October. A new school had to be 40 perches or 220 yards away from any other, and 100 perches from the district master's school. One did not have to be a cleric to teach: the registers of teachers record many a name of a married man, who could be helped by his wife and children.

This was how things stood when Gabriel Drolin arrived. This age-old set-up came under the consistorial lawyers, of whom the Rector was one, as part of the papal administration. For some time the parish-priests had complained to the cardinal-Vicar for Rome about their lack of control over the religious instruction the masters gave in their parish churches on Sundays, over the secular teaching given at the master's house, and his Christian and professional behaviour. In 1703, when Drolin was still new to Rome, an agreement was reached giving the parish-priests a say in the granting or renewal of the authorisation to teach. Two sets of authorities watching one another was not going to make it easy for Drolin to become a teacher. He had, further, to take note of another set of schools that had hardly begun to function.

The papal schools⁵⁷

The papal schools began when in 1655 Alexander VII had about thirty schools opened for girls, especially the poor. They were run by widows who taught them a manual trade and the elements of their faith. The Pope paid them 22½ livres a month, for they were absolutely free. In 1695, while 50 schoolmistresses were being paid in this way by Innocent XII, there was only one man teaching 60 boys in a papal school on the parish of St Nicholas in Parione. In 1702 two masters are mentioned, and in 1706, three. This means three separate one-man schools. Their pay was only 15 livres a month, without even the weekly sol paid in the district schools. They could teach catechism to adults once or twice a month in one of three specified churches and receive a small alms and a few of those small round loaves or *pannoni* that are still a feature of Rome.

There was also in Rome provision for orphans and abandoned children. The **Santo Spirito** hospice with 1600 beds (now the hospital on the **Lungotevere in Sassia**), took in poor children and taught them practical skills in view of a job. The San Michele hospice, which became one of the most comprehensive charitable institutions in Rome, was still new when Gabriel Drolin arrived. It took in beggars, orphans, handicapped children.⁵⁸ They were given a profane instruction and catechism. Drolin at one point taught catechism to poor French people in a hospice, either one of these or one of several small hospices attached to French institutions, such as at Saint Louis-des-Français not far from the Piazza Navona.

The Congregation of the Clerks Regular of the Pious Schools

The *Clerks Regular of the Pious Schools* were teaching in three areas of Rome when Drolin arrived. St Joseph Calasanz, who has already been mentioned, was born in Spain in 1556, and joined the Archconfraternity of Christian Doctrine in Rome. For children loose on the streets he rented a few rooms in the very popular Trastevere area and taught reading, writing and counting free of charge. A few priests helped him and in 1602 they began a community life. The district masters lost a few pupils to them and spread false stories about them. Clement VIII, who had given them an annual subsidy of 600 livres, sent two cardinals to enquire on the spot. They found no cause for complaint. The Constitutions of his congregation were approved in 1622. Before Calasanz's death in 1648 they had schools in most large towns in Italy and as far as Spain and Poland. They were asked to take over the San Michele hospice in 1684. The superior general was elected every six years and was helped by four Assistants. In 1669 they were allowed solemn vows and the rank of Mendicant order, exempt from episcopal jurisdiction. To the three vows they added that of teaching children free of charge.

They came into stiff conflict both with the district masters because of this, and with the colleges who said they must not go beyond teaching the elements. These disputes were still going on when Drolin arrived, and were not settled till 1731, when Clement XIII clarified that the Clerks Regular must teach catechism, grammar, arithmetic to young people and accept the poor free of charge. Secondly, they were authorised to teach letters and science, to receive children of the noble class in their schools, and to open boarding schools. The Congregation had had coadjutor Brothers from 1627. Those of them able to teach were tonsured and given the biretta in order to give them standing in a place like Rome in the eyes of pupils and parents. But in 1637, because of disagreements between priests and teaching Brothers, all coadjutor Brothers were forbidden to study or to teach. The aim of the Congregation was the good education of children and could go as far as Latin and Greek,

philosophy and even theology. There was much priestly ministry: confessing the children, the sick, prisoners. The dress of the *Scolopi* as they were called in Italy, was rather like that of the Jesuits.

The work of these Clerks Regular would certainly have interested Brother Gabriel Drolin. But it would have emphasised the difficulty for a foreigner, and a 'mere' Brother, to get consideration. And if the *Scolopi* were teaching the poor, was there any point in him trying to do the same? And yet it was not the same: his one vocation was to stay with the poor working-class and raise them up in every way. But trying to explain that before you were established would be time wasted. And to be established, he would need either to get some protector to back him up, or work somehow from the bottom. That 'somehow' took him another couple of years, living in uncertainty and hardship.

De La Salle has to leave the Grand'Maison and move to poor quarters in the suburb of Saint-Antoine⁵⁹

When another Brother was sent to Troyes and two to Avignon, De La Salle was no longer in the Grand'Maison. He had left it on August 20th. As a novitiate and as a house for retreats for the Brothers it was ideal: it was at the limits of the capital, in a quiet area, roomy and with gardens and courtyards. It was well-placed to be the central house of his Society. The owner for some time had offered to sell it to him for 45,000 livres, less than half what it was worth, and now put it up for sale at that price. There was no way De La Salle could find that much money. He had established a daily procession with psalms and prayers by the novices from the time he took over the house. Now, he simply prayed for a house suitable for his novitiate. Just at this time someone in his will and testament left him 50,000 livres. Somehow, La Chétardye was able to make out that it should come to him. Another person bought the house over his head, put the house up for sale for twice the amount and gave him notice to quit. In better times he could have approached La Chétardye, who would have appealed to some of the rich benefactors of the parish. Now the question was: Where was he to go? Fortunately there was no immediate buyer, and he asked if they could stay on while he found a house.

The owner, who was a good man, agreed and charged nothing on condition that the Brothers left alone the fruit that was in the garden and put up his gardener and his family in the house, to keep an eye on the fruit! A garden that was overgrown when the Brothers entered had been transformed, and the fruit was considerable. The gardener chose a room that gave him a good view of the garden, but which caused the Brothers inconvenience. Here follows an interesting story.

One reason why the house had been offered at a low price originally was

that it was believed to be haunted. Under the chapel was the vault in which the Sisters whose house it had been were buried. The ghosts of some of these were now said to have become active. "According to two Brothers," writes Blain, "who were very virtuous but of too great a simplicity, Sister Saint Fiacre, of the Sisters of the Ten Virtues, buried in the vault under the chapel, was the one who made the most noise. She was making her Purgatory in this place: she herself had revealed it by telling them her name. They saw her often and she spoke to them...It was no doubt in order to cure their imagination that Monsieur De La Salle said a Requiem mass for the relief of the Sister in question and that he got all the Brothers to go to Communion for that intention. However, the prayers did not chase her from the place: she still appeared to the two credulous Brothers. She made a row the first night in the room of the new guests whom she did not take kindly to...Everything was disturbed and turned upside down: crockery, cupboards, chairs, linen and all the furniture."⁶⁰ In the light of day the gardener thought better of it and went to bed again as usual, but in vain. Next morning he moved to a room over the stables, well away from the community wing, and the disturbances ceased.

After six weeks De La Salle was able to find a new place, and left the Grand'Maison on 20 August. Blain says that Sister Fiacre showed her displeasure at the Brothers' leaving by shaking violently very early in the morning the last cart taking their furniture away and almost upsetting it. "This is what several Brothers thought they were seeing who were there while the cart was resting on the ground and nothing came near it." Speaking of the property in his day, he says: "Left uncultivated when he (De La Salle) entered, it returned to this first state soon after he left it. The one who had had it so cheaply, unable to get used to it, got rid of it; and the last buyer has so neglected it that it is slowly going to rack and ruin."⁶¹

De La Salle had found a house far less suitable beyond the Bastille in the Faubourg Saint Antoine, in the Rue Charonne. The cost of taking the Brothers' belongings that far - about two miles through narrow, encumbered streets - left the community destitute. The house was somewhere near the present no. 89, Rue de Charonne. You were almost in the country in those days, in a suburb that even then specialised in high-class furniture. The master craftsmen had their shops and houses on the high street, Rue du Faubourg Saint-Antoine, while journeymen and those engaged in lower trades lived in the neighbouring streets such as the Rue de Charonne. The area was part of the large parish of St Paul, with its church inside the city boundary which was now the new boulevard that had replaced the former walls. The parish priest was M. Le Sourd, and when the Founder went to see him and ask his agreement, he was delighted, telling him that although he was opposed to new-fangled institutions, he was welcome.⁶² This welcome did not go so far as

supporting him when trouble came. A community of young laymen preparing to teach was, in fact, an innovation in the parish. There were five 'schools', i.e. five classes in the parish in 1678. "To teach the poor children of the parish to pray to God well, the catechism, reading and writing", the masters were always to be chosen from among the clerics of the parish, as was the custom.

Le Sourd was less close to the new community than his curate, John Baptist Goy, who administered the chapel of ease of Saint Marguerite in the suburb. He was a pro-Jansenist who had set up a school in the area in 1700. De La Salle must have paid monthly rent, for he did not take out a lease on the house as though he did not expect to be left there long, nor did he ask the Cardinal permission to have a chapel and say mass in the house for the novices, and so draw attention to himself. He arranged to say mass in the chapel of the Sisters of the Cross, across the road (on the site of the present women's hostel run by the Salvation Army). His saying Mass in the convent of the Sisters of the Cross had several interesting consequences. The tremendous reverence and recollection with which he celebrated Mass led several of the Sisters to ask him to be their spiritual director. He had given this up long ago because the time it took conflicted with his work with the Brothers, but he could not refuse on this occasion. When they heard from some other people the straits he was in, they became his permanent benefactors.

The Brothers who taught on St Sulpice's parish came as usual to the novitiate on Sundays and holydays and in holiday time, glad to meet their Founder again, who now showed up little in their schools. To give his novices practice in the art of teaching, since he no longer could send them to St Sulpice owing to the distance and the bad relations, he started, with the permission of the parish priest, a school on St Paul's parish and put up his usual sign: Brothers of the Christian Schools. He also managed to transfer here the Sunday Academy that had been so successful when restarted in the Grand'Maison. Had La Chétardye lost interest, or had he no means of providing premises for it? De La Salle made the project his own, on account of the good it did in line with his own views of what the good or urban working-classes youth required. But without the powerful and justified support of the parish priest of Saint Sulpice, he was open to attack from the Master-writers, who now planned a campaign to finish his schools for good.

There are indications that in dealing with requests that came to him from elsewhere concerning De La Salle and his Brothers, M. Leschassier, the superior of St Sulpice, tended to take him somewhat for granted. He would refer to him and then transmit his answer, instead of putting the two men in touch. Thus, on 30 May this year, the parish priest of Crosne within the diocese of Paris wrote to Leschassier asking could De La Salle provide a married teacher, and could this man also serve as his secretary. Leschassier

transmitted the Founder's answers, which were negative, instead of referring the parish priest directly to De La Salle. Tronson would not have dealt thus with what was not his Company's business.⁶³

A look back on the year 1703

If we look back on the year 1703, it was very much a year of the unforeseen, a very disturbing year yet also a year full of hope. At the end of the year nonetheless, he was out of the Grand'Maison and living in poverty and in difficult circumstances for his novices.

Yet he could still attend to the business of his Institute. In Rethel he had already acquired four houses. On 25 November he now authorised a lawyer, Nicholas Barthélemy, to buy a fifth house next to the last one bought. The purchase was made on 15 January 1704 at a cost of 830 livres.⁶⁴ These and later purchases were not all needed to house the Brothers and their classes. They were properties probably having tenants already, but whose small rents now passed to the Brothers and secured them a reasonable standard of living consonant with the practice of Gospel poverty. The money for these investments came from donations.

References

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3. Blain I, 407-408.
4. Blain I, 355.
5. Maillefer, CL6, 146-9; Blain I, 418-19; Rigault I, 220-227.
6. Maillefer, CL6, 143.
7. Blain I, 420.
8. id, 422.
9. id, 404.
10. CL6, 144, 145, 148, 149.
11. Blain I, 424-428.
12. id, 428.
13. Poutet II, 339.
14. Blain I, 374-5; Poutet I, 158.
15. Blain I, 375-6; Poutet II, 158-160.
16. Poutet II, 159.
17. Clarified in a thesis presented to the University of Philadelphia by Brother Francis Adrian Davis in 1955.
18. *Advice and regulations for the schools*, Paris, 1678. See Poutet, CL48, 115-118;

- 126-128.
19. Poutet, CL48, 118-120.
20. Blain I, 376.
21. Poutet, CL48, 124-5; 132-133.
22. id, 102-3, 110-113; 166-169.
23. Blain II, Appendix, 2-11.
24. Blain I, 428.
25. Maillefer, CL6, 150-151.
26. Maillefer, CL6, 132, 133; Blain I, 383-4; Poutet II, 45, 63; Rigault I, 271.
27. Some think the date was 4 April . See Poutet II, 63, n.42.
28. Blain I, 384.
29. Blain I, 429-31; 407-9.
30. *Dark Night, I*, vi. E. Allison Peers: *Spirit of Flame*, SCM Press 1943, 95, 134.
31. Félix-Paul, 151.
32. Blain I, 430.
33. Maillefer, CL6, 148-151; Blain I, 431-4.
34. Blain I, 434-7.
35. id, 389-90, 435-439; Ravelet, 165-168.
36. Blain I, 438.
37. id, 439.
38. id., 442-3.
39. id., 396.
40. Maillefer, CL6, 137.
41. Félix-Paul, 46-48.
42. On the earthquake, see *Bulletin des Ecoles Chrétiennes* 1953, 254-5; Félix-Paul, 55, n.15.
43. id., 54.
44. Blain I, 396.
45. Félix-Paul, 55.
46. Blain I, 396.
47. Poutet II, 173, 138.
48. Félix-Paul, 75.
49. *Dictionnaire du Grand Siècle*, Fayard, 1990.
50. Poutet II, 166-168; Blain I, 391.
51. See *Histoire du Languedoc*, Emmanuel Le Roy Ladurie, series *Que Sais-je?*, P.U.F. 1982.
52. See *Dictionnaire du grand Siècle* under *Camisards*.
53. Félix-Paul, 56.
54. Generalate archives. *Fonds Martinais*, Boxfile FM14, Théodon D7(a). Boxfile AA124, Dossier I.
55. Poutet II, 269-282.
56. Poutet II, 283-294; Félix-Paul, 48-52.
57. Félix-Paul, 51-2.
58. On these two hospices, see author's *Gabriel Drolin*, Lasallian Publications, Oxford, 89-90, 91, 210.

59. Blain II, 205; Poutet II, 34-35.
 60. Blain II, 4.
 61. id., 4, 3.
 62. id., 5.
 63. Poutet II, 342.
 64. Aroz, CL41(1), 31-36; CL42, 279-282, 284.
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Chapter 15: the master-writers' fight to the finish. Gabriel Drolin's problems seen through correspondence, 1704-1706

An introduction to this period

The next two or three years were also years occupied with diverse events and negotiations besides the increasing correspondence for De La Salle and continuous revision of his works. Lawsuits loom large, and also negotiations for new schools, to be set beside the closure of one school and the sad failure of the training-centre for country schoolmasters. Another permanent activity of De La Salle to bear in mind is his answering in detail, as extant letters show, the reports from the Brother Directors and the monthly letters of some fifty or sixty Brothers.

Of primary interest among these are the letters he wrote to Brother Gabriel Drolin in Rome. This comes not only from their content but from what they highlight about the Founder himself. Contemplative as he was, instead of staying in the novitiate when he transferred it to near Rouen, he moved back to Paris to be in touch with events. He shows himself in his letters to Drolin as sharp-minded and as one who tries to keep himself well-informed, but does not always appreciate Gabriel's difficulties.

In Paris, the depressing and disturbing opposition of the parish-priest of Saint Sulpice to him personally was now compounded with a concerted outside attack on a basic characteristic of his schools. This is the moment to present more fully the grounds for the opposition of the master-writers we have already met with.¹

Four schools and over twelve hundred pupils in one parish of the capital were giving a different face to popular education. A community of eighteen Brothers ran these schools to a degree of efficiency unmatched. More of them were being trained in the Rue de Charonne, and there was even a new school there. On the southern limits of the capital, there was another school still and a training-centre for country masters. These Brothers of the Christian schools were beginning to set up further afield. They refused to accept that the technical skills of writing that gave access to many secretarial jobs should be denied the poor because the master-writers said so. This was a unique situation. The master-writers had to move now or never. Since the little masters' defeat in 1690 they had not dared challenge the parish priest of Saint-Sulpice. He knew his rights which had just been officially clarified, and was respected by the king and the cardinal. But now it was common knowledge that La Chétardye had distanced himself from De La Salle² and had

seen the latter move from his headquarters to a situation of penury elsewhere when the parish-priest could have helped. They knew also that Le Sourd was not the man to put up a fight. Accordingly, towards the end of 1703 they drew up their plan.

They would first challenge the rights of the new school in the faubourg Saint-Antoine, then those of the training-centre at St Hippolyte's, then ally with the little masters and finally take the fight to St Sulpice's, in the hope of reducing the Brothers' schools to the level of the traditional charity schools. Cleverly, to sound out La Chétardye, they sent him a delegation complaining that they had not enough pupils to live by; they had nothing against charity schools but wanted admissions checked. In the conversation, it was clear La Chétardye was not interested as to what might happen in St Paul's parish. They went into action in January 1704.

THE MASTER WRITERS. WHAT WAS AT STAKE ON BOTH SIDES

A needed skill, exercised and taught under monopoly

A master-writer was very well-off.³ His 'workshop' was a large, well-lit room, attended by adults. Outside, a sign-board proclaimed "Fine handwriting taught by —". Inside, men sat at tables practising with a quill pen or stood examining models of handwriting displayed on easels. Some might be young noblemen, for calligraphy was a skill they might pursue like dancing or fencing. Artistry with the quill could reach a very high level, as when in the next reign a portrait of Louis XV and his consort was seen at close range to be made up of texts written with extremely fine penmanship. Noble clients could pay the master-writer well. One such master in Paris refused a post worth 30,000 livres a year offered him by Louvois, the king's Minister for War, because he earned more than twice that amount teaching some of the most considerable names in the capital. As we shall see, young bourgeois also came to learn a skill practical in legal and commercial pursuits.



In the Middle Ages, these calligraphers were part of a confraternity of those engaged in different ways in book production and illumination. With the advent of printing, they gradually became expert calligraphers on their own, serving a need as commercial and administrative paperwork increased. In 1570 they became a recognised guild, authorised to teach writing, spelling and the system of using counters to calculate numbers. The guild of master-writers was in the second of the four classes into which the 129 guilds of the city were divided. Like all other trade guilds they came, not under the cathedral chapter or the university as teachers did, but under the Châtelet.

They were expert copyists and also accountants, and were called in ordi-

nary use ‘verifiers’, whether of documents or accounts. New members were admitted after examination by four Master-writers. In Rouen they had the title of “masters and wards of the nobler art and science of writing and arithmetic, expert verifiers in the town and suburbs of Rouen.” Part of their work was to write out texts in the most legible writing possible. Before the type-writer, copying was of great importance: clerks and civil servants had not only to be able to write, but to ‘write perfectly’, which refers, not just to writing well but to a definite skill. You had to go to a master-writer when you needed a public deed drawn up, written according to traditional rules and in unambiguous wording. A master-writer had also to be able to decipher old manuscripts that were now illegible owing to the use of abbreviations and to the old forms of some of the letters. They were summoned to court to the exclusion of anyone else to assess under oath the validity of contested documents and signatures.

They were the experts in an art of writing that had becoming very refined and was taught through a meticulous sequence of painstaking strokes and hand movements. They were paid to decipher manuscripts that had become illegible to most. They had brought about a real reform in handwriting in 1633 after the *Parlement* of Paris had asked them to produce by agreement among themselves one form of ‘French’ or upright script, and one of ‘Italian’ or sloping (*batarde*) script. They did so, and the *Parlement* made them the only forms to be used. The master-writers were also trained in single- and double-entry bookkeeping, in working out foreign exchanges and in the various systems of weights and measures. They were paid to check people’s accounts.

In the chambers of lawyers, in the offices of businessmen or administrators, there was need of clerks knowing the art of writing and the use of counters, book-keeping and accountancy, things not taught in the colleges but that the merchant bourgeoisie needed to know. Young bourgeois therefore came to the master-writers to learn a needed skill besides young nobles coming to learn an accomplishment. A master-writer’s workshop was, in fact, a little technical centre concerned with penmanship. For other trades, like that of masons, leather-workers, carpenters, jewellers, the place of apprenticeship was the workshop with its tools and materials. For writing, the classroom and its writing materials corresponds to the workshop. The master-writers were then, traders in calligraphy, and like other guilds, held on to it as a monopoly, doing their best to prevent anyone else from even faintly covering their territory.

A monopoly exercised to prevent the teaching of writing in little schools or charity schools

There were less than 100 master-writers in Paris about 1700. In spite of

being wealthy, they defended their rights against any encroachment by the little masters and took them to court. In 1598, for instance, the Châtelet, under which the master-writers operated, forbade schoolmasters, who depended on the Precentor, to provide their pupils with writing-models of more than a syllable (!) but the *Parlement* in 1600 overruled this. Yet in 1661 schoolmasters were limited again, this time to three lines of template. It was an attitude that needed to be challenged. Tens of thousands of the poor were being prevented from acquiring enough ability in writing to enable them to get a better job and thereby escape from a subsistence level of life. Yet the law stood by the master-writers.

Oddly enough for us, the master-writers themselves were forbidden to show how to read: "The writers (i.e the professional master-writers) may have manuscripts or printed books to show the spelling, without for all that being allowed to show them how to read." This division of who does what among the monopolies was becoming ridiculous. The Precentor Joly argued that you cannot, when you are getting school children to read texts, differentiate whether it is for the spelling or for teaching them how to read, and therefore the master-writers were going beyond their trade in indicating a spelling. You would have to limit them to writing and not reading, and schoolmasters to reading but not writing, with a common disputed area where the two were associated. Time and events would do away with the master-writers and these quarrels.

The little masters taught writing always fearful of the master-writers. Batencour, in *L'Ecole Paroissiale*, gives a first training, and then refers his pupils to "the famous master-writers". The Brothers' Handbook, on the contrary, required that "each master of the writing class must know perfectly how to read all sorts of handwritten papers," and the pupils were taught "till they could read the most difficult writings that can be met with."⁴ The masters of the little schools, as was seen in Chapter 9, were clinging to the past. When they saw themselves outclassed by the Christian Schools, instead of adopting the new methods, they preferred confrontation, even allying with the rivals they feared.

1704

THE MASTER-WRITERS MOUNT A SUSTAINED ATTACK⁵

They obtain the right to seize the furniture of the school in the Rue de Charonne

This year the master-writers began sustained attack. Blain launches into an account of the conflict: "The declaration of war began with a plea pre-

sented to the lieutenant of police” (the lieutenant-general of police, the marquis d’Argenson) “dated in the month of January 1704, in which, after complaining about the undertaking of M. De La Salle, Priest, and of several other individual persons of whom he claimed he was the superior, who with no title or quality (that is, recognised profession) ran under pretext of charity several schools, they asked him to stop the course of these abuses that had slipped in to their prejudice. They added that even if it were true that the Brothers had the right to keep charity schools, they must make it their rule to take in only the poor. But far from keeping to this rule, they admitted into more than twenty schools” (i.e. classes) “that they ran in the town and suburbs of Paris all those who came, of whatever state, condition and parish they might be. As proof of the truth of what they put forward, they joined to this plea a list containing the names, status and addresses of the pupils they believed had no need to have recourse to charity. Of these the chief ones were the son of a man living on his wealth, two surgeons, a wheelwright, a locksmith, a wine merchant, a grocer, a goldsmith, and two caterers, whom they alleged were well-to-do.”⁶ The interesting thing about these occupations is that they were those of guilds either of the second class, to which they belonged, or the first class; the master-writers disdained to take note of cases from guilds below them, yet these were likely to be more numerous. It does show how attractive the Brothers’ schools were even for these social classes. Although all their schools in the Paris area were clearly aimed at, their opponents did not this time ask for the right to proceed against those under La Chétardye, but only against the recent school in the Rue de Charonne.

The lieutenant of police was the official protector of the guild, having received their oath of fidelity when they took office. He also saw that their registers were preserved in his archives. On 4 February he put his signature to their request, and Monsieur De La Salle was officially informed of the complaint. He took no action: as a priest, he came, not under the Châtelet but under the archbishop’s chancellor. The President of the *Parlement* advised police officers to refer to archbishop’s house any charge concerning a cleric.

As no one, therefore, challenged the master-writers’ plea, d’Argenson gave the order for all the school’s materials to be seized. On 7 February two commissioners along with the official who drew up the details of the seizure appeared at the school in the Rue de Charonne. Their report mentioned pens, inkstands, writing templates, tables and benches. Two days later the report was checked at le Châtelet, and a summons was made out against “John Baptist De La Salle, priest, doctor in theology and former canon of the cathedral church of Rheims, keeping several classes and schools and teaching the art of writing in this city,” to appear before the police on 22 February and be told that a claim for the seizure of the school’s goods “to the profit of the guild

of master-writers” had been legally made. Neither Le Sourd nor his curate Goy nor La Chétardye made any intervention. Even though they had no direct power in a civil case, to have stated their support for the accused would have carried weight.

De La Salle did not turn up at police headquarters in the Châtelet on 22 February. He and the Brothers were condemned in their absence. The master-writers were given the right to take away things concerned with writing. The charity schools were to accept in future only children whose parents were really poor; they were to teach only matters proportionate to the profession of their parents. De La Salle had to pay a fine of 50 livres “for having run several classes and schools and taught the art of writing.” So that was it! He was teaching the poor writing and things above their station. Writing was clearly one of these, since it gave them a chance of a better job. He must not do this, and the law said the master-writers were right. There was nothing he could do at the moment.

He did, however, get a chance to delay matters. The masters of the little schools, who had not yet joined up with their enemies, had meanwhile gone once more to the Precentor. This was no longer Joly but his successor Perrochel. He granted them all their rivals, the master-writers, had aimed at. On 14 February he forbade De La Salle “to teach or have taught, or to hold school” in Paris and its suburbs, “without being provided with a district by the Precentor of Notre Dame”. He fined him 50 livres and ordered the material of his schools to be confiscated. This, however, seems to have been aimed at giving a moral condemnation, since the parish priests, in fact, were now in charge of their schools. On 19 March De La Salle instructed a lawyer, M. Quellier, to appeal in one of the courts of the *Parlement* against the sentence. He was granted the right of appeal. That suit lasted two years.

Then on 4 May he presented a plea to d’Argenson at the Châtelet against the action of the master-writers. Quellier argued that the latter’s confiscation of material from the Rue de Charonne on February 22nd was invalid because by the decision of the Precentor on 14th, they had been declared impounded. The master-writers must therefore put everything back in its place. The hearing took place on 30 May. The judge declared De La Salle’s plea invalid and ordered him to pay expenses. So the master-writers and the little masters were left to argue as to whom the confiscated property belonged. This took three months, so that by that extent the Founder had delayed matters.

The master-writers broaden the scope of their complaint

The master-writers’ representative, Louis Lambert, exasperated by De La Salle’s resistance, made a general attack on the Brothers. He had the backing of one or two priests whom Blain calls the enemies of De La Salle: “Those

who had the right to object” (to the master-writers’ action) “and who could easily stop it, did not do so...The parish priest of St Sulpice, by appearing, could have dissipated the storm, for there was an agreement between the parish priests of Paris and the master-writers that forbade them to set foot in charity schools without the permission of the parish priest....The enemies of M. De La Salle, who had been able to turn M. de La Chétardye against him and bring him on their side, either did not let him be informed of the disorder or prevented him from acting. They even succeeded in getting him to suppress the fourth school he had opened a few years back...The plan of the enemies of the Man of God was to force the Brothers to leave the schools of the parish...”⁷

On June 7th Lambert requested d’Argenson to issue an injunction ordering De La Salle, already condemned, and eighteen Brothers, named as individuals without “Brother” being affixed to their name, who were teaching “without the authorisation of the Precentor”, to cease their activities immediately. Each Brother should pay the guild an indemnity of 500 livres if he persisted in teaching any but those whose fathers were really poor, while De La Salle, for having the Brothers under his orders and causing the “ruin” of the guild, should pay at once an indemnity of 2000 livres! These good master-writers assured the lieutenant of police they were only demanding justice, and only because De La Salle had shown contempt for the decision of 22 February. The injunction should be applied strictly in the suburbs of Saint Germain (that is, St Sulpice’s parish) and of St Marcel (where St Hippolyte’s parish was). They carefully made no mention of the suburb of St Antoine, because their seizure of the school furniture in the Rue de Charonne was being challenged in the courts. That so many children should be deprived of an elementary schooling, and that the master-writers should want it so in the name of their ancient monopoly was beginning to sound a little weak even then, compared with the public benefit gained from educating them. A concerted stand by the parish-priests would have shown them up. Lambert, therefore, brought in any other arguments he could. Without pupils, he said, the master-writers would not be able to pay the capitation tax, “they would be powerless to respond, as good and faithful servants of the king, to the zeal they had to serve the needs of the State.”!

Then they put themselves forward as the champions of the lieutenant of police’s rights versus those of the Precentor by a broad attack on “all those who under the authority of the reverend Precentor, or otherwise, keep charity schools” to the ruin of their guild. In referring to abuses they made out were taking place in these schools, they intended, by vagueness of terms, to implicate the Brothers. “This enterprise (De La Salle’s) is not the only one to ruin the guild of the plaintiffs. All those who - under the authority of the reverend

Precentor of the church of Paris or otherwise- keep charity or endowed schools in all the parishes do them no less harm; they receive not only the poor of the parishes in which they are established, but also children of genuine bourgeois, traders and artisans. They distinguish the latter by putting them in separate places.” This the Brothers did not do, but the phrasing of the complaint covers them with the accusation made against charity schools.

As proof, the only case they cited was that of two masters, Desgoy and Dinval, who in one school in the parish of the Holy Innocents, had a school for poor ribbon-makers, but were not restricting it to such. By overlooking all the others, they were preparing the way for the little masters to make common cause with them. At the same time they slipped in a pure supposition meant to question the integrity of the Brothers as teachers of the poor: such “malversations were not done without interest, it being probably true that no one increases the trouble taken” without expecting a return. “And so,” they skilfully added, “the poor for whom these schools are established are not those who get the masters’ attention, but undoubtedly these children from elsewhere.”

D’Argesson immediately sent a summons to the homes of the defendants. Desgoy and Dinval appeared at the Châtelet, but not De La Salle and his Brothers. They were condemned on 11 July and sentenced to an indemnity, but, too bad for the master-writers, it was much less than they had asked: 50 livres only per Brother, and 100 for their superior, with costs. It was still something they had no means to pay. De La Salle was ordered to take down within three days the inscription “Brothers of the Christian Schools”. This is a valuable confirmation of what his schools were about: “Christian Schools”, stated the aim of this new kind of school but said nothing about the social origins of the pupils. “Charity school” did. There was another clause that would open the way to endless interference: any bourgeois, any well-to-do person who sent his child to the Brothers’ school could be prosecuted. In other words, the judicial decision of 11 July made non-paying Christian schools no longer public, but strictly reserved for a class of people unable to pay anything for their children. Where did you draw the line? Notices were posted up at the crossroads warning parents of possible prosecution. They didn’t stay up long: people tore them down.

A few days before, on 5 July, a new lease had to be taken out on the property in the Rue Princesse. It had come under a new owner, a François Guillemart, in April. He renewed the lease on the same terms as before, for three years. But since the Founder was resident now in another parish and had been condemned and fined by the courts, the owner made the lease with four Brothers of the community conjointly, even though there must have been some uncertainty as to the future of the Brothers.

Among the eighteen Brothers fined and forbidden to take in any but the poor were Brothers Nicholas Vuyart and Gervase who were running the school and training-centre for country masters in St Hippolyte's parish. The parish priests of St Marcel and St Hippolyte, who had put money into these establishments, were keen to see them continue. They appealed against the decision on behalf of the cited Nicholas and Gervase. By leaving out the name "Brother" they hoped to cut out the juridical questions a reference to the Lasallian community would bring up. It did mean they were dissociating their case from the Brothers in the Rue Princesse and the Rue de Charonne. Evidently the parish priest of St Sulpice was not going to intervene, nor the one of St Paul's. At the hearing of 21 August, however, the master-writers were able to provide written evidence that Vuyart was a Brother of the Christian Schools. The Châtelet maintained and aggravated the sentence. It was clear that all the Brothers as such were now condemned. "We forbid the Brothers of the charity schools to live together...until they have received letters patent from the king and have had them registered." This prohibition had, however, no force, running counter to the decisions of the archbishop who had approved the community, and to the rights of the parish priests employing the Brothers. The right of the master-writers to check who were and who were not able to pay remained. The matter was not yet finished.

BROTHER GABRIEL'S DIFFICULTIES IN ROME IN 1704

During this year of stress in Paris, the Founder was much preoccupied with trying to get letters to and from Rome, and was very concerned and disappointed that nothing had been achieved there yet.⁸ We have three of his letters written to Brother Gabriel Drolin towards the end of 1704. They are the first extant letters of their correspondence. The first is dated 13 August from the Rue de Charonne while the Founder was waiting for the decision that came from the Châtelet eight days later. He says nothing of his troubles, needing to be very circumspect. He writes that only a week before has he received Gabriel's latest letter, dated 19 February.⁹ To have received it only about 6 August indicates it had been very much delayed. He says: "I feared like you that my letters have been opened." They could have been examined in Paris by a very vigilant police force, or, as a normal possibility, opened at the frontier. Drolin was no longer living with the Théodons. For, in order to find some money, he had found lodging with a French trader, Claude de la Bussière. He was paying Brother Gabriel for giving some lessons in reading and writing to his little daughters.

Drolin seems also to have been teaching catechism for some time in the northern half of the Campus Martius, the area between the Tiber on the west and the Pincio and Quirinale on the east. It had greatly deteriorated till

Sixtus IV (1471-84) gave it a new face. Much of the streets are still as Drolin would have seen them with their Renaissance palaces among the houses of the poor between the Corso and Ripetta, the old port of Rome along the Tiber. This port was rebuilt in the early years of the eighteenth century while Drolin was there, and was provided with a set of curving steps in 1706. Here was the parish church of **San Lorenzo in Lucina**, in the piazza of that name that gives on to the Corso. The church, on the site of the house-church (*titulus*) of an early Christian woman named Lucina still has its twelfth-century low porch with its tiled roof running the length of the front, and its twelfth-century bell-tower. The parish was an extensive one: its registers for 1705 list 11,230 inhabitants. In his letter, Brother Gabriel wrote in detail about another offer he was uncertain whether to accept. The *Scolopi* had recently been asked by Innocent III to take over the San Michele hospice. They had built in 1703 a home for about 30 delinquent children. A canon was asking Gabriel to teach in it. The latter must have spoken favourably of the *Scolopi*'s work, for the Founder replies: "It seems to me that that part of the city where there are poor to teach who lack instruction (the San Lorenzo in Lucina parish, in other words), is much better than being in an establishment (meaning this home) even in order to instruct poor people who can find someone to teach them."

Negotiations to open a school in Darnétal, near Rouen

In spite of his problems in Paris, on 20 Sept De La Salle bought through his brother Peter, now a member of the Rheims *présidial*, another house in Rethel for 650 livres from a Claude Charlet. This again, presumably, provided a regular income for the Brothers from rent paid by tenants.¹⁰

On 26 September a Monsieur Chardon, a priest of Saint Sulpice, came to see him in the Rue de Charonne. He had been sent by a Louis Deshayes, a priest in Rouen, to ask for two Brothers.¹¹ This priest had been to the seminary of Saint Sulpice only between July and November 1689¹² but had seen the Brothers in their second year in the parish. He became a parish priest of Saint Saviour's in Rouen in 1712, and retired through infirmity in 1734. The Founder gained no clear idea of where the school was nor of the terms of employment, which must mean Chardon had no idea, either. He assumed it was in Rouen, and saw in this a providential call to go to where Barré and Nyel had begun and also find a new centre for his Institute, away from Paris. He wrote to Louis Deshayes the same day:

I learnt from M. Chardon this morning that you had written to him to have our Brothers for Rouen and that you were asking for two and wanted to know what it would need. I am very willing to give you two. As to the cost, you know we are not difficult and that we could not send only one.

If you would kindly let me know what area of the town they are asked for and what it is intended to give them, you would very much oblige me. I think we shall agree on a sum without difficulty and that you will be satisfied with those I send.

I am with respect...

This was an objective and welcoming letter, and shrewd nevertheless. He waited...

In Paris, a joint attack by the master-writers and the masters of the little schools

Meanwhile, things did not improve in Paris. Through d'Argenson and through the appeal to the *Parlement*, the king's attorney general d'Aguessau, was informed of the situation. He presented to the king a memoir concerning religious houses set up without permission. In reply Louis, through his Secretary of State, the Count of Pontchartrain, told him to discuss each case with the cardinal and send him a report, reminding him that as archbishop, de Noailles might have other views. The letter ended: "You will apparently still find houses besides those contained in your memoir...None must be overlooked, if possible." The date was 26 September 1704.

The master-writers, not being able to contest parish priests' rights to employ the Brothers, concentrated on preventing them accepting any but the real poor. Unknown to De La Salle, four days after his letter to Deshayes, the master-writers and the little masters joined forces to make an end of the Brothers' schools. Lambert, the master-writers' representative, got eight little masters, all from the parish of Saint Sulpice, to sign a deed before a notary of the Châtelet, certifying that Monsieur De La Salle, "calling himself superior of the Brothers of the Christian Schools" and his "so-called Brothers" were still accepting bourgeois children into their schools, so that the informants were losing "their best pupils" (quite a tribute to the Brothers!). Undoubtedly, the next schools to be attacked were those in the parish of Saint-Sulpice. Prior to this, Lambert wanted his first objective achieved and out of the way: the closure of the school and Sunday School in the suburb of St Antoine. Since De La Salle couldn't or wouldn't pay the indemnities they had claimed, the master-writers applied to the police, who sent men "armed with ladders and hammers..The inscription was torn down, the benches, tables, books and all that was used to teach, for draughtsmanship, for reading and writing for more than two hundred young men on the afternoons of Sundays and holydays was taken off in carts without any resistance."¹³

The Sisters of the Cross opposite were in tears at what they saw, and there was a general feeling against the master-writers for destroying what existed

only for the public good. People knew what the Brothers stood for. Morally, their opponents had lost. It was still the fact that “the Sunday School came to an end in this oppression, after a marvellous success for six whole years. The fruit it produced makes it still regretted today.”¹⁴ Father Leonard of Saint Catherine noted the case in his diary and added: “M. De La Salle was condemned to 100 livres fine, which he has not paid. He let the benches of his school be sold at public auction. Then a few days later, he started again.”¹⁵ This sequestration probably took place in the last months of 1704.

Closure of the school in the Rue des Fossés-Monsieur-le-Prince

About this same time, somewhere between the beginning of September and the end of November¹⁶ the school in the Rue des Fossés-Monsieur-le-Prince was closed. The master-writers followed up the judicial prohibition against the Brothers teaching anyone but the registered poor by coming into their four schools in the parish of Saint Sulpice to check. The one who had the right to stop them was La Chétardye, but he did nothing, and the masters became more provocative. “They would bring in the police superintendent of the area, start arguments, waste time, send away pupils or put them off their work. It was a way of making the Brothers’ classes soon empty, and that was what they were aiming to achieve.”¹⁷ They threatened the Brothers with summonses and confiscations. Somewhat better-off parents with children in these schools could risk being prosecuted.

Benefactors of these schools saw their money being given to no purpose. The king’s controller general of finance, informed by d’Argenson of the disorder around the Brothers’ schools, cut the royal subsidies to the parish. La Chétardye wrote to the controller’s successor on March 15th 1708: “We have been accustomed to receiving an alms from the king each year”, and explained that the parish looked after 13 to 14,000 shameful poor and that the poor of the charity schools that cost 13,000 livres per year. “And yet, for a few years now we no longer receive anything.” He asked for this “ordinary alms” to be continued.¹⁸ This can explain why he decided to close the most recently founded school. It would reduce the number of Brothers employed by the parish and also calm the master-writers a little. Yet why did he not take a firmer stand? The masters had no right to step inside a parish school without permission from the parish priest. Blain says that enemies of De La Salle, (possibly some clerics in the parish or members of the parish charity board), prevented him acting, and got him to close their fourth school, hoping to get them all out of the parish¹⁹. One result of two schools now being closed, plus the Sunday school, meant that the Founder had, besides a few novices, some very experienced men to send elsewhere.

Second letter from De La Salle to Gabriel Drolin, October 1704

He was still in touch as far as he could, with Gabriel Drolin in Rome. Gabriel had written on February 19th, but it had not arrived, as we have seen, till about August 6th. His Superior's answer of August 13th was still on the way in September. Drolin thought that this seven months' gap meant his had got lost and as he had asked advice on a number of things, he now wrote a similar letter in three copies. He sent one via M. de la Bussière who was travelling to Paris at the beginning of September. De La Salle would therefore see the man whose daughters he was teaching. He sent another by the French post and a third was given either to the parish priest of St Hippolyte who may have been in Rome, or to someone he knew who was also travelling back to Paris. They were all sent by September 16th. In them Drolin was able to add to what he had written in February that he had since got in touch with the school-master in charge of the Campus Martius area, who had asked him to put in writing his claims and references. In this letter also, he must have asked that he be addressed as Gabriele Drolini, without the title Brother of the Christian Schools. This title could have him mistaken for the member of a religious order. Decrees of the Cardinal Vicar obliged religious in Rome to have a community residence and not to go out at certain times, and pulled them up severely for infringements.

Unfortunately, these letters crossed De La Salle's original answer of August 13th. They arrived in Paris by the end of September. Gabriel would have received the August letter about the same time. It was reasonable for him, before replying, to wait for the Founder's answer²⁰ to those three. It was made, in fact, some time in October. The letter has no postal indication and no date; it must have been sent inside someone else's letter. He says he has received all three letters. He seems very concerned and almost severe that Gabriel has achieved nothing yet. Five or six times he says the equivalent of this: "When you have been living in a house for a year, two years as you are now, at the end of it all, what have you gained? You will have to make up your mind either to come back or to undertake something where you are." It is likely that he did not understand the situation. Gabriel, teaching catechism, willing to help the *Scolopi*, learning Italian and trying to get the support of the district master, was being actively faithful. One had to be resident in Rome for five years and speak fluently Roman Italian to be able to teach.²¹

In fact, his remarks point to Gabriel's efforts. "I am sending you a note to ask him (M. Théodon) to give you fifty livres to set you up and to provide for your needs in your establishment." This would seem to be a year's rent for a room where Drolin could begin teaching under the authority of the district master. "I will be answerable to you for the rent on places you will rent until Providence provides." Drolin may have complained of lack of aid, for the

Founder writes: "I am not the one to make you or let you die of hunger."

Gabriel seems to have been required to give details about himself, possibly as a result of his request to the ecclesiastical authorities to be considered for permission to start a school. His Founder comments: "Be careful, please, that those memorials you are being asked for do us no harm. That is very risky." But they had to be made.

He has two references to home affairs. "M. Brodart of Rethel has left me an annuity of over 2000 livres. I do not benefit from this yet because it will be not be till after the death of his sister who is eighty-five or eighty-six years old. Apparently there is not much longer to wait." This accumulated interest from capital invested by Brodart would therefore be cash he could use to buy properties and maintain them and support the Brothers. Thanks to his careful administration, they had eventually eight houses in Rethel, either to extend the school, or to provide a total of 700 livres a year from tenants.²² In this present case, he was disappointed. When Brodart's sister died, the heirs disputed his will. The case lasted several years. In the end "The heirs of the late M. Brodart and of his aged sisters of Rethel, deceased a few years ago, won completely, last Saturday, the case they had against De La Salle, superior of the little schoolmasters established in some places of your diocese. The donation that these old sisters had made in his favour of a great part of their goods has been quashed."²³ This quote is from a letter cited by Aroz. The other reference in De La Salle's letter, a quite restrained one, is to the situation he was in: "We are very poor because the parish priest of Saint Sulpice now gives us very little."

Second letter to Monsieur Deshayes, 18 November

Louis Deshayes, the parish-priest of St Saviour's in Rouen replied to what La Salle had written on September 26th by a letter that arrived on November 17th.²⁴ He must have explained that the school he wanted Brothers for was in Darnétal, a small town of two parishes which in fact was about three miles to the northeast of Rouen. Yet he must have still not made that clear. We know that Mme Maillefer had founded a school for girls in Darnétal and that Francis de Bimorel had provided for a schoolmaster in 1671. Adrian Nyel had found a master, Jean Houdoul, to run it. After Bimorel's death, this master was provided for by the Congregation of the Jesuit college, a group of people doing social work that met at the college. Deshayes was its leader, and when Houdoul died in September 1704 - an example, therefore, of a very stable teacher - he proposed that they should invite two Brothers, respecting their rule about this number being the minimum.

In his letter to De La Salle, Deshayes must have explained that the 150 livres the Congregation had provided for Houdoul, along with his lodging,

would have to do for two Brothers! It was a first example of the meanness they were to be shown in Rouen. Blain, who saw it all happen, is astonished himself and could write even of his own day: "You will be surprised to see twelve Brothers, of whom ten were employed in the charity schools, maintain for nearly thirty years the charity schools out of pure charity. You will be still more surprised that in such a rich city no one has been inspired to endow them or to increase them or even to help them. You will be even more so to know that they have since then been so universally and so constantly abandoned to their poverty, that they have only received alms from outside. It is the only place in the kingdom where people have had no regard, neither for their necessity nor for the great services they render the public."²⁵

The Founder answered Deshayes the next day, and asked two precise things: "Monsieur, I received yesterday the letter you had the honour to write to me. Allow me, please, to ask you for a clarification on one point you have not explained to me, which is whether the (kind of) schoolmaster you require will be obliged to sing in the parish and help the parish priest in his functions, for you are well aware that our Brothers do neither the one nor the other." He wanted to make quite clear what the Brothers' vocation was and what it was not. The still current idea that the teacher's job could be lumped along with being the parish priest's right-hand man was unacceptable as far as the Brothers were concerned.

The second question was: "Please do me the favour also of letting me know roughly how many communicants there are in this place in the two parishes and if each parish has its schoolmaster." 'Communicants' was then the term usually employed for adult parishioners. It is the same as asking for an estimate of the adult population. De La Salle wants to know if there will be enough children for a school of two; this is the further reason for wanting to know if the parishes had separate schools or if the Brothers would have children from both. In fact, as only one master had been appointed originally and Bimorel had in 1670 donated to the two parishes jointly a small house and garden situated in the parish of St Ouen, presumably for his use, it may have implied catering for the children of both parishes; but not if another master had been appointed since then in the other parish. The Founder is not aware of the position. He adds: "I have been to Darnétal; I thought it was further from Rouen." When, in 1686, he had had to rush from Rouen to Laon at the death of Brother Nicholas Bourlette, if he took the shorter route, he would have passed through Darnétal. What he is apparently saying now to Deshayes, who seems to be making out that the township was a suburb of Rouen, is: "If my memory serves me right, Darnétal is further from the city than you are telling me." He liked arrangements to be clear. In this letter, he wanted to get things right and also to be well understood: the reputation of this first school,

he hoped, would mean more Brothers would be asked for Rouen itself. It was another big, growing town where his work for the kingdom of God would have scope. He even sent “to Darnétal a Brother to make an inspection of the place, to see if it would suit as a school and so as to take measures with M. Deshayes to prepare the house and have everything ready.”²⁶

De La Salle’s letter to Gabriel Drolin, 23 December, 1704

From Rome meanwhile Brother Gabriel must have informed him of the slow progress of negotiations to be given a school. His brother Gerard must have told him he was leaving the Brothers²⁷, and could he help to get him dispensed from his vows. Gabriel refers the matter to the Founder. He answered on 23 December²⁸, perhaps via M. de la Bussière, who may have offered to be the go-between. In fact, all the letters in 1705 passed through his hands. This one has on the back: “To my very dear, my very dear Brother Gabriel, of the Society of the Christian Schools.”²⁹

The letter is rather stiff. “Unless you yourself have a great eagerness for this work, which you do not show, you will not succeed.” This accusation does not seem to fit the difficulties Gabriel was trying to work through. The Founder had expected Gabriel to have school and salary very soon, unaware of conditions in Rome.

About his brother, he says: “I do not think you should meddle with Brother Gerard’s dispensation from vows. He is one of most unfickle minds I know and is not suited to the world and would have suited the Trappists. I am very sorry I did not leave him there. He never knows what he wants to do.” Gerard, a younger brother, was born on 18 December 1676. The text of his final vows, dated 9 December 1697, is in the *Livret des Vœux* mentioned earlier. They are those of a serving Brother (see p. 373). He may in an unsettled moment have gone off to the Trappists then changed his mind again.³⁰ De La Salle possibly did not want Gabriel Drolin to take any steps in Rome with the risk of having questions asked too soon about what he was and why he was there.

In Paris, the little masters see their chance. De La Salle temporarily out-manoeuvres them

In Paris, it was the turn of the little masters, having seen the success of the master-writers and the lack of action on the part of La Chétardye, to press home their attack. De La Salle’s appeal of 19 March (see p. 432) was dragging on indefinitely. On 22 April 1704, therefore, they made a plea to the Grand Chamber of the Parlement to advance the proceedings, and were granted it. But it was not till 4 December, after the success of the master-writers on 29 August in linking Vuyart and Gervase with De La Salle and so

getting them condemned, that the little masters put in a second plea. This was that the Precentor's sentence should extend from De La Salle to Brothers Ponce Thiseux, Jean Partois and Joseph, headmasters presumably of the three remaining schools in Paris, and to all others teaching in the Christian Schools. It is useful to recall that the schools in St Hippolyte's and St Paul's parishes and one in St Sulpice's parish had disappeared or were no longer run by Brothers.

1705

The Founder and these headmasters decided that the three of them should present themselves in law as individuals, not as associated with him. On 7 January they presented a written defence, stating that they were employed in their schools by the parish priest of Saint Sulpice, and therefore any condemnation against a certain De La Salle had no bearing on their position. As this was true, the high court of the *Parlement* found it a difficult decision. It opted, as to procedure, for what the little masters did not want: pleading in writing, so that the Brothers did not have to face their lawyers. Instead of hoping to finish with them in one hearing, the masters fumed as months elapsed while the dossier for the case was being completed. The Brothers were in no hurry to provide their side of it.

De La Salle is not deterred from opening a school in the parish of St Roch

Of the beginning of this year Blain writes: "Persecution had frightened off the novices, and he had few left. To complete his awkward situation, he had that good supply of furniture that Mme Voisin had bestowed on him, and he did not know where to store it. But divine Providence, who never forgot him, inspired a person of piety to make over to him a big empty warehouse where he put them away. And after having transported quietly what was necessary to the house of the Brothers of the schools in St Sulpice's parish, he withdrew there with the few novices he had at the time, at the beginning of 1705. He was not there for long, for the chance that he wanted in order to move out was not slow to present itself."³¹

North of the river in the Rue Saint Honoré, is the parish church of **St Roch**. As De La Salle knew it was unfinished, comprising only the choir, transept and the first arches of the nave. Louis XIV had laid the foundation stone in 1653, but construction ceased in 1660 through lack of funds. Work on the nave was resumed in 1701.³² The parish priest in 1705 had been there since 1688. He was Louis Cognet, the dean of the parish priests of the capital. He knew his rights and was respected by the Precentor, the master-writers and little masters. He had a school for girls in the parish, and he now asked De La

Salle for two Brothers. He therefore moved into the parish with his few novices and three priests, "for he always had some with him in the various places he stayed in."³³ We were told this was the case in Rheims and at Vaugirard. Brother Dominic may have been in charge of the novices until he was sent for his health's sake, to a more active occupation, teaching in Darnétal.³⁴ The school and community house were not far from the Dominican house, levelled at the Revolution. The entry to the friary was where the present no. 328, Rue Saint-Honoré is. When Gerard Drolin left the Brothers, the Founder found him a job as sacristan to these friars. The school lasted only three years.

The community was De La Salle's legal domicile in Paris till 1708. Official papers were addressed to him there, and, once he had moved to Rouen, he stayed there when matters called him to Paris. In a letter to Drolin in November 1706, he wrote: "I am more usually in this house, Rue Saint-Honoré, because we have the classes of Saint Roch."³⁵

A very painful accident and an excruciating operation

According to Blain, it was before St Roch's school opened that the Founder had a very painful accident.³⁶ Because he so often spent hours in prayer kneeling on a tiled or plastered floor, he contracted a wen on his knee that he neglected, so much so that he had difficulty in bending his knee. "To make matters worse, coming back from St Roch's one evening and passing by the Tuileries, he stumbled and fell on a piece of iron fixed in the ground to stop the leaf of a folding door. Falling in this way on the damaged knee, or rather on the wen, the pain he felt was so great that he fell almost fainting in the mud and was unable to get up. Insult followed injury, for two street porters who came by just then thought he was full of wine. But a closer look at this poor priest showed them he was worthy of their pity. They gave him a hand to pick him up and lean him against the wall....

"M. De La Salle in this state was obliged to wait till his strength came back to continue on his way, and all he could do afterwards was to get up and drag himself, rather than walk, leaning against the walls. Weakness and pain stopped him at every step, and made him fear he might remain stretched out on the cobblestones. After taking more than an hour to cover a fairly short distance, he finally reached the Brothers' house, Rue Princesse, but he was so exhausted as to be in no state even to ring the bell himself for the door to be opened, and had to ask passers-by to render him this service. Hardly was it opened that he fell half-dead into the arms of the Brother porter. They had to carry him to bed, where he stayed more than six weeks...

"When he was in Rouen, where the famous Brother Côme, a Capuchin, had a great reputation in surgery and medicine, he put himself in his hands

and endured with such great patience and calm the painful operation that is usually done for such an ailment that one would not have noticed he was suffering but for the cruel incisions that the lancet made on the living flesh in the form of a cross. For it was in this shape that the wen was cut according to the desire of the servant of God, who sought in the thought of Jesus Christ the model, motive and grace of his patience. However skilful Brother Côme's hands were for this kind of operation. the ailment was not cured...It is true that M. De La Salle, always little attentive to his health, did not take all the precautions necessary for a prompt and perfect cure. For hardly was the wound closed than he began the ordinary exercises again (the usual community times for prayer, etc.), and a short time afterwards he left for Paris, where he was called concerning the founding of a school in the parish of St Roch." He was in Rouen before 13 April 1705 (see below) and was still there on 18th, but back in Paris before 27th. "There he was obliged to put himself into the hands of the surgeons again, who after applying silver nitrate, finished cutting with the lancet all the flesh that Brother Côme had spared. During this agony, M. De La Salle, used to fixing his mind on God, said his Office...without giving the least sign of pain."

Blain goes on immediately to say: "The servant of God, obliged to allow time for his cure, profited to revise several treatises of piety he had written when he was living at Vaugirard with his novitiate. As these works and several others he composed later interest only his disciples, it is useless mentioning them. However, I make exception for the one which has for title: *Rules of Christian Decorum and Civility*, which has been so well received by the public that several editions have had to be made. It is claimed that M. De La Salle, of all the authors who have written on this subject, is the one who did so with most success...One has to admit that of all the works of the holy Priest, this one has been the most carefully worked at."³⁷ We know this was first printed in 1703. However, it was again printed in Paris in 1708.³⁸

De La Salle's letter to Drolin of February 11th, 1705

De La Salle must have been in bed recovering from his accident when he wrote this first of the four letters he sent to Brother Gabriel this year. They are all sent via M. de la Bussière and are addressed to Drolin as M. Santenot. This one, dated 11 February 1705,³⁹ was sent inside another he wrote to Brother Albert, director of the community in Avignon, who forwarded it to Rome. No answers arrived to the letter written in October, nor to that of 23 December. Perhaps Gabriel found it too hard to answer stiff letters that misunderstood in part his situation. Fearing letters were being lost, the Founder arranges for future correspondence to go through Avignon. "It is a long time, my very dear Brother, since I received any news from you. Please let me

have some and write to me via Avignon thus: To my very dear Brother Albert, at the gratuitous schools, near Saint Symphorian, at Avignon.' The schools are doing well there. We shall have four Brothers there and there is going to be a house to lodge 20 people. I presented three to his Grace the archbishop of Avignon, Nuncio Extraordinary in France, who received them very well and gave them his blessing before leaving, with great kindness." This was in Paris, since the archbishop, as nuncio, resided there. As two of the 'four' Brothers he mentions were already in Avignon, the three new ones must have included a serving Brother.

The house M. de Château-Blanc provided in the Rue de Gal near to St Symphorian's church was only meant to be provisional. He bought a much better house in St Peter's parish near the Matheron Gate. It still stands. De La Salle was keen to get the Nuncio's approval for the Brothers of his new society: it would be something more than an episcopal approval. He himself could show his submission to the archbishop and his attachment to the Holy See, and he knew that his Excellency's kindness came from the very favourable reports he had of the school in Avignon. Things might be crumbling in Paris, but here was one step nearer to having his society approved for what it was by the Holy See.

The Founder immediately warns Drolin: "Please keep this secret and never speak about it to anybody, and even burn this letter. You pass on things too much." To go round in Rome talking about support from the nuncio could risk having it misinterpreted. The Clerks Regular of the Pious Schools, who had had so much difficulty themselves, might mistake the idea of these Brothers having such support. In a postscript to his letter, De La Salle writes: "Please inform yourself exactly about the Institute of the Fathers of the Pious Schools; what their rules are, their way of life and government, if they are widespread, if they have a Superior General, what powers he has, if they are all priests, if they take money (that is, do they charge fees). Find out all you can about them, and let me know in detail as much as you can." The man keeps a very alert mind in spite of all his problems. Although he is clear as to his own foundation, he is ready to learn, and he also needs to know if his own Brothers have a place alongside these Clerks in Rome.

He has also some direct things to say to Drolin himself and seems to have given up on him: "I do not know if you will ever get anything done where you are. The spirit of God and a great zeal must guide you and it seems to me that I do not see in you enough of either for such an undertaking. God be blessed and may his will be done in that."

There were negotiations later in this month of February 1705 which had little result, concerning opening a school in the village of Guipavas at the extreme western point of Brittany. This was near the naval port of Brest, 450

miles from Paris. On 23 February the parish priest Robert Legal, leased a property to M. De La Salle for 150 livres. The parish turned out to be too far out from the town and the project was abandoned. We know that Brothers actually went there, for De La Salle says so to Drolin in September this year, but we have no other details. He had some contacts with Brittany that presumably had made such a venture seem reasonable.⁴⁰

Brother Nicholas Vuyart separates from the Brothers

We come to a depressing moment in the history of the Institute of the Brothers of the Christian Schools.⁴¹ The judicial sentence of 21 August allowed the parish priests of St Martin and St Hippolyte “to propose such persons as shall seem good to them to teach writing to the poor of their parishes, provided they make a list of the names of the poor children they teach, which list shall be placed in our hands at the end of each month and communicated to the representative of the master-writers...Which decisions shall be posted up at the door of the said schools and wherever else need shall be.” They could therefore continue to employ Vuyart and Gervase provided these two ceased officially at least to be part of De La Salle’s society. The previous parish priest of St Hippolyte, Lebreton, was near to death at this time. He was anxious to ensure the permanence of the work he had begun. He made Vuyart the legal inheritor of the capital he had put into the seminary. Admittedly, it was only part of what was needed to keep the work going. There was also the annual 800 interest from capital invested by the other parish priest, and there were other payments from the community of St Nicolas-du-Chardonnet. Lebreton could have asked De La Salle to accept the money in his name, as he had done for houses in Rheims and Rethel. But many a lawsuit was now possible over his receiving funds in his name but for the benefit of his society. Granted Vuyart’s close link with his superior, giving to him was the equivalent of giving to De La Salle. So also the latter must have understood it.

He “was therefore stupefied when, after the death of the parish priest of St Hippolyte, that is, in the first months of 1705, he came to discuss with Brother Nicholas the use of the funds, the latter told him he had no account to give him, that he could see quite well by himself to the intentions of the deceased.”⁴² Blain, who blackens any one opposed to his hero, calls him a Judas in his “perfidy and avarice.” But Vuyart did not take the money for himself. He did nevertheless choose to act as if the money did not belong to the Society, and to administer it as independent head of the school and training centre. He thereby betrayed the intentions of Lebreton, whether De La Salle’s enemies pushed him to it or some lawyer advised him. Overlooking his obligations as a Brother, he preferred running on his own an institution of

which he had long been the successful master, to remaining faithful to the solidarity he had vowed with the Institute of the Brothers. The situation was a difficult one, but it is on such occasions that a person's commitment is tested.

The consequences came home to him when the priest who had paid so far annually 800 livres, refused to deal with him as an individual and cancelled the agreement. Brother Gervase refused to go along with his decision, left him and rejoined De La Salle. Vuyart was unable to run both the school and the training-centre and the latter collapsed. Faced with what he had done, he seems to have been too proud to go back on his option. He gave up wearing the Brother's habit, got himself freed from his vows by the diocesan authority, and continued to run the primary school. A few years later, he asked to be taken back among the Brothers. The Founder was willing, but there were wise people who persuaded him not to.⁴³ Vuyart taught in his school for a total of twenty years (from the end of 1698). He fell ill on 8 April 1719, the day after De La Salle's death, and died five months later at the end of September after a very painful illness.

One has to think of what this break on the part of a man associated with him since the beginnings in 1682 and so closely, meant to the Founder, coming as it did in the middle of so much opposition. Another consequence for him was that he had to be very careful in his correspondence with Gabriel Drolin. If it were opened and it was clear that he was corresponding with a Brother, he would be seen as still the head of a group that had been ordered not to associate, and would be liable to the threatened fine. This may explain why from 1705 to 1710 he gave the name of "Mr Saintenot" to Drolin on his letters.⁴⁴

The school opens in Darnétal. Prospects for Rouen

He sent two Brothers to Darnétal at the beginning of February of the year 1705.⁴⁵ Brother Dominic must have been one of them. Their school was full immediately. Some well-to-do people now began planning to get Brothers into Rouen itself. That had been De La Salle's hope and the reason why he had accepted such a poor remuneration for his Brothers. A few years later, because the parish priest was one of those who appealed against the Bull *Unigenitus* in 1713, even this was suppressed. "This school still subsists today, although it has only 75 livres annual payment. The priest who rules the parish today, very fond of the Brothers, has found means of making up the remainder by a general collection made among the inhabitants every three months."⁴⁶ Of the two Brothers sent, the one who was to be in charge was Brother Ponce, who had given him trouble more than once. In spite of being apparently hotheaded, he may have learnt to control himself. He was also a

good administrator.

As the archbishop of Rouen, Jacques Nicholas Colbert, was in Paris at the time, the Founder was able to present the two Brothers to him before they left. He was the son of the great Colbert. He knew De La Salle was from Rheims, his father's native place, and had heard of his schools. He showed him goodwill, and later his open favour. In the schools run by the Poor Board, conditions had deteriorated. With Nyel no longer there, the seminary was asked to provide teachers. Priests, acolytes, sub-deacons filled the role, more concerned with their studies than running a class. On 2 April 1704 the administrators noted: "the master de Bouvreuil cannot write well enough; we need an extra master."⁴⁷ The little masters of the town were active against priests setting up their own schools, and so were the master writers, whose guild of about 50 members was very powerful.

Nonetheless, De La Salle would find much better support than in Paris. The first president of the Parlement of Normandy was Pierre Camus, lord of Pontcarré. He was a fine magistrate, a member of the Jesuit college's Congregation and very interested in popular education. Once he knew of the Brothers, he became their firm supporter and a great friend of De La Salle in his last years.

In Paris, putting together the dossiers of the little masters' case against the Brothers' school of St Sulpice took time, but on 26 March they made a third plea summoning Ponce and his co-defendants to prove they had nothing in common with De La Salle and his Christian schools. Would they do the same as Vuyart? As clearly they would not, the outcome of the case would be a foregone conclusion.⁴⁸

Good news from Avignon. Hopeful but difficult negotiations in Rouen. Five deaths from the plague in Chartres

But there was good news, too, this month from Avignon. A letter came from M. de Château-Blanc, telling De La Salle of the success of the school there and of the good impression the Brothers were making in the town. The papal vice-legat, Antonio Banquieri, was sending his page to the school. Château-Blanc had bought on 13 March the house mentioned by De La Salle in his letter to Drolin, and promised he would provide for any new Brothers that would be sent "until divine Providence itself provided for them through another hand."

In his letter he wrote "that he was very pleased with his disciples, that the town was very edified by them, and that His Excellency the Vice-legat was so satisfied with this establishment that he would give proof of it on all occasions." That could include when he was in Rome. Perhaps we have seen so often the Brothers' schools meeting with opposition, that we need to get the

opinion of people like these who have no axe to grind. The letter added, about Providence providing funds: "I do not doubt that God will do it. This work is of all the works of charity the most necessary in this city. I hope, Sir, that you will come and judge for yourself, and that we shall have the pleasure of seeing you."⁴⁹ The five Brothers lived on the money provided by the Treasurer and several other people, until Clement XI provided a regular pension.⁵⁰ Antonio Banquieri left Avignon on 8 August 1706 and, after travelling to Paris, went to Rome where he succeeded to various offices, becoming Governor of Rome on 18 September 1724. He was made deacon in 1728 and cardinal the same year, then Secretary of State to Clement XII. As such, he granted a pontifical subsidy to one of the Brothers' schools in Avignon.⁵¹

In Rouen, the grand vicars, learning about Darnétal (during Colbert's absence on other duties) and urged to get the Brothers to come to Rouen, expressed their opinion to the archbishop when he returned towards the close of Lent for the conferring of holy orders. At this time the Brothers from Darnétal came to pay their respects and beg his blessing. Poutet records:

"After asking news about their Superior, he asked them if he could send some of his Brothers to Rouen to establish free schools. As M. De La Salle desired it as much as Mgr Colbert, the Brothers knew they were risking nothing by assuring his Grace that their Superior was ready to satisfy him. On this reply, his Grace the Archbishop ordered M. l'abbé Couët, who always had his confidence, to write to M. De La Salle to come at the earliest to Rouen, before the departure of the Prelate, who had to leave the day after Easter ...The Founder's intention to transfer his novitiate from Paris to Rouen was not overlooked, since the reverend Couët mentions it to him in this letter..."⁵²

The letter was dated 3 April.⁵³ One can assume that this means that bringing the novitiate to Rouen was approved. The Brothers at Darnétal also wrote to the Founder about their work and their interview. He travelled by mail coach to Rouen some time before Easter Monday, 13 April, when the archbishop would be away again.⁵⁴ The wren on his knee or his eagerness to settle the matter would explain his travelling by coach. It would be at this time that he went to Brother Côme to have his knee operated on. He was still in Rouen on 18 April, since he received on that date a letter from Drolin forwarded from Paris, but was back in the capital before 27th, for he answered him from there on that date. It had been agreed that he "should go back in all haste to Paris to get those Brothers ready whom he intended to travel to Rouen."⁵⁵

"An extraordinary meeting was called, made up of the parish priests of the town, the administrators of the Board and other people who might have an interest in the matter."⁵⁶ The archbishop wanted the Charity Board to entrust its schools to the Brothers. In spite of his credit, he had no direct control over

a municipal institution. He therefore relied on M. de Pointcarré as head of the *Parlement* of Normandy to appeal to them. They were not ready for his proposal, and their negative reaction surprised him. "He expected to find some difficulty, but he did not expect to see people as frightened of the proposal he had just made as if it were a matter of bringing enemies into the town... In the end, it was agreed to allow Brothers into the Hospice to keep school, and to entrust to them those of the town which are endowed, and of which M. Nyel had already had charge. This was the news that Colbert, when he returned to Paris, brought M. De La Salle, urging him to send at once enough Brothers to teach the poor of the Board and to take care of the charity schools of the town....While everything was being prepared for the Brothers' departure, attitudes had changed in Rouen;...the administrators did not want to hear about the Brothers. This set-back did not upset the Prelate, who was rather expecting it. He told M. De La Salle not to worry, to send the Brothers off and take them himself, promising to return immediately to Rouen to smooth out the difficulties."⁵⁷

At this time, disaster struck the community in Chartres and added to the Founder's difficulty. The city was struck by typhus during the winter of 1704-5. The community was very badly affected. On 1 January Brother Germain died aged twenty-one; on 16th, a Brother Lazarus, aged thirty-four; on 27 May, Brother Michael, aged 29. The fourth was a Brother James, aged thirty-four.⁵⁸ "The first was a novice of great virtue, the second an elderly Brother, an excellent writer and a very skilful schoolmaster, and, which by itself merits praise, a true disciple of M. De La Salle, full of his spirit and of the grace of his vocation. The third, who had been Master of Novices was a man very hard on himself and very fond of mortification."⁵⁹ He had been the occasion of La Chétardye getting De La Salle deposed in Paris. Blain confuses the fourth with the infirmarian whom La Salle sent from Paris and who was in fact Brother John Chrysostom, a fifth victim. Add to these a Brother Basil who died in Paris at the end of 1704.⁶⁰ One can imagine the problems created for De La Salle when he was on the point of answering new calls. To see this work for the Kingdom of God held up in this way needed a great trust in Providence.

Some time this year he obtained the royal 'privilege' to have some ten of his works reprinted in Paris. Copies were deposited legally at the King's Cabinet on 6th August 1706.⁶¹

His letter to Drolin of 27 April. Gabriel has a school at last

It was at this time that he received good news from Rome: Brother Gabriel had at last begun to teach.⁶² He answered on 27 April from Paris, after his return from his meeting with the Poor Board in Rouen. "I am told that your

letter arrived here on Easter Sunday (this fell on 12 April), while I was in the country, and I received it the following Saturday, my very dear Brother. It caused me great joy as much because it is a long time since I received news from you as because you informed me in it that you were at last carrying out the function of your state.”

The school was in that part of the **Campus Martius** area of Rome, between the Tiber and the Corso. In this area of the city there were seven parishes, with 20,000 inhabitants. Only 22 schoolmasters were to be found in them, all receiving fees from their pupils. Only the district master (*maestro del rione*) was obliged to accept the poor and was paid for this. He kept the peace between the masters and granted any newcomer after examination the right to teach. In the parish of San Lorenzo in Lucina, with its population of 11,000, there were 11 masters teaching perhaps seven or eight hundred boys, but as the district master was not in this parish, the poor were uncatered for. Now Brother Gabriel has been allowed by his *maestro de rione* to open a sort of extension to his own school to serve the poor. He had to accept from his pupils the weekly symbolic *baiocco* and hand it over to his employer, but received nothing himself. It was a hard start. The next thing would be to get his employer satisfied so that he would support his candidature for official recognition to teach in his own right.

For this he needed a licence to teach from the Rector of *Sapienza*, given after an interview with the *maestro del rione* about his learning and moral behaviour, and also about how well he had a good Roman pronunciation of Italian. It was not extraordinary for a foreigner to be allowed to teach, in spite of only citizens of the Papal states in theory being allowed to do this, for Romans at the time despised the teaching of children. Very bravely, with only the 50 livres De La Salle had arranged for him to have, Drolin rented in the Via degli Otto Cantoni, off the Corso, two rooms, one for himself and the other as a classroom. This one was above his, for it was forbidden to have a schoolroom that gave straight on to the street. He made sure he was not too near the three schools run by the *Scolopi* Fathers.

Otto Cantoni was the name of a little square and street. The square, crossed by two streets, had eight corners, whence its name. In the little Via degli Otto Cantoni, coming into the square from the Corso, Drolin's lodging was the fourth on the left, almost at the square. Since then the square has disappeared. The Via degli Otto Cantoni, widened and blocked off, has become the Largo Lombardi. Drolin's side is now occupied by a restaurant. In his day, what had been gardens and little vineyards in the area were giving way to the little premises of craftsmen and shopkeepers all around the port of Ripetta and Augustus's mausoleum. Here were Greeks, Spaniards, Portuguese, Illyrians, commemorated still in street-names and names of churches. Gangs



unloaded ships, and carters and street-porters took them to their destinations. Coopers, blacksmiths, carpenters, would remind him of his noisy home parish of St James in Rheims. There were also the marble-cutters, the makers of reeds for use in vineyards, dyers and fullers. With many children idle, Drolin's school soon filled till he had reached the regulation limit of sixty pupils at which he had to stop unless he employed another master.

M. de la Bussière for the time being saw to his meals. M. Divers, the Vincentian Procurator General, was advising him how to get a permanent post in one of the three papal schools. Gabriel must also have said in his letter that the Founder and the Brothers in Paris were being sceptical about him, and that he wasn't another Nicholas Vuyart (he must have heard of his departure and of this criticism from someone). The Founder comments on all this with great attention, gives good news and hides the bad:

"You have done well to set up in an area far from the Pious Schools. You have done well to continue to eat at de la Bussière's; please greet him on my behalf. You have also done well not to go there entirely. If you need any school books, such as the book of prayers, - I do not know if you have it - we have had it reprinted recently. We can easily send them via Avignon." (Authorisation to print had been given for his various works in 1703 for five years. About half the prayers were in Latin.)

Now that he was in a strong position, Drolin must have let his Superior know that he had too often been blaming him. "We are far from putting you in the dock. All I that I have been impatiently waiting for is that you should be what you are. I am surprised that you say that you have never had much satisfaction on our part because there is nothing I have not tried to do and that I am still not ready to do to please you. I know quite well that you are far from doing what Brother Nicholas is doing....It is not yet time for you to hurry so much in Rome." This was a change of tone from his previous insistence.

News about Avignon. Distractions of Roman life

"A house has been bought convenient for our Brothers in Avignon, capable of taking in twenty Brothers." (This was in his last letter, and is very sanguine.) "The Vice-legate likes them and sends his page to their school." The Vice-legate (at the time Banquieri) was so called, and not full Legate, in order to leave precedence in the town to the archbishop. Banquieri, who was only tonsured, resided however in the papal fortress. "I wanted to send you the one who began here, but you did not want him." This was Brother Albert, the Director in Avignon. The offer must have been made in the autumn of 1703 in a letter now lost. It is strange that one or two months after opening this important school, he should offer the headmaster to Gabriel. Albert was a man of action who could never stay long in one place. Gabriel turned him

down. And how could he help with no salary? The Founder repeats the good news about Avignon given in the preceding letter, perhaps to cheer Gabriel up. He says Fieschi had been made archbishop of Genoa and would be moving shortly to Rome to be made cardinal. He seems to be hoping to find in Fieschi the role of a Cardinal Protector whom Gabriel could approach.

The papal treasurer in Avignon, Château-blanc, was a close friend of the Jesuits. He expressly counted on them to keep an eye on the religious teaching of the Brothers, and on the choice of Brothers as teachers, and to see to their spiritual direction. In his testament he made supervision and support of the work their right and obligation: if ever “they were denied its management and supervision, the legacy in favour of the schools would lapse.” This was an over-paternal control. If anyone was to check on the Brothers’ orthodoxy it was the bishop; appointments of Brothers were a matter for their Superior; providing spiritual direction was something De La Salle was always concerned about, yet surely by mutual arrangement. Fortunately, the Jesuits were very discreet, and we shall find them elsewhere supporting the Brothers in several ways.⁶³

The one who replaced Fieschi as Archbishop of Avignon was Maurice de Gontéry, who arrived in Avignon on May 6th. He, too, showed over the years his appreciation of the Brothers. “He used to go himself to visit the schools and took pleasure in being the spectator of the good order and discipline reigning there. Delighted with the method the Brothers used to teach, he would spend several hours watching them or listening to the pupils...He even made them (the pupils) come into his palace...to give them the honour of listening to their catechism recitals.”⁶⁴

To return to the letter: a last remark is for Gabriel himself: “Endeavour I beseech you and get rid of that worldly spirit to which you are fairly inclined...” Gabriel must have written to the Founder as his spiritual guide and admitted his difficulties in living alone the Brothers’ life. He could hardly not get involved socially to some extent, and may himself be accusing himself of worldliness. His house was a stone’s throw from the Corso, the main thoroughfare of Rome, whither the carnival and its races had been transferred by Paul II. The **carnival** became the most famous in Europe and was one of the great sights to see in 18th and 19th centuries.⁶⁵ John Evelyn visited Rome in 1644. Under “27 Feb” he has the entry: “We were taken up next morning in seeing the impertinences of the Carnival, when all the world are as mad at Rome as at other places; but the most remarkable were the 3 races of the Barbarie horses, that run in the Strada del Corso without riders, onely (sic) having spurs so placed on their backs, and hanging down by their sides, as by their motion to stimulate them; then of mares, then of asses, of buffalos, naked men, old and young, and boys, and abundance of idle ridiculous

passtime.”⁶⁶ (The spelling is Evelyn’s.)

On ordinary days, crowds walked in the Corso in the evenings. It was easy for Drolin to find friends and receive invitations. He could hardly have stayed in his house like a solitary. One can muse that while De La Salle was very informed factually about some of Drolin’s circumstances, he had none of the understanding that comes from actually living there of the cultural climate of Rome. Perhaps some adaptation was possible and necessary.

We have this year the first indication in Roman sources of Drolin’s presence in Rome. At Easter, parish registers were brought up to date. We have for the parish of S. Lorenzo in Lucina (*Status Animarum San Lorenzo in Lucina*, 1705, fol. 81v):

“D. Gabriele De Rolini”, and again:

“Alli Otto Cantoni verso in Corso, mano destra, Sigr Gabriele de Rolini, subdiacono, Mro di scola”⁶⁷ (At the Otto Cantoni, towards the Corso, righthand side, Signor Gabriele de Rolini, ‘subdeacon, schoolmaster’) for which an explanation will be given further. In 1706, on page 85 verso, no. 8:

“Sg Gabriele de Rolini, chierico, Maestro di scola”, (cleric, schoolmaster) but for 1707 and 1708 simply:

“Gabriele Rolini, Maestro di Scola.”⁶⁸

MEANNESS IN ROUEN

Rouen once more holds our attention⁶⁹ as it did in Chapter 5, and will do so till De La Salle’s death there. It was a growing commercial town on the Seine, 140 kms downstream from Paris. It was the capital of Normandy under its Dukes. Protestantism early took root in Rouen, but there was a Catholic revival as Jesuits, Vincentians and Oratorians came in. It became a centre of the Catholic League in the Wars of Religion. 4000 Protestants left the town after 1685. It had a population in 1700 of about 100,000, with 37 parishes and fifty or so monasteries and convents. Its main source of wealth was the production and export of woollens but also of cotton cloth. Rouen, despite destruction in World War II still has some beautiful Gothic churches such as the very graceful St Ouen and the cathedral, and also its remarkable Palais de Justice.⁷⁰

Counting on the Archbishop’s support, the Founder set off for Rouen with his two Brothers. The journey there, made in silence and prayer, was remembered by them afterwards as a retreat. Colbert arrived from Paris shortly afterwards. De La Salle went to receive his blessing, and was asked by him to attend with him a meeting of the Poor Board. The Archbishop called the meeting and presided over it with de Pointcarré. He found the same opposition as before, but got the administrators to accept to take on the Brothers for a trial period. They made sure the conditions were so onerous that the Broth-

ers would soon have to leave. On 19 May the two Brothers presented themselves to the Board, having been lodged in the hospice a short while. They were officially admitted, to be sent, according to the minutes of the meeting, “one to Saint Maclou’s school and the other in that of Saint Godard; and outside of their school hours (they) will occupy themselves, in conjunction with the other masters, to serve the poor, as is the practice in the said hospice, at meal time and in the usual instruction, and will be lodged and fed the ordinary way, and the ordinary master of the “big class” of Saint-Maclou will continue.”⁷¹ So the two Brothers would be part of the domestic staff of the hospice and keep their Rule as best they could.

