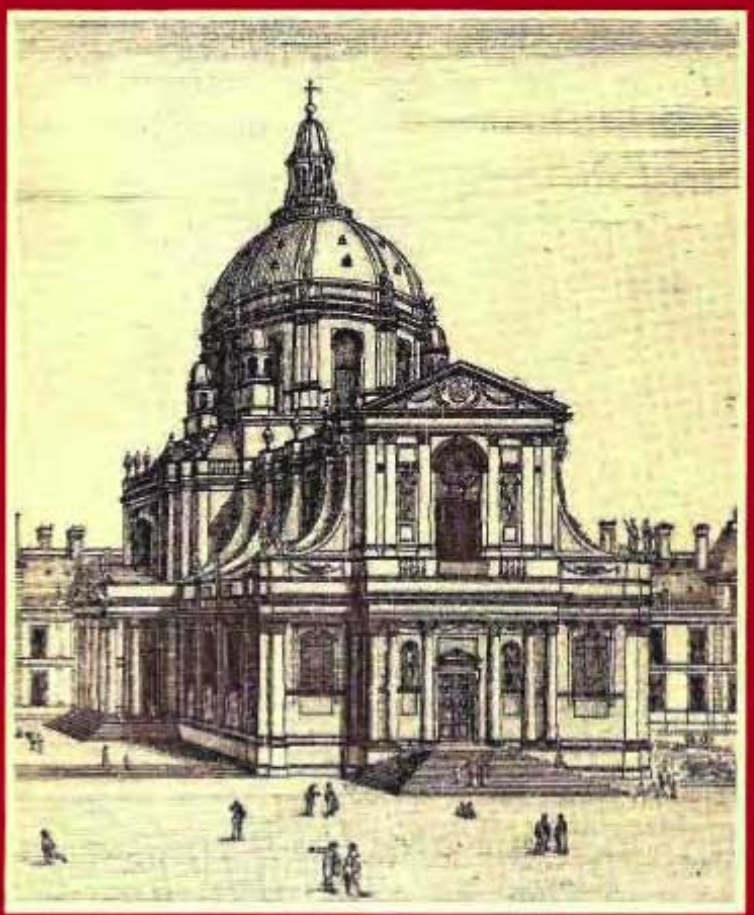
John Baptist de La Salle
The Formative Years



Luke Salm, FSC

John Baptist de La Salle
The Formative Years

John Baptist de La Salle as a young canon

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1989
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This volume is dedicated to the memory of two extraordinarily gifted teachers, Brother Charles Henry, FSC, and the Reverend Eugene M. Burke, CSP, who contributed respectively and in a significant way to the classical and theological education of the author in his formative years.

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Illustrations

Abbreviations

CL *Cahiers lasalliens.* An ongoing series of publications of studies, texts, and documents concerned with John Baptist de La Salle, his life, writings, and religious and pedagogical ideas. These publications also focus on the early decades of the Institute of the Brothers of the Christian Schools, the Society which John Baptist de La Salle founded in 1680.

CL 4 *Conduite admirable de la divine Providence en la personne du vénérable serviteur de Dieu, Jean-Baptiste de La Salle.* Brother Bernard, FSC

CL 6 *La vie de M. Jean-Baptiste de La Salle.* F. E. Maillefer

CL 7 & 8 *La vie de Monsieur Jean-Baptiste de La Salle, Instituteur des Frères des Ecoles chrétiennes.* Volumes 1 & 2. Jean-Baptiste Blain

CL 38 *Nicolas Roland, Jean-Baptiste de La Salle et les Soeurs de l'Enfant-Jésus de Reims.* Brother Léon de Marie Aroz, FSC

CL 41 II *Jean-Baptiste de La Salle: Documents bio-bibliographiques. Les Années d'imprégnation (1661–1683).* Volume II. Brother Léon de Marie Aroz, FSC

OL 1 *Le XVII^e Siècle et les Origines lasalliennes.* Volume I, Rennes, 1970. Brother Yves Poutet, FSC

Preface

This volume represents the inauguration of a new series within the overall project known as Lasallian Publications. Sponsored by the Regional Conference of the Christian Brothers of the United States and Toronto, Lasallian Publications has as its primary purpose to make available in English new translations of all the writings of Saint John Baptist de La Salle, Founder of the Institute of the Brothers of the Christian Schools. In addition, the project will publish new translations of the original biographies of the Founder written by his contemporaries in the early eighteenth century.

In order to provide appropriate historical and interpretative background for these early works, Lasallian Publications will include thematic studies, of which this volume is the first, based on relevant documentary sources contemporary with the foundation of the Institute. Many of these documents have only recently been uncovered and very few of them have been incorporated into studies published in English. Finally, the publication project will include edited and translated versions of recent Lasallian monographs as well as new and original essays on significant issues related to De La Salle and his times.

The present study centers on the formative years of John Baptist de La Salle, that is, on his education and training during childhood, adolescence, and early adulthood, including his early years in the priesthood. Subsequent thematic studies in this series will treat of his family and relationships, the early Brothers with whom he was associated, and also a study of his rather wide-ranging experience as an administrator.

With the educational experience of John Baptist de La Salle as its focus, this first in the series of thematic studies will terminate with his ordination to the priesthood in 1678, the goal of his ecclesiastical formation, and the conferral of the degree of Doctor of Theology in 1680, the final term of his academic study. From then on, De La Salle's life story took a different turn, one for which the years of formation had done little to prepare him.

The principal source for this study is Volume II of Number 41 of the *Cahiers lasalliens*. Prepared and edited by Brother Léon Aroz, FSC, and published in Rome in 1979, this work of exemplary

scholarship is entitled *Les Années d'imprégnation (1661–1683)*. In this volume the author analyzes 34 original documents from that period in De La Salle's life. The extensive introduction covers some 100 pages. There follows a photographic reproduction of each of the 34 documents with full commentary on the personalities and events as they relate to each document.

Some idea of the research involved in preparing this volume of the *Cahiers* can be gained by thumbing through the 40 pages that list the manuscript sources consulted by Brother Léon in 20 different archival collections. The bibliography of published works takes up an additional 15 pages.

Although the material in this English-language presentation is heavily dependent on the text of Aroz, and in some sections reproduces it rather closely, it is intended to be more than a translation. The adaptation is decidedly selective, excluding an abundance of details that could have little significance for English-speaking readers. Most of the scholarly apparatus and all of the footnotes in the volume of the *Cahiers* have either been omitted or incorporated into the English text. Anyone interested in pursuing the source materials further can easily find the references in the work of Aroz.

In addition, the author of this present study has not hesitated to incorporate additional background material from other sources where it seemed necessary or desirable. Especially helpful in this regard has been the first volume of Brother Yves Poutet's *Le XVII^e Siècle et les Origines lasalliennes,* published in Rennes, France, in 1970.

Whereas Aroz organizes his material in the form of a commentary to illuminate the documents, Poutet treats in a more systematic way the influences on De La Salle during his formative years. Thus these two source studies complement one another. Nevertheless, on some matters of interpretation, Aroz and Poutet are not always in agreement. That has been indicated in the present text when it seems to be significant.

Another feature of the present study is the inclusion of appropriate selections from the original biographers of De La Salle. Both Aroz and Poutet assume that the reader is familiar with these texts, a situation that does not yet prevail generally among English-speaking Brothers. For that reason it is appropriate here to say a brief word about each of these early biographers. They will be cited often in the pages that follow.

The first to attempt a biography of De La Salle was a member of the Institute of the Brothers of the Christian Schools. He was known as Brother Bernard and, shortly after the death of the Founder in 1719, was assigned by the superiors to write the story of his life. Bernard proved not to be equal to the task and his work was not thought worthy of publication at the time. Only part of it has survived in manuscript form. It was published for the first time as Volume 4 in the *Cahiers lasalliens*. An English translation by Brother William Quinn, FSC, is being prepared for Lasallian Publications.

The first complete biography of De La Salle was produced in two manuscript editions (1723 and 1740). It is the work of Dom Elie Maillefer, OSB, born François-Elie Maillefer and a nephew of the Founder. The original texts of both editions are published side by side in Volume 6 of the *Cahiers*. An English translation by Brother William Quinn of the 1740 edition has been available only since 1963. This was reprinted in 1980 on the occasion of the tercentenary celebration of the foundation of the Institute.

The most extensive of the original biographies, and the first to appear in printed form, is the work of Canon Jean-Baptiste Blain. He was the ecclesiastical superior of the Brothers in Rouen at the time of the Founder's death at Saint Yon.

Blain's biography first appeared in 1733 in two volumes comprising four books: three devoted to the life story of De La Salle; the fourth, to his "spirit and virtues." In preparing his text, which was clearly intended to promote the cause of the Founder's canonization, Blain had at his disposal all the written recollections of the Brothers, as well as several memoirs written by De La Salle himself. Due to the fact that most of these have since been lost, Blain's sometimes tedious work remains an indispensable primary source.

Volumes 7 and 8 of the *Cahiers lasalliens* consist of an exact photographic reproduction of the complete text of the first edition of Blain, published in 1733. The biography of the Founder contained in Blain's first three books has only recently been translated into English for the first time. This translation is the work of Brother Richard Arnandez, FSC. A new English translation by Brother Edwin Bannon, FSC, of Blain's fourth book, entitled *Spirit and Virtues*, is scheduled for publication in the near future.

The translations by Arnandez and Quinn of the early biographers have been used, with some minor modifications, throughout the present text. However, since new editions of these translations

will eventually appear as part of Lasallian Publications, it has been deemed advisable to cite these authors according to the French text in the *Cahiers*.

The inclusion of these quotations from Bernard, Maillefer, and Blain should not obscure the fact that much of the source material available today was either unknown to the original biographers or was set aside as of little consequence. The formative period in the Founder's life does not seem to have interested his contemporaries very much. Bernard devotes only eight of his 86 pages to it; the formative years occupy only 13 of the 340 pages of Maillefer's 1740 manuscript and only six of the 55 chapters of Blain.

Modern authors have shown much more interest in this period of the Founder's life. Brother Clair Battersby, FSC, devotes three full chapters to it in his 1957 biography, the only fully developed life of the Founder published in English. It is no reflection on Battersby's contribution to note, however, that the source material since published in the *Cahiers* was not available to him. Thus some parts of his account, especially as it concerns the De La Salle family, need to be corrected in the light of subsequent research.

The most recent complete biography of the Founder has just been published (1986) in Spanish. The author is Brother Saturnino Gallego, FSC, who has a doctorate in theology from the Pontifical Institute in Salamanca. Entitled *Juan Bautista de La Salle,* this is the first biography to take full advantage of the Lasallian scholarship undertaken since 1956. Much attention is given to the formative years in 146 well-documented pages of the 600-page book. Brother Saturnino presents for the first time in Spanish much of the same material that will be presented here for the first time in English.

In preparing this English-language study, the author had to make some decisions about how to approach the subject. The nature of the material, which includes extensive commentary on the documentary sources, seemed to exclude a breezy, imaginative style in the manner of a historical reconstruction.

It also seemed advisable to avoid any attempt to tie the De La Salle story to the major political and cultural movements of his time. Although the life span of the Founder (1651–1719) roughly coincided with the fabled reign of Louis XIV (1654–1715), just how much direct influence the political events and cultural achievements of that period had on the young canon from Reims, or to what extent he was interested in them, remains quite problematic.

A more tempting approach that also had to be resisted is the one taken by Brother Yves Poutet. Throughout his analysis of this period, he draws extensive parallels between the writings of De La Salle's teachers and mentors and similar passages in the Founder's later writings. This kind of study would seem to be material for a fully developed treatment in itself and is, in fact, a major concern of Lasallian research at the present time. It is appropriate here, however, in this study to highlight from time to time certain events or influences that would be especially significant for the future mission of the Founder.

For many reasons, then, the approach in what follows will be largely factual. Some readers, who may either have persevered through or benefited from a traditional classical and philosophical education, may find that much in De La Salle's educational experience was similar to their own. Others may be alternately horrified and amused to discover in detail what he had to endure to become an educated man of his times.

In either case, it is the hope of the author that these pages will advance the movement under way worldwide to understand better the full reality of the person and the work of Saint John Baptist de La Salle. One way to get to know the Founder better is to concentrate on one element of his life at a time, which in this text will be the formative years. To this end, an attempt has been made to assemble the material and then let the facts speak for themselves. If the material presented here does speak to the reader and resonate in any significant way, the enterprise will indeed have been worthwhile.

Luke Salm, FSC
Manhattan College
April 30, 1987

Introduction

John Baptist de La Salle, Founder of the Institute of the Brothers of the Christian Schools, was born in Reims, the capital of the Champagne province in northeastern France, on April 30, 1651. His father, Louis de La Salle, descendant from a family of cloth merchants, was a well-to-do magistrate of the provincial court of Reims. His mother, Nicolle Moët, was the daughter of a nobleman, Jean Moët de Brouillet, but she lost all claim to noble title by her marriage to a bourgeois.

Of the eleven children born to the marriage of Louis de La Salle and Nicolle Moët, only seven survived. John Baptist was the oldest. His four younger brothers were Jacques-Joseph, Jean-Louis, Pierre, and Jean-Remy; his two sisters were Marie and Rose-Marie.

At first the family lived in the town house or mansion known as La Cloche, just off the Rue de l'Arbalète. In time the house proved to be too small for the growing De La Salle family. In 1664, when John Baptist was 13 years old, the family moved to more spacious quarters diagonally across from the Reims cathedral on the Rue Sainte-Marguerite. The La Cloche mansion still stands today. After extensive restoration and renovation necessitated by the damage suffered in two world wars, it now serves as the provincial house for the Brothers of Reims.

The parents of John Baptist de La Salle were not only devout and exemplary Catholics but also respected members of the upper middle class. Many of their near and distant relatives were important figures in the cultural and social life of Reims. The routine of the De La Salle household was governed by the rules of correct and conventional social behavior. Music and the arts were held in esteem. There was a well-stocked library and the books were read, often aloud, as a form of relaxation after the family evening meal.

As a child, John Baptist seems to have been bored by the cultural soirées that were frequently held in the De La Salle mansion. It is told that on one occasion he ran to his grandmother to ask her to read to him stories from the lives of the saints as an alternate diversion. Musical performances in particular, a favorite form of entertainment that the father arranged for his guests, were not to the liking of his young son. Blain attributes this to the prevenient impulse of divine grace; Battersby, a modern author, connects

it rather to the natural distaste of a young lad for such an unexciting way to spend an evening.

Brother Bernard, his earliest biographer, relates that John Baptist was criticized on one occasion for "being excessively given to fine clothes." De La Salle evidently took the criticism seriously. Bernard says that he "profited so well from this criticism that he began to neglect his appearance, without however going to extremes" (CL 4: 19). Although this incident took place somewhat later in his life, it does give a clue to the privileged character of De La Salle's upbringing and lifestyle.

The formal education that was provided for John Baptist de La Salle fits well into this pattern. As the pages to follow will show, it was designed to give the young man all that was needed to advance in any one of the careers that his wealth and social position would open to him: the law, perhaps, in the footsteps of his father; the Church, to which his mother's influence would no doubt have inclined him; or similar opportunities in medicine, finance, education, or politics.

In the case of John Baptist the option for an ecclesiastical career was made very early. As time went on, his attraction to things religious developed into a genuine vocation to the priesthood, a personal and committed response to what was clearly perceived as a call from God. Accordingly, his education was to encompass two elements: the academic component, which would culminate in the doctorate in theology; and the ecclesiastical, which would eventually lead to ordination to the priesthood.

A turning point in De La Salle's career as a student came when his parents died within a year of each other, during 1671 and 1672. He was 21 years old at the time and just getting into the substantive part of his theological studies. From then on his pursuit of academic theology and his clerical training had to be integrated with his responsibilities as head of the household and the care of his younger brothers and sisters. That he managed these multiple and very diverse challenges so well is a tribute to his good judgment, his sense of organization, and his religious motivation.

The history of the De La Salle family itself is not the immediate concern of this present work. That is a matter worthy of formal and extensive treatment on its own. Yet it might not be out of place here to give a brief sketch of what became of John Baptist's brothers and sisters after they had been placed under his care.

Shortly after the death of her parents, the oldest girl, Marie, left the family mansion to go to live with the maternal grandmother, Perrette Lespagnol Moët. Marie took with her the youngest boy, Jean-Remy, who was not quite two years old. In 1679, just about a year after John Baptist was ordained to the priesthood, Marie married Jean Maillefer, and Jean-Remy probably returned to live with John Baptist shortly thereafter. The Maillefers had ten children, one of whom, Dom Elie Maillefer, OSB, would one day write the biography of his uncle.

Even before her father's death, probably in February 1672, the younger girl, Rose-Marie, only 16 years old at the time, had entered the cloistered convent of the Canonesses of Saint Augustine in Reims. John Baptist always showed special signs of affection for her. She died suddenly in 1681 at the age of 25.

That left three teenage boys still living at home with John Baptist. In 1677, the oldest of the three, Jacques-Joseph, entered the novitiate of the Canons Regular of Saint Augustine in Paris. After his ordination, having earned a doctorate in theology, he taught philosophy and theology at Blois. He later became prior and pastor of the monastery church of Saint Martin in Chauny, where he died in 1723.