St Maclou’s was the first school set up by Nyel in 1661 in two rooms in the buildings that formed a rectangular cloister around a small cemetery. It is now an arts centre, but you can still see the ‘danse macabre’ motif of embossed skulls and crossbones running round the building, and the bas-relief skeletons on the wooden pillars. One Brother worked here under the master-in-charge in rooms that were bright and airy, even if the boys had nowhere to play. The Brothers taught there till 1907. The other Brother worked alone in the big, dark and cold room in one of the towers of the former 12th century fortress; it had been the third of Nyel’s schools. They were taking up his work after he had a quarter of a century earlier been at the origin of their own in Rheims⁷². “So here were two lowly teachers with their broad hat and thick-soled boots in the elegant, rich and fairly disdainful capital.”⁷³ They received bad treatment before people learnt to admire and respect them, and that took time. Blain was the Brothers’ ecclesiastical superior in Rouen for some years and could still speak of it happening when he wrote: “So far their services in Rouen have been repaid only by continual contempt and frequent outrages. There is no town in France where ill-treatment has been carried further...In front of him (De La Salle) they threw stones at the Brothers in the streets, they threw some at him...Deliberately they stopped the Brothers, pushed them into the open drain or tried to push them into heaps of mud. They spat on them, they hit them as they passed...there were even unbridled women who publicly slapped their face for the wicked pleasure of trying their patience.”⁷⁴ Writing nearly thirty years later, Blain could add: “One must admit however that the town of Rouen is beginning to change towards the Brothers...they put up with them nowadays and leave them fairly in peace.” They were still in great poverty. “For thirty years they have lived in Rouen wanting in everything: linen, furniture, habits, shirts, often bread and other things necessary for life...The alms they received were so infrequent and so small that they considered extraordinary and in a way miraculous an alms of 22 livres that was made them in this time of calamity” (the terrible cold and famine of 1709-10). “It came from an unknown hand with a note that had these words: ‘Do not



trouble yourselves where this charity came from; only trust in God; take care to serve him faithfully and he himself will take care of you.”

For all its niggardliness the Board recognised the ability of the two Brothers, and applied to De La Salle, who was back in Paris, for more. On Tuesday 11 August 11th, a Brother William was allocated a miserable 36 livres a year to teach the children of the hospice itself. These were confined in a building on the west side of the Hospice, and it seems that this was where the Brothers lived as best they could for the next two years. On Tuesday 24 November 1705, Brother Joachim, for the same despicable salary, was employed by the Board to teach poor children in St Eloi's school. It was a ground-floor room in what was the port area in those days, and many blacksmiths and ironworkers were in the area. La Salle moved Brother Ponce from Darnétal and replaced him by another Brother, in order to put him in general charge of the schools in Rouen. It seems possible that he was allowed to take charge of St Maclou's "big class" while another Brother took over the "little class". This would explain Blain saying there were five Brothers, although the Board's minutes book only mentions four. Ponce would be in general charge of the Hospice school and the three town schools. The remaining one, in St Vivian's parish - Nyel's own parish - was still run by a layman, to be exact, by Brother François Le Vasseur, one of Nyel's choices forty years before.

The Brothers' daily routine consisted in having to get the poor up and preside over their morning prayer. At about eight o'clock four of them set out for their schools "The two Brothers who went to St Maclou had each more than a hundred pupils to teach, and so also the one who kept St Eloi's school." The fourth, at the Bouvreuil Gate (this was St Godard's school) "had a hundred and fifty. And the one at the Board had more."⁷⁵ At midday they had to serve the poor their meal and see to order during it, get their own meal as best they could and then go back to school. On their return, they accompanied the poor to the dining room and led their night prayer. This situation could not last, and it was not meant to. The Brothers' minds were wholly taken up by these concerns and their health suffered. The Board refused to accept other Brothers under pretext of the expense. De La Salle changed a Brother by one from elsewhere when he fell ill or was worn out. This inhuman situation went on till July 1707.

Two Brothers open a school in Dijon, June 1705

In June this year, two Brothers opened a school in **Dijon**.⁷⁶ This city, then the capital of the Province of Burgundy, lies about 330 kilometres south-east of Paris. Burgundy was a province that kept its own Assembly or States without whose approval neither king nor towns could receive any moneys from the provincial treasury. At the assembly, an individual town could not

petition for subsidies for a foundation, such as a school run by the Brothers, that other towns did not enjoy. It had to be included under a wider heading such as financial aid to town schools in general or to welfare. Fortunately, the one who invited the Brothers to Dijon was the *greffier* or secretary to the States of Burgundy, Claude Regoley.

Regoley paid for the school out of his own resources.⁷⁷ He was related through his wife to the Languet de Gergy family, whose name will recur later, and which provided the first funds for the new school. His was a very Christian family, and he himself seems to have been a daily communicant.⁷⁸ His brother-in-law, M. Languet de Gergy, was Chétardye's curate, a priest well-disposed towards De La Salle. He must have given Claude Regoley a very warm appreciation of the Brothers' schools. In February Regoley wrote to the bishop-duke of Langres, a town 65 kms north of Dijon, for approval of his proposal to set up a charity school in the parish of St Peter. The bishop gave his approval on 24 February, promising to give the official licence to teach when the project got under way. He simply agreed to such an important and trusted person as the provincial secretary and showed little direct interest.

Claud Rigoley now wrote to De La Salle asking for one master and promising to pay for him. The Founder wrote back explaining that he never sent less than two, and Rigoley accepted this and sought the bishop's approval. The latter asked for the formal opinion of his diocesan promoter who was also parish priest of St Philibert in Dijon. He had been with De La Salle at the seminary of Saint Sulpice, and certified that the two Brothers, Anthony (Jean Partois) and Barnabas who were due to come were of sound morals and doctrine. The parish priest of St Peter's was also asked, and he followed the line of the promoter. Both certificates are dated 12 May. The bishop's licence to teach, however, was not given till 15 January 1707. Jean Partois, who joined the Brothers in 1686 and was one of the most faithful Brothers, could no longer teach in Paris after the decisions of the Châtelet. Barnabas had joined only in 1700. He was later Director at Dijon.

On 16 May Rigoley wrote to De La Salle inviting him to send two Brothers and promising him an annual payment of 400 livres and accommodation. Without delay he sent off the two Brothers. Allowing for their journey and settling in, they lost no time in starting school in June. Perhaps Regoley was used to slower procedures: their house was not yet ready, and he put them up in his own. One or two difficulties having arisen, he must have written to De La Salle, and that has provided us with his answer, written on 10 July, the day before he signed the lease on Saint Yon that we see next.

Monsieur, I received your last on my return from the country. (Either he had gone back to Rouen since to see the furniture was well arranged in



Saint Yon, or he had visited some schools. One could think of the need to provide Brothers in Chartres.) I am very sorry about the inconvenience our Brothers are causing you by being so long in your house and I am at the same time considerably obliged by the charity and kindness you have for them. I am well aware that starting this foundation has given you so far and still gives you much trouble and it is a result of your zeal for the instruction of children that you undertook it and pursued its carrying out notwithstanding the difficulty that has caused you.

As for the books I had sent on for the schools, I would not have thought of doing so if Brother Anthony had not asked me. I am sorry that this did not please you. May I ask that they stay in Dijon until, if there is need of none, they can be transported elsewhere.” (Jean Partois had drawn up a list of things needed for the community and the school. This would include books for the poor who couldn’t afford them. As Claude Regoley was slow providing them, not realising how essential they were, Partois wrote directly to his superior asking for some. Regoley was not pleased.)

I do not know, Sir, if you have allowed for the house you have rented having two rooms next to one another to have classes in them, for this is indispensable for our Brothers. If you have not thought of this precaution, I would ask you to bear it in mind by renting neighbouring rooms between now and when our Brothers will occupy that house. I am, with all possible respect and gratitude, Sir, your very humble and very obedient servant. De La Salle.⁷⁹

Anthony and Barnabas were still there in 1717. In 1718 a Brother Christopher joined them and opened a single-class school in another parish.⁸⁰ Another was opened in 1729.⁸¹

The Founder leases the manor of Saint-Yon outside Rouen and transfers his novitiate there

The Founder had at the same time come to a decision about Rouen. Since everything was about to collapse in Paris, Rouen was the providential place to start again and have there the centre of his Institute. He saw the fact that the Brothers were running four schools there a godsend, even if the conditions were crushing. He could, at the right time, pull out of what was a provisional arrangement. He intended to do so as soon as he had men available to make an offer the Board could not refuse. In the immediate, he wanted to find a suitable place for his novices and for other developments. Once he had the archbishop’s authorisation to open a novitiate in his diocese, “he lost no time in getting hold of a suitable house. After having looked for a long time in the town in vain, he found one at the extremity of the suburb of Saint Sever,⁸² and preferred it to another that was offered him in another suburb.

“This house called Saint Yon is very old, and its boundary wall holds ten acres of land. It used to be called the manor of Haute-Ville, and for nearly two hundred years it passed through the hands of several lords of consideration.”⁸³ It was across the river from the town, and consisted of gardens, open grassland, great trees and spacious buildings. Eustace of Saint Yon, master of the audit office of Normandy, acquired it in 1605. He built a chapel to his patron, Saint Ionius or Yon, and the name was extended to the whole manor. It became in 1670 the convalescent and country house of the Benedictine nuns of Saint Amand in Rouen, held in the name of one of the nuns who was the niece of their benefactress. When she died in 1705 it passed to the benefactress’s daughter who was the marchioness of Louvois, widow of the former minister of State, brother of Maurice Le Tellier, Archbishop of Rheims. She put it up for lease “at the time M. De La Salle came to Rouen to establish the Christian and free Schools.

“He saw it and it pleased him, and after having spoken with M. Colbert, he returned in haste to Paris to ask Madame de Louvois for it. Fortunately she was very much disposed in favour of M. De La Salle, for she had often heard M. Le Tellier Archbishop of Rheims and her son the Reverend de Louvois, who had lived a long time with his uncle, say all the good that can be said of a great Servant of God. Delighted to be able to do a favour to a man looked upon as a Saint in her family, and even by the late Archbishop of Rheims, her brother-in-law” (i.e. ‘late’ with regard to Blain as he wrote, since he died only in 1710) “who was not the kind to hand out this title easily, she granted him the house of Saint Yon for four hundred livres, a very modest price, and made the lease for six years.

“M. De La Salle made the deal with such promptness and secrecy that his enemies who might have thwarted it and perhaps have wrecked it had no suspicions aroused. With the same diligence he sent off to Rouen” (this would be in carts) “all the furniture he had left in bond in Paris in the faubourg Saint Antoine, and furnished the new house with them.”⁸⁴

Before he had time to move his novices, however, Lambert, the master-writers’ representative in Paris made a hostile but ineffective gesture. Since learning to write skilfully was part of the novices’ training, and De La Salle had not paid the fine for doing so, Lambert actually came to the Rue Princesse on August 4th with a police-officer and drew up a writ of seizure of property. But the Brothers were only tenants, and the landlord, Guillemard, opposed any confiscation because the furniture was mortgaged till October 1st 1707 against payment of the rent. So Lambert had to withdraw. It was after this that the Founder sent Brother Guillaume (William), whom the master-writers had long pursued, to Rouen, where he was accepted by the Board on August 11th. At the end of the month, De La Salle himself moved with the novices to Saint Yon.

“The Dames of St Amand, when they heard in what hands their house of St Yon had fallen, and the use M. De La Salle intended putting it to, had the generosity to leave him the pictures and hangings of the chapel and some other furniture of the Community. It was towards the end of August 1705 that M. De La Salle and his own entered the house....At his departure from Paris M. Colbert granted him the widest powers without a time limit.”⁸⁵ He put Brother Bartholomew in charge of the novitiate and gave him Brother Dominic as sub-director, for his concentration at Darnétal was ruining his health, and De La Salle hoped the fresh air at Saint-Yon would help him. But he himself always kept a careful watch over the novitiate.

He saw this house as a place where he could pray in peace and where he could build up the novitiate. But first he called all the Brothers he could during the summer break to an eight days’ retreat. Those from Paris, particularly, must have found their spiritual progress hampered by the harassment they were going through. He led all the exercises, and gave a great and encouraging example. When some Brothers said that when he was no longer among them to stimulate them and lead them, these practices might weaken, he said God would ask him an account of the present, not the future. It is interesting that “he gave them a talk in the morning, and one of the priests he had with him gave the evening one; for the two or three who had joined him on the parish of Saint Roch in Paris, had followed him to Saint Yon and were staying there.” One wonders whether his aim was to develop a group of priests associated with the Brothers without being of their society, who would have enough contact with the Brothers while leading their own lives, to serve as confessors and spiritual directors.

The number of novices had diminished during the upsets in Paris. Two Brothers entered in 1702 and six in 1706. There are, however, gaps in the register; there must have been enough entering, in spite of five deaths in Chartres and people leaving the society, for Brothers to be sent to Avignon, Brest, Rouen and elsewhere. A few weeks before the novitiate moved to Rouen, four candidates presented themselves. In 1706 two came to Rouen to join, one a rich landowner from Beaujolais. Up till 1709 at least 32 joined.⁸⁶ If Paris remained a continual trial, the work was extending to new parts of the kingdom. Although the Founder would have liked to make his permanent residence at Saint Yon, he was in fact to be busy from now on with new foundations, and he wanted to be informed. Paris must have been the best place for contacts and to be contacted. It was from Paris that he wrote to Drolin for the next few years.

Letter to Drolin, 28 August. Some searching questions

His next letter was written on August 28th, amid busy preparations to remove to Rouen.⁸⁷ Brother Gabriel had only written once since the Founder's letter of April 27th and seems to have given a reason. "I was, in fact, surprised, my very dear Brother," writes the Founder, "at receiving no news from you for so long. Please write to me oftener in future and it seems to me a good idea if you did so every month. Brother Michael and Brother James died in Chartres, one after the other of typhus since I received your letters. Please pray to God for them."

Gabriel had left de la Bussière's and gone to live on the ground floor below his school. But to buy furniture he seems to have borrowed and now tells the Founder, who detests debts. He objects also to his teaching Latin, but this was obligatory in Rome. And also to his collecting each week a *baiocco* from the children, even if this went to the district master. But he had no choice. De La Salle also objects rightly to catechism being taught in church rather than in school, but those were the regulations in Rome. The catechism was organised by the Confraternity of Christian Doctrine, and all school teachers were required to attend and help in the teaching.

Gabriel must have written at the end of July and said the heat was stifling. Mosquitoes were a pest, and his friends had left Rome for the hills or went back to Paris. The Founder's only comment is to say the Brothers in Avignon too feel the heat and that Gabriel has more time to "study how to give up the airs of the world."

"As for myself, I do not like to put myself forward in anything, and I will make the first step in Rome no more than anywhere else. Providence must make the first step and I am satisfied." Yet he had pushed Gabriel very hard. Perhaps this is an admission that in his eagerness, he must remember the view of faith.

The Founder writes again only a week later, on 4 September.⁸⁸

The five months' gap is worrying him, and he also may want to express fully and more forcefully things said in the previous letter. It was written during negotiations concerning Calais, developments at St Yon and continued harassment of the schools in Paris. The Founder blames Gabriel for having left de la Bussière's, for that means he is in need of money. The Founder has none to spare and is emphatic on Drolin not contracting debts, and he explains why:

"...I am less in a position to help you than I have been in the past and much less, being always very short of money. I have placed our novitiate in a beautiful house in a suburb of Rouen that had been occupied by nuns, our Brothers at present having the schools of Rouen where Brother Ponce is, which is why I am always short of money. This business in Rouen leaves me hard up." He

says he will send fifty francs via M. de Chateau-blanc. "...but that also will put me out, for in three months from now I have no money to lay claim to in advance; on the contrary, I shall be in arrears." On 30th September he would have to pay the first quarterly 100 livres for the lease of Saint Yon, and the next hundred in three months from then. He has money for the first, but will have to postpone paying the second. What resources he had we do not know.

"Do not get into debt yourself any more, please, without me, for I shall be very displeased with debts."

"I have just now received your letter." This must be the answer to that 'last but one letter.' Drolin's decision to leave de la Bussière's without resources seems a brave attempt to depend on Providence - and then he had had to borrow. The Founder has a level-headed comment: "I well know that it is better to live with more hardship separated from the world, and I am very happy to see you in this disposition. But when you take it on, either you must abandon yourself totally to Providence or, if one has not enough virtue for that or enough faith, one must take measures before execution, otherwise it is acting neither in a Christian manner nor wisely."

"We are going to start an establishment in Marseilles and when Brother Albert has been there till Easter I will be able to send him to you to hurry your affairs if they are not advanced, for he is very good at that. The first six months he would work wonders. Pray God very much for that from now till then, and that God may guide our affairs in Rome and elsewhere according to his holy will... We have Brothers at Dijon and at Brest, I do not know if I told you."

The School Board of Marseilles included the bishop, de Vintimille. A certain deacon called Baron provided the teaching. Two merchant traders on this Board, Jourdan and Morellet, having business in Avignon, visited one of the Brothers' schools there and were so impressed that on their return they asked a Jesuit, Father Croiset, to write to the bishop who was then in Paris, to meet De La Salle and ask him for Brothers to take over St Lawrence's school. The Founder was so sure of the matter that he could tell Brothers Albert and now Gabriel, even before telling the Board, for it was three months later in December that the bishop answered Fr Croiset saying he agreed, having learnt thoroughly about the Brothers' methods from their Founder, and that Brothers should be taken from those already in Avignon to begin teaching the poor according to their usual method."⁸⁹ Evidently this is what La Salle had told the bishop, and then wrote to Brother Albert. These Brothers only arrived at the end of January 1706 and began teaching on 6 March .

The strange thing is his offer to send Albert to Rome after Easter. Easter 1705 fell on 5 April, so that he would leave this new school in Marseilles after a few weeks. The Founder seems to be willing to send so soon a Brother who

was energetic and unstable, as a temporary help, perhaps to get backing from ecclesiastical figures for a papal school.

Shortly after this letter our oldest manuscript copy of the Brothers' Rules was completed, on 23 September.⁹⁰ It seems reasonable to suppose that this was a copy made out for the new novitiate at St Yon, for it includes towards the end three chapters of regulations for the novitiate house.

October: the school for sailors in Calais opens

This year also, 1705, the second school in Calais that had been negotiated for since 1703 now opened. Yearly the royal Treasury paid out 150 livres, and we have seen that after a few years the annual 150 livres it paid to a former retired teacher of sailors was transferred after his decease, through the intervention of the town council, to the Brothers.⁹¹ Later the council provided an annual grant of 900 livres out of the city tolls. The inhabitants in general gave great support to the Brothers: "There is hardly a trader or businessman, who after a voyage, or after the success of some business operation, or after a lucky catch of fish, has not paid them, so to say, the tithe on his profits."⁹² It was a contrast to Rouen. After the death of the Duke de Béthune, who was so helpful to the Brothers, his son, the Duke de Charoste, seems to have been even more so. For instance, when the "gentlemen of the Royal Treasury", who, while being upper civil servants, were only of the bourgeoisie, delayed paying the Brothers' grant, the Duke himself would speak to them and then send his secretary with the copy of the royal orders if necessary. After De La Salle's death he went to see the governor of Rouen, the Duke of Luxembourg, to obtain his written consent towards the granting of letters patent to Saint Yon. Father and son have a great claim to the gratitude of the Institute of the Brothers of the Christian Schools.⁹³

M. Gense, a true burgher of Calais, was another lifelong friend of the Brothers. Judging himself unworthy to be a priest, he lived a deeply religious life as a celibate, and spent his considerable wealth helping the poor. He was in frequent touch with the Abbot de Rancé and went to La Trappe once a year for a prolonged retreat. His strong Catholic faith led to his being asked to keep an eye on the Protestants, once their religion had been proscribed. It doesn't endear us to him now that he "performed in some way the office of Inquisitor of the Faith...He pursued the Predicants and false pastors, to find out about their conventicles and the places where they held their meetings so as to come after them and oblige them to leave the country." And this, "all over Flanders."⁹⁴ But that was how he saw it. He had already brought into Calais a community of Sisters of Providence and given them his own house in which he built them a chapel, and provided them with an endowment enough to maintain six Sisters. He had no longer the means to help the Brothers in the

same way, but he had a very high esteem of their lowly work. He liked to be in their company and was sometimes invited to their prayers and recreation.

October: the beginning of a series of educational innovations at Saint Yon.

In St Yon, out in the suburb of Saint Sever of Rouen, a series of educational innovations developed.⁹⁵ Nearby a canon Alphonse de Châlon had founded a charity school in 1687. It seems not to have prospered. De La Salle was able to take it over and use it as a training ground for his novices. They seem also to have adopted within the novitiate itself, under the eye of an experienced Brother, a way of criticising one another's knowledge and responses that they called "the attack" and that resembled University disputes. This in their case would not be limited to knowledge of the catechism, and to teaching skills, but extend to knowledge of children's characters and to clear enunciation.⁹⁶ Although the Brothers at that time learnt a very precise and detailed pedagogy for teaching the basic skills only, they were able to innovate successfully in quite new areas.

When he moved to Saint Yon, the Founder transferred there three or four Brothers, including the serving Brother Thomas (Charles Frappet) whom we met at Vaugirard and who had moved later to the Grand'Maison. He had turned out to be a very good temporal administrator. The other Brothers were probably also serving Brothers. In the memoir he wrote on his Founder Brother Charles says: "At the beginning of the establishment of the Brothers at St Yon, I was sent with two or three others by the virtuous Superior, who perceiving my repugnance for a place where everything was lacking, said to encourage me, giving us contrary to his custom his blessing, that divine Providence would not fail us. Sometime afterwards, when I had told him how much the extreme poverty of the house made us suffer, he answered us that he believed that the means that God wanted to make use of on which to live was to take children as boarders at first at a cheap rate, to teach them and bring them up well. 'You will find,' he said, 'in that way the means of winning over the affection and the esteem of the inhabitants of a town in which you are not loved; you may suffer a little, but that will not last. Apart from that, rest assured that God will always give you the things necessary for life if you serve him well.'"⁹⁷

La Salle might have thought before now about boarding schools, perhaps ever since the one he had started for the Irish boys. He had since learnt, too, that the Clerks Regular in Rome had begun to run them. But the immediate idea came to him because he had hardly got his novitiate organised at Saint Yon when a few parents from the well-to-do commercial class of Rouen

asked him to take in their sons as boarders. They saw that the poor children taught by the Brothers in Rouen were gaining a thorough grounding in the practicalities of reading, writing and counting that their children were getting less well in colleges where these skills were largely presupposed or neglected, and that they were also getting a sound religious training.⁹⁸ There were other skills valuable in a town developing its trade and industry and for which there was no special provision. Individual tuition in the usual wasteful way would be most unsatisfactory. The Brothers began their boarding school. In time, on suggestions from these parents, they added courses in history and geography, literature and rhetoric, accountancy, geometry, architecture, natural history. Later there were courses for some students in hydrography, mechanics, cosmography, differential calculus, music and modern languages.

As usual, De La Salle and the Brothers would have looked elsewhere for models and adapted them, while parents were always consulted for the choice of subjects they wished for their children. In this way a new type of secondary education was gradually created that was practical and also educational for an increasing business class in the towns. It was very successful. Numbers increased: "The community was increasing considerably from the arrival of boarders that were sent to him from all parts," writes Maillefer in 1740 ("even from Paris", says Blain⁹⁹), "so that he was obliged to set up there a sort of college, separate from the community, where there were Brothers put in charge of this youth. He gave the impulse to this great organisation. The order he had put into the house was kept with such great exactness and quiet that not the least noise was heard. Everything was done in a great silence, so that it was difficult to see that this great house was inhabited."¹⁰⁰

De La Salle was an innovator in response, not to an intuition, but to the requests and needs of others. Ramification in the work of the Brothers did not come from innate charism but from sensitivity and openness to the educational needs of the population around them. But it was their detailed and steady provision "together and by association" of what was needed, their charism of faith and zeal and their individual gifts that led to schemes of remarkable efficiency. In this case, De La Salle perceived that this new creation was an extension of the work he had been called to do and for whose safeguard he had so persistently suffered opposition. Just as in the Brothers' work for the oppressed working class, "the poor", there was the implication, whether in their primary schools or in their Sunday academy that there was to be no upper limit set to their human and Christian development, so there was no refusal to meet the educational needs of a broad growing commercial class whose Christian needs could be met only by meeting their social needs.

Those who turned to the Brothers were attracted first by efficiency. What they found was both efficiency and a Christian formation. This boarding-

school at Saint Yon became their only means of access to this new education when on 24 November this year (1705) the Poor Board gave way to the master-writers and forbade the access of well-to-do children to its schools (which were now staffed by the Brothers.¹⁰¹) It was the day Brother Joachim, a fifth Brother that De La Salle moved from Paris was accepted by the Board to run St Eloi's school near the port.

The boarding school at Saint Yon must have been a very early innovation for it was already developed enough in 1706 for the parish priest, Jacques Hecquet, to insist that the school chapel should not be a rival to the parish church. "You would not believe how much the solicitude of this pastor to fill his church with parishioners wearied and upset the Brothers of St Yon."¹⁰² Much of that was later. In the present circumstances, De La Salle signed an agreement with him on 22 March 1706, covering points such as: no outsiders were to attend services in the Brothers' chapel; they and their boarders would make their Easter duties in the parish church; they would take the boarders on Sundays to the High Mass; the chaplain would be approved by the parish priest; the parish priest would judge who were ready for first communion, which would be made in the parish; the chaplain would give no blessing of ashes, candles and so on; when ill the Brothers would receive the sacraments from the parish priest. These stipulations became source of real difficulty later, when Hecquet was unable to show any flexibility.

The master-writers harass the Brothers in Paris

The three Paris schools in the Rue Princesse, Rue du Bac and Rue St Placide were still running well when they restarted this October. The master-writers stepped up their war of nerves.¹⁰³ "At the least loss of one of their pupils, on the least evidence brought by their allies of the little schools," they invaded the classrooms to argue. Both groups of masters wanted all the working classes of the parish to know that only the destitute could come to the "Christian Schools"¹⁰⁴. More and more the Brothers found they were unable to do their work and did not see the point of carrying on. It is difficult to see why La Chétardye, who wanted everything under his control, and who as parish priest had his clear rights in the matter, did nothing. The Founder was often back in Paris encouraging his men. "He often spoke the famous oracle of Gamaliel: "If this is God's work, who can destroy it? If God did not start it, I agree to its downfall."¹⁰⁵ "Endure willingly all the afflictions people will cause you, and take nothing to heart, complain of nothing," he wrote for the feast of St Stephen, "In imitation of St Stephen, faith must make you look upon everything you have to suffer from your neighbour as presents and blessings of God. Only pure faith can inspire such convictions."

More and more he could see that his schools, by providing a much more intensive service than anywhere else were transforming the lower range of society, giving the children both Christian and human hope. "The bell that sounded the opening and the end of school tolled the warning to outdated modes of teaching."¹⁰⁶ He had now more than twenty years' evidence of his three schools in Rheims, and his schools in the smaller towns of Rethel, Guise and Laon, besides his schools in Paris. Now he could add Chartres, Calais, Troyes, Avignon, Dijon, Darnétal and Rouen. No, he would not accept that the master-writers and the little masters of Paris should maintain a system and a monopoly such that the labouring poor and any others whose parents could not find time to bring up their children adequately were to be kept permanently in Christian and human obscurity. The fault of these corporations was not that they gained a living by their teaching and did so satisfactorily by current standards, but that they were penalising many thousands of the poor by living in an unchanging past. Perhaps, disappointingly, De La Salle would lose in Paris. Still the field was widening and Avignon was bright with hopes of having protectors who could seek for his Institute papal approval. Gabriel Drolin was teaching the poor in Rome itself. De La Salle's vision was far wider than that of those bodies ranged against his schools, and far more in line with evolving times.

One new conclusion came to him from this long encounter. He had so far ensured the character of his schools as giving a Christian and public service and not one stigmatised as welfare to the poor, by accepting offers from parish priests and municipalities. In Paris he had seen the disastrous effects if a parish priest became hostile. He began to count more on direct support from bishops positive towards the Holy See.

Letter to Drolin of 28 October. Mail has crossed

If we return to Brother Gabriel Drolin, the Founder's letter of 4 September, seems not to have reached Drolin when he wrote towards the end of the month a letter which the Founder answered on 28 October.¹⁰⁷ He repeated more briefly instructions given on September 4th. Drolin did get the letter of 4 September, and later than it, that of 28 August, since he has kept them. The Founder speaks of Drolin's need to wait on Providence and reproves his getting into debt and then turning to him when he is in no position to help at the moment. He blames him for leaving de la Bussière's without having a salaried post and knowing how he was going to live on his own. There must be no debts.

Total victory for the little masters

To return to the situation in Paris, events were leading to a total victory for

the little masters.¹⁰⁸ Faced with complaints from the parents of the children in his schools about the continual disruption created in the schools, La Chétardye at last took up the defence of the Brothers still in his parish. He pointed out to the lieutenant of police that the furniture of the school in the Rue Princesse that the master-writers, accompanied by a police officer from the Châtelet, had claimed to take away, was parish property; that he paid the Brothers to run his charity schools and they must be left alone. D'Argenson, if he went back on his previous decision might find the master-writers appealing to the *Parlement*. This court would question his stance, at a moment when it was investigating the long-drawn-out case of the little masters against these same Brothers. La Chétardye, approaching seventy, was not the man he was, and the priests of Saint-Sulpice wanted him to retire. Yet he continued in office till his death in 1714. His authority now was less unquestioned than formerly. D'Argenson took his time. He fixed the hearing of the master-writers and the parish priest of Saint Sulpice for March 19th. It turned out to be unnecessary.

1706

The little masters were using every means they could to keep elementary schooling in their hands. In 1702 they had proposed to d'Argenson that they should pay the Treasury 150,000 livres for the exclusive privilege of teaching the rudiments in Paris. D'Argenson was all in favour of having all the schoolmasters in Paris under one head (the Precentor). He wrote this in a letter of 21 September 1702 written to the Comptroller General of Finance in which he complains that the overlapping jurisdictions in the matter of schools makes it difficult for him to satisfy the little masters. It is a good summary of the tangled situation in which the Brothers found themselves, and the fighting for rights among the various authorities.

The University, the Precentor and the parish priests, d'Argenson says, all have their claims. The University claims that its *maîtres-es-arts* have the right to run a grammar school; the Precentor on the contrary says his masters are the only ones in the field. The parish priests claim that having the duty to teach Christian doctrine, this involves, in their charity schools, teaching them to read and write free of charge. The Precentor objects that these charity schools ruin his and make inroads into his privilege and jurisdiction. D'Argenson concurs. He adds that the archbishops give their full protection to the charity schools "of which the number increases every day", and have arranged a provisional agreement between their parish priests and the Precentor about which the latter is not very pleased.

Public order would be much better served, he thinks, if all masters were

under one superior. He admits that the parish charity schools are well controlled, but since they are concerned only with “craftsmen and workers”, they are of no use to the “principal youth”, by which he means bourgeois children, or to the children of the “new converts” who rarely attend them, so that it would be a good thing to have them, too, under one head. But the Rector of the University will not give in, and clerics cannot pay their way to a doctorate unless they hold fee-paying classes in which they coach younger students by going over lectures for them. This can hardly be stopped. So the little masters should not be listened to in their claims against charity schools. However, he adds that if they have in view only certain public elementary schools, (which can only mean the few Brothers’ schools), the matter is not worth taking seriously. In other words, he is not going to defend them.¹⁰⁹

On 5 February 1706 the *Parlement* pronounced judgment for the little masters that gave them total victory. It was given “against schoolmaster John Baptist De La Salle, self-styled superior of the so-called Brothers of the Christian Schools, and also against the cited John, Ponce (who was now in Rouen), Joseph and others, keeping school under the auspices of the said Monsieur De La Salle without any right or quality.” In consequence, “the said De La Salle and all others were forbidden to keep any little schools for the instruction of youth...without having obtained the permission of the Precentor of the Church of Paris with a quarter added to the penalties attached to the judgment and rules of the Court.”¹¹⁰ In its judgment the Court of *Parlement* referred to its earlier judgments that forbade anyone to hold clandestine schools without the permission of the precentor. The Society of the Brothers was not legally recognised, hence the “self-styled” and “so-called”. They had carried on under the authority of the parish priest of Saint Sulpice, and that had guaranteed them against the Precentor by virtue of the agreement between him and the parish priests of 1699. That evidence had to be produced in court. All it needed was a declaration by La Chétardye that would have gone into the Brothers’ dossier. It was not forthcoming, hence they were condemned as a clandestine group of schoolmasters.

The matter had gone to a very high level. When the royal attorney general d’Aguesseau had been instructed by Louis XIV in 1704 to give him a report, after seeing the Cardinal, on unauthorised communities, the Brothers of the Christian Schools had been one of them. Hence the judgment of the *Parlement* concluded: “Complying with the conclusions of the king’s attorney general, we forbid the said De La Salle to establish any community under the name of seminary of masters of little schools, or otherwise, nor to put on the door any placard similar to the one that has been seized. Done in *Parlement* February 5th 1706.”¹¹¹ It meant that the cardinal had not given a favourable opinion on De La Salle, and that therefore, with La Chétardye silent, his activity could



only be classified as illegal. On March 19th a copy of the *Parlement's* judgment was handed in at De La Salle's Paris residence in the Rue Saint Honoré, and another to the Brother in charge at the Rue du Bac school. The prohibition to train teachers would have closed his novitiate, but he had already moved it away.

De La Salle withdraws his Brothers from Saint Sulpice

Possibly to give La Chétardye time to react, he kept his Brothers in the schools. For 19 March was also the day d'Argenson had fixed for a hearing of the parish priest's appeal of 19 November against the vexations of the master-writers. Their new representative, Pierre Larché, was there to make out a case for his guild. He claimed the parish priest should stay out of the debate since he had no proofs that all the pupils of his schools had the right to attend a charity school. What did he know of the names and profession of their parents? The parish priest, he argued, should be obliged "to keep a list of the names of the said poor children that they (the masters) teach, to be placed in the hands of the lieutenant of police and communicated to the representatives of the said master-writers, which persons shall not allow into the schools any but poor children and no others." That preposterous claim states clearly the difference between the old order the master-writers wanted to freeze to their sole advantage, and the new order the Brothers' schools were bringing in.¹¹² La Chétardye does not seem to have reacted.

At this point Blain speaks very strongly of new attempts to get rid of De La Salle. "Let it be always remembered that his greatest enemies were hidden enemies, who would have been very vexed to appear so. Being good people and of high virtue, they thought they themselves were rendering service to God by persecuting his servant."¹¹³ The Brothers begged their Founder to allow them to leave. They could have stayed if they reduced their school to a strictly controlled charity school. He took advice and agreed: "He preferred to leave this establishment entirely rather than have limits put to his charity" by the order forbidding the Brothers to accept "indifferently the children of the better-off as they had done so far."¹¹⁴ He sent the Brothers two by two to different houses elsewhere. He left only the Director, to answer those who came to the house.¹¹⁵ Those who had wanted the Brothers to go found other masters to replace them from among people who had left their Institute, but apart from the fact that there were not enough, these people had families to feed and needed a better payment than what the Brothers lived on.

"At first people tended to believe that the Brothers had given a few days' extraordinary holiday, or that some illness, or some other important matter was the occasion of their withdrawal."¹¹⁶ But as the days went on and the children were roaming the streets, the parents came in a body to complain to

M. de La Chétardye. He sent word to De La Salle, asking him to reopen the schools, promising he would see to it that the Brothers were no longer disturbed. The Founder answered him: “that he had preferred to give way to his enemies rather than see himself exposed to continual interruptions that did considerable harm to the Brothers, that the way they had been treated for several years had made several give up, that it would not be easy for him to provide good replacements. He could not commit himself to sending others unless he were given the assurance that they would be left alone and safe under his protection.” Politely, firmly, he states his terms on behalf of his Brothers.¹¹⁷

La Chétardye complied. “After calling a meeting of the leading master-writers at his house, he had a deed drawn up there and then before two notaries certifying that he had commissioned the Brothers, whom he each named by their family name, to keep charity schools in his parish, and that M. J.B. De La Salle, priest and doctor in theology, had been wrongly disturbed on this occasion by the master-writers, since he had used his disciples for this work only under his auspices, at his expense and by his order...He intended that they should have every freedom to continue their function, and was drawing up the present deed for whom it might concern.” This deed was placed in the hands of the saintly Founder; it satisfied him and he started the schools again after three weeks’ interruption.¹¹⁸ “Three weeks” is a slip: this unusual vacation lasted three months, as Blain himself says in a statement quoted four paragraphs below. Had the parish-priest done his duty earlier as employer of the Brothers and according to his rights, none of this would have happened.

La Chétardye’s continued hostility to De La Salle

The parish priest’s attitude to De La Salle did not change.¹¹⁹ The latter “went to see him, and although he was badly received, he did what he could to win him over and overcome the attitude of a man who was so necessary for him, but in vain.” He received an unexpected mark of kindness from other quarters at this time. La Chétardye paid the Founder his allowance for the Brothers in State banknotes that had lost all value, so that no butcher or baker wanted them, and none would change them into ready cash. Yet the Brothers had to live. Quite unexpectedly, a number of people changed his paper money for hard cash, to the astonishment of the parish priest among others “who with all his credit would not have been able to produce this kind of miracle.”

When this money was spent, De La Salle came to ask La Chétardye for the remainder of the grant that was then due, only to be treated summarily and sent off with neither bills nor money. He realised that it was out of personal enmity to him, not to the Brothers, that the parish-priest was behaving in this way. So he just disappeared from circulation. He went to the Discalced Carmelite Fathers, just

off the Rue de Vaugirard opposite the Luxembourg Palace, for a fortnight's retreat, without telling anybody except two or three Brothers. Brother Thomas (Charles Frappet), the very able bursar who got on well with the parish priest was one of them. As instructed by De La Salle, he went to La Chétardye for money, and then said his superior had vanished they did not know where. He was given all the money he wanted. "This was not the first time this Brother, always welcome to him, had been used by the servant of God to obtain what he had been refused." The Founder was no fool!

La Chétardye now tried a nasty manoeuvre. Thinking De La Salle was far away, he thought the moment opportune to get someone else to take his place. The one he had in mind was this Brother Thomas, who had a fine presence and a venerable air, but was otherwise of a very simple mind, unable to explain himself well. But he was too obedient a man and too attached to his Founder to listen, even though the parish priest asked him several times. In due course, De La Salle suddenly reappeared among the Brothers.

The schools situation from May 1706

The schools re-opened, very likely in April or May. Instead of the 16 Brothers teaching in the parish, De La Salle sent back only twelve: ten to teach, Brother Thomas as bursar and general administrator, and one as Director of the community. "Their grant was also settled on the footing that still holds. At the request of the Brother (i.e. Thomas) so acceptable to the parish priest, the latter was good enough to pay even the three months¹²⁰ the schools were closed, and to provide the fare for the Brothers that were called back. This charity was a necessity, because the poverty of the Congregation did not allow going to the expense of this travelling. Hardly was this reconciliation concluded when it was almost ruined by a hitch. The Brother who had favour with M. de La Chétardye, having gone without his knowledge on the orders of M. De La Salle on some business outside the capital (possibly to Saint-Yon), the parish priest was offended. So that he had to be recalled as soon as possible, lest the enemies of the servant of God should make the best of the occasion against him and begin again to turn the parish priest against him."¹²¹

One of the arrangements with the master-writers was "that the Brothers would no longer admit children in their schools unless they had a note signed by the parish priest certifying their poverty."¹²² On the face of it, this was ceding the whole principle on which De La Salle had taken his stand. But firstly, it was not the master-writers, as they had so boldly claimed, that were to do the inspecting: they could no longer invade the classrooms. Secondly, the one whom La Chétardye put in charge of going through all the school lists to determine who were the real poor was his new curate (since 1704), the de Gergy whose name we have already met in connection with Dijon. In his

hands the stipulation became a formality, “basically a pure ceremony; for when the same pupils whose so-called comfortable circumstances had served as pretext for the master-writers came along with their note, the priest put in charge of examining the means of the parents of these pupils thought he could not in conscience refuse them.”¹²³

So the situation remained. But the number of pupils in ten classes must have been about 600, compared with the earlier 1000 in fourteen classes in these same three schools. The formality still to be gone through must have put off a number of the more well-to-do. “They (the schools) were very much smaller on account of the limits that had been prescribed them, but also, in compensation, they have always existed since in a peaceful situation exempt from disturbances and uncertainties.”¹²⁴ So a long period of stubborn resistance by De La Salle paid off, even if not entirely. If in practice anyone could come still, it was no longer to all eyes the public school open to all that he had in mind. The work meanwhile prospered elsewhere.

A statement on the meaning of this struggle is found in a memoir dated 1724 and entitled: *Plea on behalf of the poor of the parish of Saint Michael of Dijon*.¹²⁵ It may serve as a conclusion. In Dijon as elsewhere, the master-writers opposed the Brothers. The document says:

In answer to the Schoolmasters who object that the Brothers’ schools harm them:

1. According to all laws, the public good should be preferred to a private good. Thus, no one has ever opposed the establishment of colleges (where however, the rich are accepted as well as the poor) although that harms the schoolmasters.
2. The said Brothers having a vocation, a talent and a very special method for this work, they perform it incomparably better than the schoolmasters who having pupils in town (that is, private pupils) and other concerns cannot give the time necessary for this function and sometimes put their wife and children to doing it instead.
3. If seven or eight masters lose something in this, five hundred poor artisans will gain much by it, from having in hand to pay their *taille* (a form of income tax), the several months’ fees they would have had to pay the said masters.

References

1. Poutet II, 92-121; Blain II, 7-11, 34-44; Rigault I, 238-247; Ariès, 326, 328-32; Chartier, Julia, Compère, 54-57.
2. Blain I, 440.

3. Chartier, etc., 54-57; Ariès, 328-332.
4. Ariès, 326.
5. Poutet II, 93-121; Blain II, 9-11; Rigault I, 239-247.
6. Blain II, 8.
7. Blain II, 37.
8. Félix-Paul, 57-72; *Michelin Guide to Rome*, 164-168.
9. Félix-Paul, 57-63.
10. Aroz, CL41(1), 316.
11. Maillefer, CL6, 156-9; Blain II, 15-16; Rigault I, 280; Félix-Paul, 369-373; *Bulletin des Ecoles Chrétiennes*, April 1963, 73-80.
12. Aroz, CL42, 299, n 1.
13. Blain II, 10.
14. id. Blain was writing in 1733.
15. Poutet II, 102.
16. Poutet II, 109, n.15.
17. Blain II, 37.
18. Poutet II, 109.
19. Blain II, 37.
20. On the date see Félix-Paul, 66, 67.
21. *Bulletin des Ecoles Chrétiennes*, October 1953, 12.
22. Aroz, CL26, 273, n.2.
23. Quoted in Aroz in CL26, 274.
24. Félix-Paul, 272-3.
25. Blain II, 15.
26. Blain II, 16.
27. Félix-Paul, 68-72.
28. Or most likely so. See Félix-Paul, 71.
29. Félix-Paul, 69.
30. But see Félix-Paul, 72 and footnote 11.
31. Blain II, 14-15; see also Poutet II, 36, 145, n.14.
32. *Les Eglises Parisiennes*, Vol. I. Amédée Boinet, Editions de Minuit 1962.
33. Blain II, 14.
34. Blain II, Appendix, 78.
35. Rigault I, 245; Aroz, CL42, 321, n.1 to 6; CL41(1), 227.
36. Blain II, 456-7.
37. Blain II, 257.
38. CL19, IV.
39. Félix-Paul, 72-77.
40. Poutet II, 226, n.3; Félix-Paul, 94, 97.
41. Blain I, 365-7; Poutet II, 104-6; Rigault I, 235-237.
42. Rigault I, 236; Blain I, 366.
43. Blain II, 367.
44. Poutet II, 105.
45. Poutet II, 16-17; Rigault I, 283-3; Poutet II, 123-4.
46. Poutet II, 16-17.

47. Poutet II, 124.
48. Poutet II, 111.
49. Blain I, 396-7.
50. Rigault I, 346.
51. Félix-Paul, 76.
52. Poutet II, 138, n.10.
53. Poutet II, 17-18.
54. Félix-Paul, 81, n.9.
55. Blain II, 18.
56. Maillefer, CL6, 159.
57. id.
58. Blain II, 17-21.
59. Félix-Paul, 88.
60. Blain I, 379.
61. Poutet, CL48, 161, 169.
62. Félix-Paul, 78-85.
63. Rigault I, 347; Poutet II, 348.
64. Blain I, 397; Poutet II, 175-6.
65. Companion Guide to Rome, Georgina Masson, Collins 1965, 81.
66. *Evelyn's Diary and Correspondence*, Cavendish edition, 142.
67. In the Archives of the Rome Vicariate.
68. See *Revista Lasalliana* 47, 1980.
69. Maillefer, CL6, 160-163; Blain II, 21-24.
70. *Dictionnaire du Grand Siècle*, Fayard, 1990; *New Catholic Encyclopedia*.
71. Rigault I, 284..
72. See Brother Bernard Simon's leaflet: Rouen: *Guide du pèlerin* 3, obtainable at 7 8a, Rue de Sèvres, Paris 7e.
73. Rigault I, 285.
74. Blain II, 27.
75. Blain II, 24.
76. Maillefer, CL, 184, 199; Blain II, 45; Poutet II, 177-8; Rigault I, 291-2; Félix-Paul, 374-6.
77. Poutet II, 49-52.
78. Blain II, 45.
79. Félix-Paul, 374-376.
80. Poutet II, 178.
81. Rigault I, 291.
82. Maillefer, CL6, 164-7; Blain II, 28-32; Rigault I, 395-8.
83. Blain II, 29-30.
84. id.
85. id.
86. Rigault I, 397.
87. Félix-Paul, 84-91.
88. Félix-Paul, 91-97.
89. Poutet II, 179.
90. Brother Maurice-Auguste, CL25, 8-9.

91. Blain I, 384.
 92. id., 385.
 93. id., 386.
 94. id.
 95. Maillefer, CL6, 166-169; Blain I, 32; Rigault I, 400-401.
 96. Rigault I, 398.
 97. Blain II, 264.
 98. id. 399.
 99. id., 32.
 100. Maillefer, CL6, 168-9.
 101. Rigault I, 287.
 102. Blain I, 352.
 103. Maillefer, CL6, 172-5; Blain II, 34-37; Poutet II, 112-114; Rigault I, 245-6.
 104. Poutet II, 112.
 105. Blain II, 45.
 106. Poutet II, 114.
 107. Félix-Paul, 97-101.
 108. Blain II, 37-43; Poutet II, 115-121; Rigault I, 245-7.
 109. A.M. de Boislille and P. de Brotonne, *Correspondance des contrôleurs généraux des finances avec les intendants des provinces*, t. II, p. 121, quoted in Poutet II, 116.
 110. Quoted from Ravelet, 311, in Poutet II, 116. The full text is photocopied by Aroz in CL40 (1), 144-145 from the text in the Paris National Archives, L.515, no. 15.
 111. Quoted in Ravelet, 311.
 112. Poutet II, 119.
 113. Blain II, 40.
 114. Blain II, 37.
 115. Maillefer, CL6, 174. On the events, cf Blain II, 37-8, 41-2 and Poutet II, 120, n. 71.
 116. Blain II, 38.
 117. Blain II, 38-40.
 118. Blain II, 43.
 119. Maillefer, CL6, 174.
 120. See Poutet II, 120, n. 71.
 121. Blain II, 43.
 122. Maillefer, CL6, 174.
 123. Blain II, 43.
 124. Maillefer, CL6, 174.
 125. *Document D. 124*, dated May 1st, 1724. Quoted in Poutet II, 129, from the *Archives Départementales du Côte d'Or*.
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Chapter 16. De La Salle's two remaining major school texts and his mature thoughts on the ministry of the Christian teacher.

De La Salle's tenacity and compassion in upholding the right of the poor to escape from a socially blighting form of schooling marks a momentous stand in the history of popular education. In the escalation and outcome of the conflict as we have seen it, the issue can appear purely secular and political. What can be overlooked is the fundamentally Christian character of the liberation through education that he lived for. The school texts several times referred to in passing remind us of that character. Two major ones, his *Rules of Christian Politeness and Civility*, and his *Duties of a Christian*, were merely noted in Chapter 11 as having appeared in 1702 and 1703 respectively. De La Salle must have worked on them largely during his years at Vaugirard, but he was continually working on and revising his texts. A reprint of twelve of his works was authorised in 1705, and we have seen that during his six weeks in bed he carried out further revision. Blain singles out the *Rules of Civility*. It seems a suitable moment to look at those two works.

Very soon after his conversion to the care of his first schoolmasters, De La Salle seems to have come to a clear grasp of what their work entailed. Vaugirard could have been a time of further thought on its New Testament character, and how it was a work of building up the Church. The opposition he had met with could have sharpened his understanding of this ministry, for so he saw it. The expression he gave to his thoughts on it, in the form of sixteen *Meditations for the time of the Retreat* was written, as will be seen further in the chapter, after 1707, in his later years. While the two works mentioned above have largely become out of date, this one, allowing for its style, still remains a profound theological and practical insight into the work of the Christian teacher. It will be presented in this chapter for convenience, and to round off a consideration of his written output. On the one hand, it may be seen as complementing the outer conflict we have seen by revealing the depth of the educational project it threatened. and equally as being the inspiration behind the meticulous love of children shown in the *Conduct of Schools*.

The Rules of Christian Politeness and Civility.¹

De La Salle's work on Christian good manners, first published in 1703 and so often afterwards, follows a long tradition and is one in a long line of books on the subject. Although Antoine de Courtin, one of his sources (see below)

wrote a more careful work that was translated into several European languages, De La Salle provided the most important contribution to this form of social education in the schools of France for the next two centuries.

What follows is drawn almost exclusively from the course of lectures given by Brother Jean Pungier during the International Session for Lasallian Studies in 1990-91. The other important reference is the critical edition of *The Rules of Christian Politeness and Civility* by Brother Albert Valentin, Ligel, Paris, 1956, 550 pages. It is a remarkable study. Jean Pungier points out, however, that Valentin uses a text of 1715 which was in fact a pirate edition. It has many small differences with the original and several pages are omitted.² De La Salle, working under pressure of time, relies very much on his sources. Jean Pungier has since made a monumental study of his work in three volumes of *Cahiers Lasalliens*, nos 58, 59 and 60, dated 1996, 1997 and 2000. They are entitled: *La Civilité de Jean-Baptiste de La Salle : Ses sources. Son message.*

Treatises on civility: a tradition drawn on by De La Salle.

When Erasmus published in 1530 his *De Civilitate morum puerilium*, (On Courtesy for children), he gave civility its name and made writing on it a successful literary genre till the 19th century. He was translated into French in 1537, and the same year there appeared French translations of **Baldassar Castiglione's *Il Libro del Cortegiano***, (The Book of the Courtier), which offers a model description of the accomplished Christian and Renaissance gentleman at court.

Between 1555 and 1556 Luis de Grenada published in Lisbon the *Guide for Sinners*, a spiritual treatise that took its concern for the 'civil' or courteous aspect of behaviour from Erasmus. His aim was to form the perfect Christian. **St Francis de Sales** in his "**Devout Life**" that appeared in 1609 takes up the view that the perfect Christian is a polite one. It has been said that his aim was not educating a man to civility for the world, but educating a Christian man in the world.³ He continues therefore de Grenada's view, which was taken up by De La Salle.

About the middle of the 17th century, a host of texts on civility appeared. They copied off one another, taking where they wanted and making their own arrangement of their eclectic material. This, as Pungier remarks, describes fairly well De La Salle's way of working. Of these texts, the three to which he owes most are: a *New Civility* published anonymously in 1660 for the primary schools of the time. Its 1671 edition, however, is addressed to parents, to help them to bring up their children. The next work is that of Antoine de Courtin. He was in Stockholm from 1645 accomplishing political missions for Christina of Sweden and Gustavus Adolphus. Louis XIV in 1660 made

him Resident General with the Northern courts. He began writing texts on moral behaviour in his retirement. Finally, another anonymous work, *A Treatise on Civility...*, appeared in Lyons in 1681, drawing inspiration from the other two. At the end of the century, De La Salle in turn took up his pen to write a textbook on Christian politeness. What he refuses to take from his sources is as enlightening as his borrowings. He can stress, radicalise or weaken statements.

Even at the level of primary education, De La Salle was not the first to make courtesy part of the training of children. We have seen in Chapter 12 that, in line with a medieval practice, there was a tradition in the little schools of teaching good manners. In his first edition of *L'Escole Paroissiale* of 1654, Jacques de Batencour says that when the children read well in French “they will be given a book of politeness which is a book concerning all the duties of children towards God and their parents, and the decorum and conduct of good morals both Christian and civil; and this book is printed in characters different from the other books.”⁴

In 1688 Charles Démiat's Regulations for the schools of Lyons say that when the children are able to read French, “they will be given the beginning of the *Civilité*, to read.” This must refer to the anonymous author of Lyons' *Treaty of Civility* which was re-edited in 1685. The manuscript copy (1704-5) of the Brothers' *Conduct of Christian Schools* says, evidently copying Batencour:⁵ “When the pupils know how to read perfectly in both French and Latin, they will be taught to write, and when they begin to write, they will be taught from a book on Politeness. This book contains all the duties of children both towards God and towards their parents, and the rules of civil and Christian decorum. It is printed in Gothic letters, which are more difficult to read than French characters.”

De La Salle's *Rules of Christian Politeness..* was an immediate success. There were three more editions in his lifetime. The work was pirated. 176 editions were known by 1955.⁶ A copy of 1832 was owned by the organist César Franck, given to him by the bishop of Liège for his first communion. An updated edition was brought out in 1891 in view of its being given out as a prize at the end of a school year or after first communion (at the age of twelve) or for general sale. “The work, of large format, magnificently illustrated in some examples, was sometimes very handsomely bound and gilt on the edges.”⁷

Aim of the work.

In his preface De La Salle writes: “It is a surprising thing that the majority of Christians look upon decorum and civility as a purely human and worldly quality, and that, not thinking of raising their minds higher, they do not see it as

a virtue which relates to God, the neighbour and ourselves. This well shows how little Christianity there is in the world, and how few people there are who *live and act according to the spirit of Jesus Christ. It is this sole mentality, however, which should inspire all our actions in order to make them holy and agreeable to God...* And so all our exterior actions which are the only ones that can be regulated by good manners, should always have and exhibit a character of virtue."

The italicised passage is not so in the text. It is stressed here because this same concern underlies his catechism and sums up his whole educational aim. He continues: "This is what mothers and fathers are obliged to consider in the education of their children, and to which masters and mistresses charged with the instruction of children must pay particular attention." They should teach their children to be polite and well behaved for Christian motives. He wisely observes that to tell them that otherwise they will be blamed, or looked down on or made fun of will only make them take on a worldly attitude. Whereas they should be taught proper deportment and the right measure in what regards the body and dress through respect for the presence of God, and courtesy to others out of respect for "members of Jesus Christ and living temples, guided by his Spirit." Once again, he brings us back to the true view of faith of the value of the Christian.

Perhaps one can say that the aim of civility was to make social encounters agreeable. De La Salle wants this done through Christian motives. He wants people to be what they appear to be. Here in his or her everyday reality is the true Christian outlined in his *Duties of a Christian*. Daily relationships are both the locus and the end-product of lay Christian perfection. Ideally, Christians should, with the freedom of the sons and daughters of God, work out how best to behave, to dress, to meet people... But society, for historic reasons has already its practice of manners and civility. In De La Salle's day, and certainly in France, society was very stratified, with the conception of superior persons to whom the lower ones owed submission. The ideal for good manners was that of the Christian gentleman at court. The bourgeois would make it his model. Something would filter to ordinary people through those little manuals hawked round even country areas, and in a more substantial way through reading a courtesy manual in school.

De La Salle defines Christian politeness as "a sensible and regulated mode of behaviour that one exhibits in one's speech and outward actions through an attitude of due moderation, or of respect, or of union and charity towards one's neighbour, paying attention to the times, places and persons with whom one is dealing. This politeness towards the neighbour is properly called Civility." This definition still has a value today. But he inevitably clothes it with the

mentality and practices of the time.

De La Salle is adapting for ordinary people, the poor.

Seventeenth century French society was strongly hierarchical. It was universally accepted that in matters of social behaviour, some could command and were above the laws of civility. Courtin writes, speaking of social superiors, equals or inferiors: "To the first everything is allowed, because they command; for the others, many things have to be put up with, because one has not the right to censure them; and for the last, nothing is becoming except what is in the rules of reserve and moderation." (p.17) De La Salle accepts this distinction. In his preface he says: "He who is inferior to others is obliged to have submission towards those who are higher than he, whether by birth, whether by their office, whether by their quality (meaning the dignities they hold)."

Nevertheless, and this is important, if he keeps to the existing civilities towards the upper class, he gives them a wider application to relationships within the experience of other people. There is a shift towards replacing "a person of quality" with "a person to whom one owes respect", and such can be found in every social group. In the family, for instance, it would be the parents, the elderly; in the school, the master or mistress. Compare Courtin's: "One must let the most qualified (i.e. persons of quality) answer before oneself (p. 36) with De La Salle's letting "the most considerable persons of the company" do so (p. 217). Where the Lyons anonymous texts says: "If one is obliged to contradict a person of quality...it should never be done bluntly," (219) De La Salle has "to contradict a person for whom one should have consideration, it is not becoming to do so bluntly." (p. 218⁸) In teaching how to visit a great lord, Courtin says: "Beginning by the door of the house of a Prince, it would be impolite, supposing it was closed, to knock hard, and more than one knock, and it would be still more bad-mannered to enter in one's coach, on horseback or in a sedan chair" (19). De La Salle transposes: "When you visit someone, if the door is closed, it is very impolite to knock hard and to knock more than once. One must both knock gently and wait patiently for the door to be opened" (163).

Visualise what such behaviour could be in the lives of the poor, and it makes sense. The implication is that De La Salle is writing neither for people at court nor for the nobility. He rewrites Courtin for ordinary people. He is not pitching his treatise at the children's level: he was giving the older students who could read well, a text for them to remember when they were fathers of a family, and at the same time a detailed guide for their own Christian social relationships. As for their behaviour while at school, the Brothers actually formed them to good manners by daily insisting not only on an adapted form

of the adult courtesy of the day, but also by reminding them of the Christian motive that should inspire it. Here, for example, is what their Handbook says about the way they are to come into their classroom in the morning:⁹

“When the door is opened, care will be taken that the pupils do not crowd in, but that they enter quietly one after the other. The masters will see to it and take care that all the pupils as they enter the school walk so lightly and without haste that they are not heard, that they remove their hat when taking holy water and make the sign of the cross and then go straight to their classroom. They will be encouraged to enter their classroom with a profound respect for the presence of God. When they are in the middle, they will make a deep bow to the crucifix and will salute the master if he is there. Then they will kneel down to adore God and say a short prayer to the Most Blessed Virgin. After doing so they will get up and as before, bow to the crucifix, salute the master and then go without haste and without noise to their usual place.” The point was not that the children should do this everywhere, but that if it were done, not as points of school discipline, but as an attitude encouraged and practised by the masters, some personal attitude might develop, a sense of God’s presence everywhere and a habit of being careful how one acted in company.

Philippe Ariès writes: “*J-B. de De La Salle’s (Civility) had as much success in the xviiith century as those of Erasmus, Cordier or the Galatea in the xvth and xvith.... That a pious educator, founder of an Institute loaded with responsibilities and worries should have taken the trouble to write a treatise*” on good manners in detail, “*proves the importance that was given to matters that have become minor today. No doubt he was dealing with a rustic and brutal population and the discipline of good manners was more necessary than in our societies that are more subject to all kinds of public authorities and of police controls. One had also the feeling that there were no little things in life in society, so much was the very act of social communication essential.*”¹⁰

One of the virtues valued in this century was self-restraint - ‘gravity’ was the current term. De La Salle stresses it for a schoolmaster, and he also tried to pass it on to children of the people in a Christian perspective. He writes:¹¹ “There should always be in a person’s bearing something grave and majestic. But he or she must take great care that there is nothing that savours of pride or haughtiness, for that is extremely displeasing to everybody. This gravity should come only from the restraint and wisdom a Christian should display in all his behaviour. Since he is of elevated birth, because he belongs to Jesus Christ and is a child of God who is the supreme Being, he should neither have nor have others notice anything mean in his conduct. Everything in it ought to have a certain air of elevation and greatness that has some relation to the power and majesty of the God he serves and who has given him being, and

does not come from self-esteem and putting oneself above others. For every Christian, bound to act according the rules of the Gospel, should show honour and respect for all the others, looking on them as children of God and brothers of Jesus Christ..."

This is a remarkably elevated view of the poor he once despised. These children have their nobility. As he says to his Brothers: "Take much more care of their education and instruction than you would for the children of a king."¹² What we miss, however, in his concept of civility is the carefree joy, the easy neighbourly help that the poor, the working classes can show. The tendency of the reforming efforts of the *parti dévot* in regard to the masses, and we shall see that that went for reforming piety, too, was to eliminate the popular for the more rationally thought-out. De La Salle's understanding of improving the social relationships of the poor likewise inevitably meant trying to pass down something of the manners of high society. The idea of seeing and redeeming what is good in popular culture (or in that if any collectivity) is a gain in our own times.

His model is the "honnête homme", the gentleman, yet evangelised and offered to all. Some quotes from his work.

If we want to know the model of social behaviour he holds up, it is that of the "honnête homme", the man of good manners, the gentleman. "No other expression recalls more the French XVIIth century."¹³ The "honnête homme", usually educated by the Jesuits, has everything that fits him for life in society: ease in adapting himself to others, aptitude for arts and letters and conversation. He has learnt, from treatises on civility, down to the smallest details of dress and behaviour, what is done and not done, with keen awareness of what befits each one's rank.

The outcome was gentleness, urbanity, and elegance even in the least gesture: art has crowned nature. There was a danger that concern for correctness and elegance of manners would override sincerity. Hence the preoccupation, in texts on civility, to present the ideal of a balance between what one is and what one tries to be socially. This was also De La Salle's aim, and to spell it out in every detail. A few quotes will be offered. Some of the rules, especially dealing with what it is impolite to do, sound very crude, but there were crude manners, even at Court.

"One should avoid certain failings in the carriage of the different parts of the body, of which the first is affectation and awkwardness.." (p.2) "Everyone should take as rule and practice to comb his hair every day, and one should never appear before anyone whomsoever with tousled and untidy hair. One should be especially careful that there is neither vermin nor nits. This precaution and care is important with regard to children." (pp 7-8)

“It is very advisable, both for health as for the good of the soul, not to go to bed later than ten o’clock and not to get up later than six o’clock on the morning (p. 24).” “Good manners demand that one should make one’s bed before leaving the room...One must also take care to empty or have emptied one’s chamber pot as soon as one gets up, and one should be very careful not to empty it through the window or into the street.” (p. 52)

“It is impolite and bad-mannered...to take off one’s shoes and socks to warm one’s bare feet. It is not even becoming, when one is in company, to take off one’s shoes or to lift one’s feet in order to warm them more easily. That sometimes happens to persons who seek their convenience” (p. 57)

Noble and bourgeois families must have had, for meals, a ewer and basin of water and towels on a side-table. Yet he offers this model of cleanliness to the wage-earning poor. “Politeness requires that a little before eating one should wash one’s hands...The order to be kept in washing one’s hands is to do it according to the rank one holds in the family; or if one eats in company, according to the rank one holds among the guests...It is uncivil to make a lot of noise with one’s hands by rubbing them hard...If one happened to have very dirty hands, it would be proper to take the precaution of washing them on one’s own somewhere else...Care must be taken in wiping one’s hands not to inconvenience others, and not to wet the towel so much that the others cannot find a dry spot to wipe theirs. “ (pp 80-82)

When drinking, “One should not then look outside one’s glass. One must not, either, in drinking, make a noise with one’s throat, making it possible for others to count the mouthfuls one swallows.” (p. 121)

One wonders what children of the poor would make of the many prescriptions concerning what is served at table, such as: “Roast pigeons are served whole, or are cut through in half. In all fowl that scratch the earth with their feet, the wings are the most delicate, but the legs are better in birds that fly in the air.” (p. 96) Yet they might be, on leaving school, or some years later, be taken into service into a bourgeois household.

As a final quote, here is the way of greeting someone that De La Salle calls “very ordinary”, for so it was at the time: “It is done, firstly in taking off one’s hat with the right hand, bringing the hat right down by fully stretching out the arm and taking a pose turned outwards on the right leg, leaving the left hand free. Secondly, by looking kindly and civilly at the person one greets. Thirdly, by lowering one’s eyes and bowing. Fourthly, drawing the foot, if one wishes to go forward, by gliding it straight forward; or if one wishes to go backward, by drawing the left foot backwards. If one passes alongside, by gliding the foot forward, to the side of the person one wishes to greet, and on bending down and greeting the person, a few steps before being opposite him or her.”!

(pp 166-7) It appears that in practice this was a simple and graceful affair.¹⁴

It is his own sense of good breeding and Christian motivation that comes through.

Although De La Salle follows his sources very closely, one gets the impression that it is his own sense of good breeding that he wants to hand on to others. He is the ‘gentleman’, a person of good breeding and remains so even among the poor and in poverty. We remember that phrase of the man of honour: “With that lie I am going to say Mass.” He is offended in his sensibilities by the sight of crudeness of living and behaviour. His phrase to characterise acceptable social behaviour is to say that it is the mark of (natural) nobility of character. To condemn the opposite, he speaks of it as belonging to a person who has baseness or meanness of soul. “All these ways of cutting bread are so ridiculous that only badly brought up persons and of a low education are capable of them.” (p. 112) “It is despicable and meanness of mind to make fun of someone because he is one-eyed, lame or hunchback” (p. 199). You can see his strong disapproval in other phrases: “One must always bring the lips together when eating, so as not to lap up like pigs” (p. 105); “It is a much nastier thing to know at (bones) all the way round, and to hold them in one’s two hands, as dogs do with their feet” (p. 116).

Yet in these reactions to incivility and coarseness his whole motivation is Christian. For him, the expression and vehicle of Christian behaviour in his day was undoubtedly the behaviour of the gentleman, the *honnête homme*. He wants to lift up the lower classes by means of it, but only as clothed in Christian motives. “If all Christians strive to give marks of civility, of esteem and of respect only with these views, they would sanctify all their actions and allow people to distinguish Christian politeness and civility from that which is purely worldly and almost pagan, and so live as perfect Christians” (Preface). This was his ultimate aim and that of his Brothers, to the extent of providing a very detailed textbook on the topic.

The catechetical writings of John Baptist de De La Salle

The *Duties of a Christian* appeared in a first volume in continuous prose of 504 pages, then in a second volume in question and answer form of 312 pages. A third volume on Christian worship of 432 pages completed it. Finally, a longer and a shorter abridgement together making 127 pages appeared.¹⁵ It was a considerable output. We know of over 270 editions or reprints till 1928.¹⁶ The volume in continuous prose was the one most republished. Because it was intended for catechists and other adults, the Brothers

in the first place, more copies of its earlier editions have survived than of the second volume, which was put into the hands of the students. This latter was also known as *The Catechism of the Brothers of the Christian Schools*.¹⁷ Only one copy of the first edition of Part III is known and is in the Bibliothèque Nationale, Paris. Only the first two Volumes of the *Duties of a Christian* will be considered here. The research on this work and its context is still in process so that a final assessment is not yet possible.

Volume II is an example of a developed traditional catechism as understood up to Vatican II. It was an answer to religious ignorance. It used no stories, no imagery, no use of Scripture by direct quote (though De La Salle's summary of the life of Christ is evidently based on the Gospels, and his first volume includes many more summaries of Scripture), no adaptation to children's growth. That had to be done by the teacher understanding the capacities of his class, in the few years available. De La Salle did not sit down and write out an entirely new catechism. He had before him three existing catechisms from which he borrowed copiously. They are representative of the flood of Counter-Reformation texts that appeared in the sixteenth and right through the seventeenth centuries and belong to a different world from ours. The concern for orthodoxy in these texts and to hammer home truths without believing which the children were held to be damned, as well as their brevity often eliminates many elements of the spiritual climate of the time as well as the deep spiritual experience of their writers. We have already seen how a dry text in the catechism is complemented in real school life with practices and prayers of deep piety. It helps to see better De La Salle's work if we set it in the context of the renewal of catechesis in seventeenth century France.

Counter-Reformation catechisms and efforts at teaching the faith after the Council of Trent.

The medieval reliance on minimal instruction and the experience of life and liturgy in a Christian community was rejected in the sixteenth century in favour of cultivating a personal holiness and an explicit faith in the Christian mysteries if one was not to risk damnation. This led to developed catechisms at the beginning of the seventeenth century, spurred on by the works of Luther and Calvin. **St Peter Canisius's** catechism was spread throughout France through the Jesuit colleges and might have been adopted by Trent, but the Council decided early on to **produce its own** "for children and ignorant adults" but in fact when it was published in 1666 it was addressed to parish priests. It stressed that the preacher's or catechist's aim is to arouse the desire to know and follow Jesus Christ, and that the Church is the assembly of those called by God and led by his Spirit under one head, Jesus Christ and his visible representative, the bishop of Rome. It was a little masterpiece, but it was

soon either treated as a theological summary and developed as such in seminaries, or summarised with the risk of leaving out something of its spirit.

The Jesuit **St Robert Bellarmine** (made Cardinal in 1599), brought out in 1597 and 1598, on the orders of the Pope, his small and large catechisms, one for children, the other for the catechist. They had a wide and long success. In face of criticisms of Trent by Protestant theologians, he prepared a very clear, organised summary of the faith that people wanted. The stress is on visible signs of adherence to the Church, on what it was to be a Catholic and not a Protestant. It was easier to follow a catechism text like this than to set it in the context of the catechism of Trent, the Scriptures and the whole tradition of the Church. The result was that less was said on the mystery of the Church and on the Christian's life with Christ according to the Gospel, or on what De La Salle terms "to be a true Christian".

Trent's reform of the Church centred on the revival of the particular churches or dioceses around the bishops. They were reminded that their main function, personally or through the parish priests but also through others, was to preach the word of God to the people in their assemblies, but also to children specifically. Instructing the latter would be understood as lessons given in church, traditionally by clerics; but Trent simply says: "those charged with this function." And so a new aspect of pastoral work in a parish began to develop: teaching catechism to children.

The development of catechism teaching in France. The emergence of diocesan catechisms.

Behind Spain and Italy in taking up the reforms of Trent, France became, roughly in the period 1620 to 1740 the scene of a remarkable Catholic and spiritual renewal. Its effect on the instruction of children and the ignorant led to a steady development in teaching the faith through catechism texts and teaching methods and parish organisation. One great concern is that the poor and the ignorant will be damned for not knowing the truths of faith explicitly through the fault of the clergy. We have seen how Adrian Bourdoise pioneered the needed priestly renewal. He began a community of clerics in his parish, forerunner of the seminaries, and trained them to teach catechism. Leaflets and small volumes were turned out, in particular three short catechisms: one for beginners, another for First Communion, and a text for later years.

Bourdoise was not a person who could organise. St Vincent de Paul, through the Congregation of the Mission begun in 1626, met the needs of country people through well-organised missions. Besides the early morning sermon, there was the "great catechising" in the evening. "Everybody agrees", said Vincent, "that all the good done at the mission is done by the catechism les-

son.”

From 1660 or so till the end of the century, catechism teaching in the parishes took root. Priests left the seminary aware of their duties in the matter, willing to call in helpers when the work was too great. Then each bishop set about bringing out his own diocesan text. There was the danger now of everything made to depend on what could be done through understanding and memorising the catechism.

In 1685 the revoking of the *Edict of Nantes* meant that any Protestants left in France were now “new Catholics”, who, willy-nilly, were to be taught the Catholic faith like everyone else. In 1687 Harlay, Archbishop of Paris, brought out a new catechism meant for them as well as for teaching children that remained in force till 1846. It stressed God as a supreme, immutable spirit who sees all things. Our duty is to render him homage and serve him. This metaphysical God was not the loving Father Jesus revealed; he was distant, judging and punishing all our actions.

In 1683 Claude Fleury, a priest, wrote a larger and a smaller catechism that, alongside the official diocesan texts had into the nineteenth century 478 editions and was widely translated. He says catechisms are usually very dry, and he blames it on those who wrote catechisms by simply taking definitions out of scholastic theology. Certainly there is far less ignorance now, he notes, but the instruction is so boring that some children are turned against it for the rest of their life. After you have tried to drive abstract truths and distinctions into their heads, they are no nearer Jesus Christ. In his “Historical Catechism” he proposes to go through the stories of the Bible in order to show God’s plan of love. In fact, however, the two parts of his work: events from the Bible, and then the usual plan of Creed, Our Father, Commandments and Sacraments remained unintegrated. Later diocesan catechisms might add an outline of the Bible to an otherwise unmodified text.

It is worth noting that he lays stress on parents as being the first and best teachers of their children: “They would do far more good than priests and bishops can do. We speak to the children in church, on certain days, for a short time. The children are several together, extremely inattentive...Interruptions and reprimands take up half the time intended for teaching catechism. On the contrary, a father, who only has two or three, has them with him every day; he can take the time when they are most docile. He knows what their minds can take...” He admits that very few take the trouble, preferring “to board their daughters with nuns and send their boys to college.” He has bourgeois families in mind. De La Salle was well aware that the poor were too busy all day to look after their children, whence the need of Christian schools. What Fleury says of parents was in fact very true of the relationship between the Brothers and their pupils, and indicates indirectly the difference between their catechism lessons

and those given in church.

The Duties of a Christian Towards God: Volume I, in continuous prose.¹⁸

In the preface, after stating that most Christians are badly informed of their profession and vocation as Christians, De La Salle says that his intention is *to form a Christian*. Here we are at the heart of all his educational work. He spells out the true Christian that he wants to see grow: Granted that “it suffices to be baptised in order to be a Christian, which is why heretics and schismatics are Christians as well as we,” he goes on: “But that is not enough to be of the true religion. One must also be a Catholic, believe in God and in Jesus Christ and all that he taught us whether by himself or through his Church, and make public profession of what one believes. But even all that does not suffice in order to be a good Christian. One must in addition *live by the Spirit of Our Lord Jesus Christ and live a life in conformity with his and with his maxims which are stated for us in the Holy Gospel and in all the New Testament.*” The sentence here italicised sums up for him the essential aim of education, and can be placed alongside what he wrote in the preface to his *Civility*.

It was because he thought it would help in achieving this aim that he wrote this substantial text. It is based particularly on the teaching of the Council of Trent, which he refers to at least 83 times. For this he uses as a handy source Chanut’s *Le Saint Concile de Trente oecuménique et générale...* of which a third edition was published in Paris in 1686. There is also the considerable influence of St Augustine who coloured the theology and spirituality of the time; it shows in the strict tone of certain passages. De La Salle quotes him 48 times. Other Fathers of the Church and other writers he refers to are St John Chrysostom, St Anselm, and also Tertullian, St Cyprian and St Thomas Aquinas.

The general character of this Volume.

It has very much the same tone, although it is much better developed, as the generality of catechisms in vogue until Vatican II. It is a logical, clear, reasoned summary of theology in which everything is explained very carefully. There is the statement which is a mark of De La Salle’s pedagogy of the faith: “One must not be satisfied with making acts of speculative faith only, that is, on the truths one only believes; one must also make acts of practical faith, that is, on the truths one must practice.” In an age when *knowing* the Catholic catechism text by heart was taken as a sign of holding to the Catholic faith, De La Salle stresses very much *living* the faith.

One of the strong points of the work is that the life of Christ it presents is

evidently a careful summary of the four Gospels. Yet the lack of direct quotation takes much of its life from it. However, what he says on the love of God (89-98) has some fine developments: "We cannot of ourselves have this virtue (of charity, or love of God and neighbour)...But provided we are well disposed to receive it, his pleasure and his delight is to share it with us; for as he is our centre and true end, he desires nothing more than to see that we have a continual bent and inclination towards him...." (p. 91) That could represent a personal experience. Yet the Commandments become a long list of obligations rather than the way of life of a child of God living in thanksgiving and by the movement of the Spirit. Although for him the true Christian lives by the Spirit, this is not spelt out in this catechism. He must certainly have worked intensely to write these texts, with not enough leisure to think everything through.

When he deals with Christian practices his tendency is to take an ideal to the limit. This may be another example of his desire not to compromise, to spell out everything, but it may equally be a sign that real life is not looked at closely enough. Here is an example: "One must not persuade oneself that it suffices to hear holy Mass every Sunday and that one is allowed the remainder of the day to go for a walk, to enjoy oneself, play games, eat and drink in taverns or stay in relaxation and idleness. It would be to insult God to act in this way." (p. 110) Besides going to Mass and the procession that was made before it, to the afternoon sermon, catechism, Vespers and Compline, any time over should be used by parents making their children read some good book, teaching them, visiting some churches, or the poor at home or in the hospices, or prisoners, or people of piety in order to keep union and charity with them (p. 111). On this basis, Sunday would hardly have been a day of rest and relaxation.

Although the true Christian, for him, lives by the maxims and example of Christ, the stress in his catechism is on the Commandments and virtues without reference to the example of Christ. They are given a dry, textbook presentation. The Beatitudes, to which one would have expected to give prominence, come at the end of the first part of the volume without much development, and the last paragraph simply says: "There are a great number of other Christian maxims that it has not been thought necessary to record here because they will be easily found in many places in the New Testament. As Jesus Christ calls Christians to a high perfection, it is for them to read and meditate on them often." (p. 192).

This clearly does not represent all De La Salle's understanding of the Christian education of children. We gain the whole picture from both his life and all his other writings. Teaching the catechism was only part of the day-long ministry of the Brother. De La Salle's objective catechism has to be read

along with his meditations on that ministry, which will be looked at in the final section of this chapter.

The second part of Volume I: the means given us for loving God.

De La Salle now passes on to the means for knowing and loving God, namely prayer and the Sacraments. The definition of each sacrament is followed by a clear, reasoned presentation of the teaching of the Church, and then the author takes trouble to explain its rites and their meaning. On pages 251-55 he takes time to present the tradition of the early Church on daily Communion, something he evidently favours against the current Jansenist views.

He has more development, from pages 279 to 339, on the Sacrament of Penance (or of Reconciliation as we say today): than any other Sacrament, and follows Trent closely. He has four pages on examining one's conscience and under so many aspects that it would be an impossible and fatiguing effort to follow it through. Contrition is given fifteen pages, and twelve are given to Confession "and the defects that can be found in it." The whole thing is very laborious; there is little mention of God's attitude, nor of this Sacrament as a celebration of reconciliation. He reflects the sacramental theology of his time and perhaps again his own tendency to leave nothing out.

The second means of obtaining God's help in order to serve him is prayer, and on this he has a fine development that runs to ninety pages. On the advantages of prayer, he follows entirely St John Chrysostom (p. 417). His explanation of the Our Father he follows St Augustine and Tertullian. He offers a way of praying to God "by silence, simply being in the presence of God in an attitude of respect and adoration, without saying anything or asking God for anything...; by thought, without using any words;...by affections, when we ask God for something with the sole movement of the heart.(p. 473). He is somewhat idealist once more, or pushing a good thing right to its theoretical conclusion when he says that in every action "without distinction" (p. 489) we should offer it to God, ask his help, do it with attention to God, and unite it to Our Lord's disposition in doing such actions. He does say this is a desire, not an obligation of the Church. He has the rather depressing view that "when we work, we should think that it is sin that has put us in the obligation of working. Ask God the grace to do one's work in a spirit of penance." (p. 490).

This second part of *The Duties of a Christian* was a good reference work, free from Jansenism and Gallicanism, for the Brothers in preparing their catechism lessons. If it is idealist or strict at times, this would mark the reforming movement. But it does not have Jansenist anguish and dwelling on the sinfulness of man. Certainly valuable for the Brothers, the work seems however to be addressed to the Christian public. The preface begins: "To

belong to a calling and not know what it is, to be ignorant even of the meaning of one's name in it, what it commits us to and what are the basic duties of this way of life - that seems quite contrary to common sense and right reason; yet this is not uncommon for the majority of Christians." After fifteen years of schooling in the parish of St Sulpice, there were thousands of young parents from the Brothers', not to mention the Sisters' schools who could read, and throughout the country this number was on the increase.