At the end of June, or early in July 1681, as John Baptist was becoming increasingly involved with the schoolteachers, Pierre, who was almost 15, and Jean-Remy, who was not quite 11, went to live with Marie and her husband. Jean-Louis remained at home with his brother until the following year when he left for Paris to study for the priesthood.

In time Jean-Louis earned a doctorate in theology at the Sorbonne and was appointed a canon of the cathedral at Reims. Pierre eventually married and had a distinguished career as a lawyer. Both Jean-Louis and Pierre lent their expertise and their influence to assist the young Institute of the Brothers, especially after the Founder's death. Jean-Louis died in 1724. Pierre lived to be 75 years old; he died in 1741.

The youngest of the family, Jean-Remy, was less successful. After a stint in the army, where he advanced to the rank of lieutenant, he returned to civilian life and became a judge in the finance court at Reims. He married somewhat "above his station" in 1711, had four children of a wife 20 years his junior, suffered a mental breakdown in 1715, and died in a mental institution in Paris in 1732.

The story to follow will focus almost entirely on the eldest in the De La Salle family, John Baptist himself. The story of his formal education begins with his entrance into the Collège des Bons-Enfants in 1661; it ends with the conferral of the degree of Doctor of Theology in 1680. In covering these early years of De La Salle's "hidden life," this short treatise might well be entitled "De La Salle before his Conversion."

In 1680 De La Salle was still enjoying the relative comfort of the world in which he was brought up. This was a world where, as one recent author has described it, "the possession of money, the influence of power, the resources of culture, the networks of relationships, and circles of influence all gave stability and security." De La Salle's intellectual, religious, and ecclesiastical formation were designed to make it possible for him to fit comfortably into that world.

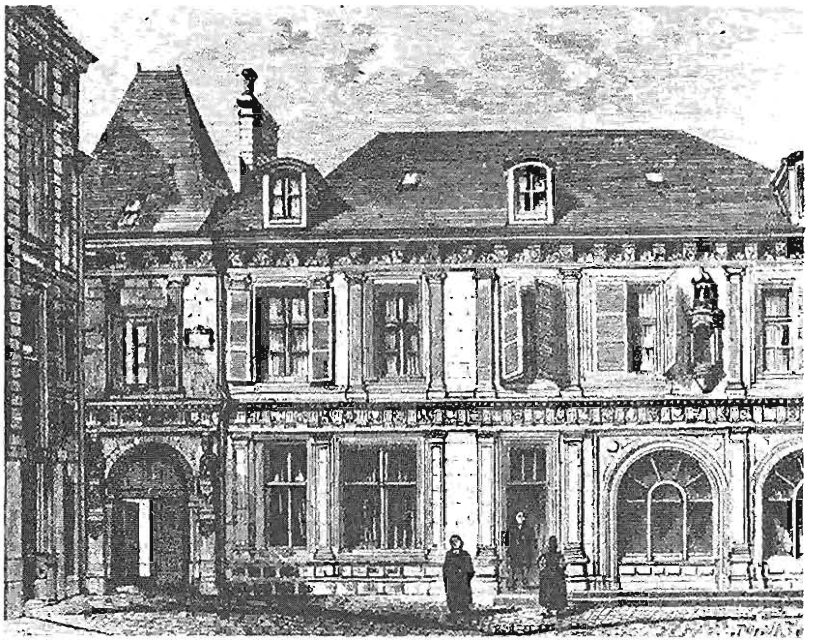
Yet in that very same year, 1680, De La Salle had already made his initial contact with a very different world, that of a little group of teachers who had been recruited to teach in the charity schools of Reims. These men belonged to a social class that was considered, not without reason, as worthless and despicable. As De La Salle would say of them later: "It was the most natural thing in the world for me to consider the men I was obliged to employ in the schools as lower in status than my valet. The very thought that I might have to live with them would have been impossible to bear" (CL 7: 169).

On Easter of 1680 De La Salle decided to invite five or six of these schoolteachers into his home to share the family table. In later years, this date would be chosen to mark the foundation of the Institute of the Brothers of the Christian Schools. In a recent and as yet unpublished address, Brother Michel Sauvage, FSC, has underscored the importance of this event:

> By this very fact, he provoked a brutal confrontation, a cultural shock between two worlds that for all practical purposes knew nothing of each other. This shock was to be felt throughout the whole family and the social environment in which he lived. It would have echoes in the very deepest part of his own being.
>
> Easter 1680. This date marks the beginning, a reference point, for the upheaval of the entire universe of John Baptist de La Salle. It indicates a point of departure for his conversion to lead the life of the Gospel. It marks the perceptible taking

> hold of a process of interior and social liberation which would bring him to the point where he had neither the intention, the desire, nor the courage to go by himself.
>
> The beginning of the foundation of the Institute was to be found in this embryo of a community. But also, and what is more important, it was the moment when a Founder was born into his vocation to live the Gospel, a recognition on his part that the Holy Spirit had begun to work in him in an unforeseen and invisible way.

It is beyond the scope of this present volume to pursue that part of the story further. It is sufficient to note, in this volume entitled *The Formative Years*, that the ultimately significant process of formation, through which John Baptist de La Salle would emerge as the Founder of his religious Institute, was to begin only after the "formative years" had come to an end.



The Hôtel de la Cloche, where John Baptist lived from 1651 to 1655

1

The Collège des Bons-Enfants

All three of the early biographers of John Baptist de La Salle describe in great detail the attraction that things religious had for him, even from his earliest years. Yet when it comes to his formal education, they seem little concerned about how this devout young child was introduced into the mysteries of reading, writing, and arithmetic.

Maillefer remarks that the father, Louis de La Salle, councillor of the city, "gave him an education in keeping with the dignity of the family. . . . He kept his son under his own care until the boy was at an age to begin his studies" (CL 6: 19). Blain is a bit more precise: "When the time came to start his formal education, he was placed in the hands of tutors capable of instructing him in human learning. After this he was sent to the college attached to the University of Reims where he spent the first years of his studies" (CL 7: 120). The college was known as the Collège des Bons-Enfants.

History of the Collège des Bons-Enfants

Foundation and Growth of the Cathedral School

By the time that John Baptist de La Salle entered the Collège des Bons-Enfants on October 10, 1661, the school had for some time formed an integral part of the University of Reims. The origins of the college go back as far as the ninth century under Archbishop Hincmar (d. 882), who gave a fresh impetus to education in his diocese by providing a school for the theological education of the canons of the cathedral. He joined to this school another for the general education of externs. The schools were located near the cathedral on the Rue des Tapissiers. The basic curriculum was organized according to the traditional seven liberal arts: the trivium, or elementary section, devoted to grammar, rhetoric, and logic; the quadrivium, or intermediate section, comprising arithmetic, music, geometry, and astronomy.

A certain number of poor students known as the *bons-enfants de la misèricorde* ("good children who need help") were provided for out of the revenues from the property of the ancient abbey of Saint-Pierre. The income was administered by the General Hospice of Reims, which was located on the site where the abbey once stood. Despite many changes in its character and location over the centuries, the school always retained the name and the tradition of the *bons-enfants*.

The history of the development of the college at Reims between the tenth and the seventeenth centuries encapsulates, in a sense, the history of medieval education. As was the case almost everywhere in Europe, the early tenth century was a period of intellectual and moral decline. At the end of that century, when Adalberon (d. 988) became Archbishop of Reims, he made it his first priority to reestablish institutions designed to foster both learning and piety.

The head of the schools at Reims during the eleventh century was the famous Gerbert, described as the most renowned scholar of the century. After study in France and Spain, Gerbert spent some time at the court of the German Emperor Otto II and then came to Reims, where his reputation attracted what his contemporaries called a "legion of students." He taught courses in rhetoric and philosophy, with the students reading Aristotle and Porphyry as well as the Latin classics.

Gerbert was an accomplished mathematician and a famed astronomer besides, with the invention of several scientific devices to his credit. In time he became Archbishop of Reims and later of Ravenna. In 1098 he was elected pope and reigned as Sylvester II until his death in 1109.

Saint Bruno, a contemporary of Gerbert, canon of the cathedral at Reims, himself a poet, philosopher, theologian, and professor of Scripture, helped to consolidate the educational revival at Reims. In 1084 Bruno left Reims to retire to the remote Chartreuse mountains, where, with a small group of disciples attracted to his hermit's retreat, he founded the Carthusian order.

The educational climate at Reims continued to improve under Alberic of Reims (d. 1139) and Garnier, his school supervisor. Recently arrived from Paris, Garnier introduced the scholastic method into the college at Reims, which soon became a carbon copy of that of Paris, so identical were the educational practices in the two places.

The period of the twelfth and thirteenth centuries was the epoch of Bonaventure and Thomas, Dominic and Francis of Assisi, Pope Innocent III and the Fourth Lateran Council of 1215. Reims had its own distinguished archbishop in the person of Alberon Humbert (d. 1218), who in 1211 began the century-long work of building the famed Gothic cathedral of Notre Dame at Reims. He was described by his contemporaries as "a distinguished preacher of the word of God," a prelate "as noted for his doctrinal teaching as for his love of justice."

In the mid-thirteenth century the Collège des Bons-Enfants received its first set of statutes, which were nothing more than a series of regulations encompassing the entire school day. Since most of the students were candidates for the priesthood, the influence of the monastic tradition was still very evident. The students were required to go begging in case of need (a practice derived from the mendicant orders), and to be publicly accused of their faults. They were also required to scourge themselves every evening, either to ward off temptations or to atone for having given in to them. All were urged "to study diligently and to learn their lessons by heart." Nothing is mentioned in the statutes of the college about teaching or the course of studies, since the classes were still being held in the school buildings located in the courtyard of the cathedral.

Expansion to University Status

A new era began in the sixteenth century as the influence of the Renaissance spread throughout France. Reims, still modeling itself on the capital, adopted the same reforms that were under way in the University of Paris. There the program in the liberal arts, the very foundation of the university's educational structure, was being given special attention. As many as 25,000 students were enrolled in the University of Paris at this time. Among them were the intellectual elite from Reims and the surrounding Champagne country, so contagious was the general enthusiasm for things of the mind.

To meet the need for an adequate preparation for those students who were hoping to go to Paris for university studies, Gilles Grand-Raoul (d. 1522), the school supervisor at Reims under Archbishop Lenoncourt, allotted considerable sums of money for the reconstruction and expansion of the Collège des Bons-Enfants. This project

was entrusted by Gilles to his nephew, Paul Grand-Raoul (d. 1558), and was completed in 1546. The new buildings featured classrooms, a chapel, and residence facilities for the administrators and boarding students. It was at this time that the schools on the Rue des Tapissiers were transferred to the new location.

Thus the Bons-Enfants became not only a residence but a center for instruction at the preuniversity level. Conformably to the educational system at Paris, the elementary and intermediate curriculum encompassed a ten-year span, with the classes designated numerically but in reverse. The tenth- through the fifth-year classes were devoted to elementary skills and concepts; the students were introduced to literature in the fourth-, third-, and second-year classes; rhetoric was the concern of the first-year class.

This program prepared the students for the following two years of philosophy, and earned for those who successfully completed it the degree of Master of Arts. The language of instruction was Latin throughout.

Nothing much remains today of the sixteenth- and seventeenth-century college buildings with their pointed rooftops, their elegant turrets, and their massive and forbidding walls. The present buildings occupy the same site but they date only from the nineteenth century. The original inscription in stone that once graced the main portal reads:

COLLEGIUM
BONORUM PUERORUM
UNIVERSITATIS REMENSIS

This inscription was moved in 1802 to the lintel of the side door of the present school building, where it can still be seen.

The only other structure that survives is an archway in Renaissance style with the inscription *Entrée des externes*. There are two angel heads, one on either side of the arch—the cherub who frowns and the cherub who smiles—representing, presumably, the respective attitudes of the *bons enfants* as they entered and left the school each day. This arch still stands at the corner of the Rue Vauthier-le-Noir. No doubt John Baptist de La Salle passed under it many times during his years as a young student.

The fortunes of the Collège des Bons-Enfants in the middle of the sixteenth century were considerably improved by the support of the formidable Cardinal Charles of Lorraine. Appointed

Archbishop of Reims in 1538 and Cardinal of Lorraine in 1547, he provided extensive additions to the buildings erected by Paul Grand-Raoul. He built a cloister to surround the inner courtyard, had the facade extended along the Rue de l'Université by the addition of more residence facilities, and enlarged the chapel.

All of this was done with a view to establishing a university at Reims, for which the cardinal had obtained approval from Pope Paul III in a papal Bull dated January 5, 1545. King Henry II sanctioned the foundation of the university in March of the same year. Provision was to be made for the four traditional schools or "faculties": arts, theology, medicine, and law. The faculty of theology was set up immediately due to the generosity of Antoine Fournier (d. 1620). The theologians of Reims were destined to become an influential force in the civil and religious struggles that were to follow later in the century.

The structure of the university at Reims was modeled for the most part on that of Paris. Instruction was practically gratuitous, with only a small sum to be paid monthly to the gatekeeper. The resident students, small in number, wore long black cassocks with cinctures, their round caps distinguishing them from the professorial doctor, whose cap was square. Except for ecclesiastical students, the externs wore no distinctive garb.

On April 1, 1555, Cardinal Charles of Lorraine promulgated the "Charter for the Foundation and Endowment of the College at Reims," thus constituting the Collège des Bons-Enfants as the faculty of arts in the new university. Out of the revenues attached to his office he provided funds for the hiring of professors and the recruitment of students, the salaries of the staff, and the maintenance of the buildings. He established several scholarships to provide boarding for residents: four for secular students, two for clerics, and four for elementary students. By an agreement ratified by Pope Pius IV in 1562, the control and direction of the Bons-Enfants formally passed from the school supervisor (known as the *écolâtre*) to the Archbishop of Reims.

Under Charles of Lorraine, Reims became a center of scientific and literary learning. Never before had Reims been so blessed with the accomplished literary figures and distinguished scholars that the cardinal knew how to attract. The Collège des Bons-Enfants, too, prospered in such an intellectual climate. The Latin authors were held in great esteem, and there was an almost fanatical enthusiasm

for the study of Greek. The professors enjoyed reputations that went far beyond the boundaries of Champagne, and many of them earned a permanent place in the history of French education.

Decline: The Wars of Religion

Unfortunately this state of affairs was not destined to last very long. Toward the end of the sixteenth century, due in part to the religious fanaticism and intransigence of Cardinal Charles himself, France became divided in a long series of political and military confrontations between Catholics and Protestants. Typical of the times was the admonition of Louis of Orléans to the Catholics: "The heretics are banding together, so band together against them; they are gathering reinforcements, so should you; they are mustering troops, you should do the same."

This was the origin of the Catholic League, with Hubert Meurier (d. 1602) and the faculty of theology at the university among its passionate advocates in Reims. The Collège des Bons-Enfants remained aloof from the controversy at first, but the assassination of Cardinal Louis of Lorraine in December 1588 gave the signal for revolt. The students took up arms, but they rarely engaged in actual combat, being content for the most part with noisy demonstrations and shouting warlike slogans.

Academic discipline suffered greatly. By 1593 things got so bad that classes had to be suspended and the buildings turned into a barracks. Peace of a sort was restored in the following year and classes could be resumed. There was, however, to be no return to the golden age of Cardinal Charles of Lorraine.

In 1606, King Henry IV authorized the establishment of the Jesuit college at Reims and incorporated it into the university. It soon became a rival of the Collège des Bons-Enfants and remained so for the next century and a half. To make matters worse, the Thirty-Years War that ravaged all of Europe during the first half of the seventeenth century was waged with particular ferocity in the Champagne country. Even after the treaty of Westphalia in 1648, civil war continued to plague France until the truce of the Pyrenees, in 1659, which finally put an end to the hostilities.

After years of occupation by successive waves of rival forces, Reims celebrated the peace with a triumphal procession under royal

arches erected over the streets, a solemn Te Deum in the cathedral, and a display of fireworks in the evening. John Baptist de La Salle was eight years old at the time.

Despite the disorder engendered by the political and religious situation, the Collège des Bons-Enfants during this period managed to produce some outstanding scholars. Among them were Guillaume Marlot, who wrote a history of Reims and its university, Pierre Cocquault (d. 1645), author of a chronology of the Archdiocese of Reims, and Oudard Cocquault, who compiled a series of memoirs and a chronology of the period from 1649 to 1668. The historical works of these authors are important sources for our knowledge of the history and situation of the Collège des Bons-Enfants in the mid-seventeenth century.

Perhaps the most famous of the graduates of the school during this period was Jean-Baptiste Colbert (d. 1683), known as *le grand Colbert,* finance minister under King Louis XIV, member of the Académie Française, and a vital force for raising standards in educational institutions all over France.

Outstanding as were some of the graduates that came out of the Bons-Enfants in the period prior to 1659, it is easy to imagine to what extent discipline had suffered as a result of the tumult of war, the sterile quarrels with the Jesuits, and the military occupation of the town. As Oudard Cocquault remarks, "For more than 30 years the college had been little more than a hideout, badly maintained and badly supervised by the administrative staff" (CL 41 II: 19).

Contemporary accounts bemoan the fact that the philosophy students could not converse in Latin, the students frequented the taverns, wine was available at the school itself for a very small sum, the dining halls echoed with cursing, and the prefect of studies had not set foot in a classroom for years. The whole situation cried out for reform.

Reform: The Statutes of 1662

The reform was not long in coming. In 1659 (just two years before John Baptist de La Salle entered the Bons-Enfants), Thomas Mercier was appointed rector of the university. Determined to pursue reform with vigor and tenacity, he managed to win over the support of the city council. In a document dated October 17, 1660,

replying to "Thomas Mercier, Rector of the University, seeking assistance in the Parliament in order to rectify the disorders in the university," the city council of Reims declares:

> It has been decided that the city will support the excellent program of the said Rector aimed to remedy the disorders which presently exist in the college of the said university. To this end let there be four persons appointed who, together with the said Rector, will examine the regulations to see what the city can do, using the principal regulations that concern the general public, to cooperate with him in his intention to restore order. (CL 41 II: 20)

As early as September 4, 1660, the Parliament of Paris had already made clear its intention to support the rector of the university at Reims. Finally, on May 16, 1662, an order of the Parliament officially approved and registered the statutes of the University of Reims. The university now had a set of regulations under which it could function efficiently. These statutes are still preserved in the municipal archives of Reims.

Since it was just seven months earlier, on October 10, 1661, that John Baptist de La Salle had entered the Collège des Bons-Enfants, it is possible to follow him through the course of his studies, with a full knowledge of the internal organization of the institution, the courses that were offered, the class schedule, and the rhythm of the school day as a young student would have experienced it.

Organization of the Collège des Bons-Enfants

The college of liberal arts is the very foundation of the academic structure of any university. This was especially the case in the older European university system whereby all the students had to pass through the college of arts before being admitted to the doctoral programs in the advanced schools. These were the schools, or "faculties" as they were called, of theology, medicine, and law.

The Archbishop of Reims

According to the 1662 statutes, the head of the university was the Archbishop of Reims. He was also the official protector of the

privileges of the university. He promulgated its regulations and could even change the statutes with the consent of the French Parliament and the University of Paris. He appointed the rector and the other officials: the headmaster, the principal, the econome, the chaplains, and the titulars of the endowed theological scholarships.

The Rector

The rector exercised authority in his own right. As the guardian of doctrine and morals, he held the first place after the archbishop and ranked first among the various city officials. The rector was elected annually during the month of January. Once he assumed his functions, the rector was expected to arrange for a solemn religious service to be held twice during the year, once in the winter term and once in the spring. Prayers were offered for the good of the Christian religion, the health and prosperity of the king, the welfare of the kingdom of France, and the University of Reims.

On the day following this service the rector, accompanied by two student representatives and two censors appointed by himself, was required to make a formal visit of all the halls and classrooms of the college. He was received by the principal and a delegation of elected representatives. The rector then inquired after the lifestyle, the moral character, and the doctrinal orthodoxy of the entire personnel: the principal, the endowed scholars, and the student body generally. He ascertained to what extent the principal and the professors were zealous and diligent in their responsibility for educating the young persons committed to their care. The rector would also visit the dining halls to become informed about the quality and the quantity of the food, making note of anything that needed correction.

During the week following his appointment, in the presence of the retiring rector, the new rector had to examine the general situation of the university, taking note of those areas that were functioning well and those where difficulties existed. He was expected to be especially attentive to any matters that were currently in the process of litigation. The rector was not supposed to come to any quick decisions without having previously consulted with the deans of the four faculties and with the prefects of the resident students.

According to the statutes, it was the rector's responsibility to see that the important administrative posts were assigned only to

candidates who were competent, temperamentally suitable, without personal ambition or selfish motives, and generally considered useful to the university. He could grant academic appointments only to those who had studied at the faculties of Reims or Paris. The rector was also responsible for judging the qualifications of those who presented themselves for academic degrees.

It seems that the post of rector of the university was much sought after. As a rule it was held for only a year at a time, or at most for two years, and it was considered a great honor. Most of those who held the post were priests with either the licentiate or the doctorate in theology.

Among those who held the post of rector during the time that John Baptist de La Salle was a student at the university were some of his relatives, including Nicolas Rogier (1664) and Rogier's two nephews, Guillaume (1673) and Nicolas (1680). In later years even more of the close relatives of De La Salle held the post: Remy Favart (1681), Philippe Maillefer (1682), Nicolas Fremyn (1690–1691, and again for a second time in 1735), Pierre Godinot (1693), Guillaume de La Salle (1707), Jean-François Maillefer (1718–1720), Nicolas Parchappe de Vinay (1724–1725), and Jean-François de La Salle (1753–1755).

The Headmaster

Although he was under the authority of the rector, the headmaster, according to the statutes, was nevertheless an important administrator in the university structure. In modern terms he would be called the dean of the school or faculty of theology, which in the University of Reims had its center in Saint Patrick's Hall. The headmaster was expected to hold a doctorate in theology and have a good foundation in the liberal arts. His particular function was to preside over the lectures, the defense of doctoral theses, and other academic functions that were open to the public.

The headmaster occupied the first place in chapel and was expected to make sure that the religious services were conducted with devotion and reverence. It was his responsibility to enforce the required attendance at religious instruction and chapel services. In accordance with the founding charter, the headmaster was required to see to it that the entire personnel of the university—the professors, the research scholars, the students, and employees—received the

sacrament of penance at least eight times during the year, on the days specified in the statutes.

In addition, the headmaster was in charge of room assignments, internal discipline, the supervision of the residents, the furnishings and cleanliness of the classrooms, as well as the archives and the preservation of the charter and other official documents pertaining to the foundation of the university.

The Principal or Prefect of Studies

What the headmaster was to the School of Theology at Saint Patrick's Hall, the principal or prefect of studies was to the Collège des Bons-Enfants. He did not need to possess the doctor's degree but he was expected to be a member of the faculty of arts. It was his responsibility to be sure that the young students lived in a good and becoming manner and that they applied themselves seriously to the study of the humanities. One of his duties as principal was to recruit teachers who were both competent in their field of knowledge and models for young persons by reason of their exemplary way of life. No consideration of favoritism was to determine the selection of teachers.

The principal was not allowed to admit as students, let alone as resident students, any who professed the Protestant religion. The day students were not to have anything to do with the "new religion" under penalty of dismissal. In order to maintain both residents and nonresidents in religious devotion and to motivate them to fulfill their religious obligations, the professors provided catechetical instruction on Saturday afternoon at the end of the school day.

After consultation with the headmaster, it was the principal who appointed the professors of philosophy and grammar. He could, with the permission of the archbishop or the vicar-general, dismiss them for good reason. Each year, toward the end of June, he offered to the professors either a renewal of their assignment or a promotion to a more advanced class. Before any public announcement was made, however, he had to submit to the archbishop or his vicar-general the list of professors and their course assignments for the coming year.

It was up to the principal to make sure that the professors used as the basis of their courses only those texts that were considered unobjectionable and had been approved (*castos et probatos*). Those

who disregarded this requirement were to be dismissed if they persisted after a first warning.

The students of rhetoric and poetry were required to give oral presentations in the presence of the rector and the professors; nothing, however, was to be recited in public until it had first been approved by the principal. Towards the end of the academic year, the principal arranged for the presentation of a dramatic tragedy as part of the ceremonies connected with the distribution of prizes. The general public of the city of Reims was always invited to applaud the performance and congratulate the winners of the prizes.

The principal was to give holidays only sparingly: all day Thursday in summer and only a half day in winter, unless Thursday should happen to fall on a feast day. He fixed the date for the vacation periods, staggering them in this fashion: the end of August for the philosophy students; the beginning of September for those studying rhetoric; about September 8 for the second elementary class, and September 15 for the rest of the younger students. The reopening of the school year was fixed for October 10, the day after the feast of Saint Denis.

Although he was the administrator of the Collège des Bons-Enfants and at the same time its financial officer, the first responsibility of the principal was to supervise the academic program of the college. It was up to him to guarantee that the students did not begin the courses in philosophy until they had acquired a perfect knowledge of Greek and Latin, together with the principles of grammar and rhetoric. This was considered the only sound foundation on which to build advanced learning and scholarship. The principal was assisted in his various duties by a supervisor of discipline, the professors, the tutors, and graduate students who had already obtained the Master of Arts degree.

To a modern reader this external framework would seem very rigid in its control of the study habits and the application of the students. It was based on the conviction that a good relationship between those who teach and those who are taught will prevail only where there is good order, serious work, and respect for the authority of the professors.

The Curriculum and Daily Schedule

The statutes of 1662 spell out in detail the course of studies and the daily routine to be followed in the Collège des Bons-Enfants (CL 41 II: 27ff.).

A young boy entering the sixth "grade," as De La Salle did at the age of ten (it should be kept in mind that the grades were numbered in descending order), had as his first task to master the structure of the Latin language. The beginning student was then introduced little by little to the various Latin authors. The following outline gives an idea of the academic rigor of the course of studies that would eventually culminate in the degree of Master of Arts.

- Grades 6 and 5 (*Pueri*): Rules of Latin Grammar, plays of Terence, Cicero's Letters, Virgil's Eclogues, and works of other Latin authors.
- Grades 4 and 3 (*Provecti*): Sallust, Caesar's Commentaries, Cicero's *De Officiis*, Virgil, Ovid, Review of the Rules of Latin and Greek Grammar.
- Grades 2 and 1 (*Majores*): Cicero's Orations and Oratorical Works, Latin Poets (Virgil, Horace, Propertius, Juvenal, Plautus), Rules of Greek Grammar, Excerpts from Homer, Hesiod and Theocritus, Study in depth of Plato's Dialogues, Demosthenes and Isocrates, the Odes of Pindar, and other similar authors, depending on the choice of the principal and the professors according to the ability of the students.
- First-year Philosophy: Logic and the Nicomachean Ethics.
- Second-year Philosophy: The Physics and Metaphysics of Aristotle.

As may be inferred from the curriculum outlined above, there was little room for the study of contemporary authors. In fact, the statutes explicitly forbade the introduction of any recent works or any that might be considered suspect. "The student ought to drink at the font of knowledge that is fed from only the purest springs." In order to assure an adequate mastery of the classical authors the statutes prescribed that six hours a day be devoted to practical exercises, one hour to memorizing the rules of grammar, and the rest of the time to translating and interpreting the texts or to composition work, that is, imitating the style of the various poets, orators, and historians. In addition, every day from 10:00 A.M. to 11:00 A.M.

and from 5:00 P.M. to 6:00 P.M. there were exercises in the art of improvisation and disputation. These exercises were obligatory.

The resident students were required besides to give an account of their progress to their teachers every Saturday after the noon meal. Great importance was attached to memorization, the *scientiae thesaurus,* as it was called. Students were continually called upon to repeat what they had learned. Much of Saturday was devoted to a review of what had been covered during the week, special attention being given to the more difficult subjects in order to help the students become familiar with them.

IN TERTIA CLASSE.

Doctrinæ Christianæ præmium meritus & consequutus est.
THEODORICVS BAZIN Remus.
ACCESSERVNT.
CAROLVS DV MESGNIL Parisinus, *Conuictor.*
NICOLAVS MIMIN Remus.
FRANCISCVS CAILLAMBAVLT Remus.
IN EADEM
Primum soluta Orationis præmium meritus & consequutus est.
GERARDVS BLANCHEBARBE Remus.
Secundum. IOANNES LAMBERT Remensis.
ACCESSERVNT.
LVDOVICVS BLANCHEBARBE Remus.
NICOLAVS MIMIN Remus.
IOANNES BAPT. DELASALLE Remus.
IN EADEM.
Primum strictæ Orationis præmium meritus & consequutus est.
LVDOVICVS BLANCHEBARBE Remus.
Secundum. IOANNES BAPT. DELASALLE Remus.
ACCESSERVNT.
IOANNES LAMBERT Remensis.
PHILIBERTVS DVBVS Mazarinæus.
NICOLAVS ARNOVLT Aueniacus.

A page from an awards program at the Collège des Bons-Enfants

It is interesting to note that the prescribed curriculum made no provision for the study either of geography or history. Whatever the students learned about these subjects would have to come indirectly through the study of the ancient historians or, perhaps, through the historical passages in the Bible. There was no place, either, for the masterpieces of French literature, and the contemporary world generally was avoided as a fit subject for serious study. As a result, none of the great authors writing at that time would have penetrated the Collège des Bons-Enfants: not the Pleiade, not Montaigne, Malhèrbe, Corneille, Racine, La Fontaine, or Molière, and certainly not Rabelais.

This does not necessarily mean that John Baptist de La Salle grew up totally ignorant of the subjects that did not form part of the curriculum at the college. His father, Louis de La Salle, was an accomplished humanist; the elder Jean Maillefer, a relative by marriage, a close friend of Louis, and a frequent visitor to the De La Salle home, was an indefatigable traveller with stories to tell of faraway places. It might be supposed that during the evening hours, as the two men discussed the literary and political movements of the day, John Baptist would have been encouraged to listen in on these conversations. In every bourgeois family, the living room at home was the natural complement to the classroom at the college.

The following would have been the daily schedule at the Collège des Bons-Enfants during the time John Baptist was a student there, according to the statutes of 1662:

5:00 A.M. Rising hour for resident students.
5:30 A.M. Assembly; morning prayer; study period.
7:00 A.M. Class.
10:00 A.M. Composition; oral exercises.
11:00 A.M. Mass in the Chapel of Saint Patrick for both residents and externs, followed by the noon meal.
1:00 P.M. On weekdays, a meeting with the professors and a review of the morning's work. On Sundays and feasts, religious instruction.
2:30 P.M. Afternoon classes.
5:00 P.M. Composition; declamation; debates.
6:00 P.M. Chapel; supper.
7:00 P.M. Night prayer; retiring.

With the exception of a provision for a free afternoon on Thursday, the statutes made no provision for leisure time; the word "recreation" did not appear anywhere. No particular form of dress was imposed on the nonresident students, except for the clerics who would be expected to wear the soutane. On the other hand, all the students were required to maintain in every respect standards of modesty, moderation, and simplicity. The statutes urged the students to love their professors as they would their own fathers and to create among themselves a spirit of mutual friendship and service.

Student discipline was very rigid. The statutes required that the students were to report promptly to the chapel, to the classrooms, or to the dining hall, at the sound of the bell. They were to walk two by two ahead of their professors in entering any of these rooms and were not to leave before the given signal without express permission. Curse words and obscene expressions were strictly forbidden. Anyone attempting to seduce one of his fellow students was punished with the greatest severity; the same applied to those who swore oaths, invoked the help of the devil, or who engaged in fighting or otherwise caused physical injury.

When a student was caught doing something wrong or was punished for his faults, he was expected not to murmur against the teacher, threaten him, or reply in an arrogant manner. On every occasion the scholars were to show due respect to their professors, whether within the confines of the school or outside in the city. They were told to show the same respect to the teachers in the lower grades as well as to any dignitary that might happen to visit the college. Games were forbidden during the time before and after meals, except in unusual circumstances and only with explicit permission. In their ordinary conversation, even when a professor was not present, the students were required to speak in Latin or in Greek; the deliberate use of barbarisms or clichés in these languages was considered deserving of punishment.

Such, then, was the situation at the Collège des Bons-Enfants when John Baptist de La Salle first entered its doors in 1661. It had a long history going back to the tenth century; its organizational statutes were in the process of revision and reform; its curriculum was centered on classical language, literature, and philosophy; its discipline was strict; its ambiance was dominantly clerical in the Gallican Catholic mode.

2

Student Cleric

On the basis of what is known about the organization and the curriculum of the Collège des Bons-Enfants, together with the testimony of the biographers and a few additional but very precious documents, it is possible to reconstruct in some detail what the experience of the young John Baptist would have been during the years of his elementary and secondary education.

The young boy, who was himself to become the founder of a group of teachers devoted to education and the schools, was just ten years old when he was enrolled in the college for the first time. The earlier instruction he had received from his private tutors at home made him eligible to enter what was known as the sixth class.

Although Brother Bernard says in his 1721 biography that the young De La Salle "was sent to school at the age of eight or nine" (CL 4: 12), modern scholars agree that this could not be quite correct. The documents show that he completed the eight-year course and was granted the Master of Arts degree in 1669. This means that it was in 1661, when De La Salle was ten years old, that he entered the school for the first time.

Classical Studies and Clerical Status

The opening day of the school year was set by the statutes for October 10, the day following the feast of Saint Denis, the early martyr who had been Bishop of Paris. Accompanied by his parents, John Baptist would have arrived at the college where they would all have been received by the new principal, Louis Bonvent. Perhaps they were greeted as well by the chancellor, Pierre Dozet, a cousin of Louis de La Salle, father of John Baptist.

At precisely 10:00 A.M. the bell would summon everyone to the chapel in Saint Patrick's Hall, where all the students, old and new, together with their professors, joined in a Mass of the Holy Spirit. This was followed by a general assembly, during which the principal would read and explain the statutes pertaining to the faculty

of arts. No doubt he added, as he was required to do, an exhortation that the rules be exactly observed. As a student extern, De La Salle returned home for the noonday meal. The afternoon of the first day was spent on organizational details.