The Duties of a Christian. Volume II, in question and answer form. Its main sources.¹⁹

In this second volume, we can see what De La Salle intended the children to know and how he constructed it with a carefully discerning eye from several existing works. Even this catechism was not meant directly for the pupils. It was meant to help the Brothers in the detailed planning of their lessons by providing them with more questions to put to the pupils to help them to understand and keep them attentive. "The master will not speak to the pupils during the catechism lesson as if he were preaching, but he will question them almost continually by means of several questions and sub-questions."²⁰ There are two and a half pages in the Handbook on how to question the class, how to involve the inattentive, the slow learners. This Volume II of the *Duties of a Christian* gives plenty of extra material in interrogative form for the master to use, but the questions the children learnt by heart are limited to those contained in his two Abridgements of this work.²¹

Just as for his *Rules of Christian Politeness...* De La Salle was pressed for time in composing this text. He took therefore from other catechisms, making changes as needed and slipping in what he had most at heart. He had three catechisms in front of him.²² One was by a Claude Joly, who came from a poor family, joined the new Community of Saint-Sulpice and became bishop of Agen (a town between Bordeaux and Toulouse) in 1655. He published in 1672 his *The Christian's Duties*, intended for adults. It was very balanced doctrinally, with some severity which encouraged not going to communion for some time after going to confession. The book is very clear and concise, and one aim is to lead from knowledge to a spiritual attitude.

John Le Coreur, the second source used by De La Salle, seems to have been a doctor in theology, a confessor and spiritual director in the parish of Saint Germain l'Auxerrois in Paris, near the Louvre, and who died in 1692. Little is known of him. He brought out *The Principal Duties of the Christian* in 1683 and an abridgment in 1688. For him, as for all seventeenth century catechising, it is necessary in order to be saved, to know Christian doctrine and live it. But everything, instead of expressing loving relations between God and his people becomes obligations. "What is, of itself, of the

domain of deep spontaneity, of freedom, of the order of relationships, becomes a set of works to accomplish, of things to do.”²³ Contrary to his plan, however, he has beautiful things to say, for instance, on the Holy Spirit who makes of the faithful one united body, who is in each of us making us children of God and inspiring our prayer. He has, however, Jansenist doctrinal errors, namely, that God does not give to all sufficient grace to be saved, and that few will receive the grace of perseverance, and he also pictures God as blinding and hardening those he wants to punish. While De La Salle avoids taking anything of this, he appreciates Le Coreur’s spiritual depth in writing of the Church and of baptism, for instance. He took a fair amount from him in his Volumes I and II.²⁴

The third text consulted by De La Salle was *The Catechism of the Diocese of Chartres*, written by Bishop Godet des Marets and published 1699. There is a copy in the Brothers’ Archives, Rome. The bishop says he took the catechism of the Council of Trent as model, but made use also of several diocesan catechisms. He also says he “consulted with persons able to give us useful advice on such an important matter.”²⁵ As he was a great friend of De La Salle and often visited the Brothers in Chartres, one can guess that these were some of the persons he consulted. De La Salle borrowed from Godet des Marets in his first Volume, but especially in his second - on the Sacrament of Penance, for instance, and still more on prayer. He was at home with what the bishop had to say on this and appreciated his doctrinal balance.

So there was De La Salle at his desk, perhaps late into the night, sometimes in a freezing room, often in pain from rheumatism, often interrupted, sometimes for days, perusing the three books in front of him and judging what to take, what to modify. He planned an improved edition in 1714, as we shall see, but he was hindered from doing so. We do not know how he would have liked to have had it.

We would not use his catechism today. Apart from having a different world to meet, we have, for instance, learnt to be more biblical, more life-based; we are learning to involve the local Christian community. New technologies have immeasurably complemented written texts.

This function of teaching the faith is set within the whole educational endeavour of the Brothers. Their ministry was not limited to catechising. Even in their daily religious teaching, they were not content with teaching thoroughly what was in the catechism. The *Handbook for Christian Schools*, which expressed their conviction and practice in the matter, says:²⁶ “(The master) will not fail in each catechism lesson to give a few practices to the pupils and to instruct them as thoroughly as he can on the things which concern the morals and behaviour that one should observe in order to live as a true Christian.” De La Salle says, in his *Meditations for the retreat* (2.3) : “Is

it your main care to instruct your disciples in the maxims of the holy Gospel and the practice of the Christian virtues? Have you nothing more at heart that to get them to have a liking for them?"

The anthologies of prayer published by the De La Salle for class use or for the Mass or before and after Communion and Confession had the same practical aim. So had the Handbook, so had the *Rules of Christian Politeness*. If his catechism teaches to turn often to God during the day, the Handbook states how initiation into this (and not just teaching it) is catered for in school: "At each hour of the day a few prayers will be said to give the pupils the habit of thinking of God now and then during the day" (p. 76). The *Exercises of Piety for Christian Schools* provided the material: "At nine o'clock and ten o'clock the following prayers will be said." (p. 6) Over and above all this, it was the daily contact and influence of the Brothers "that they may teach them to live good lives and win them over to the Gospel maxims." (*Rule*)

An attitude to popular culture.²⁷

Some strictness about what constitutes Christian behaviour was noted in De La Salle's catechism. Part of the key lies in a negative attitude towards, or ignorance of any value in popular culture on the part of the reforming group in the French Church which he followed. We are learning, whether at home or abroad, that to impose what we think is best on a 'lower' culture may be a big mistake. We have to learn to see and listen for a long time. We cannot, however, read that back into the seventeenth century when priorities in reform were different. Episcopal visitations of the parishes as laid down by the Council of Trent were meant to correct abuses. In France these were seen as such by an upper class culture passing judgment on popular devotion. Anything wrong is noted, never what is good. It is a normal part of popular culture to end an occasion with a meal, quite possibly in the tavern, or to come together in the long evenings to talk or sing. Instead of giving these activities their blessing, instead of suggesting an education in social relations, visitations enquire about going to the tavern on patron saints' days (of the different crafts), playing cards, dancing "or other superstitious things" "If women and girls spend evenings together, and if there is any disorder."²⁸

There is something of this in De La Salle's work. Take, for example, processions and pilgrimages. They have a certain popular way of being carried out; togetherness counts for a great deal, and piety has a collective, friendly character. For De La Salle, however, a procession is "a public prayer said by the clergy and the people, marching solemnly."²⁹ Spiritual motives and explanations are given for everything. Thus, the three reasons for which the Church instituted processions are: 1. to honour Our Lord's journeys. 2. To remind us that we are to walk after him. 3 That clerics come behind the crossbearer to

show they must follow Jesus closely and give the example. Clerics walk two by two because Jesus sent his disciples out two by two, and so on. This is very artificial and is in no way popular piety. We get an idea how the procession really went in the last paragraph he wrote on defects to avoid: going by curiosity, talking together, not praying or looking around while praying, leaving before the end. Here again, there is a lack of contact with reality. In the catechism we read what people are supposed to do. We never hear what they actually think and feel and what really relates them to God.

A different consequence of this ignorance was that the cultured sections of society failed to see that Christianity among the ordinary people could be overlaid by a very primitive culture. Teaching purely theological notions out of the catechism while being unaware of this was not necessarily sound. Priests could say one thing and the people understand another. For instance, De La Salle explains carefully the history of the use of blessed bread which then used to be given out at Mass. He sees it as a reminder of the Last Supper that was adopted during Sunday Masses when the habit of communion at every Mass dropped out. Taken with faith and respect, it "can obtain the remission of venial sins, chase away devils and cure several illnesses." Among wrong uses of blessed bread, he lists "letting children profane it and give it to the (farm) animals."³⁰ But precisely the latter practice came from the folklore belief that blessed bread had inner power. Teaching that it could be instrumental in healing would only reinforce this superstition.

The same misunderstanding is shown towards the carnival time before Lent. Ordinary people wanted to enjoy themselves for a while with a good meal and plenty of noise, and then settle down to observing Lent. De La Salle calls the carnival "the devil's Lent". During the last three days of the carnival, the good Christian "and especially a Christian child" should not go into the streets to see the masquerade. He should "keep away from company more than in another time; eat little at supper, go to bed early and rise early". He should attend school, and be absent "not even on the Tuesday, not even if his parents encourage him."³¹ It was asking the impossible.

What we have here is an example of two cultures in opposition. There was what one may call the 'ecclesial' culture of the two or three million that composed the 'scholarly' element in France, and that of the lower classes in villages and town with their folklore memories and practices. With none of the benefit of modern studies in human cultures, the 'ecclesial' culture - of those who had been through the colleges, and of which De La Salle is a representative - sought to lift the uneducated only by giving them something of itself. Nevertheless, that something was basically good.

What De La Salle achieved, in this context, was to promote the full education of the young. In teaching them civility, he taught them a different set of

controls in society than those of their culture, perhaps, but much of this was good. They were taught in school a discipline of mind and body that would help them to be steady workers and it also taught them a self-control they lacked. In their catechism lessons and in the whole atmosphere of the teaching they learnt to relate to a personal God, not to an impersonal 'Providence' somewhat confused with nature that their culture might lead them to believe in. They achieved self-awareness as a child of God, brother of Jesus, temple of the Holy Spirit.

The Brothers' work was, then, not merely a secular pursuit. It was a ministry of the Word of God to children, carried out as a mission on behalf of the Church and perceived as being within God's eternal plan of salvation. This deepest meaning of his Brothers' work De La Salle set out with conviction and serenity in the sixteen Meditations he wrote for their consideration during their annual retreat.

De La Salle's Meditations for the Time of the Retreat:

The work of the Christian teacher is a ministry that lays the foundations of the Church.

General character of these Meditations.

These sixteen meditations, that is, two a day during an eight-day retreat, have as sub-title: "For the use of all those who work for the education of youth and especially for the retreat that the Brothers of the Christian Schools make during the vacation." They do not cover all that De La Salle would want to say to his Brothers. The retreat was not a time to discuss teaching method, but a time for the Brothers to look at their motivation in all they did. The morning and some of the evening time would be taken up with talks and meditation on evangelical perfection, and also with self-examination covering all one's life of faith, using De La Salle's *Collection of Short Treatises*.³²

But during these retreats De La Salle spoke also on the Brothers' mission. Over the years he came to see that it was an activity and a profession that with regard to children partook of the New Testament ministry of the Word. He reflected long on this ministry in the life of Jesus himself and in the early Church, especially as practised by St Paul and explained in his Letters, as well as on the work and teaching of the great pastoral bishops and others from the early centuries onwards. He saw the work of the Christian teacher, commissioned by the bishop, as a share, with regard to the young, in the same ministry. His Brothers, by being called to dedicate their life solely to this work in a lifelong commitment, were being called to affirm in the Church the reality of this ministry.³³

The actual idea of writing retreat meditations on the topic he may have taken from the Minim Fr Giry, who after Fr Barré became the superior of the Sisters of the Child Jesus of Rouen. He published in Paris in 1687 ten meditations for them “mainly for the time of their retreats and of their spiritual exercises, on the principal duties of their state.” De La Salle, however, talks less of duties than of the gift of a ministry of the Word, and with much greater vigour and clarity. This work, however, was not given the careful finish of his printed texts. There is often repetition of the same word, and sentences are sometimes very long.³⁴ Yet one also gets the impression on reading these meditations of a man gripped and convinced by his topic, emphasised by repetition. The sub-title of the work implies an intention, cut short by his death perhaps, of having it printed for a wider audience. It was published about 1730.³⁵

He is not lecturing but in a sense reminiscing, in the later years of his life, on the goodness of God in calling people such as his Brothers to this ministry, and marvelling at its excellence. He is not calling them to an examination of conscience except secondarily, but to a reflective admiration of God’s goodness and on the significance and effects of exercising responsibly their profession. In these meditations he quotes Scripture according to the 1707 revised version of the Oratorian Denys Amelote’s translation of the New Testament.³⁶ We can think of periods after 1707 when he had the leisure to work on it further. He used his time while at Grenoble from 1713 to 1714, as we shall see, to compose works for the Brothers. His happy experience teaching there for a month may have inspired him to begin to write down his understanding of vocation of the Christian teacher as a basic ministry in the Church. On his return to Paris in 1714 he was mostly in his room praying or writing meditations for the Brothers.

The work manifests a detailed reference to what is said about handing on the Word of God in the New Testament, which it quotes 199 times (and 13 times the Old Testament). De La Salle would have had the New Testament in hand and copied out certain passages: we do not have to expect that he wrote them from memory. Yet the ease with which texts are used, often several in the same paragraph, indicates the familiarity of long acquaintance with them: he knew where to look for them.³⁷

Brother Timothy as Superior General had the Founder’s Meditations for Retreat Time printed probably soon after 1725,³⁸ for in introducing the first printed edition of De La Salle’s other Meditations for Sundays and feasts, which we know appeared not later than 1731³⁹ he says in a foreword: “The great welcome given to the Meditations for the Retreat, and the holy avidity with which each one prepared to listen to them with a singular attention at the next retreat, encouraged us to work with greater ardour at having printed the

meditations that this holy cleric also composed for all the Sundays and main feasts of the year.” He speaks of him “occupying himself with this work in the last years of his life, having then for this purpose used a great part of his time.”⁴⁰ It must have been not only inspiring but moving for the Brothers to hear read out the ideas and even the very phrases their Founder had often used with them.

The foreword added to the Meditations for the time of the Retreat when the came to be printed indicates that there were “two for each day of the retreat, so that if need be, one of the two could take the place of a public or private reading, and serve as matter for the evening conference or exhortation.” As the second meditation was a practical application of the theology of the first, an experienced Brother might well have led the evening discussion or given a talk in order to bring out the pedagogical implications.

Only extracts will be given from these fine meditations. It is worth bearing in mind in reading them, that the clientele concerned were of primary age. Again, each Brother had his one class through the year, and taught not only religion, but was able to attempt the full range of teaching and educational relationships that were part of their ministry to children. Thirdly, he was working in a post-Trent, almost entirely Catholic society. We are dealing with a far more complex situation. Yet in these Meditations De La Salle sets out as no other the basic inspiration of the Christian teacher’s life.

In God’s eternal plan of salvation. The elements of a Christian education (Meditations 1 and 2).

It is God who, in his providence, has set up the Christian Schools. This is the heading of the opening meditation. The first paragraphs have all the serenity and wonder of that first deep experience of God’s providence that he had in the begin ‘in God’s plan of salvation.’ For he writes:

“God, who by the ministry of men spreads the fragrance of his teaching throughout the world, and who ordered light to come forth from darkness, has himself enlightened the hearts of those he has destined to announce his word to children so that they may enlighten them by revealing to them the glory of God.

“Since, therefore, God by his mercy has given you such a ministry, do not distort his word; but acquire for yourself before him the glory of revealing the truth to those you are charged with instructing, and let it be your whole application in the instructions you give them, looking upon yourselves as the Ministers of God and the dispensers of his mysteries.” (1.1)⁴¹ These paragraphs are typical of the work: they embody seven quotes from St Paul, especially II Cor 4, where the Apostle presents with great confidence his ministry of the Word. Looking at these texts, De La Salle is sure the Christian teacher’s

work is identical to the apostle's, if in a different context. Paul, indeed, said of his own mission: "Christ did not send me to baptise, but to preach the gospel." (I Cor 1:17)

After referring to the plight of the children of the poor left on the streets, De La Salle says: "God has had the goodness to remedy such a great disadvantage by the setting up of Christian schools where the children, being kept all day, and learning reading, writing and their religion, and so being always kept busy, will be in a position to be employed at work when their parents wish to put them to it. Thank God that he has had the goodness to make use of you to provide the children with such great advantages, and be faithful and exact in doing it without receiving any pay, so that you can say with Saint Paul: "the subject of my consolation is to announce the Gospel freely, without it costing anything to those who listen to me." (2.1 [I Cor 9:18])

Nevertheless, "It is necessary that those who are given them to instruct them should specially concern themselves with bringing them up in the spirit of Christianity." This phrase "spirit of Christianity", or "the Christian outlook", which recurs under De La Salle's pen, expresses the basic aim of the Christian school. As a first aspect of this education, he sees endeavouring to lead the children from bad habits to a change of heart. "You first care, then, must be always to pay attention to them in order to prevent them from doing any action, not only bad, but in the least unbecoming, getting them to refrain from whatever has the least appearance of sin." (2.2) "You would be reprehensible if you did not encourage them to give up their past life."

Leading them to follow Christ, however, was the basic positive concern for him: "Is it your main care, therefore, to instruct your disciples in the maxims of the holy Gospel and in the practices of the Christian virtues? Have you nothing more at heart than to get them to have a liking for them?" (2.3) "You should, when reading the Gospel, study the way and the means he (Jesus Christ) used to lead his disciples to the practice of the Gospel truths; now putting forward as happiness all that the world holds in horror, such as poverty, abuse, insults, calumnies and all kinds of persecution for justice' sake; now giving them horror for the sins into which men habitually fall, at other times putting forward virtues to practice such as gentleness, humility. It is according to these practices, and all the others of Jesus Christ, that you must teach the Christian youth confided to you." (4.2) While De La Salle and his Brothers worked through education to reduce the socio-economic poverty and dependence of the poor, they nevertheless presented to them among other virtues evangelical poverty. They were not secular social reformers but educators in the spirit of Christianity.

De La Salle widens this effort to include formation to Christian community life, particularly through the right reception of the sacraments. "The apostles'

principal care after having instructed the early faithful was to get them to receive the sacraments, to gather them for prayer together, and to get them to live according to the spirit of Christianity. That is what you are obliged to do above all things in your profession.: you must, in imitation of the apostles, have a particular attention to get those whom you instruct to receive the sacraments.”

To sum up, the teacher’s ministry of the word to the children of the poor does not consist in teaching the faith only, but in *accompanying* the child in helping him to live by it. Further, from what we know elsewhere of De La Salle’s aims and struggles, it is exercised within a broader ministry that makes real the redemption Christ brought to the poor.

That the care to instruct youth is one of the most important functions in the Church (Meditation 7.)

This is De La Salle’s title for the seventh Meditation of the series. On this topic the language flows more easily and powerfully. The relevant New Testament passages (of which there are forty-two) seem to be drawn in naturally, and the ideas connect in long periods.

“God having chosen and destined Saint Paul to preach the Gospel to the nations, as he says himself, gave him such a knowledge of the mysteries of Jesus Christ, that he made him capable like a good architect of laying the foundation of the edifice of faith and of religion that God erected in the towns where he announced the Gospel, according to the grace that God had given him for this, by being the very first to preach in those places. Hence he says quite rightly that those to whom he announced the Gospel are his work and that he has fathered them in Jesus Christ.

“You can say without comparing yourself to this great saint that (according to the proportion there is between your function and his) you do the same thing and that you exercise the same ministry in your profession, so that you should look upon your function as one of the most considerable and necessary in the Church, by whom you are charged on the part of the pastors (meaning bishops and their parish priests) and mothers and fathers.

“What is called laying the foundation of the edifice of the Church is instructing children in the mystery of the most blessed Trinity and in those mysteries that Jesus Christ accomplished while he was on earth; since according to Saint Paul, without faith it is impossible to please God. That being so, how much should you not consider yourselves honoured by the Church, for being destined by her for such a holy and elevated function, and because she has chosen you to provide the children with the knowledge of our religion and the spirit of Christianity. Pray God to make you worthy of exercising such a ministry in a way worthy of him.”

He passes on to show that the Christian teacher's function follows on a tradition going back to the beginning of the Church and to Jesus himself. "What makes this function considerable is that the holy bishops of the early Church looked upon it as their main duty, and even made it an honour to instruct catechumens and new Christians, and to teach them catechism. Saint Cyril, patriarch of Jerusalem, and Saint Augustine, have left us catechisms in writing that they taught themselves, and that they had the priests teach who helped them in their pastoral functions. And Saint Jerome, whose knowledge was so profound, asserts in his letter to Leta that he saw more honour in catechising a young child than to be the tutor of a great Emperor.

"The reason why these great saints acted in this way is because it is the first function that Jesus Christ laid on his holy apostles, immediately before leaving them, when he said: 'Go, teach all nations, baptising them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.'

But Jesus Christ was not satisfied with entrusting to his apostles the function of teaching catechism: he also did it himself, and taught the principal truths of our religion. 'I must announce the Good news of the Kingdom of God, for that is why I have been sent.'

*Tell yourself that that is why Jesus Christ has sent you and why the Church of whom you are the ministers employs you.*⁴² Give then all the application necessary to discharge this function with as much zeal and success as the saints exercised it."

Ambassadors and ministers of Jesus Christ by the movement of his Spirit (Meditations 3, 4 and 9).

De La Salle now looks at this ministry from the inside. He wants it to be seen as a ministry lived in union with Jesus Christ and as empowered and given life by his Spirit.

"As you are the 'ambassadors and ministers of Jesus Christ' in the function you exercise," he writes in his third meditation, "you should do it as representing Jesus Christ himself. He it is who wishes your disciples to look upon you as himself, and to receive your instructions 'as if he were giving them', being persuaded that it is the truth of Jesus Christ that speaks by your mouth, that it is only in his name that you teach and that it is he who gives you authority over them, and 'that they are themselves the letter he has dictated to you and that you write' every day 'in their hearts, not with ink, but with the Spirit of the living God' who acts in you and by you, by the virtue of Jesus Christ..."

"To carry out this duty with as much perfection and exactness as God asks of you, give yourself often to the Spirit of Our Lord, so as to act in it only by him, and that your own spirit may have no part in it; and thus this Holy Spirit

being poured out on them (the children), they may possess fully the spirit of Christianity.”

Turning now to the actual exercise of this ministry in the classroom he writes with feeling: “When it happens that you find some difficulty in the behaviour of your students, that there are some who do not profit by your instructions, and in whom you notice a certain spirit of waywardness, you will no doubt have recourse to God, and you will *ask Jesus Christ very earnestly*⁴³ to enliven you by his Spirit since he has chosen you to do his work. Look upon Jesus Christ as the Good Shepherd of the Gospel ‘who seeks out the lost sheep, puts it on his shoulders and brings it back’ in order to put it back into the flock. And since you take his place, look upon yourselves as obliged to do the same thing, and ask him for the necessary graces to bring about the conversion of their hearts” (4.1).

In his ninth Meditation, he draws attention to the *gifts given the Christian teacher by the indwelling Spirit*. “Think over what Saint Paul says ‘that it is God who has set up in the Church apostles, prophets and doctors,’ and you will be persuaded that it is he also who has established you in your profession. One of the signs that the same saint gives you is ‘that there are various ministries but there are different operations, and that the Holy Spirit manifests in each one his gifts only for the common good’, that is, for the utility of the Church. ‘One receives through the Holy Spirit the gift of speaking with wisdom; another the gift of faith by the same Spirit.’” He limits himself to these two charisms and does not continue the quote because these are gifts that concern the ministry of the word. Then he draws the conclusion:

“You should not doubt that it is a great gift of God, the grace he has given you of putting you in charge of instructing children, of announcing the Gospel to them and of bringing them up in the spirit of religion...

“Let it be known, then, in all your way of acting with regard to the children who are entrusted to you, that you look upon yourselves as the ministers of God, exercising it (this ministry) with a sincere and genuine charity and zeal, bearing with much patience the difficulties you will have to endure, happy to be despised by men and to be persecuted by them even to giving your life for Jesus in the exercise of your ministry.” This paragraph is inspired by 2 Cor 6, where he sees the parallel between the difficulties in St Paul’s ministry and the Brothers’ own among the poor. In fact, he is very close to St Paul in the whole of this meditation, quoting him nineteen times.

Correction within the ministry of the Christian teacher (Meditations 11 and 12).

De La Salle is not looking at misbehaviour merely as a discipline problem, but at unchristian behaviour as a pastoral concern. The first point he makes is

that one does not let wrong behaviour go without comment. In fact his eleventh Meditation is entitled: "Of the obligation the Brothers of the Christian Schools are under of reprimanding and correcting the faults committed by those they are charged to instruct." "One of the signs and one of the effects of the zeal one has for good and for the salvation of souls," he begins, "is to reprimand and correct those in one's charge when they fall into some fault." The important word is "correct", not punish, as we have seen in the Chapter 12 on Handbook for Christian Schools.

Regular instruction itself includes presenting Christian standards of right and wrong. This is not always enough. As De La Salle says: "Children have this proper to them that often they fall into a fault only because they do many things without thinking, and as the reprimands and corrections given them tend to make them think about what they are doing, they cause them to watch over themselves so as not to fall into the same faults. Be therefore exact not to put up with considerable faults in them without applying this remedy." He shows Jesus resorting to strong words when people wilfully oppose right behaviour, as with the sellers in the Temple of Jerusalem, or with the Pharisees and their hypocrisy. Similarly St Paul castigated the Corinthians for not excluding from their assembly an incestuous man.

He points out that a child used to sinning "has lost so to say his freedom, according to what Jesus Christ says 'that he who commits sin is a slave of sin'. It is up to you who are the teachers of those you look after to take all possible care to set them in that 'liberty of the children of God that Jesus Christ won for us' by dying for us. You need for that to make use of two means towards them. The first is gentleness and patience. The second is prudence in reprimands and corrections." (11.1,2) This reference to education to Christian freedom from sin and bad habits is significant. While he certainly worked for the economic and social liberation of the poor, this more vital freedom was first in his mind.

He has much to say on corrections in the ensuing meditation. "It would be of little use to give reprimands and corrections if those who give them did not take the right steps to give them well. The first thing to which they must pay attention is to undertake them only by the guidance of the Spirit of God. Hence, before resorting to them, the right thing is to gather in one's thoughts so as to open oneself to the Spirit of God and prepare to give the reprimand or correction with as much moderation as possible and in the way most likely to make it useful for the one we intend giving it to. For human beings, even children, being endowed with reason, must not be corrected like animals but like rational persons.

"They must be reprimanded and corrected with justice, making them realise how they are wrong and what correction the fault they have committed

deserves and trying to get them to accept it. And as they are Christians, you must be ready to give the reproof and the correction in such a way that God will be pleased, and you must do everything in such a way that they receive it as a remedy for their fault and as a means of becoming better behaved.

“It is proper next to examine before God what correction the fault deserves and if the culprit has made up his mind to receive it with submission, or whether you must try to incline him to it. One should not fear, if one behaves prudently in the matter, that it will have a bad effect.” Then follow some questions for the teacher: “Have you so far paid attention to yourself so as to correct your disciples only in the view of God? Have you not corrected them through an immoderate zeal, and perhaps with impatience and anger? Was it to make them change their behaviour rather than to punish them for some annoyance they caused you? Did charity lead you, or rather did you not do it to take out on them your bad temper? Pay great attention to this in future, so as not to act in a thing of this importance except in view of pleasing God.” (12.1)

The recompense of the Christian teacher (Meditations 15 and 16).

Two further meditations (13 and 14) cover our accountability to Christ. They consider self-assessment in the presence of Christ and his appreciation of the work we do for him. Two final Meditations dwell on the reward the Christian teacher can expect in this life and in the next. What he says on this, directed towards the Brothers of the Christian Schools, is also true of the Christian teacher generally.

“Regard it as a considerable recompense that God gives you, even in this world, to see that by means of the establishment of the schools, whose running God has charged you with, religion and Christian living are increased among the faithful and particularly among the artisans and the poor, and give daily thanks to God, through Jesus Christ Our Lord, that it has pleased him to set up this good and to give this help to the Church. Ask him also earnestly that it may please him to increase your Institute and to make it bear fruit day by day, ‘so that,’ as Saint Paul says, ‘the hearts of the faithful may be strengthened in holiness and justice’.” (15.3)

“What will be the joy of a Brother of the Christian schools when he sees a great number of his students in possession of eternal life, which they will owe him by the grace of Jesus Christ! What correspondence will there not be between the joy of the teacher and that of the disciples! What special union will there not be in God of the one with the other!”

And, widening it out now to all Christian teachers: “What will not be the glory for the persons who have instructed the young, when their zeal and their application to bring about the salvation of children are published before all men, and all heaven will resound with the thanksgiving that these blessed

children will render to those who have taught them the road to heaven! So act, by your good and wise behaviour towards those confided to you, as to obtain all these advantages and all these kinds of glory.” (16.2,3)

References

1. *Les Règles de la bienséance et de la civilité chrétienne*, 510 pages, CL19.
2. See also Ariès, 429-440.
3. Ruth Murphy, *St Francis de Sales and Christian Civility*.
4. *L'Ecole Paroissiale*, 1684, 252.
5. pp 46s.
6. Albert Valentin, critical edition, 131ss.
7. Poutet, CL48, *Jean-Baptiste de La Salle aux prises avec son temps*, 163, n.60.
8. The quotes from Courtin are from his 1672 edition; from the Lyons anonymous writer, that of 1681.
9. CL24, 2-3.
10. Ariès, 434.
11. CL19, *Règles de la Bienséance...*, 2-3.
12. Med. 133.
13. Louise Godard de Donville, opening a brilliant short article on the term in the *Dictionnaire du grand Siècle*.
14. Albert Valentin, op. cit., 415, n.6.
15. CL20: *Les Devoirs d'un chrétien envers Dieu et les moyens de s'en bien acquitter*, Tome I in continuous prose, 540 pp; CL21: id., Tome II, (by question and answer), 312pp; CL22: *Du culte extérieur et public que les chrétiens sont obligés de rendre à Dieu et les moyens de les lui rendre - Troisième partie des devoirs d'un chrétien envers Dieu*, 432 pp; CL23: *Grand Abrégé des Devoirs d'un Chrétien envers Dieu. Petit Abrégé des Devoirs d'un Chrétien envers Dieu*, 167 pp.
16. CL20, II-XVIII.
17. id., III-IV.
18. CL20.
19. CL21.
20. *Conduite des Ecoles*, CL24, 99.
21. CL21.
22. CL20.
23. Brother Jean-Pungier, *Jean-Baptiste de La Salle et le message de son catéchisme*, Rome, 1984.
24. id., 69-86.
25. id., 90.
26. CL24, 102.
27. This section is based on Brother Jean Pungier's lectures during the International

Session of Lasallian studies in Rome, 1990-1991.

28. *Le Parfait Ecclésiastique*, by Claude de la Croix, 1676, 599, 600.

29. Volume III, CL22, 12-13.

30. id., 45.

31. id., 82-83.

32. See CL13, Appendix, 1-8, and, in CL15, that section of the *Short Treatises* entitled: *Considerations that the Brothers must make from time to time, and especially during their retreat*.

33. For a fine presentation of the text of these Meditations, translated by Brother Augustine Loes, see Brother Miguel Campos's Introduction to "Meditations for the time of retreat. St John Baptist de De La Salle", St Mary's College Press, Winona, 1975. The original French text was reproduced as CL13 in 1963.

34. Rigault I, 493 and n.1.

35. CL13, III.

36. Brother Michel-Sauvage in CL1, XXX; Brother Jean-Rodrigue, in CL47, 16, nn 61, 62.

37. cf Michel-Sauvage, CL1, XXXVII.

38. Rig I, 492.

39. CL47, Brother Jean-Guy Rodrigue, : *Contribution à l'étude des sources des "Méditations sur les principales Fêtes de l'année"*, 1988, 4.

40. CL12.

41. In this and the following references after quotes from these Meditations, the first figure gives the number of the meditation; the others, one or more of the three points into which each is subdivided.

42, 43. Italics not in the text.

PART IV

**GROWTH IN THE SOUTH. A FIRST SUCCESS IN ROME. A
CRISIS FOR THE INSTITUTE. THE FOUNDER'S LAST
YEARS: 1706-1719**

Chapter 17 : Growth in the south.

From legal defeat in the capital, events take us to Dauphiné and to the sunny south of France, in Languedoc and Provence, where De La Salle's Society takes on new life. We see bishops and town authorities or leading figures giving their support. Even if negotiations could be very slow, some not maturing in his lifetime, he was able to take on five new foundations. At the same time, the Brothers are put in a false position in Calvinist areas by seeming to be in the vanguard of the new royal policy of enforced Catholic instruction. The situation throws fresh light on what exactly these new teachers are about. Among the Brothers, back in Rouen and elsewhere, occur some unwise or unedifying incidents. In Rome, Drolin, already teaching in a dependent position, obtains the licence to teach in his own right. But he is beset with money difficulties, and after April 1707, serious events interrupted his correspondence for two and a half years.

The Founder writes to Drolin on 11 February, 1706

On 11 February 1706, six days after that judgment of the High Court of Parlement which gave victory to the master-writers and the little masters, the Founder writes to Drolin¹ without any mention of it as if matters in Rome were his only concern. Gabriel had been quite put out by the Founder's letter of 28 October which had been again quite stiff on debts and again had promised only 50 livres that covered his rent and nothing more. He wrote back under the influence of his annoyance. His letter may have arrived in Paris mid-January. A few days later, he wrote apologising. De La Salle had answered the previous letter immediately, and although we do not have that answer, it included a promise of 100 livres, as this letter of 11 February, answering Gabriel's apology, shows:

"I saw quite well, my dear Brother, that you were not quite yourself when you wrote the letter prior to the one I am answering, but I have tried not to give you cause for it. I am very happy to learn from your latest that your annoyance has diminished; I think it would have entirely calmed down when you receive my latest." He justifies what he had said and still says he had expected not to have to fund Drolin after six months or a year, or "a year and a half...if I went that far." Yet, although he is always firm, he is never as blunt about debts as before, even though he has difficulty in finding money. He is clearer about Drolin's situation. "I shall do for you all that will be possible to me, though I am very far from having money at present and I owe nearly nine hundred livres." This refers either to the fine following on the

decision of the *Parlement* of 5 February, or to what he owed in rent on St Yon. "I am sorry to see you were living as poorly as you make out. And will you please tell me what I can do to remedy it. You can see the situation I am in; nevertheless the situation you are in seems to me embarrassing and I feel it deeply." He gives him the information: "We have had a school in Marseilles for two weeks."

We might wonder where he got the money from for Drolin or for any other needs. One answer is prayer and trust in Providence. Brother Thomas Frappet gives us an example: "Having been in charge for several years of providing for the needs of the house, I was often both the victim and the witness of the great poverty that made it a prey to all the needs of life. When I saw it in this extremity, without resources and without any hope of human aid, I used to go and tell the good Father, to find in him, for want of money, at least a little consolation and some gleam of hope. His usual answer was that patience was needed and that divine providence would provide. He informed me by this answer that he had no more money than I in his hands, and by increasing my concern he increased my problem and drained my confidence. The need, which later grew, increasing my worry, brought me again to the door of his room. But I found it locked, and my insistence in knocking did not make him open it. Then looking through chinks in the door, I saw him in prayer. Tired of knocking and waiting, I withdrew without money like someone trying his luck, to see if I could find something on credit for the needs of the house. When I returned the porter told me to go and find the good Father in such-and-such a church where he was waiting for me. It was usually in Notre Dame or St Genevieve's. There he gave me the money I needed, without my knowing where he got it from."²

La Salle's very precise letters to Drolin give us some idea of the acuity of his mind, his orderliness and business ability and his capacity for work. He clearly studied the letters from Rome very closely, asked searching questions, and got additional information from other contacts. At the same time, in his eagerness to see the project succeed, he put great pressure on Drolin, not realising the circumstances. He was moreover getting regular information from the Director of each house, and replying to the monthly letters of each Brother. In those letters he is again answering each Brother, if briefly, yet to the point, and the result can be quite a long letter. Thus, he wrote on 1 June this year to Brother Hubert who at 23 was Director at Laon. There were now two schools there, three Brothers for each, and Hubert has many things to say and ask about. His Superior answers him on 33 points, ranging from "I was very consoled to learn from your latest, my very dear Brother, that you are in the disposition of total abandonment." to "The garden should not be seen to during recreation, unless perhaps a day is used for watering, and even

so the serving Brother can do it.”

The Brothers take over a school in Marseilles.³ An interesting background to its foundation.

On 6 March 1706, two Brothers took over a school in **Marseilles**. This city, seventy-five miles southeast of Avignon, with a population approaching 80,000, was a great port trading with the whole of the Mediterranean. In 1660 Louis XIV had by letters patent reorganised its administration troubled by factions, and given the power to the commercial class. From that time on it lived for trade, especially with the Levant, for which it was given the monopoly. It also developed trade with the West Indies and South America in what were known as “the southern seas”. It imported spices, leather, cotton and silk, and here Dutch and English brought their wood, tar, iron and coal.⁴ Under a Mediterranean sun, with the lure of the sea and the polyglot character of the port and trading area, it was a place of great energy and violence. The port area, the ‘Vieux-Port’ (Old Port) in particular, would provide plenty of scope for the Brothers. “Between St Lawrence’s and Our Lady of les Accoules (an area of the town), in the maze of alleyways where a variety of smells hover, where clothes lines stretched from one house to another carry washing like banners and streamers under a strip of blue sky, there are swarms of idle children roaming about, waiting, while they make mischief, for the time when they can be sailors.”⁵

On 13 March 1704, a number of the ‘notables’ of Marseilles held a meeting in view of setting up ‘public’ schools (as contrasted with private masters’ classes) on St Lawrence’s parish. It was a parish among the poor. In their deliberations the ‘notables’ spoke of the advantages of learning to read and write: “What excellent subalterns several sailors would be if they could read and write! We see too often the sad effects of the ignorance of the masters and chief officers of several ships, who navigate by rule of thumb, and who, through lack of theory, make considerable errors in their reckoning. How many others, for want of help, have failed to make a fortune among our neighbours and in the furthest countries?. But even if all these cases did not occur, would they be worse off for knowing how to read and write?” They speak about religious ignorance, even though catechism is taught on Sundays and holydays before Vespers, for people do not attend. “And how many poor Christians, slaves or free, from this same parish have apostatised among the Muslims?” A reminder that raids from Barbary were still going on, and that people were settling in other ports.

Parents, these notables say, who take their children with them when they go out fishing may object. Yet from the age of four to eight years you see crowds of them on the quayside with nothing to do. They are up to minor mischief in the town, and keep their parents worried because of the danger

they are always in of drowning. A school was therefore decided, and until permanent funds were forthcoming, several of these gentlemen would form a board and would each pay in ten livres a year. They would have a business meeting once a month and inspect the classes. They follow tradition in requiring the teacher "to be at least tonsured, in a long dress and, if possible, a priest." The stress is on religious training: daily catechism teaching, daily mass with the rosary, Sunday mass, use of the sacraments. All this provided the bishop and the town councillors agree.

At the next meeting of this board, on 10 May 1704, the bishop was present and agreed, and promised an annual donation of 30 livres. The Town Council held out some vague promise, but a master had already been found and given a salary of 180 livres. He was a deacon called Baron. On 14 April 1705 his pay was increased by 40 livres, yet there was dissatisfaction with him because he was using the old ways of teaching and only few were attending. By now the success of the Brothers in Avignon had got to the knowledge of the Board. "People of the town (of Avignon) came into the classes to satisfy their curiosity and see young people naturally inattentive, thoughtful and attentive to lessons given without speaking. Strangers who came to Avignon were drawn by the rumour of this novelty and were taken there when it was seen they had a fund of piety. Messieurs Morelet and Jourdain, rich merchants from Marseilles, and of exemplary piety, made it their pleasure to verify with their eyes if everything they were hearing in praise of these schools was true. They were inspired to share with the city of Marseilles the advantage of that of Avignon."⁶

M. Pierre Jourdan, a former town councillor, was a benefactor of a Jesuit Congregation of Mary. It had been founded recently on 20 January 1704 for artisans by Fr John Croiset, S.J. at the bishop's suggestion in order to promote religious instruction and piety. It soon numbered 300. On their return, Jourdan and Morellet (to give them their correct spelling), asked Fr Croiset, as already mentioned, to write to Bishop Ventimille. The Board met on 21 January 1706, to consider the Bishop's reply sent in December. It was agreed unanimously that their treasurer, the Reverend Truillard, should write at once to Avignon to get one or two of these Brothers, until the house one of the Board had given for the purpose should be ready, when three Brothers could teach there. Baron's services were terminated with pay up to 20 April. De La Salle's letter to Drolin of 11 February shows that two Brothers came from Avignon at the end of January. They began teaching on 6 March, as the Board meeting of 6 April noted with great satisfaction. It refunded the expenses of their journey. They were allotted 150 livres each annually. Expenses they incurred on behalf of the school would be met by the treasurer, the Brothers simply having to present the list with their receipt of the goods at the bottom.⁷

All this must have given the Founder great encouragement while the schools were under such difficulties in Paris. It may be merely noted at the moment that some of these members of the Company of the Blessed Sacrament, Morellet, for instance, including some of the clergy, especially in Les Accoules parish, had Jansenist sympathies.⁸ This will appear later.

Two examples occurred at St Yon of lack of wisdom and sensitivity.

When Brother Dominic Seillier was moved from Darnétal to St Yon, he found his father and two of his brothers finishing their novitiate. The elderly father had asked De La Salle if he could join the Brothers, and got the surprising answer: not unless you bring your two other sons. This would mean the whole four would have joined the Institute. He answered that they would be only too willing, but his daughter, who wanted to enter a convent, had not the means and so her two brothers were staying behind to look after her. The Founder used what influence he had to get the girl accepted into a Paris convent quickly. Her father and his two sons then sold up their house and furniture and presented themselves at St Yon.

Brother Dominic treated his father, called Brother Hilarion, and who was seventy, very strictly, “without allowing either for his great age or for the long-standing habits of the good man. He punished in him with severity and in public, the least irregularities.” His father took it all very humbly. “One single example among several others, will suffice to bear witness to the patience of this saintly man. When they practised on him the point of rule which orders the Brothers’ hair to be cut every month, the old man, very sensitive to cold in the head, noticing that they were taking off so much and fearing the consequences, let fall by a few vulgar words or by some sign what he felt. Brother Dominic ordered the Brother who was cutting hair to cut his closer, without regard for his age or his dislike. Brother Hilarion accepted with a submissive and docile heart.”⁹ Brother Dominic may not so much have lacked kindness as wisdom as to know where the priority lay, but the incident shocks us.

Hilarion was a model of obedience in the Society. He was porter at St Yon till 1713, when he was sent to be cook at Guise. De La Salle was in the south of France all that year. Brother Hilarion was given the order to travel at the beginning of Lent. “The weather could not have been worse. It is well known that snowfalls, or thaws, or rains make the roads almost impassable. The poverty of the houses of St Yon and Paris not allowing the old man in his seventies any commodity for his journey, he undertook it on foot. No one even thought of providing any because he looked healthy, and his courage showed much more strength than he had. He reached Paris, however, after having done the 28 leagues that separate this capital of the kingdom from the capital of Normandy, in a fit state, to all appearances, to finish successfully

his route which was of 40 leagues. So that after a day's rest in Paris he was allowed to continue on his way to Guise. But worn out, he had to stop at a small town called Cressi, which is four or five leagues from Guise, where he died. The news of his death and the way it had happened hurt considerably the feelings of De La Salle, who was at the time in Provence. This holy Founder having reproached Brother Bartholomew for having sent so far on foot and in such a trying season a man so advanced in age, the latter had to make out its absolute need and the impossibility of doing otherwise.

As for Brother Dominic, he was already dead. Fervour had eaten him up, his body having fallen into a languor, which sapped his strength gradually over eighteen months, and led him to the grave. He died at St Yon in 1707."¹⁰

Two letters to Drolin: 16 April and 12 May, 1706

With his mind on Marseilles, the Founder kept up his correspondence with Brother Gabriel Drolin. He wrote on 16 April and 12 March this year 1706.¹¹ His letter of 11 February reached Brother Gabriel at the end of February. Gabriel had in between written on 23rd, and then answered his Superior's latest on 2 March. The Founder therefore begins his letter of 16 April: "I received your two latest, my very dear Brother, one of 23 February, the other of 2 March" The news Drolin was able to give him was that with the approval of the district schoolmaster, the *maestro del rione* of Campus Martius, he had been granted by the University a licence to teach. It did not bring him any financial benefit, but it was a guarantee for the future. Gabriel sent a copy of the Latin text to De La Salle. The latter, however, already knew of the granting of the licence, perhaps through M. Théodon who was in Paris at the time. He writes: "You should have sent me straight away the copy of your certificate to teach without waiting for me to know of it otherwise. I am grateful to you for sending it me in your latest."

Money comes up again, for both are short of it. A bill of exchange for 100 livres has been going backwards and forwards, and De La Salle has lost 20% in the change from papal to French money, plus a commission of 7 francs.

Then some news: "We have Brothers in Marseilles who began recently. They have nearly 200 students in one school alone. There are schools in the four quarters of the town; they will have them all eventually." His ambition was to reach all the young poor of the town. This did not happen till after his death. In 1720-1 the plague took away half the population of Marseilles. One Brother died of it; the other, at death's door, recovered and looked after the sick. It was after this that the four schools were given to the Brothers. One may note above that the first school mentioned as having 200 pupils had only two Brothers.

In his next letter of 12 May,¹² the Founder says he received Brother Gabriel's letter only the day before, the first for five weeks. Since Gabriel's previ-

ous one was sent on 2 March, he must have written this one about 10 April . Again money questions come up. Gabriel was still in difficulties even after receiving the 100 livres, and he had applied for help where he could. He asks for 30 livres to pay his rent and to avoid having his furniture confiscated. As an alternative, he would write to his sister. As De La Salle's letter of 1 April 1707 refers to repaying his brother-in-law, this may have been his younger sister Catherine, whom we know was married in 1691; but it could have been his older sister Elizabeth.

His Superior tells him: "You can be sure, as I wrote to you, that I had not abandoned you. Do you think I want to let you die of hunger?" In other words he was acting but the money had not come through. He will tell Brother Albert to send him the 30 livres, although he will not find it easy. "You must be very careful not to let those who own your house confiscate your goods. It is not a good thing, either, to contact your sister." Drolin, we can see, has been careful to let his Superior know his plans. What else was he to do? Did De La Salle realise his plight? Should he not have recalled him? Or was the commitment of both and the bond between them to see this through stronger than the difficulties? "The post leaves every week. Why do you not you write to me? Why have you been five weeks without writing to me?" So he expects frequent news from Drolin. The state of this project mattered to him. Is it also a plea arising from their strong relationship? His postscript shows the careful mind he had: "You did not send me the date of your licence. You only put Datum, etc. Please send me in full both copy and signatures." He had sent a copy but without the date and signatures. The Founder was most careful about official documents concerning his Institute.

A request from Grenoble for two Brothers.¹³

It is an example of the way in which Brothers seem to be invited from now on. On the one hand their reputation has spread, and on the other, we are at a time when authorities, whether episcopal or municipal or provincial, see the need for well-run schools. Serious Christians such as those who had formed Confraternities of the Blessed Sacrament were very much interested, sometimes in the aftermath of Protestantism in their area, otherwise out of reforming concern that could include the desire to see the streets of their town better ordered and its commerce prospering. Dauphiné, of which Grenoble was the capital, had been an area of fighting and massacres in the Wars of Religion and even in the reign of Louis XIII under Protestant barons. It had been very marked by Calvinism, but there was a Catholic revival under bishop le Camus. The highest legislative authority in the province was the *Parlement* of Grenoble, ennobled by Louis XIII in 1636. It did away with 76 Protestant churches before 1685, when the Edict of Fontainebleau was applied severely.¹⁴

In 1644 a discreet Christian group, composed of some of the leading personages of Grenoble, formed a kind of community with the intention of relieving the needs of the poor and instructing the young. It was, in fact, a branch of the Company of the Blessed Sacrament. Among its members around 1705 it counted the president of the *Parlement*, the presidents of the Audit Office, a Canon Jean d'Yse de Saléon, future archbishop of Vienne (the former capital), and a Canon Claude Canel, councillor and clerk of the *Parlement* as well as canon-theologian of the Chapter. The Company had early on created a Poor Board that had provided Grenoble with a fine general hospice. In 1705 two of its administrators were Canel and de Saléon. Colleges, little schools and a hospice they now had. One thing they saw lacking was the need of a charity school in the very popular parish of St Laurence. The group met and created a School Board open to men and women willing to contribute to the provision of this school and its administration. This Board lasted till the Revolution.

The question of finding suitable masters came up for discussion. Some thirty years earlier the bishop had failed to get teacher-priests from Charles Démia. Both Canel and de Saléon had heard of De La Salle and his schools in Paris. De Saléon, aged thirty-six, had heard of them while he was at the "little seminary" of Saint-Sulpice. Canel had entered the seminary in 1665 and had kept up correspondence with it since, and would have heard of the Brothers. He would, however, still be inclined to Démia's idea of priest-teachers, since he had links in Lyon with the Company that had so far kept to the traditional preference. Its members however were, in fact, taking sides as to whether or not to call in the Brothers instead. In the event, de Saléon was due to go to Paris shortly (in 1705-6), and was commissioned by the Board to make use of his contacts there. In the capital he met the bishop of the neighbouring diocese of Gap and got him to see De La Salle over the matter. Canel himself had the chance to go to Paris later about January 1706, and see De La Salle himself. The latter was most willing to send Brothers, but it was another fifteen months before everything was ready in Grenoble, and another year before the Brothers could come.

The Founder's letter to Drolin, 21 June

In the interval, he was corresponding with Gabriel Drolin. His last letter of 12 May (see p. 482) crossed the one Gabriel wrote probably late May in answer to his of 16 April. It reached Paris shortly before 21 June, the day the Founder answered it.¹⁵ Another letter from Paris, written very likely at the end of May and sent through M. de Chateaublanc seems not to have reached Drolin. As part of the **War of the Spanish Succession** (1701-1713) there was always fighting in the north of Italy between the troops of Louis XIV and

those of the emperor of Austria. This affected the postal services. The Founder now gives the information that Fieschi, the former Archbishop of Avignon, has been made cardinal, as he had said would happen in his letters of 27 April and 28 August of the previous year. Fieschi was one of twenty so promoted in May 1706. Banquieri, the papal vice-legate in Avignon, had meanwhile been transferred to Rome. The Founder's hope was that when, in five or six months' time, "the Brother from Avignon" joined Drolin, Cardinal Fieschi and Governor Banquieri would present to the Pope this community of two, teaching the poor gratuitously. Banquieri, as already noted, was in fact not made Governor of Rome till 1724.

Then the Founder checks himself: "But I do not like all these human views and they are not the ones the saints made use of." Again, in speaking of the help prelates might give, he has to check his views to see they were views of faith. He would not have shown that inner reaction to anybody, but he does to Drolin. Gabriel must have told him that his letter to the Papal Almoner had had no effect and may have suggested writing direct to the Pope, for the Founder had said earlier in the letter: "You see what use all your memorials are. Do not speak with his Holiness, you would spoil everything. We will have to take other measures: God will give us the means. But do not let slip the opportunities you may come across, but do not be in a hurry."

"You speak to me as if I was very hard and as if I did not want to give you anything. I do not know if it is because you do not receive my letters (perhaps because of the war.) I did not think your life was as hard as you tell me." So Gabriel's letters have enlightened him on the point.

Plans in October 21, 1706 to invite the Brothers to Le Puy take time to mature

This year 1706 we find the Bishop of Le Puy, a little hilly town in the Massif Central some hundred miles southwest of Lyons, and his Grand Vicar, Francis Guyton, a Sulpician who was superior of his seminary there, trying to get Brothers into the diocese.¹⁶ The Bishop had been himself vicar general to the archbishop of the neighbouring diocese of Mende who was also negotiating to have Brothers. About October Guyton wrote to Leschassier, the Superior of Saint Sulpice, to tell him of his bishop's intentions. Leschassier replied on 26 November: "I have delayed this letter so as to be able to speak to Mr de la Sale (sic) to have some of his schoolmasters. He has promised me that he would provide some for his Lordship the bishop of Le Puy. He reckons that it needs fifty crowns (150 livres) for each Brother and that in each house there must be at least three Brothers who teach and a serving Brother to do all the housework. Generally, he prefers there to be four Brothers who teach. Mr Rigoley, the Secretary of the States of Burgundy, brought some to Dijon of

whom he writes that he is delighted.”

So here is De La Salle beginning to make a stand not to send not less than four Brothers, since having only two Brothers in a place created too many difficulties. Since those requesting Brothers might balk at providing for four, he is clearly prepared not to go ahead. But often he does allow for two where the foundation is not too far from another place where there are Brothers or if the town is large enough for further development of the school.

For the guidance of Brother Ponce when later he acted for him in the South, he wrote out a number of points among which can be read: “There could however be some houses of two Brothers provided that they are very few in number and that each of these houses is near some town where there is a complete house of the Brothers of this Institute and these houses for two could be occupied by Brothers who are infirm or elderly and who need rest.”¹⁷

In Le Puy there were people providing funds but they were still looking for more benefactors, and premises had to be found. If we look ahead: in February 1710 De La Salle asked Brother Ponce, who was now in Avignon, having been moved there from Rouen, “to pass through Mende and Le Puy to take some measures” about the projects. Ponce was able to start a class in Mende on 5 March but then fell ill and never went to Le Puy. It was only gradually that funds were found, and it was not till 23 September 1741 that three Brothers came to the town! But they were then given a large and fine property.

Deliberations in Lyons fail to come to a decision to invite the Brothers

Meanwhile in Lyons, from 1706 and 1710 a significant debate went on that finally rejected De La Salle’s idea that teaching is a full-time profession of great importance to the Church.¹⁸ With a population of about 95,000, the activity of the people of Lyons was geared to the prosperity of the bourgeois trading community, that is, the capitalist silk “manufacturers”, who provided the raw material for countless home looms. There would have been great scope for the Brothers among the poor weavers.

In 1700 the diocesan seminary of Saint Irenaeus in Lyons was run by the Sulpicians under a Francis Rigoley, brother of the Claude Rigoley of Dijon. One of its former directors, Bourlier, had just been appointed director of St Charles’s seminary, the one founded by Démià. He applied to it the Sulpician ideal, developing theological studies at the expense of learning how to teach the elements, and refusing to admit laymen unless they were decided on the priesthood. Already in 1700 the prefect of the seminary remarked that those in minor orders might accept to teach in parish schools, but as soon as they became priests they were unwilling to do anything outside what their priestly powers enabled them to do. Teachers were lacking, and by July 1706 there

was a current of opinion that the Brothers of the Christian Schools might accept to look after the schools. A memoir of the Sisters of Saint Charles witnesses to this, if faultily. It was written to “introduce into the seminary of St Charles the Brothers of Charity created for that by the Priests of Saint Sulpice, as is believed.” On 2 August the School Board met and raised the matter, but nothing came of it.

There was, however, a movement among some of the directors of the School Board and some benefactors to have four Brothers put in charge of St Charles’s seminary. They would have liked support for this from the Sulpicians. One of the Sulpician directors of St Irenaeus wrote to Leschassier, who answered in November: “It is true, Sir, that Mr de la Sale (sic), patriarch of the Brothers of the Christian Schools, has done all he could to link up his community to St Sulpice, but he has never been able to succeed, and we do not interfere with their affairs. I think they are good people, but I do not know a single one of them and I would not advise any of our men to get involved in it...” This was taking a ‘hands-off’ attitude. Yet a week later he wrote that letter to the Sulpician Guyton at Le Puy, showing he had spoken to De La Salle and had obtained precise information from him. He did not seem to want the Brothers to take over the seminary of St Charles and make of it a training-centre for lay teachers. Yet when Francis Rigoley, a man of great authority among the Sulpicians, wrote in 1708, Leschassier showed willingness to see things move quickly if De La Salle were asked for Brothers and the bishop of Lyons agreed.

His reference to De La Salle wanting a link with the Company of St Sulpice is very interesting. The Founder was always very concerned about proper spiritual guidance for his novices and Brothers, and may have wanted a link between the Grand’maison and the seminary.

To come back to the debate over introducing the Brothers into D mia’s seminary. It centred on two opposing options: whether to train priests who would teach the poor only temporarily; or whether the Brothers of the Christian Schools should be called in to train teachers according to their conviction that this was a most necessary and a full-time profession. The latter option was eventually thrown out in 1710. Here again, time has proved De La Salle right in seeing teaching as a vocation demanding “the whole man” as he put it.

D mia’s seminary trained both laymen and clerics and helped them to discern whether they were called or not to the priesthood. The less gifted and those more talented who did not intend to be priests would remain school-teachers and be sent to any of the urban or rural areas of the diocese. It was accepted as an unavoidable psychological and social reality that the more intelligent, apart from a rare heroism, would not wish to stagnate in a function

poorly appreciated by the public. Those who decided to remain lay and accepted to teach would soon leave a popular school to run their own. Those who became clerics would, after a few years in the parish school, move on to a curacy or parish with its benefice. Their teaching years were seen both as benefitting the schools and serving as a training period before working in a parish. Démia was trying to solve the needs of the diocese and of the parishes both as to teaching the poor and training clergy.

De La Salle and his Brothers saw things from the point of view of the parents and their children. The former often looked only for a rapid and efficient preparation for a hard working-life. That a cleric-teacher should think of the children spending a couple of years learning to read Latin and to be able to give ceremony by their presence and singing at weddings and funerals had no appeal for them. De La Salle saw the need to separate the clerical and educating functions in order that the latter might truly meet the needs of the poor. He was also convinced that there were individuals ready to devote a lifetime to popular education.

The reputation of the Brothers as teachers and as trainers of country schoolmasters was becoming known. Already in 1688 Démia had written, in his *Avis important* to the Bishops' Assembly: "It is certain that if His Majesty established training-centres to form masters, they would thereby provide all his Kingdom with the advantages that the cities of Lyons and of Rheims are beginning to enjoy through such teacher-training centres."¹⁹ This good opinion was spread by members of the Company of the Blessed Sacrament, so that now inviting them to run Démia's failing seminary had become a possible solution well worth considering.

We can follow the details of the debate. On 20 August 1706, Pierre Bouillet, treasurer to the School Board and Démia's executor, read out at a meeting of the Board a paper "concerning the Brothers of M. De La Salle of Paris" that envisaged employing them, on a trial basis, in the poor schools of Lyons. "An individual offered to provide their travelling expenses." The proposition embarrassed some members, and the matter was postponed.

On 3 September an extraordinary meeting of the Board was convened to discuss the finances of the seminary. It took place in the rooms of the superior of the seminary, Philip Bourlier. He had been the director of the Sulpician seminary of St Irenaeus in the town, and had been appointed to his present position by the archbishop, Claude de Saint-Georges. The treasurer, Bouillet, was unfortunately absent. The finances showed a deficit of 4000 livres - a sum large enough to pay thirty teachers for a year. There was a suggestion to close two girls' schools and two boys' schools, but rather than this the members agreed to raise their annual contribution to the funds. Calling in the Brothers could hardly be on the agenda on this occasion.

The financial problem was still not solved. On 19 May 1707 the archbishop himself called a meeting both of the Board and of the seminary staff. Fresh revenues were promised, tied to the proviso that some clerics could enter St Charles's Seminary who had no intention of teaching. Bourlier went further by suggesting that clerics could enter who were looking to quite different pastoral activities than teaching.

Bouillet and his friends were upset at this dilution of *Démia's* aims for the seminary, and at the beginning of 1708 they circulated an anonymous memoir detailing the way St Charles's finances were being utilised. Bourlier threatened to go back to St Irenaeus's, but the Superiors of St Sulpice refused to countenance his wish. By September 1708, at the beginning of the new academic year, the effect of this split was that those seminarians who intended to be ordained gave up their teaching. It was this gap in school posts that now moved Bouillet and his friends to propose bringing in the Brothers of the Christian Schools to run St Charles as a centre exclusively dedicated to forming Christian teachers.

On hearing of this, Bourlier notified the Archbishop who called and presided over a meeting of the Board convened to debate the issue. Both sides saw themselves as representing *Démia's* true intentions. If we begin with Bouillet's thesis: he maintained it was false to see St Charles as a purely ecclesiastical seminary. "It must be only a place of retreat for instructing and testing the masters, whether clerical or lay, destined to serve the little schools. Hence it cannot be run as a clerical seminary without violating its foundation rules." Unfortunately, he went on, in 1708-9, seminarians who only intended joining the parish clergy were put in charge of little schools, "and that is where the abuse lies," for "the occupations of a seminarian" are too much at variance with those "of a little master to be able to be reconciled in the same person." The seminarian has to give all his time to the study of theology, plainchant, etc., while the master of the little schools must be concerned only with learning the art of teaching well an infinite number of poor children to read, write, the catechism and arithmetic.. This requires "a very special vocation. How then can you get the same person to practice with success two professions so different?" One can almost hear De La Salle himself in these arguments. In practice, if a seminarist is "a good schoolmaster, the poor children see him suddenly taken away: he is provided with some benefice or curacy in the country, and he is replaced by a young cleric who needs to go to school himself."

Bouillet then appealed directly to the example of the Brothers. The motive behind such an establishment as *Démia* had intended was to "make it resemble the Brothers of the Christian Schools established in several towns of the kingdom. These Brothers make a novitiate and take the vow of having no

other occupation than to teach the poor.” They teach for three hours morning and evening instead of the usual two. And he goes back to his argument that the seminarian aiming at ordination “teaches only in the hope of reaching the priesthood.”

Philip Bourlier’s answer was that D  mia intended St Charles to be a seminary preparing poor candidates for the priesthood. They should be made curates and teach two hours morning and evening - that suffices for schools for the poor. To attempt to introduce the Brothers of the Christian Schools would be contrary to D  mia’s foundation and smacks of a cabal, since only the Board can introduce these Brothers. And the archbishop would never agree.

Moreover, he went on, one can very well train a good schoolmaster and make of him a good priest. To teach the elements, a quarter of an hour’s preparation suffices before going to school, leaving the cleric plenty of time to study theology “in order to receive sacred orders and be useful to the Church.” As if teaching the poor was not. On all these points De La Salle would disagree. Bourlier is speaking as a bourgeois when he sees the poor as not needing much education.

He recalls the proposition in 1706 to have four of these lay Brothers brought into the poor schools, and which the Archbishop rejected “for any number of sensible reasons of which it suffices to cite two. Firstly, a community of laymen would never keep to the necessary dispositions nor persevere as would a clerical community. Besides, M. D  mia’s intention was to combine in the same work two great goods, one to instruct the poor, the other to train poor clerics to teach them, which would not happen if lay Brothers were brought in.”

As Poutet comments, Philip Bourlier showed an exceptional clerical chauvinism. Unfortunately the Archbishop sided with him, and ruled that St Charles’s was a diocesan seminary for all those aspiring to the priesthood. When it was suppressed at the Revolution, this institution was not revived, whereas the Brothers were able to return to Lyons after the Concordat with Napoleon in 1801. The debate which went on between 1706 and 1710 showed up the somewhat unsteadiness of D  mia’s concept of training mainly clerics to teach children for only a temporary period before going on to exercise their priestly ministry. It led to the two preferences that showed up in the debate, either to train people on the lines of the Brothers of the Christian Schools, that is, to be schoolmasters only, without the temptation of ultimate benefices, or definitely train for the priesthood, with only a small amount of time given to looking after the schools of the town. Given the impulse of priestly reform, particularly as it showed itself in Sulpician training that exalted the priest, the second alternative was the more easily welcomed solution in Lyons.²⁰ But at least even here, and this is significant, the existence of the Brothers and their

schools raised questions as to the teaching vocation and preparation for it that ultimately would have to be answered.

A letter to Drolin, 26 November. A pressing need

While this debate was opening, the Founder's letter of 21 June to Drolin was on its way to Rome. Meanwhile, one of Gabriel's was travelling to Paris where it arrived on 24 July. His Superior must have received and answered it, for he refers to it below, but the letter has not survived. This was about the time he had withdrawn the Brothers from the schools of Saint Sulpice, while he was at the Rue Saint-Honoré.

The next letter from Drolin is dated 16 October. He had had some kind of accident, but was ready to start school again on the usual day in Rome, 18 October. The Founder answered on 26 November.²¹ He is worried about the long delay in Gabriel's correspondence. "It seems to me that I had not received any (letter) from you since 24 July, which is a very long time. I am very sorry about the accident which happened to you." There are the usual money and postal problems and comments over news about Rome. Then he asks Drolin to start a novena to St Peter on Christmas Day, for a pressing and important need of the community, which he does not specify, probably through prudence.

"We have a house near where your brother lives (this was the Dominican house in the Rue Saint-Honoré mentioned earlier) where I got him a place as sacristan because he was not finding his salvation in the outside world, being too easily-going. He is at present well-ordered and well-behaved, and comes to me for confession. I am more generally at this house, Rue Saint Honoré, because we have the school on St Roch's parish."

The important matter referred to seems to be the need to find a new and ample property in Paris. "For eighteen years they (the Brothers) were lodged in the Rue Princesse where the local school was, in a house very inconvenient on account of its situation that left it open on all sides and looked over by more than twenty neighbouring households. The Brothers, who could not go out of the house without being seen, had not the freedom to breathe the air of their courtyard in recreation time, without being a spectacle to curious and malicious eyes."²² They had no garden and the house was too small. The problem was to find a better one and get La Chétardye to agree to resume responsibility for the rent that Baudrand had ceased to pay. So again De La Salle counted on Brother Thomas. He found a very suitable house at the new southwest limits of Paris in Rue de la Barouillère, meaning 'street of the toll barrier' or Toll Street. It is now Rue St Jean-Baptiste De La Salle close to the Brothers' Lasallian Centre in the Rue de Sèvres. The property occupied 3000 square metres and stretched towards the Rue St Romain. There was

very little building here in those days and much open space, and the house had a garden. It belonged to a priest named Mascarani, who wanted only 400 livres per year. De La Salle went quietly to see it and was very satisfied. When Brother Thomas went to see the parish priest he agreed as soon as his curate de Gergy had visited it and reported back favourably. He ordered it to be rented and paid the 400 livres. This was early in 1707; the Brothers moved in and stayed there till 1722.²³

There was more to acquiring the use of this house than finding a better residence for the Paris community. Paris, as we have seen, was far better than Rouen for communications and for getting reports from many sources. The people who got in touch with him from provincial towns were often in Paris or had been trained in Paris and knew people there. If ever legal recognition should be desirable, it would be better to have letters patent recognised throughout the jurisdiction of the Paris *Parlement* than one limited to Normandy. There were other factors: Archbishop Colbert, for instance, had in 1702 obtained a decree from the King's Council depriving the Archbishop of Lyons of his primacy over Normandy. It would not help De La Salle in negotiations for foundations in the Lyons archdiocese if he were in Rouen. If he was very keen to get a property in Paris big enough for the Brothers to make their annual retreat there, it must have been because he hoped to make the capital his centre once more.²⁴

Letters to Brother Matthias, an unstable, emotional character

It is on 3 December, most likely 1706, that the Founder wrote the first of ten letters that have come down to us written over the next eighteen months to a Brother Mathias.²⁵ He appears first as a young Brother in Rheims who cannot settle down and asks to be changed to Paris. The Founder agrees to do so at the beginning of 1707, but he is soon begging to be sent far away from the capital, and after only three months is sent to Mende to help Brother Ponce. He seems to have been a good teacher and to have been able to control a class. From Mende he writes letter after letter complaining of everybody and everything and wanting to go back to Paris. After Ponce is moved to Avignon in January 1708, Matthias is sent to join him in June, perhaps because he may take to the Mediterranean climate there. He seems to have left the Brothers by 1710, but he kept De La Salle's kind and sensible letters. They were found around 1850 in the attic of a house a few kilometres outside Avignon.

Whereas the Founder's answers to Drolin show him measuring a trusted disciple against a project he is impatient to see realised, these letters show him taking people as they are, with great understanding. He does not measure up the Brother against a Rule seen as a code. He encourages him to live a way of life seen as his own. These are extracts from his first reply that we

have:

“You are the first I am writing to for this month, my very dear Brother. I ask no more than to comfort you in your distress, but you tell me almost nothing in your letters. You repeat a great many times the same thing that it is enough to say once. Please, see that your letters are better written and better spelt, for I can hardly read them. You tell me only as reason for changing you that you do not get on in Rheims. You quite realise that with us people have to fit in wherever they are sent by our Superiors, obedience being the principal rule and the greatest satisfaction for the Brothers.”

The next letter we have is nearly a year later, written on 18 November 1707, when Mathias was in Mende and wanting to come back. “I received your first letter the day before yesterday, and today the other. Who told you God does not ask you to do your work? You are quite all right in it, you are at peace, you are quiet, when you are supported. I well know, my dear Brother, that you need support, but with it you will keep going. You ask me to come to Paris: you quite realise it is not a good time for that.” Roads in the area today are usually cleared of snow within twenty-four hours; some roads may stay blocked for some time. In those days, Mende would be cut off for a long period. Mathias was not thinking when he just wrote according to his mood. “I do not know in what and by whom the way you have been treated is inhuman. Be assured I shall do for you whatever is possible for me.” On 30 December he writes: “You should not have urged me so much to send you so far and want to come back so soon.” He tells him to talk or write, instead of to outsiders, to Brother Ponce: “I have charged him to do in that area whatever is fitting for the good of the Brothers.” So Ponce has been appointed by his Superior as Visitor for the South, a new form of delegation that became permanent.

So the letters go on. Sometimes Mathias seems more settled, and the Founder can then give more time to counselling him. Then letters begin to pour in again from him: “I do not know, my very dear Brother, why you write to me so many letters at a time. I will see to having you changed soon.” (1708, probably late April or early May) There is an amusing comment in the letter of 23 March 1708: “Are you not ashamed to say: ‘Such a fine young man like you, being in such a profession!’ You are a wonderfully fine young man! How can you speak like this of yourself? Are those the right terms for a religious?” The word ‘religious’ shows that De La Salle saw the Brothers’ life, apart from any possible recognition by the Church, as a consecration to live in community for the work of educating the poor.

12 December: a school opens in Valréas in the Comtat-Venaissin, but does not last

“His Lordship the Bishop of Vaison is asking for Brothers. You know him.” The Founder had so informed Brother Gabriel Drolin in his letter of 28 August 1705. This apparently small bit of news is, in fact, a break-through. A bishop has asked for Brothers.²⁶ We have seen cases where people interested in getting the Brothers of the Christian Schools into their town or parish have secured the support of their bishop, but here is a bishop himself recognising the value of these Brothers and taking steps. It was the kind of approval De La Salle valued. Here was the local church approving his work. In this case, the diocese (of Vaison) was in pontifical territory. Its bishop was the Joseph Francis Gualtieri Drolin had met on arriving in Rome.

He was consecrated Bishop of Vaison in 1703 and took possession of his see on 21 October. Within two years he was asking for Brothers, but it took another year to find funds and convince the local authorities. In December 1706 Brother Albert was sent from Avignon, where Ponce had recently arrived, to start a school on 12th in Valréas, a town of 3000 people about 40 miles northeast of Avignon. Another Brother was sent in February. Among their pupils were a certain number whom their parents wanted to go on to college studies. The notables of the city wanted the Brothers to teach Latin. When they declined to do so, the municipality decided on 13 June 1707 to dispense with their services at the end of the school year, on 31 August. The Bishop did not step in to help them.

A growing desire for schools. Royal legislation

In this case, an invitation by a bishop was followed by failure. It nevertheless indicates a groundswell in favour of schools that needs to be examined. De La Salle did not found schools, but provided the right kind of teacher and the right kind of schooling against the forces of inertia and tradition. For a long time now, the invention of printing and the spread of cheap books through pedlars had created among ordinary people a desire to be able to read. As the Tridentine reform progressed in France, the need for schools was felt; they were increasingly provided for the poor to receive religious instruction and be taught the necessary reading and writing skills. As parish charity schools were opened, and more than the usual mere handful in fee-paying little schools were sent by their parents, the problem was how to keep such a group in order and occupied. It is evident that parish priests who heard of the new Brothers who were skilled in this would be interested in having them. They had already applied to the many female religious congregations to look after girls.

This kind of interest also came from higher up, as we have already begun to see. Increasingly influential people, town authorities and bishops began to see the need for schools in a changing society. We have to note that one of the

aims in furthering primary schools was the elimination of Protestantism from areas where it existed. This was certainly how Louis XIV saw it. In 1665 he had authorised bishops in Protestant areas near the Massif Central to set up schools costed to the inhabitants if the local authorities declined to provide the funds, precisely to be centres of Catholic propaganda. In 1686 children of the “new converts”, those who had given way to the pressure of his Edict of the year before, had to attend school. In April 1695 he decreed that all country schoolmasters had to be approved by the parish priest. Finally, in December 1698 he decreed that as far as possible, “Masters and mistresses be established in all the parishes where there are not any, to instruct all the children, and in particular those whose mothers and fathers have professed the pretended reformed religion.”

The masters were to be paid 150 livres a year, the mistresses 100. All this was to be under the control of the bishops. They now have the go-ahead from the state to get municipalities who baulk at the expense or are indifferent, or secretly pro-Calvinist, to provide a school. They have the right to add the expense of keeping the masters to the local budget. *Intendants* and all other officials are to give their support to the bishop. Finally, all must attend school to the age of fourteen years, except the better-off who can provide good tutors or send them to college. Priests and bishops are to check this, and magistrates are to punish defaulters.²⁷

The Catholic's duty to educate his children in the faith was now made a legal obligation. It does not mean it was applied or could be applied as thoroughly as in our far more centralised states, but bishops and municipalities maintained the favour of the monarch by furthering Catholic schooling. This explains the new attention beginning to be shown to obtaining the services of a body of men whose orthodoxy was not in question and whose methods were extremely effective with large numbers. De La Salle and his Brothers were going to be drawn into this sweeping proselytising movement. The Company of the Blessed Sacrament, gathering eminent local people in the various towns, was something of an extremist group in this respect. When De La Salle accepted to take on a school in a more or less Calvinist area, it does not mean his aims coincided with those sponsoring the foundation. Certainly he would want to see the children Catholic, but he did accept that Protestants, too, were Christians, and his model in dealing with them was St Francis de Sales. Moreover, he had a much wider view of the education of the poor than teaching religion only and doing so in view of conformity to what was expected.

He is bequeathed a house in Rheims. And loses a legacy in Rethel

Among the multiple matters now concerning him, De La Salle still has time to see to the temporal affairs of his Institute. The Brothers of the Rue Princesse must have moved into the property in the Rue de la Barouillère about now. On 10 January in Rheims, a priest called Claude Pasté, aged 80, drew up his will. In it he bequeathed to De La Salle a house in Rheims, from which there was an annual 40 livres rent from a tenant, provided the Brothers continued to teach school gratuitously in Rheims and said specified prayers for the repose of his soul on the eve of the five main feasts of the year. The Brothers had this house till 1791 when it was confiscated and sold.²⁸

The Founder had told Gabriel Drolin in October 1704, as we have seen, (p. 439) that a M. Brodart of Rethel had left him more than 2000 livres to come to him after the death of his aged sister (or sister-in-law) who in fact survived him. He died before January 1704. His wife and her sister were his sole heirs and willed their money to De La Salle. His wife died late 1704 and her sister, now the sole heir, made out a new will that left a considerable sum to M. De La Salle. When she died (before 26 January 1707) however, the will was contested.²⁹ “Two of the richest people of this town had left him a considerable sum to help this foundation. The donation was in true form. He was even already in possession, and the papers and the bond were in his hands, and yet it was contested” by heirs who already had plenty. “M. De La Salle judged it (the case) himself for them and decided in their favour by desisting from his rights.”³⁰ That is in fact stated in the transaction he signed in Paris on 26 January 1707, at his house in the Rue Saint Honoré in the presence of two notaries from the Châtelet. “He (M. De La Salle) stated that lawsuits did not suit his character and that very willingly he would forego all rights whatsoever so as to obtain peace and quiet, although the right acquired by him was incontestable.”³¹ And so he lost a considerable sum that would have helped the school in Rethel.

The Brothers made a great impression in the town. When a Brother Louis died there in 1728, people going to his funeral said that rather than pray for him, they would ask him to pray for them. The dean told the other clergy assembled in the sacristy: “We are going to fetch the saintliest saint of the parish.” When he came to bless the coffin, his tears choked him and he was unable to finish the *De Profundis*. This Brother Louis is listed in the *Catalogue of the Brothers of the Christian Schools* that records entries before 15 August 1725. He was born on 18 April 1688, entered on 17 April 1709 and died in Rethel on 9 March 1728.³²

Of a Brother Francis who died there in 1755, aged 75, the certificate of decease says: “Unknown to men, known to God alone, he did nothing but his duty; humble of heart, penitent, hard-working, vigilant, devoted to the school.

He did all he could to renew youth and form for the Lord a people inspired by his fear and his love. He had been the companion of Brother Louis, superior of the Christian School, sent by M. De La Salle, the founder.”³³

A successful foundation: the bishop of Mende calls in the Brothers, February 1707

The Founder made no mention of his forfeiting his claim to the Brodard inheritance in his next letter to Drolin, written on April 1st (see further, p. 499). He has good news instead. “Brother Ponce has recently started a school in Mende, an episcopal town of France at the entry of Languedoc, where he fell ill.” **Mende** had only 4000 inhabitants, but it was the capital of the former province of Gévaudan, situated in hilly country some 70 miles by road south of Le Puy. As it was the most northerly centre of the woollen industry of the Languedoc, it had many poor living at subsistence level on home weaving who were easily reduced to beggary in hard times. This foundation had the full backing of the bishop.³⁴

Francis de Piencourt, Bishop of Mende since 1678, believed in popular schools. In 1685 the order of the *Intendant* of Languedoc gave him full legal power over the choice of masters. Funds were not forthcoming; so in March 1706, at the age of 76, he used his own resources to set up an annuity to support a school (that is, one class) for boys and one for girls. He found much support. The mayor agreed to set aside rooms for the purpose in the town hall. The cathedral Chapter, which had an investment providing 60 livres a year for instructing the poor, agreed to transfer this to the new project. Louis Martineau, the priest who was treasurer of the local General Hospital and his sister, Madame de la Fage, were interested. The latter acted like a Lady of Charity in the parish. She had wanted to bring in the Sisters of Vincent de Paul. She had a great admiration for the Jesuits (to whom she left her house) and for the Sulpicians. Her brother stayed with the parish community of St Sulpice when he went to Paris. There a certain priest, La Sayette, who joined the Sulpicians in 1695 had become a director of the seminary.

When Mme de la Fage told him of the need for teachers in Mende, he approached De La Salle, but was told he never accepted to open a school for fewer than four Brothers. A fifth they would provide for from their own resources, to look after their temporal needs, so as to be able to live a suitable community life. La Sayette had not made out a good enough case for Mende, locked away in the hills, cut off for several months in winter and having only one parish. There did not seem the possibility of an initial foundation for two Brothers developing into a school requiring four teachers. De La Salle made further enquiries with a priest from Mende, the Reverend Boulet who was in Paris, and was given a much more glowing account. In February he wrote to

Brother Ponce in Avignon to go to Mende and Le Puy to see if conditions there were right. Ponce replied on 28th, saying he was leaving that day and would report to his superior on the outcome of his visits. He arrived in Mende on 5 March .

We find Mme de la Fage writing a few days later to the priest from Mende, Boulet, already referred to, asking him to see the director of the seminary, La Sayette, about a final decision concerning this school. The idea was that La Sayette would contact De La Salle, let Boulet know the result and the latter would report back to Mme de la Fage. Instead of putting Mme de la Fage and De La Salle in contact, here was a repetition of what Leschassier had done earlier in overlooking his position as Superior. On 21 March, therefore, Boulet went to the seminary and found La Sayette absent. Fortunately, he now went to De La Salle and told him the Bishop of Mende hoped to find funds to provide for a third Brother, and would he tell Brother Ponce to start the school with two classes only (which would mean sending another Brother to join him). The Founder read to him Ponce's letter of 28 February and said he was hoping to know through him what the bishop desired. He was always very prudent in getting a clear answer from the right authorities.

He also explained certain things on which the Brothers took a stand, for Boulet wrote back on 22 March: "It is their unchanging rule not to take a penny from anyone (among their pupils) and to busy themselves only with what concerns solely their profession." So anyone wishing to employ them could not count, as a source of revenue, on them doing some profitable work in addition to their teaching, and at the expense of their community spiritual exercises. Nor "on the presents or little helps that the parents of children a little more comfortably off could give them, that they will never accept even were they to die of hunger." The position was clear: if Brothers were wanted, funds would have to be found to maintain them. In no way would some pupils pay and not others, in no way would the poorest, not able to offer anything, feel themselves the poorest; in no way would the better off, drawn by the good teaching, expect preferential treatment.

The bishop promised his protection and the school opened before 28 March (for Boulet wrote on that date that 'one of these days' De La Salle had got someone to tell him that Brother Ponce had started the school in Mende). The Founder was in no hurry to send a second Brother. He wanted a community of three or nothing, and he was not going by the fine words of Boulet. He needed something official and in writing, and waited on Ponce's success, good teacher as he was, to have its effect. Before 1 April Ponce fell ill, the school closed and the bishop had to come to a decision. On 8 April he wrote to De La Salle a letter full of praise, asking for two Brothers to start the

school again, in addition to Ponce:

“I cannot, your Reverence, thank God enough for having inspired you with the plan of forming schoolmasters to instruct youth and form it to Christian piety. Seminaries form good clerics; but good schoolmasters, giving the first impressions of piety and of religion, can contribute to sanctifying all Christians. One cannot be more pleased than I am with the Brother you sent me, who is beginning, while waiting for another to help him, to instruct our youth. I would be most obliged to you if you added another good subject who is capable both for writing and arithmetic, for it is the means to attract the whole of youth and in that way to give it the first impressions of Christian piety. On my part I shall give them all the protection they can expect so that they will have perfect satisfaction in their work in this town. The Brother can give you a good account of my good sentiments for him and for this establishment. I beg you that my good sentiments may increase by the good choice you will make of the schoolmasters you will send me. I will be very much obliged to you...Francis, Bishop of Mende.”

La Salle, having now the assurance he wanted, prepared to send two of his men. That could not be done immediately. Even today, as was noted earlier, snow may have to be cleared in this area until the end of April. With severer conditions at the time, bad roads and the much greater difficulty travelling by foot, two Brothers were not sent from Paris till the beginning of June. A reference to accounts, found in the *Archives of the Département of the Lozère* notes: “Brothers Sebastian and Mathias came from Paris and reached Mende on 21 June 1707. They spent sixty livres for their journey.”³⁵ They and their classes were lodged in the house of the ‘consuls’, or town hall. Already on 30 May the town council had thanked the bishop for the “marvellous fruit” of Ponce’s work. As there were only two classes, Ponce was now free, besides helping in one class and acting as Inspector, to visit in the Founder’s name the schools of this area. He made him, in fact, the first of what he termed “Visitors” of a “District” of his Institute. On November 7 1707 we find the Bishop of Mende writing a letter to Brother Ponce while he was seeing to matters in Avignon, and addressing it with an inflated title: “For the Most Honoured Brother Ponce, Superior, Visitor of the Brothers of the Christian Schools.”

Three weeks earlier, on 19 October, with the Corporation and the Cathedral Chapter joint signatories, the Bishop had finally drawn up the deed giving permanence to the foundation of the boys’ school and the girls’ school that was to be run by Barré’s Sisters. He begins with a preamble: “We, Francis, bishop, lord and governor of the town of Mende, convinced that the good of peoples and their temporal happiness depend principally on a holy education

of youth in both public schools run by three schoolmasters and two schoolmistresses...” He then names the invested sums from the annual interest of which 450 livres would be paid for three Brothers and 250 for two Sisters “with which they will perform exactly and religiously their functions within the rules of their institutes.” He was both approving their rules without asking to see them, and making others respect them. “And as those (institutes) of the Reverend De La Salle and of the institution of the Holy Child Jesus of Paris are the most famous in the kingdom and those where youth makes the most progress in virtue, I will and intend that the executors of my foundation take subjects from the said institutes as long as they exist, preferably to all others.”³⁶ He had them accommodated in premises above the town hall. He died shortly after, on 17 November, ten days after writing to Brother Ponce. Barré’s Sisters arrived later that year, and were given rooms in the same municipal building as the Brothers of the Christian Schools.

Letter to Drolin, 1 April. The Founder is confined to bed

Just after the school opened in Mende, the Founder wrote to Brother Gabriel Drolin on 1 April 1707.³⁷ This letter was written five months after the last one, in answer to one from Gabriel received about 23 March. Both he and his Superior had been unwell. Drolin is anxious to know if the money he borrowed from his sister (from her husband, in fact) had been repaid, and he raises the question of a second Brother. “I received your letter about a week ago, my very dear Brother,” writes De La Salle, “I am very sorry about your illness and I was very glad that God had given you your health back. I, too, was very unwell for six weeks, being unable to walk; at present I am much better. I was very surprised not to receive news of you and that distressed me. I have not yet given back to your brother-in-law the money you mention, but I will have it given back to him as soon as I am able.

“What I want to do is to send a Brother at the end of this summer, for I very much wish to provide you with more rest and more means to apply yourself to mental prayer.” The Founder has realised that after five years in Rome living in poverty, without community life and throughout the debilitating summers, Gabriel is exhausted. A second Brother would have to be provided for while he learnt the language and sought authorisation to teach. He would replace Drolin. But no Brother ever came. The Founder mentions the new schools in Valréas and Mende.

The six weeks when he was unable to walk would fit in very well with the account given earlier of the accident to his knee. But Blain speaks of that incident and the operation on it in Rouen by the Capuchin Brother Côme as before the time “he was called concerning the founding of an establishment that was planned in the parish of St Roch.”³⁸ The period in bed here men-

tioned could refer to a period of acute rheumatism; he had another period in bed next year. We forget that he was fifty-six, which was old age at that time, and that, living in unheated rooms in a period of bad winters, and neglecting himself as he prayed for long hours, he was very badly afflicted. We have no further letters from Brother Gabriel Drolin till the one he wrote in November 1709, a letter the Founder received only in February 1710.

2 August: the Founder takes his Brothers out of hospice work in Rouen and takes over the four schools under conditions that leave them in great poverty

Conditions meanwhile in Rouen were such as to bring the Founder to a decision.³⁹ Since May 1705 the Brothers had worked in Rouen in impossible conditions imposed by a Poor Board that intended them to withdraw. De La Salle was torn between getting his Brothers out of this situation and holding on to these schools started by Nyel and that could have such an effect among the poor of Rouen. At the beginning of 1707 the Brothers of Rouen, exhausted and unable either to do justice to the work of teaching or attend in any fit state of mind to their religious exercises, drew up a memoir on the situation and presented it to their Founder. It was essential, they said, to pull out of the extra work at the General Hospice and to have their own community house somewhere in the town. But they also made the courageous suggestion that if their numbers were increased to cope with the number of children in the four schools, they would be satisfied with the present financial arrangements. "They feared less to suffer poverty than to fail in regularity."⁴⁰

The Founder pondered their memoir and discussed the offer with de Pontcarré, who advised him to make out a petition to the Board on those lines and promised to support him. Not that his support was needed to get the Brothers out of the Hospice, as Blain remarks,⁴¹ since the Board wanted to see the end of the Brothers. De La Salle, however, was going to make the members of the Board a courageous offer that suited their meanness. "I do not find", adds Blain, "that M. Colbert made any move for this matter, and I do not know why. Judging by appearances, either he was away or he did not appear to take interest in getting the Brothers out of a place where he had so much wished them to be", though he always kept his keenness for their schools. The offer De La Salle was making was to withdraw the Brothers from the Hospice, for the reasons they themselves had put to him, and to take full charge of the four schools, putting in each two Brothers without any increase in salaries. The Brothers would find a house in which to live as a community, and for that purpose he would add a Director and a serving Brother at no further expense.

The Board debated the offer at its meeting of 2 August 1707. It admitted that it was “impossible for four people to suffice for the instruction of the great number of poor” and that the excessive work (not admitted openly) was a hindrance to the “rules of the institution.” It then presented De La Salle’s offer as if it came from them: “A remedy could be found by increasing the number and allowing them to take a private house in some suitable place in the town. Under the good pleasure of Messieurs the administrators, he (De La Salle) will provide annually ten Brothers for the running of the said four schools, two in each district and two for the instruction of the poor boys in the said hospice.” The Board would retain full control over the schools, with the right to visit them when they pleased. They would be responsible for the furniture and school materials. The two Brothers teaching in the hospital would have to be there from eight to eleven in the morning and from two to five in the afternoon, “without the said hospice having to provide any food for them in it.” On Sundays they had to teach catechism to the poor old men and bigger boys. Not a word of thanks was said about the Brothers’ offer.

Next, in a rather off-hand manner, they concede, since it will cost them nothing, that “the said Brothers can withdraw to any house in the town they think fit to feed and maintain themselves, and live together in what way they may wish to do so”. Then comes the deliberate final stinginess: “because the said hospice will pay them only the sum of six hundred livres per year, starting from the day they will begin their duties.”⁴² This was sixty livres per Brother, the third of the minimum accepted at the time for the personal upkeep of a schoolmaster. In addition, the rent for a house had to come out of this. As soon as the Board made its decision, De La Salle installed the community in a house in St Nicholas’s parish, rented at 300 livres, half their total income.⁴³ It meant they would live in extreme poverty. The Founder was able to give them a little help from the profits from the boarding-school at St Yon and from occasional alms he received. He took the two Brothers out of the hospice the next year, for by 20 September the minutes of the Board’s deliberations refer to the former teachers doing the customary work. He never regretted taking over the four poor schools.

In St Nicholas’s parish we meet with the usual claiming of rights by the parish priest. He expected the Brothers to attend his church on Sundays and to provide and offer the blessed bread. Yet the Brothers were dreadfully poor and they had to be with their pupils at Mass in four other parishes. The parish priest complained to the Archbishop, who decided the Brothers would provide the bread but the parish priest would pay the baker! It still meant the Brothers were expected to attend his church to offer it. The Founder asked Brother Thomas to look round for a house in another parish, where the parish priest would be less unreasonable. He authorised him on 24 December to

take out a lease on a property that had two main buildings, a large garden and stables, at the corner of the Rue des Minimes and the Rue Caron in the parish of St Nicaise. The deed was signed on 14 July. The rent was only 170 livres. We can have a thought of gratitude and admiration for the twelve Brothers who were prepared to live their vocation in such dire poverty.

October. A school opens in Alès in the Cévennes. Calvinist children are forced to attend by royal decree

From the faraway Cévennes at the same time, he was being asked to open a school in Alès,⁴⁴ a small town about 70 kms from Avignon and 110 from Mende. The Cévennes are the ill-defined southern part of the Massif Central, an area both shut in with its high hills and deep valleys, and yet open by the direction of its valleys to the Mediterranean. Alès, on the Gard, faced towards Nîmes and Avignon. For a century now, the area had been Huguenot. Eighty per cent of the people of the Cévennes at this time were “new converts”. Most of the ‘notables’ in Alès would be Calvinist in leanings.⁴⁵ The war of the Camisards was hardly over when the Brothers were asked to open a school there.

It is an example of a quite new situation in unfamiliar territory, that De La Salle is asked to face. The diocese of Alais (to give the old spelling) had been taken out from the diocese of Nîmes at the request of Louis XIV and made into a separate diocese by Innocent XII in 1694 precisely to combat Calvinism. By royal decree, all children in France must now be brought up as French Catholics. It is a situation of intolerance that we would not accept nowadays. Nor did De La Salle, although that needs qualifying. The invitation to open a school in Alès came in the form of a letter that the grand vicar Mérez (more correctly spelt Méretz), who had been at the seminary in Paris with him, wrote on 2 June on behalf of the first bishop, François de Saulx: “I do not know, Sir, if my name is still known to you and if you remember anything of me at all, but I have never forgotten you, and I remember you very well as the one I saw at the seminary of S. Sulpice.” He refers to his having founded a society of schoolmasters “who do great good wherever they are established. We would need some in this area where we have difficulty in finding Catholic ones to whom we could confide the education of youth. We would need two at present for Alès: it is a matter of destroying heresy in this area and of establishing the Catholic religion. The work is great and we need good workers. We will have them paid by the community.” By that he means the inhabitants, on whom, by Louis’s decree of 1698, a levy could be imposed. That would hardly make the new teachers popular.

Méretz goes on: “In this way your masters will have nothing to ask of the children’s parents. The masters’ annual allowances are already established

by His Majesty, so that it will be nothing new. But we must take these Huguenots by their interest, and show them that these new teachers will train good writers. I am having recourse to you, to have some of those you have trained. Father Beauchamp the Jesuit very much praised to me those he has seen at Avignon and Marseilles, which are very Catholic towns.” (If the Jesuits praised them, it meant they were orthodox.) “The diocese of Alais is almost entirely Huguenot. We need schoolmasters more than any other workers; for we have preachers, but we lack catechists.” So, in royal eyes and in those of the diocesan establishment, given that the diocese was created for that very purpose, the school was the main instrument of Catholic propaganda. That is not the same as education. The most you could do was to get the children to conform, which after all was all the State wanted; and if the diocese hoped for more, it was likely to get little beyond “practising Catholics” - people who would cultivate back at home what they really believed in.

De La Salle was offered, therefore, the new *national policy in religious 'education'*. He accepted to send two Brothers, but they came with their own aim, that is, to form “genuine Christians”. You cannot get genuine Christians by force. To develop a point made earlier, the Founder would certainly wish Calvinist children (legally “new converts”) to share fully his own faith, but that could come about only by free acceptance, and the means his Brothers would use was kindness. The time was not yet when the acceptance of religious freedom and pluralism would mean adopting a different way of offering others one’s belief in Christ and his Church. He sent Brothers into a very difficult situation which we would avoid nowadays.

The school was at first housed in unsatisfactory premises on the edge of the town till 1711 and then for a year close to the town wall, but in April 1713 it settled at 22 rue de Bouquerie.⁴⁶ To give it authority, in the light of Louis’s decree of 1698, the new school was called the *Royal School of Alès*. It disappeared in recent town clearance schemes. Three Brothers did for less salaries the work of the previous five ecclesiastics who made demands about pay. They made the change, considerable when the Calvinists taught the Bible in French, of beginning to teach how to read French before Latin. But it would make the schools a little more acceptable to them.

When he saw the school going well, the Bishop decided to give it the monopoly of primary teaching in the town. Since the principle of one faith for the nation was behind the king’s policy, and that any other belief was denied existence, parents should not have the choice of teachers. More than this, he supported the new school to the point of banning all others: “If any other, whether Catholic or heretic, laid himself open to the charge of teaching children in secret, the penalty was prison. Whatever pleas he received on this score from the leading men of the town, he never wanted to grant this right to

others than to the disciples of M. De La Salle. In vain the Huguenots laid endless schemes (Blain's tone is hostile throughout his account) to make him give way on the point. He was inexorable, and all the lay masters who did not want to die of hunger were obliged to go elsewhere to seek a living and a job."⁴⁷

"He did more: for he used the authority of the Prince to oblige mothers and fathers to send their children on Sundays and holidays to the Brothers' catechism lesson, under pain of a fine. They had to obey." But, as he adds: "at first the fruit was not greater because these children brought a mind and heart in revolt against the lessons they were forced to listen to. Lest even these lessons should have their effect, the parents were very careful to efface the impressions they might leave in the souls of their children, as soon as they were back at home."⁴⁸ All this episcopal and royal intolerance certainly put the Brothers in a false and painful position. The Camisard war, moreover, which still had smoulderings here and there till 1713, had restored self-confidence to the Calvinists, even if they had failed. This would not make them more likely to accept the Brothers' teaching. On the other hand, even though the legislation remained in force, the authorities had learnt to be more careful about applying it, which might mean a little less tension.

The Brothers' kindness must have had considerably more effect than anything before their arrival, for the Bishop not only wanted another Brother in the school, but would have liked to have several more to spread throughout his diocese. This would mean, of course, one here, one there, in the villages. On 28 January 1708, he wrote to De La Salle:

"We have here, Sir, your Brother schoolmasters that we are very pleased with, which makes me wish for several others, to spread them in our towns of the Cévennes and in all the large places. Were I to have thirty, I should make good use of them. I have the honour to thank you for those that we have and of asking for others. I am doing and shall do for them all that I can. They do incalculable good. I shall be careful to maintain them in the spirit you give them and to watch over them and just give them my advice when it will be necessary; and, in addition, to give you a proper account. We need here a Brother for a second top class, because we have to ease the pressure on the one already functioning because of the number and for the commodity of the inhabitants. I hope that if we can spread the help of your good and dear Brothers, it will be an infallible means of making good progress in the families of our poor Catholics. I let you know, Sir, how I feel so that you may be willing that we should act together in this lost district, and which merits your charitable zeal...François, first bishop of Alès."⁴⁹

The Founder did send a third Brother, but he had no intention of sending

Brothers singly throughout this hilly country. Had he been a fanatic for converting Protestants, he no doubt would have done so. By the time Blain wrote his biography, there were masters and mistresses throughout the area, paid the 150 livres the king saw they were provided with.⁵⁰

It may help at this point to complete what was said earlier in the chapter about the new interest and the complex motives which entered into providing schools for the poor. Amid these the Founder steered his own path. At all levels of French society, there was concern for the religious instruction of the young. If people challenged the Brothers' claim to teach all who came to their schools, no one contested their teaching of religion. But the motives for supporting them varied. The king's concern for uniformity of the faith throughout his domains was supported by the bishops and by the *Intendants*. In such a climate, conformity was sought after, in the sense of exhibiting visible signs of practising the Catholic faith, one of which for children was attending Catholic schools and Catholic catechism lessons. The danger was that what De La Salle saw as the mark of the genuine Catholic, namely life in the Church inspired by the Gospel and by the movement of the Holy Spirit, was less noticed and less promoted.

Concerned notables in the towns sought genuinely the Christian instruction of the poor, but their motives could include safeguarding law and order and eliminating Protestantism. Here again, it was external right behaviour that tended to be sought after. None of these good people, finally, were close enough to the poor to see and promote their full Christian vocation and call to holiness. Still more, none of those groups considered changing the lot of the poor. They were not really evangelising, but looking rather for conformity and obedience.

1708

Apart from the school in Grenoble that had been planned two years before, there were no new foundations before Easter 1709. There are not many events to record in the next two years, and a number of these lack precise dating. The Founder, between bouts of rheumatism, keeps up his correspondence with his Brothers and visits some of the northern communities while seeing very closely to the government of his Institute and continuing to work on his meditations. Perhaps he could be oftener with the novices at St Yon and betake himself to deep prayer. In fact the next incident occurred when he was at St Yon, apparently incapacitated by rheumatism.

Complaints against St Yon

Blain tells the story:⁵¹ "Towards 1708, the *Intendant* (of the *Généralité* or tax-region) of Rouen, having received several complaints against the Broth-

ers concerning their pupils and the boarders of St Yon, came there accompanied by the First President (of the Normandy *Parlement*, M. de Pontcarré) to obtain exact information about the truth of the accusations. The holy man being at the time unwell and confined to his poor little room, these gentlemen came in and took their places beside him. The First President spoke first and said: 'His worship the Intendant has come here to inform himself thoroughly about your house, about what is done there and to verify if all that is said about it is true. He has received several petitions against your school Brothers and also against you concerning the boarders. It is said you have masters incapable of teaching; that you do harm to those in the profession, and that you feed your boarders very badly, in spite of receiving large boarding fees from them.

"The holy man answered with his usual humility and restraint in these words: 'Gentlemen, I dare to assure you that this house is not as badly run as people have made out to you. We give the function that befits each one and of which he is capable. Some novices are only applied to exercises of piety, to take the spirit of their vocation and to enter into the practice of the virtues proper to them. Others make serving Brothers who are occupied only with the temporal side of the house. As only manual work is demanded of these, they are not required to be able to read and write. The third group consists of young men that we begin to train in the lower classes under the guidance of the more experienced ones who work in the higher ones, and we wait until they have become capable before employing them. These are under the guidance of a wise and prudent Director who sees that each one acquits himself well of his work, and he is obliged to give an account to us.' In two sentences he outlines the professional training that followed the novitiate.

'With regard to the boarders, their food is matched to their boarding fees. Some give only one hundred livres, others pay fifty crowns (150 livres); some are at the rate of two, three and four hundred livres and more, and it is right that the difference in fees should make a difference in the food. Apart from this, all are very well.' To prove it, the wise superior made them all come in presence of the *Intendant*, who on seeing them filled out and with a healthy face, was convinced by his eyes of the falsity of the reports that had been made him. He was even so pleased with what he saw that he promised to pay no attention in future to the petitions that would be presented to him on the matter. Whereupon the First President took the opportunity to say to him, laughing: 'Well, Sir, was I not right in telling you that you would go back more pleased than you came?'"

What we have in these arrangements is a broader application of the principle De La Salle had always maintained in his schools run for the poor of a parish, and which helps us to see it better. In those schools, first of all, the

teaching was free for all and all received the same attention. All could come who wanted. Even if the main clients were the poor, other social categories were represented and learnt to accept to be alongside the poor while the latter were helped to fit in with them and found they were taught to the same high standard.

Among the boarders at St Yon the majority would not be poor but from various levels of the commercial class. Even the children in his primary schools went home to differing standards of living. It was not part of his function to protest against a situation he could not change. In fact, he did not protest against anything; he worked through his Institute to bring about the Christian and social salvation of the poor and of any others who came with them. In the long run that would have its effect. In a society riddled with and committed to social distinctions, he accepted things as they were in one sense, and ignored them in another, since he had heroically made himself free of them long ago. Some of the profits from this boarding schools were used to help the twelve Brothers in the town to keep body and soul together in order to serve the poor.

If the figures concerning fees given by Blain are correct, five different levels of quality in the meals would have to be made, which does not seem possible. According to the standard practice with boarders, they had money deposited with the Brother in charge of them, and it was the amount of this that made the difference between the children. One can add that they would certainly wear clothes of varying style and quality. (Would they be at different tables, the better portions of the food given to them?) Differences were accepted by the society of the time and by the children, and by De La Salle. But having them together at all was remarkable, and also not confining even his boarding school to those of above a certain economic level.⁵² In the classroom, all were treated equally in every way. Education and time would make a difference in the way social categories accepted one another.

Deeds signed in February and March

Two deeds were signed in February and March this year that both concerned De La Salle. François Lespagnol, an uncle of his, had died in 1679. His widow, Marguerite Bachelier (these names of the Rheims oligarchy appear again), died childless in 1706, and in consequence her will had to take note of 27 heirs. Among these were John Baptist De La Salle, his brothers Jean-Paul, Peter and Jean-Remy and his sister Marie with her husband. The amount to be divided was just under 40,000 livres, or over 400,000 euros. Whatever he did with his share, De La Salle had to claim it. For this, he gave powers of attorney to his brother Canon Jean-Louis by a deed drawn up before notaries in his residence in Rue Saint Honoré on February 11th, 1708.⁵³

In Paris again, it was la Chétardye who signed a lease in connection with the school in Rue Princesse. "The school stayed in the rooms that the parish priest rented in Rue Princesse."⁵⁴ La Chétardye made an arrangement on 9 March 1708 with the owner of the property that was on the corner with the Rue Guisarde, for the use for nine years of two large rooms on the ground floor and three above. Part of the agreement was that between then and the coming Easter a side door, "would be made from the Rue Guisarde to enter the said rooms" in one of which a wooden staircase would be constructed in one of the ground-floor rooms leading to the three rooms above.⁵⁵ This was so that "the schoolboys and others will have no communication and will not enter or go up by the stairs of the said house which gives on to the said Rue Princesse." The rooms would be whitewashed "to make them lighter." The lessor, a Joseph Colesse, "Sieur de Grandcourt, living in Paris, Rue Princesse", retained the right to use the trap-door in one of the lower rooms to take his "wood, wine and other things" to his cellar. The deed was signed in the presbytery "before midday." The rent was 350 livres. The next day La Chétardye had a change made to the deed, by which toilets would be provided in the yard, constructed with due care to privacy, smell and infection. The rent was raised to 400 livres. We saw on page 565 that the number of children had dropped; this would explain why the parish priest rented smaller premises.

A miracle attributed to De La Salle, 1708

The following attestation relates to an event that occurred this year, though no precise date is given. The original is preserved in the Brothers' Archives in Rome.⁵⁶ The Brother Pacomius mentioned was one of those four Sceillier brothers who with their father joined the Brothers of the Christian Schools.⁵⁷

I, Jacques Raffy, bourgeois of Rouen, declare that I saw a miracle happen in the house of St Yon at the Brothers of the Christian Schools while I was a boarder with them.⁵⁸ In the year seventeen hundred and eight this miracle was performed by Monsieur Jean Baptist De La Salle, priest, doctor in theology, former canon of Notre Dame of Rheims and founder of the Brothers of the Christian Schools. It so happened one day, it being the time of the midday meal, that Brother Pacomius who was in charge of the larder, came to tell Monsieur De La Salle that there was not enough bread for the dinner. Immediately Monsieur De La Salle told all the Brothers and the boarders to go to the chapel to pray, and he himself knelt down, his hands joined and his eyes lifted up to heaven for the space of a quarter of an hour. Then he made us say a prayer to the Most Blessed Virgin. But I do not remember any more what prayer it was.

And after the prayer was over, he sent Brother Pacomius to the larder to

put what was needed on the tables for the dinner, and a short while after we went to the refectory to dine where all found the larder full of very good bread, quite white and fresh and of a different shape from the kind we were usually given. And what made all the Brothers and boarders realise that it was a miracle Monsieur De La Salle had done, was that the bread had been bought neither from the town nor the suburb. For we would have known it because bakers are obliged to put their stamp on their bread, and there was no mark in the bread in the larder. Moreover, Brother Pacomius said himself that it was a miracle that God had done in favour of Monsieur De La Salle, and that no one could have got into the larder, since he had the key in his pocket.

In testimony whereof I have signed,
J. Raffy.

There are a number of similar memories written down by the Brothers that Blain records, several in connection with St Yon. Brother Thomas, the bursar, who has already been quoted, saw these things at closer range than others, and has left quite a lengthy memoir utilised by De La Salle's biographer in his fourth book. He writes of an occasion when the manor was still only leased to the Brothers. "One day when I was working in the garden of St Yon with the intention of planting a vineyard, trees and other things, he forbade me to do it. His reason was that having a firm hope that God would put the Brothers in possession of this place, embellishing and improving it would be equivalent to putting up its value and (having) to buy it more dearly." Several prospective buyers came, in fact, but were put off by the state of the property. There were people in Rouen who were trying to get the Brothers out and who put notices up all over Rouen that St Yon was for sale, and who at the same time let the Brothers know that they should get out of the property because the renting and buying was not for them. They tried to persuade Mme Louvois with some success at first, that it should not be sold to the Brothers and to raise the rent beyond their means. "The servant of God had recourse to his usual weapons, which were prayer and trust in God."⁵⁹ St Yon was sold to the Brothers on 8 March 1718.⁶⁰

"One day at St Yon, there being no bread and no money, the good Father told Brother Joseph to go with another Brother to the Carthusians who are close by, to beg their charity. They went, but they were sent away in shame, and the refusal given them was thought to be justified by saying that since they had nothing to live on, they should not be setting themselves up in the town. Going from thence into a dozen of the leading houses of Rouen to seek the help refused them at the door of a monastery endowed and enriched like

the others by the liberality and alms of the faithful, they were even worse received. Finally they received in their visits seven or eight francs.

“Coming back to St Yon very tired, after having told the good Father the account of the insulting refusals and outrages of all kinds they had collected instead of alms, they handed over to him a bulky packet of letters that one of the Officers of the Carthusians had dropped on the way, fairly close to the Brothers’ door. ‘God be blessed,’ said the servant of God, ‘It seems it is God’s will that the Carthusians should help us. Go back with the packet you have found.’ He was not disappointed in his hope, for the Carthusians, after many thanks for the packet found and returned, finally touched with pity for their neighbours, sent them two or three sacks of corn.”⁶¹

The Brothers leave St Roch’s school in unhappy circumstances

The Brothers left this year the school opened on St Roch’s parish in 1705. Poutet gives one explanation. “This school did not last more than two or three years. Young students were put in place of the Brothers. The reason for this change was the intention to oblige them to be present at the catechism lessons the clerics of the parish give in church, so as to keep order and silence and keep inattentive youngsters within the bounds of duty.”⁶² It certainly would have been an imposition on the Brothers at the end of their hard week in school to ask them to keep order for someone else. De La Salle may well, however, have accepted it as he had accepted other awkward situations.

Blain gives another reason, none too clearly stated, in his second volume.⁶³ It was the behaviour of a Brother Onesimus. He joined the novitiate in the Grand’Maison when he was about twenty, after which he was sent to Guise. For some time he behaved normally, then about 1707 he became what Blain terms “dissolute”. By this he means “he became too familiar with the children...Joking with one of his pupils, he pierced his tongue right through.” One might interpret this to mean that the Brother liked to fool around with the boys in play and joking that could become boisterous and then dangerous because it led to daring involving more or less cruelty. “The father, rightly irritated, went to complain to the king’s Lieutenant, who having made the four Brothers come in his presence, ordered them to leave Guise and never come back. However, after having been mollified by the Brothers’ confessor, who went to throw himself at his feet to make him revoke his order, pointing out to him that it was not just that the innocent should bear the penalty of the guilty one, nor that the town should lose the inestimable benefit of the charity schools,” he drove out only the one.

The Founder accepted his expulsion but while he judged this was a very unfortunate occurrence he knew that Onesimus should not be written off as a permanent failure. He gave him the chance to start afresh where he could

keep an eye on him. "He employed him again in Paris to run a school in St Roch's parish of which he caused the ruin by a dishonourable action in which he was surprised. The shame he had of it almost made him lose his mind. He threw off the Brothers' habit he had dishonoured and fled so as to hide from what the witness knew, who took advantage of the fault of the one to send away all the other Brothers and cause them to lose an establishment which had subsisted for several years with blessing."

Judging perhaps that a larger community would be more helpful, he sent Onesimus to St Yon to help in looking after the boarders. Yet "he dishonoured his profession again by disgraceful practices, which having come to the knowledge of the Grand Vicar of Rouen, he gave orders to expel him from the Society. The Brothers carried this out with great joy in the year 1710, in the absence of M. De La Salle who had gone to make his visits." 'Dishonourable', 'disgraceful' (*honteux*) referred to socially unacceptable behaviour in a class-conscious society. Anything more would have brought on expulsion by the Founder. Even so, Onesimus appealed to him, after his return from his visits, to be taken back. This seems to belong to the year 1714 or after, for "the request, referred by the holy man who no longer wished to decide anything nor concern himself with government, to the assembly of the Brothers, was unanimously rejected." It was after the closure of St Roch's school that De La Salle must have made the new house in Rue de la Barouillère his Paris residence.

15 July, 1708: He delegates the pastoral visting of his communities to "Visitors"

He could no longer hope to visit all the houses on a regular basis, whether because of the distances to cover or because he was now so affected with rheumatism. He therefore now grouped them into three sectors or districts. He appointed Brother Joseph to visit the schools of Rheims, Rethel, Guise and Laon. He himself kept Paris, Chartres, Troyes, Dijon, Rouen, Darnétal and Calais, which still left him considerable travelling. Brother Ponce was already Visitor of the southern area. The 'obedience' giving his new function to Brother Joseph runs :

"We the undersigned, priest, doctor in theology, Superior of the Brothers of the Christian Schools, send our Brother Joseph to visit the houses of Rethel, Guise, Laon and Rheims; hence we charge the Directors of the said houses to receive the said Brother in the said quality and to let him know all that goes on in their house.

Done in Paris, this fifteenth of July one thousand seven hundred and eight.
De La Salle.⁶⁴

Brother Joseph, born at Lerzy about 12 miles north of Laon on 18 February 1678, entered the novitiate at Vaugirard in 1697 and was allowed to take the three perpetual vows of the Society in 1700. He was twice among those forbidden by the Châtelet to teach in 1704 and 1706. He was then sent to Rouen to replace Brother Ponce, who had been posted to Avignon, till 1710. We saw him earlier as one of the two Brothers going to beg from their Carthusian neighbours. The Founder repeated this obedience nominating him Visitor on 30 July 1709. Brother Joseph did not therefore reside in the area he visited: he was Director in Rouen and simply travelled to visit Champagne as told. In 1710 he was Director in Paris, and that year he both visited Chartres perhaps as part of a tour of his Superior's area, and Champagne at the end of the year.⁶⁵

A few days before De La Salle wrote out that first obedience for Brother Joseph, the vicar general of Chartres, Claude-Maur d'Aubigné, took possession of the archiepiscopal see of Rouen on 10 July. Archbishop Colbert had died on December 10th the preceding year. Although d'Aubigné knew the Brothers well in Chartres, in Rouen he became cold and even hostile. Life seemed never to be easy for De La Salle.

The school in Grenoble opens in October, 1708

At this time arrangements in Grenoble for sending two Brothers there were coming to a conclusion. On 30 April 1707, fifteen months after the Founder had agreed to send two Brothers to Grenoble, Canon Canel wrote to him on behalf of the School Board: "About fifteen months ago, when I was in Paris, I had the honour of speaking to you, Sir, to know if you could give two Brothers from your Community to run a charity school in Grenoble, and you had the goodness to give me the hope that you would grant it. I believe that his Lordship the Bishop of Gap who stayed in Paris after me, also spoke to you. Since then we have got everything ready, both for their accommodation and for their upkeep. I am begging you, therefore, to let us have two as soon as you can, and let us know approximately what we should provide them with, whether for their journey, whether for their upkeep in Grenoble. We shall take the funds for what they need out of the alms destined for works of charity, and we shall look upon this as one of the finest we can do. If you would give yourself the trouble of writing to let me know what is needed for the journey, I will have it paid to you immediately in Paris. I am, Sir, etc."⁶⁶

"M. De La Salle received this letter with joy and even with surprise at the offer made him. He sent off immediately the two Brothers destined for Grenoble." What astonished him was that the expense of the two Brothers' journey was paid, contrary to his usual experience. Blain adds: "One can judge from a single example how burdensome the Brothers' journeys were to

such a poor Community. Obligated one day to send one to Avignon, he gave him all the money in the house. The Brother, however, was not greatly burdened, for all he got was twenty-eight livres.”⁶⁷

Blain is at fault in saying that the two Brothers were despatched at once. He had not seen the Grenoble Archives mentioned next. Although the agreement between De La Salle and the Poor Board of Grenoble was made in September 1707, and a paper printed in the eighteenth century, kept in the Board’s Archives, lists the names of the magistrates who “established schools in this town in 1707”, two Brothers did not arrive until September of the following year. A register of receipts and expenses for St Laurence’s school notes: “For the food of the Brothers, from the month of September and October when they began the school” and lower down, “For the first journey of the Brothers arriving in the month of September 1708.” The explanation seems to be that the bishop, Cardinal le Camus, died on 12 September 1707.⁶⁸ His successor was not appointed till May 1708 and took possession of his see only on 7 March 1709. Ecclesiastical law forbade any community, regular or secular, being introduced or approved while a see was vacant. Strictly it did not concern the Brothers, whose society had no juridical existence, but the Board would evidently prefer to wait and get the new bishop’s approval.

Bishop Ennemond Alleman de Montmartin did approve, and so the school opened. Later on he favoured the opening of a second school in St Hughes’ parish, in 1715.⁶⁹ “To release the pressure on the other, which was overcrowded”, says Blain. It reveals the support the new bishop gave to the Brothers.⁷⁰ St Laurence’s school was outside Grenoble proper. Across the Isère, on its right bank, between it and the first rocky beginnings of La Chartreuse, ran a narrow road, St Laurence’s street. Along it were rows of crowded houses, certain families having but one room for up to six persons. Their ragged children played in the streets, and at the end of the day the grown-ups would be glad to sit on their doorstep to get some fresh air and chat. At the further end of the street from the town is the small church of St Laurence, where recent excavations have brought to light one of the earliest Merovingian churches. At no. 40 in the street a plaque states: “In this house Saint John Baptist De La Salle, Founder of the Brothers of the Christian Schools, and organiser of primary teaching in France, taught school in 1713.”⁷¹ A detailed examination of various records of the period by Brother Yves Poutet shows that the school was at no. 42, with families on either side, till Easter 1712, so that this was the house visited by De La Salle in 1711. But it moved to better quarters in no. 40, and it was there that he taught for a month in 1714.⁷² The interior has since been renovated. It remains an important visiting point for the pilgrimage in the footsteps of the Founder.⁷³



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4. *Dictionnaire du Grand Siècle*, Fayard, 1990.
5. Rigault I, 348.
6. Blain II, 12.
7. Rigault I, 352.
8. See Poutet II, 314-328.
9. Blain II, Appendix, 78-9.
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11. Félix-Paul, 110-116.
12. Félix-Paul, 116, 128.
13. Poutet II, 183, 251-3, 306-8; Blain II, 54; Rigault I, 361-3.; Maillefer, CL6, 179.
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17. Quoted in Poutet II, 223 from the Archives of Vaucluse.
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19. CL44, 227.
20. See Chartier, etc., 68-9.
21. Félix-Paul, 122-126.
22. Blain II, 44.
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28. Aroz, CL42, doc 95.
29. id., 350-351.
30. Blain I, 182.
31. Aroz, CL42, 359.
32. CL3, 45.
33. Quoted by Brother Aroz in CL42, 279, n. 2.
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36. Poutet II, 192.
37. Félix-Paul, 126-134.
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39. Maillefer, CL6, 162-165; Blain II, 24-27; Rigault I, 287-290.

40. Blain II, 25.
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 44. Maillefer, CL6, 180-183; Blain II, 49-54; Rigault I, 357-361; Poutet II, 45-6, 64, 199-211.
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 47. Blain II, 53.
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 49. Poutet II, 203-4.
 50. Blain II, 52-3.
 51. Blain II, 404-5.
 52. Poutet II, 94, n.51.
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 56. Archives reference: AMG. BJ503/2 D9. A copy was kindly provided by the Archivist, the late Brother Edwin Bannon.
 57. See CL3, 35 [14], 42, [48], [49].
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 61. Blain II, 14.
 62. Poutet II, 37.
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 65. Félix-Paul, 221-2.
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Chapter 18: more growth north and south, and some problems, 1709-1711

1709

These three years are again a time of concern, hopes and anxieties for the Founder and of growth for his Institute. For the third time, he accepts to start a training-centre for country schoolmasters near Paris. The dreadful winter and cruel famine of 1709 affected all his Brothers, something which distressed him greatly. La Chétardye, ever hostile to him, tried to form a breakaway community in Paris. With Drolin in Rome, correspondence is patchy. It was interrupted by war, leaving him isolated and penniless and unable to continue his school. Yet circumstances led to him to be given a papal school. Three more foundations in France mark the new appreciation for the Brothers. De La Salle's hopes and ambitions for the South lead him to make a seven month's tour there before he is recalled urgently to Paris to face another disaster.

A training-centre for country-schoolmasters opens at St Denis, north of Paris

Some time this year (one would presume in October), in order to start a school there, "the saintly Founder sent two Brothers to St Denis in 'France' (that is, l'Ile de France), 18 kilometres north of Paris, at the entreaty of a Mademoiselle Poignant, who gave part of the funds necessary for their upkeep and at the pressing requests of Father de l'Hôtellerie, Prior of the famous monastery in that place. It was not without regret that the holy man was so obliging, for he did not like these small places where two Brothers only, left to themselves, were in danger of falling out of line, and he began to take a dislike for those small establishments that had difficulty in maintaining themselves." He gave way because he had reason to hope that the foundress would increase the funds and so allow more Brothers to be sent. "But Mademoiselle Poignant died before having the time to complete what she had begun, so that the establishment has remained till the present (1733) in its first situation."¹ We have few details on this foundation.

Far more documented are the circumstances surrounding the attempt to start another training centre for country schoolmasters in the same town, and which ended in the Founder's loss of reputation and honour.² On this third attempt to set this development on foot Blain writes:³ "He had never lost sight

of this great scheme nor the hope of succeeding. He always believed that something would be lacking his Institute, or that his Institute would not render the Church all the service it owed it, as long as he did not train for the countryside as for the town good Christian masters capable of giving to youth the instruction and education necessary for salvation....For the third time, the holy priest's plan turned to his shame and confusion...God's judgements are impenetrable and it is not for us to give the grounds for them. Perhaps in God's counsel some other than the Founder of the Brothers is reserved for carrying it out."

At the beginning of his developed account Blain says: "We have still in our hands the justifying memoir that M. De La Salle drew up on this matter before taking flight; we cannot have a better guarantee of the truth."⁴ He uses this document to go back to the origin of this painful episode.

"In 1707, at the beginning of December, M. Clément, who was a beneficiary of the abbey of St Calais came to see the Christian School in the Rue Princesse." Blain here anticipates his holding this benefice. He could only take it after Charles-Francis de Méroville gave it up when he became bishop of Chartres in 1710. St Calais is near Le Mans. "After having examined for a fair length of time what went on there and the order that was kept, he was curious to see M. De La Salle and asked the Brother to whom he had addressed himself to take him to the house in Rue St Honoré where M. De La Salle had put himself into the hands of the surgeons in order to be cured of a wen he had contracted on one knee through his assiduity to prayer. The holy man was very surprised to see the young cleric who was brought to him throw himself at his feet and beg him to give him two of his Brothers to help him to undertake a holy work he had in mind. The cleric added that he had already a good supply of new linen suitable for the use of several boys that he was planning to bring up from the age of seven to twenty by applying them to some trade and in instructing them in all that befitted their age and condition."

The idea seemed to be to start somewhere in Paris for beggar children and those without home and family a privately-founded hospice that would include classes and workshops for learning a trade. There was such a set-up for boys in the hospice of La Pitié already referred to (see p. 304) in the suburb of St Victor, but all the troublesome children picked up by the police and older ones arrested by them were also sent there, so that it was called the sewer of the parish hospices.⁵ Clement's plan seemed to be to remove from this atmosphere children who were there only through homelessness and keep them till they were twenty. This would mean having less than thirty children over an age-range of fifteen years. It would be impossible to teach them as a group, and they were too few to have masters for each age-group. It also meant keeping them isolated from society and imprisoned till adulthood in an

institution. De La Salle never saw this as the work of his Brothers,⁶ which was to prepare for life in society.

The Founder therefore told Clément that such a project did not come into the sphere of his Institute's work. When the young man asked him what the aims of his Society were, he wrote out for him a short memoir. Clement "took it away and after studying it for three days, he came to tell the holy priest that he had no interest in the institution of the Brothers, but that he was willing to take interest in the training of country schoolmasters." (This is another indication that De La Salle very much included this as one of the aims of his Institute.) "So his idea was to add to the education of young children that he planned, a training centre for country schoolmasters, and he formed the plan of gathering them into a common house. He has said since that he wanted to endow in this house twenty places for school masters to be trained for the villages."⁷ Clément came back to De La Salle many times, always keener for the scheme. De La Salle was in no hurry. He knew that in Paris and in the archdiocese he would have to watch his steps very carefully. The prohibition imposed on him by the courts not to train schoolmasters counted only for Paris, but he preferred to wait. Moreover, he had recently sent Brothers to Mende and Alès and could hardly have provided three more immediately. Clément was a young man wedded to an idea. His father, a famous surgeon gynaecologist, was a wealthy man, and was preparing to obtain for his son some abbey with rich revenues. The younger Clément said he would use all the revenues to advance his scheme. "In the meantime his father made him, so he said, a yearly allowance of 800 livres for his petty pleasures, that he intended devoting entirely, except for 100 francs, for his enterprise."⁸ He came two or three times a week for a whole year, and wrote letter after letter. De La Salle never paid him a visit during this time.

The cleric did not give up. He wished to bring the project to the attention of the Cardinal, without his name being known, and asked De La Salle to speak to his Eminence or someone of his entourage. He approached the Grand Penitentiary, the Reverend Vivant. The answer he received from the Cardinal through him was favourable, except that he was against a training centre for schoolmasters being set up in the capital itself, where it would be likely to attract the undesirable attention of the master-writers. Some village near Paris would be a preferable location.⁹ A short time later M. Vivant suggested for the centre a large house in the village of Villiers-le-Bel, twenty kilometres from Paris, that had been bought by the parish priest. This was the Reverend La Grange, the writer of that letter to Canon Vuyart when the M. De La Salle was deposed. He ran into the latter in Rue St Denis in Paris and pressed him to accept the offer and come to his parish. De La Salle informed Clément, telling him "to beware missing a good bargain and making a bad one instead."

Clément wrote a strong reply in the negative, giving as reason that it was too far for him to go there often. In his answer to this letter, De La Salle “went so far as to admit that he feared to get involved and make some false step by going along with him.”

The young cleric saw what he meant and wrote another strong letter to assure him “that he would never break his word and that he would rather sell his shirt than not keep it...It was at that very time that the school of St Denis in France was founded, of which we have spoken.¹⁰ This would be October 1708. Clément tried several times to get the lease on the house belonging to the Priory of St Denis ceded to him by its current lessee, and failing in this, urged De La Salle to rent the front part of the house where the new school was in order to start the training-centre. He would agree only if the Cardinal and also the Prior gave their consent. Both did agree, but the owner of the property did not, so Clément had to look elsewhere. “After several searches he finally found one suitable for his intentions. It was that of Mademoiselle Poignant, sister of the foundress of the school. It was in the Rue des Ursulines, where the technical school now is. He decided on purchasing it and concluded the deal for thirteen thousand livres.” We are told it was a very fine house.¹¹

The contract was signed on 23 October 1708. As Jean-Charles Clément was a minor, M. Rogier “friend of the holy priest and his confidant” lent his name to the contract, the Founder considering it best to stay in the background. At Clément’s request he paid 4000 livres to Rogier, and later 1200 livres. This money had been given to him “for the needs of his community, and in particular to go towards establishing a training-centre for country schoolmasters under the direction of the Brothers.”¹² This was “the interest on an important capital sum ceded in perpetuity by the Duke de Mazarin” in 1685,¹³ and which the Founder had kept by after the failure of his second attempt under Vuyart. Some time after the purchase was made, the young cleric made out an IOU for these sums, though it stayed in the hands of Rogier. Clément’s immediate act after the sale of the house was to dismiss the priory bailiff who occupied it. The Brothers moved in at Easter 1709 and “a little while after they accepted three young men to train them as country schoolmasters.¹⁴ These three went on Sundays and holydays in cassock and surplice to St Marcel’s, their parish, and they stayed in this house until scarcity (the famine) making itself felt, they were sent away with the intention of recalling them at a more favourable time.” Moreover, “to privilege this acquisition, the Cardinal obtained from the Duke of Maine a written exemption from billeting of soldiers, in which it is stated that it was granted by order of the king, and that there must be three Brothers in this house, one of them in charge of plain-chant.”¹⁵

Poullart des Places, De La Salle and the training-centre

“I do not know” Blain writes, “from what impulse M. De La Salle proposed to the cleric Clément, after the purchase of the house at St Denis, to join with M. Desplaces who was living in community with a good number of clerics, giving him to hope that he would get from him subjects suitable for running well both the training centre for country schoolmasters and the children whose education he was planning.¹⁶ The cleric followed his advice and took very much to M. Desplaces in the visit he paid him. They combined, and after having made out a plan as to the way to bring up these young men, they drew up a memoir that they took to the Cardinal who gave it his approval. Since that time the two projects, one of a training centre of country schoolmasters and the other of a house for bringing up young boys, were two separate objects in the ideas of the cleric.”¹⁷

The “Desplaces” Canon Blain refers to is Claude-François Poullart des Places, with whom he had studied at the Jesuit college in Rennes, in Brittany. Clearly Blain, who had now been established many years in Rouen, had little information on this development. This is not surprising, for Des Places died on October 2nd, 1709 at the age of 37. Poutet is the one who has brought to light his link with De La Salle. Des Places came to Paris in 1701 to continue his studies at Louis-le-Grand College and prepare for the priesthood. That year a missionary in Brittany published in Paris a 95-page letter to the archbishops of France on ‘the best education to give to clerics’. For this “What should be added to the arrangements of the Council (of Trent),” he wrote, “is to set up little schools in country parishes to prepare the children and give them the first layer of letters that the Council requires in order to be received into these colleges. The Reverend De La Salle has already taken pains to train masters for the little schools that could spread into the provinces.” He seems to say further that there should be an understanding between village schoolmasters and the directors of the junior and senior seminaries as to the quality of candidates for the priesthood. And that those who would seem not capable of holy orders, but not the least of them, could be destined for teaching (as minor clerics).

Des Places would have read this pamphlet of a fellow Breton and been curious about De La Salle, but he was immersed in his studies at the time. He noticed soon enough that many round him wishing to become priests were too poor to realise their desire. He was of a rich family, destined to be a counselor in the *Parlement* of Brittany. He was given 800 livres a year (perhaps ten thousand pounds of today’s money) for his own use. He helped poorer students out of this money, at school and afterwards, when he started gathering them in a room and giving them instructions now and then. Finally, in 1703

when he was only 24, he founded at Pentecost the Community and seminary of the Holy Spirit for poor students. He and two others looked after the up-keep and spiritual formation of about seventy students, who went daily for their courses to Louis-le-Grand College.

When De La Salle advised Clément to get from des Places's seminary people to run his training centre, it cannot have been instead of his Brothers, since for him the training of country schoolmasters was a parallel concern of his Institute to the forming of Brothers' teaching communities. What could be the function of teachers coming from the Holy Ghost seminary?

In his first training centre in Rheims for country schoolmasters, and in his second in Paris, there were no clerics in the primary sense of the term, i.e. those who were tonsured and were thereby considered to have entered the clerical state. In its secondary meaning cleric meant "the one who has care of certain things that concern the running of the parish."¹⁸ The term would certainly apply to the schoolmaster, whether minor cleric or lay. We saw some of his many duties in Chapter 8 (p. 248). He could look after parish property, be cantor or sacristan, help in the administration of the sacraments when his pupils received them, and sweep and decorate the church on certain days. The situation at St Denis may mean that De La Salle's knowledge of Des Places's community had made him aware of a possible new development to his original conception of training centres for country schoolmasters, namely, the acceptance of candidates who could be either lay or in minor orders. The aim of the Congregation of the Holy Spirit (granted letters patent in 1726) was to train poor students in the clerical spirit who would accept and prefer the difficult posts for which bishops could find practically nobody. These posts included being curates, missionaries, clerics serving in hospices and poor parishes. They were being trained for holy orders, but not necessarily the priesthood. Des Places, therefore, was not training lay village schoolmasters, but clerics apt for all parish duties in a village, including possibly being the curate-schoolmaster.

The arrangements at St Denis may be clearer if we suppose the Brothers teaching the young men reading, writing, arithmetic, plain-chant and how to run a class; while either Des Places himself or one of his men trained them to be effective helpers of the village priest and was free to turn their thoughts towards minor orders or beyond. This seems the explanation for the three young men mentioned earlier as going on Sundays and holydays to the local parish in cassock and surplice to learn how to help in various ways during the services. The training was too short for preparing for holy orders. Some might be tonsured, intending already the priesthood, the others, when in their villages, would opt for marriage or priesthood. (Or would, in fact, the three young men be young entrants to Des Places's congregation?). One can com-

pare what a priest from St Nicolas-du-Chardonnet wrote after De La Salle's death about the training centre in St Hippolyte's parish. He said that among the four men he sent to be trained there, "one became a priest and teaches the humanities with the edification of youth."¹⁹ He may have been tonsured already and the idea may have been that he should train to be a village priest-schoolmaster. To sum up, perhaps De La Salle appreciated the cooperation of Des Places's congregation in seeing to the 'clerical' side of a village schoolmaster's training, whether he remained the parish priest's lay right-hand man, or opted for minor orders or more. It shows his openness to adaptation and innovation.

The dreadful winter and famine of 1709. The Founder's trust in Providence

The famine referred to above followed on the dreadful winter of 1709. Saint-Simon noted: "The winter, as I have already pointed out, had been terrible, and such that, in living memory, none could be recalled that was anything like it. A frost that lasted nearly two months without respite had, from the first days, turned the rivers solid down to their mouths, and (made) the edges of the sea able to bear carts that conveyed the heaviest loads. A false thaw melted the snows which had covered the ground during that time. It was followed by a sudden return of the frost as severe as the previous one, for three more weeks."²⁰

The following statistics confirm his entry: "October and November 1708 were mild and the month of December the usual. January 1709 began with fairly warm weather, but soon, from 4th to 13th by sudden jumps the temperature fell and with alternations remained severe until the middle of March. On the Celsius scale the thermometer would have indicated -18° on January 10th, -23° on 13th and -20° on 21st. It was still -5° on March 13th. A first thaw had taken place on January 26th, but a new period of frost burst all the plants swollen with water. The winter wheat crops perished and it was impossible to sow in spring in soil that was too hard. The little that grew was reserved by the government for the sowing of 1709 and the famine became such from April onwards that martial law was decreed punishing with death those who bought up stocks."²¹ The famine was going to effect the Brothers like everyone else and force some decisions on their Founder.

When the wheat harvest failed, people began to hoard their old grain and the price of bread rose. The administrators in the finance department profited by their position to buy up great stocks of wheat and hoard them in different parts of the country. Artificially high prices for wheat were fixed and anyone who tried to sell lower was severely punished. The king would do nothing about it, and when *Parlement* tried to legislate to put a check on this, he was

extremely angry and told them to mind their own business. "It can be said that there is hardly a century that has produced a scheme more concealed, bolder, better put together and of a more constant, surer and more cruel oppression. The fortunes it created are innumerable, and countless the people who literally died of hunger, and of those who perished afterwards from illnesses caused by the extremity of wretchedness."²² Thousands died that winter, in spite of bread being given out at the Tuileries at the worst of the disaster, and the distribution of soup by charitable organisations. You could hear the cold, starving homeless at night, crying out and sobbing, before dying.²³

This famine brought considerable concern to the Founder,²⁴ for his Brothers everywhere suffered from it, and the following paragraphs record what Blain writes himself with great feeling on what they went through. Although De La Salle retained inner peace because of his absolute trust in the heavenly Father, "he did not, however, remain idle in the arms of divine Providence without seeking the necessary helps it sends without noticeable miracles in the course of natural events it arranges. By seeking, he found. True, he found little; but this little sufficed for people who knew how to be content with little." Blain points out that while each Brother suffered in his own person from the famine, their Superior "as leader felt in his heart the suffering of all his members, and they did not (have to) share with him the solicitude that concerned him of providing for all their needs." In accepting the minimum for the upkeep of his Brothers everywhere, it meant that everywhere now the Brothers were in great difficulty with the rise in the price of bread. In Chartres, on 15 June, for instance, bread was four to five times its usual price.²⁵ But he was most concerned about those he had left in St Yon. They had sought help from the houses of the great and with people who had a reputation for charity, but they had only suffered rejection. As a last resort they turned to the Archbishop. But Bishop d'Aubigné was prejudiced against De La Salle and the Brothers. Blain says that his enemy (La Chétardye), was enough known and esteemed by the greatest prelates, to be able to turn d'Aubigné against him.

"The Brothers of St Yon shared with those of Rouen, as they still do today", Blain writes, "the bread that the heavenly Father sent them, as well as the yield of their garden, very extensive but sandy and infertile. This is how those poor Brothers lived and still live today. Their number then was over thirty: ten ran the schools of Rouen and the others made up the novitiate and the group of Brothers looking after the boarders or employed in the service of the house of St Yon or in cultivating its gardens. They live from the work of their hands and content themselves in the main with bread, vegetables and very small beer." As he points out, after paying the rent on their house out of their mere 600 livres a year, the ten Brothers in the town had hardly 300 to live on, and

the Founder “would not have been well received if he had asked an increase in their allowance.” Whereas in all the other places where they were the Brothers were endowed, (that is, someone had provided a capital that produced an acceptable income) here “they have not yet found anybody with the means or the will to provide for their subsistence.” They remained dependent on the miserable salary paid by the Board.

The Founder in Paris was keenly aware of the distress of the Brothers in Rouen. He thought of transferring them all to the capital, but the Brothers there were already running short of food. In the end, “after giving it much thought, he hoped to find more resources for them in the capital of the kingdom, and so he decided to recall some of them. But whom to recall? The novices or the ten schoolmasters?” He finally opted to bring the novices to Rue de la Barouillère. “On arriving in Paris, they increased the community by more than a half. The house, which was reasonably big for the Paris Brothers, became too cramped when the new guests arrived. Its inmates, about forty in number, were on top of one another, so to say, day and night. Poor straw mattresses, with as poor a blanket and sheets which were not worth more, laid down on the floor, but with order, in the rooms, behind doors, and wherever they could, served as beds. Yet however poor this house of Providence was, it was open to whoever asked to come in. The Superior’s charity closed it to no one of those who showed goodwill and were not brought by necessity.” Some of the Brothers questioned this willingness to share with the newcomers the bread that was insufficient for them to eat their fill and was often lacking. Many of these postulants stayed only a month or two. At least they have made a good retreat, the Founder would say.

He never seemed worried, even when there was nothing in the house. For they were not spared the calamities of the times. Once, when they had no food and no money left, and owed the baker, the latter refused to supply any more bread until he had been paid. The Founder turned to prayer. Next morning, on the way to say Mass, he met someone from whom he no longer expected any charity. When in answer to a question he told this person he was going to say Mass and pray for food for his community, he was told: “Go in peace, I shall see to it myself.” The person immediately brought 30 livres to the community. He often encouraged his Brothers to patience and trust in God. For those in other communities, he supported them by his prayers and his letters. He told them to ask for their daily bread and also for the grace to make good use of their poverty. Blain says that divine providence was more liberal to the Brothers in Rouen and Paris because of their greater need. A priest who used to make his house open to Brothers travelling between Rouen and Paris remarked on it, saying that there was no community poorer than theirs, and yet, even if they had suffered from the famine, no one had died

and their numbers had even increased, while other communities were ruined or heavily in debt.

Nevertheless, because of their poor food, six of the Brothers contracted scurvy. To limit the contagion, the Founder had them placed in a separate room at the top of the house and put two Brothers to look after them. He spared nothing to cure them, but he had not the money for the expensive remedies required. There was a doctor in Paris known for his successful operations for scurvy, but his fees were quite out of De La Salle's reach. Yet the famous Dutch doctor, Helvetius, known throughout Paris, who had told him about this surgeon, promised to get him to reduce his fees for these poor people. Helvetius deserves our gratitude, for he had a great respect for De La Salle, and for that reason visited those who were sick, and gave advice and remedies all free of charge, and when he was too busy, he would send another doctor. Likewise the specialist for scurvy, predisposed by Helvetius, let the Founder know he also would charge nothing and asked him to bring the six Brothers to him. To save time and trouble for them, De La Salle hired two carriages and went with them to encourage them during the painful operation.

Laxity and revolt in Paris. La Chetardye and others try to promote a break-away community

While the Founder had been in Rouen, some of the Brothers in Paris had begun to be free and easy with their lifestyle. When he tried to bring them back they turned against him and complained loudly about the severity of the Rules.²⁶ He tried to win them over by gentleness. He even named one of them Director of one of the houses recently set up in the provinces, as a mark of trust. He thought this would give him time to reflect away from Paris, and that looking after a community would moderate his views. On the contrary, he wore the Brothers of that community down with his domineering attitude, took to an uninhibited way of life and scandalised the town by his arrogant speech, so that the Founder had to recall him. Instead of complying, "he scorned the orders of his superior, left the habit and returned to secular life where he had arranged for himself a place so as to live comfortably.

"There were also several others who, led astray by his bad example, were stirred to rebellion and tried various means to withdraw from M. De La Salle's jurisdiction. They relied on the credit of several people who protected them and were helping them to break away from the Institute and form a separate body. They looked secretly for a house to go to, hoping to draw the others little by little, so as to organise between themselves a gentler and easier way of life." So far this is Maillefer's account. He gives no hint as to who were supporting these Brothers from outside.

Blain is more precise, without actually mentioning a name.²⁷ “It has not been forgotten that the aim of the great enemy of the servant of God was to take from him the government of the Institute”. There was no means of ousting him, after his attempt in 1702, until a new opportunity occurred. It came through a Brother who had been five or six years in the community and had tired of the Brothers’ life. He seems to have wanted to get rid of De La Salle, take his place and change things. He went to share his griefs with the parish priest, surely to get his support, knowing his attitude. In the account that follows, Blain, keeping La Chétardye’s name quiet, seems to speak of the “enemy” as another, but as the means he promised to take could only be possible if he were La Chétardye, he seems to be the same person.

The Brother expressed surprise that the parish priest should pay the allowance for the community to De La Salle, when the latter was using it to feed all the new mouths. He guaranteed that if their lot could be improved, he could win over almost all the community. “The enemy of the servant of God promised the traitor to rent a house for him and those who would follow his course, to feed them well, to provide for their upkeep in abundance, to set him up as superior and then to reform everything in agreement with him. “I have an infallible means in the annual allowances the parish priest of St Sulpice pays the twelve Brothers employed in the schools of the parish; for I will be able to transfer them to the new house and attribute them to those who will follow you.” The wording is strange; it seems as if another than La Chétardye is speaking. Yet only he controlled the allowances. Either Blain obliquely refers to him, or the speaker is someone likely to succeed La Chétardye, who was old, as parish priest.

It seems that “the plan might have succeeded in part, if God had not made it fail.” One Brother was won over, but then he had such qualms of conscience that he revealed the plot to the whole community. They were for throwing out the Brother who had started it. One wonders how many among them might really have followed him. It was the Founder who remained calm and sought with all his charity to reconcile the community and this Brother. The latter, however, failed to respond, and caused more disturbance in the house. “However contagious he was, M. De La Salle, full of compassion for his misfortune, still could not bring himself to cut off this rotten member.” In the end the Brother left, and peace returned to the community.²⁸

Difficulties in Chartres. The Founder has to withdraw three Brothers

In Chartres at this time the Founder had to face another problem. Poutet comments: “How strange men are! After having reproached the Founder with the over-poor life of his disciples, after having put forward the dangers

to their health, the Bishop of Chartres now wished to economise on their accommodation.”²⁹ The former priory of Saint Vincent, by one of the town gates, had been added in 1705 to the junior seminary as a benefice. It was to this building that the bishop wanted to transfer the Brothers and also their school in St Hilary’s parish. Although four Brothers of the community had died here in 1705, De La Salle had replaced them, so there were still seven. What he thought of the plan to move them is recorded in his letter of 20 July this year to Brother Hubert, Director of the community:

“What M. Binet said to Brother Hyacinth about the plan of the bishop of Chartres, his Lordship has told me myself. He wants to put us up in St Vincent’s house, which would be very unsuitable and in which there is neither yard nor garden and where it seems to me you would be very ill at ease. Brother Hyacinth says the opposite.” (Brother Hyacinth, a late vocation and a serving Brother, has already been met with, p. 374. Brother Hubert could not get on with him.) “It seems to me that you must pray to God and get your pupils to pray to him by having the pupils continue the litany and sending two Brothers every Sunday and holyday and on Thursdays, the free day of the week, to go to communion at Notre Dame (the cathedral) in Our Lady’s chapel, for the intention that his Lordship’s plans may not be carried out and that what will be for the greater good may be carried out both for your accommodation as for the increase of schools and schoolchildren and let no one in your community make any move for that. Leave it to God for the carrying out.” In fact the bishop died on 26 September. The transfer to St Vincent’s priory seems to have been effected after all by his successor, Bishop Mérinville, who was his nephew.³⁰

But more serious difficulties followed the bishop’s death. Des Marets died on the date given³¹ before having provided the Brothers with an endowment³², and there were people in authority in Chartres who did not want them. The community had depended on the bishop for lodging and whatever he gave for their upkeep, which presumably was generous enough but given personally. His nephew continued to provide wheat and wine, and a certain Canon de Truchis and others helped them. They seemed now to be in great poverty. Of the inhabitants of the time Rigault writes:³³

“But the population is not very generous and the civil authorities badly intentioned. The people of Chartres are fearful of having among them new congregations that have to be fed. La Beauce” (the great plain around the city) “once won over, is of a solid piety: to overcome its wariness, its native hostility, it needs the patience of the saints. And if money is in question, even the saints have to learn to wait at the door for several seasons.” De La Salle might well have withdrawn the Brothers; even so, they were in such straitened circumstances that he withdrew three of them. The other four remained

in great poverty, attached to a city “which is so specially under the protection of the most Blessed Virgin.”³⁴ Some years after, His Royal Highness the Duke of Orleans arranged for an annual sum of 500 livres to be paid the Brothers, enabling one more to be sent.

A foundation at Mâcon that did not last

In this year 1709, presumably in October, three Brothers were sent to Mâcon at the request of a Canon de Gore.³⁵ Mâcon lies on the west bank of the Saône, 70 kms north of Lyons. In De La Salle’s day it was a small walled town with a Jesuit college, an Oratorian seminary, four Mendicant communities and three convents. We know nothing of the circumstances of this foundation. It did not last long: the municipality was against the Brothers, and on 22 December 1711 they were ordered to cease as from that date their school activities and thereafter withdraw from the town.

Three months before, on 27 August, the two Brothers at Mende were given a safe-conduct by the bishop for their journey to the novitiate, which was then temporarily back in Paris, for their retreat. Their Director was the faithful Brother Anthony (Jean Partois) in place of Brother Ponce. Without this recommendation they could have been stopped by royal troops as possible Protestant immigrants. “Pierre Baglion De La Salle, by the grace of God and of the apostolic Holy See bishop and lord of Mende, count of Gévaudan, king’s counsellor in all his councils, to Brother Anthony, in charge of the little schools of this town, greetings. We permit you to go during the coming vacation to Paris, accompanied by Brother Joachim, and we attest to all whom it may concern that you profess the Catholic, apostolic and Roman religion, that you have exercised your profession with fruit and edification. And we beg Messrs the Governors of the King’s fortresses, mayors and aldermen to let you pass freely on your way. Given at Mende, in our episcopal palace, the twenty-seventh of August 1709. Pierre, bishop of Mende.”³⁶

1710

WHAT OF BROTHER GABRIEL DROLIN? DIFFICULTIES AND FINAL SUCCESS

What was happening to Brother Gabriel Drolin over the past three years?³⁷ The Founder’s letter to him of 1 April 1707 would have reached him at the beginning of May. Yet Gabriel’s next letter was not till 7 November 1709, a gap of two and a half years. And this letter took three months to reach his Superior in early February 1710. In his answer of 14 February he says: “I wrote you two letters, one in the month of August and the other at the end of

November (1709) that Brother Ponce tells me he took himself to the postman.” So nothing had arrived from Rome in between in reply to these. That there was a longer gap is clear: “We have Brothers in Grenoble, Alais, Mende and Mâcon since I have had no answer from you, I think.” In his next letter, on 12 May he writes: “Several of your letters and mine must have disappeared somehow. In fact a week ago I asked M. Divers who came here to write to let you know that I had written many letters to you and that I was distressed at not receiving news of you.”

There seems to be three causes for this break. The Founder’s letter of 1 April 1707 is the last to have the indication: “To M. Divers.” He was accused of Gallicanism and requested to leave Rome by Clement XI. He left Rome on 14 April 1708. The Founder therefore ceased writing. Yet this could only be for a time, judging by his letters of 14 February and 12 May referred to above, where he says he has made many attempts to write. Even then he received nothing from Brother Gabriel. He does make allowance for some correspondence having disappeared, but the total silence leaves him very distressed.

Why Brother Gabriel’s silence? The War of the Spanish Succession (1701-1713) always had northern Italy as a theatre of fighting between French and Austrian troops. The French, who had till now controlled the Po valley, allowing postal communications through Turin, were forced to withdraw completely early 1707.³⁸ Austrian troops then invaded Provence and laid siege to the port of Toulon but withdrew in August. Next year they invaded Savoy but were forced back into Piedmont. No postal services were possible in these years. To Fr Diver’s expulsion and the war must be added the great cold and famine of 1708-1709. Travel and transport of mail would be out of the question.

Gabriel was really isolated and penniless. He would not be able to pay the annual fee of 100 francs to have his licence to teach renewed. This would explain why he left his school apparently in August 1708, for his name is not on the register of the parish of San Lorenzo in Lucina for Easter 1709.³⁹ He obtained hospitality again with M. de la Bussière. It was his lowest period, but he did not give up.

Without a school to occupy him, Drolin could not stay all day at la Bussière’s nor simply roam the streets, and he needed to find a means of income. Many young people came to Rome for their studies for the priesthood or, if priests, to find some post in Rome. There were frequent ordinations in the Vincentians’ chapel in the Via delle Missioni. Getting accommodation was a problem for those involved. About a mile east of his previous lodgings, we find Drolin is renting the ground floor of a three-story house in a little street near the **Piazza Barberini**. His house, known as the Casa de Filippis, was in

the Via Ferrea, now the Via dei Cappucini opposite the Capuchin church just off the square, and was in the parish of S. Susanna. It was a much quieter area then. Drolin shared his lodgings with three men, two of whom, aged 25 and 35, were from outside Rome. On the other side of the staircase on the same floor a Spanish priest, don Diego, was living. These are registered in 1709 as being in the parish of Saint Susanna. He also had a changing number of ordinands. By taking all these in Drolin made a living. The Vincentians may have arranged his tenancy with the owner, de Filippis, knowing Gabriel could keep order.

The parish registers for St Susanna for 1714 record, p. 34, n. 441:

Vicolo incontro alli Cappucini, 441, Sig Gabriele Drolini, maestro di scola: anni, 51.

(Street opposite the Capuchins, Mr Gabriele Drolini, schoolmaster; age 51.) And again in 1716:

cura de sig.ri De Filippis - Via Ferrea. Sg.r D. Gabrielle Drolini, Maestro della scola Papa.” (In charge of the gentlemen at De Filippis, Via Ferrea, D. Gabrielle Drolini, master of the papal school.

It was a moderate climb of nearly half a mile through streets less direct than now to the parish church of St Susanna with its fine façade in Counter-Reformation style. This is now the American church in Rome. The Capuchin church down near the Piazza Barberini is that of Santa Maria della Concezione, founded in 1626 by the Capuchin Cardinal Antonio Barberini, brother of Urban VIII and uncle to the Cardinal of the same name who was for a time archbishop of Rheims. When the young scholar and poet John Milton was on a visit to Rome in 1638 the Cardinal invited him to the nearby Palazzo Barberini and welcomed him himself at the door.⁴⁰

Drolin accepts the tonsure. And starts a papal school

The *Liber Ordinationum* or Book of Ordinations for the Rome Vicariate records on p. 222 for Sunday 5 May 1709 under the heading: *ad Primam Tonsuram* (to the first tonsure): “Gabriel Drolin, Remens”, that is, Gabriel Drolin of Rheims.⁴¹ The fact is there. In Rome, to be constantly taken as a cleric and inevitably questioned why he was not showing the tonsure, would create for Drolin problems of acceptance by the authorities and his clerical friends. To be taking in students for the priesthood would cause more questioning. Even more if he obtained the running of a papal school. One may compare what was said earlier about the coadjutor Brothers of the Clerks Regular (p. 421). Receiving the tonsure, it seems, was only a practical move, with no bearing on Gabriel’s fidelity to his Institute, though it may have trou-

bled him. Had he been one of a community of three or four Brothers, none of these pressures would have arisen.

The Founder learnt of his receiving the tonsure, probably from a Vincentian back in Paris. He may have asked about this in those letters (p. 528) he sent in August and November 1709 through Avignon, via M. de la Bussière. They were never delivered, possibly because the latter picked up his post from the French office near the **Trevi Fountain**, and not from the papal post office nearer the Piazza Barberini. De La Salle does not ask (again) about the tonsure till his second letter below.

Having the tonsure did mean, in fact, that Drolin was offered a benefice and also an unexpected situation arose that would have taken him out of his material insecurity. The best comment on his accepting the tonsure is, that instead of choosing to profit financially by it, he preferred to remain in poverty and in fidelity to his vocation by accepting the chance of starting a papal school.⁴² The opportunity came through Joseph de Guyon de Crochans, the secretary of Cardinal de la Trémouille,⁴³ who would probably be known to Drolin already. In 1709 he was named bishop of **Cavaillon**, a small town in papal territory 45 kms southeast of Avignon. He was 35, yet he was only tonsured. He received at the Vincentians' the four minor orders on June 9th, the subdiaconate on 23rd, the diaconate on 14 July and the priesthood on 11 August. Drolin would therefore meet him often. It was he who obtained for him the authorisation to open on his premises in the Via Ferrea the gratuitous papal school the Founder had always wanted.

There had been such a school for some years in St Susanna's parish in the Via della Purificazione, which ran across the bottom of the Via Ferrea. A Roman cleric, Pietro Lucidi, ran it from 1702 till 1706, but thereafter the house was indicated as vacant. It was after a gap of three years, then, that Brother Gabriel was given the post provisionally, probably in October 1709. It was only a verbal authorisation, not a written licence. His pay amounted to two Roman crowns or 10 livres a month, but later (after 1712) he drew the regular pay of three crowns⁴⁴, a sum "which hardly provides for the needs of life."⁴⁵ He wrote to the Founder his letter of November 7th to give him the good news. But he must have written more than once before that via Avignon, perhaps after receiving De La Salle's letter of August that year, but those letters had not arrived.⁴⁶ This brings us back to his Superior's answer of 14 February 1710.

The Founder's letter of 14 February, 1710

"I was delighted to receive a few days ago, my very dear Brother, your letter of 7 November that your brother sent me." It had taken three months, crossing his own November letter which, strangely, is his last till this one. He

mentions the two letters he sent in August and November to M. de la Bussière. "If they are not be addressed to him, let me know and give me a sure address, either to you directly or elsewhere, but please, make sure it is reliable. I am delighted that you now have a papal school. It is what I have been longing for. I have instructed Brother Ponce to go and greet on my behalf the bishop of Cavaillon if he is there (he did not arrive till later in the year, in October or November), and to express to him my thanks for his kindnesses to you. We must try and see after this that another Brother will be with you.

I am very glad that you have left M. de la Bussière's. I am writing to him to thank him for the kindness he has shown you and the favour he granted you. I assure him also that I shall not forget him but will pray for him and also have prayers made to God for himself and his family. I am very glad that you have made a retreat so as to try to take up the spirit of your state with more abundance and spirit of prayer. I shall pray to God that he will give it you...

We have Brothers in Grenoble, Alais, Mende and Mâcon since I heard from you, I think. Pray God that he may bless our Institute, and believe me, in Our Lord, my very dear Brother, all yours."

These last lines are meant to revive his connection with the Institute and show it is extending, and in his direction. Drolin is eager to let his Superior know about the papal school. The tonsure had nothing to do with his attachment to the Society in spite of his difficulties and whatever others were advising him.

Letter of 12 May, 1710, to Gabriel

The Founder ceased using the papal post at Avignon for the next few years, even if the French post was more costly for Drolin. Perhaps also Brother Ponce was giving himself the privilege of tampering with the mail. That was the first letter Gabriel had received for three years. Not knowing that De La Salle had written three of late nor that one or two of his since October had not been received, it was only by this letter that he realised the Founder was well informed of recent matters concerning him. He must have answered at length about his circumstances and his difficulties, so that his Superior's answer of 12 May 1710⁴⁷ is also long. As usual, only extracts are given here.

"Your letter was not dated. It was with much consolation that I received your last letter, my very dear Brother... I am very displeased that the lack of receiving letters from me put you off attraction to piety." The Founder's apparent silence had depressed him. "There is no doubt that you should teach catechism every day to your pupils." The parish priest may be objecting to Drolin's teaching catechism since the normal thing in Rome was to give this task on Sundays to members of the Confraternity of Christian Doctrine. Drolin stood by Institute practice.

Drolin had written about replacement by another Brother, and De La Salle comments. Yes, he is no longer young and it is time to train another in the ways and language of the country. But Drolin had also pointed out that he would have to be supported by extra funds for the first year till he was authorised to teach. The Founder agrees and says the exchange rate is very high at present, and with the times being still very bad, it would be difficult to find the money, but for a year it should not be too difficult.

“I do not know what you mean by saying that so far you have appeared only half-regular. Have you changed anything in your dress or your exterior, and in what - let me know.” Drolin may be referring to the fact that he has been so far half a minimum community of two. “When you are two you will clearly both have to appear regular.” In other words, if you’ve changed anything you’ll have to change back. Drolin had adopted a longer robe approximating the clerical cassock in length. In Rome, the Brother’s robe appeared “extravagant and ridiculous.”⁴⁸

Drolin must have spoken of his still unofficial position as papal schoolmaster as though he couldn’t yet call his a papal school. His Superior wants him to get that status. He goes on: “I shall make sure a second Brother is sent to you during the coming vacation. Try to take steps for that. I shall send you two books of school prayers.” Drolin must have asked him to pay him a visit: “I haven’t thought yet of going to Rome and I could do only with difficulty at the moment.”

“Several of your letters and of mine must have vanished somehow or other. I even asked Father Divers a week ago when he came here to let you know I had written many letters to you and that I was distressed not to receive news from you.” This gives an idea of the interruption of postal services over the last three years.

Then the important query: “I have been told you had wanted to be tonsured (he carefully does not put it as a fact). Tell me how the matter stands. You well know that that is contrary to the practice of our community.” We do not know what Gabriel’s answer was. The next letter we have was sent fourteen months later. The tonsure is no more referred to.

Brother Bartholomew is nearly sent home through ill health, April 1710

Only a month before the above letter the Founder had to come to a decision about the Brother Bartholomew who had entered the novitiate in 1703 (p. 406) and whom he had sent to Chartres even before the end of his novitiate because he was too tense. He had no great gifts as a teacher, but he made up for it by working hard to succeed. “Those who have been his companions in the exercise of school functions bear out that, in place of talent his ingenious

charity used a thousand ways of winning the children over to God, and that you could add nothing to the care and trouble he took to teach and sanctify them.”⁴⁹ But that can also mean stress; for Bartholomew, with his weak health, it meant depression and temptation. He became quite ill, but from what, we are not told. “The surgeons had to be called, and he had so much to suffer from their hands” that it drove the temptation from his mind, “without his body being perfectly cured.”⁵⁰ He was perhaps better with young adults and where there was less stress for his rather delicate health and sensitive nature. The Founder had the wisdom to see it and do something about it. He recalled him to Paris in 1705 and put him in charge of the novices, knowing his virtue and his psychological gifts.

Brother Bartholomew was twenty-seven, intellectually gifted and trained, matured by suffering and the guidance of his Founder. Again temptation assailed him. He was strongly inclined to give up the Brothers’ life. To strengthen his resolve to stay, “he took the irrevocable vow of obedience and of stability in the Institute, and joined to it that of perpetual chastity.”⁵¹ In other words, the Founder let him make the perpetual vows of association, stability and obedience only two years after entering the society, and to these he added the vow of chastity. His formula of vows is third from the end in the Little Book of Vows begun by the assembly of twelve Brothers in 1694, but whereas in the other cases most of the text is written by another, Brother Bartholomew marked his decision by writing it out himself. It ends: “Done in Paris, this seventh of June, day of the feast of the Most Holy Trinity of the year one thousand seven hundred and five. Joseph Truffet, called Brother Bartholomew.”⁵²

He was nearly sent home for health reasons five years later. He was then in Rue de La Barouillère, whither the Founder had brought the novices the year before. As a result of privations during the famine and caring for sick novices, he contracted scrofula, and contagion was feared. At this moment he received news of his father’s death and with it the offer from the little municipality of Saint to pass on to him his father’s post and allowance. “The senior Brothers who remained (unlike a number who under the campaign and interference of the master-writers had given up and left) and who wished to get rid of Brother Bartholomew because he had dangerous and considerable infirmities, delighted with this occurrence, tried to profit by it to send away by a fine and honourable way out a man whose virtue they valued but whose poor health they feared. To get M. De La Salle to side with their opinion, they consulted the doctors to see if there were specific and proper remedies for curing the scrofula this Brother was attacked with. The answer was that the cure being doubtful, the shortest and safest thing for him and for the Society was to send him away.”⁵³

They told the Founder, pointing out also that the sick man would be set up well enough for the rest of his days. "The wise Founder, seeing the senior Brothers had come to a conclusion about sending away a man he believed precious for his Congregation, wished at first neither to consent to nor contradict their wish, according to his usual principle of determining nothing by himself and not to oppose the common view of his disciples...He gave in, although with great reluctance and with a secret desire to keep the Brother. This decision taken, the one who tells us these facts was told to pack Brother Bartholomew's bags and open the door next morning for him to leave. M. De La Salle passed the night in prayer. The next morning, the Brother who had to open the door for the one being sent away, having come into M. De La Salle's room to get the keys, saw that the Founder had not gone to bed and had prolonged his prayer throughout the night. The conclusion to this lengthy prayer put an end to the Brother's intention. For M. De La Salle having sent for Brother Bartholomew and having spoken a long time with him, found him in such holy dispositions that he could not bring himself to put out of the house a man who consented to sacrifice his small fortune to stay there. For the pious Brother immediately wrote a letter in which he stated he renounced his father's post."⁵⁴

It may be that it was at this moment he renewed his vows in the Society and added the vow of chastity, for Blain says he learnt of his father's death "almost immediately"⁵⁵ and his mother begged him to come home and be her support in her old age. He was very sensitive to her distress, but he told her he was firmly committed to his vocation but that he would always have her in his prayers. "Seeing herself in consequence out of hope of seeing the child take the place of the father to nourish her with his earnings and console her by his presence, her tears were endless."⁵⁶

The Founder's gift of prayer and contemplation

There is so much activity in the Founder's life that this incident of Brother Bartholomew's cancelled departure usefully recalls us to his commitment to prayer. Not only did he spend much time in supplicant prayer on occasions such as that one, but he had a high degree of contemplation as far as we can judge. One would say he was favoured with a special gift of contemplation for which his total generosity in reforming his nature and making it open to God, and his long periods of prayer disposed him. And that may have gone back to those weekends in the church of St Remi in Rheims.⁵⁷

The Brother who the morning of Bartholomew's intended departure discovered that the Founder had spent the night in prayer also recalls how once when he and a Brother Lazarus had to leave the house very early and needed to ask their Superior for the keys. As the usual knock on his door met with no

answer, “having had the curiosity to look through some opening in the door, I perceived on one side his prie-dieu overturned and he fallen on the floor on the other side, where he was overcome by the sleep that had surprised him during prayer.” They had to knock harder. De La Salle righted the kneeler and came to the door as though he had just got up. They said nothing. “However, we could not help looking at one another and smiling, both of us very glad to see there was nothing the matter with him.”