On the following day the regular routine that would be followed for the rest of the school year was put into effect. Classes began in earnest at 7:00 A.M. and school remained in session, except for the break for the noon meal, until 6:00 P.M. The public prayers for the king and the archbishop, as well as for the university and its benefactors, would bring the school day to a close.

Among those enrolled in the college during that year, John Baptist would have found many of his relatives: lads with names such as Cocquebert, Roland, Lespagnol, Marlot, Favart, Frizon, or Minim. Others of his relatives preferred to send their sons to the rival college of the Jesuits, an institution whose precise relationship to the University of Reims was at that time a matter of bitter dispute.

The student body at the Collège des Bons-Enfants was, of course, exclusively male, as was also the teaching and administrative staff. According to the statutes, women were to be totally excluded, even from the role of servants.

Although there was little or no tuition to be paid, with only minimal gratuities required from time to time, the children of artisans and the poor were for all practical purposes excluded. They could not afford the examination fees or the cost of books and school supplies. In the social climate of the time, such students would have been out of place and totally unwelcome by reason of their dress, their manner of speech, and their patterns of behavior. Furthermore, the duration of the course of study and the subject matter of the curriculum were totally removed from the situation of the poor families who had to send their children out to work at an early age. It is interesting to speculate what impact, if any, this social inequality had on the impressionable John Baptist during his student years.

Once enrolled in the college, John Baptist joined his fellow students in the sixth class and began at once the study of Latin. The text in use at the time was the *Despautère nouveau* of Pajot. There were endless hours to be spent repeating over and over again the declensions and conjugations. Sentences had to be picked over in the most minute detail, the words parsed one by one until finally the meaning of the Latin text would become clear.

In describing these early years at the Collège des Bons-Enfants, the biographers of De La Salle are lavish in their praise of his work at the school. Blain says, "He was no sooner enrolled in the college of the University of Reims than he became an example for the other scholars and the source of great satisfaction to his teachers" (CL 7: 120). Bernard says, "He made remarkable progress in a short time," and, "The wisdom and grace which he exhibited during this period caused him to be loved by his teachers and respected by his fellow students" (CL 4: 12). Then Blain makes this rather startling judgment: "Both God and his teachers were pleased with him."

Clerical Tonsure

Toward the end of his first year at the college, on March 11, 1662, John Baptist de La Salle received the clerical tonsure. This first step in the direction of the priesthood signaled his official entrance into the clerical state. The traditional ceremony took place in the chapel of the archbishop's palace. Since the newly appointed Archbishop of Reims, Cardinal Antonio Barberini, had not yet taken possession of the see, Pierre Dozet, who served as vicar-general of the archdiocese as well as chancellor of the university, arranged to have the tonsure conferred by Jean de Malevaud, the Auxiliary Bishop of Clermont. John Baptist was not quite 11 years old.

It was not at all unusual at that time to give the tonsure to boys at the age of 10 or 11. The only canonical requirement was that they must first have received the sacrament of confirmation and have been instructed in the rudiments of the faith. The initiative in the case of John Baptist may have come from Pierre Dozet himself, who no doubt had an eye on his young cousin and might well have wanted to direct the pious and promising lad toward the priesthood.

The parents of De La Salle must have been confronted with a variety of conflicting motives in giving their consent to the tonsure. On the one hand, they realized that this step made their son eligible for ecclesiastical benefices. It could not have been far from their minds that the post of canon of the cathedral of Reims held by their aging cousin, Pierre Dozet, would normally be handed over to someone in the family in the very near future. On the other hand, John Baptist was the eldest son, destined by social custom to follow his father in the profession of law and to raise children that would

provide heirs to the family name and fortune. To point the young man in the direction of the priesthood at such an early age entailed a considerable sacrifice for the parents.

All the evidence, however, attests to the strong Christian faith of the De La Salle family. The religious atmosphere of the home was certainly a guarantee of the authenticity of the vocation of their firstborn. Indeed, the other two sons who were raised at home before the death of the parents, Jacques-Joseph and Jean-Louis, also were to be graced with a priestly vocation. Only Pierre and Jean-Remy, both of whom were very young when the parents died, went on to marry and to raise families that would perpetuate the name of De La Salle.

As for John Baptist himself, the original biographers are at great pains to point out the signs of a priestly vocation from his earliest years. Blain tells us that his father took him to the church services when he was yet a child and that he was "much taken by everything that he saw in church" (CL 7: 118). At home the lad would amuse himself by building toy chapels, decorating the statues around the house, and imitating the gestures of the priest at the altar.

As he grew older, he would inquire of his father about the meaning of the church services and seemed grateful for the intelligent response to his questions. Even the grandfather, Jean Moët de Brouillet, of whom John Baptist was especially fond, introduced the lad into his own practice of reciting the Divine Office of the Church. Although much of this was not very unusual in young boys growing up in the atmosphere of a pious and well-to-do Catholic family, it provided John Baptist with a foundation on which to build his own more mature determination to follow in the direction in which he was convinced the divine call was leading him.

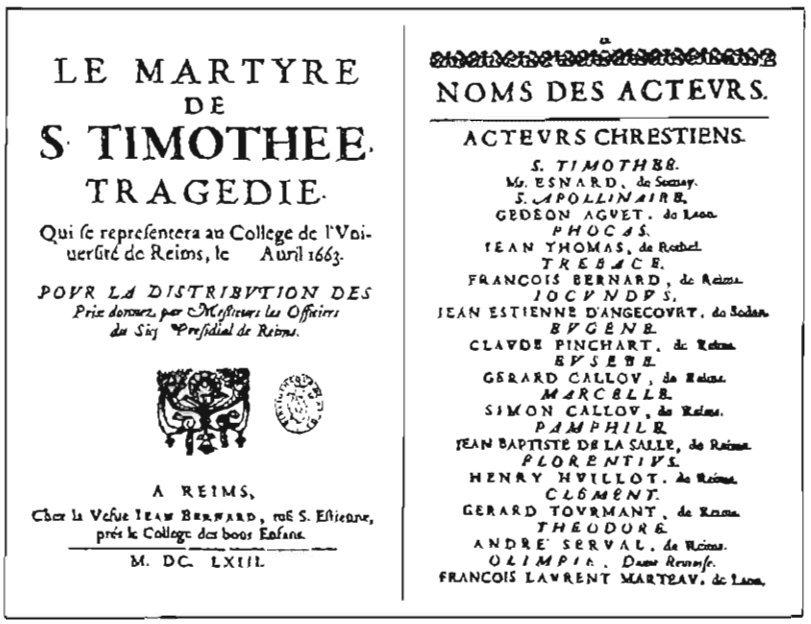
On March 12, 1662, John Baptist de La Salle, now tonsured and in some sense set apart from his school companions, returned to complete his first full school year at the Collège des Bons-Enfants. He continued as before to live at home with his parents but now he would come to school wearing the clerical cassock. This would have identified him to his fellow junior seminarians, most of whom lived at home as he did. Only the poorest of the seminarians resided at the university as endowed boarding scholars. One item that must have given John Baptist some trouble was his chestnut brown hair that tended to fall loosely in abundant curls, a style that was

forbidden by the regulations. It is not known for certain whether this rule was strictly enforced, and whether it was applied to his case.

Drama and Oratory

In October of 1662, John Baptist advanced to the fifth class where he began to study the Latin of Cicero and Virgil. Toward the end of that school year, in April 1663, he took part in the annual school play. It was the custom for the college to present a dramatic tragedy every year on the Sunday after Easter. The city council and other distinguished guests were invited in the expectation that they would donate and distribute the prizes to the better students.

The printed program for the April 1663 presentation is preserved in the Reims archives (CL 41 II: 151ff.). The tragedy for that year was "The Martyrdom of Saint Timothy." We find the name of John Baptist de La Salle listed among the players in the role of Pamphilius. It was not a leading role. The synopsis in the program indicates that Pamphilius was one of a group of Christians who tried



LE MARTYRE
DE
S. TIMOTHEE.
TRAGEDIE.

Qui ſe repreſentera au College de l'Vniuerſité de Reims, le Auril 1663.

POVR LA DISTRIBVTION DES
Prix donnez par Meſſieurs les Officiers
du Siej Preſidial de Reims.

A REIMS,
Chez la Veſue IEAN BERNARD, ruë S. Eſtienne,
prés le College des bons Enfans.

M. DC. LXIII.

NOMS DES ACTEVRS.

ACTEVRS CHRESTIENS.

S. TIMOTHEE.
Mr. ESNARD, de Sezanay.
S. APOLLINAIRE.
GEDEON AGVET, de Laon.
PHOCAS.
IEAN THOMAS, de Rethel.
TREBACE.
FRANCOIS BERNARD, de Reims.
IOCVNDVS.
IEAN ESTIENNE D'ANGECOVRT, de Sedan.
EVGENE.
CLAVDE PINCHART, de Reims.
EVSEBE.
GERARD CALLOV, de Reims.
MARCELLE.
SIMON CALLOV, de Reims.
PAMPHILE.
IEAN BAPTISTE DE LA SALLE, de Reims.
FLORENTIVS.
HENRY HVILLOT, de Reims.
CLEMENT.
GERARD TOVRMANT, de Reims.
THEODORE.
ANDRE' SERVAL, de Reims.
OLIMPIE, Dame Romaine.
FRANCOIS LAVRENT MARTEAV, de Laon.

Program for the *Martyrdom of Saint Timothy*, as part of awards ceremonies at the Collège des Bons-Enfants.

to rescue Saint Timothy from prison. According to tradition, Saint Timothy had come to Reims to preach Christianity and had been jailed by the pagan governor. The rescue operation was foiled at the last moment, and Timothy and his jailed companions were put to death.

Among the other actors listed in the program were Simon Callou and his brother, Gérard. Years later, Simon married Anne Maillefer, the sister of Jean Maillefer, who was by then the brother-in-law of De La Salle.

Another document that has survived is dated about two years later, April 12, 1665 (CL 41 II: 160ff.). It lists the recipients of the prizes given that year at the annual distribution. By that time John Baptist was completing the courses in the third class, which means that he would have begun the study of Greek grammar in preparation for reading the Greek authors in the last two years of the classical course. Among those who were awarded prizes on that occasion, the name of John Baptist de La Salle is listed for a second prize in elocution (*strictae orationis*) and an honorary mention in extempore declamation (*solutae orationis*).

In the biography written for the canonization of De La Salle in 1900, Jean Guibert mentions a similar prize for oratory awarded to John Baptist at the distribution of prizes a year later in 1666. But the source cited by Guibert makes no mention of it, and there is no other documentary evidence to support this event. Nevertheless, Guibert gives it as the reason that motivated Pierre Dozet to resign his canonry in favor of his young cousin (CL 41 II: 167).

Canon of the Cathedral Chapter

On October 10, 1666, John Baptist began the final year of what today would be called his secondary education. A signal event during that academic year was the decision of Pierre Dozet to resign his benefice as canon of the cathedral of Reims. As he had the right to do, he designated his young cousin, John Baptist de La Salle, to succeed him.

Father Pierre Dozet, whose mother had been Isabeau de La Salle, had held the position of canon for 52 years, had been vicar-general of the archdiocese during the ten years while the see was vacant, and in 1666 was still chancellor of the University of Reims. He continued as chancellor until shortly before his death in 1668.

For John Baptist, not yet 16 years old, it was a distinct honor to enter the company of the cathedral chapter of Reims, which numbered among its former members three popes, 23 cardinals, more than 30 bishops, and, most remembered of all, the great Saint Bruno, founder of the Carthusians.

The investiture took place on January 7, 1667. Brother Paul Joseph, in the *Bulletin des Ecoles chrétiennes* (1910), and Brother Léon Aroz, in the *Cahiers lasalliens* (41 II: 174ff.), have described the scene on the basis of the Latin ritual used at Reims during that period. Their description is worth repeating here in English translation.

On the appointed day, the young John Baptist, wearing a simple cassock, presented himself at the side portal of the cathedral facing the buildings reserved for the use of the canons. This portal was known as the *Porta pretiosa* after the opening words of the prayer following the martyrology that was read each day near that door: "Precious in the sight of the Lord is the death of the saints". After receiving permission to enter, the young canon designate presented his credentials together with 20 gold pieces, and an additional 20 French coins for the library. He then formally petitioned the chapter to be allowed to take possession of the canonry and the benefice that had been vacated by Pierre Dozet. The members of the cathedral chapter then went aside to examine the documents and vote on the admission of the candidate.

Summoned by the beadle, John Baptist entered the chapter room carrying on his left arm the vestments that he would wear in choir. He knelt at the right of Father Louis de Vienne, the provost, who vested him in the violet mantle with its ermine trim and long train and placed around his neck the cross of a canon, saying:

> We have voted to admit you into the possession of the canonry and the benefice, held until now by the Reverend Pierre Dozet, in this holy church of Reims. All other claims are rendered invalid by the conferral of these vestments.

John Baptist then arose, went to the far end of the bench where the register was kept and, kneeling once more, swore the oath that dates from 1299:

> I, John Baptist de La Salle, canon of this church of Reims, swear on the holy and divine Gospels that I will faithfully give

> advice as required and according to my conscience to my church at Reims. I swear also that I will never reveal the secrets of the chapter, or anything that I may know, believe, or hope that could be harmful, dangerous, or prejudicial to that church or any of its individual members.

When John Baptist returned to the vestibule near the *Pretiosa*, the dean of the chapter, Father Robert Le Large, seated and with head uncovered, then addressed these words to the candidate who knelt before him:

> Do you swear that you are born of a legitimate marriage and that you have the proof of it in valid nuptial documents?
>
> I swear it.

Then two canons, chosen as witnesses, produced the documents and took the same oath. The dean, holding the book of the Gospels, then said:

> By the handing over of this book we admit you to take possession of your canonry in this church.

John Baptist took the book of the Gospels and kissed it. Then the dean, presenting a loaf of bread, said:

> By the handing over of this bread we admit you to take possession of your benefice in this church.

John Baptist took the bread and kissed it.

Another oath followed concerning fidelity to the financial policies of the chapter. Then Claude Bernard, the chanter, conducted John Baptist to stall number 21 in the lower tier of stalls in the cathedral sanctuary, and said:

> Receive this choir stall for the purpose of truly singing psalms to the Lord with mind and voice. Now kneel and say the Pater Noster and Ave Maria.

Canon Bernard then conducted John Baptist to his place in the chapter hall corresponding to his rank—a minor cleric—and in that rank, the lowest place. With that the ceremony concluded.

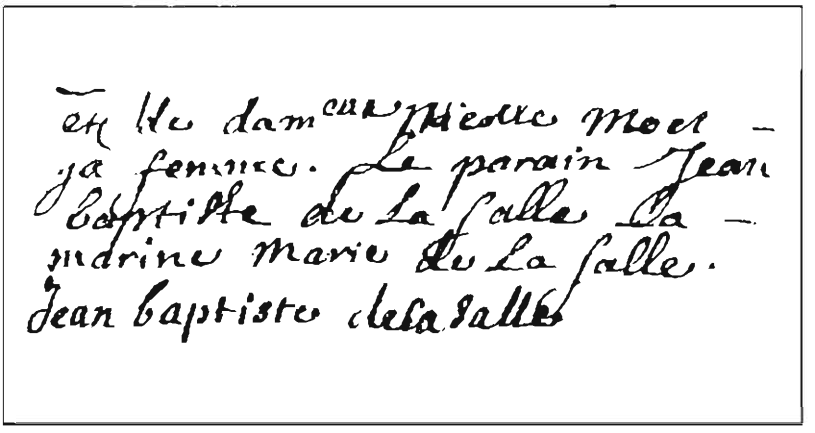
In addition to the members of the chapter and those officiating, there were present his parents, his brothers and sisters, his

grandparents and godparents, Jean Moët de Brouillet and his wife Perrette Lespagnol, invited guests and, almost certainly, Father Pierre Dozet, who had resigned his canonry in favor of his young cousin.

In this ceremony, John Baptist de La Salle assumed both the duties and the privileges of a canon of the cathedral as a member of the cathedral chapter of the Archdiocese of Reims. The duties were principally related to public prayer, especially the daily recitation in choir in the cathedral of the liturgy of the hours and attendance at the capitular Mass. The canons were also expected to participate in the solemn liturgies and processions that marked the great feasts in the church calendar.

At the time, the church feasts were quite numerous, compared with more modern times. They included not only ten holy days of obligation, but also all the feasts of Our Lord and Our Lady, the solemnities marking the seasons of Advent and Lent, Christmas and Easter, as well as the celebration of the special patrons and anniversaries proper to the Archdiocese of Reims. In addition, there were always special occasions to be solemnly celebrated, such as the reception of Cardinal Antonio Barberini as the new archbishop in December of 1667, and the solemn *Te Deum* for the peace of Aix-la-Chapelle in June of 1668.

In addition to participation in these liturgical offices, the members of the chapter were required to meet regularly to attend both to the internal affairs of the chapter and to serve in their capacity



The earliest known signature of John Baptist. He was 15.

as an advisory body to the archbishop in matters pertaining to the archdiocese.

The position of canon was not, of course, without its rewards. For participation in each of the liturgical services there was a fixed stipend that, in the course of a year, represented a considerable income, approximately 1,000 livres annually, the equivalent today of about $10,000 (CL 41 II: 179).

It could not have been easy in the stratified society of the time, reflected and enhanced by the importance attached to ecclesiastical rank, for a young canon to learn to accept gracefully the honors that came to him from his new dignity. Even at the university the new status of De La Salle in the midst of his fellow students had a certain importance. According to the statutes, he had to make a formal declaration to the academic authorities of his status as a canon; his name was so inscribed on all the school registers; and the rector had to be notified personally. From then on, all the reports of his teachers and other officials had to mention his dignity as canon under pain of invalidity. In addition, at all public events he would appear in procession with the cathedral chapter, wearing the distinctive garb of a canon.

From another point of view, the regulations of the chapter imposed a rather rigid discipline on the younger canons who were not priests. They were expected to pay special deference to the canons who were priests. They were required to be zealous in their studies and modest in their behavior. For example, if they wore their hair too long they were subject to a reprimand from the dean of the chapter; if they persisted in this or other signs of affectation, part of their stipend could be withheld. Three times a year they had to present to the chapter signed testimony that they were making satisfactory progress in their studies. Although the canons attending the university were exempt from attending the canonical hours in the cathedral on school days, they were strictly bound to the long offices that occupied the greater part of the day on Sundays and feasts.

In such a situation there would have been little occasion for John Baptist de La Salle to indulge in demonstrations of independence or extravagance. Quite the contrary. Blain testifies:

> The ermine cowl was in no way a danger to this young ecclesiastic and it did not alter his religious attitude. This honor

> did nothing to set him on a pedestal in comparison to the other young clerics, except for the fact that his piety alone distinguished him from his comrades. His studiousness, his personal piety, and his modest behavior in choir served to make of him a model for the other scholars at the university and a source of edification for the canons in the cathedral. (CL 8: 237)

The Classical Influence

It was under such circumstances that John Baptist completed the standard program in classical studies as the school year came to an end in the summer of 1667. Day in and day out, week after week for the six years between 1661 and 1667 he had recited the rules of grammar, prepared the required exercises in composition and elocution, mastered the Greek and Latin classics, and engaged in public disputations.

His written style would always bear the stamp of these mental gymnastics: not much lyricism, but always the correct phrase, well-rounded, logical and precise, yet often enough marked by a certain heaviness. His extensive contact with the art of poetry and the achievements of Greek culture must have contributed to the formation of his intelligence but it had little influence on his later writings. Although these were always laced with extensive quotations from Scripture and the spiritual authors, scholars have been unable to trace more than a handful of allusions to the classical authors.

With all of these advantages and disadvantages, the youthful Canon De La Salle began the traditional two-year course in philosophy on October 10, 1667.

Minor Orders

On March 17 of the following year, 1668, providing for an element that normally pertains to the status of canon, De La Salle took the four minor orders of porter, lector, exorcist, and acolyte. The ceremony took place at Reims in the chapel of the archbishop's palace. The officiating prelate was Charles of Bourlon, the Bishop of Soissons, acting as the delegate of Cardinal Barberini (CL 41 II: 195ff.).

In this matter, the original biographers of De La Salle have been shown to be in error on two points: they locate the ceremony at Cambrai, in the mistaken presumption that the see of Reims was still vacant; and among the orders conferred, they include the subdiaconate, which was to come only four years later in 1672.

Philosophical Studies

The Program of Studies

Meanwhile the program in philosophy that De La Salle had entered in the previous October was running its traditional and predetermined course. This first year was devoted to the study of logic and ethics. The professor was André Clocquet, then a young theologian who had won much respect as a result of his address to the provincial council of bishops in 1665 and to the town council of Reims in 1666 on the subject matter of his courses. His success in these public displays of learning was a source of satisfaction to the students of the Collège des Bons-Enfants and their parents. It showed that the quality of the professors in "their college" was equal to that of the Jesuits. Clocquet was also a pastor of the old Saint Peter's church, a post that 10 years later he would try to resign in favor of John Baptist de La Salle.

Logic was on the schedule in the morning classes, with Aristotle's *Organon* as the principal source and text. The subject matter was divided into six sections: (1) *Categories,* the major ways of classifying all of reality and the proper use of predicates; (2) *Hermeneutics,* or the science of interpretation through the analysis of various types of propositions; (3) *Prior Analytics,* or the laws of deductive reasoning; (4) *Posterior Analytics,* a treatment of inductive knowledge; (5) *Topics,* eight books devoted to exercises in dialectics; (6) *Refutation of Sophisms,* or the means to identify the causes of false reasoning.

Since Aristotle was beginning to be challenged by some of the philosophical thought of the time, it is possible that a treatise on logic, published at Port Royal in French rather than in Latin, might have been used as a supplementary resource in the course. Likewise,

in treating the eight books of the *Topics*, the professor would have had the opportunity to introduce some contemporary elements into the course, as the statutes required him to do.

Although it was forbidden to present the theories of Descartes as certitudes, Yves Poutet suggests that they could have been presented as hypotheses for discussion. This would have given more emphasis to observation and insight, as well as a more critical attitude toward the artificial devices of Aristotelean logic. Some such approach may have had an influence on the practical orientation of De La Salle's educational methodology (OL 1: 170).

A bachelor of theology as well as a philosopher, André Clocquet would almost certainly have used the treatment of "extrinsic sources" in the *Topics* as the occasion to introduce references to Sacred Scripture, the tradition of the Church, the definitions of councils, the teaching of the Church Fathers, papal pronouncements, the lives of the saints, and the policies of the bishops and the clergy of France.

This raises the question of whether or not at this stage in his education John Baptist would have been introduced to the subtleties of the conflict between the papacy and the church in France. The declaration of the four Gallican articles, affirming a certain independence of the French church from Rome, was not to surface until 15 years later in 1682.

There is no doubt, however, that the special status of the Catholic Church in France was stoutly defended in the University of Reims, since it depended for its support on the civil authorities. They in turn clearly preferred what they called "their college" to that of the Jesuits, who were strongly committed to the Roman view. The topic could have provided a lively subject for debate in the logic classes. On the other hand, at this early date in 1667, it is more likely that for De La Salle and his classmates the polemic with the Protestants would have been used to debate the question of the sources of religious knowledge.

The afternoon classes during the first year of philosophy were given over to the study of ethics. Again the basic text was from Aristotle, this time the ten books of the *Nicomachean Ethics*. In this work Aristotle envisages the human life, insofar as it is human, as centered on the practice of virtue. A detailed study of the principal virtues leads him to make a fundamental distinction between the intellectual and moral virtues.

In the last part of the *Ethics* Aristotle shows that happiness—which is not to be confused with pleasure—is related to intelligence and so participates in the divine intelligence. Thus the life of the mind, with contemplation as its highest activity, is shown to produce the greatest happiness. All of this would have found ready acceptance in the mind of John Baptist de La Salle. It would also provide a solid foundation for the study of the *Summa theologiae* of Saint Thomas in the theology courses that lay ahead.

On October 10, 1668, De La Salle began the second year of the philosophy course. Just the week before, on October 3, he had assisted at the solemn obsequies following the death of his father's cousin, Pierre Dozet, former vicar-general of the diocese and chancellor of the University of Reims, the priest who had resigned his canonry in favor of the young John Baptist.

The academic program for the second-year philosophers was particularly heavy. The morning class from 7:00 A.M. until 9:00 A.M. was occupied with the study of Aristotle's *Physics*. In this work Aristotle treats of the various types of change and movement, the principle of causality, the concepts of time and space, the nature of the soul, all leading to the question of the ultimate cause of the movement in the universe. It is obvious that this fundamentally philosophical approach to nature had little in common with what today would be studied in a course called "physics."

Mathematics was the subject matter for the class that went from 9:00 A.M. until 10:00 A.M. As followed by De La Salle this course comprised not only algebra and geometry but also cosmography, theories of measurement, and musical theory.

The afternoon class was devoted to the *Metaphysics* of Aristotle. This, the culmination of the entire philosophical edifice, brought the young philosophers to the highest reaches of abstract thought, dealing with "being precisely as being." They would study the history of the science of first principles, the levels of abstraction, being as potency and act, matter and form, and the problem of the one and the many. The course concluded with a discussion of the existence and spiritual nature of "the eternal and unmovable mover of the universe."

Since these lectures followed the noon meal, which was the principal meal of the day, it is legitimate to speculate on the heroic efforts that must have been required to keep awake and attentive to all of those abstractions.

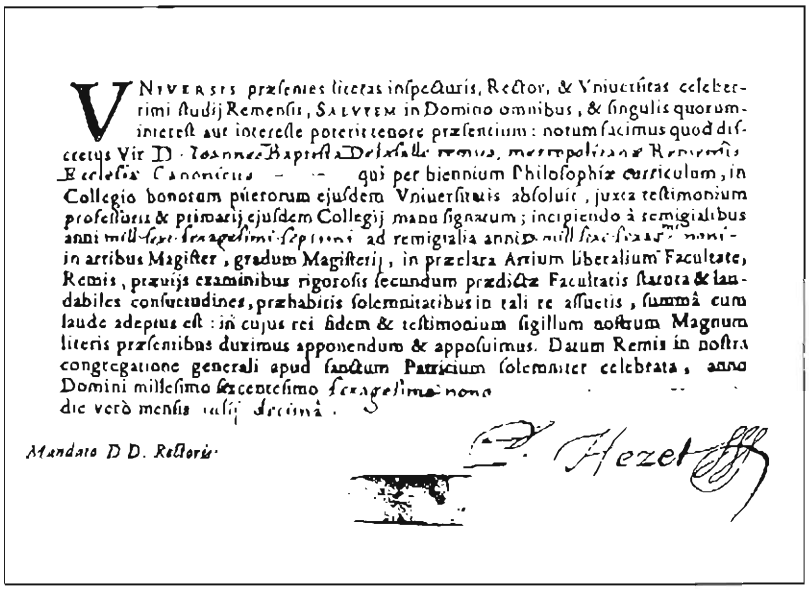
Master of Arts

At the conclusion of the two-year course in philosophy, John Baptist de La Salle presented himself for the final examinations leading to the degree of Master of Arts. The required formalities were rather complicated: testimonial letters to be presented to the rector, registration for the examination, payment of fees to the university as well as the required gratuities for the examiners and the ushers and, finally, the examination itself.

The examination was oral and conducted entirely in Latin and with the elegant politeness that the Latin formulas elicited. It comprised two distinct sessions: the first was given over to the professors of lower rank and limited to logic and ethics; the second took place before the senior professors and extended to the entire field of philosophy. The questions usually took the form of theses to be stated, divided and subdivided with distinctions and subdistinctions, then finally defended or refuted. There were abundant traps in this procedure designed to catch the unwary or the unprepared student.

De La Salle took this examination in the great hall of Saint Patrick on July 9, 1669, and passed with the highest honors. There are preserved in the Generalate of the Institute of the Brothers in Rome two important documents that relate to this event: the testimonial letter to the rector, dated July 8, 1669, testifying to the good conduct of De La Salle and his completion of the required courses; and the diploma itself, dated July 10, conferring the degree of Master of Arts with the notation *summa cum laude* (CL 41 II: 204ff., 211ff.).

In this way the career of John Baptist de La Salle at the Collège des Bons-Enfants came to an end. A young man of 18, a canon of the cathedral of Reims, he was considered fully equipped to pursue advanced studies and a distinguished career based on the foundation that had been so solidly laid during his eight years at the college. Within ten years, however, he would be deeply involved in the work of establishing the Christian schools, a work for which most of this training for all practical purposes was useless. As Brother Yves Poutet has expressed it, he would shed the trappings of his classical education, discarding it as if it were an old and ill-fitting garment (OL 1: 173).



VNIVERSIS præsentes literas inspecturis, Rector, & Vniuersitas celeberrimi studij Remensis, SALVTEM in Domino omnibus, & singulis quorum interest aut interesse poterit tenore præsentium: notum facimus quod discretus Vir D. Ioannes Baptista Delalle remus, metropolitanæ Remensis Ecclesiæ Canonicus [illegible] qui per biennium Philosophiæ curriculum, in Collegio bonorum puerorum ejusdem Vniuersitatis absoluit, juxta testimonium professoris & primarij ejusdem Collegij manu signatum; incipiendo à remigialibus anni mill. sexc. octogesimi septimi ad remigialia anni mill. sexc. nonagesimi [illegible] in artibus Magister, gradum Magisterij, in præclara Artium liberalium Facultate, Remis, præuijs examinibus rigorosis secundum prædictæ Facultatis statuta & laudabiles consuetudines, præhabitis solemnitatibus in tali re assuetis, summâ cum laude adeptus est: in cujus rei fidem & testimonium sigillum nostrum Magnum literis præsentibus duximus apponendum & apposuimus. Datum Remis in nostra congregatione generali apud sanctum Patricium solemniter celebrata, anno Domini millesimo sexcentesimo octogesimo nono [illegible] die verò mensis julij decimâ.

Mandato D D. Rectoris.

Hezet

The diploma of Master of Arts degree, granted *summa cum laude,* on July 10, 1669.

3

Theological Student

With the degree of Master of Arts, John Baptist de La Salle would have been eligible to enter any of the graduate schools of the university and follow courses leading to the doctorate in either theology, medicine, or law. Already tonsured by the time he was 11 years old, a canon of the cathedral when he was not quite 16, and in minor orders a year later, the young scholar not surprisingly enrolled in the faculty of theology.

First-Year Theology at Reims

The original biographers give the impression that, once he had completed his philosophical studies in Reims, John Baptist left immediately for Paris to begin his theological studies there. Maillefer says:

> After he had finished his course in philosophy, as was the custom, he took his degree of Master of Arts, being then about 18 years old. He then left for Paris for the Sorbonne to study those things suitable for a person in the ecclesiastical state, and to take his licentiate and doctorate. (CL 6: 21)

And Blain concurs in almost the same words:

> Once his course in philosophy was completed, as was the custom, he took the degree of Master of Arts. This first step towards the doctorate, which was still a long way off, led him to think of going to that wellspring of the sciences, the University of Paris. Thus he decided to go to study at the Sorbonne to obtain the licentiate and the doctorate. (CL 7: 123)

The documentary sources make it clear, however, that De La Salle began his theological studies in the faculty of theology at Reims, where he was enrolled from October 1669 until July 1670. The

theology faculty at Reims had been established in the sixteenth century by Cardinal Charles of Lorraine and had been handsomely endowed by Antoine Fournier early in the seventeenth century.

The school was housed in a group of buildings adjacent to the Collège des Bons-Enfants. The chapel, dedicated to Saint Patrick, was surrounded by residences for the headmaster, the professors of theology (there were only two of them), and the scholarship students. In addition, some of the theology classes were held each day at the nearby Abbey of Saint Denis. The student body consisted of diocesan seminarians, monks from the Abbey of Saint Denis, and members of the various religious orders with houses in Reims. The faculty of theology was governed by the statutes of Thomas Mercier as approved in 1662.

According to these statutes, upon his entrance into the faculty of theology and the new academic world that it represented, John Baptist de La Salle would have been required to take the following oath:

> I, [John Baptist de La Salle],
> 1) swear that I shall respect the rights, the exemptions, the privileges and the statutes that have been enacted and will be enacted for the University of Reims;
> 2) swear that I shall honor and reverence the Lord Duke Archbishop of Reims, who is the officer entrusted with the preservation of the aforesaid privileges; to show the same honor and reverence to the rector of the university and the dean of the faculty; in every situation to obey them in all their licit and legitimate commands; to preserve peace and harmony among all the various divisions of the University;
> 3) swear that I shall reveal to no one any private matters that will bring discredit on the University;
> 4) swear that I shall truthfully give my family name, my Christian name, and make known any benefice that I may possess or any noble birth that I may enjoy, as well as the diocese from which I come.
>
> Do you so swear?
>
> I so swear.
>
> Then as a sign of your sincerity, kiss now this image of Christ crucified.

In addition to this formal oath, the statutes urged the students beginning theology to be determined to excel among all the other students of the university and to serve as models for them both in the church and in the classroom.

The statutes also established the daily class schedule:

- 8:00–9:00 A.M.—Saint Patrick. Lectures on the *Book of Sentences* of Peter Lombard.
- 1:00–2:00 P.M.—Saint Denis. Theology lecture and practical exercises in theology.
- 2:30–4:00 P.M.—Saint Patrick. Lectures on the Old and New Testament as interpreted by the Fathers of the Church.

When De La Salle began the study of theology at Reims in 1669 there were only two professors, Michel de Blanzy and Daniel Egan. De Blanzy lectured at Saint Patrick, Egan at Saint Denis. At the end of the academic year, each student received a handwritten certificate testifying to his attendance at the course and the quality of his work. Fortunately, the two certificates that John Baptist de La Salle received at the end of his first year of theology have survived. The originals are preserved in the archives of the Generalate of the Brothers in Rome (CL 41 II: 217ff.).