A canon wrote: “When I was making a retreat under the direction of the holy man M. De La Salle, who lived with his Brothers in Rue Princesse in Paris, I was lodged over the oratory; and as it happened that some need obliged me to get up and pass this oratory, I found this holy man prostrate on the floor where I have no doubt he had spent the remainder of the night. Having left him one day at six o’clock kneeling by his table, I found him in the same posture and at the same place at four o’clock next morning.”

He was so taken up with prayer that the Brothers tried not to disturb him; and when they had to, sometimes he would gently reprove them. “This happened one day when a Brother, looking for him, found him in prayer face to the ground, annihilated and overwhelmed before God.” “Nothing was more ordinary than to see the fire come to his face and see him change countenance when he went up to the altar, or when he appeared before the Blessed Sacrament, or when he set himself to prayer or when he entered into himself in a very deep recollection.”

“One of the schoolmasters of Boulogne (a Brother) called Vigneron, going one day from Rheims to Paris with the holy man, was given the order to go on a little ahead, so as to leave him at liberty to say his Office. The young man having walked on alone for some time, bored with M. De La Salle’s absence, stopped to wait for him and to see where he was. Unable to discover him with his eyes, he retraced his steps. After he had made some way, he saw him from a distance in the posture of a man praying. Having then come nearer, he saw him standing, his face upturned like a man in ecstasy. Such a sight, that would have agreeably surprised someone else, frightened this one, who, to be rid of his fear, made the holy priest come out of his rapture by pulling on his robe.” M. De La Salle, displeased at this, said: “I told you to keep going.”

THREE SCHOOLS ARE OPENED IN OCTOBER THIS YEAR

At the beginning of the school year three schools were opened. It means that there were now sufficient recruits and that authorities were increasingly turning to De La Salle to provide schoolmasters.

At Versailles, probably October 1710

One was opened in Versailles probably in October 1710.⁵⁸ It was the Vincentians, who ministered both to the royal palace and to the parish of Versailles, who called in the Brothers. Versailles, originally a village of a few hundred souls twenty kilometres west of Paris had become a major town of over 30,000 inhabitants. The building of the palace, between 1668 and 1711 and the planning of the gardens drew vast numbers of labourers. The palace required thousands of servants and specialised craftsmen. Over a third of all marriages and deaths were of these servants.

“It was M. Huchon, parish priest of the town, who provided this help for the poor of his parish. It was not difficult for him to find the resources and the protection necessary for this establishment from Louis XIV, who, everyone knows, honoured him till his death with his esteem and trust. The free school was first opened in a house situated in the Parc aux Cerfs (the Deer Park, a royal domain), and there they had in a short time the success they had met with everywhere else.”⁵⁹ Huchon looked for a better house, but because the King and his Court lived there, “houses are at the highest price and rarely for sale.” But he found one near the Deer Park and was able to buy it immediately and to provide for the Brothers’ upkeep. “A few years after, the master who ran an endowed school near the parish having died”, M. Huchon called in two more Brothers. De La Salle soon added a serving Brother so that there was the community of five which for him was the desirable minimum.

“After the death of Louis XIV, the house which served as junior seminary for the Priests (i.e. of the Mission) and which was near the church, having become empty, it became the Brothers’ possession through the charity and the efforts of the parish priest of Versailles. This house such as it is, convenient and away from the others, is most suitable for a community.”⁶⁰ The town was within the diocese of Chartres and the community would have the approval of the new bishop and of Mme de Maintenon.⁶¹ Huchon’s successor and the Vincentian community as a whole gave their support to Brothers dealing like them with the poor. One quite unfortunate incident nevertheless took place.⁶²

The most senior Brother at Versailles “was a perfect schoolmaster, he had all the talents of his vocation to a superior degree.” The parish priest took a great liking to him, and he likewise sought to win Huchon’s favour. This Brother began to take liberties with his rule and became worldly, neglecting his exercises of piety. The Founder noticed it when he visited the community and decided that the best was an immediate change, away from Versailles. But the Brother, highly appreciated as a good teacher, went to M. Huchon, who told his Superior that if he took this Brother away he could take the other with him. De La Salle was astonished at a Vincentian taking sides in this way against orders given by a superior and pointed this out. M Huchon said he

accepted the consequences and would see to them. The Founder gave way, not wishing to see the school closed.

The Brother became less and less interested in his vocation. "One fine morning he packed his bags, got rid of the Brothers' habit and went off. The parish priest learnt of it early enough to send after him a former Missionary in the house, who caught up with him at the end of the avenues of Versailles," but to no purpose. M. Huchon realised his mistake, and made amends. "Realising that their (the Brothers') regularity depended in part on their number, he increased it as has been said."

THE SCHOOL IN MOULINS

Louis Aubery, founder of the charity schools of Moulins

Moulins, about 150 kms northwest of Lyons, saw the Brothers arrive also this year to take over a school.⁶³ The circumstances of this foundation show how much stable teachers like the Brothers were the need of the age, how much the way for them was prepared by someone else, what enlightened support and diehard opposition could mean, and the need for patience in negotiation.

The Reverend Louis Aubery, curate of St Peter's, Moulins, before calling in the Brothers to run the school in the parish, had worked very hard to develop Christian schools in the town. His parish priest, de Savignac, needs also to be remembered as giving his backing to Aubery's efforts. Moulin was not the seat of a bishopric till 1788; its churches, such as St Peter's, were even dependencies of neighbouring country parishes. St Francis de Chantal died here in 1641 in the Visitation convent. The Jesuits had a college in the town. For a long time now the bishops of Autun had legislated concerning religious instruction and its neglect and had insisted on parish priests taking the children for this at midday on Sundays. In 1669 the bishop, recorded that St Peter's was "the main church and the most attended, which is filled only with office-holders, burgesses, rich merchants and a great number of artisans from all over the town and suburbs" and that the parish priest had only two curates "mostly unknown and temporary persons without the required capacity"⁶⁴. He ordered him to have four curates. This St Peter's church no longer exists.⁶⁵

Gaspar de Savignac became parish priest in 1675. Louis Aubery, whose father was a bourgeois trader, became his curate in 1681 at the age of 31, and so he remained all his life. His dedication to the education of the poor had a great effect on the town. In the spirit of the Gospel he tried to imitate D mia. "Touched by the ignorance and bad behaviour of the ordinary people, the reverend Aubery started to teach school himself. He attracted to it several children who, at an age when they were incapable of being put to any work,

spent their time in bad behaviour and contracted bad habits that they often took with them to the grave. They were taught to read and write, they were instructed in the principles of our religion and were prepared for their first communion. Afterwards they were sent home to take on kinds of work suited to them, and they were a subject of edification by their self-control and their right behaviour, and (a source) of instruction to their parents by reading (to them) some good books.”⁶⁶ He started this work about the same time as De La Salle in Rheims, and had been teaching over thirty years when he called in the Brothers. It was de Savignac who gave over to Aubery a room in his presbytery to use as a school.

His curate, besides giving religious instruction, was interested in seeing the children rise out of a situation where they were handicapped by illiteracy, open to being tricked by clients and suppliers, and having to go to a notary to make out the simplest contacts.⁶⁷ In 1685 he used his money to buy a house for himself and his school, and the next year donated it to the parish. He tried to set up a training-centre for mistresses for girls, but in the end he handed over to the Sisters of the Cross the capital he had invested for that purpose. He had no fortune left, having given away even his furniture. He lived in poverty, and so had more than one resemblance to De La Salle.

He taught single-handed for fifteen years, then took on young clerics to help out. This gave him the freedom to go to Paris and stay there a fair time in 1698. But although he must have studied the methods of St Sulpice, he seems not to have met De La Salle. Back in Moulins he found that his helpers tended to pull out. At one time he had to suspend school but, holding to his resolve, he used the time to repair and add to the house. To keep the school going, he used whoever could help him, sometimes priests passing through. One of them was a cleric who after a dissolute life was in search of an ideal confessor. He heard of Aubery, came to Moulins and offered his services for the school. But he moved on again and found out De La Salle in Paris, who converted him. At his death in Soissons some time after, he made public that he owed his conversion to him; it increased considerably the latter’s reputation in this pastoral field.⁶⁸

The late bishop had named Aubery “Director of the Charity Schools of Moulins” (two classes) and had set up a small school board for this and the girls’ school, the whole being under de Savignac as superior and administrator under the bishop. There were 200 boys in Aubery’s school, taught free of charge and provided also free of charge with the school materials needed. The Treasury board in Moulins had set apart a vacant plot of ground for building a larger school. All this was set out and made the best of in a request for letters patent for the schools of Moulins. It would mean recognition by the state for acceptance of grants whether from the treasury or anyone else. But

it was turned down: royal officials were not sympathetic to giving legal existence to an increasing number of little institutions. This was in 1708.

Aubery asks for one Brother and later for another

One or other class continued to close with the departure of a master or shortage of financial resources. Aubery had already, about 1706, applied to Manis, director general of the School Board of Lyons for two clerics so as to found permanently two classes. The unanimous view of the Board was that they could not accept. They would have to guarantee to provide always two masters to Moulins. Here we see the difference between D  mia's foundation and De La Salle's. The poor clerics trained in the former's seminary taught only while preparing for the priesthood, and then decided their future. There was no policy for training schoolmasters by profession who could then be placed as required by the Board. Aubery had to look elsewhere. He then got in touch with the School Board of Marseilles. Its answer suggests that he had heard about the Brothers there, possibly through the Company of the Blessed Sacrament, which had started the Board.⁶⁹ He was sent a copy of the minutes of the meetings at which it had been decided to call on the Brothers, along with a copy of the daily regulations of the Brothers and their duties in school.⁷⁰ In 1709, on the occasion of a journey to Paris, Aubery enquired about the schools in the parish of St Sulpice.

He now wrote to De La Salle asking for one Brother to teach one class while he taught the other. With the episcopal see vacant at the time, de Savignac would have sought the approval of the grand-vicar of Autun. He was Languet de Gergy, brother-in-law of Fran  ois Rigoley of Dijon; he therefore knew from him of the Brothers' work there. Even more would he know of him through his brother, the one who was curate of St Sulpice, and even from La Ch  tardye, with whom he had a close correspondence. Previously, since he had joined the seminary there in 1692 and had stayed in the parish still 1702, he had seen for himself how the Brothers' schools were run. De La Salle sent only one Brother because he was certain others would be asked for. "As soon as he saw himself in a position to pay the allowance for a master, he (Aubery) asked for a Brother of M. Delassalle (sic) to run a second class. He continued in this way for several years with this Brother to teach school, after which he asked for a second one."⁷¹

Aubery, who was now 60, saw the Brothers as eventually replacing him in his school and giving it the permanence he sought. At some time letters patent would be granted, not for the Brothers' community, but for the new School Board which both administered the property and saw to the change of masters if necessary. The Brothers would be employees of the Board and have to follow its statutes. These had been framed in the main by 1708 but were

approved by the Bishop only in 1711. The Bishop asked his Grand Vicar Languet to study and modify them as he judged best. Languet did so but also came to the school to see how the Brothers taught. "He was so delighted, especially by their way of teaching catechism, that he ordered the senior of the two Brothers to come two or three times to the parish church and teach catechism publicly to the children in the presence of all the young clerics and other catechists of the town (they were also clerics) whom he obliged to attend so as to learn the Brothers' method and follow it. The Brother obeyed, although with reluctance, for it is not the Institute's practice to teach catechism in church; it is a function they leave to clerics. The Grand Vicar was present at the head of the clergy that he had told to come. This mark of distinction served in no small measure to accredit the Brothers."⁷²

In the light of this, what was written down concerning the teaching of catechism in the Board's Regulations which were still waiting for letters patent would evidently be replaced by the Brothers' method. The same applies to methods of punishment, and to teaching to read French before Latin. Since Aubery had wanted the Brothers precisely because of the success of their methods, there must have been an easy understanding between him and De La Salle and the Brothers. So, evidently, Languet saw it. Statements were written into the Regulations leaving the Brothers their freedom. In his approval of these Regulations in 1711 he wrote that, in virtue of a decree of the king in 1669 ordering all schoolteachers in the diocese of Autun to be approved by the bishop and "forbidding the officers of justice within the competence of the *Parlements* of Paris and Dijon to disturb those he has appointed", the charity schools of Moulins were to be run in perpetuity "the way they are run today." Without naming them, the Grand Vicar was approving the Brothers as the permanent masters of the charity school of Moulins. Blain wrote that in his day "these classes are so crowded that the Brothers who share between them close on three hundred pupils, find themselves often crushed under the weight of the work. It is to be hoped that God will inspire some person of charity to complete what was begun and sustained so well by the zeal of the late M. Aubri (sic)."⁷³

While letters patent were granted the School Board in 1717, local opposition prevented their being registered by the *Parlement* of Dijon for nearly ten years.⁷⁴ The general hospice, fearing a sharing of alms collected for the poor, gathered negative opinions: a canon said the school would turn out dissolute children; a former director of the hospice declared that schools were the ruin of arts and crafts, the source of forgers, quibblers and rogues. An officer of the treasury and a magistrate agreed that reading and writing were harmful to artisans, who needed no further instruction than that given by the parish priests. Under such pressure, the Town Council renounced the rights given

them by the royal decision, accepting that schools were more harmful than profitable. All this opposition was an expression of the attitude whose validity De La Salle questioned, namely, that the only aim of a charity school is to turn out Catholics docile to the laws of Church and State.⁷⁵ The next two successors of de Savignac took a stand against the powers given to the Board. On January 29th 1727, *Parlement* judged in favour of Aubery with costs to the mayor and council and the parish priest. Aubery died at the age of eighty in 1730.

Four Brothers are sent to Boulogne

It was another Vincentian, after those of Versailles, the reverend Besnard, director of the seminary of Boulogne, who advised a very devout man of the nobility, M. de la Cocherie, to found a school for the poor and call in the Brothers.⁷⁶ (Blain writes Bernard, but Vincentian archives show Besnard.) La Cocherie, a deputy of the *intendant* of Amiens under which Boulogne came, was a man who like M. Gense in Calais, lived a celibate life dedicated to the Church and the poor. He also had already given away most of his wealth to other charitable projects, but other people came forward to endow the new foundation, especially the Bishop, who invested 3200 livres with the General Hospice. Four Brothers arrived in October 1710. The Bishop, who for seven years now knew of the good work done in Calais, received them very graciously and gave them lodging in the seminary while a house was got ready in the lower town. This was the commercial and maritime centre. The bishop then was able to get two more Brothers to run a school in the upper town, the old town with its rampart, cathedrals and bourgeois residences, but where there were also the poor.

The six Brothers lived in rather cramped conditions in their house in the lower town for two or three years. The Town Council considered the matter about 1712, and obtained from the King the transfer of a plot of land. The town Commandant, the Marquis of Colembert, took interest in this second school. He marked out the land and also provided the plan of the house, both school and community, probably as the Brothers indicated. The first founders of the school and other persons provided funds, but even so the materials ran out and the work stopped. The Commandant came to encourage people at the work, to get the carters to make a few journeys free of charge, and all the workers to do some free overtime. This work may have gone on in 1714-15, for De La Salle visited Boulogne in 1715, and saw how willingly people were working on the house⁷⁷. In Boulogne, then, as in Moulins, a zealous priest had initiated calling in the Brothers, who likewise had the support of the Bishop. In addition they received strong financial support from the well-placed and the well-to-do, and general goodwill of the population.

A problem in Troyes, December 1710

In December this year a problem was settled in Troyes.⁷⁸ The incident provides another example of the Founder's governing ability. Brother Joseph continued to be appointed by annual 'obedience' as Visitor of certain communities. Troyes came to be included. Brother Joseph visited the town in 1710 and found that François Lebey had died on 15 July. He was the parish priest who had given over his presbytery for the Brothers and their school, while he resided in the junior seminary of which he was the superior. His successor came on 25 July and not being also in charge of the seminary, wanted to have the presbytery made available for him. It may be recalled that it had been incumbent on the bishop since 1703 to rehouse the Brothers. Things were not solved immediately, and Brother Joseph wrote to his Superior telling him that the school might have to close.

The Founder wrote on Tuesday, 23 December : "I received your letter this midday, my very dear Brother. I shall leave on Saturday to go to Troyes. Do not move from there, wait for me. I shall be there on Monday and we shall discuss together all that concerns the affairs of that town and all you propose concerning the Rheims farm-rents. Tell no one, not even Brother Albert, that I am going there. I shall try to see that all turns out well and that every one will be satisfied. I am in Our Lord, my very dear Brother, all yours. De La Salle.

Let nothing be done concerning the discontinuance of these classes till I arrive."⁷⁹

The Founder needed three days to do the 144 kms from Paris to Troyes and must have gone by coach. The farm rents must refer to several fields or vineyards he had acquired and rented out for the support of the communities in Rheims. It is another example of the variety of his activities on behalf of his Institute, and his managerial ability. Brother Joseph may have suggested using some of the income from those lands to help the school in Troyes. Brother Albert, whom we last heard of as due to join Brother Gabriel in Rome, but was sent to Valréas instead, was now at Troyes; he left the Institute some time before 1714.⁸⁰ The Founder does seem to be able to rely on him to be discreet. It seems that matters in Troyes were arranged satisfactorily. De La Salle could point to the bishop's obligation. It is not known how the latter provided accommodation. In another parish the priest and several parishioners provided enough funds for one master and the rent for one class.⁸¹ On 25 August 1719, four months after De La Salle's death, in place of this provisional accommodation, Brother Thomas (Charles Frappet) was able to rent a spacious house with gardens for 60 livres. Two other schools were opened in

1720, so that with a serving Brother there was a community of seven.

1711

THE FOUNDER VISITS HIS COMMUNITIES IN THE SOUTH OF FRANCE, FEBRUARY TO SEPTEMBER 1711

His letter to Brother Joseph, 6 February 1711

On 6 February 1711 the Founder wrote a letter, probably in Paris, to Brother Joseph while he was in Rheims.⁸² We do not have his ‘obedience’ as Visitor for 1710-11, but clearly he had been given one, since De La Salle is writing to him as having responsibility in the Rheims area. He seems also to be clearing up matters that he will not be able to deal with himself till after Easter. The reason is that he was planning a visit to his southern houses. In fact, he did not return till September.

“I received yesterday your three letters together, my very dear Brother. I am answering the most urgent. It seems to be a good thing for Brother Placide to go to Guise.” This Brother was from Laon and had joined the novitiate in Paris only on 29 April 1710; his time there was evidently shortened, since he is now being moved from Rheims, very likely, to Guise. He died in Rethel in 1714, aged only 23.

“I am sending Brother Fabian with the little Brother from Mende to take Brother Placide’s place, and in two or three years he will be in a better position to profit from the novitiate than at present, and he will teach his class well. You will give the horse to Brother Fabian to bring it back here; he will be in Rheims by Tuesday evening.” This is the first mention that De La Salle was no longer making all his journeys on foot, but was using a horse. A little story about this horse corroborates this. “One day being in a garden where he was saying his Office, a horse that he sometimes made use of for his journeys, having escaped and gone into a neighbouring garden without however causing any damage, the owner of this garden was so incensed that he came to the Servant of God in a sort of fury and struck him a blow on the cheek. The holy man, without showing the slightest annoyance, knelt down immediately in front of this angry man and asked his pardon if he had caused him any hurt. The one who had lost his temper, surprised by such a humility, withdrew speechless and confused. This example of patience and humility would have gone unknown, like so many others, if a Brother who had witnessed it did not edify the others by it.”⁸³

We know of a Fabian who died in Paris in 1711. Deaths and departures were something the Founder always had to take into account. The “little

Brother of Mende” makes an interesting story. The Reverend Boulet who had painted a very positive picture of the good to be done in Mende, had suggested that since the Brothers would be teaching the children there till the age of 14, in accordance with royal decree, some would be good enough to teach a dozen or so children in village schools. What is certain is that a Robert Esbrayat, on reaching the age of fourteen after four years with the Brothers in Mende, asked to join their Society. He might have begun teaching under the guidance of his former teachers, for De La Salle is saying above that he can run a class well. He was sent to the novitiate, but the Founder wanted him to gain more maturity, and sent him to Rheims. He taught there in ordinary dress, but is called a “little Brother”, the designation of a postulant attached to a community. At the end of the school year the Founder changed his mind and called him to the novitiate.

Robert entered the Society on 15 September with the name of Brother Benedict. In the *Catalogue of the Brothers of the Christian Schools* which gives the names of Brothers who entered the Society between January 1715 and 15 August 1725⁸⁴, Brother Benedict is entered as born on 12 October 1696. When he came to the novitiate in 1711 he had only “a few worn clothes” with him. He may have taught in Paris, for on 17 July 1714, while De La Salle was still away on his second journey south, Brother Bartholomew wrote to the parish priest of Mende that the Brother from that town who was in Paris, was receiving through his uncle letters from his mother that might turn him away from his vocation. He made his final vows, taught in Laon, was Director of the school in Dieppe in 1744 and died there in 1750.⁸⁵

“Brother Dositheus would not have written to you,” the Founder’s letter to Brother Joseph goes on, “if you had not been the first to write, no more than the Brothers in Guise. I do not know why you write in this way to the Brothers as you like. There must be none of these communications by letter from one house to another, that does not befit us. If you want to prevent them, do not undertake them yourself. It would be desirable if M. Bourgeois learnt to sew and to shave and cut hair well; that is important.” This was the nephew of the new parish priest of Laon. He was intended for the temporal needs of communities. Brother Bartholomew admitted him as a novice on 13 May this year while De La Salle was in the South. He died in Paris some time before 1716.

“I do not know if a boy, a stone-cutter, has been to see you since I left. If he continues to demand admission, he must be put off till Easter; they must not enter together. Please see that Brother Remi is given what he needs. He tells Brother Thomas that he needs wool to make himself stockings, and that he hasn’t any, and a camisole.” We know little of this Brother Remi, who disappears before 1711. Brother Thomas in Paris provided all the clothing of the

Brothers. As letters for him had to go through De La Salle as Superior, he knew of all these needs and attended to them. The camisole was a sleeved vest, added between the jacket (or here, the robe) and the shirt in winter. This letter again shows remarkable attention to detail.

His first tour of the south

It was after posting this letter that the Founder began his long journey south. Blain tells us that: "his departure from Paris for this journey is dated in the month of February 1711." This was hardly the best month to travel. As Founder of this work of God, he took seriously his responsibility for seeing that it was developing correctly. Although he was well informed by his regular correspondence with his Brothers, he wanted to speak to and encourage them directly and see things for himself. He needed to contact and thank personally the various bishops and benefactors, and to look into the matter of local recruits. It also gave him the opportunity of giving Brother Bartholomew space to act as his deputy, in view of his replacing him eventually, well aware that it meant taking risks and that not all the Brothers appreciated his choice.⁸⁶ Knowing how much Bartholomew had gone through to become a Brother and stay faithful, he gave him his complete confidence. "Some of the senior Brothers could not see (this trust) without resentment."⁸⁷ Nevertheless, Bartholomew's silence and charity won them over.

We have few details on De La Salle's movements in the south of France in 1711. There was all over France a very good network of stage-coach routes and inns, supplemented by river-boats. These were too dear for the poor, and the Brothers usually travelled on foot and used inns or other hostels. The Brothers could manage from twenty to thirty miles a day, at least on long summer days, allowing for rests and meals. In a letter to Brother Mathias on 4 June 1708, passing on De La Salle's orders for him to go from Mende to Villefort, 28 kms away, Brother Ponce had written: "The present is to advise you to leave on Saturday 9 June very early, to go to Villefort that same day. Go to the White Horse. It is practically outside the town of Villefort and you will find a Brother there to meet you. You will have to leave as soon as the town gate of Mende is opened. There are seven leagues (21 miles) from there. You will do it easily for the days are long." For these long journeys, however, De La Salle, almost sixty and afflicted with rheumatism, now went on horseback.

There were two main routes south from Paris in those days. One, the "Bourbonnais route" ran more or less southward to Moulins and then south-east to Lyons. The other, more and more used, but not so easy, went south west to Dijon and then south through Mâcon, again to Lyons, where it followed the Rhone. The Founder would presumably take the former so as to

visit the one Brother who was teaching in Moulins with Aubery. It was while he was travelling that his sister Marie died in Rheims on 23 March at the age of 57. Her husband, John Maillefer, had already written in a letter in 1697 that she suffered from stomach pains 'night and day', and that it worried him a great deal. We have already seen that he was heartbroken at her death. He wrote: "she was only two hours ill, from an apoplexy. I cannot say more." To console himself, he wrote with great love a "funeral discourse on the death of his wife" intended for his children and his posterity.⁸⁸ John Baptist would probably not learn of her death till he returned to Paris.

He may have stayed a fair time in Grenoble, to recuperate, we may suppose, from the journey. The benefactors of the school offered him 50 livres to mark his arrival and to show their thanks for his sending two Brothers. He arrived in Avignon on 27 July, five and a half months after leaving Paris.⁸⁹ It was midsummer so that he would experience the southern heat. It so happened that three days before, the Consuls or town councillors had deliberated on a petition presented to them by the twenty-one members of the guild of master-writers. It said, after a grovelling and humble preamble: "It is, your worships, against the new establishment of gratuitous schools that Mr de Château-Blanc has made in various places of the town, and that he intends increasing, that your suppliants take the liberty to bring to you their complaints". They were not against the Brothers teaching virtue to the poor free of charge, they said, something any of the suppliants would be ready to do for the real poor. And they recognised that they were thereby relieved of a painful concern. "But as the persons who have been called into this city for this good work do not keep to the intention of their pious founder (they are referring to Château-Blanc) and as, not content to receive the true poor and those not well-to-do, they attract children of persons truly well-to-do, it follows that a considerable number of your inhabitants, who have limited themselves to instructing the youth of your city and who have no other means to support their family, have the sorrow and misfortune to see their school empty." They therefore ask that these Brothers should only be allowed to admit children who have a certificate of poverty from their parish priest. Otherwise, twenty families face destruction since these master writers are too old to take on another 'art'.

Whereas their counterparts in Paris, more numerous and powerful and counting on La Chétardye's non-interference, were very aggressive and entered the schools, here the attitude of the Bishop, Vice-legate and Papal Treasurer made them much more deferential. The same principle was at stake, however. A small group, exercising a monopoly, was trying to prevent educational and economic advance for the poor and anyone else not attending their schools. In Paris they had tried to prevent people learning to write at all or very little,

outside their writing workshops. As Poutet puts it:⁹⁰ “they hoped to obtain confirmation of the sad traditional privilege of the poor to be relegated to free schools closed to the rich.” One has to take their statements on their impoverishment with a pinch of salt. The master-writers might be losing some of their less well-off clients, but as most of them were often among the nobility and bourgeois, they continued to prosper. One remembers that they were needed in the courts because of their expertise in deciphering old manuscripts, and for writing out deeds.

At that meeting of the Town Council, “each one having given his opinion, it was concluded and deliberated that the consuls, assessors, representatives of the clergy, university and others who compose the ordinary Assembly would hear the reasons of Mr de Châteaublanc and of the Brothers who direct the said free schools with those of the said schoolmasters and writers and would report back on them in a council meeting.”⁹¹ With all his conviction, strengthened with the experience of conflict in Paris, about what his schools were about, De La Salle must have put the Brothers’ case calmly and powerfully, for nothing was changed.

It was while he was in Avignon that he had the *Collection of Short Treatises* printed. Presumably he had got the Brothers to have this printing taken in hand. He wrote to Drolin, but we do not know of any answer (see further). He paid a visit to the bishop of Cavaillon, for he says in his next letter to Drolin: “I dined with his Lordship the Bishop of Cavaillon whom I thanked for the kindnesses he had shown you.” This eating out with people was rare with De La Salle, but he wanted to thank the Bishop and, one may surmise, to see what the prospects might be for a school. He went to Marseilles on 2 August⁹² and from there he wrote to Gabriel Drolin on 24th.⁹³

He writes to Drolin on 24 August, 1711

The Founder says he had written from Avignon and has not yet received Drolin’s answer. He must have written soon after his arrival in that city, since he expected an answer by now. We do not have this letter. Perhaps Drolin was too oppressed by the stifling heat of Rome. There was a gap in correspondence now of fourteen months since 12 May 1710, which itself had ended a break of two and a half years. The Founder while in Marseilles was profiting by the fact that Count Miaczinski, son of the grand treasurer of Poland, was going to Rome to study theology. “The day he arrives, please find him an inn where he will be well lodged. He is a very pious person with whom I have a special relationship. He could be of great service to you.” The Count was aged 21. Drolin gave him the room that had been vacated by the Spanish Don Diego. He left Rome by 1714 perhaps for Poland on his father’s death.

“We could soon send you a second (Brother), but I ask you not to give up

our Brothers' habit. Do not listen to what the Vincentians tell you on the matter."

"Those in Paris would like to destroy our society. I am pleased that I can write this to you as being quite reliable." He is referring to the group of Sulpicians or others who were interfering with the affairs of his Society. But it is news that they are definitely set on destroying it.

"Please write to me from time to time". One wonders what the situation was in Rome or between the two men that gave rise to this kind of plea. Communication seems now to be only as occasion required, not on the regular basis De La Salle had insisted on earlier (as, for instance, in the letter of 28 August 1705, p. 460).

"Tell me exactly how things are with you.. As the Pope has six schools in Rome, it would be very much to be wished that they were all in the hands and run by our Brothers." There were, in fact, only three papal schools at the time, but we have here an expression of the Founder's ambition: to have all the schools of a town. It surfaces again further on in the letter: "We have just opened schools in Versailles and at Boulogne-sur-Mer and at Moulins. Pray God that may extend them more and more. I pray to Our Lord that he will fill you with his graces and I am, in Our Lord, my very dear Brother, all yours. De La Salle."

He might have stayed longer in Marseilles, to see to more developments, but "he received letters from Paris recalling him at once to defend the acquisition made at St Denis. The matter was serious: his interest and his honour were involved."⁹⁴ He left Marseilles on 1 September for Avignon, and then visited Alès, Les Vans (where two Brothers were due to come in October - see below) and Mende.⁹⁵

As he made his way back to Paris, he made a detour through Epernay, 24 kms from Rheims, for he was there "for the grape harvest",⁹⁶ which occurred in mid-September. The reason was to visit his youngest brother, Jean-Remy, who at the age of 40 had married on 5 May a girl of twenty in her parish. He was already showing signs of the mental illness that finally required him to be taken away. Jean-Louis and Pierre, the brothers who could have attended, - both were at Marie's funeral six weeks before as witnesses⁹⁷ - did not do so, perhaps because they did not agree with a marriage with such a difference of age. John Maillefer was still crushed by the death of Marie. Jean-Louis and Pierre may also have stayed away because of the reflection on their brother when at the engagement of the fiancés on 29 April a contract was made out establishing separation of goods.⁹⁸ It was it seems, a sensible precaution on the part of the parents. Jean-Remy was in debt, and they were preventing him solving his problems by drawing on the money, investments and jewels they had given their daughter. Yet, against this con-

tract, he did appropriate and squander her property. His brother John Baptist would not know of the contract; he would have visited him and his wife in any case. Although we have no documentation, it seems reasonable to suppose that he would have then done the further 27 kilometres to Rheims to express his sorrow to John Maillefer and see the Brothers. He would reach Paris late September.

A school at Les Vans, the last foundation in his lifetime

This year in October, after two or three years' negotiations, another school was opened in the south, at **Les Vans**.⁹⁹ This is a very small town at the foot of the Cévennes, eighteen miles from Alès. The Prior there, Claude du Roure, from an old family of Languedoc, had led the people into Calvinism in 16th century. The Du Roure family, however, and the greater part of the population, returned to the Church under Louis XIV. A Vincent du Roure became a priest, refused benefices offered him and lived in poverty, wearing a hair-shirt.¹⁰⁰ Blain writes: "Les Vans is a small town of little fame, almost all Huguenot, where there is only one parish." Of Vincent du Roure, he says: "Being at Avignon he wanted to see for himself if all the good that was said of the schools was true. He felt inspired to set up a similar one in favour of the town of Les Vans, and did not want to leave Avignon without having consolidated his good will by a testament made out in due form." He did this at a notary's on 20 July 1708, making the Brothers of the Christian Schools heirs of his modest fortune on condition that two Brothers or more, depending on the interest from his fortune, should run a school, "the whole with the approbation of the bishop and count of Uzès."

His intention was to remedy the lack of education and to counter the Calvinism into which the children had been born. His total capital was only 7000 livres invested in 1707 with the States of Languedoc, producing an annual interest of 350 livres. He left nothing to his heirs except 5 sols each to safeguard the validity of the will, and begged his relatives not to take badly his preferring the interests of the poor and the Church to themselves.¹⁰¹ When he died on 19 September 1710, his testators notified De La Salle who accepted the inheritance and agreed to send two Brothers. Through Brother Ponce he requested the invested capital to be transferred to the Brothers of the Christian Schools of the town of Les Vans. This request was presented by the Usher of the Audit Office of Montpellier on 3 January 1711. On 28 the Town Council of Les Vans heard the Mayor set out the last wishes of the testator, who was his brother. The Bishop approved the school being set up, and "Brother Ponce Thiseux, Visitor of the said Brothers, went expressly to this town (Les Vans) and offered to give them (the Brothers) their function, requesting the meeting to be pleased to deliberate on their accommodation

and their school.”¹⁰²

The meeting voted a tax on the inhabitants (including “new Catholics”, according to royal decrees) for the present year only of 130 livres. With Vincent du Roure’s bequest, this made a total of 480 livres, which means that three Brothers were envisaged, not two, at a salary of 150 livres each, the other 30 livres paying for their accommodation. There was some kind of school running, under a certain Ginhoux, who remained in office till the next summer holidays. In October 1711, Brothers René and Maximin arrived. The members of the Town Council went with the Director (René) to visit the premises and, seeing the bad condition and shortage of material, had five tables made, two big chairs with pine step, thirty “cannes” (about 120 feet) of benches for the children in school, and in the church a frame painted black (for the crucifix or a picture of Our Lady), four little chairs, the wooden base for a little bell and finally, the overhauling of old tables and benches.” The 100 livres voted for the year 1711 towards the payment of the teachers was divided between the Brothers and Ginhoux, so that the latter received a small retirement sum, whatever else was paid him. The two Brothers were given for their accommodation a fairly attractive house on the small church square. They were surrounded by people on the watch, among people used in this southern clime to chatting at doors and living in the open air.¹⁰³ Whatever the expectations, the number of teaching Brothers never rose above two. This was the last foundation in the Founder’s lifetime.

De La Salle was planning a further visit South. Trouble in Mâcon

It is worth noting how several times now people had wanted for their own town the kind of school they had heard of in Avignon. Here is an example of a Brothers’ school creating a reputation for itself through its service of the poor.

The arrangements for Les Vans were made through Brother Ponce, but the Founder clearly intended travelling south again in order to consolidate the work being done there. His aim perhaps was to bring some of the Brothers back to a more faithful following of their ideals; and to start a novitiate for that area. An interesting speculation is that this consolidating would have included a journey to Rome. It would seem that it was in preparation for a long absence that he gave Brother Joseph not only a more extensive mandate geographically, but also the mission of “representing the ‘Society of the Christian Schools’ with local authorities”¹⁰⁴ and bishops in that wider area. The text accredits the Visitor to a wider public than the Brothers.

“We, the undersigned, Priest, Doctor in Theology, Superior of the Brothers of the Christian Schools, declare to all to whom it may concern that we are sending our very dear Brother Joseph of the said Society to visit the houses

of Moulins, of Dijon, of Troyes, of Rheims, of Rethel, of Laon, of Guise, of Calais, of Boulogne, of Rouen, of Saint-Yon, of Darnétal, of Chartres, of Versailles and of Saint Denis, depending on the said Society of the Christian Schools. In faith of which we have signed the above. Done at Paris, this sixteenth of November one thousand seven hundred and eleven. De La Salle.”¹⁰⁵

The only northern community not included was that of Paris, where Bartholomew was. Nor was Mâcon on the list. The bishop, Tilladet, according to Blain “did not like the Brothers, and was very much soured against them, I do not know why.”¹⁰⁶ The cause may have been that the one who had invited the Brothers, Canon Gorze, had failed to get his authorisation. Tilladet was a cousin of Le Tellier of Rheims and would have known of the Brothers from him, apart from the fact that a near relative of De La Salle, a Moët, had been ordained with the title of a chapel of the cathedral of Mâcon. Perhaps he had also gathered from his cousin that De La Salle was an independent character and had declined to put his society under the Archbishop of Rheims. Whatever the motive, Tilladet gave the Brothers no support when in 1711 the Town Council showed them its hostility. The leading citizens did not want religious in their charity schools. The Brothers were not religious, but they were “in religious dress” as the minutes of the Town Council’s deliberations of 22 December 1711 stated, and were clearly not living a secular mode of life. On this date the Usher challenged Brothers Simon and Barnabas to know “what voice and what subject (meaning who?) had obliged them to take on the quality of masters in the said school without the permission of his Lordship the Bishop, the first director for the establishment of any kind of school?” The masters “not wishing to answer” were compelled to withdraw” and to cease by that day their lessons in the said school.”¹⁰⁷ This was at the beginning of the Christmas break. The Founder must have known the situation was deteriorating before he omitted Mâcon from Brother Joseph’s area, and must have intended visiting it himself. But by the time he came to travel in March 1712, there was no community to visit.

The different reactions of municipalities to the Brothers’ schools

This attitude of the leading citizens and Town Council of Mâcon shows the difficulties the Brothers could have with municipalities and the different view they might have of schools for the poor compared with the Founder’s.¹⁰⁸ This helps to bring out how he saw the function of his establishments. When a municipal council decided to invite the Brothers, it was because some leading person of the town, cleric or layman, had suggested it. It never originated from a deliberation by that body concerning the education of the poor of the

town. That was left to the clergy. If, nevertheless, a serious proposal was made to them, especially if all the expense would not fall to the municipality and create discontent among various bodies in the town, they might, as a Catholic corporation, help in the financial and material side of the enterprise. Nine municipalities gave support to such proposals, and De La Salle accepted them all. Only a very early one, Château-Porcien, was of brief duration. In the others, the Town Council's support reflected town opinion. "The Brothers' teaching was considered not only as a service to the Church or a form of free help to the poor, but as a participation in the life of the town. More than parochial, the Christian school was free, communal and public."¹⁰⁹

There was less chance of success or of an easy passage when a school was negotiated without the Town Council being involved. Mâcon is a clear case in point, but in other towns the Councillors had to safeguard a host of local interests: the town college, the master-writers, the little masters, the general hospice that received legacies for the poor...They would wait till they saw the Brothers' work was worthwhile. They would not themselves champion the rights of the poor.

In the long run, the Christian Schools would change the stratification of society.

When town councils, clergy, nobility or bourgeoisie looked at the schools question in this period, they were looking for the conversion of Protestants, and a cure for the vagrancy and idleness of the poor, but they were also defending their own interests. Yves Poutet comments on what in fact, with time, happened.¹¹⁰ "The free popular school took on the aspect in the beginning of a useful remedy for defending bourgeois, noble or clerical interests. Now the Lasallian school took part in the social trend that gave more and more importance to the petty bourgeoisie, (which was) without effective means of obtaining the abrogation of the social inequalities that began to weigh on it. Because of the success of the teaching dispensed in the Lasallian schools, this petty bourgeoisie constituted, from the first years of the eighteenth century, a second clientele of these schools, while the artisans, the journeymen, the day labourers, the people without trades, jacks-of-all-trades or those good for hardly anything made up the original set for which it had been necessary, in the beginning, to create disinterested teachers.

"By an inversion that seemed senseless to many, the petty bourgeoisie wished to profit by the privilege of the poor and attended charity schools from which disorder, dirtiness, fleas and bad manners were beginning to disappear. This was the principal cause of enmities that arose in Paris, in Rouen, in Moulins and elsewhere, against the Brothers' schools. A social coming together took place, therefore, in school. The lower middle class sat side by side with arti-

sans, while the poor prepared themselves to climb several social rungs thanks to a better instruction.”¹¹¹ This movement began in De La Salle’s lifetime, but it was only after his death that a real surge began.

It was two days after the Brothers were told to cease work in Mâcon that Brother Thomas in Rouen was able to begin arranging the lease of a better house for the Brothers. It was one light spot in a sky dark with the manoeuvrings around the training-centre at Saint Denis which concern us next.

References

1. Blain II, 55-56.
2. For the whole story see Maillefer, CL6, 168-9; Blain II, 72-81; Rigault I, 248-253; Poutet II, 30-31, 45, 332, 365-6.
3. Blain II, 55-56.
4. Blain II, 56.
5. Rigault I, 250, n.1.
6. Poutet II, 30.
7. Blain II, 73.
8. id, *ibid*.
9. Rigault I, 249.
10. Blain II, 74.
11. id., 74, 56.
12. id., 73, 75.
13. Poutet II, 332.
14. See Poutet, CL48, 182.
15. Blain II, 75.
16. Blain II, 75; Poutet, CL48, 173-189.
17. Blain II, 75.
18. Definitions from the *Dictionary of the French Academy* of 1694. See Poutet, CL48, 184.
19. Blain II, 180.
20. Saint-Simon, *Mémoires*, tr. from Tome I, Hachette, 1951.
21. Félix-Paul, 207, meteorological details based on Bouant’s *Les grands froids*, Hachette, 1880, 146-162.
22. Saint-Simon, *Mémoires*.
23. *La Vie quotidienne des Parisiens au temps du Roi Soleil: 1660-1715*, Jacques Wilhem, Hachette 1977, Chapter 10.
24. Félix-Paul, 207.
25. Maillefer, CL6, 190-3; Blain II, 63-65.
26. Maillefer, CL6, 191-2.
27. Blain II, 64.
28. Blain II, 63-65. Cf Maillefer, CL6, 193, where Maillefer says the Brothers drove him

out with his accomplices.

29. Poutet II, 157.
30. Rigault I, 264.
31. Poutet II, 137.
32. Blain I, 376.
33. Rigault I, 265.
34. Blain I, 377.
35. Poutet II, 248-9; Rigault I, 293.
36. Poutet II, 193-4; CL11, 379.
37. Author's *Brother Gabriel Drolin*, 171-175.
38. John A. Lynn, *The Wars of Louis XIV 1667-1714*, Longman 1999, 325.
39. For April 1708 the reference is *Status animarum San Lorenzo in Lucina*, 1708, no. 204, fol. 78.
40. *Companion Guide to Rome*, op.cit., 231.
41. The Latin record is in the *Liber Ordinationum generalium et particularium incipiens a prima Aprilis 1704*: from p. 220, Archives of the Rome Vicariate.
42. Blain I, 314.
43. Félix-Paul, 132-133.
44. Félix-Paul, 139.
45. Blain I, 393.
46. Félix-Paul, 142.
47. id., 138-145.
48. Rodolfo Cosimo Meoli, *Frère Gabriel Drolin*, 131.
49. Blain II, Appendix, 41.
50. id., 11.
51. id., 13.
52. CL3, 12, 18.
53. Blain II, 282.
54. id, ibid.
55. Blain II, Appendix, 13.
56. Blain II, Appendix 13-14, 40. And see Rigault I, 387-389.
57. The following incidents are taken from Blain II, 282-4.
58. Maillefer, CL6, 186, 187; Blain II, 65-68; Poutet II, 47; Rigault I, 293-5. On the date see Rigault I, 293, although Maillefer, CL6, 186, says 1709.
59. Blain II, 65-66.
60. Blain II, 66.
61. Poutet II, 47.
62. Blain II, 68.
63. Maillefer, CL6, 184; Blain II, 69-70; Poutet II, 212-221; Rigault I, 296-310.
64. Poutet II, 212, n.2.
65. Rigault I, 310, n.2
66. Quoted in Rigault I from a memoir in the archives of the Département de l' Allier.
67. Rigault I, 298, referring to the archives as above, D. no. 101.
68. Blain II, 341-5.
69. Poutet II, 237, 299.

60. Blain II, 66.
61. Poutet II, 47.
62. Blain II, 68.
63. Maillefer, CL6, 184; Blain II, 69-70; Poutet II, 212-221; Rigault I, 296-310.
64. Poutet II, 212, n.2.
65. Rigault I, 310, n.2
66. Quoted in Rigault I from a memoir in the archives of the Département de l' Allier.
67. Rigault I, 298, referring to the archives as above, D. no. 10l.
68. Blain II, 341-5.
69. Poutet II, 237, 299.
70. Rigault I, 299-300; Poutet II, 299.
71. Poutet II, 214, n.17, quotes from the *Mémoire sur les écoles charitables de Moulins*, Archives of Saône et-Loire, G 937(7).
72. Blain II, 69.
73. id., 70.
74. Rigault I, 309-310.
75. Poutet II, 59.
76. Maillefer, CL6, 186, 188; Blain II, 70-71; Poutet II, 53-4, 63, 164; Rigault I, 295-6.
77. Poutet II, 34, n.22.
78. Rigault I, 277-9; Poutet II, 168; Félix-Paul, 223-226.
79. Félix-Paul, 223-224.
80. Félix-Paul, 76.
81. Poutet II, 168.
82. Félix-Paul, 226-232.
83. Blain II, 419.
84. CL3.
85. Poutet II, 188, n.14; Félix-Paul, 231.
86. Rigault I, 371.
87. Blain II Appendix, 14.
88. CL41(1), 237; CL27, 34-37.
89. Félix-Paul, 146.
90. Poutet II, 129.
91. From the Avignon Council's deliberations, Poutet II, 129.
92. Félix-Paul, 146.
93. Félix-Paul, 145-153.
94. Blain II, 76.
95. Brother Lucard, *Vie du Vénérable Jean-Baptiste De La Salle*, Rouen 1874, 226, where he says these details were entered into a register of the Avignon community in 1736.
96. Aroz, CL27, 170.
97. Aroz, CL41(1), 239.
98. CL27, 149-159.
99. Maillefer, CL6, 195-7; Blain II, 68-9; Poutet II, 64, 222-225; Rigault I, 366-370.
100. Rigault I, 367-8.
101. Blain II, 68-9; Rigault I, 367.

- 102. Rigault I, 368-9..
 - 103. Rigault I, 369-70.
 - 104. Poutet II, 144.
 - 105. Félix-Paul, 233-4.
 - 106. Blain II, Appendix, 41.
 - 107. Poutet II, 247-8.
 - 108. See Poutet II, 70-74.
 - 109. id, 71.
 - 110. id, 72-3.
 - 111. id., 74.
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Chapter 19: Two and a half years in the south of France, 1712-1714.

1. The Marseilles failure. De La Salle's own crisis.

FLIGHT FROM PARIS AFTER THE CLEMENT AFFAIR

The Founder had clearly in mind to return to the South to set up a province of his Institute in that region, and centred most likely on Avignon. But whatever the date he had planned to begin his journey, the outcome of the lawsuit brought against him by Julian Clément, the surgeon, left him no option but to move, and move quickly.¹ By now the young Clément had been made, according to the bad custom of the time, the titular of the rich abbey of St Calais in the diocese of Le Mans, yet he did not attempt to pay back De La Salle or to pay Mlle Poignant. He had told his father of the contract he had made through Rogier. The father, looking to the family's advancement, told him he was a fool to get involved in this sort of thing, and that the best thing to do was to pull out of it on the grounds that he was a minor. As a leading surgeon-gynaecologist, the elder Clément would be in demand at court. This explains why "in 1711 the Cléments received from Louis XIV letters of nobility that worked on their pride. Julian, the father, reckoned that he would make a show of power by crushing the poor man who, according to him, had allowed himself to catch the younger cleric in his net. He persuaded his offspring to deny flatly his debts and to claim that in all that affair of Saint Denis, he had been dupe and victim."²

De La Salle meets with a will to disgrace him and imprison him

"In vain M. De La Salle, returning in haste from the South, tried to re-establish the rights of truth. He came up against a barrier of prejudice and bad faith on the part of the surgeon. Pushing the spirit of conciliation to the extreme, he declared he was ready to renounce his personal claim: it was playing right into the hands of people who had sworn to ruin his honour."³ This is another event where Canon Blain really feels the indignity and hurt done to De La Salle, and, having the memoir and other papers in front of him, goes into full detail. On the Cléments, he writes: "They wished to listen neither to reason nor to any offer of compromise. To their minds he was an impostor, a deceiver who had suborned a minor, and he must be declared such by a judicial sentence that branded him, and condemned to all the penalties that justice employs against such crimes."⁴ On De La Salle's rejected offer to cede to M. Clément senior the entire house bought in part with his own money, he says: "This man quite promised himself to have it awarded to

him, and it was too little to satisfy him. The holy man should have to pay with the loss of his honour and freedom for, I will not say the fault, but the fervour of his son. Personal summons and prison were prepared for him. I do not even know whether they wanted to spare him the rope or if from prison they did not flatter themselves that they would drag him to the gallows.”

This seems exaggerated: Blain always takes a dark view of De La Salle’s enemies; but he does seem to have been in personal danger to his honour and freedom, for the Cléments had influence and would be therefore feared by those to whom De La Salle had recourse. After painting the black picture, Blain takes time on the other hand to give the young Clément his due as having acted in good faith, and wonders why he should have sided with his father. He concludes: “The deceiving or deceived cleric agreed. He was either very weak or was very smart; whether the one or the other, he was very thoughtless.” He adds something else: “It is believed that the secret enemy of M. De La Salle got into this business, and that he studied how to light the fire instead of putting it out. For a long time now he wanted to see M. De La Salle far from Paris and at last to lay down the law in his Institute. If that is the case, as there is every reason to believe, *and as M. De La Salle was convinced of it*,⁵ he finally succeeded.”⁶ That story begins with the outcome of the lawsuit that now followed.

The details of the case

Rigault gives the details. “They brought against the Saint in fact a truly scandalous action before the civil lieutenant of the Châtelet. M. De La Salle received on 23 January 1712 a writ summoning him to appear. The plaintiffs’ plea was nothing less than an accusation of suborning a minor and extortion of funds. By 17 February the chancellery delivered to the Cléments letters of annulment, setting aside the cleric’s commitments. The latter, three days later, demanded ratification of these letters, which allowed him not only to be released from the 5200 livres advanced to him for the purchase of the Poignant property, but in addition, to claim the restitution of the sums he had taken out of his grant as a young cleric for the upkeep of the student-masters.

“The dossier put together by the defendant included thirteen letters of the reverend Clement, his I.O.U acknowledging the debt, and a memoir in which M. De La Salle set out the account of his foundation of St Denis.”⁷ According to Blain, he “put them into the hands of several persons of credit and authority, asking them in charity to have justice done him. The use they made of them was to send them to be examined by several barristers who were in relation with the opponent of the servant of God, as has always been believed. For in the memoir they drew up and which they sent to those who had consulted them, they pronounced, not as barristers, but as declared enemies

of M. De La Salle, and the outcome of their consultation agreed entirely with the petition presented to the Civil Lieutenant. This result having been sent to M. De La Salle, one cannot believe how surprised he was to find adversaries everywhere.”⁸

Blain gives us no idea who were the persons “of credit and authority” to whom De La Salle turned. It was not wise to present the case himself: he was known from the long conflict with the little masters and master-writers as one who had been condemned several times and several times had taken no notice. He knew that judges were often ignorant and easily swayed by the powerful. As a priest, he could not turn to Noailles, who in the controversies of the time had sided with Jansenism and was well aware De La Salle judged otherwise. “Then he realised that there was no safety for him except in flight.” What he knew was that the Cléments, not content to release the young cleric from his debts, would proceed against him personally in the name of revenge for their own honour, and have him seized and put in prison indefinitely.

The kind of imprisonment that awaited him

There were many prisons and they were always full. You could be imprisoned immediately even for small infractions. Usually you were tried next day, but you could be detained there by *lettres de cachet* as a preventive measure. These were not only for the Bastille. The Cléments could obtain from the lieutenant of police letters detaining De La Salle in the Châtelet prison, for example, for suborning a minor. It would require another letter for him to be set free, which means he could be left there indefinitely. The condition of the prisoners was dreadful. They were badly fed, and depended on collections made for them; the jailers, often brutal, had to be paid for everything. People were incarcerated in the Conciergerie, the Grand Châtelet and the Petit Châtelet, either several to a small room or in dungeons; some were chained in dungeons into which water from the Seine oozed, and could not stand up in them. In the Châtelet and the Bastille, people could be forgotten all their life.⁹ We can recall the priest De La Salle visited in the Bastille (p. 273).

He would be cut off from his Institute, and the Brothers would suffer from his disgrace. But it was common in those days to escape arrest by fleeing from the area of jurisdiction of the lawcourt or *Parlement*. Outside Paris, moreover, the police were far less organised. “This plan had not yet been executed when M. Rogier, the one who had lent his name for the purchase of the house, came to tell him that he had been condemned, that the house was confiscated, that a warrant of arrest had been made out, and that he should see what he should do to protect himself.”¹⁰ In other words: make his escape.

“The servant of God, surprised by so precipitous a judgment, was still more so at his cause having been abandoned by the very ones whose protection he

had implored. It is certain that if they had been willing to appear and take in hand the cause of the holy priest, they would have parried the blow. Their credit would have at least helped him out of difficulty even if it had not prevailed enough to obtain for him a favourable judgment.” He contrasts his situation with that of Rogier who, “implicated in this affair as much or more than M. De La Salle, without credit and authority, was able to have justice done him.”¹¹ For when he saw De La Salle was going to lose the house, he declared his interest in the matter, demanded the return of the five or six thousand livres he had advanced (although they were De La Salle’s) and was granted it. When the house was sold, he was given his money out of the proceeds and the rest was confiscated.

He has to flee from the jurisdiction of the *Parlement* of Paris

Blain resumes: “Was there malice or negligence in those he had chosen as his defenders in abandoning him to oppression? It is not for us to judge. It is certain that they had their bias and that they were in relation with the one who wanted to remove the servant of God from Paris. Why then, someone will say, did M. De La Salle put the defence of his cause in their hands? Because, without prop or support, he had no one who wanted to take interest in it. He hoped that prejudice would give way to charity on this occasion, and that upright men, for such were those whose assistance he had implored, would rid themselves of all human sentiment to sustain the cause of God.” He sees Rogier, “the intimate friend of M. De La Salle”, blameworthy in abandoning his friend. “It was easy for him in pursuing his own interests to pursue those of his friend, and he would as easily have saved the honour and interests of the servant of God as his own.”¹²

The Founder was quite aware of his dangerous situation and moved quickly. He had to choose someone to take his place while he was away. Among the several possible ones, his choice fell on Brother Bartholomew. “He revealed to him his plan, gave him the necessary instructions to maintain order and regularity, and taught him how he should behave in his absence. That done, the man of God disappeared and left everyone in ignorance of the place of his voluntary exile from Paris.”¹³ However, having planned his visit since the preceding year, it is more likely that he had prepared Brother Bartholomew some time before this.

He “left the day after his condemnation in 1712, the first week of Lent.” This must refer to the annulment of 17th, for the first week of Lent ran in 1712 from 13 to 20 February.¹⁴ He left Paris, then, on 18 February, again in the depth of winter. He must have realised that he must expect the worst. “He went to hide deep in Provence and appeared in Paris only when he could do it in safety, that is to say, when his enemy, secret and beyond measure, and

who set all the others in motion, had no longer the power to harm him.”¹⁵ Canon Blain is overdramatic. It was not a matter of hiding — he acted in the public domain in Marseilles and elsewhere — but of moving to a different jurisdiction, and to Provence because he had already planned to go there.

Less than a month later, on 14 March, Rogier presented a petition claiming damages, and requested to be given full possession of the house. It may be that his aim was to give it back to La Salle, but he had to appear as distancing himself from him. A move like this, however, took away from him his character as man of honour. He kept the house till his death in 1718; in his will, he gave back, not the house, but a lump sum.¹⁶

On 31 May the Châtelet condemned De La Salle, ordering him to give back to the Reverend Clément his IOU for 5200 livres, together with the sums that he had given for the training-centre and which came to a total of 2300 livres. “We forbid the said Mr De La Salle to demand of minors such transactions and money or to make use of similar proceedings, and we order him to pay costs.”¹⁷ This sentence branded him with the infamy of someone taking advantage of minors as a habit. It marked the attitude of the judges and of the elder Clément. On 11 June the letters of annulment were ratified so that all the young man’s obligations were wiped out. On 15 June judgment was delivered on Rogier’s petition: “We order that the house situated at Saint Denis that he acquired by contract of 24 October 1708 from Miss Poignant, will belong to him in full ownership.” De La Salle or the Brothers he placed there were to be out by 24 June (in just over a week’s time, therefore) or have their goods put on the pavement, and were to pay Rogier the rent till the moment they left the house. The defendant was given the choice within three days of paying Rogier 8000 livres (about 150,000 euros) plus interest arrears, something he had no means of doing.¹⁸

It was a pitiless judgment, apart from the fact that it was given against someone who was absent, and indicates the bad will of the judges throughout. The terms they used to designate him were inspired by those behind the affair. Instead of referring to him as Superior of the Brothers of the Christian Schools (everywhere), the judgment of 31 May said simply: “Priest, styling himself superior general of the Brothers of the Christian school of the town of Rheims”,¹⁹ while that of 15 June said: “priest of the diocese of Rheims,” in other words, a provincial nobody. Blain sees in this “evident proof of the collusion of his opposing party with his great enemy. He himself revealed his intentions by this choice of wording and showed clearly that it was he who had again pulled all the strings in this last persecution. He succeeded at last in his plan and had full victory over the servant of God.”²⁰

Reaction of the Brothers to Bartholomew's position

With regard to the attitude of his Brothers, the Founder was aware that his nomination of Brother Bartholomew as his stand-in during his absence would bring to a head, as he must have foreseen, a certain amount of discontent. Some of his advice to Bartholomew must have borne on this. The situation inevitably and providentially tested the ability of the Brothers to hold together in what was in some ways an irregular situation. "Some of the senior Brothers, seeing at their head this neophyte in the Society, without election on the part of the body and without nomination on the part of the head, were not in the mood to recognise as Superior a man who appeared to be so without any title."²¹ Blain accepts that they could not really be faulted since most of them, in good faith, were aware neither of the Founder's whereabouts nor of his designation of Bartholomew to replace him for the time being. Some who lived far from Paris knew this man little if at all, and several, in a spirit of obedience to their Founder, felt they should refuse obedience to anyone but him.

Bartholomew wrote to all the communities, to say that the Founder was in good health, that he had had to flee, that the place where he had gone was known, and that, according to the intention of their common father, they could write to him (Bartholomew) and he would do what he could to content them. He made clear he was only a substitute for their real Superior until he returned and not by personal right, and that he would try to govern according to his spirit. This clarified the position for most, and they accepted him on those conditions. It was a touchy thing for them for any Brother to try to take the place of the one they regarded as a saint and as their indispensable Founder. Yet it was time, and past time, for them to face up to having a Brother installed as Superior General before he died and also to relieve an ageing man of the burden.

"Two or three Brothers did not want to submit to this new leader and broke away. (They) were not sorry at the absence of M. De La Salle, because it favoured their liking for independence."²² Bartholomew did what he could to win them over, but they only behaved worse than ever. They had really sorely tried the patience of the Founder long before this. In the end, the senior Brothers held a meeting and expelled them from the Society. In the event, the Society pulled closer together round Bartholomew.

On 17 February, too, an event of less importance occurred in Rouen, but not without its value for the Brothers. The guild of master-writers, sixty-five in number in 1662, were only thirty-six in 1725, so they possibly numbered between thirty and forty in 1712. They had evidently lost pupils to Nyel's schools. They had in the past prosecuted priests who, to survive while they studied, taught writing among other things. Fourteen priests were condemned

for this in 1710. The master-writers obtained letters patent in 1711 which were registered by the *Parlement* of Rouen on 17 February. While priests and all others were forbidden to teach writing, a clause excepted “the public charity schools for the poor,” in other words, the Brothers’ schools. It does not mean, however, that they did not want restrictions put on who should be admitted to these schools.²³

JOURNEYS AND PROBLEMS IN THE SOUTH OF FRANCE

To Avignon, then to Alès and Les Vans: Calvinist opposition

For his second visit to the South,²⁴ independently of the Clément affair, the Founder had planned to go straight to Avignon. It was for this reason that he had added Moulins, Troyes and Dijon, that he would otherwise have visited, to Brother Joseph’s area. He would want to finish his travelling before the heat set in, then give his time to matters in Marseilles. He covered some 750 kilometres to reach Avignon. This would be on horseback, especially as he had to get clear of Paris quickly. “He arrived in Avignon towards the end of Lent 1712.”²⁵ If this were true, it would be towards the end of March, since Easter fell on 27 March, but this is contradicted by his presence in Alès on 12 March (see further). “The Brothers of the town, delighted like the others to have their Superior, kept him with them as long as they could.”

He needed to rest from his journey; he might then have courted the leading figures of the town who would have been delighted to have his company. It says a great deal for him, that, in spite of his personal troubles, when he found the Brother who looked after the youngest class unwell he immediately undertook to replace him until he was fit again. “It was his custom to act in this way: each time one of the Brothers of his community was suffering, he took his class.”²⁶ The next day he took his class of little boys in rank to the Augustinian church to say Mass. He handed them over to Brother Bernardin, who had the older boys, and went into the sacristy to prepare for Mass. A distinguished stranger was immensely impressed by his whole appearance as he came to the altar, and asked Brother Bernardin who this priest was. When he said he was the Superior of the Brothers, he said: “I am not surprised. His mere aspect proves he is a good man.”²⁷

Brother Bernardin was the Director in Avignon. The Founder had trained him at St Yon. He did excellent work in the South and died “in the odour of sanctity” in 1751. He was the Founder’s “friend and confidant.”²⁸

“He prepared to visit all the establishments there were in the area. The Brothers were alarmed, for there was danger for him to go too far afield due to the Camisards who held the countryside and who made cruel war on clerics. However, under the wings of divine Providence, his journey from Avignon to Alais was successful and without incident.”²⁹ (This was a journey of

50 kms in easy country.) The proceedings of the town council of Alès (this is the modern spelling) show that he arrived there on March 12th.³⁰ The eagerness of the Brothers to see their Superior was imitated by a great number of people who knew him only by reputation, and took pains to give him honour for the care and the zeal his disciples manifested for the instruction of youth. No one seemed to consider him more than the bishop of Alès when he went to present his respects to his Lordship. Bishop de Saulx saw the progress of the Catholic faith thanks to the Brothers. He had just obtained from the town council at its meeting of 1 March better lodging for them.³¹

“After a few days’ stay in Alais, he set out for the little town of Les Vans (forty-odd kilometres in increasingly hilly country) and took the route through the parish of Gravières which is at no great distance (5 kms) from it. He was received there like an angel from heaven, and kept there several days, in spite of his resistance, by the prior of the place, a great friend of the virtuous priest who had founded the school of Les Vans, and by whom he had been urged to take on the spiritual direction of the Brothers.”³² This prior had a very high opinion of De La Salle and served his mass for him. But he disliked this attention and got away as soon as he could, and for this reason changed his route when he revisited the area the next year. In the sacristy of the little stone church of Gravières is a portrait of a man in civil costume, looking quite unlike De La Salle. Yet underneath is clearly written: “The portrait of M. Jean-Baptiste De La Salle, priest, doctor in theology, former canon of Rheims, Founder of the Brothers of the Christian Schools.” According to a verbal statement in 1986 of the parish priest of Les Gravières,³³ there is underneath a painting of De La Salle, but the canvas was re-used to paint the portrait of a notable of Les Vans. The one who acquired it assumed this represented De La Salle and added the title.

“Arriving at Les Vans from Gravières, he pleasantly surprised the Brothers who, not expecting to see their Superior ever again in this area, looked upon his visit as a gift from Providence.”³⁴

He saw their patience in teaching the children of Calvinists, and encouraged them. They needed it. Attendance was thin, for Calvinist parents sent their children outside the town to get them instructed by Calvinist teachers. Already Basville (Nicolas Lamoignon de Basville), the ruthless *Intendant* of Languedoc, had been called in by Vincent du Roure before 1711 when he was planning to set up a Catholic school run by the Brothers. This seems to be Maillefer’s meaning³⁵ when he says that when du Roure undertook to found the school, “he found great opposition on their part, but he overcame them by the authority of the *Intendant* of the province, who came expressly on the spot to keep the sectarians in bounds.” “From a careful reading of Maillefer, the event took place during the lifetime of the abbé de Saint Jean

(du Roure), who died on 19 September 1710. Now the will founding the Catholic school dated from 20 June 1708, the year during which the *Intendant* came to the town as the municipal registers relate.” When he saw the number of new converts elected to the town council, “he kept in charge the preceding ones (i.e. councillors) so as not to increase the number of administrators converted to the Catholic religion.”³⁶ The result was underhand warfare by the people against the municipality and in consequence against the school it was supporting. It did not help that Vincent du Roure was a relative of the mayor.

If we go back to when Brother René first visited the school in September 1711, the reason for its dilapidated condition was precisely that children were not attending, and that the town council, Calvinist in sympathy, was unwilling to spend money on a school it did not want. It held back from putting such expenses on the town budget. The bishop got in touch with the *Intendant*. Lamoignon de Basville ordered the consuls to provide the Brothers with satisfactory school furniture, and was obeyed. In 1719, in fact, (see below), the Brothers pointed out that “They (the consuls) provided the furniture because de Lamoignon obliged them to by his decree at the request of the bishop of Uzès.” The population continued to show its objection by sending children elsewhere and by not re-electing deputies. Basville was obstinate and either there were no elections in 1711 or 1712 or he vetoed them as in 1708. The appearance of the Brothers in September 1711 had, therefore, the semblance of a piece of Catholic and royal vexation. It is not surprising that the alvinists tried to make their situation untenable.³⁷

So as to escape the consequences of disobeying royal decrees in the matter, they alleged that the Brothers were teaching reading badly, teaching writing worse and very little arithmetic. The town council sided with them. Even eight years later, in its deliberations of 27 December 1719, it stated, looking back to 1712, that Ginhoux taught well, while the Brothers did not, “the majority of the inhabitants, both old and new Catholics being in the obligation of sending their children outside of the town to learn, so that it would be more advantageous for the said inhabitants to choose for themselves a good master.” The argument was: “The people do not send their children, therefore the Brothers must be teaching badly.” If born Catholics also, as was alleged, were really not sending their children, it would be a first understandable reaction towards people virtually foreigners, not knowing Occitan, wearing an unusual dress and keeping much to themselves. In their counter-plea the Brothers challenged the town council: first, to ask their Superior, if the Brothers’ incompetence was proved, to send better ones; secondly, to ask the bishop to see to the change if on examination they were incompetent. The town did neither: they and the Brothers knew that in 1714 the bishop had examined and approved the Brothers’ capacity to teach.³⁸

The people did not stop at keeping their children away. They were quite determined not to have another faith imposed on them. "They made several attempts on the lives of the Brothers, laid traps for them, set up barricades in the street to prevent them leaving their house. Unable to put them off by so many insults, they gathered together one evening and surrounded the house completely, determined to destroy it and to massacre all they found. They first attacked the door and the windows by throwing stones. Then they tried to climb over the wall. The Brothers during this time were in their oratory praying. The magistrate delivered the Brothers from the danger which threatened them, and at the request of the bishop of Uzès an exemplary punishment was made of the authors of the sedition."³⁹ Blain makes no mention of this event, possibly because he knew De La Salle relied solely on patience and kindness for his educational work. Perhaps also it involved only a handful. "No document of the time alludes to these events: it seems that had they been very grave, the register of the deliberations of the Council would have kept the memory of them, disorders never occurring without expenses."⁴⁰ The bishop did not interfere to forbid attendance at schools outside the town till 1717-18, and even then it was left as a principle, with no arrests made.⁴¹ Success did not come immediately nor fully to the Brothers.

On to Mende, then back through Uzès and Alès to Marseilles

After only a few days acquainting himself with this situation and counselling the Brothers, the Founder left Les Vans for Mende. As the crow flies this journey is about 55 kms, but the road, winding increasingly upwards with many bends was nearer 80 kilometres long. In summer it was a rocky, sunlit countryside, noisy with cicadas, empty of people, but where someone might appear threateningly from a hiding-place. In winter "This journey was for him perilous and uncomfortable: he ran more than once the risk of losing his life passing through the difficult mountains of Gévaudan, fringed with dreadful precipices. So that, gripped by the sharp and rigorous cold which is felt there, he brought to Mende a very much impaired health. But as he was not a man to listen to himself, after a few days' rest he began his visits by that to the bishop of the town who had for him a singular esteem, and who gave him all the imaginable signs of it. The prelate, after having said to the praise of the Brothers what could please him, urged him very much to eat at his table"⁴², but the Founder excused himself on the grounds of the Brothers' rule. Brother Timothy, one of his best men, was Director there it seems, from 1710 to 1712.⁴³

The bishop was no longer de Piencourt, who died 13 December 1707, but Baglion De La Salle (no relation), who was consecrated in 1708. "The eagerness people had in the town to know the Founder of the Brothers brought on

him many visits which took up all his time. (For those who came to see him could not leave him; charmed by the grace of his words and by that air of holiness he bore on his face, they were wearied neither of seeing him nor listening to him.) He therefore made up his mind to leave as soon as possible without noise and to take leave of very few people, lest he should be stopped."

"He did so, and returned to Les Vans with the same perils and the same discomforts that he had had to put up with going there; and from there he left for Uzès so as to clear up a few matters and to present his respects to the bishop."⁴⁴ One likely matter was the situation at Les Vans: the small numbers in the Brothers' classes due to Calvinist hostility. The Founder would not have wanted any compulsion as at Alès, which may explain why the bishop took no action till 1717-18. The bishop himself raised another matter. "The bishop of Uzès was persuaded that the fruit of the Christian Schools required stability in the masters, and on this principle he was opposed to changing the Brothers in the town of Les Vans. But when M. De La Salle had spelt out the inconveniences of this demand, and made them obvious, the good bishop, who wanted only good, gave in to the strength of his reasons. In this way the visit ended to the satisfaction of M. De La Salle, who received great tokens of the prelate's goodness and great promises to protect the Brothers of Les Vans."⁴⁵

The one who changed Brothers from one community to another in this southern area was Brother Ponce. We know that Brother René, the first director, was replaced by Brother Henri in 1712, which would mean in the coming October. Brother Ponce must have had reasons for changing him and notified the bishop. The bishop did not want unilateral decisions to be made in the matter. He was right in wanting teachers to stay longer in a given school. But there were other considerations. The good of the Brother or of the community might be involved: De La Salle could cite the example of the Brother in Versailles. He did not like small communities, and to give young Brothers in such houses the chance of a better experience of community life, he needed to move them around to larger communities. There were also the great difficulties the Brothers had in Les Vans. The bishop could hardly disagree. Brother René may have been changed precisely because this first year with Calvinist children had been too hard for him. We hear of him in Laon in 1717.

Whether or not De La Salle said it, the great argument was the need for the Superior of the Brothers to be free to move them according to the needs of the work of the Society, and not have Brothers tied to a diocese. Evidently, the Brothers were working for the diocese they were in. When the communities were larger, they could be more stable. The change of one Brother as needed made less difference, and the diocese should be better served in consequence. The new Society had still to reach optimum conditions for its mis-

sion. In Les Vans Brother Henri himself was succeeded as Director the next year, 1713, by Brother Maximin, one of the original two, while an Ildefonsus brought the number in the community back to two and in turn gave way to a Brother Matthew before October 1716.⁴⁶

“Continuing his journey, he passed through Alais again and came to a famous town” says Blain.⁴⁷ Maillefer names it: Marseilles.⁴⁸ It was at the end of May, it seems.⁴⁹ By now he had covered over 1100 kilometres.

Overall stability in the northern communities

Here he must have received from Brother Bartholomew the text of the two summonses of 31 May and 15 June. Blain gives a disturbing account of their effect on the Founder that is not in character with what we know of him. “The greatest affliction of the latter was that he imagined that all the Brothers of Paris were already won over to his enemy. It was a vain idea, for the Paris Brothers remained in his regard in his absence what they had been in his presence, submitted and inviolably attached to his person. The occasion of this idea was that Brother Bartholomew, believing he was doing the right thing, had sent him the two summonses in which the holy Founder was qualified as Superior of the Brothers of Rheims and not of those of Paris. These terms, which could only have been dictated by his rival, gave birth in him to suspicion of the fidelity of his Paris disciples, and to fear that they had already become a party to the tricks of his enemy. The holy man, predisposed in this way, followed his usual behaviour, which was to give way, to humiliate himself and to abandon to their own guidance those who seemed to reject his own, as he had done with the Brothers of Mende. Following this preconceived idea, he no longer wished to communicate by letter with Brother Bartholomew, whom he believed to be in the adverse camp.”⁵⁰ (Blain’s reference, incidentally, to trouble in Mende seems misplaced, for we do not hear of it till 1713.)

It was not De La Salle’s way to give in to feelings of this kind. That he could feel things, yes, perhaps very much, but to give way to suspicion does not seem likely. Moreover, he did not just give up and let things slide. His letters to Drolin are proof of a man with a grip on things, who knew how to be a Superior. To say he thought Bartholomew had turned against him fits neither what Blain has already told us about him nor what we otherwise know of the relations between the two.

Now he says that the Brothers in the communities away from Paris took advantage of the situation to take liberties with their usual life-style. “The harm went further than in 1702 (in that year, he records six or seven of the Paris Brothers leaving) and might have ruined the Institute.” Blain must be transcribing from differing memoirs without critical comment. When the

Founder finally returned to Paris, the Institute had not fallen apart; it had not split as Barré's had done, and no house was closed because of departures. No new houses were opened, it is true, implying that the number of novices had dropped, but one cause of this, as we shall see, was outside interference. Blain says the trial purified and strengthened the Institute. He adds a kind of postscript to the Clément affair: "Accused after the death of the Regent (this was in 1723) of undertakings against the State, he (the young Clément) was sent in chains far from Paris."⁵¹ He was imprisoned in the Bastille on 7 July 1723 and condemned on 27 August to be beheaded for corrupt practices in the liquidation of the East India Company. Thanks to his father's influence this penalty was commuted next day to life imprisonment. He left the Bastille for the castle of Saumur on 23 November 1723.⁵²

MARSEILLES, MID-1712 TO JUNE 1713

At the beginning of his account of De La Salle's journeys in the south of France, Rigault⁵³ gives his impression of the handling of this period by Blain and Maillefer that applies particularly to the second stay in Marseilles. The former "dramatises, blows up or simplifies history after the fashion of a hagiographer of the "Golden Legend". All his account of the incidents that marked the "southern" years of the Saint are controlled by this bias: the colours are strong and without tints, the characters pre-determined in attitude, the facts interpreted in order to produce compassion or blame.

"Dom Maillefer keeps his reserve. It is true he would sin rather by omission. At least, if fault there is, he genuinely admits it: he tells us that he has passed over certain unfortunate details that would have put on the spot people he spares and respects. In his family, in his entourage, Jansenist sympathies are evident: he wishes to cause the "Appellants" no harm, even slight." Apart from this, there are uncertainties about dates, and about where people are, and who is to blame for certain attitudes and actions.⁵⁴

Great support in Marseilles. An intended visit to Drolin has to be cancelled

The Company of the Blessed Sacrament, as we have already seen, was very committed to providing Christian education as well as profane instruction for the poor, whether by catering for abandoned children placed in the hospices, or by founding parish schools for boys and girls. In Marseilles a number seem to have been of Jansenist leanings. They first worked between 1684-88 to provide free schools in parishes lacking them, beginning with the three parishes of Les Accoules, Saint Martin and 'La Major', the cathedral parish of St Mary Major. From 1690, they strove to get them to be public schools, that is, taken over, in total or in part, by the municipality. In 1695 they

were able to do this for the one girls' school, run by Barré's Sisters, and in 1704 for the boys' school of St Laurence's parish, when they called in the Brothers. Thirty-four of them subscribed the necessary funds and formed a school board that planned, with the bishop's support, to extend the use of the Brothers to "the four districts of Marseilles". De La Salle must have expressed his hopes and plans for this. He told Gabriel Drolin on 16 April 1706 that the Brothers would soon be starting a school in Marseilles and that "there are schools in four areas of the town, they will have them all eventually."⁵⁵ But where were the Brothers to come from? The need called for a local novitiate. Meanwhile, from 1706 to 1712, the Brothers had only the one school of St Laurence.⁵⁶

For there was no immediate request from the other parishes. The famine of 1709 and then the transfer of Bishop de Vintimille in 1708, the death of his successor in 1709 and the appointment of Belzunce to succeed him in April 1710 held matters up. But things had progressed by 1712. "For a long time people desired to bring him to this city. As soon as his arrival was known, several clerics of merit came to see him in order to discuss with him the means of extending his Christian schools in the town."⁵⁷ He was evidently all in favour, but he had clearly planned a visit to Rome as part of his journey south, and must have written to Drolin on the matter. He would therefore have explained to these members of the school Board that he would give the schools his attention as soon as he returned.

We are about mid-June,⁵⁸ when he had been only a short time in Marseilles. The fact that a priest, a certain M. Ricordeau, on whom he gives some information in his next letter to Drolin, was going to Rome, may have been a factor deciding him to travel then, so as to have a companion. But "a pressing affair" turned up. Whatever it was, it turned out not to be a matter that could be decided quickly. It "had not been achieved" when he wrote to Drolin. Poutet surmises that it was a matter of being asked to provide one Brother for the moment for the cathedral parish. De La Salle would have had to take him from some other region of France, and, it seems, this was refused because someone from the area was wanted. As there were no local Brothers yet, this might have meant moving a Brother from St Laurence's or from Avignon, as having some experience of the South. The Company of the Blessed Sacrament had had a successful school in the cathedral parish, as we have seen, since 1688, and in 1704 they drew up an agreement, planning to provide schools for each parish run by one or two clerics they would propose to the bishop. "As often, in the Company, they aimed at achievements at town level." It was for this reason that they allowed 50 children from St Martin's parish to profit by this school. But there was some disagreement about the project. The bishop may have wished to entrust the school to the Brothers of the

Christian Schools, but he could not go against the contract. He would have to win over the signatories. There were people for and against, but it was Joseph Arnaud, parish priest of Les Accoules, who objected that the Brothers were not clerics, and he and others of like mind must have swayed the rest.⁶⁰ Had all agreed, then De La Salle's hopes in 1706 of having all the schools of Marseilles could have been realised. This is what the bishop must have held out to him.

The sailing he had booked and cancelled took place sometime after 8 June, a date justified below. It must have been a disappointment for De La Salle not to meet Drolin and see the Roman situation for himself. The bishop's offer was, nevertheless, in line with what he had been hoping for these six years: to be given the running of the four boys' schools in Marseilles and to build up the community of two Brothers into a more healthily sized community. His sentiments were perhaps less ones of resignation than of a real joy, tempered with regret. The bishop wanted four extra Brothers to take over the schools at les Accoules and at St Martin.⁶¹ "Almost all the parish priests of the town wanted to entrust their schools as a whole to the Brothers" writes Blain, and Maillefer says the same.⁶² The Founder was willing, but he asked to be able to start a novitiate in order to train local candidates. "The favourable dispositions in which he found these people gave him the thought of setting up a novitiate in Marseilles. That solved the difficulties there would be in taking from distant provinces the subjects necessary for all the schools he planned to establish. He would form Brothers from the area itself who, consequently, would be in a better position to produce fruit than strangers who were used, neither to the air nor the manners of Provence. He proposed a plan which was received very favourably.

"He even found facilities he could not have dared hope for. Each one was eager to contribute to this establishment. The bishop of Marseilles was the first who showed his zeal. Most of the parish priests of the town joined in. Many other persons took interest: among others, one gave funds. Several gave guarantees for the future. A house was leased. It was immediately furnished. People vied with one another to provide novices. The number was soon filled. Each day was marked by some new favour and it seemed that the thing to do was simply to keep in step. M. De La Salle, full of joy, nevertheless looked ahead. He feared that all this great fire would go out in a short while. He mistrusted a too great vivacity that like the lightning, passes quickly by and disappears suddenly. He had endured so many contradictions in his other foundations, that he did not predict too much from the speed with which this one was being done."⁶³

Letter to Drolin, mid-July 1712

The Founder gave the reason for cancelling his voyage in his letter to Brother Gabriel Drolin of mid-July 1712.⁶⁴ Although this letter is not dated it helps us with other dates and contains interesting information. De La Salle says he has answered all Drolin's previous letters, which seems to imply that Drolin had written that he had not received any replies.

"I would have liked, my very dear Brother, to go and see you and I was ready to go with a certain M. Ricordeau, canon of a collegiate church of Troyes who went to Rome a month ago, but at that time a matter cropped up which delayed this voyage because it was urgent. But it has not, however, been achieved."

This 'month ago', linked with another date, gives us a clue as to when this letter was sent. M. Ricordeau, to be able to get on in Rome, had asked people in Marseilles if they had letters for Rome he was willing to deliver. He was given one by the *Intendant* general of the galleys in Marseilles, who wrote to a banker at the court of Rome on 8 June 1712: "The favourable occasion of M. Ricordeau, canon of St Stephen's Church, Troyes, means that I have the honour to write to you the present." This is our guiding date. The boat must have left not long after this. Ricordeau also took with him a letter for Drolin and likewise brought back the answer. The Founder, replying to this, as he says, a month after his cancelled voyage is writing therefore about mid-July.

Drolin must have asked again for a Brother. "It will be difficult for me to send you a Brother before I have begun a novitiate in this area. I am going to start one immediately, since they want people of the area because of the difference there is between the language and that of France. As soon as the novitiate is functioning, I shall go to see you and discuss matters with you." So he still intended to go to Rome. He refers to a request Drolin had made about how to get a copy of his certificate of baptism. This must mean he had been asked for one as part of a dossier towards being officially recognised as master of a papal school. The Founder had made enquiries at once.

A Jesuit preaches on the importance of the education of youth

The novitiate opened in August, as we know from the next letter to Drolin. Maillefer wrote in his first biography in 1723: "The novitiate was flourishing and in consequence one had every reason to hope for the future. Those who had been the main authors of this good work made effort at the same time to extend the free schools to the different quarters of the town. The necessary funds had been provided. It was only a matter now of bringing in the Brothers. It was decided to establish schools in parishes where there had not yet been any and where none had been asked. A Jesuit was enlisted to preach in St Martin's parish to exhort his audience to endow one. He was listened to

favourably. Each one showed eagerness to give, so that very soon the situation was ready for beginning the classes.”⁶⁵ The fact that François Aubert, the parish priest, called in a Jesuit shows he was not of Jansenist sympathies. This was an important occasion, for the consuls, that is, the members of the town council, were present.⁶⁶ Blain says the Jesuit spoke on “the importance and the necessity to give youth a good education and the necessary instruction”, and that his sermon took place in Lent,⁶⁷ which would have been before De La Salle came. It fits in better with the above if it had been in Advent 1712, and also with the opening of a school in St Martin’s parish on March 1st 1713.⁶⁸ We have seen that the Company of the Blessed Sacrament had already provided charity schools for three parishes. The appeal for money could only be for providing for two Brothers for the remaining St Martin’s parish and for the marked increase in school numbers that could be expected.

Meanwhile the Founder did his best to train the postulants sent to him. Maillefer says that because of this care, he ceased writing to any of his communities.⁶⁹ Blain repeats this and gives other reasons: “the interest of the Institute” demanded this suspension of all relations so that his enemies could not turn against his own their anger towards him. This might apply to Paris, if the police intercepted confidential letters, but not for all the other houses.⁷⁰ The simplest reason may be Blain’s earlier one, namely, that only two or three knew where De La Salle was, and that the latter was encouraging the Brothers by his silence to turn to Bartholomew.

Blain contradicts himself by adding that “M. De La Salle however, kept up correspondence with the Brother in charge of the novitiate of St Yon”, forgetting moreover that the novitiate was back in Paris, and not seeming to realise that the novice-master was Bartholomew. He seems either not to see that the notes he has before him, sent in by various Brothers, sometimes refer to the same thing, or he does not check on what he has written previously.

Leter to Gabriel Drolin of 16 December, 1712

The Founder had sent his mid-July letter after his cancelled visit to Gabriel by the hand of a curate from Paris whom he must have met in Marseilles. Drolin replied to this, too, and De La Salle answered it through the post. Whether that letter reached its destination or not, we do not have it. A third letter from Gabriel arrived early in December, and the Founder answered it on 16 December.⁷¹ (Communication was quicker for the time being, since Marseilles was much nearer Rome than Paris.)

He blames Drolin for lending a fair sum to the Polish Count or for lending any at all. The money was possibly lent to cover Miaczinski’s entrance fees to courses at the University (the Sapienza). It is clear that Gabriel is no longer in difficulty over money. He is paid as a master of a papal school, even if

meagrely, and he may still have some lodgers. De La Salle goes on: "This is only the third letter (of yours) since M. Ricordeau left, and I have answered them all: the first, by the curate of St Martial's, Paris; the second by the post, and here is the answer to the third. I have answered all your letters since I have been in this part of the country." Drolin must have said he had sent other letters. One topic must often have been the sending of another Brother. "I think I can certainly send you a second one, but it cannot be till after Easter", which implies he will send one of the new novices, as he says more clearly below. This 'second one' is interesting. A papal school was not one of the district schools and was beyond any action by the little masters. Perhaps a second Brother could now be sent. Against this, none was actually sent till 1728.

Several times in the remainder of the letter, he is sounding out Gabriel on the basis of information brought back by M. Ricordeau, yet at the same time trying to check how reliable it is. "Is it true that you are wearing a long robe and a long mantle as M. Ricordeau tells me who came back in the Pope's galleys? If that is so, how can you expect me to arrange for another Brother to be with you, since both must be dressed the same way and wear the habit of the community. You also have, it is said, a very small hat. The Vincentian Fathers do not change hat in Italy." We know Gabriel soon wore a longer robe (see p. 658). As for hats, while the Vincentians established in their large house would have a stock of clothing, Gabriel could only buy the current clerical headgear when his was worn out. "I would be very pleased that a second (Brother) served to withdraw you from frequent activities with the world, and that the Pope's allowance passed to him."

But then he recalls the basic reason of the Roman foundation. "I look upon what has begun in Rome as something of importance, but we need to wait till the novitiate I began four months ago is well organised, either for me to go and see you, or to send you someone belonging to these parts." Either he judged a man from Mediterranean France would be at home in many ways in Rome, or that he would be attached to this southern province and more easily reached from there. Incidentally, there is no sign in this letter that the novitiate is in danger of folding up.

He warns Drolin not to trust M. Ricordeau too much. He also speaks in severe terms of another suspended priest about whom he is more informed. "There is also a priest for whom I found work, who stayed a certain time with us, who is suspended for having gone to war since he became a priest and who at present is fifty-four or fifty-five." He is positively against his being reinstated. "It would be a good thing both for him and for the Church that he should not be reinstated. He is called, I believe, M. Celisier. He is from Rouen itself, for he changed his name and kept his army name which is de

Saint Georges.” Nothing certain is known about this priest, but these words tally with an account in Blain⁷² of a ‘soldier-priest’ who “came with a note from M. De La Salle to be taken into the house (in Paris, presumably), and he stayed there two years. He was given work in the school, to take him out of idleness, and boredom.” De La Salle hoped to be of some service to him, but he wanted to try his fortune again, this time by going to Rome and trying to get a benefice in his own native area by competing with others for the purpose, “waiting,” as Blain sarcastically remarks, “for one of those moments desired by cupidity when he could be the only one to appear for the test and find no competitor cleverer than himself.”

To continue with the letter: “M. Ricordeau told me that there is a master in one of the Papal schools who is very old whose school a Brother could easily get, and that there are only three schools of the Pope in Rome. Is that true?” There were in fact only three schools. Throughout this letter there is his keenness about the Brothers’ making progress in Rome, and his usual close attention and sharpness of observation. “He says also you do not have thirty pupils and that you were not working hard at your school.” From what is said further in the letter, M. Ricordeau seemed to have the type of mind that likes running down people and tries to get something for nothing. He saw the schools reopen after the hot summer; the children may not yet have returned in full strength, since there was no obligation to come. Many could have been ill with malaria.

“It is a good thing for you to go and teach catechism to the poor French people in the two hospices you told me about. It would be a good idea to continue the practice.” These hospices have already been referred to (p. 511). Drolin had taken on this work in addition to his teaching and may have wanted to drop it because of age and his school work. “M. Ricordeau is speaking quite unfairly to say that the Brothers in Troyes had been minded to come to blows.” There must have been a quarrel: the Founder does not give a flat denial, implying that he has heard of it, which shows he had some communication with the north. Brother Joseph may have written and mentioned it. Ricordeau seems not to tell untruths, but to put a malicious slant on what he picks up. So in the next sentences: “He says you only gave him to eat once, although you say seven or eight times. I gave him a meal only once on the way out and not at all on his return. He would, however, have wanted to come here often for that.

“How comes it that I have been mentioned to the **Queen of Poland**?” This was the French wife of **John Sobieski**, king of Poland, who died in 1696. She took up residence in Rome in 1699 on the Via Sistina near the church of Trinità dei Monti, and so not far from Drolin. Count Miaczenski must have told him he had mentioned De La Salle to her. “My coming will have been

much delayed.” That seems a somewhat regretful look back to the original date he had given Drolin. But come he will. However, events decided otherwise. And now, another gap in correspondence: the next letter we have to Drolin was not till four years later.

1713

Trouble in Mende. The Founder visits the community

Trouble in the South was growing for the Founder. A Brother Médard who had made his novitiate in 1702 and began teaching in Calais had been sent from there to Marseilles in 1708 and then to Grenoble, where he behaved so badly that the founders of the school had him sent away. He went to Dijon where he left the Institute. He sought to come back in 1712 and was forgiven by his Superior who invited him to the novitiate in Marseilles for a while and then sent him to Mende, to replace Brother Timothy whom he appointed Director of novices. This would be December-January 1713. In the course of the coming year Médard made light of community life along with a Brother Isidore who had made his perpetual vows in 1705 but of whom little otherwise is known.

De La Salle came to visit the community⁷³ some time after placing Médard there and before April (since Médard absented himself then without permission — see further). It involved a journey of about 260 kilometres in each direction, half of it in hilly country. Fearing that one or the other might be changed the two Brothers went to the bishop and the mayor to get their backing in favour of staying. There had, indeed, been too many changes in Mende since the school opened in 1707. The explanation may be similar to that for the many changes at Les Vans. Beginning with Brother Ponce, there had been nine Brothers, although there were always three present at any given time, which meant a certain stability and continuity. And three, Anthony, Sebastian and Timothy had been excellent. Although the Founder at first stayed in the house, he was told he was not wanted. There certainly was not much room in their cramped quarters over the little town hall, but that was not why they wanted him out.

He must certainly have intended to change at least one Brother. But when he went to pay his respects to the bishop and mentioned the need for a change, he was told categorically he must not change these Brothers, and that any sent to replace them would be sent away. He was surprised to get the same answer from the mayor. Yet he stayed with this community, “as a fourth Brother (Blain is not sure of the number), trying to win over by his good example those he could not correct by authority.” The two Brothers found his presence objectionable and decided to send him away. “One of them took it

on himself and in an off-hand way told him with insolence that if he wanted to stay in their house he must pay for his keep.”⁷⁴ He could have argued on the basis of the foundation contract, that it was he, in fact, who had the right to change them. But he said nothing, and left, “and found shelter in a strange house.” It was in fact with the Capuchin Fathers. “He had asked them for hospitality when the Brothers of Mende had shown him the door, and had been received by them with much charity.”⁷⁵

Some time after this he was given a lodging by a Mademoiselle de St Denis. She was a person of good birth who had wealth and used it for the upkeep and Christian education of a great number of children of Calvinist parents. Several other young women joined her in this and formed a community called the Daughters of the Christian Union. When she heard of what had happened to De La Salle, she thought of profiting by his presence. “She offered to see totally to his upkeep, and he accepted. She drew from him excellent advice for the guidance of her new community.”⁷⁶

It is worth pointing out that the bishop (who was also governor of the town) did not help when he installed the Brothers over the little town hall which continued to be used for public meetings. This was still the case in 1742. In an Instructive Memoir of that year, the Brothers explained that they were in perpetual discomfort. The children had to climb up to the first floor by outside stairs, open to all weathers; the classroom was above the town hall chamber. Town assemblies were very frequent and well attended, especially when the price of bread and of meat was being regulated. Besides all the shouting to put up with, the children themselves were ordered not to make the slightest noise and to take their clogs off. In spite of all the care taken, there were often complaints. “We have to act as servants to the town servants, and provide them with brooms, stoves and fire shovel...Every Saturday we have a crowd of artisans (evidently serge-weavers) who swear, shout, argue and murmur because of the confiscation of a few serges of which we are the guardians, and we have difficulty because of the goings and comings to prepare and take our meals.”⁷⁷ For Brothers not well committed, these circumstances could be incentives to finding compensations in an easier life and, even if the memoir is making the most of any grievance, one can understand why Brothers often needed to be moved. It is worth remembering the tough conditions those early Brothers often lived in.

To return to the two Brothers Médard and Isidore, they acted in fact as they liked. Médard, because of the cold at the end of the winter, left Mende without authorisation at the beginning of April but caught pleurisy on the journey. He reached Alès at the beginning of Holy Week and immediately went to bed and died on Easter Monday.⁷⁸ This was 17 April. Isidore, the Brother who had showed De La Salle the door, was now on his own. “He had himself

tonsured, took a servant girl and committed a thousand scandalous liberties under the habit of the Institute he no longer belonged to.” He had to keep up appearances because Bishop de Piencourt had inserted the clause in his will that the masters must belong to the Brothers of the Christian Schools. Blain wrongly says he carried on like this with his companion for ten years and both died of the plague (which he sees as a due punishment) when it spread north from Marseilles in 1721.

In fact, - to look ahead - Brother Henri was sent from Les Vans to be director here in September 1713. (He was still at les Vans on 21 August 1713, but not by 22 January 1714.⁷⁹) He got rid of this Brother Isidore - perhaps the bishop and magistrates had learnt their lesson and backed up Henry - who went to Paris and told tales to the community there about his Director, about which more later.⁸⁰ Henri was now on his own. Through lack of recruits, De La Salle had to leave him so for a while, and then was able to send him a Brother Nicholas. It was these two who were there till their death of the plague in 1721, after which there were no Brothers in Mende for two years. The school remained empty, but finally it was filled with three other Brothers whom the bishop of Mende and several leading citizens of the town asked for towards 1724.⁸¹

To return to 1713: the Founder left the town without having succeeded in winning over Isidore to a better way of life. “It was one of his keenest pains as he admitted himself, and he needed to call up all the strength he was capable of so as not to break down.”⁸² He may not have stayed long in Mende. Allowing for the long journey back, perhaps he was in Marseilles early April, to find the atmosphere quite changed.

The two Brothers in Marseilles turn the School Board against De La Salle

If the novitiate was his prime care, he also saw to the spiritual reinvigoration and growth of the other Brothers in the South. While he deliberately left the northern communities to the care of Brother Bartholomew, he “contented himself with watching over those who were within reach of Marseilles. From time to time he sent for the Brothers of the neighbouring towns and gave them retreats and strengthened them against laxity. Some of them, accustomed for several years to breathing an air of freedom...supported with impatience the exactitude he insisted on.” Concerning this and later talk of Brothers leaving, it is worth remembering how few these Brothers were and how infrequently they could be gathered in Marseilles. There were five in Avignon, nearly 100 kms away; three at Alès, 170 kms away; two at Les Vans, 210 kms distant, and one or two Brothers in Mende, 260 kms away. With the two Brothers in St Laurence’s parish, Marseilles, that makes only thirteen or

fourteen, and we know of trouble only in Mende and Marseilles.

The two in this town “were the first to show their discontent.”⁸⁴ We know that De La Salle disliked communities of two. From September 1712, therefore, he required the Brothers on St Laurence’s parish to take up quarters in the novitiate, for he saw clearly that their style of life was not ideal. But they had led too easy a life to be happy with the regular life of the Brothers. Yet their Superior “demanded from them in that, nothing that they had not practised before he sent them to Provence.”⁸⁵

To get back to their own style of community life, the two Brothers, in his absence in Mende, went to members of the School Board that employed them and presented the situation as prejudicial to their work. Having to go to and from the novitiate every day diminished the time of their presence in the parish, they said. “They added with even more malice that they made it their duty to inform these gentlemen that a part of the endowment fund (of the school) turned to the profit of the novitiate, and that it served for the upkeep of the novices.”⁸⁶

These arguments were taken at face value. Basically, the founders of the school had acted purely as citizens of Marseilles, concerned only with the benefit to their town. In their haste to get a school in one of their parishes, they had not discussed with De La Salle the wider issues proper to a society established in many towns and with a centralised form of government suited to that situation. While it was they who benefited by this wider experience, they were unwilling to see that funds for the novitiate could legitimately be taken out of the income accruing to the Brothers if it still left their maintenance catered for. Novices, likewise, were not just for this one town. The Superior of the Brothers had to be free to move them around. It does not seem to have registered with them that the two Brothers and the excellent man De La Salle had put in charge of “their” novitiate came from outside Marseilles.

With regard to the Brothers in St Laurence’s parish, the Board again was too used to seeing them in a way under their control, and were also perhaps too friendly with them. They therefore asked De La Salle to release the two Brothers from the need to go to and from the novitiate house and to leave things as before. When he declined, they turned against him. The Brothers’ Society was not the compliant, easy-going affair they had gathered from seeing how those two Brothers lived. It had its ideals, and its horizons were far larger than theirs.

A change of atmosphere

The two Brothers’ discontent was not the basic cause of this change of attitude. It fuelled a latent opposition which erupted following on the Jesuit’s

sermon. The public announcement that the traditional clerics were to be replaced as schoolmasters by a lay community caused furious debate. The clerics concerned, moreover, would hardly accept losing their occupation. There would certainly be heated disagreements about teaching to read French first. Again, would not this be one more religious community for the town to support? Would it have to contribute to the upkeep of the novitiate if the masters came from there? Finally, a school run by the Brothers would mean surely that some of the great number of little masters in the town were now going to lose pupils.

Among the funds that had been provided so readily in view of supporting the Brothers, those for St Martin's school were in fact provided entirely by a François de Gratian. Yves Poutet is able to quote from a document concerning St Martin's parish which states that because "there was still lacking in 1712 a public and free school for the education of children whose parents are without means to see to it", a trader, François Gratian, had invested 3000 livres to provide 150 livres annual allowance in order to employ a cleric at this work.⁸⁷ This was before the Jesuit preached on the second Sunday in Lent (or Advent). His sermon favoured this project as much as that of bringing in the Brothers. You had, as at Lyons, people on both sides: those who were used to having a cleric, and those who wanted this new type of very effective lay teacher. What does surface is a certain clerical clinging to old practices, a dislike of some of the practices of this new lay community and of some of its school methods. If opposition to the Brothers were to express itself, it would be by arranging that the new or refounded school on St Martin's parish was run by a cleric. This in fact happened. The school opened on 1 March 1713, with a cleric in charge.⁸⁸

Similarly, the parish priest of les Accoules, Joseph Arnaud, who had ample funds from a legacy to endow a school, surprised the bishop by telling him that the benefactors consented to draw up contracts of endowment only if clerics did the teaching. Yet it seems it was the clergy in their first enthusiasm who had got the bishop to dissuade De La Salle from his journey to Rome for the sake of taking over their schools.⁸⁹ Maillefer, writing in 1723 and who was here better informed than Blain,⁹⁰ writes on this developing opposition, as far as it concerned Aubert:

"People did not fail, meanwhile (while the School Board was supporting the Brothers of St Laurence's), to work at founding a school on St Martin's parish. The day had been decided on for sending there two Brothers of the Institute, but the parish priest who in spite of the esteem he had for M. De La Salle, could not appreciate most of the practices that were in use in his Institute, thwarted this undertaking in an underhand way. He got those who had seen to this matter and had provided the funds, to ask that their destination be

changed and that they be used to maintain some clerics who would take on themselves to do the teaching. He persuaded them that this would be more useful and more in keeping with the interests of the parish, because while teaching, they (these clerical teachers) would at the same time be in a position to render other services to the Church. As this parish priest was of good birth and had credit, he was able to handle minds so well that he won everyone over to his opinion. When he felt sure on that score, he took care to win over the bishop of Marseilles. He told him, giving it an air of truth, that those who had endowed the school in his parish had changed their minds about the Brothers, that they were minded to give the school to clerics, and, to the objections raised by the bishop, he added that if the first plan were insisted upon, the founders were determined to withdraw the funds and apply them to other works of charity.”

“The prelate, who knew of the matter only from what the parish priest told him, did not know to what he could attribute this sudden change. He was inclined towards the Brothers of the Christian Schools. He was so persuaded of their usefulness that he would have liked to obtain this help for all the parishes of his diocese. But he believed that it was a prudent thing to treat people’s views tactfully at the beginning of his episcopate. And so he let things run their course without showing his displeasure.

“When the parish priest saw he had no further opposition to fear from his bishop, he went to find M. De La Salle, gave him in full detail the apparent reasons why people had changed their minds about the Brothers, and tried to make them acceptable to him. M. De La Salle had no difficulty in consoling himself over this loss. He answered at once: ‘God be blessed, apparently it was not his will that this foundation should take place’, and thanked the parish priest for the trouble he had put himself to. As soon as he had left him, he went to prostrate himself in order to adore the orders of Providence.”⁹¹ This preference by the clergy for clerical teachers might have an old-fashioned attitude behind it, but there was nothing sinister about it in itself. But it hid the real reason for opposing De La Salle.

What part did Jansenism play in this change of opinion?

As already noted, Blain gives Jansenism among the clergy and other founders and benefactors⁹² as the real motive of this return to the choice of a clerical schoolmaster. Even though attachment to traditional practices seems one reason, there is also truth in this one. Granted that, as Poutet says,⁹³ Jansenism was not that year the hot topic it became the year after with the publication of the Bull *Unigenitus*, yet it had become a live issue again there since the turn of the century. “The spirit of the sect had spread in Marseilles, as in the whole of France, among the theologians and among the members of

an upper bourgeoisie that at the same time gave the example of piety and zeal.”⁹⁴

The long “Clementine Peace” that began in 1669 ended in 1701, when the debate on grace and free will flared up again. Louis XIV and the French bishops pressed Clement XI to publish a condemnation of the ‘respectful silence’ that Antoine Arnauld had counselled. This he did by the Bull *Vineam Domini* of 1705. As he had expected, it only caused more polemic. The nuns of Port-Royal held out; in 1709 Louis had the community dispersed and the convent demolished in 1711. The king found that the *Parlement* of Paris was finding it difficult to accept the Bull, and that Jansenism had considerable support even among the episcopate.

Fénelon, who had attacked Jansenism in 1704, resumed his campaign against it in 1710 and against Quesnel. De Noailles was a supporter of Quesnel, and refused Louis’s order to take back his approbation of Quesnel’s work. Part of the hierarchy sided with the archbishop, and a schism threatened. Louis again turned to Rome. Clement XI was aware that a new condemnation would have little good effect, but at length he signed the *Bull Unigenitus Dei Filius* on 8 September 1713, condemning 101 propositions from Quesnel’s *Moral Reflections on the New Testament*. Immediately it produced a polarisation.

Although this had not yet occurred in Marseilles when he arrived there, De La Salle had come to a city already in effervescence, as Rigault puts it.⁹⁵ For one element in the city, he soon stood out objectionably as one who was faithful to the See of Rome. Speaking of Arnaud (i.e. Joseph Arnaud, parish priest of les Accoules), although he does not mention his name and elsewhere confuses him with Aubert, Blain says he: “had approached M. De La Salle and had struck up a great relationship with him.” At first the Jansenists did not reveal themselves; then “the cleric of great renown made the first steps. He did not go far without noticing in the manner and mien of M. De La Salle that he had no relish for the new doctrine.”⁹⁶ He says elsewhere⁹⁷ that the Jansenists had regular meetings and discussions to which they invited De La Salle. The usual topic was “the matters of the day”, which necessarily meant at the time the revived disputes around Quesnel. The Founder took no part until he was asked, and then expressed his own position. It was after the Jesuit’s sermon that this group formed a secret cabal, according to Blain⁹⁸ led by Arnaud.

Other factors in the opposition, which becomes very defamatory. Brother Ponce leaves the Institute

If opposition to the Founder’s religious stance (which would also irritate the Gallicanism of many of the clergy) was a factor in the new development, there were others. It is not easy to see to what extent different influences

played their part. The ideals and practices De La Salle was teaching the novices (and which they had not seen in the two teaching Brothers) seemed to have been too much for some, and a kind of reproach for them and others. People wanted him to abolish many of the practices of the Brothers as being too constricting, and when he refused, they taxed him with stubbornness and severity. "They detached themselves from him insensibly, avoided him as a tacit censor of their conduct, discredited him in the town and made him odious to any who wished to listen to them. They did not stop at this. They worked to weaken his novitiate. They went further: they released among the public a scurrilous satire full of calumnies. M. De La Salle, attacked in his reputation, made it a duty to sustain the dignity of his character."⁹⁹ He is said to have done this within the bounds of "Christian charity", in defending the lifestyle of the new society. If he defended himself, which was not his practice, one suspects that the libellous tract contained charges about his faith that he would not leave unchallenged.

To resort to defamatory pamphlets seems excessive, yet Maillefer, who is not carried away like Blain, goes on: "They were so embittered that matters were taken to extremes ("they took vengeance to extremes", he added in 1740). They cheated the Brothers out of the hope of spreading further in these parts. The novitiate faded away through lack of subjects. The Brothers, even the most settled in their vocation, were shaken, and some abandoned the Institute."¹⁰⁰

"While all this was going on in Marseilles, those of the Brothers in other parts of Provence and who knew only imperfectly what was at issue, gave credence to the false rumours which were being spread against M. De La Salle. They began to murmur and complain about him openly. There were some more rash who had the boldness to tell him that it seemed he had come to Marseilles only to destroy and not to build up." Maillefer here seems to have vague information; Blain identifies these as the two Brothers in St Laurence's school, not Brothers elsewhere.¹⁰¹ "He (De La Salle) felt this reproach more keenly than all he had had to suffer so far. He felt all its bitterness. He strove in vain to win back these estranged minds. They abandoned him and turned towards his enemies."¹⁰²

What is unfortunately true was that Brother Ponce failed to give a lead to the Brothers of the region. He had been becoming more and more independent in his centre at Avignon. He finally left the Brothers. "This fall was neither sudden nor precipitate. It was done with all the sang-froid of a man who was preparing for it at length. He took care, before leaving the house, to strip it and give himself a good supply of money. When he found he had a considerable sum, he made off with his booty."¹⁰³ He left in 1713 or 1714, for his name is not on the *Catalogue of Brothers* drawn up in 1714. In spite of the

impression Maillefer gives of a notable proportion of the handful of Brothers in the South losing faith in their Founder, we only know of Ponce who left; Médard and Isidore's behaviour had other causes. Even the two in Marseilles seem to have stayed.

Two postscripts: Joseph Arnaud and his friends after the Bull *Unigenitus*. An explanation of Maillefer's position

Joseph Arnaud and some of his friends came out into the open as Jansenists after the Bull *Unigenitus*. In 1714 he resigned from his parish and appealed to a General Council against the Pope's decision. He was exiled from the province and fled to Paris where d'Argenson arrested him. It is an indication of his watchfulness from which De La Salle had had to flee. He was set free and died in 1733. One of Arnaud's clergy also appealed against Belzunce and against the Pope, and was exiled in 1736. Another opponent of De La Salle, Canon Surles, of the same parish, was banned from exercising his ministry in the diocese and died in 1743. Arnaud's first curate also appealed and was denied the last sacraments. Les Accoules had evidently had a Jansenist clergy. Some of the leading laity in the promotion of schools on St Martin's parish also refused to submit. Yet it was Jansenists like these who in 1723-4 found the means of providing for three Brothers to take over the school. It was a paradox. They had never made charity schools centres for spreading their theological views. Perhaps they came to appreciate the strict life of the Brothers and also their staying out of the controversies of the time, but especially their competence, even to the point of giving up their old idea that only clerics should be schoolmasters.¹⁰⁴

With reference to the attitude held by Dom Maillefer, who, it may be recalled, was a monk of St Remi's abbey in Rheims, it is a fact that the Constitution *Unigenitus* was resisted by the ecclesiastical province of Rheims more than anywhere else except Paris, whether by the university, the cathedral chapter, parish priests and religious communities. Rheims was the most organised Jansenist centre outside Paris. It was a great depot for Jansenist books from Paris or smuggled along the frontier from Holland. The faculty of theology was the only one other than the Sorbonne to oppose the Bull. It had the protection of Le Tellier, but his successor in 1715 ordered acceptance of the Bull under pain of excommunication. Three canons left Rheims rather than subscribe. One was Jean-François Maillefer, the biographer's elder brother. In 1716 Jean-Louis, De La Salle's own brother, refused to accept the Bull and never retracted. He died excommunicated in 1724.¹⁰⁵ Among six other relatives of De La Salle who became Appellants was Dom Maillefer, his nephew and biographer. His Jansenism appears in his biography of De La Salle in 1723. In the foreword to his 1723 version he wrote: "I have been

careful to spare the reputation of several persons of merit (the phrase among Jansenists for their own kind) who, through views one has not wanted to go into, caused pain to M. De La Salle.” He seems to have been a little less defensive in his 1740 version. He rephrases the foreword: “I have also made it my duty to suppress certain secret intrigues, into which personal interest had slipped, so as to spare...etc”.

DE LASALLE HAS A CRISIS OF FAITH IN HIMSELF AS FOUNDER

He retires to the hermitage of Saint Baume and then to the monastery of St Maximin

After the collapse of his great hopes for the spread of the work of Christian education in Marseilles, and especially after the Brothers in the South seemed to have lost faith in him, “he began to doubt seriously whether his undertaking came from God. He had recourse to prayer, but he was so downcast that he no longer experienced those favours which usually eased his pain when temptation was at its strongest. He believed that his sins were the cause of it. With this in mind, he resolved to go away and yield to the storm, ‘persuaded’, he said, ‘that my absence may calm my enemies and inspire them with thoughts of peace for my dear children.’ He withdrew in effect to the **hermitage of St Maximin**, ten or twelve leagues from Marseilles, possibly at the end of April or early May. It was there that, rid of all the worries caused by the obstacles that were being continually put in his way, he applied himself with a quite new fervour to prayer, to the meditation of the sacred books and to the most laborious exercises of penance. He there enjoyed a profound peace and such a perfect tranquillity that they gave him the idea of ending his days there, unknown to men.”¹⁰⁶ The Founder did not often reveal how he felt or about his relations with God, but he did open up to some, for Maillefer is here able to quote him to that effect. As he wrote the above in 1723, Maillefer must have taken it from Brother Bernard’s manuscript, and the source could have been Brother Timothy. We have also a statement made in 1742 by Brother Bernardin that will be seen later.

To be exact, De La Salle withdrew first, not to St Maximin’s, but to the cave of Sainte Baume, on top of a sheer rock, 1147 metres high “above the foliage of a fresh and lush forest. All around was the sparse grass between the stones, the broom, the gorse, a few pinewoods; the perfume of flowers of lavender and all the Provencal light on the austere countryside. The cave hollowed out near the top sheltered, according to tradition, the penance of Saint Mary Magdalen...John Baptist De La Salle came there on foot along the winding mountain paths...He then retired to the monastery of Saint Maximin for forty days, ‘following the office each night’”.¹⁰⁷

Blain repeats¹⁰⁸ Maillefer with regard to the Founder’s doubting whether

his work really came from God or whether it was his own idea. He seems to have gone through a crisis, which had the character of a spiritual trial such as God allows those in close union with him to experience. He doubted whether God's call, as he had always believed, was at the basis of his work. He cross-examined himself and found, as all those close to God do, that his sins were the obstacle. And why was it that everywhere (an exaggeration) trouble arose around his person? But there would also appear to be psychological grounds to this collapse of morale. His behaviour suggest a nervous breakdown as a result of physical fatigue and stress.

He was a man who was ambitious to see God's work develop. He was boosted by success, and depressed by failure. Even if he controlled his reactions, they were there. Among the many signatures left by him, Brother Aroz has discovered that differences psychologically significant can be detected in times of opposition.¹⁰⁹ He had seen in 1711 the great hopes Marseilles held out, and had returned for that reason the next year. Here, as he told Drolin, he expected the Brothers to have the four boys' schools for the poor of the town; here he hoped to start a novitiate that would serve the South as St Yon was serving the North. Everything had at first gone remarkably well, and now, total failure. Had he been too sanguine? Had he not read the signs aright?

A second consideration is that De La Salle was sixty-two. It was old age in those days. (Blain speaks later of "that great age, having died in the 67th or 68th year of his life, during which even in his mortal illness he kept until the last hours all the strength and presence of his mind."¹¹⁰) Even with the strong constitution and the great will power he must have had, his energy could no longer be the same. His rheumatism was a great drag, several times confining him to bed. His long journeys must have worn him out, his trials used up much nervous energy. At his age a person realises the tempo of life is changing. Even if he can do many things still, the superabundant energy of early and middle years is fading and it is time to leave the more active things to younger people. Life, — and it is God's will — is calling him to be more contemplative, even if still calls him to serve others, perhaps differently.

It was maybe in line with this new way of experiencing life that the Founder would have liked to end his days in a contemplative monastery. Both biographers relate this, but neither says he intended to translate this into fact. He remained very attached to the Brothers. But Maillefer, like Blain after him, says: "It is true that at the time of his greatest agitation ("the time when he was most agitated by different thoughts on the situation of the affairs created for him without respite", he says in 1740), it came to his mind several times to withdraw to some parish in Paris in order to work in peace directing consciences ("working for the conversion of sinners for whom he felt a great

leaning” he says in 1740), without concerning himself further with the affairs of his Institute (“and to abandon his Institute entirely to the care of Providence”). But these ideas only passed through his mind, and he always kept the same tenderness for his children. He lost sight of them for some time only to shelter them from the blows aimed at him and that fell on them.”¹¹⁰ It is normal again for a person who has come to this change in life to be drawn to activities for which he has the talent and that have now the possibility of greater rein. But discernment of the will of God has also to be made.

This period was then a time of spiritual crisis and also of perception of a needed change of lifestyle depending on the loving will of God. Uncertainties about the Brothers in the north, news that there was serious interference yet not having yet the information that it was wise for him to return to Paris must have contributed to his depression. We shall see further that he knew he could not go back as long as La Chétardye was alive. It really was time for the Brothers to realise that he was an old man who had worn himself out for them. In conformity with what he had tried to impress on them, they should now positively have elected a Brother as Superior and transferred their loyalty and obedience to him while venerating their Founder and caring for him in his remaining years. It must have been disappointing to him that there was no sign of this yet. It seems to be at this time that his enemies in Marseilles, presumably because they no longer saw him, spread it around that “he had abandoned the interests of his Institute.”¹¹¹

He attempts a second time to take ship for Rome

Maillefer places here a voyage De La Salle planned to make to Rome, as if it were the only one; and he is misinformed as to Roman affairs and his subject’s motives. Blain also mentions it, without placing it clearly. After cancelling his first voyage the Founder told Drolin in mid-July 1712 that it had only been “delayed” and that he would go to see him and discuss matters with him “as soon as the novitiate is ready.” In December that year he talks of either coming himself as soon as the novitiate that had begun four months before was well organised, or sending someone after Easter. Things turned out otherwise: the novitiate began to dwindle and the whole situation brought on a crisis for De La Salle himself. Perhaps it was mid-June that he left St Maximin. It gives a new slant to his crisis that if he saw his hopes for Provence dashed, he still kept his mind on the Roman project. Not only was he going himself, but this time he was keeping his long-delayed promise and hope of sending Drolin a companion. “He booked a berth in a vessel ready to set sail, and got the Brother he had chosen to be his seafaring companion to buy the necessary provisions for the voyage.” This Brother could only have been one trained in the Marseilles novitiate and who did not follow the gen-

eral drift away. If so, he did not persevere, for none of those novices are recorded in the *Catalogue of the Brothers of the Christian Schools* (see further, p. 768).

“While waiting for a favourable wind, he consulted God in prayer to know his will and follow it blindly. He was quickly heard, for at the moment of embarking the Bishop of Marseilles happened to be on the quayside and questioned him closely about the subject of his voyage. M. De La Salle explained the motives and reasons. The prelate saw with regret the loss he was going to suffer. But he spoke with such cordiality to M. De La Salle that he stopped him departing. He told him to go back home and prepare everything to take possession of Our Lady of les Accoules. M. De La Salle obeyed with the docility of a child. He returned to join the school Brothers and said to them as he greeted them: ‘God be blessed! Here I am back from Rome. It is not his will that I should go. He wants to use me for something else.’ However, this foundation having been again thwarted by his enemies, he quite realised that his presence would always be harmful to the progress of his Institute in this province. He resolved therefore to leave it and withdrew to Grenoble.”¹¹³

This mention of the school in Les Accoules parish at this moment needs an explanation. Joseph Arnaud, the parish priest, was certainly not willing. He had earlier told the bishop that when the founders drew up a contract, they would want a cleric in charge. A will made out by a certain Nicolas de Bouquin and witnessed by Arnaud, bequeathing 6000 livres to endow a school, specified in fact a cleric as schoolmaster.¹¹⁴ It had not yet come into effect (in fact, not until 1733) and perhaps the bishop hoped to influence the founders. But there were limits to what he could do, and his goodwill towards De La Salle was not enough. Not being a Jansenist and therefore not in their counsels, he might not have been aware of the strength of the opposition. When Maillefer earlier¹¹⁵ gives as one result of the campaign against De La Salle that the school of Our Lady of Les Accoules was not given to the Brothers, he may be referring in advance to this failure. The cancelled voyage seems to be a second attempt to go to Rome, for while the first is recorded in a letter to Drolin as an early attempt, with no mention of a Brother coming with the Founder, here both biographers place it at a time when the situation in Provence appeared hopeless, and before he moved to Grenoble (after a visit to Mende, considered next.¹¹⁶) It was the ageing De La Salle’s last attempt to be in Rome personally. Arrangements for this voyage would necessitate his staying with the St Laurence’s community for a while, and one wonders about his relationship with the two Brothers.

He retires to Mende

It would be hard to believe that he now made the long, difficult journey to

Mende (on horseback) if Blain does not say he did. He would have got the information from Brother Timothy; and we have also the following attestation made in 1742 by Brother Bernardin and that is now in the Brothers' Archives:¹¹⁷

"I certify to all whom it may concern that in the year one thousand seven hundred and twelve, our most venerated Father, Messire John Baptist De La Salle, founder of the Brothers of the Christian Schools, assured me from his own mouth that it had depended only on him to be Bishop; which he refused generously, because the persons who made him this offer were completely opposed to the Constitution (i.e the Bull Unigenitus) and wanted thereby to win him over to their views; that a cleric of the city of Rouen, for the same end, made him a present of 700 livres, the first time M. De La Salle met him; but the second time, having revealed his views and making him the same offers of service, M. De La Salle declined and never met him again, even though the house of Saint Yon was at the time in an extreme necessity; that he spent forty days and more at the Hermitage, four leagues from Marseilles, without changing underwear, and getting up at midnight to attend the office; that he came from Marseilles to Mende in Gévaudan, having spent (on the journey) only seven livres ten sols, although it is forty-six leagues. This I attest to be most true. In faith of which I have signed.

Done at Bourg Saint-Andéol, this 6 May 1742.

Brother Bernardin."

This Brother, Pierre Martin Ronsin, was born near Rocroi in the archdiocese of Rheims in 1686. Rocroi was the scene of the scene of the "Great Condé's" famous victory over the Spanish army of Flanders in 1643. Pierre joined the Brothers in 1704, bringing but "a few old clothes."¹¹⁸ We saw him at Avignon in 1712 (p. 562); he was Director at Alès from 1714 to 1721. He died in 1751. He was the kind of Brother De La Salle could confide in, and at the time needed to confide in. Rigault says he was sent to Mende as Director in May 1713,¹¹⁹ but gives no reference.

Bernardin's attestation refers to four different events, probably in chronological order but occurring in different places. His initial statement that the Founder told him these things in 1712 is a slip, since the last two events took place around mid-1713. Again, the Bull was not issued till 8 September that year; and it was not till after the royal decree of 15 February 1714 that bishops had to promulgate it in their dioceses, and that then opposition came into the open. Bernardin wrote this statement in 1742. If we suppose that, looking back to events early in the century, in his mind the expression "opposed to the Constitution" means Jansenists whether before or after the Bull, his date

could be 1713 at the earliest. There is still the possibility that the Founder confided in him in 1714 when saw him at Alès, where he was Director, during his farewell tour of the southern communities before returning to Paris.

That De La Salle was offered a bishopric is quite a revelation. As it was the King who nominated bishops, advised by various people, this must have occurred in Paris. "Persons" may be a term covering only one important sponsor, and, if we are looking for one "opposed to the Bull", it could very well be Cardinal de Noailles.¹²⁰ The offer of money in Rouen must have been made before De La Salle had to take his novices back to Paris on account of the famine of 1708. "Revealing his views" would seem to indicate that cleric's Jansenist attitude. Not changing underwear for over a month would be a very unpleasant form of penance in hot weather. Spending about 600 francs in today's money on hiring horses and staying in hostels must have meant eating very little.

On this stay in Mende Blain says:¹²¹ "After the pious Founder had stayed some time in the hermitage just mentioned, he withdrew to another solitude in the town of Mende. There the servant of God, hidden from the sight of men, believed that they no more thought of him than he of them. So that he was not a little surprised when he saw arriving in his new solitude the Brother Director to whom he had left the direction of the novitiate house." Timothy found him "in a lodging that Mlle de St Denis had prepared for him, where he lived as in a veritable desert."

The Director of novices had come to tell him that he had nothing to do: the novitiate was empty. This may have been in July, and he had come to be directed to some school for the coming year. The conversation that followed must have been recorded by Timothy and given to Brother Bernard, for Maillefer quotes from it in 1723. He is less likely to add to it than Blain¹²² though he is not aware that De La Salle is in Mende. De La Salle "admitted to him (Timothy) that he was surprised that people still thought about him, and that he had flattered himself that since he had withdrawn into solitude men had entirely forgotten him. 'Come!' he added, 'Why do you come to trouble my joy? I find such charm in my place of retreat that I am resolved to condemn myself to an eternal silence.' The Brother, surprised by this answer, begged him not to abandon his children who had need of his counsels and his lights more than ever. To which M. De La Salle replied: 'God be blessed my dear Brother! Now, why do you think of addressing yourself to me for that? Do you not know my inability to command others? Do you not know that several among you no longer want me as their Superior? They are quite right, for I am very incapable of it.' The Brother, who had always kept a tender veneration for his worthy Superior, could not keep back his tears at this talk. He threw himself at his feet and told him he would not abandon him until he

let him know his will. M. De La Salle consoled him and indicated a house where he told him to withdraw while waiting till it pleased God to restore calm to them.”¹²³

This conversation is disconcerting. La Salle seems to have dissociated himself from his Institute. Here was the man who had been “surprised to the point of astonishment”¹²⁴ at the ways God had chosen to charge him with the establishment of the Christian schools. He had been one of the three to make that heroic vow and three years later to join the twelve in taking the three perpetual vows. Was he judging that at his stage of life contemplation was indicated for him, and that he had to leave the work of the school to God and the Brothers. The situation of several Brothers in the South not wanting him and his own conviction that his work as Superior had always brought on trouble, reinforced this view. Nevertheless, it seems to be a waiting stance: it would always be until God indicated otherwise. And in fact here, in spite of what he says, he does act as Superior and sends Timothy to Avignon. He and De La Salle would wait “until it pleased God to restore calm to them.” He it must have been also, rather than Brother Ponce, who sent Brother Henri here the next September, when the schools closed.

When he came to Mende, Timothy went first to the Brothers’ house expecting to find his Superior there. He was spurned and turned away as De La Salle had been, but it could only be by the one occupant Isidore. Mlle de St Denis tried to keep De La Salle as the spiritual director of her new community. “She offered to pay his upkeep all his life, and after his death to transfer it to a third Brother added to the other two in Mende, if he consented to stay there. This the holy man would not listen to.” Here we have an indication that whatever his inclination, he would not take on a permanent obligation that would end his link with the Institute. “At least she obtained from him regulations for her community, and she took all possible care to profit by his stay in Mende. When he left, she made him a present of a horse to continue his travels.”¹²⁵

He moves to Grenoble about the end of July

It helps to put De La Salle’s withdrawal into solitude into perspective to realise that he could not have been long in Mende. If he went there possibly at the end of June, we find him already settled in the community in Grenoble by 9 August, for on that date he signed a contract for the reprinting of his *Duties of a Christian*, which means he had previously gone over it,¹²⁶ using presumably a copy in the house. He stayed there till the following May. It is worth noting that if in the next month he sent Brother Henry from Les Vans to take over as Director in Mende (see p. 703), he was governing his Institute, at least in the South.

So ends a period of failed hopes. If the picture is not always clear, it may be because there were few Brothers aware of what was happening, and because the Brothers afterwards would not be in a hurry to record a bad time in their history, when a few of their number did them no credit and when there seemed to be a collapse of morale in their heroic Founder.

The picture in the south changed after his death. After recounting the failure of the bishop of Marseilles' offer, Blain writes a triumphant finale: "There is no city in France where zeal for the Christian schools and good will for the Brothers has been carried further. They have classes open in all the quarters of the town" (i.e. the four schools De La Salle had hoped to get), "and they are as full as though there were only one. If the blessings with which God favours them are so great, one may say that they are the fruits of the crosses that M. De La Salle carried there."¹²⁷

His concern for others in the midst of his own preoccupations is shown by the following incident that occurred either during his first or his second visit to the town: "A novice, son of a Paris surgeon, on leaving St Yon and having opted for the King's service, was condemned to the galleys as a deserter. The poor fellow had been expiating for twelve years this double fault (for Blain, one of the faults was his leaving St Yon) when M. De La Salle, having gone to Marseilles, the holy man, touched with compassion, worked to get him free and succeeded."¹²⁸

References

1. Maillefer, CL6, 200-201; Blain II, 76-81; Rigault I, 249-53; Poutet II, 46.
2. Rigault I, 250.
3. id.
4. Blain II, 76.
5. Italics not in Blain.
6. Blain II, 77.
7. Rigault I, 250.
8. Blain II, 77-78.
9. See *Vie quotidienne des parisiens sous le Roi Soleil*, chapter 10.
10. Blain II, 78.
11. id.
12. id.
13. Blain II, Appendix, 16.
14. Félix-Paul, 154, n.1.
15. Blain II, 79.
16. Rigault I, 251-3; Blain II, 158.

17. National Archives, quoted in Rigault I, 252.
18. id.
19. Rigault I, 253.
20. Blain II, 79.
21. Blain II, Appendix, 16.
22. id., 17.
23. Poutet II, 124-5.
24. Maillefer, CL6, 200-203; Blain II, 81-83; Rigault I, 273-4.
25. Blain II, 81.
26. Details by Brother Claud in the community register: Lucard, *Vie du Vénérable Jean-Baptiste De La Salle*, 222.
27. Lucard, 229, quoting the *Archives du Département de Vaucluse*.
28. *Notes Historiques, Avignon et Comté, 1702-1755*, from *Histoire des Frères de Toulouse, 1789-1890*, Fr. Lemandeur, Toulouse, Le Sistoc Publishers, 1909.
29. Blain II, 81-82.
30. Lucard, *Vie*, 229.
31. Rigault I, 373; Lucard, *Vie*, 230.
32. Blain II, 82.
33. To Yves Poutet, the author and others.
34. Blain II, 82.
35. Maillefer, CL6, 195.
36. Poutet II, 65.
37. id., 66.
38. Poutet II, 223-4.
39. Maillefer, CL6, 195-7.
40. Rigault I, 370.
41. Poutet II, 224.
42. Blain II, 82-3.
43. Poutet II, 195, n.53. *Notes Historiques, Avignon et Comté, 1702-1755* say he was there in 1712.
44. Blain II, 83.
45. id.
46. See Poutet II, 223-4.
47. Blain II, 83.
48. Maillefer, CL6, 202.
49. Félix-Paul, 154.
50. Blain II, 79-80.
51. id., *ibid.*
52. Lucard, *Vie du Vénérable Jean-Baptiste De La Salle*, 218 and note.
53. Rigault I, 371-2.
54. Maillefer, CL6, 202-211; Blain II, 83-94; Rigault I, 374-7; Poutet II, 180-3, 311-322, 327-8, 348-351.
55. Félix-Paul, 111.
56. Poutet II, 310-11.
57. Maillefer, CL6, 202.

58. Félix-Paul, 155.
59. Poutet II, 320, n.55.
60. id., 319-320.
61. id., 181.
62. Blain II, 84; Maillefer, CL6, 202/203.
63. Maillefer, CL6, 202, 204.
64. Félix-Paul, 153-159.
65. Maillefer, CL6, 204.
66. Poutet II, 317, n.38.
67. Blain II, 85.
68. Poutet II, 181, n.20.
69. Maillefer, CL6, 204.
70. Blain II, 85.
71. Félix-Paul, 160-168.
72. Blain II, 341.
73. Blain II, 47-49, 471; Poutet II, 195-7, 199, n.72.
74. Blain II, 48 ad fin.
75. Blain II, 47-9, 99.
76. id., 99.
77. Poutet II, 199, n.72.
78. Blain II, Appendix, 111.
79. Poutet II, 197, n.62.
80. Poutet II, 195, n.52, 196-7.
81. Poutet II, 195, Blain II, 49.
82. Blain II, 471.
83. Maillefer, CL6, 204-7; Blain II, 86-7; Poutet II, 313-314.
84. Maillefer, CL6, 204, in his 1723 version.
85. Maillefer, CL6, 205. Added in 1740.
86. Blain II, 86.
87. Poutet II, 316-17.
88. Poutet II, 181, n.14.
89. id., 181, 182.
90. id., 311, n.8.
91. Maillefer, CL6, 206, 208.
92. Blain II, 88-93.
93. Poutet II, 314-328.
94. Rigault I, 375-6.
95. id., 376.
96. Blain II, 87-88.
97. id., 89-90.
98. id., 88.
99. Maillefer, CL6, 208.
100. Maillefer, CL6, 208 (1723 version.)
101. Blain II, 93.
102. Maillefer, CL6, 210.

103. Blain II, 92.
 104. See Poutet II, 322-28.
 105. Aroz, CL27, 87-95.
 106. Maillefer, CL6, 210.
 107. Rigault I, 377.
 108. Blain II, 96.
 109. Aroz made this study in CL41(1), 379-481.
 110. Blain II, 415.
 111. Maillefer, CL6, 212, 213.
 112. Maillefer, CL6, 212. Blain II, 97.
 113. Maillefer, CL6, 214.
 114. Poutet II, 181, n.14, and letter to author of 8 July, 1992.
 115. CL6, 208.
 116. Maillefer, CL6, 212; Blain II, 93.
 117. A copy was graciously communicated to me by the Institute Archivist, Brother Edwin Bannon, in 1991.
 118. See the register in CL3, 39.
 119. Rigault I, 377.
 120. As surmised by Brother Saturnino Gallego in his *San Juan Bautista De La Salle I*, 486.
 121. Blain II, 98.
 122. cf Blain II, 98.
 123. Maillefer, CL6, 210, 212.
 124. Bernard, 23.
 125. Blain II, 99.
 126. Rigault I, 379.
 127. Blain II, 94.
 128. Blain II, Appendix, 122.
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Chapter 20: Two and a half years in the south: II. Mischief and crisis in the north. Events till 1717

Since February 1712 the Brothers in general had no news of De La Salle and many were confused and upset. Three Brothers likely to know of his whereabouts were Bartholomew, Joseph and Thomas (Charles Frappet). While serious and aggressive efforts were made by La Chétardye and others to impose one of themselves as superior, and then remodel the Society, these three did not remain idle. Joseph, as Visitor, first obtained attestations from bishops as to the work of the Brothers, and then proposed bringing the community in Rheims and even all the houses of the Institute under the protection of the archbishop of it. Brother Bartholomew asked every bishop where there were Brothers to appoint an ecclesiastical superior to watch over their interests and regularity. He must have discussed this with Brother Joseph, and possibly with others (the Brothers in Paris, St Denis and Versailles, judging by later events), for consultation was a mark of the Institute. Whatever the possible dangers, these were steps countering la Chétardye's plan or any danger of the Institute falling apart. Brother Thomas was in touch with De La Salle concerning the eventual purchase of St Yon, which he saw would more likely be the centre of his Institute.

However, a crisis developed in Paris when the Brothers there were persuaded to submit changes in their Rules to de Noailles. The Founder meanwhile, in Grenoble, was leading a life both of prayer and activity. After some eight months there, he had just been reassured by a shepherdess with a gift of discernment that God still wanted him to lead his Institute, when a touching and pressing letter from the Brothers in Paris recalled him. Even so, a group of priests there still challenged the Society's right to self-government. As a whole, however, wherever it had spread, it was growing in cohesion and in signs of goodwill.

The master-writers try to intimidate Brother Bartholomew

The master-writers come on stage again. When they found out that De La Salle had left the capital, they tried to see how they might intimidate his stand-in. They obtained from the marquis d'Argenson a police sergeant to their liking and, along with him, called on Bartholomew at the Brothers' community house. "Several captious and malicious questions were put to Brother Bartholomew, in the hope of catching him out. A so-called 'clerk of court' wrote down his answers, but they were so wise and prudent that the police sergeant appeared put out by them." A final answer made him

ashamed of the posture he had been made to take, and he left full of admiration for Bartholomew.¹ This, however, was a minor difficulty compared with the uncertainty the Brothers were left in, and the outside attempts made to change the government of the Institute.

The situation caused by the Founder's absence and silence. Brother Joseph, northern Visitor, seeks attestations from bishops

Canon Blain gives us contradictory reactions from the Brothers, perhaps expressing the unease and confusion those distant from the capital must have experienced.² Maillefer is briefer: "The houses of his Institute in Paris and in the provincial towns suffered greatly from his long absence. The Brothers were in mortal worry over his situation. They made persistent enquiries to find where he had withdrawn, without being able to find out anything certain. This depressed them. They did not know what to think of this mystery. Some thought he was dead, others imagined he had given up the government of the Institute. Each one reasoned it out in his own way."³ Some could not take this uncertainty and were prepared to leave. It was Bartholomew who reassured and won them over by his gentle procedures. He came to be looked upon as Superior even by those from outside.⁴

One of the good results of the uncertainty of the situation was that the Brothers did take some steps to strengthen the position of their Institute. It was probably Brother Joseph, Visitor for the northern region or the 'Province of Paris' who, when visiting the Brothers' communities in a diocese, called on the bishop to see how the Brothers were viewed. The very favourable comments he heard led him to ask for a written attestation by the bishop. In this way we have three such testimonies given in 1712: from the bishop of Laon on 17 July, of Chartres on 19 August and of Troyes on 12 December. They are almost identical. They are not concerned with sanctioning the Brothers' rules, but with approving their behaviour and teaching ability. For Laon, for instance, we have:

We, Louis de Clermont, by the grace of God, bishop duke of Laon, peer of France, count of Anizy, certify to whom it may concern that there are in our diocese Christian Schools established for several years by the Brothers called of Christian Doctrine with whose conduct we are very satisfied, both for their piety and edifying reserve as for their capacity to teach children Christian doctrine, reading, writing and other necessary things for their education, which is a great resource and very useful to the poor children of this town and of some other places of our diocese.. Given at Laon....

Similarly by "Charles François" (de Mérimville) of Chartres, and "Denis

François Bouthillier de Chavigny” of Troyes.⁵

A move to obtain royal patents for the Rheims community

Further than this there was, probably at the end of 1713 or early in 1714,⁶ a move to obtain from François de Mailly, archbishop of Rheims since 1710, letters patent from Louis XIV for the house in that city. There is a letter, without address, date or signature, in the archives of the *Département de la Marne*,⁷ written by someone having authority to write in the name of the Brothers. As Bartholomew had to stay in Paris with his novices, Poutet⁸ sees Brother Joseph, the Visitor, as the author. At the time, indeed, he was Director of the community in Rheims.⁹ Various people wished to make generous gifts to the Institute, but it had as yet no legal existence. To obtain the necessary letters patent required being able to prove one had a fair capital already. Joseph (if he is the author) therefore limited his objective to getting letters patent for the sole house in Rheims which, thanks to the group of trustees De La Salle had created around his brother, Canon Jean-Louis, could count on a capital of 30,000 livres.

After a preamble guaranteeing the obedience of the Brothers of the Christian Schools, the letter goes on:

A few months ago, my Lord, I had the honour to speak to you about our establishment in Rheims and its patents. I have the honour to tell you that we had thought of asking for patents for all our houses in general, but that not being able to show enough funds to obtain them for them all, we had limited ourselves to requesting for the sole house of Rheims, as being the first and the city where the good began. We would wish also that this house of Rheims was the mother, so to say, of all the others, that is, this one should be the only one that could receive moneys for the foundations that might be asked for, in whatever town of the kingdom it might be...

We are inclined to this, my Lord, for two reasons: We have a great desire to put our community and even the whole Institute under the obedience and under the protection of such a good and zealous prelate (and) funds are to be found there more than in any other place. I had the honour to tell you that we have twenty-five houses, seventeen of which are in the Province of France that is called the province of Paris, and the other eight are in Provence and beyond Lyons. Six of the province of France are in your metropolitan province...(only two were in his actual diocese)

I think it will not be difficult to obtain patents, in view of the establishment we have at Versailles, of our being known and loved by Madame de Maintenon and by the Rev. Le Tellier; and still more if we have the honour of being under your protection and of being presented by your Excellence

to his Majesty.¹⁰

Full details followed of the financial situation of the house and of assured donations, amounting to 30,000 livres, and Joseph believes that another 10,000 livres will be forthcoming without difficulty once letters patent have been granted. The archbishop was not necessarily impressed by this language. He must have enquired about their superior general and found that for getting on for two years he was in the south of France and was not communicating with his Brothers. And, with the matter of the Bull *Unigenitus*, then Louis's death in 1715, the archbishop and Mme de Maintenon had other things to think about. Nothing came of the letter.

This action of writing to the archbishop raises questions. On the face of it, it offered to place the whole Institute in dependence on him, making it a diocesan congregation. One can, however, see these protestations of obedience as no more than part of the protocol of showing respect. It might very well have been a move by the Brothers to counter the interference going on in Paris. But at least someone was acting, taking responsibility, which was what the Founder wanted the Brothers to do.¹¹

Brother Joseph was acting as what he would be later, an Assistant to Brother Bartholomew when he became Superior General. Blain pays tribute to his loyal service to the Institute for nearly thirty years. "This Brother was admitted in Paris by M. De La Salle towards the year 1700 aged twenty years. He was from the village of Lerzi by Marle in Picardy. He was always inviolably attached to M. De La Salle, and he was one of those faithful disciples who never abandoned him in his greatest persecutions. He was likewise the support of Brother Bartholomew, who handed over to him the greater part of internal and external affairs, in which he was very knowledgeable." M. de Pontcarré, the first President of the *Parlement* of Rouen, had a very great esteem for him and received him with great friendliness. He became exhausted while arranging the arrival of Brothers in the town of Meaux and fell ill in the Brothers' house in Paris. There he died some days after 21 February 1729.¹² The Founder must have considered him as his possible stand-in.

La Chétardye's plan to take over the Brothers' Paris community through his school deputy

We come to the grave matter of La Chétardye's plan to take over the Brothers' Paris community through his deputy for the schools and to change their form of government.¹³

La Chétardye's delegate as supervisor the schools of the parish was the Reverend de Brou (Henri Paul Augustin Feydeau de Brou), nephew of the

bishop of Amiens, and counsellor of the Paris *Parlement* before entering the seminary of St Sulpice, after which he joined the other priests on the parish.¹⁴ Blain, as he had done for La Chétardye, takes time to give his name, possibly again to spare the feelings of clerical readers trained in the seminary of St Sulpice. He says wonderful things of him that his actions did not justify. He “served the Brothers as Father,” he says, for instance, “in the absence of M. De La Salle, and showed a great zeal for their interests.”¹⁵ La Chétardye seems to have been behind the claim of this man of some standing, at a time when the Brothers were somewhat demoralised, to be looked upon as their superior, and then to make changes to their form of government. La Chétardye’s plan, according to Blain “was to cut out of the Institute a quantity of usages and practices and to give it another form of government, with new regulations and new superiors.”

According to this supposed system: 1. The Brothers would have an outside Superior able to guide them, after the fashion of religious Sisters. 2. The Paris house would constitute a separate society and depend entirely on this ecclesiastical superior. 3. The novitiate would be suppressed as useless and too much of a burden; for it cost very much to bring up and feed so many novices. Moreover, there was no need for one for Paris. 4. The Brothers would not be able to be changed from one town to another. 5. It was proposed to have one, two or three novices, more or less in each house, according to its income and needs. 6. Finally, another form of government was considered that was not made public.

Brother Bartholomew or the bursar, Brother Charles, were directed to go to de Brou when they claimed their allowance. The Brothers “were advised at the same time to have confidence in him, even to choose him as their superior.” They were not in a hurry. What de Brou now did was to give himself the title of superior “while waiting for the Brothers to give it him. To render his election more prompt and more certain, he took the decision to suspend all charities and to cut off from the Brothers the allowances due them. He succeeded in making the Brothers suffer greatly and to place them in a strange scarcity; but he did not succeed in having himself chosen in due form for what he wanted to be.

“Meanwhile, he exercised an authority that had not yet been given him: he took from Brother Bartholomew the freedom to receive postulants without his permission, and he sent them away himself; for, according to the scheme advanced, only three or four were wanted. Matters were on this footing when M. De La Salle came back from Provence.” One wonders how this interference came about. De Brou was not made ecclesiastical superior. In a later meeting of de Brou and Brother Bartholomew with the Cardinal, the latter had to ask who was the superior. De Brou may have insisted that the

salaries he paid the Brothers were not to be used on postulants. Bartholomew must have made some kind of protest, for “when he wanted to receive a greater number of novices, the power of doing so was taken away by taking from him the necessary means for feeding them.”¹⁶

Bartholomew was in a weak position in some ways. He was not officially superior of the Brothers internally, still less would he be seen so to the clerical world. Not having the experience of his Founder, nor of older Brothers, since he entered only in 1703 after De La Salle’s deposition, he did not have the clear mind and arguments of the latter in certain situations. Fortunately, he had the backing of those who had been longer than he in the Institute and who remembered the events of 1702-3. “Some of the senior Brothers who sustained Brother Bartholomew, resisted with vigour and encouraged one another not to give way. They granted, however, liberally the quality of superior to the one who desired it and who gave it himself.” Perhaps he was making the most of his title of Superior of the schools of St Sulpice, and the Brothers went along with him in giving him the title and no more. “This title alone, stripped of the authority it indicated, did not satisfy him. He skilfully went on to profit by this denomination to insist on the reality. ‘You call me’, he said one day, ‘your superior; you must give signs of it.’ And lest the Brothers should not grasp enough these words, he added ‘that he wished an act to be drawn up, and that after having it signed by the Brothers, it should be placed on the Register of the House.’”¹⁷

It seems that the act was transcribed into the *Booklet of the Vows*, that treasure of the Brothers containing the vows of the Founder and the twelve Brothers in 1694 and all subsequent emissions of final vows till 1705. There must have been another register from 1706 onwards that we no longer have, and the act could have been written into this one.¹⁸ But if the Brothers put it in the other one it was done deliberately. For it was written on the blank page that immediately followed that declaration of the twelve in 1694 that after De La Salle’s death their intention was “that there be no one accepted among us nor chosen as superior who is a priest. We will not have even and will admit no superior who is not associated and has not made vows like us.” And so they made clear the difference they made between de Brou’s external superiority and that of their present elected superior, M. De La Salle.

At one moment, when he thought he had prepared the ground well enough, de Brou proposed the change of government already mentioned. “He was not listened to; and to ward off this blow the Brothers replied respectfully that beforehand the opinion and consent of all the Brothers outside Paris would have to be obtained.”¹⁹

Brother Bartholomew asks for ecclesiastical superiors to the Brothers in each diocese.

In this serious situation, Brother Bartholomew asked for ecclesiastical superiors for the Brothers to be appointed in each diocese.²⁰ According to Canon Blain²¹ it was La Chétardye (even if he does not name him) who now told de Brou to suggest to Brother Bartholomew to write to the Directors of every community and “to find an external superior able to direct them and to take care of their concerns.” It was pointed out to him that if De La Salle had found the burden too great, he should not try to carry it all, not having his character or experience. Maillefer, however, attributes the move to Bartholomew himself: “Brother Bartholomew, who mistrusted his little experience and feared to take on himself the burden of the superiorship that it seemed that the Brothers deferred to him through the great confidence they had in him, took the resolution to get the Bishops in the dioceses where there were Brothers of the Institute to provide for their direction, and he asked them accordingly to give them an ecclesiastical superior whom they could consult on their spiritual and temporal affairs.”²²

The new Society outside Paris was known now and appreciated, often warmly supported by the bishop and town notables. It was normal practice to have a diocesan ecclesiastical superior exercising for the bishop his duty of supervision of communities in his diocese. To ask for some discreet extra care while De La Salle was away would counter la Chétardye’s plan to split up the Society, the better to control as an independent unit the community in his parish.

It seems that such superiors were appointed, not for each house, which would have been a quite different matter, but one per diocese, and this within the Institute’s Province of Paris only. This latter is clear from a letter by Brother Bartholomew on 17 July 1714, when he was asking as late as this for an ecclesiastical superior to be appointed in Mende: “All the above matters, Reverend” (he is writing to M. Martineau, parish priest of Mende) “could, if you thought it opportune, give you occasion to let his Lordship your bishop know how our Brothers are behaving, so that he might order, if he judged it opportune, that someone should watch over their behaviour.” He adds a postscript: “I forgot to let you know that the houses of our Province of Paris are directed by the care of ecclesiastical superiors named by their lordships.”²³

Doubts about the wisdom of this innovation

Whatever the origin of this procedure, it was very novel. “This step appeared bold and rash. There was a conviction that it could have unfortunate consequences for the government of the Institute. Most of the Brothers

disapproved of it and showed their displeasure.” Fortunately these ecclesiastical superiors seem to have been very discreet. Blain continues: “Some even of these local superiors (of which he was one), foreseeing the dangerous consequences that the new form of government that people were trying to introduce might produce, were keen to abolish it.” Some of the senior Brothers and some of the ecclesiastical superiors made several suggestions to Brother Bartholomew:

“The first, to undertake a general visit of all the establishments. The second, to get them to communicate to the outside superiors only external matters and those which needed their protection. Thirdly, no longer to call these Reverends by the name of Superior, but to call them Protectors. Fourthly, to have during the school vacation a general assembly at St Yon of the principal Brothers of the houses, so as to deliberate on the general good of the Institute, to choose in the absence of M. De La Salle a Superior General.”

Brother Bartholomew did not make a tour of the communities: perhaps one should remember his poor health. Perhaps also he counted on the visits of Brother Joseph with whom he worked closely, to have the same effect. And there was no assembly at St Yon. Had the Founder been dead, there would have been no hesitation. But it says worlds about his moral prestige and about the Brothers’ attachment to him that they could not bring themselves to elect a Superior General. Giving their full support to Bartholomew was the best response to the situation.

At the same time, many tried to get in touch with the Founder and alert him to the situation. “The friends of M. De La Salle wrote to him (and) made him sharp reproaches on his inaction and his silence in such delicate circumstances. Most of the letters that were written to him on this matter did not reach him. He received a few by chance, when there was nothing more to fear. For, at the time they were given him, he learnt that things were in good shape and that what Brother Bartholomew had done, had a success one had not dared expect. The most zealous of the Brothers, that this change had not pleased, were reassured by the good it produced, and they acknowledged that they had been wrong to get alarmed so precipitously. M. De La Salle approved it also, and he has admitted since that his Institute was very much indebted to the wise government of these ecclesiastical superiors.”²⁴

THE FOUNDER IN GRENOBLE

De La Salle did not answer these appeals. Letters from him could incriminate the receivers. He could have resigned as Superior, but this would have demoralised the Brothers, suited his enemies and created polarisation between the supporters of himself and of a new Superior. The twelve of 1694 had declared not to elect one of themselves till after his death. Whatever the

reasons, we have in fact no letters from the Founder for 1713 or 1714. Yet we do know that in Grenoble he did take means to find out what was going on in Paris.²⁵

Maillefer says of his stay in Grenoble: “He found the Brothers there in a great peace, and he determined to stay with them as long as possible. He chose the most secluded place in the house in order to attend to prayer. He remained there a long time unknown, receiving and paying no visits, solely occupied with following the exercises of the house with his usual exactness and fervour.”²⁶ In fact, he was active in various ways, and perhaps we can begin to see in him at this stage a model for his Brothers when they would no longer be in active teaching. There was a little attic at the back of the house, and it is there he seems to have lived and prayed and worked at his books.

There was still only the one school in St Laurence’s parish, dating from October 1708. (A second one was opened in St Hughes’ parish in 1715. Being run by the same community, Les Vans remains the Founder’s last foundation.) The Brothers had as spiritual director Canon Didier, who belonged, not to St Laurence’s church as Blain says, but to the collegiate church of St Andrew in the main part of the town.²⁷ The school came under the School Board, a body formed according to the spirit of D mia’s Regulations (the latter had declined to send masters to Grenoble when requested). A priest on this Board, therefore, watched over the spiritual welfare of the masters and mistresses of the schools. The bishop, de Montmartin, chairman by right of the Board, confirmed him in this function. De La Salle accepted this set-up. In fact, he entrusted Canon Didier with seeing to the publication of a new edition of his catechism: *The Duties of a Christian*. “He took a particular care of them (the two schools) and took towards them the place of M. De La Salle, taking on himself with a father’s affection all their spiritual and temporal interests.”²⁸

The Founder gave much of his time to prayer. He used to say mass in the **chapel of the Visitandines**. There is a steep climb to it, but there was an easier path he could take, suffering as he was from rheumatism. Sometimes he went to the collegiate church of St Andrew. We have a testimony to the effect he had on people from a Brother Patrice, who entered the Institute in 1777, and was sent to teach in Grenoble in 1780. To go to St Hughes’ school he passed every day in front of St Andrew’s. “I had several times the occasion to see M. Villars, canon and dean of the chapter, a very respectable man in his nineties. He had seen M. De La Salle and spoken with him several times during his stay in Grenoble. M. De La Salle sometimes said mass in their collegiate church. M. de Villars himself was edified with the liveliness of his faith. He saw his face change during the sacrifice. People

rushed to see him at the altar.”²⁹

But he also profited by the Brothers’ having copies of the *Duties of a Christian* to revise it. In the Grenoble library there is a copy, in De La Salle’s hand, of the royal privilege that had been granted him on December 19th, 1711 to reprint his text. With it is the following declaration:

I have handed the enclosed to Monsieur Molard to have the said book, contained in the said privilege, printed by Matthew Petit, printer in Grenoble, which I consent to be printed by him once only. Done at Grenoble this ninth of August one thousand seven hundred and thirteen. (Signed) De La Salle.³⁰

The work was not, in fact, reprinted. The printer would not accept his changes. “The changes and additions he made to it were not to the liking of the printer. There was no alternative but to go his way, and the book was reprinted according to its first form.”³¹ Even prior to the issue of the Bull *Unigenitus*, he may have wanted to make clearer the Catholic position on grace and against the teachings of Quesnel.

He spends three days at the Grande Chartreuse. He sends the Director of the community to Paris to get news. And takes his class.

“It was during his stay in Grenoble that he went to visit the **Grande Chartreuse**³² which is only a day’s journey away. He would have liked to be able to end his days there. The Prior of the Chartreuse, struck by the reserve and recollection that shone out in all he did invited him to do so without knowing him. For M. De La Salle had taken the precaution to forbid the Brother who accompanied him to say who he was, lest he should be given in this house the honours it is customary there to defer to Canons from Rheims. But he was obliged to satisfy himself with the disposition of his heart. He left this holy retreat at the end of three days, after having given to his sense of piety, not all the time he would have wished, but what he could steal from the business of his Institute, and he returned to Grenoble full of veneration for the holiness of this famous monastery.”³³

This is corroborated by the Brother Patrice already quoted: “During the month of September of the year 1781 we, Brother Director and myself, went to spend a few days at the Grande Chartreuse. We were received there with marks of distinction. Those illustrious solitaries told us that the ardour of the virtues of our Venerable Founder were still in great veneration in their solitude and that the lapse of sixty-six years had not weakened the memory of them. The R.F. Prior and the R.F. Procurator, very respectable men, told us that their Fathers were so struck by the holiness and virtues of our Founder that they appealed to him to settle among them. But he left the

monastery and returned to Grenoble to the Brothers' community."³⁴ His refusal to join the monks is similar to his declining Mlle de St Denis's offer to stay in Mende. Whatever his motives for keeping a very low profile, he was not abandoning the work God had called him to, even if he could not see how he could serve it. Note above the reference to 'the business of his Institute.'

The fact that a Brother was free to go with him to the Grande Chartreuse means that we are in the month of September, when the schools were closed. Bartholomew must have informed his Superior about the situation in Paris and the appointment of ecclesiastical superiors, and some letters from other Brothers may have reached him. To get more information, he decided to send one of the two Brothers at Grenoble to Paris. Given that Grenoble is something like 570 kms from the capital, the Brother would have to leave as soon as the holidays began and would not be expected back till after the school year had started. This was Brother Stanislaus. Blain tells us that the Founder taught school in his absence.

Of his stint at St Laurence's school Maillefer says: "He applied himself to instruct the children with an attention one could not tire admiring. The parents were very edified by it and conceived such a high esteem of his piety that from now on they only called him the holy priest." Blain says that "if he made any distinction between the pupils, it was in favour of the poorest. The holy priest led, according to the Brothers' custom, the children two by two to the church to hear holy Mass, and after having arranged them in order, he went up to the altar to say it with a religion that fixed on him the looks of his little disciples and of all those who assisted."³⁵ We can picture him, an aged figure slowed by rheumatism, guiding this double file of children.

Here once more we can fortunately have the confirmation by Brother Patrice: "I was sent to the Grenoble community in 1780. This is what I learnt in that town: M. De La Salle fulfilled the duties of a schoolmaster with an inexpressible joy. He took his pupils himself to church and said holy mass for them. The pupils and those assisting were struck by his piety and devotion. So that when he was seen going to church with his pupils, you heard in the street people saying: 'Let's go to mass, there is the holy priest who is going to say it.' I have heard these words myself which were repeated to me by old men who had formerly been M. De La Salle's own pupils."³⁶

Once Brother Stanislaus returned, the Founder went back to his usual occupations, including "composing several little works of piety, both for the instruction of youth and for the use of the school Brothers."³⁷ As, in fact, he had written all his texts for school use, he would be more likely working on his *Meditations* or on his *Method of Mental Prayer* or on his *Meditations for the Time of the Retreat*.

Stanislaus may have gone as far as Rouen, for the next month we find the Founder in touch with Brother Thomas, the Institute bursar there, providing, it would seem, for the future purchase of Saint Yon. On 2 November this year as well as on 20 December 1714, when he was back in Paris, he had four investments made in his name with the city tolls office, totalling 6,000 livres³⁸. It is quite impossible to say he had lost interest in his Institute.

It was in fact in pretty good shape except for the fact that the novices were restricted to four as long as the novitiate was in Paris. There were difficulties, however, in moving it back to Rouen, where the new archbishop was against De La Salle. As for the South, "he learnt with joy that God had restored peace to his houses in Provence," Prudently, he avoided appearing personally lest his presence should start trouble again. "He contented himself therefore with sending Visitors to maintain regularity and to give him an account of how the Brothers were behaving in this province."³⁹ While keeping in the background, he had, then, his Institute well organised: Bartholomew was accepted as his stand-in in the North, while Joseph, his right-hand man, toured all the houses of that Province. In the South, he could rely on Timothy. He could not, however, have been aware of the disquieting events taking place in Paris at the end of 1713.

Disquieting events in Paris at the end of 1713⁴⁰

That year Cardinal de Noailles came to give Confirmation to the children of the parish of St Denis, and was talking to the two Brothers who ran the school there. "After enquiring about his (De La Salle's) health and where he was, he spoke very highly of him to the whole assembly, added that he was a holy man and a great servant of God, and very much recommended the Brothers to give him his compliments."⁴¹ To speak in public in this fashion showed the Cardinal had completely abandoned his earlier misinformed attitude. The next sentence of Blain is quite astonishing: "M. de La Chétardye, parish priest of St Sulpice, sensitive to these marks of the archbishop's kindness for the Institute, went, accompanied by M. de Brou (not, note, by Brother Bartholomew) to thank him, and to beg him to place this work under his protection." Praise evidently directed to De La Salle and to the Brothers in someone else's parish he construed as praise for 'his' Institute, meaning the community and schools in his parish. (Was he staking a claim to be recognised as the Superior of the Institute in the Paris region?) One wonders if he did not have some sort of obsession; if not, this seems to be jealousy persisted in even in old age.

De Brou followed this up. He asked Brother Bartholomew to go with him to see the Cardinal. Bartholomew wisely took with him another Brother; the information must come from him. "M. l'abbé de Brou having next taken

Brother Bartholomew and another one to salute his Eminence, they were received very favourably. The prelate having asked and learned which of the two was the Superior, he questioned him with much gentleness, asked him if he had many novices, etc., and recommended him to train good schoolmasters.” Since de Brou had taken the initiative, and in view of his attitude, one is puzzled as to which one said he was the Superior; the mention of novices might indicate the Cardinal was talking to Brother Bartholomew. But at least we know that if the Cardinal had to ask who was Superior, he had nominated no one to that post, and was even unfamiliar with the lay government of the Society. But he was certainly favourable. Using this evidence of the Cardinal’s goodwill, De Brou now suggested that it would be a good idea to have the Rules approved by him. In itself it was a good idea. The Brothers must have felt it would give them some stability while they were uncertain when their Founder would return. It would be an escape from the situation in Paris.