The first, from Michel de Blanzy, reads as follows (in translation from the Latin):

> I, the undersigned, a Doctor of Theology and Public Professor in the College of the University of Reims, testify to all parties that are or might be concerned that the Reverend [Dominum] John Baptist de La Salle, a canon of the illustrious church of Reims, during this present year has listened to and taken notes on my theology lectures. During all this time he has given unusual signs of both diligence and learning. In the year of Our Lord 1670, July 15. [Signed] De Blanzy

The second, from Daniel Egan, is similar with the addition of some more precise details:

> I, the undersigned, a priest, a Doctor of Sacred Theology and Public Professor, to all who could have any interest in this matter, testify that the Reverend [Dominum] John Baptist de La Salle has benefited by my theology lectures held in the classrooms of the University at the Abbey of Saint Denis at Reims and has done so with clear evidence of diligence, piety,

and unusual scholarship, this from the year 1669 to the present day. In testimony whereof I have signed with my own hand. At Reims AD 1670, July 15. [Signed] D. Egan

The Professors

Michel de Blanzy was born in the early years of the seventeenth century in a small town in the diocese of Soissons. He came to Reims in 1648. A doctor of arts and a doctor of theology, he was made canon of the church of Saint Timothy in Reims, and in 1657 he served a one-year term as rector of the university. He was regent of philosophy in the Collège des Bons- Enfants before finally being appointed professor of theology in 1662. He held this post until 1684, when he was installed as a canon of the cathedral of Reims.

Five years later, as his biographer Jadart relates, "having fully enjoyed the studious and serene lifestyle which his income and his foresight provided for him," De Blanzy drew up his will, leaving his extensive library to the cathedral chapter. He also provided generously for the poor who were housed in the municipal hospice at Reims (CL 41 II: 227). He died in the following year on November 11, 1690.

Daniel Egan had also come to Reims in 1648, a fugitive from religious persecution in his native Ireland. English and Irish expatriate theologians were no novelty in northern France. It was, for example, while the English College at Douai was temporarily housed in Reims (1578–1593) that the original Catholic translation of the New Testament into English first appeared. Daniel Egan continued this tradition, not only in his own person, but also by establishing a fund of 3,000 livres to make it possible for young Irishmen to come to Reims to study for the priesthood.

Appointed in 1656 to the chair of theology that had been endowed by Antoine Fournier, Daniel Egan rapidly acquired other titles of distinction: canon of the church of Saint Timothy, chaplain of Notre Dame, pastor of the church of Saint Sixtus and later of Saint John, and headmaster of the Collège des Bons-Enfants. He became a naturalized French citizen in 1678.

Despite his many titles and the revenue attached to them, he had a reputation for preferring the simple life, the solitude of his study, and his contact with the students in the classroom. He resigned

his teaching position in 1695, when he, like DeBlanzy, was made canon of the cathedral. He died on June 4, 1699 (CL 41 II: 240).

The Courses

The subject matter of the morning course taught by Michel de Blanzy was scholastic theology, devoted, as was traditional, to the tract, *De Deo Uno,* treating of the existence and attributes of God, of the angels, and of predestination. The lectures would have followed the order and been based on the text of the *Book of Sentences* of Peter Lombard.

The precise content of the course taught by Daniel Egan at Saint Denis in the early afternoon is not quite so clear. In the document appointing him to the chair at Saint Denis, he was required to give a daily *praelectio,* that is, an introductory lecture, which was to be followed by "exercises to foster the practice of theology by the students." Presumably this hour would have been coordinated with the morning lectures of De Blanzy (CL 41 II: 230).

The courses were taught according to the method traditional in scholastic theology. Thus, in the certificate written by De Blanzy, De La Salle is said to have "listened to and taken notes" on the theology lectures. With the quotations or "sentences" from the authorities cited by Peter Lombard as a starting point, the professor would develop each unit of the course in a series of theses. These would be analyzed and defended by arguments, first from authority and then from reason. The argumentation would proceed deductively from principles to conclusions according to strict logic. What was of faith would be clearly distinguished from theological opinion, and one theological opinion would be compared with another in terms of the degree of probability to be accorded to each. Finally there would follow the refutation of any thesis contradictory to the one proposed, including the classical heresies and any theological "novelties" current at the time.

The students were expected to master this material in all of its complicated detail. The emphasis was on memory and technique rather than on personal conviction, and not at all on creative or critical independent thought. Through practical exercises called "scholastic disputations," both with the professor and with one another, the students were trained in the effective use of the argument from

authority, as well as the application of strict logic to theological questions by defining, distinguishing, and sub-distinguishing the terms and the propositions.

This kind of training left its mark on John Baptist de La Salle. During his entire life he displayed a prodigious memory, a detailed acquaintance with Sacred Scripture and the Church Fathers, a somewhat stilted and unimaginative writing style, and a firm resistance to theological innovation.

It is not clear, from the attestations given to De La Salle, which of the two professors taught the course in Scripture as interpreted by the Fathers of the Church. It could have been De Blanzy or Egan, or both, or someone else. A later historian of the University of Reims faulted the Scripture courses of De La Salle's day as not sufficiently attentive to the historicity of biblical events (Cauly cited in OL 1: 231). The professors at the time were evidently enamored of the spiritual and allegorical interpretation of the Bible that was so common among the Church Fathers.

However that may have been, the writings of De La Salle in his later life, especially his meditations, attribute an almost excessive historical character to the biblical maxims and events, particularly those of the New Testament.

Transfer from Reims to Paris

In the normal course of events, De La Salle would have been expected to continue the remainder of the five-year course leading to the degree of Bachelor of Theology at the Reims university. For one thing, to go elsewhere would require the permission of the cathedral chapter to be absent from the city and to be excused from his duties as canon.

However, during the academic year 1669–1670 a dispute arose between the professors of the faculty and the administration of the University of Reims. The trouble had its origin in 1668 with the retirement of Pierre Dozet as chancellor of the university, a post he had held for 50 years. This was the same Dozet who in 1666 had resigned his canonical benefice in favor of De La Salle, his younger cousin.

During the course of the year 1669, Cardinal Antonio Barberini, the Archbishop of Reims, appointed Louis-Eléonor Tristan to succeed to the office of chancellor. This did not sit well with the

professors at the university, all with their doctorates or licentiates, since Tristan had only a bachelor's degree in theology.

As early as May of 1669, Daniel Egan, in the name of the faculty, had protested the abnormal situation of having the examinations for the licentiate presided over by a chancellor who did not himself hold that degree. Two others of the faculty, Professors Oudart Duchemin and Nicaise Oudinet, went one step further and filed suit to have the appointment nullified.

The suit came before the Presidial Court of Reims, of which Louis de La Salle, John Baptist's father, and Jean Moët, his maternal grandfather, were members. Since the court had as one of its functions to protect the privileges of the university, it is not surprising that on May 14, 1669, the suit brought by the professors was dismissed (CL 41 II: 221; OL 1: 228ff.).

The court did what it could to try to reconcile the opposing parties, and things calmed down a bit during the fall term of 1669. It is not known whether at this time there were plans for John Baptist to go to Paris to begin theology. In any case, and under these circumstances, with Louis de La Salle obliged to support the claims of the University of Reims, it would have been quite awkward for him to allow his oldest son to go elsewhere for his theological training.

Accordingly, in October 1669, John Baptist de La Salle enrolled in the faculty of theology at Reims, a decision that would have been interpreted as support of Chancellor Tristan and perhaps as a gesture of reconciliation.

Relative calm prevailed during the fall term of 1669. However, on the eve of the solemn convocation opening the new term in January 1670, Jacques Thuret, the *écolâtre* or diocesan supervisor of education, challenged the right of the chancellor to have presided at the licentiate examinations during the previous spring. This right, he argued belonged to the archbishop or to one of his vicars. Encouraged by Duchemin and others, Thuret then declared that all the acts of the chancellor were null and void.

The professors held a meeting in the Carmelite convent, where they passed a resolution to defer the licentiate examinations scheduled for Easter week and to forbid the beadles to convey to the candidates their certificates of eligibility signed by the chancellor.

Chancellor Tristan refused to be intimidated by these moves and held the examinations as scheduled. The faculty immediately

declared them null. Tristan was thus forced once again to bring the matter to the Presidial Court. The professors remained adamant, issuing a statement on September 1, 1670, that reaffirmed their previous position. Meanwhile, the opening of the new academic year was not far away.

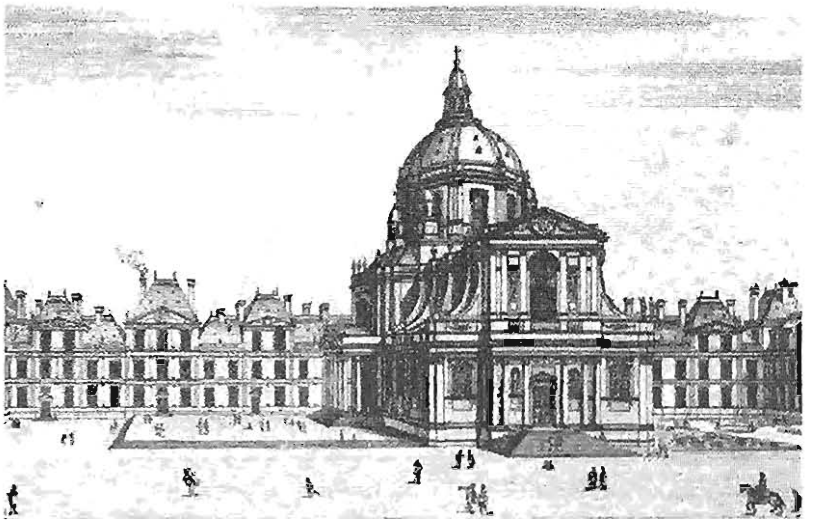
John Baptist de La Salle found himself caught in the middle of all this disorder. The validity of the examinations and the credibility of the diplomas were in question. Although it is not known exactly how the students were affected in the day-to-day running of the university, the continuous polemics and legal battles were hardly conducive to serious theological study. Brother Yves Poutet thinks that this was a major factor in the decision to have De La Salle transfer from Reims to Paris in order to continue his theological education in a more favorable academic climate (OL 1: 228); Brother Léon Aroz is inclined to think not (CL 41 II: 277). In either case, De La Salle left for Paris in October 1670 to enroll in the Sorbonne.

The controversy at Reims was eventually referred to the Parliament in Paris. In a formal decree dated December 16, 1670, the Parliament declared that the claims of the petitioners, Duchemin, Egan, Oudinet, De Blanzy, and others, were without foundation and Eléonor Tristan was confirmed in the office of Chancellor of the University. By that time De La Salle was already well into his second year of theology at the Sorbonne.

Theological Studies in Paris at the Sorbonne

Upon his arrival in Paris in October 1670, John Baptist de La Salle took up residence in the Seminary of Saint Sulpice. The seminary was organized principally to provide the spiritual atmosphere and training appropriate for candidates aspiring to the priesthood. For their introduction into academic theology, the seminarians walked each day over to the Sorbonne where the courses were offered, examinations held, and advanced degrees conferred.

At the time De La Salle was a student in Paris the name Sorbonne referred to four institutions: the college founded in 1253 by Robert de Sorbon in order to prepare candidates for theological study; the faculty of theology, inaugurated shortly thereafter; the resident



A view of the chapel and a wing of the main building of the Sorbonne, in Paris.

Society of the Sorbonne, a prestigious association of those with advanced degrees in theology who were teachers or graduate students at the Sorbonne; the Company of the Sorbonne, composed of doctors of the Sorbonne, canons, and other church officials living in Paris. In 1682 there were 753 living doctors of the Sorbonne.

The faculty of theology and the Company of the Sorbonne together constituted what was known as the "Reverend Gentlemen of the Sorbonne." This was a very powerful corporation which one author described as having "awesome authority that investigated all new ideas, judged and condemned them, the most important group in the University of Paris, and the oracle of all France" (R. Mousnier cited in CL 41 II: 46).

As part of the University of Paris, the Sorbonne was governed by the statutes promulgated in 1600. At one time the university had been under the jurisdiction of the papacy. Eventually it came under the control of the kings of France, who considered it as their "eldest daughter." Although the university was originally ecclesiastical in its organization and curriculum, the statutes of 1600 reflect the increasing domination of the French church by the French crown. Part of the preamble reads as follows:

> The well-being of every realm and all of its people depends on the good education of the young. Education polishes and enlightens their minds while they are as yet unspoiled and innocent. It renders them suitable for public service and trains them to fulfill public functions; it strengthens their devotion to their families and to our country as well as respect and obedience toward its magistrates. (CL 41 II: 46)

Accordingly, an increasing number of secular functions were assigned to the university. The king and the parliament exercised more and more control, both direct and indirect, over its activities: the appointment of the professors, the supervision of the election of the rector and, most important of all, the determination of what political and doctrinal theories might or might not be discussed in the courses. The University of Paris set the tone for the 17 other universities throughout France.

As was customary ever since the Middle Ages, the university was composed of four schools or "faculties": theology (the Sorbonne), canon law, medicine, and liberal arts. Although the faculty of theology was considered the first and most prestigious, in another sense the faculty of liberal arts was more important, since it conferred the degree of Master of Arts required for admission to any of the other schools.

Depending on their place of origin, the students enrolled in the Sorbonne were divided into four "nations," as they were called: France, Picardy, Normandy, and Germany. Each nation was divided into provincial groups consisting of one or several dioceses. Thus John Baptist de La Salle was registered in the nation of France, province of Champagne, Archdiocese of Reims.

Earlier in the seventeenth century the University of Paris had been in a state of decline. It was no longer that "vast and bottomless sea where one could fish for all sorts of learning, virtue, and truth using serious study for bait," as one author so colorfully describes its heyday (H. Ferté cited in CL 41 II: 48).

There were several reasons for this. At that time in Europe the wars of religion were a source of disorder everywhere. In France, the conflicts between the Church and the royal power tended to have a deleterious effect on all institutions, as did the rivalry within the Church among the various religious orders.

Furthermore, although the Sorbonne had a tradition for simplicity of lifestyle and had always enrolled a goodly number of the relatively poor among its theological students, by the mid-seventeenth century it had become all too prosperous. The professors led an easy life not at all in keeping with the principles of the priestly asceticism they were supposed to be teaching. They had little concern to advance the cause of scholarship, satisfied for the most part to be transmitters of received knowledge rather than creative thinkers.

In particular the new Cartesian philosophy, which was creating a new spirit in the seventeenth century, was rejected out of hand. Instead of broadening their intellectual horizons, the professors seemed to devote most of their energy to the accumulation of multiple benefices, despite the prohibitions of canon law. The inevitable result of this casual attitude of the professors was a fair amount of insubordination on the part of the students and a notable lack of discipline in the residence halls.

This raises the question of whether such an atmosphere had any impact on John Baptist de La Salle during his student years. There is no evidence that it did. Residence in the Seminary of Saint Sulpice would have provided a bulwark against such negative forces, at least as far as discipline appropriate to candidates for the priesthood was concerned.

Whatever may have been the conduct of the professors, the statutes of the Sorbonne proposed a lofty ideal for anyone engaging in the study of theology. The first of these statutes established the principle that "true human happiness consists in the knowledge of God." Article 2 enumerated the dispositions that the theologian ought to bring to his study: a pure and unspoiled attitude of mind, separation from the corruption of the world, a submissive spirit without pompous airs, and the renunciation of all ambition so as to have only God in view. John Baptist de La Salle did not have to await his entrance into the Sorbonne to have made these qualities his own.

It is important, then, to realize that De La Salle's association with the Sorbonne was simply in his capacity as a student enrolled in the faculty of theology. The classes were held in buildings adjacent to the college of the Sorbonne, which had been considerably renovated in 1627 by Cardinal Richelieu. His tomb can still be seen in what had once been the college chapel. De La Salle was not part

of the college since he resided at Saint Sulpice. Whether he might have eventually joined the famous Company of the Sorbonne remains problematic, since he had to leave Paris before obtaining any academic degrees from the university.

De La Salle came to the Sorbonne from Reims armed with the prerequisite Master of Arts degree and a full year of theology besides. There lay ahead two more years of theology and two of advanced philosophy in order to fulfill the five-year requirement for the Bachelor of Theology degree. In the two remaining years of theology, only two courses were required in each year. Given the choice of dogma, moral, or Sacred Scripture, De La Salle opted for the dogma cycle. These courses were taught by the two "royal professors," Jacques Despériers and Guillaume de Lestocq.

The courses began on October 18, the feast of Saint Luke, and continued until late in July. In the absence of textbooks, the students were required to keep notebooks which were regularly submitted to the inspection of the professor. Often the schedule of classes would be interrupted when the professors were called upon to preside at the assemblies for the oral examinations of candidates for degrees. All the students were expected to be present and sometimes to participate in these sessions.

Even so, the time available to cover the course material was much too long. This led the professors to fill out their lectures by going into great detail on matters of minor importance. The sources indicate that the professors preferred to spend most of the available time dictating notes, occasionally expressing their personal opinions "off the record" on controversial subjects, but rarely encouraging discussion or debate, much less any exploration of new avenues of thought or research.

Part of this conservative approach to teaching was the continual vigilance exercised by the academic authorities over every aspect of the courses. Strict orthodoxy was insisted upon under pain of dismissal. References to questions that were the subject of contemporary dispute were not to be expressed in the material dictated for inclusion in the student notebooks. Professors had to be cautious in expressing their personal opinions on a given subject, unless, of course, they happened to coincide with the official policy (OL 1: 297).