Since de Noailles showed himself so favourable to the Institute, Brother Bartholomew fell in with the idea. He “called together the Brothers of Paris, of Versailles and of St Denis, to agree on the changes to be made to the regulations. For, for a long time the rivals of the holy priest had so much exaggerated their difficulty that they were believed by several of the Brothers who were not the most fervent. The Rules having been touched up with the notes separate, the Reverend de Brou (not Brother Bartholomew, one can note) went and begged the Archbishop to examine them, to which the prelate agreed. This examination was passed on to the Reverend Vivant, one of the grand vicars of the archdiocese, and the Rules were put in his hands. He kept them for seven or eight months.”⁴² As we know that the Cardinal gave his decision the following April, these events took place in September-October.

The situation was very serious, and one wonders how Brother Bartholomew came to agree to what was done. Here we have changes promoted by outsiders in the direction of laxity for other aims than those of the Institute. There was another serious aspect: by agreeing to a possible changed rule consented to by the three communities only, he was splitting them from the rest of the Institute. Whether or not some of the administrative changes certain people at St Sulpice had in mind were inserted into the Rule on this occasion, some would happen by the fact of creating a separate section out of the Brothers in Paris. As the months passed by, they began to take fright at what they had done.

1714

Painful treatment for another bad attack of rheumatism

During this time the Founder in Grenoble had another bad attack of rheu-

matism.⁴³ It is easy to forget that he was now usually in pain from it. There was also the wrenched muscle from that fall in the snow in his youth. Rheumatism was always with him, but it was presumably during the winter, from his working in that unheated attic in Grenoble, that it became so bad that he could no longer walk. "He was obliged to stay in bed. Fever arose and he fell into an exhaustion that caused fears for his life. The eagerness of the Brothers of Grenoble to procure for him all the relief their charity suggested to them was unable to soothe his pain. Recourse had to be made to the extraordinary remedy that had been used effectively twenty years before, when he was attacked by the same malady in Paris. He gave in to the wishes of his Brothers and generously went back to that bed of pain where he was solely occupied with prayer as though he felt no pain. The Brothers showed him their surprise, but he answered them with the holy man Job: 'God be blessed, may his will be done and not ours! If we receive health from him should we not also receive illness in the same way? May his name be blessed eternally.'"⁴⁴

His greatest regret was not to be able to celebrate mass. Once he began to convalesce, and he could walk without falling, he wanted to celebrate again. "To satisfy him, since he could not yet go far, they led him to the little chapel which is in the hospice that the Carthusians have in Grenoble. He said mass as soon as he could stand on his feet." (This chapel was in St Laurence's Street).⁴⁵ While he was ill and unable to say mass and the office, he said several rosaries a day and countless short prayers.⁴⁶

He makes a retreat on the hill of Parménie and meets Sister Louise⁴⁷

Once he felt better, this ageing man thought of making a retreat "to make up" for what he had lost in terms of spiritual exercises during his illness. Canon Jean Yse de Saléon (see p. 484) of St Andrew's church, one of the founders of the Brothers' school and an admirer of De La Salle, was the spiritual director of a retreat house four leagues northwest of Grenoble, on a hill called Parménie that was part of his lands. He was due to be absent for a fortnight. He therefore offered his friend the chance of a fortnight's retreat in this quiet spot,⁴⁸ and to replace him, it seems, at the same time. Dom Théodore Bellanger, who was Prior of Parménie from 1866-1895, says that De La Salle "took up residence at Parménie, replaced as director and confessor the Reverend Yse de Saléon that other preoccupations called elsewhere, but soon his confreres of Paris, Versailles and Saint Denis wrote him a letter of recall."⁴⁹ It is not likely that this move to Parménie would have taken place till after Lent.

The hill of Parménie has a long history. Little is certain before 12th cen-



ture, when a fortified priory there of Austin Canons is referred to, belonging to the bishops of Grenoble. In 1259 the bishop of Grenoble replaced the Austin Canons by a convent of Carthusian nuns. The foundation remained very poor. At the end of 14th century armed bands made life insecure, and the nuns moved elsewhere. In the next century, local people gradually took possession of the lands on the hill. In 1495 the bishop had one door of the church walled up and the other locked. History is thereafter silent till 1650. In fact, at the time of De La Salle's stay in Grenoble, the hill of Parménie was believed to have been an uninhabited place except for shepherds until Sister Louise settled there.⁵⁰

Louise Hours, or "Sister Louise", as she came to be later known, was born in 1646, some thirty kilometres northeast of Grenoble. The family moved to Beaucroissant, a village close to Parménie. Louise kept sheep, and often grazed them on its slopes. She felt inspired to rebuild a chapel among the convent ruins. Only after a long delay did the bishop allow her to proceed with her idea. Louise, joined by another poor girl, went begging and the work began with the help of local people. The front of the chapel remained open, closed only by a great balustrade, as though waiting for further development. Not knowing yet what God intended, Louise and her companion built close to the chapel a hut of wattle and daub, and lived there seven years mostly on black bread and water, and without any fire. Occasionally a priest came and said Mass, but usually the two went every day down the hill to the parish church.

By 1681 the little chapel had become the sacristy of a larger one (although the two together were only thirty feet long), and there was accommodation for a priest, for a few pilgrims coming to make a retreat, and for herself and her companion. She obtained as chaplain the services of the saintly Monsieur Roux, a priest from nearby who then worked for over thirty years at Parménie. People began increasingly to come here for retreats, and by 1686 there were two buildings able to receive up to eight men and eight women, and soon more rooms had to be added.

On M. Roux's death in 1712, therefore not long before De La Salle arrived in Grenoble, Jean d'Yse de Saléon took over the work of the retreats.⁵¹ On Sister Louise's reputation at the time Maillefer writes: "People spoke of her outside, and gradually many persons were seen to make it a duty of devotion to go and see Sister Louise who was held by the public to be a prodigy of holiness. People recognised in her talks that God was favouring her with his graces and they had no difficulty in placing themselves under her guidance in order to make a few days' retreat. God showered her with his favours in proportion to her zeal, so that she could see into the future. People came to consult her as an oracle and willingly abode by her decisions."⁵²

When De La Salle “accepted willingly (Yves de Saléon’s) proposition and set off with him”,⁵³ the Director of Grenoble, Brother John, went with him and looked after him.⁵⁴ This may indicate the time when the school was closed for the Easter break. The Founder had a long talk with Sister Louise. “He told her about all the troubles and opposition that had perturbed his life since he undertook the founding of the Christian Schools. This good Sister told him in detail of all those she had experienced in her retreat, of the struggles she had had to maintain against the suggestions of the devil, and how God had given her the strength to come out victorious. She assured him at the same time that he was not at the end of his work, that he would still have to suffer and should prepare for it. M. De La Salle told her of the desire he had to spend the remainder of his days in solitude, that he thought that this idea came from God since he had always felt an inclination for the private life. The Sister replied without hesitation that this was a mistake, that he was called by God to the work and government of his Institute. This was the way of salvation that had been opened up for him and he should walk in it with perseverance till the end of his life.

“He saw the order of God in this answer and after several conversations in which they understood one another and helped one another mutually with their advice for the space of a fortnight, he returned to Grenoble, very impressed and full of esteem for Sister Louise. Since then, he kept up a pious correspondence by letter with her to consult her on his doubts. She had them read to her and used a third person to answer. She wanted to have the works of devotion he had composed, and although she could not read, she kept them as precious reminders of the virtue of the one she looked upon as a saint.”⁵⁵

In this encounter we have an example of someone seeking discernment. Sister Louise’s clear view made De La Salle perceive afresh what he seems not to have been able to see for some time now: that God’s call to him to be Founder of the Brothers of the Christian Schools was a lifelong one: that God wanted and supported him till the end; and there was something still for him to do. He always awaited on some external confirmation of the process of discernment. He received, in fact two remarkable ones. The first one could not have been a more certain, a more encouraging and a more touching affirmation when it came. It arose from the situation the Paris Brothers had let themselves be manoeuvred into.

THE PARIS BROTHERS RESPECTFULLY ORDER THEIR FOUNDER TO RETURN

The draft of a modified Rule of the Brothers was so long in the hands of the Grand Vicar of Paris - seven or eight months - because something mo-

mentous was happening. It was the reaction of de Noailles to the Bull *Unigenitus*. “The King, the Sorbonne, and the majority of French bishops were for accepting the Bull unconditionally, but eight prelates, with Noailles at their head, did their utmost to prevent its promulgation. The King forbade the Cardinal to appear in his presence, and ordered the other prelates to (leave court and) return to their dioceses. On 15 February the Bull was officially registered by the *Parlement* together with a royal decree which commanded the bishops to promulgate it. Ten days later de Noailles published a pastoral letter in which he made his attitude of resistance to the Holy See public.”⁵⁶

The growing concern of the Brothers of the Paris region about the future of their Institute must have taken on a new gravity when they realised they might be approved and come under the control of a pro-Jansenist bishop. They decided, in view of their responsibility in the matter, to be the spokesmen around Bartholomew of the whole Society and to recall their Founder.⁵⁷ A meeting was held during the school Easter break. This little assembly took the step, convinced of the urgency of the matter, of commanding De La Salle under the obedience he had vowed to the body of the Institute, to resume control. “Body of the Society”, as we have seen, would mean that portion of it in a position to represent the whole body and command in its name.

And so they composed a letter, a very moving letter, showing they still made their own the original inspiration he had given them, using his very terms. And then they assured him they were convinced he had from God the gifts to lead the Brothers and had always done so successfully. It is one of the great documents of the early Institute. It was written on Easter Sunday, 1714.

Reverend and our very dear Father, We, the leading Brothers of the Christian Schools, having in view the greater glory of God, the greater good of the Church and of our Society, acknowledge that it is of extreme consequence that you should resume the care and the general conduct of the holy work of God which is also yours, since it has pleased the Lord to make use of you to found it and to guide it for so long.

Everyone is convinced that God gave you and still gives you the grace and the talents necessary to govern well this new society, which is of such great usefulness to the Church, and it is with justice that we bear you the testimony that you have always led it with much success and edification.

And so, Monsieur, we beg you very humbly and we command you in

the name and on behalf of the body of the Society to which you have promised obedience, to take charge immediately of the general government of our Society.

In faith of which we have signed. Done at Paris this 1 April 1714. And we are, with the most profound respect, reverend and very dear Father, your very humble and obedient inferiors, etc.

If it was in Easter week that the Founder visited Parménie, this letter would have arrived in his absence at the Brother's house in Grenoble and would have been taken up to him. We might think his reaction would have been to recognise in it a most powerful and supportive confirmation of Sister Louise's advice. It is instructive for us that he had at first misgivings and had to convince himself it was a genuine letter. If the Paris Brothers felt they had the right in the circumstances to command in the name of the Institute, it could not at first appear so to the Founder since the Southern province at least had no knowledge of the affair. He had also to work through his own estimate of himself and the strong conviction that it was better for everyone if he stood apart from the government of the Institute.

"M. De La Salle was very surprised when this letter was brought him. Various thoughts came to him at that moment. He hesitated whether he should give in to orders emanating from such an extraordinary jurisdiction. But after some reflection he considered he should submit without examining too much from which quarter this blow came."⁵⁸ This being said, he must have been deeply touched and encouraged by the tone of the letter. He showed it to Sister Louise who said: "It is evident that the Lord wants you to go back to Paris once M. de Saléon has taken up again his functions as director of this house."⁵⁹

De Noailles refuses either to approve the Rule or to suggest changes

What De La Salle did not know was that three days after the Brothers sent him their letter, the Grand Vicar Vivant sent back to de Brou the plan for a new rule accompanied by a letter in which he stated that the Cardinal had no intention of agreeing to any change, and that de Brou should stick to his function of looking after the schools of the parish and see there was no outside interference.

His Eminence does not judge it opportune that anything should be decided or signed in his name, neither concerning the Regulations nor the changes being sought to the Regulations. He relies on your wisdom for the good government of the schools in your care, and

*he very much expects that under such wise guidance piety and peace will flourish there.*⁶⁰

It was the end of La Chétardye's plan and a tremendous relief for the Paris Brothers. Not only were the changes refused, but the original Rule was not imposed by de Noailles as a diocesan Rule on the Brothers of Paris. By implication he recognised De La Salle as Founder and Superior. And as Blain says, his refusal was "a stroke from heaven; for it is well enough known that his approbation would not have speeded that of the Holy See and might have hindered it."⁶¹

A lieutenant aged twenty-two comes to Parménie and joins the Brothers⁶²

The second event confirming that Sister Louise had discerned rightly occurred before De La Salle left Parménie. Canon Yves de Saléon had just come back at the end of De La Salle's retreat, when a young pilgrim arrived in the dress of the poor. He was Claude François du Lac de Montisambert, whose grandfather, the Marquis de Beauvilliers, commanded in war time the nobility of the Chartres area. He was born at Tigy in the diocese of Orleans on October 30th 1691. He joined the army and at fourteen was made lieutenant. He was a very sociable character, got caught up in gambling and lost considerable sums. His parents had him transferred to a regiment in Champagne. The War of the Spanish Succession was on at the time, and this regiment was involved in the **Battle of Malplaquet** against the Duke of Marlborough on 11 September 1709, when Du Lac was not quite eighteen. He was seriously wounded and carried from the battlefield, but his life was not in danger. His convalescence gave him time to reflect, and he completely changed attitude. He left the army in 1713 at the age of twenty-two, sold his horse, doffed his uniform and took on the garb of a peasant and made for Grenoble. There he spent much time in the churches and in looking after the sick in the hospitals. He tried to join the Capuchins and later the Carthusians at the Grande Chartreuse, but they turned him down. He then made the pilgrimage to Rome and to Loretto, came back to Grenoble and thought of spending some time in retreat on Parménie.

De Saléon was delighted to see him, having known him in Grenoble. He knew that he was intelligent, generous and seeking after perfection. He considered that Providence was directing him to the Institute of the Brothers and suggested this to De La Salle. The latter was cautious on learning of his adventurous life, but he had a long talk with him, spoke of the life of the Brothers and left him alone in his room to think it over. Finally, he admitted him. He handed him over to the Director of the community, who was at



Parménie with him, to initiate him in the life and aims of the Brothers. All three must have gone down to Grenoble. Two months later, on 6 June, Brother John had Du Lac's fine head of long hair cut and gave him the habit of the Institute with the name of Brother Irenaeus. A fortnight later he was sent to Avignon to teach and at the same time continue his novitiate under the former master of novices, Brother Timothy, who was Director there. He was to have an important place in the Institute.

The Founder makes clear his position on the Bull *Unigenitus* and leaves Grenoble, June 1714

The Founder evidently broke the news to the community in Grenoble that he would be going back to Paris. When the news got round, such was his influence on people that "the friends he had in Grenoble, having learnt of his resolution to return to Paris at the request of the Brothers, made every effort to dissuade him. But he answered them that he had vowed obedience and that he must submit."⁶³ Yet he did not immediately set out on the journey back to "France", and arrived in Paris only in August. Brother Bartholomew may have sent a covering letter. He must have been kept informed by the Director of the Grenoble community of the Founder's state of health. As we shall see also, De La Salle could not go back as long as la Chétardye was alive. Bartholomew may in consequence have asked him to take all his time visiting (some of) the Southern communities before travelling north, and to make that journey leisurely. Merely notifying Bartholomew meanwhile that he accepted to resume the active superiorship of the Institute would change the whole situation of the northern Brothers and restore their morale immensely. One imagines they would have been very happy to inform de Brou.

It seems correct to see De La Salle as staying in Grenoble till into June. In that letter of 17 July to the parish priest of Mende already alluded to, Brother Bartholomew wrote: "I have learnt that M. De La Salle left Grenoble a few weeks ago to visit the houses in Provence."⁶⁴ This could be after the giving of the habit to Du Lac de Montisambert on 6 June. Another indication lies in his reaction to the local publication of the Bull *Unigenitus*. In accordance with the royal decree of 15 February, Bishop de Montmartin published the Bull *Unigenitus* in his diocese in April. De La Salle found it the topic of discussion and people taking sides when he came back from Parménie, and he himself was challenged. Maillefer the Jansenist says laconically: "When he was back in Grenoble, he learnt that new sorrows had been stirred up for him. But they soon cleared and had no other effect than to give a new lustre to his patience."⁶⁵

De La Salle had been discreet on a topic where discussion only seemed to

make things worse, but once the Bull was formally promulgated in the diocese, he considered it his duty to make clear where he stood. He read the document to the Brothers in Grenoble and explained it, along with the pastoral letter sent with it. Beyond that, when he was asked, he affirmed his acceptance of the Bull and pointed out Quesnel's errors, without denigrating personalities in Grenoble who sided with them.⁶⁶

"The party was embittered by this, and good Catholics made it a great honour to have at their head a man who was looked on as a saint, and who was not an ignorant one." A lady in the town who trusted his views asked him to examine the books she had. When he saw she had Quesnel's *Moral Reflections* among them he was indignant. The lady assured him she did not know it was a condemned work, and gave it to him to burn. It is interesting that earlier, in Paris, when de Noailles had condemned it, it was in the Brothers' community library. The Founder had immediately withdrawn it and sent it to the parish priest, even though as doctor in theology he was entitled to keep such books.⁶⁷

To return to the situation in Grenoble, the friends of Quesnel attacked De La Salle and made up stories about him. "They did not succeed, however, in Grenoble in defaming the servant of God. His virtue was not in doubt in that city, and the party received a set-back on that occasion."⁶⁸

Finally the day came when he set out from Grenoble to take up actively the superiorship by visiting the few houses of the southern Province. "He went to say goodbye to all those who had honoured him with their esteem during the stay he had made in Grenoble. The day before he left, he prepared for his journey by long and fervent prayers. He exhorted the Brothers of the house that he was leaving to preserve peace and union and to live in the exact observance of the Rules of the Institute. He embraced them all and left immediately. It is easy to understand up to what point they were affected by this separation. They felt it all the more because it took from them the hope of seeing him again in future."⁶⁹

He revisits the southern communities then travels north and reaches Paris in August⁷⁰

We have no record of his last visit to the southern communities, or how he travelled the 1,100 kilometres or so prior to arriving in Lyons, supposing he visited them all. "M. De La Salle set out via Lyons, where he remained for a few days. His first care, as soon as he arrived in that town, was to go and perform his devotions at the tomb of St Francis de Sales. He stayed there some time in prayer to stir up more and more his piety and fervour. From Lyons he went to Dijon (a further 200 kilometres) where the Brothers saw him with a joy mingled with sadness because of the few days he granted

them to console them for his long absence.”⁷⁰ (With reference to St Francis de Sales, he died in Lyons but was buried in his episcopal town of Annecy; his tomb is in the basilica of the Visitandines there.⁷¹ Annecy is in the Savoy Alps, over 150 kilometres by road from Lyons.)

It was while he was still travelling that Brother Bartholomew wrote on 17 July to M. Martineau, the parish priest of Mende, the letter that has already been referred to (p. 726). In it we learn the following: “I take the liberty, Monsieur, to let you know that the parish priest of Saint Sulpice died on St Peter’s day (June 29th), in odour of sanctity, and that M. de Gergy, who was his curate, is now his successor in pastoral care.”⁷² Clement XI had sent him a month before his death a brief praising his virtues and his holy achievements. Everybody praised his saintly life, and the Brothers knew how much he had done in his parish. Yet he was the biggest obstacle De La Salle ever met to the development of his Institute. Brother Bartholomew must have kept in touch with him and told him la Chétardye was ill and was not expected to live. He therefore waited for further news. “The news he received of his death had facilitated his return to Paris, *where he would not have dared return if this rival had still been alive. This is the declaration that M. De La Salle himself passed on to several Brothers he could trust.*”⁷³ This admission puts a new question mark over his long stay in the South. It suggests that it would have lasted as long as La Chétardye lived. The latter was not against the Brothers - on the contrary, he envied De La Salle’s being their originator. It was against him as Founder that he took a jealous stand.

The main content of Bartholomew’s letter was about something else, that showed he was still deferring to de Brou in a way De La Salle would not have done. Brother Isidore, who had come from Mende with his stories about Brother Henry, had left a gap there, yet information was needed about this Brother Henry before Bartholomew could risk sending a Brother from Paris. As it meant moving a Brother from one of the schools of Saint Sulpice, he correctly informed de Brou and in consequence wrote his letter to M. Martineau:

“I beg you to be good enough to inform yourself of what is happening among our Brothers of Mende, who have the happiness of working under your authority to instruct a part of the flock entrusted to you. We know, by our own experience, how great is the zeal you have for the salvation of souls. This gives us the hope that you will wish to take all the measures and the means to procure the order and regularity that the Brothers of your town, it is said, lack. For we have learnt, both by what people have written to us from Mende, and from Brother Isidore that Brother Henry treats the Brothers badly and adopts secular ways to the point that he is thinking of

leaving his Institute. It has been added that there is no longer in his community mental prayer, silence or the other practices necessary to preserve the spirit of piety and of charity. Moreover, we have learnt that Brother Henry spreads the rumour that our Society is divided on the Paris side and that there is no more regularity. Finally, we have learnt he had treated shamefully M. De La Salle, our Founder, whom he obliged to abandon the Brothers of Mende.”⁷⁴As the Founder was in Grenoble when he appointed Brother Henry to Mende, this is quite mendacious. It was Isidore’s own behaviour!

Martineau answered on 1 August, but he wrote, not to Bartholomew, but to de Brou, telling him two Brothers were needed in Mende. (He should expect and not oppose, therefore, some change in personnel in his own schools run by the Brothers.) This confirms that Brother Henry was on his own, so that Bernardin, if he had been there, was now in Alès (see p. 714). It also implies that increasing numbers of pupils meant that one extra Brother only was not sufficient. Before de Brou answered, the situation changed entirely: the Founder turned up in Paris.

THE FOUNDER BACK IN PARIS

He leaves the details of government to Brother Bartholomew

It was on 10 August 1714, that the Founder knocked on the door of the Brothers’ house in Rue de la Barouillère and said: “Here I am. What do you want me to do?”⁷⁵ They must have been speechless after his long absence, overcome by his simplicity and evident holiness and perhaps noticing how he had aged. And then there must have been joy and tears. Yet further conversations with him disabused and disappointed them. Maillefer wrote in his 1723 version: “He appeared before the Brothers with the submission of an inferior, refusing all marks of distinction and the deferences to superiority that they wanted to render him. He said, on meeting them: ‘Here I’ve come. What do you want of me?’ The Brothers, surprised by such a deep humility answered him that they begged him to resume the general government of the Institute. M. De La Salle refused to accept this and said that since they had survived with so much success during his absence, there was reason to believe that God was giving it his protection and that they should continue as they had begun. He had come back on their order, but always with the thought of living in the private state into which Providence had led him by secret ways” (In 1740 he wrote: “the particular state to which Providence had brought him by secret ways that showed him his vocation”),” and they should proceed to the election of a Superior General who could repair, by his good behaviour, the mistakes he had made.

“The Brothers made clear to him that they would never choose any other but him while he lived. This resolution distressed him. He withdrew to his

room where he prayed God in the bitterness of his heart to free him from a burden that was becoming too heavy. He was listened to only two years after, as we shall see later. But in this interval, he kept only the title of Superior, passing the detail of affairs on to Brother Bartholomew, who, however, did nothing without consulting him.”⁷⁶

“The holy man refused even to be in charge of the house or even to preside the exercises. He kept only the exercise of the ministry he could not pass on to the Brothers. He said holy Mass for them, heard their confessions and on Sundays and holydays gave them a half hour’s spiritual exhortation. The remainder of the time he stayed in his room and used his time to pray, to read Holy Scripture and books of piety, and to compose spiritual works for the particular advantage of his own.”⁷⁷

De Brou and some others of the clergy of Saint Sulpice remain hostile and meddle in the Brothers’ affairs

The man who had had himself inscribed as superior in the *Book of Vows* and who had opposed accepting postulants must have felt very small before De La Salle. On 5 October he finally answered M. Martineau’s letter of 1 August: “I gave an account to M. De La Salle of what you give me the honour to write to me. He seems to me fairly hard put to provide good subjects in your town in place of the Brothers you are short of.” (which is not surprising since de Brou had limited the number of novices.) “However, he is very attached to keeping this school going and he proposes to see to it very shortly. That is all I can tell you on this subject, for, since he has been in Paris I think I must hand over to him the government of his society of which I have taken care only in his absence.”⁷⁸ That was a remarkable misstatement. The Brothers made very clear he was not their superior and removed the evidence of his claim: “On M. De La Salle’s return this page was torn from the Register.”⁷⁹ The *Book of the Vows* in the Archives has in fact, a page neatly torn out, a fact not noticed till Brother Félix Paul checked Blain’s statement in 1951.

This, unfortunately, was not the end of trouble about who was Superior of the Brothers. There were “heirs of his (La Chétardye’s) attitude”, which would imply the group of clergy at Saint Sulpice who sided with him. One of them - in fact de Brou (see further) - professed to be scandalised that De La Salle heard the Brothers’ confessions, believing he had not the Cardinal’s permission. He expressed his surprise to Brother Bartholomew and then to De La Salle himself, “who withdrew him from that astonishment only to put him into a greater,” as Blain gloriously puts it, “by showing him the wide powers he had received from his Eminence the Cardinal when he first came into the archdiocese, without obligation to have them renewed.

The cleric we are speaking of was all the more surprised that he knew of no one who had the like, and that this mark of distinction had not been given to himself, as his rank and birth seemed to demand.”⁸⁰

This priest, “a man of great means and of a virtue beyond his quality”, seemed to object to De La Salle’s return to Paris and, in contradiction to what he had written to M. Martineau, went out of his way to challenge his position. He drew up a memoir and had it sent to the Founder requesting prompt and precise answers. These questions were: “Who will be hereafter the Superiors of the Brothers? What will be their vows? To whom should one address oneself when wishing to make a foundation? What will the annual allowance be? What will the Rules of the Society be?” Blain, as often, leaves us guessing who this person was. After analysing in his way the pitfalls in these questions, he says De La Salle would have been accused of thinking simple Brothers without learning were better (as Superiors) than enlightened and learned clerics, and of setting at nought the recent idea of ecclesiastical superiors which had been a success, “which was wounding personally the author of this memoir, who had been the first author of this enterprise. Finally, it would be also telling himself that he was not looked upon as the Superior of the Paris Brothers, and that he was usurping a title that no one had the right to give him.” That can only mean de Brou, and yet one would have thought, from other things we have seen Blain say of him, that he would now leave well alone.

If De La Salle had shown the memoir to the Cardinal, the latter would have been irritated at this interference after his decision of 4 April, and would have soon put de Brou in his place, but he avoided getting the man into trouble. The simplest would have been to keep silence. “But this is what he did not dare to do, for although this Reverend had no authority over him he had assumed some over the Brothers; they even had need of him; he could do them great good and great harm.” He therefore answered all the questions except the first, but this only annoyed the man. “To satisfy him, the holy Founder would have had to answer that the community of the Paris Brothers would be governed by him and the Reverend gentlemen of ****”, which can only refer to (some of) the clergy of Saint Sulpice. De Brou had control of the allocation paid the Brothers, and he refused to pay it until he got the answer he wanted. De La Salle was ready for trouble, but he still kept a prudent silence.

The situation incredibly went on for six weeks, and the Brothers were running short of money. They decided to work out an answer themselves that was not what de Brou wanted but that he could have no quarrel about, and that in fact was meaningless. “The Institute of the Brothers would be directed by the Reverends **** who in agreement with the Reverends ****

would choose an ecclesiastical superior.” (Blain’s asterisks would seem in the first place to hide one or two specific names - including de Brou’s? And in the second case ‘of the parish of St Sulpice’). The Brothers knew that government by a group of priests (in the parish of St Sulpice?) was not what he wanted; and that any choice of an ecclesiastical Superior would have to go to the cardinal, and then he would be in trouble for interfering. Whatever it meant, de Brou handed back the text smiling. Perhaps he thought they had given in. When the Brothers got back to De La Salle, he uttered a deep sigh: “O my God, what a heavy weight you have lifted from my heart!” The next day, when someone went to collect the allowance, it was given at once.⁸¹

The Founder’s relief shows there had been an awkward situation. As Poutet puts it: “Rather than one person (i.e. La Chétardye, now deceased), it was several ‘Reverend gentlemen’, according to Blain’s expression, who thought otherwise than De La Salle”, and he interprets the “Reverends ****” above as referring to priests of St Sulpice.⁸² The following incident and De La Salle’s comment on it seem to make this clear. The bishop of St Omer had come to Paris while he was in the South, to ask for Brothers for his episcopal city. “The novitiate being then overthrown, those who had interfered with the government of the house had answered the prelate that it was empty of subjects.” The bishop went back empty-handed and a school for the poor remained a project. When one of the Brothers told De La Salle on his return, urging him to write to the bishop, he was distressed at this missed opportunity and said: “*What do you expect me to do? Those whom you know in Paris after having ruined the novitiate in my absence, meddle with directing the community without allowing me to see to it myself.*”⁸³

The remarkable story of the knight d’Armestat

As a change not too exhilarating from this sad situation, here follows the story of a possessed man exorcised by the Founder this year. Sometime before the Founder returned to Paris, a knight called d’Armestat had joined the novitiate.⁸⁴ He was a young man of a noble family in Germany who had served in the imperial army under Prince Eugene of Savoy. After the latter’s defeat at the battle of Denain, 24 July 1712, which ended the War of the Spanish Succession, he left the army, crossed into France and retired to Lyons. He went one day into a church where a possessed woman, the talk of the town, was being exorcised. As soon as she saw him she said in a rage: “You do not believe there are demons, but you will feel one day their fury.” The effect on d’Armestat was that he had himself instructed in the Catholic faith and renounced Lutheranism. To escape the notice his conversion brought him, he left for Paris, where he looked for an experienced

priest to make a general confession and to be helped to form a new plan of life.

He was directed to a priest of Saint Sulpice, who advised him to enter De La Salle's community. He was accepted on 8 October 1714. Once he had decided to take on this life, he felt acute pains all over his body, and the wounds he had received in the army reopened. He endured this for a day without saying anything, but he was found next morning unconscious on the floor of his room in a pool of blood. The Brothers brought the doctor, but the blood still flowed so that he was given the last anointing. He recovered consciousness immediately and his wounds closed. But a few days later he lapsed into unconsciousness again, and a great quantity of blood came out of his mouth. He rolled his eyes, looking now and then towards one corner of the room and seeming to speak. He spent the night in extraordinary agitation and then fell into a swoon for four hours during which he believed he saw a crowd of demons threatening him if he did not leave the Brothers. He was recommended to pray to Our Lady, and found the temptation disappeared.

Once he recovered, he asked to be given the habit, but as soon as he received it the torture recommenced; his tongue swelled up and filled his mouth, as though he were being strangled. He was brought the holy viaticum, and as he seemed nearing his end, the community began the prayers of the dying. His pains diminished as they prayed, and totally went away. But they returned several times. De La Salle came back from Grenoble at this time and witnessed several attacks. He studied the symptoms and was sure this was a real possession. He used the prayers of the Church for such occasions, going alone into the sick man's room. He was entirely delivered and spent several untroubled years as a Brother. But several persons of consideration persuaded him to leave on the pretext that the Brothers' life was not suited to a man of his condition.

Blain adds: "The fact seems incredible, and one would not dare state it in a century in which people do not want to believe anything which appears extraordinary, if there were not the Brothers who were witnesses of it as guarantee." One night, all the man's toe-nails were pulled out, and the Brothers saw the result the next day. "This testimony is accepted even by those who make out to be freethinkers. M. De La Salle was, like the Brothers, witness of this fact and of others we have just related. He had come back from Grenoble and for more than six weeks had done in favour of this new convert so cruelly troubled by the Demon all that the tenderest charity could inspire in him."⁸⁵

This exorcism is one example of a considerable pastoral ministry that De La Salle as a priest exercised, alongside his main commitment to the work of the schools. Blain records, among many other instances, his converting of

a Scots Presbyterian and of a man who passed himself off as a priest and dabbled in sorcery.⁸⁶

Other events at the close of 1714. A new care in cataloguing entries and deaths in the Institute

We are at the close of 1714. On 11 December a Brother Placide died, aged twenty-three or twenty-four. Deaths like this and departures and the few novices at the moment explain why no further foundations were possible for some years: the one desired by the bishop of St Omer was begun only in 1720. Brother Bartholomew wrote to a Brother on this death: "I am informing you of the decease of our dear Brother Placide, which took place on 11th of the month of December of this year 1714. This good Brother died as he had lived. He joined us at the age of nineteen years and has been with us for four and a half years. He was of a well-bred family." He speaks of his many virtues, especially during several illnesses, particularly the last one, "which was of nine days. Shortly before dying, he recited the *Te Deum*, the *Gloria in excelsis*, sang a hymn and had the happiness of seeing Jesus Christ and his holy Mother. He died joyfully, very content and very peacefully."⁸⁷

In the Bibliothèque Nationale in Paris is a *Catalogue of the Brothers of the Christian Schools* that was begun at the end of 1714 or early 1715.⁸⁸ It begins by quoting a ruling: "There will be two registers or books. One is called the book of the postulants. The other is called the book of the Brothers, on which will be written: 1st, their name in the society at the taking of the habit; 2nd, their family name; 3rd, the town, diocese and parish and the day and year of their birth; 4thly, and the date of their entry." Often also are added later the vows made, and the place and date when the Brother left or was sent away, or died in the Society. The ruling was recent and implies some assembly of the Brothers after the Founder's return. The decision marks the will to reaffirm that the Institute was one. It does not start with new entries only: it lists all the Brothers then present in the Society, beginning with Gabriel Drolin. There were, including novices, 108 Brothers who had entered before December 1714, teaching in 21 towns of the country. Likewise witnessing to the unity of the Institute, this same year a list was begun of the deceased Brothers, beginning with those who had died hitherto. A copy in the Brothers' Archives says in its foreword: "All the Brothers who have died, up to and including 1713 have been taken from a list that an elderly Brother kept by him and is in consequence unsure as to correctness, because the book from which all the others have been taken dates only from 1714, and because till then apparently a register of deceased Brothers failed to be kept; it follows that all the first ones until the said year 1714 are doubtful as to the place and time of their decease."

Deaths were indicated as they occurred in the *Catalogue of the Brothers*. In fact the first death recorded is that of Brother Placide. He was born Thomas Guyot at Sissone in the diocese of Laon on 25 July 1691. He entered the Society on 29 April 1710, “bringing a few old clothes”, and died in Rethel. This mention of the rags a postulant brought with him appears fairly often in the catalogue. Similar indications are: “he brought a shirt”; “he brought a few small items of furniture”; “he brought three old shirts and a new one”. It shows the poverty of many an entrant. The entries in this catalogue confirm or modify some of the assertions by Blain about Brothers leaving and about the limit put on the number of novices. In 1712 there were 5 novices, and one Brother left; in 1713 there were nine novices and three Brothers left; in 1714, three novices, which must be the effect of de Brou’s restriction, but no one left. The crisis the biographer indicated seems not to have taken place. In 1715, there were six novices, while three Brothers left. In 1716, 14 novices but seven departures.

To conclude the record of this year: Whatever confrontations the Bull *Unigenitus* stirred up in Grenoble, De La Salle found a much greater ferment in Paris. There were serious defections among the clergy. There was far more controversy going into print and with greater acrimony. He saw with sadness this revolt against a decision of the Holy See, and the effect on devotion. He took to prayer and stirred up others to pray, in particular Sister Louise. He wrote in the strongest terms to her of the need to pray for submission and peace in the Church of France. She answered that she deplored this division in the French Church, but that the storm would slowly subside, as God had revealed to her.⁸⁹

1715

Effect of Louis XIV’s death on the Brothers. The Founder has to take the novices back to Rouen

On 1 September Louis XIV died after a reign of sixty-four years. The destitute people of Paris danced in the streets. The last thirty years or so after 1688 had effaced the memory of the earlier triumphs abroad. At home there had been increasing taxation and misery. An epitaph written by ‘a simple parish priest’ begins: “Louis 14th, king of France and Navarre, died on 1 September of this year, scarcely regretted by his whole kingdom, on account of the exorbitant sums and excessive taxes he levied on all his subjects. The clergy were shamefully servile in doing the King’s will; he had hardly to request for a grant, to be given more than he asked.”⁹⁰

De La Salle was not an adulator of Louis XIV. His meditation on St Louis, King of France, has only a reference at the end to the Brothers’ work procuring the good of the state by all they teach the poor. In his catechism,

under duties to those in authority, he does not mention the king. Yet he did not refuse to accept royal subsidies that would help finance schools for the poor, whatever the royal policy involved might be: defence in the matter of the school for naval cadets in Calais, instruction of the “new converts” as in Languedoc, or genuine concern as shown by Mme de Maintenon. But royal initiative was slight: Louis might recommend and decree, but he saw the actual creation and running of schools as a matter for town authorities and parish priests.⁹¹

When Louis granted a subsidy of 450 livres for the first school run by the Brothers in Calais, it was in consideration of that town’s part against the maritime powers in the Spanish War of Succession. But by the Treaty of Utrecht of 11 April 1713 Louis had to keep peace with England, and the town was no longer a front-line position. The allowance was not renewed from 1714, and the Brothers had to depend on private generosity.⁹² The naval school had already a more normal means of support. When Louis XIV’s grandson, Louis XV, succeeded him while still a minor, the Regent, Philip of Orleans (to look forward a little), withdrew the royal subsidy, but it was restored by Louis XV with back payments, on 19 July 1716. The order he gave his Treasurer, practically identical with Louis XIV’s previously, is a virtual recognition of De La Salle’s Institute. It was “to pay cash to the Brothers of the Christian Schools of Calais the sum of three hundred livres bonus, granted by the late king my grandfather in consideration of the trouble and care they take for the instruction of ratings.”⁹³ As we know, the municipality added 900 livres annually taken from the city toll dues that went to both schools.⁹⁴

In Paris, “the death of the King Louis XIV deprived M. De La Salle of the aid that the Bishop of Chartres, his friend, obtained from the liberality of this great monarch through the favour of Madame de Maintenon. It had for a long time helped him to sustain his Paris community which found itself so much in want at the end of the year, that he was constrained to abandon Paris to move with it to Rouen.”⁹⁵ “The shortage of cash and the extraordinary high cost of food that increased daily in Paris” compared with less inflation in the provinces⁹⁶ decided him to send the three or four novices away with Brother Bartholomew to Saint Yon. He stayed another month at the Rue de la Barouillère and after winding up a few matters in Paris, re-joined them with the intention of dropping all other care except that of preparing for death.

“Before leaving to follow the novitiate, he asked the Brother Director of the house to let him pray to God for two days shut up in his room, which he left only to take his meals, in order to consult God to know whether he should go and present his respects to the Cardinal de Noailles. Apparently

he was inspired not to go, for after having said holy Mass very early in the parish of St. Sulpice, he went to salute M. de Brou and take leave of him.”⁹⁷ The Cardinal’s Jansenist stand and his appeal to a Council must have been the motive. But he had to weigh not taking leave of the Cardinal against his respect for the bishop of a diocese, and also against possibly losing de Noailles’s goodwill towards the Brothers.

When De La Salle informed de Brou that he was leaving, the latter’s reaction may be seen as putting him in a good light. He opposed his travelling, and in fact used the words “I forbid you”. Blain pointedly interprets this as something that “charity inspires sometimes to make up for the want of authority.” De Brou was worried about how the Brothers would survive without De La Salle when, with prices rising on everything, they were beginning to run short of money. This seems to mean he was used to him obtaining the help of Providence when no one else could. The Founder gave way, but the Brothers felt he should be at St Yon. Two of them went to explain matters to de Brou. Edified by such a man, much older than he was, deferring to him, he withdrew his objection.

One more interesting development in Paris marks this year. In the parish of St Paul in the suburb of Saint Antoine where De La Salle had taken refuge in 1703, the then pro-Jansenist curate, John Baptist Goy, was now parish priest in his own right. Saint Marguerite’s chapel of ease had been made his parish church. On 14 May 1715, he started a second school, run by the Tabourin Brothers. These were well-known Jansenists calling themselves Brothers of the Christian Schools. They had been founded in 1711 nearby by the Reverend Tabourin. They were closely modelled on De La Salle’s Brothers except for their dress, which was black and of ordinary cloth but of bourgeois cut. Because Tambonneau, the head of the Treasury, subsidised them, they were popularly called the Tambonneau Brothers. Blain treats them as counterfeit, but they could have been a genuine imitation. Although they developed little, they survived the Revolution for a time. Goy had also brought into the parish in 1713 the Sisters of St Martha, founded by the widow of the Théodon mentioned in La Salle’s letters to Drolin. She was a militant Jansenist. After the Bull *Unigenitus* they gradually followed Goy’s stance of appealing to a Council.⁹⁸ Madame Théodon was sent to the Bastille for a while in 1728 for circulating Jansenist leaflets clandestinely.⁹⁹

1716

Developments at St Yon

In the letter he wrote to Brother Gabriel Drolin at the end of this year, and which will be seen later, the Founder wrote: “For nearly ten months I have

been infirm in this house in which I have been for a year.” Old age and infirmities such as his rheumatism either kept him in bed or at least in his room throughout the year 1716; he used the time writing. Around him the institutions at St Yon were developing. The boarding school had not declined during the years when the novitiate had moved back to Paris nor in his absence. A Brother Francis who was in charge had had new buildings erected. Early on the Founder had agreed to take in young people in their teens who had character difficulties or were already involved in anti-social behaviour. Their fathers sent them to St Yon in the hope of reform. They had separate accommodation: they were housed in the fourth of a set of buildings around a yard of 1500 square metres that these detainees could use, while the free boarders had the use of a ground of half an acre. They took part in very much the same studies as the other boarders and were with them for prayers and the catechism lesson. Control was very strict, but as they improved, it was relaxed, and they might join officially the other students.

Such was the success the Brothers had with young people considered incorrigible that de Pontcarré considered asking De La Salle to set up a detention centre at St Yon for young men and even grown-ups who had caused some scandal and been condemned by the courts, or who had compromised their reputation and that of their family, and that a public trial would only harm further. For such persons their families had obtained *lettres de cachet*. These detainees made a doubtful and motley group of varying moral blame. They included members of the nobility, religious and priests, upper and middle bourgeois. Among them, a few were sent because they were feeble-minded and even insane.

Entirely separate arrangements were made for this group. Their building was quite isolated. They were kept locked in their own rooms and allowed communication with the others only when their attitude or changed health allowed it. They were visited by the Director and the Brothers in charge of them, and by doctors. They were allowed to have caged birds in their room and to grow flowers in window-boxes. If they improved, they were allowed to come together at meal times and break times, and could follow lessons in geometry, design, and architecture or do manual work in the gardens or in the spacious workshops alongside the field. Only the superiors in charge knew where these detainees came from. Throughout their stay they were given a fictitious name: Saint So-and-so, taken from the liturgical calendar. Their families paid considerably more for their re-education and upkeep than was charged for ordinary boarders.

Since this was not an early development, and de Pontcarré would have wanted to discuss the matter personally with De La Salle as superior gen-

eral and as his friend, it probably was not initiated before 1715¹⁰⁰. For it was only after this that difficulties arose with the parish priest of Saint Sever to which Saint Yon belonged. That agreement of 1706 about taking the boarders to the parish mass on Sundays was evidently impossible with regard to the group of prisoners -for such they were. It exposed them to public gaze, not to mention the chance it gave them to escape. So the Founder organised for them all the liturgies at St Yon, Easter Sunday included. True to form, M. Hecquet "took everlasting proceedings against M. De La Salle with the ecclesiastical superiors."¹⁰¹ So writes Blain who was in Rouen. Since Hecquet died on 4 June 1716, this applies more to his successor, Louis Dujarrier-Bresnard, who replaced him in August the same year and took up the complaint.¹⁰² The dispute went on almost till De La Salle's death.

The Founder visits Calais and Boulogne

In June this year, M. Gense, the staunch Catholic from Calais, came with M. de la Cocherie, founder of the Brothers' school in Boulogne, to St Yon expressly to visit De La Salle. He received them with great cordiality, showed them round the boarding school and other departments and then took them to a lodge he had had built at the far end of the grounds. There they conversed for several hours, and then he had a simple meal served them. He and they were kindred spirits who took to one another immediately: "The priest admired in the layman the fervour of the first Christians. The layman admired in the priest an apostolic man, a vase of election that the Lord in his mercy had prepared in these last times to be the ornament of the Church of France." The two went away marvelling at his holiness and wisdom.¹⁰³ In return, in August (Blain says seven or eight months after coming to St Yon), Brother Bartholomew asked De La Salle to pay a return visit to Boulogne and Calais. It was a gesture of kindness and regard towards him. The Founder was feeling perhaps better in the warm months of the year, and this journey would be a change. Very likely, his two visitors had asked Bartholomew for this and had provided for a coach.

On his arrival in Calais, everybody, town councillors and people, bourgeois and nobles, gave him a tremendous welcome. The dean asked him to celebrate the high mass on the Assumption of Our Lady. The dean himself gave the homily, but said not a word on the feast of the day. He was either Jansenist or had yielded to the Jansenist attitude of belittling Mary's role. After the Mass, De La Salle could not refrain from pointing this out, and the scandal of not referring to such a doctrine. The dean admitted his fault and made up the following Sunday. The Founder visited M. Gense a number of times. On one occasion the latter, wanting to have his guest's portrait painted, sat an artist in the room next to the dining-room behind a tapestry. The artist,

unfortunately, had to move to get a better view, and De La Salle noticed it. He said nothing but determined not to accept another invitation to go there.¹⁰⁴

He left shortly afterwards for Boulogne. There, a crowd came out to meet him and escort him to the Brothers' house. M. de la Cocherie, who was deputy to the *Intendant* of Amiens, and other leading figures were eager to speak to him and honour him. The Brothers, of course, were overjoyed to see him. They were touched almost to tears at the poverty of his dress that was all worn and patched. They had a new one made in haste, and kept the old one as a relic. They were still in their cramped quarters, but De La Salle saw how people were giving of their own time to build a new house. It had, however, been under construction on and off since 1712. (Even in 1724 the Brothers had to write to the governor asking if he could have stairs made up to their rooms, instead of the ladder they had to use at some peril!)¹⁰⁵

Provision for the children of his youngest brother, now insane

We may insert here the results of his youngest brother Jean-Rémy's mental decline. John had last seen his brother at his marriage at Epernay in September 1711. He had four children, the last born in 1716 and who died the next year. Their father began to exhibit signs of a nervous malady that first showed itself in extravagance. His affairs turned to disorder and he squandered some of his wife's property. He grew worse and resigned his office as royal procurator at the Mint of Rheims in 1715. His illness turned to insanity, and the lieutenant of police had to intervene, in the first case on 27 November 1716. But already Jean-Louis must have alerted his brother that Jean-Rémy would soon be confined to an institution, for on 28 November they signed a legal provision, promising to pay for his upkeep. On 15 February 1717 he was declared civilly incapable. The police had to intervene again on 21 May,¹⁰⁶ and he was now put away, probably in the famous asylum for the insane at Charenton, then a village near Paris, now part of the capital, where the Marquis de Sade died in 1814. Jean-Rémy De La Salle died there in 1732 and must lie buried in the cemetery.¹⁰⁷

References

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4. Blain II, 110.
5. Maurice-Auguste, CL11, 375-6.

6. id, CL11, 88.
7. id., 86, n.4.
8. Poutet II, 150.
9. CL11, 88, n.3.
10. id., 87.
11. id., 88; Poutet II, 152-3.
12. Blain II, Appendix, 28.
13. Blain II, 111-114; Rigault I, 390-391; Poutet II, 144-5.
14. Poutet II, 147, n.22.
15. Blain II, 149.
16. Blain II, 111-113.
17. id., 113.
18. See CL3, 11-12; Poutet II, 148-9.
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21. Blain II, 114-115.
22. Maillefer, CL6, 122.
23. CL11, 76, n.4.
24. Maillefer, CL6, 224.
25. Maillefer, CL6,, 214-15; Blain II, 99-100; Rigault I, 379-380.
26. Maillefer, CL6, 214.
27. Poutet II, 184, n.15.
28. Blain II, 55.
29. Lucard, *Vie du Vénérable De La Salle*, 289.
30. Rigault I, 379.
31. Maillefer, CL6, 311 6.
32. Maillefer, CL6, 314-217; Blain II, 100; Rigault I, 380.
33. Maillefer, CL6, 214-216.
34. Lucard, op. cit., 289-90.
35. Maillefer, CL6, 216,217; Blain II, 101-2.
36. Lucard, op. cit., 288.
37. Maillefer, CL6, 216.
38. Félix-Paul, 22.
39. Maillefer, CL6, 216.
40. Blain II, 149-150; Rigault I, 392; Poutet II, 145-7.
41. Blain II, 149.
42. id, ibid.
43. Maillefer, CL6, 218, 219; Blain II, 102-3.
44. Maillefer, CL6, 218.
45. Lucard, *Vie du Vénérable de La Salle*, 291.
46. Blain II, 103.
47. Maillefer, CL6, 218-221; Blain II, 103-105; Rigault I, 380. For the history of the site: *Parménie*, by Brother Leo C. Burkhard, Grenoble, 1976.
48. Maillefer, CL6, 218, 220.
49. Quoted in Burkhard's *Parménie*, p. 165.

50. See Maillefer, CL6, 218; Blain II, 103.
51. On all the above, see Burkhard, op. cit.
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56. W. J. Battersby, *St John Baptist De La Salle*, St Mary's College Press, Winona 1957, 258.
57. Maillefer, CL6, 225-7; Blain II, 118-119; Rigault I, 392-4; Poutet II, 146-7.
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59. Dom Théodore Bellanger, Prior of Parménie 1866-95, quoted by Burkhard, 165.
60. Blain II, 149; Poutet II, 147.
61. Blain II, 150.
62. Félix-Paul, 217-18; Aroz, CL26, 252; Lucard, op.cit., 296-300; Rigault I, 421-424; Rigault II, 150-169.
63. Maillefer, CL6, 226; Blain II, 119.
64. Lucard, op. cit., 307.
65. Maillefer, CL6, 222.
66. Blain II, 106-7.
67. Blain II, 221-222.
68. id., 107.
69. Maillefer, CL6, 226.
70. Maillefer, CL6, 225-7; Blain II, 118-119; Rigault I, 392-4; Poutet II, 146. Maillefer, CL6, 228-9; Blain II, 119-120.
71. *New Catholic Encyclopedia*, McGraw-Hill, 1966.
72. Rigault I, 394.
73. Blain II, 121. Italics not in Blain.
74. Lucard, op.cit., 269.
75. Maillefer, CL6, 228, 229; Blain II, 120-121.
76. Maillefer, CL6, 228.
77. Blain II, 121.
78. Poutet II, 198.
79. Blain II, 113.
80. Blain II, 121.
81. See Blain II, 121-4.
82. Poutet II, 148, n.23.
83. Blain II, 406. Italics not in Blain.
84. Maillefer, CL6, 228-233; Blain II, 125-127.
85. Blain II, 125-7.
86. Blain II, 345-6; 340. See Index to CL10 under Conversions, 18; Hospitality, 33.
87. Blain II, Appendix, 42.
88. CL3, 24-79.
89. Blain II, 223.
90. From the full quote in *Louis XIV and France*, by Victor Mallia-Malines, p 111-112, in the series *Documents and Debates*, Macmillan 1986.

91. Poutet II, 41-48.
 92. Id., 41-45.
 93. Lucard, op. cit., 319.
 94. Rigault I, 273.
 95. Maillefer, CL6, 222, 233.
 96. Blain II, 127.
 97. Blain II, 128.
 98. Poutet II, 35; Blain II, 219-220; Rigault II, 32-34.
 99. Generalate archives, *Fonds Martinais*, Boxfile M14, Théodon D(7a).
 100. Poutet II, 100, n.74.
 101. Rigault I, 402-404; Blain II, 32-34.
 102. Blain II, 168.
 103. Rigault I, 404.
 104. Lucard, op.cit., 318; Blain I, 388.
 105. Blain I, 388; cf Lucard, op. cit., 319-320.
 106. Lucard, op. cit., 320,321, n.1; Blain II, 71; see Blain I, 388.
 107. Aroz, CL27, 169-171.
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Chapter 21: The General Chapter of 1717. The Founder's last years and death,1717-1719.

Once he was back in St Yon, about the end of August, 1716, after visiting Calais and Boulogne, the Founder knew it was urgent to have a Brother elected Superior before he died.¹ It was not clear, for instance, how the various diocesan ecclesiastical superiors would react if the Brothers were to lose such a revered man without proper provision. One can certainly add his desire to take the lowest place and live in obedience, but the steps he took were clearly thought out in view of assuring an indisputable transition of authority in the Institute and clear written evidence to the fact. For all his withdrawing from government, here he was handling matters with a very clear objective and procedure. He first called a meeting of several Brothers from Rouen and St Yon. They were Francis, head of the boarding school, Dositheus, head of the four schools in Rouen, Ambrose, head of the detention centre, and Charles and Stephen, teachers at St Yon. They met on 4 December 1716. The Founder declared to them his intention of quitting the position of Superior. The only obstacle to this was the great attachment of the Brothers to him that made them unwilling to face up to his resignation from office and his coming death. He assured them he would still be available, and they did then agree.

He proposed that a general assembly be called to St Yon the following Pentecost, and be composed of the leading Brothers, but that beforehand the written agreement of every Brother in the Society to its decisions should be obtained. He wished to get an expression of the unanimous will of the Brothers, and have it legally recorded as such. He proposed that to obtain this consent, one who had their trust should be sent round the houses of the Society. These five Brothers had no difficulty in selecting Bartholomew for this purpose. At the end of the meeting they drew up the following declaration:

“We, the undersigned, Brothers of the Christian Schools, having met in the house of Saint Yon in order to make provision for what is most urgent concerning the good of our Institute, seeing that for nearly a year M. De La Salle, our Founder, has not been in a fit state to see to it, having always been infirm since that time, have judged opportune and even necessary that Brother Bartholomew, who has been appointed to the government of our Institute for several years, should now visit all the houses that depend on it, to find out what is happening there and how the Brothers are conducting themselves, so as to be able afterwards, with the principal Brothers of our Society, to see to the means of establishing, preserving and maintaining the unity and uniformity of the Institute, to decide on and determine the rules and to provide at the same time for the general government of our Institute,

in an assembly it will indicate to be held in the house of Saint Yon, from the feast of the Ascension until Pentecost.”

After the signatures the Founder simply added: “I consider opportune what the Brothers have resolved above”. But Canon Blain, as ecclesiastical superior, wrote: “We the undersigned, superior of the Brothers of the Christian Schools of Rouen, nominated by his Grace the Archbishop, permit Brother Bartholomew to be absent for several months in order to do what M. De La Salle and the Brothers judge necessary, believing it necessary as well as they. Blain.”² This seems an unnecessary act of authority. In discreet hands, as in Blain’s case, it served to protect the Brothers, a novel lay community still unrecognised in Church and state, from outside interference. Blain never attempted to legislate, and when the Founder returned to Rouen, he remained his great admirer, referring to himself³ as “a canon, a great friend of the Institute”.



The Founder writes a final letter to Gabriel Drolin, December 5th

The Founder was well aware there was one Brother whom Brother Bartholomew would not be able to reach: Gabriel Drolin. And so the very next day, 5 December 1717 he wrote to him.⁴ As the text shows, this was not the only letter he had sent since that of 16 December 1712, and this present final letter is in part an answer to one he had received recently.

At Saint Yon, suburb of Rouen, this 5th December 1716.

It is very much in spite of myself, my very dear Brother, that I have not written to you for so long. I have written to you several times without having an answer from you. I believe it is because my letters were intercepted, just as I found out that some had been intercepted from you to me. I have had many unfortunate affairs since that time (this seems to refer to 1712 onwards; he does not detail all he went through) and I am at present in a house in the outskirts of Rouen called Saint Yon, where the novitiate is.

I assure you that I have much tenderness and affection for you and that I pray often to God for you. You may write to me when you want. I hope that the Brother who is at Avignon at the present time (Timothy) will be faithful to send me your letters, for he is very sensible and I will answer you that way. For nearly ten months I have been ill in this house where I have been for a year. The scandal of the archbishop of Paris is creating trouble among the bishops. (On 5 March de Noailles had appealed to a General Council against the Pope, and was joined by four other bishops.) I do not know what people think of it in Rome. (The Pope in fact had written personally to the Cardinal, and the College of Cardinals had sent him a

letter asking him to reconsider his views, but to no purpose.⁵) I was very much comforted by your last letter and your continued affection and kind heartedness gave me great pleasure. Let me know, please, how things are with you.

I was minded this vacation to send you a Brother who has been to Rome and knows a little Italian and who is very sensible and a good teacher, but I have employed him elsewhere, believing that his usefulness in that place was of great importance.

This could have been Brother Irenaeus (see p. 738) who was sent to St Yon as sub-director of novices. But his biographer shows him unable to control a class.⁶

The Brothers are preparing to hold an assembly from the Ascension till Pentecost to decide on many things concerning the rules and the government of the Institute. Please give your consent to all that will be decided in that assembly by the principal Brothers of the Society.

I believe you are still continuing to keep school. Let me know please, how many students there are.

Gabriel's name, in fact, figured regularly, with his position as teacher, on the annual registers of St Susanna's, and he received each year the equivalent of 180 livres out of the pontifical budget. Cost of living was not high in Rome, where the price of ordinary commodities was kept within the means of the poor. When the Count Miaczinski left Rome in 1714, Gabriel sublet his rooms to a certain Giovanni de Blanch, and next year to a young German. In 1716 a widow of 83 years occupied the rooms. The rent he received offset in part what he himself was paying.

Your nephew came to see me, telling me he wanted to be a Brother and that he had been to see you and that you were going to become a priest. As he is light-headed, I sent him away to think it over, and I have heard no news of him since. I am, in Our Lord, my very dear Brother, all yours.

De La Salle.

This was the last letter that we know of written by the Founder to Drolin. Brother Bartholomew took it with him on his tour and posted it himself at Avignon.

Brother Bartholomew's tour of the Institute

He did not have a strong constitution and dreaded this very long journey in winter, through distant and even dangerous territories. His fear was such that on being nominated he began to tremble all over and burst into tears. But he

took a grip on himself and put his trust in Providence. As Blain says, the dangers on his route were far from imaginary.⁷

He did his travelling on horseback. It was a very considerable journey, begun as winter set in. We know only of a few isolated incidents. "Having fallen off his horse, and not having been able to free one of his feet from the stirrup, he was dragged very far." "Two robbers closed in on him one evening as he left a town, and pursued him a long time without being able to do him any harm; for they found themselves as though enchained in his presence. Always close behind him, they could not stop him, held back it seems by an invisible hand. Astonished themselves by what was happening to them, they did not know what to say or do. The Brother, put out by such a bad company, asked them often with his usual calmness what they wanted, but, as if their tongue were tied as much as their hands, they remained disconcerted and speechless." Finally, they were able to leave him, to their great satisfaction, and he recognised God's protection in the event.

"Passing one day in the Vivarès, a region where precipices are frequent, he found himself lost in paths where the abundance of snow covered the ground." He put his trust in God and prayed to his guardian angel. On opening his eyes "he saw far off some travellers who made him a sign to follow them without fear." He escaped similar dangers travelling through Auvergne. Later on, his route crossed a river, and he had to test it for a fordable place. But in fact he had fallen on a very deep part. He urged his horse to enter the water, but it backed away. He tried again, then used his spurs, to no avail. The horse's rearing up, indeed, threatened to plunge him into the river. At that moment he noticed a poor man from a neighbouring village who shouted across the river at the top of his voice that he was heading for certain drowning, and then pointed out a shallower part of the river where he was able to cross in safety.⁸

He took with him on his long journey a little register in which to record the agreement of the Brothers, according to a formula probably drawn up by De La Salle and the five Brothers. His visit is like a roll-call of the Institute, with names we would all like to know more about. It also shows how small the Institute still was, how far-flung it was, considering the slowness of communications, and how small some of the communities still were. It points to boldness and risk on the part of the Founder in following the calls of Providence.

Brother Bartholomew began his long tour with a visit to Chartres, which is about 85 kilometres southwest of Paris. The first entry on his register is this declaration, signed by the four Brothers of the community on 9 December:

We, the undersigned...acknowledge that our dear Brother Bartholomew, appointed for several years to the government of our Institute, came here

from the house of Saint Yon, in a suburb of Rouen, where he lives, and arrived at our house on the seventh of December one thousand seven hundred and sixteen to make a visit according to the custom of our Institute, and that we have given him an account of the running of our house and our expenses, and that we fully accept that there should be an assembly of the principal Brothers of our Institute in the said house of Saint Yon, at the time that has been indicated to us by the said Brother, to decide on and determine our rules and to make provision at the same time for the government of our Institute, and finally that we are ready to do and to follow what will be decided in that assembly.⁹

The Director was the Brother Hubert who has left us six of De La Salle's frank letters of guidance to him.

After Chartres, Bartholomew went on to Moulins, where on 16 December two Brothers signed the same formula. It took an eight days' ride in winter conditions to do the perilous journey to Mende, where he spent Christmas. Brother Henry, along with Brother Nicholas, signed on 27th. The traveller then moved quickly southwards to avoid the worst of the winter in that area. It would also give the distant Directors time to make arrangements for their travel to St Yon if they were able to do so. Two Brothers signed at les Vans on 31st.

1717

It was perhaps on the descent towards Alès, on snow-covered tracks, that his accident occurred, for he rested there till the Epiphany, when Bernardin, the Director, and three other Brothers signed. In Avignon he stayed with Timothy, who was to succeed him, and three other Brothers from 8 to 10 January only, when they signed the declaration. The two Brothers in Marseilles signed on 15th.

He made the journey from Marseilles to Grenoble in a week. The four Brothers there signed on 26 January. On 8 February two Brothers signed at Dijon; on 15th, two at Troyes. It took five days to get to Rethel. It was on this stage that he had that experience with the robbers. The four Brothers there signed on 13 February. Then it was the turn of Rheims. He was there on 25th. Brother Joseph and eight other Brothers signed on 28th, five signed at Laon on 4 March. He stayed some time with the three Brothers at Guise. Then he covered the long stretch to Calais, to be with the six Brothers there from 16 to 18 March and then with the six at Boulogne, who signed on 21st, one being the Fiacre who would replace Drolin in Rome. He then took the coastal route south via Abbeville and so to Rouen. He arrived there in time for Easter, which was on 28th, for the 10 Brothers there (running the four

schools) signed on Holy Saturday, and the two in Darnétal on 2 April. He rested a while, and on 14th he set out for Versailles, Saint Denis and Paris: on 16, 18 and 25 April respectively, we have the signatures of 4, 2, and 11 Brothers. He was back at St Yon by 1 May. His register concludes with the signatures of the nine Brothers there.¹⁰

This precious document contains 99 signatures. With the Founder, Brother Bartholomew, and Gabriel Drolin, the Institute counted 102 members. As to novices, 13 were admitted in 1716 and 5 in 1717. Most of these would be at Saint Yon when Bartholomew returned. His tour had taken five months and he had covered over 1000 miles. He calls for our admiration and gratitude. In his absence, during Lent, De La Salle prevailed on the one in charge at St Yon to allow him to take the lowest place in the refectory for meals, after the gardener and carter. (So serving Brothers had a lower place.) There he stayed until Brother Bartholomew came back and made him resume his usual place.¹¹



THE GENERAL CHAPTER OF PENTECOST, 1717

Sixteen Directors, including Brother Bartholomew, formed the Second General Chapter of Pentecost 1717.¹² The six Directors who were not able to make it were all in charge of schools of two Brothers only and could not be spared. The only exception was the Director of Darnétal, who probably made an arrangement with the Brothers of Rouen. Although the preparatory commission, if we may call the five Brothers by that name, had set the dates for the Assembly from Ascension Thursday to Pentecost, it must have been postponed, for it began on Pentecost Day, 16 May 1717. The Founder sent each Director an order to be at St Yon for the two or three days' retreat which would precede the Chapter procedures. "One needed to wait for the return of the warm time of year to convoke the Brothers. The custom was in fact as though established with them to hold this kind of assembly at the time of Pentecost and dispose those who composed it by a retreat."¹³ This does indicate that De La Salle did meet the leading Brothers regularly.

He opened the retreat by an address in which he spoke of the importance of what they were about to do, and then proposed how to conduct the Chapter in the right dispositions. He suggested also a method of electing a Superior which he took in part from the Rules and Constitutions of St Ignatius. He composed in French a prayer for invoking the assistance of the Holy Spirit and left it for their use. He then withdrew completely from the Chapter and remained in his room so as to leave the Brothers entirely free. They said that prayer five or six times a day and followed the procedure he had suggested.

They first chose Brother Bartholomew to chair the Assembly, and after two days proceeded to an election in which he received the majority of the



votes. This would be on Pentecost Tuesday, 18 May. When De La Salle was told, he was not surprised, but Brother Bartholomew begged the assembly not to put this burden on his shoulders. This was not accepted. He asked them therefore to give him two Brothers to help him to discharge his duties. They agreed, and used the same election procedure as in his case. The two elected were Brother Jean Jacquot, Director of the Paris community, who had joined the first community in Rheims in October 1686, and Brother Joseph the Visitor, Director of the actual Rheims community. They kept to their present residences. For the Brothers since then - and this is something De La Salle must have asked for - Brother Bartholomew is the first Superior General. John Baptist De La Salle remains their Founder.

After this, the capitulants gave their attention to the “rectification of *Rules* and practices”. It was evident they would not have time to go through them in detail with due reflection. But also, they wanted the last thoughts of their Founder on their way of life. Accordingly, they asked him to review the *Rules* as he thought fit. The deliberations went on till Trinity Sunday. The Brothers renewed their vows on that day after De La Salle and Brother Bartholomew.¹⁴

A legal dossier is made of the proceedings of the preparatory commission and of the minutes of the General Chapter

The Founder made sure that for all time the Brothers would have written evidence of the momentous moment when with the unanimous consent of the Institute its General Chapter elected one of themselves as their Superior General.¹⁵ On 30 June 1717 a document was drawn up in the chambers of the solicitor Sanadon in Rouen of which there is a copy in the Brothers’ Rome Archives at the beginning of the Register of General Chapters. It opens:

“Today there appeared before the king’s counsellors, hereditary solicitor-notaries, receivers and royal apostolic notaries for the bailiwick, town and county of Rouen, the undersigned, Brother Joseph Truffet, called Brother Bartholomew, Superior General of the Brothers of the Christian Schools established in several towns and places of the kingdom of France, nominated by capitulary proceedings held in their house of Saint Yon of Rouen in the suburb of Saint Sever on May the twenty-third last, and also Superior of the said house of Saint Yon, and there residing, the which has brought and deposed in the Notary’s office of Rouen: a document in the form of a deliberation held by the Brothers of the said Schools, assembled at Saint Yon on the fourth of December last; a small register bound in board and parchment, in duodecimo, containing the proceedings of visits made by the said Brother Bartholomew in twenty-two of their houses; and a deliberation in consequence, held in the said house, the said day, the twenty-third of

May last... the whole placed among the minutes of Sanadon, of the said solicitors undersigned... This was done, brought, deposed and passed at the said Rouen in the chambers of the said Sanadon, solicitor, on Wednesday afternoon the thirtieth and last day of June one thousand seven hundred and seventeen.”

The deliberations of 4 December 1716 and the little register of the visits mentioned above we have already seen. The document recording the proceedings of the General Chapter declares:

In consequence of the visit made by our very dear Brother Bartholomew, as appointed to the direction of our Institute, and of the deeds signed by all the Brothers of our Society, we the undersigned, Directors of the greater part of the Houses of the Society of the Brothers of the Christian Schools, spread over a great number of the provinces of the kingdom, namely (and the names of the sixteen Directors follow), having assembled in the house of Saint Yon, in the suburb of Saint-Sever of the town of Rouen, in the name of the Most Holy Trinity and under the protection of Saint Joseph, patron of our Society, with the written consent of all the Brothers of the Institute, to deliberate on the means to be preserved in our first spirit, acknowledge that to keep in constant and persevering union and in entire uniformity, in the midst of all the events whether ordinary or extraordinary to which we are exposed in this life, and to procure, as far as we are able, the support and solidity of our Institute, we have judged opportune, for the greater glory of God, to begin by the nomination of one of us to have its general and universal government on whom all that concerns our Institute would depend entirely. We have thought and made several prayers and pious works for that intention. We have used the ordinary formalities of voting slips and ballots, of which the greater number were in favour of our very dear Brother Joseph Truffet, called Brother Bartholomew, whom we have elected and do elect with free will, without distinction of persons nor any form of constraint, as our general and perpetual Superior, promising to have an entire submission and obedience towards him, in union with Our Lord obeying unto the death of the Cross, renouncing anything that might be contrary, whether for the present, whether for the future.

Following on this great Institute document is the new Superior's acceptance of his election:

And I, Joseph Truffet, called Brother Bartholomew, to satisfy the obedience that I profess, accept with humble submission the election

made of me by our very dear Brothers, and I promise to have in view in all my conduct only the glory of God and the good of our Society. But as I would not be able alone to suffice in dealing with all the matters which concern our said Society, I have asked all our dear Brothers here assembled to be so kind as to choose two Brothers to help me in the government of the Institute.

The document continues by registering the due election of the two Assistants, and of their acceptance to advise the Superior without regard to their interests or distinction of persons whether outside or inside the Institute. And so the Brothers were fully in possession of their own government.

Although all the Brothers had in advance accepted the decision of the Chapter, Brother Bartholomew made assurance doubly sure for Paris when towards the end of the year he visited the eastern houses of the northern or Paris District. He had a declaration inserted into the minutes of his visit relative to himself. The original of the following, signed by the Brothers of the Paris community, is in the Brothers' Archives in Rome.

We the undersigned, Brothers of the society of the Christian Schools, running the Christian and free schools of the parish of Saint Sulpice, and serving Brothers destined to provide for the temporal needs of the said Brothers, accept and approve the election that has been made of Brother Joseph Truffet, called Brother Bartholomew, as general and perpetual Superior of our said Society in the month of May last by the Brother Directors of the majority of the houses of our said Society. We declare that the said Brother Bartholomew in that quality of our Superior general came from the house of Saint Yon, in a suburb of Rouen, where he lives, to visit our house. Wherefore we gave him an account of our conduct and that of our house, whether spiritual or temporal, and we have received with respect and submission the advice he had the goodness to give us, with the disposition of practising it. That also the same Brother Bartholomew, our Superior general, sent recently from the said house of Saint Yon to this one two Brothers so as to start a new school near the Invalides, which began Monday last, and gave us Brother John Jacot (another spelling of Jacquot) called Brother John, to be our director and to govern our house under him. Done in our house in Paris, in the suburb of Saint Germain, this eleventh of November one thousand seven hundred and seventeen.¹⁶

This statement shut the door on any future La Chétardye or on any internal hesitations such as had been in the past. It is interesting to note that of the eleven Brothers in the community who had signed their consent to the General Chapter, only seven remained. One had left, others had been changed,

and the community (with the two new Brothers for the new school) numbered now thirteen. Brother Fiacre, till now Director at Boulogne, also signed. Bartholomew had just made him the new Visitor of the northern province to replace Brother Joseph, now Assistant. Under its new Superior, the Institute was in running order.

The Founder's total respect for Bartholomew's position

Once Brother Bartholomew was elected, the Founder showed the utmost discretion in not accepting any reference to himself as Superior, in not trespassing in any way on the new Superior's role.¹⁷ It was not only to respect fully the position of a Brother at the head that he had always seen as necessary. It was also the humility of not clinging on to power and also the conviction of his own inner poverty and worthlessness. But he knew how, with great humility, to give support to the new man. Thus, when Bartholomew had to ask a favour of the notable of some town, the Founder added his own little word:

Permit me, Sir, though a poor priest of Saint Yon, to take the liberty of joining this note to the letter of Brother Bartholomew, Superior of the Brothers, to beg you to be so good as to do in their favour what he takes the liberty of proposing to you... Sir, your very humble and obedient servant, De La Salle, a poor priest.

On another occasion he wrote to someone also unknown, presumably living in St Denis:

Permit me to tell you, Sir, that you have been apparently wrongly informed about me when you were told that I did so much good in the Church and that I sent masters into towns and villages to instruct youth. It is quite true that I began to train Brothers to keep free schools, but I have long since given up being in charge of them. It is one of the Brothers, named Brother Bartholomew, who governs them at the moment, and who lives in this house, and whom the Brothers, including those of Saint Denis, acknowledge as their Superior.¹⁸

Humility he certainly had, but he is also pointing out at it is a Brother who is Superior of the Institute.

We have extracts from two letters he wrote to Brother Bartholomew in this period:

You know that I am always ready to obey you in all things, being presently in submission and not having made the vow of obedience to do what I like.

The following must refer to some offer to the Brothers that involved himself:

If I am looked upon as united to the Brothers of the Christian Schools, it appears that my present state must be one of simple submission, without my making one step forward about what concerns them except by dependence.¹⁹

People would raise eyebrows today at such deference. "When it was sometimes put to him that in his quality of the Lord's Minister he should not submit so easily to someone who was in every way inferior to him, he answered with some heat: 'Do the Lord's Ministers not have to humble themselves? Must they teach only by word and not by example?'"²⁰

If some Brothers still wrote to him for advice, he read their letters only after getting Bartholomew's permission, and when he wrote back, he told them they should no longer come to him. He came to Bartholomew for every permission. The latter gave him a general permission to act as he thought fit, but he never wanted to profit by it. In the same spirit of obedience, he gave the Superior when he asked for it, all the benefit of his experience and wisdom. This excellent relationship between the two helped to develop a perfect unity in the whole body of the Institute.²¹

The choice itself of Bartholomew as Superior General helped this. His was a very gentle nature. All the young Brothers for the last twelve years or so had passed through his hands as Director of Novices. His prudent government in the Founder's absence had won over the older Brothers. It was not an entirely new Superior they were having, and things went on as usual. "All that was new among the Brothers was the emulation with which they hastened to acknowledge the new Superior by signs of respect and real marks of submission."²²

Other events in 1717

There are a number of diverse events to record for this year 1717. The Brothers of Rouen had moved to less confined quarters in 1712. They were on the corner of the Rue des Minimes, a narrow and little frequented street. On 20 July this year, the Brothers were going about half-past six in the morning to Mass at St Nicaise's, one street away, when they were set upon by two drunken soldiers, one with his sabre, the other with his stick. They escaped any real hurt by taking refuge in a house, although one was very badly dealt with, catching several blows from the stick. The Brothers, fearing further attacks, thought it right to inform the area policeman who was their neighbour. By order of the bailiff a police superintendent took statements of witnesses and drew up a report. The two soldiers, having other charges against them, appealed to the Brother they had hurt, and he wrote out a full pardon, and the case was dropped. When the Founder heard of it, he was very put out

that the Brothers had gone to the police at all. The Brothers tried to argue that they had to take steps against similar attacks, but he said: "The Brothers are there to suffer everything and make no one suffer." And to stress the point, he quoted the Acts of the Apostles: "They left the Jewish Council full of joy, for having been judged worthy to suffer insults for the name of Jesus." "The holy priest, citing the words of the Acts of the Apostles, quoted them in Latin contrary to his custom. This was something he never did except for topics he had very much at heart."²³

A fact not noted by his early biographers that has come to light recently, thanks again to Brother Aroz, is that the Founder paid a visit to Reims this year to see to the interests of his youngest brother, Jean-Rémy. This is recorded in a document in the Bibliothèque Nationale, Paris. Jean-Rémy's brother-in-law, Valentin Philippe, writes there of him cryptically: "He resigned as king's prosecutor, 1715; withdrew 1717, died in Paris 1732."²⁴ As we have seen, Jean-Rémi had been certified incapable of civil acts in the February 1717, yet was still in Rheims in May. But all his goods and property were seized on 17 August this year and on several subsequent dates, so that he was no longer at home at that time.²⁵ Possibly his brother went to visit him soon after the general Chapter and also to see his other brother Jean-Louis concerning him and the interests of the Brothers' schools in Rheims. Another possibility is, that as he was in Paris for some months from 4 October (see below) he could have made the journey then less onerously.²⁶ However, we are not told that he actually saw his youngest brother.

Rogier's legacy and the purchase of St Yon

This year Rogier, he who had taken for his own use in the Clement affair the 5,200 livres De La Salle had given him to purchase the house, fell ill. Feeling the need to put things right, he bequeathed to him the annual interest on a sum of 5,200 livres he had invested,²⁷ but only after the death of a maidservant who would have the first enjoyment of it. She died shortly after him. A letter came, requesting De La Salle to go to Paris for the formalities of the transfer. He would only go with the authorisation of Brother Bartholomew. He reached Paris on 4 October but instead of going to stay with the Brothers, he went to stay at the Seminary of Saint Nicolas-du-Chardonnet, still run by the followers of Adrian Bourdoise. He would willingly have stayed with the Brothers, but he did not want their respect and affection for him to detract in any way from Bartholomew. And going to the seminary allowed him to lead more easily the contemplative life he was drawn to. For all his humility, he realised full well the influence and power he had after nearly forty years of founding and building up the Institute. He allowed only John Jacquot, the Director, to get in touch with him, and only rarely; if other Brothers came

unawares, seeking his advice, he encouraged them to rely on Brother Bartholomew, saying he had not much longer to live.

When he went to a solicitor's chambers to have the legacy read out to him, he heard himself qualified as Superior of the Brothers of the Christian Schools, and was asked to sign with that title since it was so in the document. But he refused, and preferred to leave without the money. He stayed on in the seminary, and it was only after three months' refusal that the solicitor agreed that his signature alone would be sufficient for validity. Things were arranged even better: the M. de Plancy with whom Rogier had invested the capital, agreed to release it in place of an annual interest. And so De La Salle received, in the form of a donation, what was in fact a restitution. This lump sum made it possible to buy the property of Saint Yon.

1718

Negotiations for the purchase of St Yon. The Founder's discreet advice

The Marchioness de Louvois, who had leased Saint Yon to the Brothers, died before December 1715. Her heirs, after two years' discussions, let it be known that they were putting the house on the market and invited the Brothers either to leave or to declare their intention of buying it.²⁸ They had not the means to buy it. Through Brother Bartholomew they expressed their anxiety to their Founder. He told them they could trust in Providence and should think of buying the house. This surprised them, but they nevertheless went to see the Reverend Louvois, the deceased's son and executor. In consideration for De La Salle, for whom he had a great esteem, he offered the whole property for only 15,000 livres, of which 9,000 was to be paid on the day of sale. In the various negotiations involved, the Founder, even in the seminary, was wide awake to the financial steps needed, and, in total deference to the new Superior, offered sound advice. Brother Bartholomew had travelled up to Paris to consult him on 8 December, and Brother Charles, the Institute bursar, was there in January, asking him among other things to contact certain people. When he went back to Saint Yon, De La Salle sent with him the following letter:

Seminary of Saint Nicolas-du-Chardonnet, 17 January 1718.

Brother Thomas told me he was leaving today, my very dear Brother. He got me to give a receipt for your payments of interest and state that these payments belong at present to the heirs of Mme de Louvois, and another simple receipt a few days before.

These would seem to refer to the interest on those monies invested with the

city tolls office in his name, in 1713 and 1714, and used so far to pay the rent on Saint Yon. For the sake of simplicity, perhaps, his name was maintained. But he says:

Do not count on these two receipts, neither the one nor the other except in so far as you are agreeable, for I made a declaration, as you required of me on your last journey (to Paris) towards the Conception of the Blessed Virgin, by which I declared on 11 December last that your four contracts for interest on the city tolls of Rouen do not belong to me and that I only lent my name to them, but that they belong to the Brothers of the Christian Schools of the house of Saint Yon in the suburb of Saint Sever of the same town and that the money was provided by Charles Frapet, called Brother Thomas, bursar at the time of that house, (this refers to the years in 1713 and 1714) and I then put this declaration signed by me into the hands of M. Berton, bursar of this seminary, who saw to it.

With regard to the house of Saint Yon, as to whether you will buy it or not and how, about which you ask my advice, do not pay any attention to what Brother Thomas may say or make me say about me or by me.

Brother Thomas, who was often in close contact with De La Salle and saw the effects of his prayers in time of extreme poverty, and his trust in Providence, must have been saying, which was true, that the Founder had assured him Saint Yon would be theirs.²⁹ De La Salle does not want to appear a prophet whose words Bartholomew might think he should heed, but as a useless old man whose job was to obey. He continues:

But rely only on what I am telling you in this letter, which is that I cannot give you advice on that and that you should consult people more enlightened than I, the matter being of consequence.

Give it careful thought, the matter not yet being concluded. I do not advise you to borrow money to buy it. I do not say absolutely however not to do so, you can consult other people on this point. I believe that what you do in this respect will be always well done. It is not fitting that I should have any part in all these matters in that respect, I being nothing and you as superior being the master.

With regard to the persons you tell me to see, if you wish, I shall see them, and that being supposed, have the goodness to tell me that you order me as being my superior and that of the Brothers, and I will go at once or on the first non-working day, and I will tell them that you have ordered me to go and see them. I wish you and all the Brothers, whom I greet, a good and happy year. I am with respect, my very dear Brother, your very humble and very obedient servant, De La Salle.³⁰

De La Salle, of course, while most careful not to impose a decision on his Superior, was all in favour of the purchase.

Brother Bartholomew writes to Brother Gabriel, 18 February, 1718

Some time at the beginning of this year Brother Gabriel Drolin must have written to Brother Joseph in Rheims (surely as being someone he knew) telling him of his distress at not having received any word from the Founder for a year. So he *had* received that of 5 December 1716, in which De La Salle had asked him to give his consent to the forthcoming Assembly of the Brothers. He most certainly would have answered it, but his letter never arrived. He had received nothing since. He could have had no knowledge of the results of the Assembly. Brother Joseph got in touch with Brother Bartholomew. The latter knew that De La Salle also had received nothing and had been saddened at receiving no answer to his letter of 5 December. Bartholomew therefore wrote to Gabriel³¹ and mentioned first his receiving his letter via Brother Joseph. He does not seem to realise that Gabriel must have received and answered his Founder's letter, nor his distress, for he continues:

I can tell you, my dear Brother, that M. De La Salle is very upset that you did not answer his last which I posted myself at Avignon. He hoped that you would send your consent for what would be decided in the assembly that took place in the month of May last in which our dear assembled Brothers judged fitting to put me in charge of the general government of our Institute, and we have also chosen together by ballot our dear Brothers John and Joseph as assistants. He charged me to greet you with much affection on his part and to ask you to let us know if you want us to send you a Brother to help you this coming vacation. The affairs of our Institute are going very well. We have bought a house for fifteen thousand livres (It was not bought yet, but the purchase was as good as settled) for the novitiate in Rouen and it is very likely that we will soon have a foundation in Canada.

The Regent had already granted, he says, 3,000 livres' annual allowance for schoolmasters that the Brothers are seeking authorisation to train both in France and Canada. In a postscript he adds:

Our dear Brother John Jacot greets your very humbly and recommends himself to your holy prayers.

Gabriel and John had known one another in Rheims in the very early days. The mention would help Drolin to relate to Bartholomew, someone unknown to him.

A final letter from De La Salle to his brother Jean-Louis bequeathing annuities to the children of his brother Jean-Remy

Either before or while at the seminary, John Baptist received several letters from his brother, Canon Jean-Louis De La Salle, about the disposal of monies and rights on property that were his and that Jean-Louis was administering. On 2 March 1718, he wrote to his brother in Rheims the following final letter:³²

Sir, my brother. Since you point out in your latest that a single one of my letters suffices to declare my intentions concerning what goods of mine are still in your hands, I declare therefore by the present that I here and now make over and leave to the children born or to be born of Monsieur Jean Remy Delasalle, my brother, through the compassion I have for the state of destitution to which they are reduced, the annuity from a capital of two thousand livres deposited with the clergy of the diocese of Rheims, reserving to myself or to those to whom I will give the right, the faculty of taking back and withdrawing the said annuity when either I myself or those to whom I shall yield this right will find it proper, by paying the sum of two thousand livres which will be made into a fund for the profit of the said children.

I likewise make over and leave to them two thirds of another annuity owed by the guild of locksmiths of the same town of Rheims, being on a capital totalling fourteen hundred livres at four percent, the said two-thirds making for me thirty-eight livres' annual income, plus the half of a feudal due in the Thillois area near Rheims of which the other half belongs to the said gentleman Jean Remy Delasalle, my brother; plus the right belonging to me on a house situated in the village of Trois Puits near Rheims, deriving from the estate of a Matheu Menu by name. Of which annuities and capitals the usufruct will henceforth belong to the said children and will be held by you, Reverend De La Salle, canon of the church of Rheims, my brother, and will also be distributed by you and at your discretion, without your being obliged to give them any account of it at whatever time and for whatever cause.

I am, with much respect, Sir my brother, your very humble and very obedient servant. (Signed) De La Salle.

At Paris at the Seminary of St Nicolas du Chardonnet. This 2nd of March, 1718.

The details of this transaction may not be of interest in themselves, but they point to the continuing administrative awareness of De La Salle and to his solicitude for his family.

He leaves St Nicholas's seminary and returns to St Yon. A tribute from the seminary

With his successor elected and fully supported, and the purchase of Saint Yon settled, the Founder considered his work over, and hoped to spend in the seminary what time remained till his death and leave the Brothers throughout the Institute to relate fully to Brother Bartholomew. But one can understand that such was not the thought of the Brothers, especially the new Superior, who needed to consult De La Salle. He feared he might die outside a Brothers' community, whereas at St Yon his holiness would be a tremendous example for novices and Brothers alike. Eventually, the Brothers got the superiors of the seminary to represent to De La Salle that if obedience was what he had come to practise in the seminary, he should practise it now. And so, accompanied by Brother Bartholomew, he left the seminary on 5 March to their great regret.³³ He spent two days with the Paris community, to their immense delight. It must have been a very moving leave-taking on 7th, for it was likely they would never see him back in Paris. They asked him for his blessing. In presence of Bartholomew especially, he was unwilling to give it, but on the latter's request, he did so.³⁴ It was the turn of the Brothers of St Yon to receive him with joy. But he told them often he had not much longer to live and they should get used to doing without him.

After his death, one of the superiors of the seminary wrote to Brother Bartholomew, on 1 March 1721.

We are very happy, my very dear Brother, about the plan you have formed to give the public a life of M. De La Salle, your venerable Founder. We had the honour and the advantage to possess this holy priest in our seminary from 4 October 1717 until 7 March 1718. We specially noticed in him an extraordinary zeal and fervour for his own perfection, a profound humility and a great love for mortification and poverty.

(Besides being at all the daily exercises of the seminary,) he admitted to me that regularly every day he gave a further two hours and a half or three hours to meditation. (He followed entirely the regulations, including the one of not going out of the seminary without permission.) In vain did I tell him several times that with us he had every permission and that that point of the regulation was not put there for him. It was not possible to get him to accept dispensation from it.

He never wanted to accept a room with a fireplace when he entered the seminary, and instead of warming himself with the others, at least during recreation time, he preferred to talk with some seminarist in the lecture rooms or in the garden, so as to have the occasion of suggesting to them some holy maxim and detachment from the things of the earth.

People have been very wrong to want him to be taken for a man who had a leaning for the new doctrines. He was of the most submissive and the most attached to the decisions of the Church. (So, incredible as it seems, people had tried to have him regarded as a Jansenist.)

I am with perfect esteem for your Community and for you in particular, my very dear Brother, etc. At St Nicholas's Seminary, March the first 1721.

Maillefer, quoting this letter almost in full, omits the reference to a life of De La Salle. This was entrusted to Brother Bernard, and Maillefer did not like the result. He also disregards the mention of the Founder's attachment to the Holy See.

The manor of St Yon is finally purchased as the new centre of the Institute

On 8 March 1718, the day after De La Salle's departure from the Paris community, the deed of sale of St Yon was signed before two solicitors in the Paris town-house of the Reverend de Louvois, king's librarian. Present were the "high and mighty" heirs of the marchioness: Michel-François Le Tellier de Louvois, two peers of the realm and others. Since the Brothers as a Society did not possess letters patent, the purchase was made "on behalf of their legal successors" but in their own name by "Joseph Truffet and Charles Frapet, both living usually in the house of Saint Yon, a suburb of Rouen, lodging at present in Paris in the little Rue Saint-Michel, in the suburb of Saint Germain, parish of St Sulpice." Though De La Salle was not there, he had provided most of the money: the 6,000 livres drawn out of the town tolls office, and the 5,200 had recently been restored to him after Rogier's death. Brother Bartholomew had appealed to the communities, and they had provided collectively another 2,340 livres. Brother Thomas (Charles Frappet) would take the remainder from the income of St Yon.³⁵ As far as he could, the Founder had provided, with the help of God, a secure site for the central government of the Institute and its novitiate. He was still implementing that vow made in 1691 of association and union "until the establishment of the said society." Everything that defined the new Society was in place. Recognition by the Holy See was being prepared for in Avignon and Rome. The future he could leave to the Institute to secure after him.

As soon as the property was bought, plans needed to be made to extend the boarding section. No time was wasted: on 22 March the Master of the Ports and Passageways of Normandy was called to St Yon with several experts to consider the plans which they approved.³⁶

A sharp letter to Brother Bartholomew about the state of his novitiate

The Founder had occasion at this time to write a sharp letter to Brother

Bartholomew about the state of his novitiate.³⁷ This must have been written shortly after he returned to Saint Yon. It could be between 8 March and 12 May.³⁸ It shows a quite different view of De La Salle than Blain's traditional hagiographical praise gives us. Even though no longer Superior, and the most humble and deferential of men, he had the interior freedom to speak out when the good of the Institute required it. The Superior was away again, possibly in Paris.

I am writing to you, my very dear Brother, quite astonished to see your novitiate in the state it is in: two or three novices who are formed in nothing and who observe the rules no better than if they were just entering the house. There are in addition five postulants full of their passions and who have practically no example.

The new master of novices (Irenaeus) not being himself trained for his post, hardly knowing either what he ought to do or what the novices ought to do, says he has no rule and no more have the novices. I am not aware having seen, at least for a great number of years, such a novitiate in the community, and with that you are thinking of making new foundations!

People complain also that the novices who are in Rouen have not very much the spirit of their state and do not set much store by little things. Think, please, about putting all that right at the earliest, for you know that the strengthening of the Institute depends on novices well trained and very regular.

I am in a fit state to go to the principal exercises like the others, to sleep in the common dormitory and to eat like the others in the refectory. I beg you not to oppose it.

We are waiting for you any time now, for this house has need of your presence. I am, in Our Lord, my very dear Brother, etc.

Brother Bartholomew was, in fact, often away. We saw him visiting the Brothers at St Sulpice as Superior General on the preceding 11 November. According to De La Salle's letter written in the seminary and sent to Bartholomew through Brother Thomas, he was again in Paris about 8 December. He travelled to Rethel on 17 December and signed a deed there drawn up by a solicitor.³⁹ He was back in Paris on 30 January with Brother Thomas.⁴⁰ It was from Paris that he wrote to Brother Drolin on 18 February. He was there again on 5 March when the Founder left the seminary, and remained there at least till 8th, when he signed the contract for Saint Yon. Was he too conscientious to delegate to an Assistant and a Visitor domiciled in Paris? He had taken Brother Irenaeus as his helper in the novitiate with the intention that he should eventually replace him, but to leave an untrained young man with the novices during his absences was not wise delegation.

As regards the novitiate, five entered in 1717 of whom two left, so there remained the “two or three” the Founder is talking about who seem to have no idea of the Rule. There must have been a considerable improvement after this, for these three persevered. Of two aged twenty-three at their entry, one died at St Yon and the other, a Brother Sixtus, died in 1788, the last surviving Brother to have known the Founder. The third, Stanislaus, who was nineteen, died in 1731. He was a remarkable holy Brother who suffered greatly from stomach pains. He was made Director of novices of the new novitiate at Avignon and then Visitor of the southern District. Blain gives eleven pages to him in his Appendix. Of the five postulants De La Salle refers to, three took the habit and two persevered in the Institute. “The novices in Rouen” refers to those in their first year in the schools. The novitiate, therefore, now included a year’s spiritual formation and a year gaining professional training and experience. Thirteen novices had taken the habit in 1716 and had in part been formed by De La Salle, but they must have had little follow-up. Six only stayed on in the Society. One, Brother Denis, was sent to Canada for a few months in 1737.⁴¹

A teacher, trained at St Hippolyte’s under Vuyard in 1700-1701, it may be recalled, had been sent to this new region on behalf of the Sulpicians in Montreal. It became a live issue again for the Institute directly in 1717 and 1718.

An invitation to send Brothers to Canada

Brother Bartholomew had referred optimistically in his letter to Drolin to an invitation to send Brothers to Canada.. “New France” was far away, but its population of Normans, Angevins, Bretons..., was well served by the Jesuits, about whose martyrs everyone knew, and by the Franciscans and the Sulpicians who were training its clergy. Now the Brothers of the Christian Schools, too, were being offered a chance to serve the Church over there by educating its poor. Success in Canada, including the training of the schoolmasters Bartholomew was hoping for, would win the good will of the Regent in so far as their work served the national interest, and “could contribute very much to our solid establishment in France” as he said in his letter to Drolin.

The background to this offer is a very interesting story, of which only an outline can be given.⁴² At the time we are speaking of, there were about 16,000 inhabitants in the territory of Montreal.⁴³ It had been founded in 1642 by a society created partly by Olier, who sent four of his men there as early as 1647. The Sulpicians, “lords of Montreal” ran the seminary and administered several parishes. Although their work was the training of priests, from Olier’s time they had recognised the importance of having schools for the poor in their parish. In Montreal, they began doing something about this themselves, and later encouraged the creation of a group of teachers, lay and

clerical, known as the Brothers Rouiller from their leader. They faded out by 1693. The use of clerics in minor orders ran into the usual difficulties of lack of training and instability.

At this point a François Charon de la Barre founded a hospice and an orphanage. He began a little society he called Brothers Hospitallers of St Joseph of the Cross. He extended his work to teaching, wishing to have all the schools of Montreal and to start a training-centre for masters. He obtained letters patent in 1699 and aimed at making his society into a religious community with vows. The problem still was to get trained schoolmasters to run his centre. In a visit to France in 1700, he went to the Seminary Priests of St Sulpice. The one remarkable institution they could point to was that of De La Salle, with the schools in their parish and his training centre in that of St Hippolyte. On 22 April 1700, Leschassier writes, with reference to a recent interview with Charon: "These gentlemen of the hospice have told someone in Paris that they could limit themselves to keeping only orphan children and they that would unite willingly with a community of schoolmasters which is in Paris and which has houses or schools in several other towns of the kingdom."⁴⁴ These would train village schoolmasters. But De La Salle's Brothers would have to be two in a community and run a town school where they could give practice to their trainees. For reasons of prudence, the Sulpicians did not agree to Charon taking over one of their schools in Montreal.

There was a second possibility: De La Salle offered to train a man who would then go to Canada and share these new efficient methods with trainees. The Assembly of the consultors of St Sulpice unanimously decided:

Our (Reverend) Gentlemen of Montreal having indicated in their latest letters that they would need a good schoolmaster who knew how to write well, it has been proposed whether M. De La Salle's offer would be accepted to provide one of this quality provided he had six months to prepare him for it. All the Assembly has been of the opinion with a common voice to accept this offer and to make the necessary expense for it.

The one selected for this was the Antoine Forget we have already seen. He would have entered the training-centre run by Brother Vuyart in October 1700. He left for Canada in April 1701, which allows for six months' training. He was twenty-nine, and stayed in Canada till 1715, when ill-health forced him to return.⁴⁵ He taught in a school begun by the Sulpicians frequented mostly by children of Indian tribes. That he tried to carry out the methods taught by Vuyart appears in this letter of Leschassier in May 1703 to the Sulpician in charge: "M. Forget wants to have silence observed in the school by the pupils as he has seen it practised with De La Salle. You will examine if that is good, and in that case if the thing is possible."⁴⁶

This was not the last of Lasallian influence in Canada. On 30 June 1707, Louis XIV had Charon informed that his group was to cease as a religious congregation, and must neither wear the habit nor use the name 'Brother.' This justifies De La Salle's extreme caution as to how his society of lay masters appeared to people outside. Charon came to France to plead his cause for five years but in vain. His society was secularised and he returned to Montreal in 1712. Then in 1716, when he had only four members left, he thought of joining up either with the Brothers of Charity, a group of hospitallers, or with the Brothers of the Christian Schools. M. Magnien, Leschassier's assistant, to whom a Sulpician in Montreal wrote on the matter, was in favour of neither, and on De La Salle's Institute he gave an opinion that was partly true at the time, partly disparaging. "You can tell him (Charon) that M. De La Salle no longer resides in Paris but in Rouen, where he has been obliged to transport the sort of novitiate of his Brothers. His community is no less shaky than that of M. Charon, not knowing if someone will be found to govern and sustain it after M. De La Salle's death who has not even letters patent from the King, and so one cannot make a solid pact with it."⁴⁷

Charon, who had learnt about the Brothers when in Paris earlier, seems not to have gone by Magnien's opinion but to have made enquiries and to have received firm assurances from Brother Bartholomew, the new Superior. He therefore revisited France in 1717. Having influential friends, he was able to get from the Regent an annual grant of 3000 livres for the maintenance of six teacher-trainees, as Brother Bartholomew mentioned in his letter to Gabriel Drolin. M. Charon got in touch with Brother Bartholomew. A question remained: the Superior General was very concerned about the spiritual direction of his Brothers in Canada. Would the Company of St Sulpice accept to give this? He approached them on the matter. Leschassier must have thought well of the idea, for he brought it before the Assembly of Consultors on 17 February 1718. They asked first that they should know something about the vocation and rule of the Brothers. Leschassier brought the matter up three times, and on 30 March the Consultors accepted the plan.

Brother Bartholomew now "gave his consent and M. De La Salle his agreement, and together with the Assistant who was brought to St Yon expressly, they designated the Brothers they destined for this mission." They were "four subjects distinguished in merit and in virtue".

"Two days afterwards the Brother Assistant, ready to go back and having gone very early to take his leave of the Servant of God, was very surprised to hear him say: 'Ah, my God! What are you going to do? You are going to undertake a matter that will throw you into an infinity of worries and which will have unfortunate results.' Brother Bartholomew, who came in at this point, replied that there was no way of backing out, that everything was con-

cluded and decided. In fact, the expenses of the embarkation had already been paid. The holy man repeated: 'What are you going to do?' and said nothing more. This double admonition made an impression on the Brothers. They did not involve themselves further, and after having broken off the planned scheme, they were not long without finding out that it had been intended to deceive them with a white lie. The good M. Charon confessed that his plan was to place the four Brothers separately with country priests to teach children...It was without doubt by a supernatural illumination that he (M. De La Salle) had this knowledge."⁴⁸

When Charon met the Regent, all he could do now was to ask for letters patent for his present commitments and then look round to find out how he could ensure the continuation of his work. "He was obliged to substitute in place of the Brothers other persons whom he did not himself take to Canada, for he died on the way back."⁴⁹ He took sick and was buried at sea.

In Chartres, the four master-writers try to stop the education of two or three hundred of the poor

In Chartres on 19 February, the day after Brother Bartholomew wrote to Drolin, "the bailiwick and police headquarters of Chartres" laid down:

We have forbidden the school Brothers to receive in their schools any children other than those who are recognised poor, whose mothers and fathers are not on the roll for alms from the Board. We charge the said Brothers to give every three months to the royal police prosecutor and to the syndic of the Master writers of this town a list of the pupils they have actually, and will have in the future in their schools, so as to recognise the status of the said pupils.

We forbid the said school Brothers to demand any salary or retribution (ignoring the fact they never accepted any money or presents whatever) to form any sort of community nor to increase the number of the four Brothers that they are, to go round collecting under whatever pretext, nor are they to put a cross on their door. The present sentence will be read and published at the homily of the parish masses of this town, suburb and outskirts of this town."

This sweeping and over-bold prohibition resulted from a complaint by the master-writers of Chartres, who were only few in number.⁵⁰ It shows that many of the bourgeois were on the side of the master-writers and against the Brothers' work for the poor. The Brothers always had to expect difficulties from these and from the authorities in Chartres in matters where money had to be paid out. The latter people were always on the defensive against any new community coming into the town drawn by pilgrim needs. The Sisters of

St Paul of Chartres, for instance, had no end of trouble, from 1713 to 1740, from the guilds, the councillors and the legal profession. As for the master-writers themselves, they were a small number of whom only four “had more pupils in their school or in town” (as private pupils) “than they could teach; they even took in girls; and the others were such that almost no one wanted to entrust to them the instruction of their children.”⁵¹

The Brothers had a statement of their case drawn up for them. Any one was free to open “little schools”, they said, and these came under the bishop only and, under him, the parish priests, while the master-writers’ privileges concerned only writing and arithmetic. They had no business saying who could or could not attend the Brothers’ schools. Especially as quite arbitrarily they classified as well-off those who paid the “poor man’s tax.” This was a moderate tax and many artisans who were of quite modest means preferred nevertheless to pay it because otherwise their children would be excluded from the charity schools. They would then, if they wanted to have their children taught, have to pay a little master. The parish priests, knowing the real poverty of such artisan families, would admit their children and even stretch a point. The Brothers claimed these totalled “perhaps a dozen children” whereas the bailiff’s sentence “drove from the charity schools two to three hundred children who would remain without instruction.”

The third paragraph of the prohibition forbade the Brothers to exist as a community, to go round begging (it was not their practice, but it appears that they were so badly off that they had to do it sometimes), to put a cross on their house (which they did not do) indicating a religious community, and to be more than four in the schools. What this last prohibition implied was that the Brothers were so successful that their schools would need to extend. That should have called for more support, not less, but the town’s commercial class had set its face against any footing of an extra bill. The Brothers had to handle carefully the word “community”. They certainly lived in community, and their ideals and practices were those of a lay religious community. Strictly speaking, in the Church and in society they were nothing. Hence they could argue correctly that they were not a ‘community’ - a word that meant a regular community such as that of Franciscans, the Canonesses of St Augustine and so on - but that, as their document put it, “they lived together because they had only one room in bad repair, each one with his poor bed (in it).”

Although the Brothers had a clear case against a breach of their public rights, they had no legal existence and so could not pursue it in the courts. But the order to have the decision read out in the churches without asking the bishop put the bailiff and police manifestly in the wrong. As the Founder, who was at St Nicholas’s seminary at the time, said, when he heard of it: “Such a sentence can be issued only by episcopal authority. It is therefore a neces-

sary consequence that the Bishop of Chartres gave his on this occasion, or that the magistrates usurped it.”⁵² He must have advised contacting the bishop, who was not amused. De Mérinville signed the Brothers’ appeal and had it taken to the *Parlement*. On 31 January 1719 the Court quashed the sentence, specifically on the count that the bailiwick had forbidden any children to be admitted into charity schools other than those whose fathers and mothers were inscribed on the Board’s alms list. That was a quite new departure from the normally accepted restrictions De La Salle and his Brothers had opposed in Paris, for instance. The Brothers continued therefore to accept sons of artisans: tailors, shoemakers, tanners and vinedressers, that is, those whose fathers were members of the lower guilds but were not poor, along with street-porters and the like. On Sundays, when they gave their hour and a half catechism lesson, they even admitted children who during the week attended other schools (the little schools) - a sign of their popularity.

It is interesting that the decision of the High Court of *Parlement* was the contrary to that given against the Brothers of Paris by this same *Parlement* in 1706. It was a question partly of power: close on a hundred master-writers of Paris backed by d’Argenson against the Brothers, in the earlier case, and the bishop against a few master-writers in Chartres. But also the climate in this early eighteenth century must have been changing: national interests demanded less ignorance in the towns. This time, the legal decision as to whom the Brothers might take in was given no limiting qualifications. The social and economic uplift of the poor was possible.

THE FOUNDER MAKES A CAREFUL REVISION OF THE RULE

In the minutes of the General Chapter drawn up on Trinity Sunday, 23 May the preceding year, the Capitulants had stated: “As for the rectification of the *Rules* and practices in use in all the houses of our Society, we protest that we observed the formalities that can be demanded of us, both by prayers and pious works as well as a total renunciation of our own views and that we decided on nothing except with great reflection and after several due considerations, discussions and deliberations, and by majority vote, the whole for the greater good of our Society.”⁵³ They themselves therefore voted some changes, but we have seen that, apart from lack of time, they wanted their Founder to give his thought to a revision of the *Rule*.

In spite of retiring to St Nicholas’s seminary, he must have begun this work there and continued it back at St Yon. He must have brought much prayer and reflection to this work, but he also would have consulted the Brothers. This went on till towards the middle of 1718, when he handed the finished work to Brother Bartholomew. The latter had copies made for each community. Only the copy he sent on 31 October to the community in Troyes has

survived and is in the Brothers' Archives. It comprises 124 pages, 19 by 14.5 cms, bound in parchment. The handwriting throughout is that of the Brother Michael who joined the Society in 1705 who transcribed also the pre-chapter and chapter decisions of 1716-17. Each sheet bears the Superior's initials JTFB, and the last page is entirely in his hand, being an attestation that these are the *Rules* "according as they were determined and decided both by us and by the Brother Directors of our said Society in our assembly held in our house of St Yon."⁵⁴ This is not claiming that they made all the changes, but that the Chapter decision to hand over the completion of their work to M. De La Salle validated the result.

When one compares the text of the *Rule* of 1705 and that of 1718, one notices adjustments, clarifications, maturer statements and developments in the light of experience, but the thrust of the *Rule* remains the same.⁵⁵ The chapters on the Brothers' school ministry, for instance, now contain a specific one on how to give corrections, and lay stress on silence as a means of establishing order and progress. A new chapter on Modesty (or due behaviour) is taken almost without change from the Collection of Short Treatises and completes the chapters on the community virtues of the Brothers. There is a chapter for serving Brothers and another on the sick, both as to their care and as to their spiritual life and behaviour. The *Rule* absorbs and updates the *Daily Regulations* of which the Brothers still have a copy dated 1713.

But there are certain additions of special weight that the Founder must have worked over carefully. They are concerned with the spirit and motivation of the *Rule* and its observance. If he stresses regularity, he does not want it to apply only to external regulations. In fact he warns against it: regularity takes note of the whole rule, especially its spirit. He puts at the beginning of *Chapter 2. Of the spirit of this Institute* the following words: "What is most important and what is of most concern in a community is that all those who form it have the spirit proper to it." And further on, after stressing daily reading of the new Testament and great respect for it, he adds "looking upon it as their first and principal rule." Anything else is secondary to the Gospel continually meditated on and re-read anew in the light of the times.

After the chapters spelling out the details of what life and mission meant to the Brothers in those days, the Founder composed a very careful Chapter 16 entitled: On Regularity (meaning, not punctiliousness, but keeping the *Rule*), where he balances faithful observance of points of rule - which each have their purpose - with the essentials. "It is necessary that the Brothers apply to themselves and take as foundation and support of their regularity what St Augustine says at the beginning of his Rule: that those who live in a Community should above all things love God and then their neighbour, because regu-

larity, if separated from the observance of these two commandments, is quite useless for salvation.”

He picks out

“the following things as the most essential to their Institute which are the four internal supports of their Institute:

Mental prayer;

The (thought of the) Presence of God

The spirit of faith;

Interior recollection.

The four external supports of their Institute which are:

The weekly personal interview with one’s Brother Director.

the accusation (the daily brief admission of external failings);

The notifying of defects (or weekly hearing of one’s external failings pointed out by the community).

How to spend recreation well.”

He transposed these also from the *Collection of Short Treatises*. It is noticeable that the four ‘internal supports’ depend entirely on the individual Brother. They are his spirituality, the core of his Rule of life, and are not a matter of external points of observance. In their own way the four external supports point to the values of community life and exchange, expressed somewhat in the monastic tradition. Today the Brothers’ Rule says: “The community is for the Brothers their home... It is there that they experience each day anew the friendship, the esteem, the trust and respect that they have for one another.”⁵⁶

THE LAST YEAR AND DEATH OF JOHN BAPTIST DE LASALLE

“Like a torch shedding a brighter light”

In the Archives of the Institute is preserved the renovation of vows made at St Yon on Trinity Sunday, 12 June 1718. The new Superior General signed first, and then “J.B. De La Salle, priest and founder of the Brothers of the Christian Schools, chaplain in the said house of St Yon.” No more than he wanted to deny that he was a priest, did he want to deny that God had called him to be Founder of the Brothers. In both he had exercised and still exercised charisms of service, but he sought no social privilege or power because of them. He gives his actual function as ‘ministering in the chapel of St Yon.’

His biographer Canon Blain has much to say of his last year or so,⁵⁷ having seen him often at close quarters. Most of the quotations that follow are from his work. Blain's desire to present his hero as a saint, one might say, of the stained-glass window type, tells us how humble, mortified, patient and prayerful he was to the end and longing for death. It is not that these things were not true of the Founder, but we have to depend on other sources to see that at the same time he remained alert to practical realities till his very last days. He handed over to Brother Bartholomew the foundation documents of his schools he had so carefully safeguarded; he made sure all deeds signed by him in favour of Brothers' communities were likewise made over to him; he reacted quickly and unequivocally to an imputation of Jansenism; and his last will and testament confirmed with exactness the transfer of deeds and donations he had already worked on.

Blain says well that he was in the midst of his Brothers "as a torch that sheds a brighter light as it approaches its end."⁵⁸ He often spoke of death, and sighed after heaven. "He felt by the weight of his years, by the weakening of his strength and by the increase in his pain that his end was close. Moreover, the holy man believing himself useless in the world, and seeing his desires accomplished, gave rein to his desire for death; and he begged God, if it was his good will, to hasten it." "He had so well forgotten what he had been and what he was still, that to see him you would have taken him for what he claimed to be, the last of all. He was so submissive, so humble and so obedient that it did not appear that he had ever commanded." To one older Brother who would never take his word that he should learn to do without him, he wrote: "I beg of you for the love of God, my dear Brother, that in future you will not think of addressing yourself to me in any way. You have your Superiors to whom you should communicate your spiritual and temporal concerns. From now on I want to think only of and prepare for death which must soon separate me from all created things."

He spent more and more time in contemplative prayer. He had long judged advancement in perfection with the progress made in one's prayer of conversation with God. He spoke every day to the novices on this subject. "It was after the mental prayer they made before lunch - this was a practice meditation - and of which he asked them an account, that he went into interesting and instructive detail with them. After which, he read to them a few pages of his book."⁵⁹ This refers to his *Explanation of the Method of Mental Prayer*. He had it printed. No copies remain of what must have been a limited private printing. Our oldest edition is of 1739.⁶⁰

At the same time the Founder was attentive to all the groups at St Yon. He often visited what may be called the prison section. There he could use his gift of recalling people to God and exercise his priestly ministry. He was not a

man who would condemn someone merely because he had been put away at the request of the family or by court order; in fact, he condemned no one. Among them there were those who led a good life after they had left; some entered the religious life.

Then there were the ordinary boarders: he was always very good to them. He was always available for confessions, and often came to see them during their recreation times. "They were, on their part, delighted to see him, and put him among them by surrounding him in order to join to their pleasure of hearing him and looking at him, that of showing him their affection. For they loved him and he had their hearts. So the holy man, after having seized the moment to give them some short instruction suited to their age, so as not to hinder them in their innocent amusements, withdrew to their great regret."⁶¹

He was available once or twice a week to hear the Brothers' confessions although, as he wrote to a niece of his some time after Ascension Day in 1718: "I am here the sole priest to confess fifty people and it is not easy to get another for this house because it is some distance from the town."⁶² "He did this," Blain adds, "with such a fatherly goodness that they cannot recall it without being moved."

Disregard and trying behaviour from some of the Brothers

Even so, for some of the Brothers, their Founder's withdrawal from all exercise of power and his diminishing energy led to a certain disregard, which to him was very acceptable and to which he seems to have responded with a sense of humour. "One of his most senior disciples, a man who had never left the rank of serving Brother, treated the servant of God with haughtiness and insolence, without realising it, for if he had noticed, he would have been extremely ashamed. This Brother, indeed, filled deep down with esteem and respect for his Father, looked upon him as a saint and had always remained inviolably attached to him in the most critical occasions that have been mentioned. And yet when he met him he treated him with arrogance and often provided the virtue of the Servant of God with great exercise." Once, for instance, a parish priest of Rouen he was often in contact with invited him to celebrate High Mass one Sunday. He could not avoid dining with him, "because it would have been too long to go back; besides, he did not want to say no to this friend he had to humour, who had already done good turns to the community and who could do others." Yet when he got back to the community, this Brother told him off for breaking the Rule by dining outside the house. On another occasion, this Brother told him he was being fed out of charity as being a poor priest who was now good for nothing, at which he could not help laughing, being used to this form of 'compliment' from him.⁶³

Another Brother “as uncouth as the first and much more stupid” was a religious crank who believed he had a high degree of contemplation. He had such remarkable visions, he said, up in the attic, that one should only enter it barefoot. Authors like Luis of Grenada, Rodriguez and St Francis de Sales were not good enough for him. Only Quietist writers would do, and De La Salle was only one of the common lot of priests. All the Founder could do was to get him to consult someone else. This was the Canon “who was a great friend of the Institute”, and who says “never could a man, without being mad, have had such a tiny provision of common sense. A few days afterwards the visionary, although of a fairly advanced age, jumped over the walls of the house and left his hat in his efforts to get over. He went to present himself to La Trappe, but found the door closed. Not knowing what to do with himself, he was, out of charity, taken in by a community of nuns to sweep the church and help the sacristan. He met his end not long after.”

It might surprise us that one Brother tried his Founder’s patience so much as to make him ill. He was “haughty, thoughtless, insolent even, but without noticing it; for if he was of a small mind, he had no ill will, (yet) he put terribly to the test the holy priest’s patience by marked indocility, continual importunities and stinging reproaches. He tried him so much by his repeated misdemeanours that he wore down his health.” The Founder could easily have brought him to order by use of his authority, but he preferred patience. “His health nevertheless, succumbing to the violence that nature had to do to itself, he was obliged to go to bed. One of the leading Brothers, ignoring the cause of his illness, urged him with so much entreaty to tell it him that at the end he drew these words from him: “It is not possible for me to be in health as long as I am in the company of Brother...”⁶⁴

The hostility of the new archbishop of Rouen

Far more serious was the hostility shown by Claude Maur d’Aubigné, who, after being vicar-general of Chartres under Godet des Marets, became bishop of Noyon in 1701 and archbishop of Rouen in succession to Colbert in 1708.⁶⁵ Canon Blain knew him in both places. He died three weeks after De La Salle, and Blain, writing in 1733, says he was even then regretted by good Catholics and virtuous priests. Yet he treated the Founder “with a rigour that has few examples, and so did the grand vicar who was with him.” This was Bernard Couët, who had close links with Jansenist circles in Paris⁶⁶ and who, according to Blain, was influenced by De La Salle’s “secret enemy” there. The running complaint about not taking the boarders and prisoners of St Yon to church on Sundays seems to have been blown up and used against De La Salle. The latter, on his return to Rouen in 1715 and whenever he had been away, “never failed to go and present his respects to Bishop d’Aubigné, but

he was always badly received by him and with much contempt.” On one particular occasion, the prelate forgot himself and “kept no measure in the harsh words he said to him. The humble priest, who was already on his knees, had no sooner heard the first words from his mouth than he prostrated himself...” And when he had finished, he left after making a profound reverence.

The grand vicar Couët, by passing on the continual complaints from the parish priest of St Sever, only fed the archbishop’s mistrust. The fact that De La Salle’s action was reasonable, and that all the remainder of the agreement was observed, made no difference. On one occasion, Couët accused him of lying and said so to d’Aubigné. A Canon who was present (it was Blain) spoke up for a man “he honoured as a saint”, but was not listened to, and the bishop was prepared to suspend his powers as chaplain. Blain, fearful of the effect on a man “already ill with the illness he died from”, went to ask him, without telling him why, about the matter he had been accused of lying about. De La Salle explained simply, and the Canon took this back to the archbishop; but he was disregarded, Couët maintaining the Founder had lied. He asked Blain if he would accept to tell the sick man that he was no longer chaplain, but he refused. He found it very odd that even if De La Salle had committed misdemeanours, he should be treated like this at the end of his life. But as he was sure someone else would be sent, he tried to prepare the ground by seeing the Founder himself and telling him that a storm had arisen on his account at archbishop’s house, and might burst at any moment. He left it at that.

An increase in physical pains

Apart from his chronic rheumatism and failing health, the Founder seemed destined to suffer in other ways. On one of his visits to the confined section of St Yon, “and giving them according to his custom some instructions, a seat was brought for him to sit down. But the Brother who was with him, thinking he did not want to use it, removed it without him being aware of it, so that a moment later, the holy priest wishing to sit down, fell backwards and hit his head so hard that he was picked up more dead than alive. This fall caused him an abscess in the head which made his cure despaired of. But as his hour had not yet come, God permitted this abscess to come out through the ear, which took him out of danger. During all the time he was unwell, he gave an example of patience that drew tears from the eyes of those who had the happiness to look after him.” As for the Brother who had occasioned the accident, he never showed him the slightest displeasure, and when he came to ask pardon, he assured him that he should adore the guidance of Providence who had allowed it.⁶⁷

Another unfortunate accident was caused by a door falling on him that brought on a terrible headache. “One day, after walking and speaking with a

Brother without losing any of his usual cheerfulness and tranquillity, Brother Infirmarian having accosted him and asked him how he felt, he answered: 'I have always such a violent headache that it seems as though some one was splitting it, etc. But what pains me most is that I cannot apply myself either to read or write or anything, God be blessed.'"⁶⁸His mental faculties, then, were otherwise unimpaired.

Physically, however, things were different. "We have already seen that for a number of years now he had felt the pains of a rheumatism that gripped his whole body. In the last year of his life, his pains began again without it being possible to make him moderate his usual austerities. People hardly noticed even that he was unwell, by the care he took to hide the knowledge of his illness from the Brothers who had no reason to be aware of this, for he had always a cheerful and calm countenance. However, with time, it was noticed that his strength was diminishing and that he did not have his usual facility to do things. This indisposition joined to an asthma that had tormented him for some time, plunged him into a great exhaustion."⁶⁹

Careful administrator to the end

A proof of his mental alertness is that between August and September 1718 he signed in favour of the Institute in the person of Brother Bartholomew four deeds that are now in the Brothers' Archives. He first handed over his library. He had always kept it up, however poorly he dressed and lived personally. On 11 August he signed the following:

I the undersigned declare that several years ago I left to Brother Joseph Truffet, called Brother Bartholomew, in charge of the general government of the masters called the Brothers of the Christian Schools, all the books that belonged to me and which are in a library at the house of the Brothers of the said Christian Schools in the parish of saint Sulpice in Paris, to dispose of all the said books as it pleased the said Joseph Truffet, called Brother Bartholomew, and that he has disposed of in fact since that time as he willed and has always had the key of the place where the said books are as a sign that he was and is the owner. Done in duplicate at Rouen in the house of Saint Yon, this eleventh of August one thousand seven hundred and eighteen.⁷⁰

He was next careful to hand over for the archives all the deeds he had kept carefully concerning the establishment of the Brothers in various places. On 5 September it was Brother Bartholomew and then the Founder who signed the following:

I the undersigned, Superior general of the Brothers of the Christian Schools,

acknowledge that in that quality Monsieur Delasalle, founder of the said Brothers, handed over to me the foundation contract for two of the said Brothers for the parish of St Nizier of the town of Troyes.

Other documents that he handed over were: the copy of the bishop of Mende's deed of foundation for three Brothers; a copy of the holograph will of Jean Delze Du Roure, priest, endowing two Brothers for the town of Les Vans; two letters written in 1705 by the Reverend Coet (= Couët), then Archbishop Colbert's grand vicar, one approving the establishment of Brothers in Rouen, the other approving the establishment of a novitiate at St Yon. Also, a letter from M. de Pontcarré concerning the difficulties the bursar of the Poor Board was causing the Brothers in 1707; an important deliberation of the same Board on 2 August 1707 by which De La Salle would provide ten Brothers for the schools of the town, the Brothers being free to settle in a private house and live there "according to the rules and customs of their Institute."

There was also a deed signed before notaries in Rouen in 1705 concerning the destination intended by De La Salle for the furniture of St Yon. This may refer to the pictures and hangings of the chapel and some other furniture that the Dames of St Amand, the previous occupants, had left him. The last paper was the agreement that was to cause so much friction, made between De La Salle and M. Hecquet, parish priest of St Sever. Finally, he promised that if he came across any other documents concerning one or more of the 22 houses of the Brothers, he would hand them over, "giving up entirely his responsibilities with regard to the said houses and what concerns them."⁷¹

On 14 November De La Salle signed two deeds. By the first he declared having no claim to the furniture in the house of St Yon. Some of it he had had transported from the suburb of St Antoine, Paris, in 1705, and he must have had to sign for the acquisition of much more as the establishment developed. He specifies that this furniture is intended for the novitiate, defined as "the subjects who are and will be trained there to be sent as needed to the said twenty-two houses and to others to which the said masters, called Brothers of the Christian Schools, may be sent in future." They are also for the use of the serving Brothers at St Yon and for Brothers coming to St Yon from other houses of the Institute. This furniture is not to be put to any other use. Should one wish later to put them to some other use, "I leave them at that moment and from now to the house of the Sisters of Charity, situated in the suburb of St Denis in Paris, opposite the house of Saint-Lazare (the Vincentian house), considering the Sisters as charged with the instruction and the care of the poor."⁷²

In the other document, Brother Bartholomew accepted all the "contracts,

treaties and other papers” in the possession of De La Salle, who promises to hand over any other deeds concerning the Brothers to be found in the twenty-two communities. These were real services rendered the Institute by a man in pain and of failing health. He is the model throughout his life for those Brothers and others involved in the archives and the financial management of the Institute. Brother Bartholomew signed the deed and the Founder initialled it.⁷³ After this, according as his headache and his rheumatism allowed, he must have worked at his last will and testament.

1719

A letter from his brother, Canon Jean-Louis de La Salle, 3 January 1719

The Brothers in Rheims, one can assume, must have let the Founder’s relatives know that he was weakening. Canon Jean-Louis De La Salle would not know, perhaps, because since his public stand against the Apostolic Constitution *Unigenitus* in 1716 and again in 1717, his elder brother had broken communication with him.⁷⁴ Because the other two of the body of trustees that John Baptist had set up in 1700 had died, Jean Louis from 1710 had become the sole person responsible for looking after the interests of the Brothers’ property in Rheims, securing for them a legal ownership (in his name) and seeing they were sufficiently provided for by interest from invested legacies and from rents on land or houses purchased for the purpose. He remained a great protector of the Brothers.⁷⁵ There were still matters outstanding, and provision also had to be finalised for Jean-Rémy’s children. It was for these reasons that he wrote this letter.⁷⁶

Rheims, this 3 January 1719. Sir, my very dear brother. Although it seems you are determined to forget entirely this part of the world and that you have broken off all commerce with us for a year or even several years (that would include his absence in the South), when I have been able with great difficulty to obtain an answer on your part on the most important affairs, I do not consider myself dispensed from my duty and I give myself once more the honour of writing to you not only to present to you my respects at the beginning of this year and to wish it truly a happy one as far as there can be such in this world, but mainly to remind you once more of some affairs important for your community about which I have had several times the honour to speak and write to you. You know that the matter of the property of the house in Rheims is still in abeyance and that there are two owners only instead of four (that is, he himself and his brother were the only remaining trustees). I have proposed several to you and I have always distanced myself from admitting M. Frémyn to this number. If your

Brothers in Rheims let you know how he behaves here in his position as their superior, you would yourself judge it to be desirable that he should take no part in the affairs of the Community.

The Brothers of Rheims had been given, then, and still had, their ecclesiastical superior. We are not certain whether it was Canon Nicholas Frémyn, doctor in theology, first cousin of John Baptist and Jean-Louis De La Salle, being the son of their aunt Marie De La Salle. He was staunchly orthodox, being a great defender of *Unigenitus*. Less likely, it could have been Antony Frémyn, clerical adviser to the présidial, a nephew of Nicholas's and who would be only about 25 at the time.⁷⁷ If it was Nicholas, Jean-Louis's reasons for opposing him was his orthodoxy, just as his own candidates for the trusteeship were all Jansenists or Jansenist sympathisers. In fact, he goes on:

I have proposed to you several times Mr Maillefer, my nephew, and I cannot propose one more attached to good" (the kind of phrase Jansenists used about one another) "and on whom one can count more for the preservation of this work. I do not know why you hesitate to nominate him, among the very small number we have today of good priests.

He had three surviving nephews among the Maillefers, sons of his late sister Marie. The two we know most of were the Benedictine François, the Founder's biographer who became a Jansenist, and the eldest, Jean François, who was far more known as the standard-bearer of Jansenism in Rheims, a doctor in theology, canon of the collegiate church of St Symphorian, apparently member of the Faculty of the University and at some time its Rector. He is the one Jean-Louis has in mind. He refused to accept the Bull *Unigenitus* in 1714, and was suspended *a divinis* and excommunicated in 1715. He maintained his position till his death in 1723. He was a man of great piety and of care for the poor, but Jean-Louis knew very well why his brother would not countenance him.⁷⁸

He mentions three other possibles, of whom we know little,

Unless you wish to choose outside the town, for example, M. Guyart of Laon.

This was the one who remained always a great supporter of De La Salle and the Brothers and an anti-Jansenist but not polemically so, which is perhaps why Jean-Louis suggests him.⁷⁹

He now passes on to matters concerning the Brothers' properties.

I cannot refrain from reminding you also that you have several houses in Rethel and a few things in Rheims acquired in your name that it is important to dispose of by will, with good advice, so that after you my brother's

children, being minors, on account of their father's infirmity, or those who will act for them, can have no claim over them and that there is no doubt about knowing to whom they will belong.

Here he is referring to the three surviving children of Jean-Remy, for whom he and his brother had made an arrangement in 1716. They might claim their father's share of any property that John Baptist De La Salle held in his name for the Brothers, or be pushed to it by their mother who seems to have been litigious, if its ownership were not defined by will.⁸⁰

With regard to properties acquired at different times by John Baptist in Rethel, some clarification as to ownership was needed. Jean-Louis spells out the situation for five of these. Among them were two houses declared as belonging to John Baptist De La Salle, and after him

to those who will be in charge of the Schools in Rheims. That (phrasing), could allow some ambiguity, and it is not clear whether the superior of the Brothers is intended, or a cleric, the superior nominated by the archbishop.

Further on, he writes:

In Rheims, you have the house bequeathed by M. Pasté, to you, for the Schools. I do not know if there are still some other effects; I shall find out. That would have called for some discussion together, but still, what I can do is to remind you and ask you to see to it.

You have heard, no doubt, of the death of M. Maillefer, my brother-in-law, which occurred on 7 December.

This may have been the first news for his brother. This Maillefer was John, widower of his sister Marie, who had taken a stand against him when he took the schoolmasters into his house, but later turned his admirer and protector. Jean-Louis mentions the decease of two other clerics known to them both, and concludes:

I am with all the attachment and the respect I owe, my very dear brother, your very humble and very obedient servant. De La Salle.

A postscript:

You have still in Rheims goods acquired in your name: the dilapidated habitation next to the Brothers' house (it gave on to the Rue Neuve), feudal lands at Acy (near Rethel; the Founder had been able to buy these holdings in 1713 thanks to a bequest of 800 livres by a bourgeois of Rheims in 1705; they provided an annual rent), and a house in the Rue des Deux Anges, bequeathed by M. Pasté."

It was not far from the hôtel de la Cloche, in a street that has since disappeared. Bequeathed in 1709, it was another property the Brothers could lease in return for rent. John Baptist certainly received his brother's letter, for his will takes note of it, and he no doubt answered it.⁸¹

THE FOUNDER'S LAST THREE MONTHS

28 January, he writes to reject an imputation of Jansenism

Pierre de Langle, bishop of Boulogne, was one of the four bishops who had sided with de Noailles in appealing against Clement XI. His attitude created unrest and uncertainty in his diocese: people on both sides mistrusted or denounced one another.⁸² To increase the list of Appellants as they were called, Jansenists flattered people or got them to sign in bad faith. "These are the facts of which no one is ignorant; but here is one that interests M. De La Salle that is not yet known", writes Blain.⁸³ In 1718, under cover of the bishop's authority, a list of Appellants was circulating in the diocese, and the name M. De La Salle was on it. It was in fact his brother's name, but the Dean of Calais, which was in the diocese of Boulogne, made it appear it was the Founder of the Brothers and that he was "one of the most declared anti-Constitutionalists." If true, this would have been a distinct feather in their cap. It was all the more despicable an attempt that the Dean knew very well how strongly La Salle was attached to the See of Peter. For the people of Calais, who had received him with so much joy and veneration two and a half years before, there was shock and consternation. The Brothers of the community wrote immediately to St Yon, asking him to dispel the equivocation. Frail and suffering as he was, he was both distressed and aroused by the imputation. "He learnt only with extreme impatience that his name had served to accredit a doctrine he condemned. This humble priest, used to affronts for more than thirty years, could not remain silent on an occasion that concerned his faith. He spoke with all strength and moderation" in a letter⁸⁴ he wrote to the Brother Director of Calais, intending him to publish it.

From Rouen, this 28 January 1719.

I do not think that I gave any grounds to his Reverence the Dean to say that I am among the number of the Apellants, my very dear Brother; I have never thought of appealing, nor to embrace the doctrine of those who appeal to the future Council: I have too much respect for Our Holy Father the Pope, & too much submission for the decisions of the Holy See, not to acquiesce in them. I intend in that to agree with saint Jerome, who in a difficulty caused in the Church by the Arians who were demanding him to admit three hypostases in God, 1^o thought it his duty to consult the Chair of saint Peter on which he knew, he said, the Church was built; and addressing

Pope Damasus, he made clear that 2° if his Holiness ordered him to acknowledge three hypostases in God, notwithstanding the drawbacks he found there, he would not fear to say three hypostases; hence this Saint finishes his Letter 3° by earnestly begging His Holiness by Jesus Christ crucified, who is the Saviour of the world, and by the Trinity of the three Divine persons in one same nature, to grant him the favour of authorising him by one of his Letters, to say or to deny three hypostases in God. His Reverence the dean, or other, must not therefore be surprised, if conforming to this great Saint so enlightened concerning matters of Religion, it suffices for me that he who today sits in the Chair of saint Peter, should have declared by a Bull accepted by almost all the Bishops of the world, and should have condemned the hundred and one propositions taken from the Book of Father Quesnel, and if after such an authentic decision of the Church, I say with saint Augustine that the Cause is finished. There you have on that my mind and my attitude, which has not been otherwise, and which I shall never change. I am, in our Lord,

My very dear Brother,
your very humble and affectionate servant,

De La Salle, priest.

A manuscript copy of this letter is in the Brothers' Archives. The Jansenists claimed tradition in their favour in opposing the Bishop of Rome. De La Salle therefore quotes the great fourth century champion of Roman orthodoxy, and gives his references, which they would find (in Latin) in the edition of St Jerome's works published by a Benedictine of St Maur between 1693 and 1705. His final reference to Augustine, their favourite source, supporting totally Pope Innocent I's condemnation of Pelagianism in 417, added another great fourth century doctor of the Church to the argument.

This vigorous and direct letter disconcerted the Jansenist party, and showed up their bad faith. They took it out on the Brothers of Calais. The manuscript of the history of the school in Calais, now in the Brothers' Archives, quotes a local historian who records that the chairman of the town grants committee cancelled in 1719 the allocation of 300 livres; one parish priest did likewise for the 100 he had donated, another his subsidy of 50; another benefactor cut his 30 livres by half. Fortunately, as we have seen, the royal grant continued, and the municipality took out annually 900 livres from the city toll dues in their favour.⁸⁵

The Founder's last weeks

Ash Wednesday fell on February 22nd this year. "Towards the beginning of Lent the asthma increased and suffocated him so much that it prevented him

breathing. In spite of this discomfort he could not refrain from wanting to keep the Lenten fast with as much exactness as if he had been in perfect health. The Brothers begged him in vain to take some relief. He answered them that the victim was ready to be immolated and that he had to strive to purify it. They believed that Brother Bartholomew, back from a journey he had made to Paris, would have more credit over his attitude. He joined his entreaties to those of the Brothers, but just as vainly. M. De La Salle told him that he knew his needs and begged him not to impose a ruling in this circumstance. They had recourse to his confessor, who acted with authority and forbade him to keep the fast. He was therefore obliged to submit and to accept the relief proposed to him.

His malady got worse. A violent headache arose with a pain in the side that brought him to exhaustion. "He could no longer find any rest nor peaceful position. The doctor was called and had no sooner seen him that he judged his illness was mortal. This holy man received this news with a joyful and tranquil expression, manifesting with saint Paul the ardent desire he had to leave the earth so as to go and be reunited to Jesus Christ, his divine Master. Nevertheless, all the remedies were tried that were believed the most suitable to soothe his great pain. He took them, in spite of the extreme repugnance and the bad tastes that made him feel sick."⁸⁶

Even at this late stage he had to put up with the inexperienced fervour of a novice and submitted with great docility. "One of them who was helping the Infirmarian, spoke to him on obedience with the language he was being taught in the Novitiate. When he presented him with something revolting, or it was necessary to move him so as to take another position - a movement that his great weakness made very painful - 'Come, Sir,' said the young man, 'you must do this, you must take that through obedience.'" And De La Salle "gathered his diminishing strength to lend himself to the Novice's desires."⁸⁷

"Everything that was used for his cure became useless. The malady increased noticeably. So he told the doctor that it was superfluous to go to so much effort, that his hour was approaching and that recourse should be had only to the sovereign Doctor who alone knew what was best for him."⁸⁸ "The cessation of the remedies and his abandonment to God restored him so as to be able to go up to the holy altar again to offer the holy Victim and to confess during almost a fortnight in spite of his pain... M. De La Salle was in a state in which any other would have stayed in bed... People were astonished to see him on his feet active and forcing his body to obey him, to satisfy his devotion. But all that is too violent does not last... the sickness became towards the end of Lent so violent that it obliged the Servant of God to go back to bed. As he felt his body weakening, so joy grew in his soul, and showed on his face. 'I hope,' he said, 'that I shall soon be delivered from Egypt, to be brought into

the true promised Land.”⁸⁹

He recovers enough to celebrate Mass on the feast of St Joseph

And yet he recovered enough strength to celebrate mass on the feast of St Joseph, 19 March. Maillefer writes: “However, on the day of the feast of saint Joseph, Protector of the Institute of the Brothers of the (Christian) Schools, and for whom he had a special devotion, he wanted to say Mass again in his honour. The evening before he was so weak that it was impossible for him to support himself on his feet or to be able to recite his breviary. The Brothers were persuaded that he would never be able to satisfy his devotion. But towards ten o’clock at night he thought his pain was diminishing and that his strength was returning. He thought it was a dream and he spoke of it to no one. He was agreeably surprised the next day when he effectively felt in a state to get up and to say Mass. He profited with thanksgiving by this last favour. The zeal with which he celebrated the sacred mysteries led all the Brothers to believe that God had given him back his health through the intercession of Saint Joseph. They were all eager to go and show him their joy. But after having given them the satisfaction of speaking to each individually, and having said to each what befitted him according to his needs, he fell back into his earlier weakness, and from that moment on, his life was entirely despaired of.”⁹⁰

Blain picks up the story: “The parish priest of Saint Sever, warned of the danger in which the Founder of the Brothers was, came to visit him; and after telling him he sympathised with him in his illness, he exhorted him to patience. The pastor, accustomed to seeing worry and disquiet wherever he went to the houses of sick people at the approach of death, was quite surprised and almost put out to see this man peaceful and in state of indifference to the outcome. As though he had been shocked or little edified with the sense of security in which the Servant of God appeared to be, he felt it his duty to withdraw him from it by announcing bluntly approaching death and the Judgment that follows it. ‘Know,’ he said, ‘that you are going to die, and you will then have to appear before God.’ ‘I know,’ answered M. De La Salle, ‘and I am quite submitted to his orders. My lot is in his hands. May his will be done.’” The effect on the parish priest was that “he was even inspired to end with peace and charity a small difference of opinion he had had with the holy man, who had not wished to agree with all he demanded of the Brothers who were on his parish: which gave a real consolation to the pious sick man.”⁹¹

“A few days before the death of the holy man, Brother Superior being alone with him by his bed, noise and a sort of dispute was heard in which the Brother was raising his voice and showing emotion. That appeared surprising; for people knew the profound veneration Brother Bartholomew had for

the holy Founder. To find out the reason another Brother entered the sick man's room, and addressing Brother Bartholomew, he begged him to say nothing to M De La Salle that might distress him. 'Ah! my Brother', answered the Superior, 'if you knew the reason that makes me heated, you would agree with it and you would speak even louder than I. M. De La Salle has just told me that his illness is ruining the house and that it is better to let him die than go to so great an expense.'"⁹²

On 3 April, Monday in Holy Week, he signed his last will and testament.

This is a document of great power and lucidity. He says first of all those things nearest his heart. Then he ratifies the various transfers of property he has made to the new Superior General, then clarifies who will be after him the owners of the properties about which his brother had reminded him. Finally he guarantees the investment he had made in favour of Jean-Rémy's children. The condition is that they or their guardians do not interfere with the arrangements, this being a legal protection while the Brothers were without letters patent. The original of this will is most unfortunately lost. There are two 18th century copies of it: one in the Brothers' Archives and another by Dom Maillefer in the city library of Rheims.⁹³ When he quotes the first part of it in his biography,⁹⁴ Maillefer has the Jansenist arrogance to omit all reference to attachment to the Holy See, not hesitating to omit it, even from a will.)

"In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen. I the undersigned, John Baptist De La Salle, priest, being ill in a room near to the chapel of the house of Saint Yon, in the suburb of Saint Sever of the town of Rouen, wishing to draw up a will which concludes all the affairs that may remain to me, I recommend firstly my soul to God and then to all the Brothers of the Society of the Christian Schools to whom he has united me, and I recommend to them above all things to have always an entire submission to the Church, and especially in these unfortunate times, and in order to show proof of it to disunite themselves in nothing from the Church of Rome, always recalling that I sent two Brothers to Rome to ask of God the grace that their Society will always be entirely submissive to it. I recommend to them also to have a great devotion towards Our Lord, to love very much holy communion and the holy exercise of mental prayer and to have a special devotion to the most Blessed Virgin and towards Saint Joseph, patron and protector of their Society, and to carry out their function with zeal and a great disinterestedness, and to have among themselves a close union and a blind obedience to their superiors which is the foundation and the support of all the perfection in a community.

Furthermore, I confirm and ratify two deeds of transfer or donation that I have made in favour of Joseph Truffet...of all the books that belonged to me..and of all the furniture that is in the house of Saint Yon...I approve also all the other deeds made out in his favour.

Furthermore, I declare that the two small houses in Rheims that are rented out...will belong to those who will have the ownership of the big house where the Brothers live, to dispose of them for the same purpose. And as for the houses acquired in Rethel Mazarin...for these three houses to make of them only one house for the Brothers of the said christian Schools to live in, run their classes and for other aims proposed for them...as it is declared in the deeds and contracts of the said three houses...the said houses having been left to me for the aims proposed above and the freedom having been given me, whether by the said contracts, whether by a deed signed before Copillon, solicitor in Rheims, to nominate a person in my stead in order to dispose of them in case the community begun in Rheims should no longer exist. As there are not yet letters patent, I nominate Mr Delasalle, my brother...and those to whom, with him and after him, the said houses of Rheims will belong...”

To these also he leaves three other houses in Rethel, two being where other classes are held, that is, a second school of which we have here the first clear notice, and the rent from a third house contributing to the upkeep of the Brothers. Finally, the interest on the capital of 2000 livres he invested on behalf of his three nephews. Houses bought for them and rent from another he leaves to his brother on their behalf, provided they or their guardians do not try to interfere with the above arrangements.

Done in the said house of Saint Yon, this third of April one thousand seven hundred and nineteen. (Signed) Delasalle.⁹⁵

The next day, Holy Tuesday, 4 April, “he asked for holy Viaticum, which he called his passport, with an eagerness that surprised, and some difficulty was made about giving it him, because people did not yet believe he was so near his end; however, they promised to bring it the next day. This delay favoured the great desire he had to get ready. All the night was spent in this preparation.”

On Holy Wednesday, 5 April, “As soon as day began to appear, he gave orders that everything should be set out to receive his Lord fittingly. To please him it was done with all the magnificence that the poverty of the house of St Yon could allow. Ashamed to receive in his bed the Prince of Eternity, he made so many entreaties to be taken out of it and be clothed in his stole and surplice that he could not be refused. And so, seated in his chair, he awaited his Lord and his God. But when the sound of the bell announced his approach,

he was no longer master of himself. Confused at appearing seated before his Creator and his Judge, a transport of fervour seized him and made him prostrate himself before him to adore him and annihilate himself in his presence. Then, his face on fire with the excess of his joy and the ardour of his charity, he was seen to receive the holy Viaticum the way he had been seen so many times to celebrate holy Mass, with the devotion of a seraph. This fire that appeared during this time on his face gave him an air of healthiness that led the assistants to believe that he was well. Some of them could not refrain even from showing their astonishment at giving communion as Viaticum to a man who seemed in good health.”⁹⁶

It was on or about this day that someone sent by the grand vicar on behalf of the archbishop chose to tell the dying man that his powers as chaplain had been revoked. “As they were well aware that the Canon (this refers to Blain) had not wanted to take on the office of policeman, they sent another who did so, and who announced to the holy priest the revocation of his powers two or three days before his death.” They could not even let Holy Week go by; and the one who came could see very well he was talking to a dying man who was struggling for breath because of his asthma. “The Canon who was a friend of M. De La Salle, having gone to see him two days before his death (therefore, on the Wednesday), learnt from his mouth that someone had come to tell him of the revocation of his functions. ‘They had asked me,’ said the Canon, ‘to bring it to you, but I was in no hurry to carry out such an unpleasant commission’. ‘I suspected it,’ answered the pious dying man, ‘from what you had the honour to tell me in your last visit.’ He received this ignominy, which was the last, without losing any of his peace and tranquillity.”⁹⁷

“What should not be forgotten”, Blain adds, “is that a few days afterwards, the Brothers having come to tell the Grand Vicar of whom we have just spoken, of the death of their holy Founder, he exclaimed: ‘He is a Saint: the Saint is dead’. He could have added that he himself had put the last stroke to his holiness. But how can a man of intelligence declare a Saint the one he had accused of imposture and against whom he had just issued a suspension?” Blain felt the absurdity and injustice and insensitivity of it, yet he concludes that God allows good men to turn against his favourites, without losing the esteem their virtue otherwise merits.

Canon Blain may well have come to hear De La Salle’s last confession, for he records: “Being on his deathbed after making his confession, he was heard to say to his confessor: ‘My father, I am so cowardly that I have asked God to make me die.’”⁹⁸

The consolation of receiving holy Viaticum was not complete “until he was brought the last Sacrament, which he asked for with earnestness. Extreme Unction (the name then given to the Sacrament of the Sick) was given him

the next day, *Maundy Thursday*, and he received it with the greatest presence of mind, answering all the prayers himself. When they were finished, he remained in a profound silence for the space of seven hours.” There were people round his bed, wishing “either to be witnesses of his blessed ending or to receive from him some advice, or to hear some word of edification. He satisfied them all, and even revealed to several what was most hidden in their souls, which astonished them greatly. A lay person who was present, whether by curiosity or by piety, wanted to make the same test and begged him to tell him what he thought of him. He answered: ‘It depends only on you to be saved; for God fills you with his graces, but you do not profit by them. You do not go to him as you ought. You bury the talents that have been given you.’ Nothing was truer: this man admitted it.”

“However, as he had great difficulty in speaking, and as his voice was getting weaker, they thought he was about to enter into agony. Then all his children threw themselves on their knees to ask his blessing, and Brother Bartholomew, raising his voice, asked him to give it to all those present and to extend it to all the Brothers of the Institute. His humility at first offered resistance, but finally, yielding to the entreaties that were made him, he raised his eyes and hands to heaven and said: ‘May the Lord bless you all.’ This blessing made many tears flow from the eyes of his disciples.

“Towards the end of the day he began to lose consciousness, as his words without coherence made apparent. The prayers for the agonising were said. They were no sooner finished than he came round. He profited again by this last moment that God gave him to pass on in a few words to his disciples the horror he had of worldly society. He said:

If you wish to stay and die in your state, never have anything to do with society people. For little by little you will take a liking for their ways of acting, and you will get caught up so much in their conversations that you will not be able to keep yourselves through policy from applauding what they say although very pernicious. The result will be that you will fall into infidelity, and being no longer faithful to observing your rules, you will get tired of your vocation and finally you will abandon it.

“He could not say more because a cold sweat that came over him took away the use of speech. At that moment he entered on a severe agony, which lasted from midnight until half-past two the next day, which was *Good Friday*. Having then come to a little, the thought was suggested to him of imploring the assistance of the most blessed Virgin by this prayer of the Church, that it was his custom to address to her every day at the end of the day: *Maria, Mater gratiae*, etc.⁹⁹ Brother Superior who never left him, then asked him if he did not accept with joy the pain he was suffering. ‘Yes,’ he answered,

‘I adore in all things God’s action in my regard.’

“They were the last words he pronounced. At three o’clock in the morning he fell back into agony which lasted till four o’clock. The agitation it caused him did not prevent there being seen on his face a tranquil and assured look. Finally towards four o’clock he made an effort as though to go and meet someone, he joined his hands, raised his eyes to heaven, and expired. He died on 7 April 1719, the day of Good Friday, aged sixty-eight years.”¹⁰⁰

“He showed all during his illness only a happy and smiling face, which remained after his death so noticeably that people took pleasure looking at it. You could have thought he was still alive, for he appeared as he was when he made mental prayer, or when he listened to the personal account of some Brother.”¹⁰¹

Honours paid after his death

“The news of his death having spread in the town of Rouen, each one hastened to see once more a man that had been looked upon enough as a Saint but who had not been treated as a Saint. People were eager to share the things he had left. The difficulty was to satisfy those who asked for them; for a crucifix, a new Testament, an Imitation of Jesus Christ, a pair of rosary beads, made up all his furniture and his sole riches. This inheritance having been seized by the more deft and alert, people threw themselves on his clothing, of which each one took according to his devotion some shreds as relics. Outsiders made no scruple about seizing by a pious theft what fell under their hands. Some even cut off some of his hair, others kept as a treasure what he had made use of. Those of his disciples who could have no share in what he left seemed as distressed as children who have lost their father’s inheritance. To console them, several copies of the will he had made shortly before his death were made and distributed to all the Brothers present and absent.

“The holy priest’s body was clothed in his sacerdotal vestments and exposed in St Yon’s chapel from the Friday evening until the afternoon of Holy Saturday, so as to satisfy the devotion of his disciples and of the public. He was then buried without pomp (because of the day) in St Susanna’s chapel in the parish church of Saint Sever in the presence of a great concourse of people who assisted at the funeral. He was carried by six Brothers who watered with their tears the ground where they passed. The paschal solemnity and its octave having prevented holding his service, it was celebrated on Low Monday with much solemnity by the clerics of the junior seminary of St Patrick. Many persons of piety were eager to render to his memory the honours he had avoided with such care during his life; and God seemed to accept

their devotion by tangible evidence of his power, that we do not dare call miraculous before the judgment of the Church.”¹⁰²

Letter sent out by Brother Bartholomew to the communities, including Gabriel Drolin

The Superior General sent out letters to all the communities. The one he sent to Brother Gabriel Drolin on Easter Thursday gives us an idea of their content:

Rouen, 13th April 1719.

My very dear Brother,

The grace and the peace of Our Lord be always with us. It is with a great subject of sadness that I write to you this second (letter) to give you notice of the death of M. our very dear Father, which occurred on the day of Good Friday at about four o'clock in the morning, having previously been administered the Sacraments of the Church with much edification for the neighbour. He was ill all during Lent.

All Rouen regrets him and looks upon him as a Saint and he was very much visited on the Friday and Saturday until he was buried. I hope you will take the trouble to write a note in answer to our last.

His Grace the archbishop of Rouen and the First President do us the favour of protecting us. I recommend myself to your holy prayers and I am with all my heart, in Jesus and Mary,

my very dear Brother,
your very humble and very affectionate servant,
Brother Bartholomew.

P.S. I make it a duty to send you the first article of the will and testament of our very dear Father which concerns all the Brothers of our Society as the last instruction and the last order he has given us. (There follows the first section of the will that must have been sent to all the Brothers. There is one difference: where the Founder wrote: ‘to disunite themselves in nothing from the Church of Rome,’ Bartholomew inserts: ‘from our Holy Father the Pope and...’)

M. our very dear Father wrote several letters in favour of the constitution of Our Holy Father Pope Clement the eleventh that have made a good impression.¹⁰³

Brother Gabriel Drolin remained on his own, faithfully devoted to the poor children of Rome, for another nine years. In the parish register, the *Status Animarum* of the parish of St Susanna, for 1727, p. 53, no. 506,¹⁰⁴ we read:

Casa Philippi.

Sig. D. Gabriello Drolini, francese, a. 65.

Tommaso Fiacro francese, a. 44.

Tommaso religioso francese, a. 37. (This was Charles Frappet).

From 1728 the last named does not appear, and in 1729, only Brother Thomas Fiacre's name. The Institute bursar had accompanied Brother Fiacre to Rome for the latter to be Drolin's replacement. Gabriel returned with Frappet to France to find the small group he had left there a growing Institute most of whose members he did not know. He spent a short time in Avignon and then was sent to the Brother's community in Auxonne, 30 kilometres southeast of Dijon. Perhaps there was a Brother there he knew. In 1731 Brother Timothy thoughtfully delegated Brother Gabriel to receive in his name the triennial vows of four Brothers in Avignon.¹⁰⁵ Brother Gabriel Drolin died on 11 January 1733.

Condolences and sorrow of the Brothers

As the news of De La Salle's death spread through France, letters came in to Brother Bartholomew "that did not allow him to forget his loss. Several parish priests had a solemn mass sung through a pure movement of charity towards the deceased." In particular, in answer to Brother Bartholomew's notice of his death, one of the priests of the seminary of St Nicolas-du-Chardonnet sent a letter which begins:

My very dear Brother, it is with great sorrow that I received your letter concerning the death of your most honoured Father M. De La Salle that M. de la Vertu had already told me about. I passed on this sad news and I recommended him to the prayers of our Community. Each one, and I in particular, look upon him as a Saint who prays for us in heaven. You know better than we the holiness of his life and the contradictions he had to endure for your foundation, an evident sign that it is the work of God."

He went on to detail the edifying conduct of the saint while in the seminary, very much as in the later letter of 1721 already quoted. It was in this letter of condolence that he expressed his gratitude for the way four of the young men he had sent had been trained as country schoolmasters in St Hippolyte's parish, and might have formed a most useful community in his native province; and who taught "in spite of the assaults they often have to bear from

magistrates, and sometimes from parish priests and clerics.” He concludes:

I hope that this death will not separate me from the affection of your Community, that you will always do me the honour of looking on me as one of your friends.¹⁰⁶

From the communities Bartholomew got back letters from Brothers broken-hearted by the news, and had to overcome his own sorrow in order to send them words of comfort. He wrote to one of them:

My very dear Brother. The grace and peace of our Lord be with us. It has not been without great reason that you have shed tears on learning of the death of M. our very dear Father; I do not think that any of our Brothers could have prevented his eyes from shedding them, that being so natural. But all things being considered, my dear Brother, it must be admitted that such has been the holy will of God, who having given him to us for as long as it pleased him, has taken him from us in order to reward him for his labours and his holy life. We must submit and conform to his divine good pleasure. Our very dear Father is not lost; he is, to all appearances, among the number of the Saints in Heaven. No, my dear Brother, I do not want to pray to God to take you from this world. I forbid you to die, except to your own will and to your own views.

Our Father did not die without permission; I think he would have died long ago, if he had had the permission. Do not therefore be misplaced in your sadness, for the one you weep over as dead is alive, he is in the peace that no one will ever be able to take from him. I do not know how I am: I am sad and joyful all at once. The odour that I have of his holy life together with the memory of several extraordinary things that happened at the time and concerning his death console me. So be of good heart; for the sadness that does not come from the movement of the Holy Spirit is dangerous.¹⁰⁷

Epilogue

Creating a new style for the teaching profession

If I had ever believed that the concern I had for the schoolmasters out of pure charity would ever have made it a duty to live with them, I should have given it up. It was apparently for this reason that God, who guides all things with wisdom and gentleness, and is not in the habit of forcing the inclinations of men, wishing to encourage me to take full responsibility for the schools, did so in a most imperceptible

manner and over a period of time; so that one involvement led me to another, without my having foreseen it in the beginning.

De La Salle, it is clear from the history of his century, did not suddenly appear on an empty educational stage. There was a wide movement, in Church and society, to provide a better education for the masses. But he was a great innovator within that movement. For what still needed creating was a society of trained and dedicated lifelong Christian schoolmasters working “together and by association”, who by their cohesion and love of the poor, were led to abandon outdated approaches unhelpful to them.

It was at an opportune moment, then, that the Holy Spirit stirred the heart of a young bourgeois canon to throw in his lot with a group of willing young teachers of the poor evidently needing guidance. He turned out to be someone who served them in total dependence on God’s handling of events and on the inner leads of the Spirit, with utter determination and great powers of organisation.

When he died, his work was unfinished, since it had as yet neither papal approval nor legal existence. The latter was accorded gradually. In Rome, patient negotiations led to the *Supplica*, the formal request for recognition. Its wording was virtually that of the subsequent *Bull* which was signed by Pope Benedict XIII on 26 January 1725. The actual document in parchment was sealed with the leaden bull a month later, on 25 February¹⁰⁸ and is one of the most solemn forms of papal bull. It presents the Brothers of the Christian Schools to the Catholic Church as being a religious Institute with simple vows in which the profession of teaching constituted one of its most characteristic activities. No member of the society could be a priest or aspire to the clerical state. This is not a restriction nor a rejection, but part of the defining of a new vocation in the Church and an absolutely original society within it: an Institute of teachers whose profession was incorporated into the consecrated life.

The full meaning of De La Salle’s work would only be seen after some time, as **his Institute** spread. Before the French Revolution over 900 Brothers of the Christian Schools throughout France, ensured - along with others - not only the spread of Christian education, but that the old inefficient way of teaching the poorer classes of the towns and even the commercial class, was more and more seen to be out of date. At the Revolution they lost everything and were scattered. But they picked up again. After a century they numbered 10,000 in France and another 5,000 over many countries of the world. Badly shaken in France by being banned from teaching in that country in 1904, the Institute recovered and spread further world-wide, with a certain holding on to the letter of venerated past texts. In seeking to update their understanding of fidelity to their Founder, the Brothers were spurred on by



the Second Vatican Council, an effort which in a sense has put them in crisis. From there being over 16,000 Brothers then, they are now under 6000, still in a process of inner renewal and of adaptation to the contemporary world and education. Their history, even in their Founder's lifetime, has involved a recurrence of crises and new growth. It has always included learning from and being supported by contemporaries, besides being ready to step out into new pedagogical areas. The interest shown today by many teachers who know the Brothers is in sharing their spirituality of faith and zeal.

When they began three centuries ago, it was the Brothers of the Christian Schools who took the brunt of carrying forward the renewal of the education of the urban poor, or the depressed working majority in the towns, and then of the new commercial class, against set routines and vested interests, or against the view that saw the salvation of the poor in religious instruction alone. Since then, many similar Institutes along with them have extended and diversified that work in many parts of the world and have helped to form the ideals of a developing teaching profession. Today, education in different countries is in the hands of teaching professions of national scope. In the Catholic Church, teachers as a whole, since they are commissioned by the bishops in each diocese to educate according to Catholic principles, recognise they are carrying out a lay ministry of which De La Salle and his Brothers revealed the existence and the true meaning.

John Baptist De La Salle was declared a Saint by the Catholic Church on 25 May 1900, and principal Patron of Catholic teachers in 1950. He it was that effectively gave the profession its sense of purpose, its ideals and its dignity compared with how he found it, beginning first with meeting the needs of the powerless and disadvantaged of society. In the developed world today these disadvantaged still exist, and over the globe they constitute four fifths of humanity. Whole populations await even the basics of survival. But not on bread alone does man live. There is the need to offer in gentleness and respect the Good News of Jesus Christ through education for a fully human life.

Christ himself took as his own programme these words of the prophet Isaiah:

*The spirit of the Lord has been given to me, for he has anointed me.
He has sent me to give good news to the poor;
to proclaim liberty to captives
and to the blind new sight,
to set the down-trodden free,
to proclaim the Lord's year of favour.*¹⁰⁹



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2. Rigault I, 406.
3. Blain II, 166.
4. Félix-Paul, 168-173.
5. Battersby, op. cit., 272.
6. Bertrand de La Tour, *Vie du Frère Irénée*, Avignon, 1774.
7. Blain II, 133-4, Appendix, 36-8; see also Maillefer, CL6, 236-7; Rigault I, 406-9.
8. Blain II, Appendix, 37.
9. Rigault I, 407.
10. id., 406-9.
11. Blain II, 410.
12. Maillefer, CL6, 236-9; Blain II, 134-6; Rigault I, 409-12.
13. Blain II, 134; Maillefer, CL6, 236, 238.
14. Blain II, 135-6.
15. Rigault I, 406-11.
16. Rigault I, 413.
17. Maillefer, CL6, 238-241; Blain II, 152-3.
18. Blain II, 413.
19. Blain II, 450.
20. Blain II, 445.
21. Maillefer, CL6, 240-241.
22. Blain II, 150-151.
23. Blain II, 469-70; Lucard, op. cit., 317, referring to the *Archives* of the Appeal Court of Rouen.
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25. Aroz, CL27, 170 and n.2.
26. The late Brother Edwin Bannon, Institute Archivist in 1991, pointed this out to me.
27. Maillefer, CL6, 242-245; Blain II, 154-157; Lucard, op. cit., 399.
28. Félix-Paul, 18-22; Blain II, 157-9; Rigault I, 415-415.
29. Blain II, 264.
30. Félix-Paul, 18-22.
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34. Blain II, 159-162.
35. Rigault I, 415-419.
36. Lucard, op. cit., 408.
37. Félix-Paul, 23-26; Blain II, 328.
38. See Poutet II, 344, n.46.
39. Lucard, *Annales de l'Institut des Frères des Ecoles Chrétiennes*, Tome I, 369.

40. Félix-Paul, 22.
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43. Poutet, CL48, 286.
44. id., 311.
45. id., 314, 316 and n. 85.
46. id., 320.
47. id., 327, n.148, 328.
48. Blain II, 153, 154.
49. id., 154.
50. Blain I, 378-9; Rigault I, 265-8; Poutet II, 125-6.
51. Rigault I, 266.
52. Blain I, 378.
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54. CL25, 9-10, 146.
55. See CL25.
56. *The Rule of the Brothers of the Christian Schools*, ed. 2002, art. 54.
57. Blain II, 162-181; see also Maillefer, CL6, 248-257; Rigault I, 424-437.
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59. id., 164.
60. Rigault I, 479-480.
61. Blain II, 165.
62. Félix-Paul, 387.
63. Blain II, 166.
64. id., 470.
65. Blain II, 167-9; Poutet II, 162-3.
66. Poutet II, 162, n.5.
67. Blain II, 472.
68. id., 171, 469.
69. Maillefer, CL6, 250.
70. Aroz, CL26, 306.
71. Aroz, CL26, 309-12.
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74. Blain II, 228.
75. Details in Aroz, CL27, 106-108.
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81. Aroz., CL27, 166-171; CL26, 260-285.

82. Rigault I, 272.
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 84. Blain II, 223.
 85. Rigault I, 272-3.
 86. Maillefer, CL6, 250.
 87. Blain II, 450.
 88. Maillefer, *ibid.*
 89. Blain II, 171.
 90. Maillefer, CL6, 252.
 91. Blain II, 172.
 92. *id.*, 410.
 93. Aroz, CL26, 286.
 94. *id.*, 254.
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 96. Blain II, 172-3; Maillefer, CL6, 252, 253.
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