During the time De La Salle was a student in Paris, the theological polemic centered on three themes in particular: Jansenism, Gallicanism, and Cartesianism.

Jansenism

This movement takes its name from Cornelius Jansen, a professor at the University of Louvain and later Bishop of Ypres, whose book, *Augustinus,* published posthumously in 1640, was intended to be an explanation of the doctrine of Saint Augustine on grace and predestination. The emphasis in the book was on the insufficiency of human nature, the need to keep human nature in check by penitential rigor, the necessity and infallibility of divine grace, the gratuity of predestination, and the risk of damnation to which most people were exposed.

The book created a sensation in the theological world. It was particularly opposed by the Jesuits, who saw in it a revival of the theories of Calvin on predestination, and a threat to their emphasis on the importance of human free will in relation to the action of divine grace. The Jansenist movement was also opposed by the theology faculty of the Sorbonne, as well as by the French court, which was dominated by Cardinal Mazarin and later by King Louis XIV.

The spiritual and geographical center of Jansenism was the reformed monastery of Cistercian nuns and the priests associated with them at Port Royal. Chief among these was Antoine Arnauld. He first came to prominence by his defense of the strongly rigoristic theories of the Abbé of Saint Cyran, a friend of Jansen, and a vigorous opponent of the idea of frequent Communion.

The controversy eventually came to focus on a series of five objectionable propositions that supposedly contained the essence of the doctrine contained in the *Augustinus.* These had first been proposed for examination to the theology faculty at Paris in 1649. The public polemic that resulted served to line up the defenders of the Jansenist doctrine on the one side and its opponents on the other.

Both sides appealed to Rome. On May 13, 1653, Pope Innocent X, in the Bull *Cum occasione,* condemned the five propositions, attributing them to Jansen. On September 1 of the same year, the

faculty of the Sorbonne decided by a unanimous vote to accept and register the Bull, and threatened with dismissal any of the professors who would not submit.

Arnauld and his followers remained adamant. They insisted that although there might well be error in the propositions, and that the pope had a right to condemn them (the question of "right"), yet the pope's authority did not extend to the declaration that the condemned propositions accurately reflected the teaching of Jansen (the question of "fact").

In 1655, Arnauld issued a public letter in which he again declared that he could not find the five condemned propositions in the *Augustinus*. As a result he was debarred from the Sorbonne in February 1656. On October 16 of that year, Pope Alexander VII, in the Bull *Ad sanctam Petri sedem*, affirmed that the five propositions were indeed contained in the *Augustinus* and that they had been condemned in accord with Jansen's meaning.

As the polemic continued, the king intervened by calling an assembly of the clergy. It seems that the Jansenists were perceived not only as a threat to the pope's authority but to that of the crown as well. On February 1, 1661, the assembly voted unanimously to uphold the papal decrees. This decision was ratified by the faculty of the Sorbonne on May 2 of that year. Every clergyman in France was thereby required to subscribe to the formulary expressing the doctrine contained in the decrees of Innocent X and Alexander VII.

Such more or less was the situation when John Baptist de La Salle came to Paris to study theology in 1670. Despite the papal and royal decrees, however, the Jansenist doctrine and resistance to Roman authority continued to thrive in the theological underground.

In the course of his research, Brother Yves Poutet has discovered a remarkable document from 1673, authored by a Roman sympathizer, that lists all the doctors of the Sorbonne with a judgment concerning their attitude toward Jansenism. Among the doctors there from 1670 to 1672, the author of the document designates three as confirmed Jansenists, nine as having Jansenist tendencies, four as Jansenist for political reasons, and 27 as supportive of Rome. By the following year, 1673, the Roman observer judged that there were six confirmed Jansenists, three inclined that way, ten leaning to the Roman position and only one "staunch and courageous Roman Catholic" (OL 1: 254).

Whatever the statistics, the sources attest that the seminary directors at Saint Sulpice and the two dogma professors who taught De La Salle at the Sorbonne, Jacques Despériers and Guillaume de Lestocq, were notable in their opposition to the appeals of Arnauld and in their support of the official position of the pope, the court, and the Sorbonne. The impact of this early influence on De La Salle was to be seen years later when, toward the end of his life, he declared himself unequivocally opposed to the Jansenism which by that time had become rather fashionable.

Gallicanism

This doctrine, which was expressed in many different theological and political forms over the centuries, centered around four basic ideas in French Catholicism: the independence of the king of France from papal control in the temporal order; the authority of the king and the French clergy to limit papal intervention in the affairs of the church in France; the superiority of a general council over the pope; and a denial of papal infallibility.

During the time John Baptist de La Salle was a student in Paris, the Gallican question was hotly disputed at the Sorbonne. If the faculty of the Sorbonne was notable for its resistance to the Jansenist tendencies of the French Parliament, as a body it showed no reluctance to accept the main tenets of Gallicanism. On May 2, 1663, the theology faculty had approved the six articles (later reduced to four) passed by Parliament asserting the Gallican "liberties," as they were called. Two years later the Sorbonne condemned the writings of Matthew de Moya for defending papal infallibility. Pope Alexander VII thereupon censured the Paris faculty; Parliament in turn censured the pope.

Among those who voted in 1663 to support the pope in opposition to the decree of Parliament there is specific mention of De Lestocq, who argued that the decree was invalid both as to content and to form. He would one day be the dogma professor of De La Salle. Also opposed, as the records show, were "all the theologians of Saint Sulpice and Chardonnet."

Among the Sulpicians, Father Claude de La Barmondière, destined also to play an important role in the life of De La Salle, accused the Sorbonne faculty of committing mortal sin in voting for the decree. By the time De La Salle entered the Sorbonne the faculty

was quite divided on the question, yet the major influences on him, especially at Saint Sulpice, were anti-Gallican.

The conflict continued back and forth until 1681 when King Louis XIV again convoked an extraordinary assembly of the French clergy to deal with the matter. Bossuet, the famous author, orator, and bishop, was given the task of preparing a doctrinal declaration of the Gallican liberties in four articles. All members of the clergy were then required to sign the declaration. By royal decree of March 22, 1682, "perpetual and irrevocable," it was formally forbidden to teach any contrary doctrine. Each professor was required to subscribe to the decree, and only those candidates could be granted the licentiate in theology or canon law who had sustained the Gallican doctrine as one of their required theses.

At first the theology faculty refused to sign or register the royal edict but eventually they were constrained by threat of force to do so. Among those who opposed its acceptance was Jacques Despériers, another of De La Salle's dogma teachers. The sources also note that at the faculty meeting on that occasion the priests of Saint Sulpice were conspicuously absent. By that time (1682), De La Salle had been away from the center of theological controversy in Paris for ten years.

Apart from its doctrinal and theological aspect, the royal declaration of 1682 soon became a diplomatic affair. In the heat of the discussion, the forceful and saintly Pope Innocent XI canceled the diplomatic privileges of the French ambassador to the Vatican. The tension eased somewhat under Alexander VIII, who was at first inclined to take a more lenient view. But then he came to see the importance of the issue and began in 1690 to prepare the papal constitution *Inter multiplices* rejecting the Gallican formulations of 1682. This was formally published by his successor, Innocent XII, in 1691.

Pressured by the French bishops, who had to show support for the pope before they could obtain their letters of appointment from Rome, Louis XIV finally abandoned the declaration of 1682. On September 14, 1693, he wrote to Innocent XII: "I have given the necessary orders that the contents of my edict of March 22, 1682, concerning the declaration made by the French clergy . . . need no longer be observed." Like Jansenism, however, the Gallican tendencies remained despite the formal condemnations, only to surface again with new vigor and in a new form in the nineteenth century.

Cartesianism

This philosophy derives its name from René Descartes (1596–1650), whose famous dictum, "I think, therefore I am," signaled the beginning of a movement that has dominated philosophy ever since. Sometimes described as a "return to the subject," this approach revolutionized philosophical thinking to turn away from the objective world of reality "out there" and concentrate on the functions and categories of the human mind. Descartes published his famous *Discourse on Method* in 1637, his *Meditations* in 1641, and his *Principles* in 1644.

One aspect of Descartes' philosophical method that provoked the strongest reaction among traditionalist thinkers was the principle of methodic doubt: not to accept as true anything of which we do not have a clear idea. At the time this was considered very revolutionary. Although some philosophers were intrigued with the notion and its implications, the theologians vigorously opposed it. Despite the fact that Descartes never applied the principle of doubt to matters of faith, the theologians were convinced that it would inevitably lead to absolute skepticism. They also feared that Descartes' theory of the extension of matter would go contrary to the doctrine of the Incarnation and the Eucharist.

Poorly received at Rome, Cartesian theory was mercilessly combatted at the Sorbonne. The University of Paris held tenaciously to the philosophy of Aristotle and requested that Parliament itself condemn the new philosophy. The resulting parliamentary decree ordained that Aristotle would always be taught in the university and that the administrators should see to it that this was done. All bookstores and travelling book dealers were forbidden to offer for sale any journals or books containing the new ideas.

Among those at the Sorbonne who most strongly opposed Cartesian philosophy, we find once again De La Salle's two dogma professors, Despériers and Lestocq, both mentioned by name in that connection in a letter to the Sorbonne dated June 10, 1671, cited by Brother Yves Poutet (OL 1: 297). De La Salle was still a student there at the time.

Although widely criticized when it first appeared, Cartesianism continued to win adherents until eventually it supplanted Aristotelean thought as the dominant philosophy in the French universities.

Just how personally involved in these disputes was John Baptist de La Salle during his student days in Paris remains unclear: probably not at all. The views of his professors, of course, would have been well-known to him and no doubt influenced his own views. Since, however, he was barely beginning his theological studies, it is most unlikely that he would have had an opportunity to participate in the public debates that so engaged his professors.

In view of the makeshift character of his subsequent theological education, it is not surprising that even in later years De La Salle shied away from theological debates. Thus he did not declare himself publicly on the matter of Jansenism until he was practically forced to do so in 1714, toward the end of his life. Even then he did not enter into the substance of the theological polemic.

If this was true of De La Salle himself, it was even more true of the advice he would give to his Brothers. Thus he wrote in his meditation for the Sunday in the octave of Christmas: "Let us leave to the learned all these learned disputes; . . . Let us teach only the common doctrine of Jesus Christ, and make it our practice to follow in everything what the Church teaches the faithful in the catechisms approved by her . . ." (CL 12: 20).

He is even more explicit in the *Recueil*, a "collection" of brief reflections on the Brothers' religious life: "Hold fast in all things to what is of faith. Shun novelties; follow the tradition of the Church; accept only what she accepts; condemn what she condemns; approve what she approves either by her councils or by her sovereign pontiffs. Render her prompt and perfect obedience in everything" (CL 15: 80).

These and similar expressions in his writings would indicate that De La Salle learned well the lessons taught in his theology courses. They might also indicate that for reasons of temperament, personal preference or conviction, or even lack of opportunity, De La Salle never really became an independent theological thinker in his own right.

Courses at the Sorbonne

In contrast with the abundant information generally available about the political, academic, and theological situation at the University of Paris when De La Salle was a student there, precise information

about the courses he followed is relatively scanty. Some documentation has survived, however, and it is worth examining.

Having opted for the dogma cycle in the theological program at the Sorbonne, John Baptist followed the courses of Jacques Despériers on the Incarnation (*De Incarnationis mysterio*) and that of Guillaume de Lestocq on the Trinity (*De Sanctissimae Trinitatis mysterio*) during the academic year 1670–1671. During the following year, his second in Paris and his third studying theology, he took the course of Despériers on the Sacraments in General and on Baptism (*De sacramentis in genere; De baptismo*) and that of De Lestocq on Grace (*De gratia*).

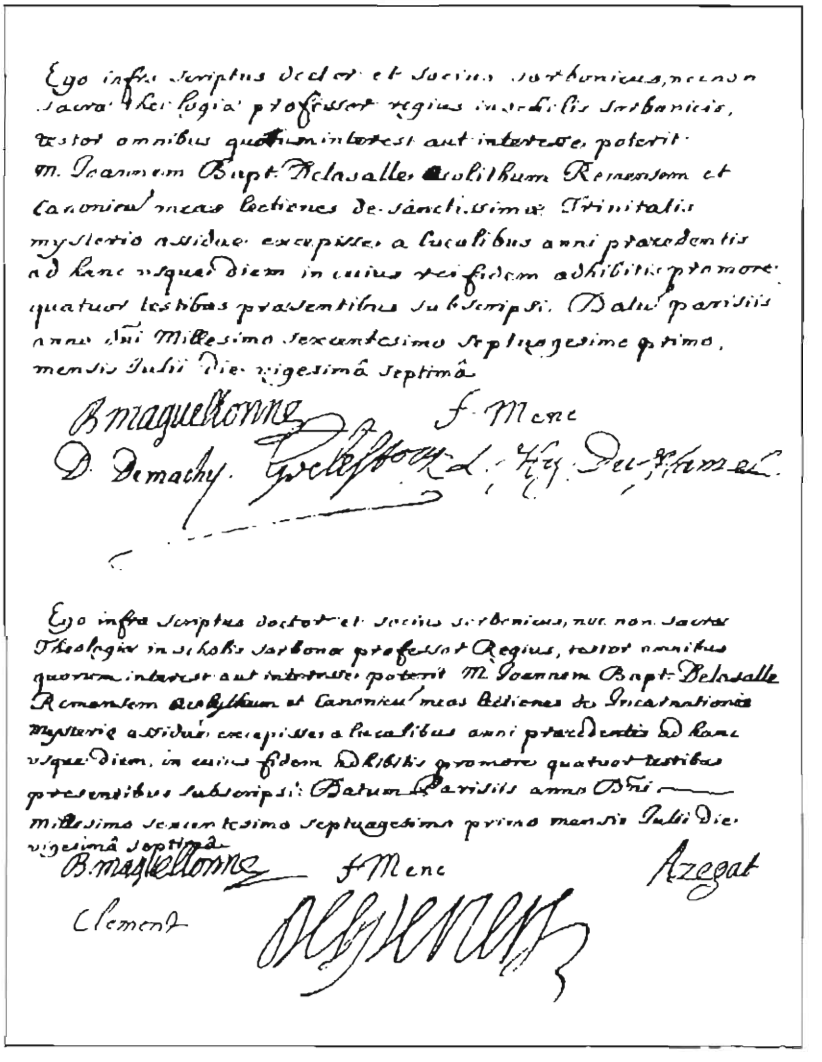
As was the custom, at the end of the course each student prepared a certificate to be signed by the professor and witnessed by some of his fellow students. This he would keep as the only record that he had successfully followed the course. The originals of the certificates prepared by De La Salle in his first year at the Sorbonne are preserved in the archives of the Brothers' Generalate in Rome (CL 41 II: 242ff.).

The first of these reads in translation as follows:

> I, the undersigned, a doctor and member of the Society of the Sorbonne, as also Royal Professor of Sacred Theology, testify to all those who are or will be concerned in the matter, that Master John Baptist de La Salle, acolyte and canon of Reims, has assiduously followed my lectures on the mystery of the Incarnation from the feast of Saint Luke of the preceding year up until this present day. In testimony whereof I have signed as is the custom in the presence of four witnesses. Given at Paris in the year of Our Lord 1671 on the 27th of July.
> [Signed] B. Maguelonne, F. Menc, Azégat, Clément, Despériers

An almost identical certificate attests to the fact that De La Salle followed the course on the Trinity. The signature of G. De Lestocq replaces that of Despériers; Maguelonne and Menc are again the witnesses; Azégat and Clément are replaced by D. Demachy and L. Hg. Duhamel. Both of these certificates, except of course for the signatures, are written out in De La Salle's own hand.

Certificates have also survived attesting to the courses followed at the Sorbonne during De La Salle's second year, which was interrupted by the death of his father in April 1672 (CL 41 II: 307ff.). The first of these reads in translation as follows:



Two certificates, signed by his professors and witnessed by his classmates, attesting to the fact that John Baptist had completed two courses in theology. The text of both is in his own handwriting.

> I, the undersigned, a member of the Society of the Sorbonne and Royal Professor of Sacred Theology at the Sorbonne, testify to all those concerned that Master John Baptist de La Salle, a canon of Reims, has diligently followed my course on the sacraments in general and on baptism from the feast of Saint Luke in the year 1671 up until the twelfth of the month of April 1672. In testimony whereof I have signed this present document. Given at Paris in the School of the Sorbonne on the sixth day of December in 1672. [Signed] Du Chailloux, Brenier unworthy cleric, Nouy, Menc, Despériers

There is a second certificate relating to the course on grace that is word for word the same except for the subject matter of the course and the signature of G. de Lestocq, which replaces that of Despériers. The student witnesses are the same.

These certificates from 1672 differ from those of the previous year in several particulars. They are written, not in De La Salle's own hand but by his classmate, Etienne Du Chailloux, who prepared them for the professor to sign. The terminal date is in April and reflects the fact that De La Salle had to leave Paris definitively when he learned that his father had died on April 9. The certificates themselves are dated much later, in December, long after De La Salle had left Paris. No doubt he had requested these documents in the hope that he might some day be able to resume his theological studies where he had left off.

An idea of the content of two of the four courses mentioned in these documents can be gathered from two manuscripts that have recently been discovered. These are in the form of notebooks in which two of De La Salle's fellow students copied the lectures as they were dictated by the professors. De La Salle himself would have kept such notebooks but unfortunately they have not survived.

The notebook of François-Philippe Lalouette, preserved in the library of the Sorbonne, contains a detailed outline of the course given by Jacques Despériers on the Incarnation (CL 41 II: 547). The outline follows exactly the subject matter of the first seven questions of Part III of the *Summa theologiae* of Saint Thomas. In these questions the "angelic doctor" deals with the fittingness of the Incarnation and the mode of the union of the two natures in Christ. The last question treated in the course, at least according to the

manuscript, is that of the operation of grace in Christ, an issue that would have been sensitive in the light of the Jansenist controversies.

This course outline is fundamentally no different from courses on the Incarnation that have been given for centuries in Roman Catholic seminaries throughout the world, at least until recently. The methodology, following the "thesis method," was deductive. Principles were derived from the "sources of revelation": the Bible, often with a fundamentalist reading of isolated texts, and Tradition expressed by citations from the councils, the popes, and the Church Fathers. The thesis would then be shown to accord with sound theological reasoning. Finally, the opposing errors would be refuted. In the case of Despériers, with his reputation as a staunch defender of the papacy and Roman theology, this would have included arguments against the theories of Luther, Calvin, and the Jansenists.

A detailed summary of the course given by De Lestocq on the doctrine of grace has likewise come to light in the discovery of the notebook of François Menc, another fellow student of De La Salle's and one of the witnesses who signed his certificates. The manuscript is preserved in the municipal library of Marseilles (OL 1: 300ff.).

In this course, too, the classic questions were considered: the idea of grace and its divisions; the states of nature as pure, fallen, and redeemed; the necessity and efficacy of grace; the question of final perseverance. The first part of the course concluded with a discussion of how to reconcile grace and free will; the second part concluded with the notion of merit. Saint Augustine is frequently cited against Baius, Jansen, Luther, and Calvin, all of whom claimed Augustine as their patron. Cajetan and Bellarmine are aligned with the Church Fathers to demonstrate the truth in conciliar and papal condemnations of ancient and contemporary heresies.

This conforms to what is known of De Lestocq's ardent opposition to the Jansenists. It had a strong and a life-long influence on De La Salle, as can be seen from his stand against Jansenism years after he had been away from any contact with formal theological study.

The exclusive concentration on the field of dogma as an adequate basis for a rounded theological education may strike any contemporary theologian as rather strange. One might ask, for example, where is the systematic treatment of moral theology? (Moral

theology was just beginning to emerge as a distinct branch of theology in the seventeenth century.) Or where are the specialized courses on the Old and the New Testament?

It is true that these areas would have been treated in a summary way in the introductory courses in the first year of theology. They would also have to be mastered by private study in preparation for the comprehensive examinations required for the theological degrees. Yet this system of limiting the formal courses to only one branch of theology does suggest that there were certain lacunae in the total theological education.

The Professors

In estimating the influences on De La Salle during his student days at the Sorbonne, it is perhaps more important to focus on the background and personality of his two theology professors rather than on the content of their courses. Since the documents of the period and the historical writing derived therefrom refer frequently both to De Lestocq and Despériers, it is possible to get some idea of the reputation and character of each of these men.

Guillaume de Lestocq was born at Amiens on January 26, 1627, the same year as his famous countryman Bossuet. The elder De Lestocq was a country squire, a salt merchant, and wealthy enough to have the title, Counsellor to the King. After the death of the father, when Guillaume was but ten years old, the mother sent the child to the Jesuit college in Amiens, where in due course he obtained the Master of Arts degree. From there he went to Paris. In 1652, at the age of 25, he received the doctorate in theology from the Sorbonne.

This was the period when the Jansenist controversy was beginning to emerge as a major theological and political issue. The Bull *Cum occasione* of Innocent X condemning the five propositions from the book of Jansenius was promulgated in 1653. Among the Sorbonne theologians who defended the papal bull against the protests of the Jansenists, the name of De Lestocq appears frequently in the documents of the period.

When, in January 1656, Jacques de Sainte Beuve expressed his sympathy with Arnauld and the Jansenists, he was deprived by royal decree of his position as Royal Professor of Theology at the Sorbonne.

In March of that same year, in a solemn convocation called by the dean of the faculty, Guillaume de Lestocq was named to succeed Sainte Beuve by a unanimous vote of the faculty of the Sorbonne.

From then on the fame of De Lestocq was assured; in the process he managed to obtain several lucrative benefices. He was honorary prior of one of the Benedictine priories in the Diocese of Mons, and he held a similar benefice attached to the Augustinian priory in Amiens. At the same time he was canon of the cathedral church of Amiens and honorary chaplain of the Chapel of Saint Michel at Vance in the Diocese of Tours.

These multiple benefices, quite contrary to the canon law of the time, were likewise at odds with the spirit of the Gospel that the university statutes required the professors to inculcate in their students. His considerable wealth did not, however, interfere with De Lestocq's duties as a teacher or his effectiveness in the classroom. His physical presence alone, tall and stout as he was, no doubt had its impact on the students.

If De Lestocq had a reputation as an opponent of Jansenism, he was somewhat less forceful in the defense of papal authority in the face of the Gallican theories. As one author put it, to think otherwise would be "to attenuate the authority of the king, the rights of the crown, and the liberty of the Church in France." In general, the faculty of the Sorbonne seemed partial to the Gallican views. In this regard they were in sharp contrast to the seminary faculty at Saint Sulpice, all of them staunch defenders of papal authority and infallibility.

The historian Gérin, in his account of the Gallican controversies published in 1870, cites a letter written to Colbert, the prime minister, by one of his agents reporting on what happened during the discussions of the Sorbonne faculty in 1663 (CL 41 II: 66). At issue was the question of whether or not the Sorbonne should register the parliamentary decree opposing the pope's censure of the Gallican articles. His evaluation of De Lestocq is interesting:

> Lestocq, professor—a fine spirit, extraordinarily supple, always careful to be agreeable in conversation. He has a good literary education; he likes to be thought well of and craves attention; he even tends to dominate. He is a vigorous agitator and he willingly goes around visiting in order to assure success for his projects. He has a good business sense and speaks Latin fluently.

> He is a fairly good administrator and is well-suited to be dean of the faculty.
>
> He has declared himself against the Jansenists, although they would like to believe that he is not altogether sincere. . . . Yet deep down in his heart he does not believe in and is not all that attached to the opinions of Rome. This he clearly explained to me, although he said he did want to preserve a positive relationship with Rome.
>
> If it ever came to a question of a confrontation between Rome and the Jansenists, if it were up to him to point the direction of what measures to take, he would be the right man to be in charge of the faculty, since he knows what is going on. He expresses himself well and understands how to get things done.

Whatever truth there may be to this assessment, the historical evidence shows no hesitation on the part of De Lestocq in his opposition to Jansenism at every stage of the controversy, whether as dean of the faculty of the Sorbonne, in his theology lectures, or in his frequent contacts with both the Jesuits and the Sulpicians, all ardent anti-Jansenists who held him in high esteem.

As to his Gallican tendencies, the record is not so clear. His name does not appear among those who challenged the Gallican declaration of 1682. But he is numbered among those who petitioned the king in that year to allow the faculty of the Sorbonne to continue their regular monthy meetings and to make pronouncements on doctrinal matters. In this, as in similar protests to the diocesan authorities, he was a forceful advocate of the privileges and what today would be called the academic freedom of the professors of the Sorbonne.

Toward the end of his life, De Lestocq seems to have adopted a more evangelical lifestyle. On July 14, 1704, he instructed his attorney to hand over to the pope the two priories whose revenue he had enjoyed. At the same time he resigned his canonry of the cathedral at Amiens and the chapel of Saint Michel in Vance.

On the following day, July 15, 1704, he dictated his will from his sickbed "in his apartment in the Sorbonne residence . . . with a view of the courtyard of the house located on the Rue de Sorbonne." Renouncing all pomp, he desired that his "funeral procession, service, and interment should be done with all possible

simplicity, and without any show of human vanity." The date of his death is disputed: a reference in a letter of Father Louis Tronson, the former Superior General of the Sulpicians, would indicate that De Lestocq died in 1704, a few weeks after he had dictated his will. Others think there is evidence that he lived until 1711 (CL 41 II: 67).

In his will De Lestocq provided generously for his fellow theologians of the Sorbonne, his surviving relatives, the poor of the parishes where he had held benefices, and finally to his housekeeper. His magnificent library he left to his nephew, Nicolas de Lestocq, "priest, licentiate in theology, member of the House and Society of the Sorbonne."

Most of the books in this valuable collection were lost or destroyed during the French Revolution. About one-third of them survived, however. Brother Yves Poutet has analyzed the inventory in some detail to show the kind of thorough scholarship that De Lestocq brought to his theological teaching and writing (OL 1: 309ff.).

Jacques Despériers was of Norman origin and, like De Lestocq, was abundantly wealthy. The year of his birth is not known. The earliest records show that he enjoyed a benefice attached to the cathedral of Lisieux and for many years was headmaster and professor of philosophy in the college there. There are, in fact, notes that have survived from his Lisieux philosophy courses dating from 1648 to 1651, the year that John Baptist de La Salle was born.

Despériers had a good reputation as a teacher of philosophy, and so it is not surprising that he eventually came to the Sorbonne, where he obtained the licentiate in theology in 1659 and the doctorate in 1662. In time he was named Royal Professor of Theology, a title he held during the time that De La Salle was his student.

Like De Lestocq, Despériers was caught in the midst of the doctrinal controversies at the University of Paris. He had a high regard for the Jesuits and for the faculty at Saint Sulpice, which is another way of saying that he was strongly opposed to Jansenism. He was known to be hostile to Cartesianism as well and a resolute advocate of the personal infallibility of the pope. When, in 1682, the faculty of the Sorbonne was being pressured to accept and register the royal decree on the Gallican liberties, Despériers was among those

who opposed the statement and argued, unsuccessfully as it turned out, that it be revised.

Reference has already been made to the strongly traditional content of his course on the Incarnation. Apart from that, and the appearance of his name among those who opposed the current theological "novelties" as they were called, little else is known. That is enough, however, to enable us to see how he and De Lestocq formed the pattern of De La Salle's theological outlook, which forever after would be Trinitarian, Christological, and strongly committed to a defense of the Roman position against the prevailing and more fashionable theological speculation of the period.

Classmates

As we have seen, the certificates attesting to the fact that De La Salle faithfully attended four theology courses during the two years he was at the Sorbonne all contain the signatures of his fellow students: Maguelonne, Azégat, Clément, Menc, Demachy, Duhamel, Brenier, Du Chailloux, and Nouy. By way of background for understanding the context of De La Salle's Paris experience, it might be useful to summarize what is known about the quality of these young men and their subsequent history.

Barthélemy Maguelonne joined the Sulpicians in 1676. After he obtained his doctorate in theology from the Sorbonne he was assigned to teach moral theology in the Sulpician seminaries and eventually became a seminary rector. A devout but somewhat timid priest with a tendency to scrupulosity, he was considered a good teacher and an understanding guide in the confessional. He died in 1706.

Honoré Azégat also joined the Sulpicians but he did not obtain the doctorate in theology until 1680. After a few years as a parish priest, he also turned to teaching. He never enjoyed good health but immersed himself nonetheless in the preparation of his classes. The correspondence with his Sulpician superiors indicates that he found community life difficult. In fact, he had to be reprimanded several times for excess in the use of coffee, tobacco, and liquor. Eventually he was persuaded to resign from the Sulpician Society. He was given a pension to live out his last years with his family and died at his home in 1722.

Pierre Clément had already been a seminarian for four years when De La Salle arrived in Paris in 1670. After a brilliant career as a student at the Sorbonne, he was ordained in 1678. He spent most of his life trying unsuccessfully to avoid ecclesiastical honors and the benefices attached to them. When the Bishop of Besançon tried to appoint him as rector of the seminary, he moved to Rouen. After some years working in the chancery office there, he was appointed pastor and later vicar-general. Despite his protestations, he was made Bishop of Périgueux in 1703, a position he held until his death in 1719.

François Menc is worthy of mention on two counts: his signature is the only one to appear in the attestations for both of the years that De La Salle was at the Sorbonne, and it was his set of notes on De Lestocq's course on the doctrine of grace that has survived. Menc was from Champagne, as De La Salle was; this fact may explain why De La Salle asked for his signature two years in a row.

Little else is known of Menc. The records in the Sulpician archives show that there was reluctance to accept him into the Society or even to have him teach in their seminaries. They felt that he was overly zealous, severe on himself and more so on others, and likely to be a disruptive force in a community. Eventually he became a professor in the diocesan seminary of Aix-en-Provence where he died.

All four of these witnesses to the signature of Despériers were fellow seminarians of De La Salle at Saint Sulpice, in addition to being classmates at the Sorbonne. In the certificate signed by De Lestocq, the signatures of Azégat and Clément are replaced by those of Demachy and Duhamel. Nothing further is known about either of these last two, since there is no record of them in the Sulpician archives.

As has already been noted, the certificates testifying to the courses followed by De La Salle during his second year were prepared and signed after his departure from Paris. Except for François Menc, the names are different from those of the previous year.

Of the three new names, Brenier, Du Chailloux, and Nouy, that of Antoine Brenier is the best known. He was born of a wealthy family and seems to have been something of a child prodigy, completing his master's degree at the age of 14 and his law studies at 17. He then decided to enter the ecclesiastical state, came to the seminary of Saint Sulpice in 1669, and three years later joined the

Sulpicians. Humility and obedience characterized him from the start. His humility is evident in his signature on De La Salle's certificate, where Brenier styles himself "unworthy cleric." It was even more apparent in his reluctance to enter the priesthood, which he kept putting off until he was finally commanded by his superiors in 1684 to accept ordination.

Brenier served the Sulpicians as rector of the junior seminary, consultor to the Superior General, and visitator to the Sulpician establishments in the south of France. He wrote extensively on devotional and ascetical subjects and had a reputation as a perceptive spiritual director. Comparative studies show some common themes in his writings and the later writings of De La Salle, although by contrast the Founder of the Brothers tempered his ascetical doctrine considerably to adapt it to the demands of the teaching apostolate. Brenier died in 1714.

Etienne du Chailloux, after completing his doctoral studies in Paris, became pastor of the parish of Saint Philibert in Dijon where he served for half a century. He maintained regular contact with the Sulpicians in Paris and welcomed them in Dijon whenever the occasion arose. This proved to be helpful when he himself came under attack for having defended one of his female parishioners who was accused of Quietism. She was exposed as a fraud, and the accusations were turned against Du Chailloux. It was the influence of the Sulpicians and other prominent ecclesiastics among the Sulpician alumni that managed to get him acquitted. He died in Dijon in 1728 at the age of 81, much loved and respected.

Practically nothing is known of Pierre Nouy. After three years at Saint Sulpice from 1670 to 1673, he returned to his native Nîmes, where he became a pastor of a parish. Nothing further is known of him, except for a letter he wrote to Saint Sulpice in 1698 saying that he was in ill health and asking the Sulpicians to find a successor, a request they were unable to satisfy.

The Sorbonne Connection

The very fact of having attended the Sorbonne would have established spheres of influence for De La Salle extending to those highly placed ecclesiastics who had preceded him at that prestigious institution, as well as with those who would come later. In the paragraphs that follow, mention will be made of some of those

prelates who studied at the Sorbonne before, during, or after the time that De La Salle was a student there, and who were to play an important part in the subsequent life of the Founder or in the development of his Institute.

One such doctor of the Sorbonne from the year 1640 was Charles de Bourlon, the Bishop of Soissons, who conferred minor orders on De La Salle in 1668. Another was Charles-Maurice Le Tellier who, as Archbishop of Reims, ordained De La Salle to the priesthood in 1678 and with whom De La Salle had to deal in the course of forming the community of the Brothers. Le Tellier obtained the Sorbonne doctorate in 1666. François de Harlay de Champvallon and Louis-Antoine de Noailles, successively Cardinal Archbishops of Paris during the difficult years when the Institute of the Brothers was struggling for its existence, were both doctors of the Sorbonne, receiving their degrees in 1671 and 1676 respectively.

Edme Pirot is another name that will ever be memorable in the Lasallian annals. A doctor of the Sorbonne since 1664, he was dean of the theology faculty from 1681 to 1693. As vicar-general to Cardinal Noailles, it was he who tried to have De La Salle replaced as superior of the Brothers in 1702, an arrangement that the Brothers simply refused to accept.

Paul Godet des Marais was a student at the Sorbonne and a resident in the *Petite Communauté* associated with Saint Sulpice during the years De La Salle was in Paris. The two apparently became good friends. Shortly after he became the Bishop of Chartres in 1692, Godet invited De La Salle to take over some of the schools in his diocese, the first bishop ever to do so. In 1702 De La Salle addressed to Bishop Godet his famous memoir defending his policy of teaching French rather than Latin in the schools. The two men always had great respect for each other. The bishop was able on several occasions to intervene with the ecclesiastical authorities in Paris in favor of De La Salle and the Brothers.

François Bouthilier de Chavigny, who had the dubious distinction of ranking last out of 82 candidates for the Sorbonne licentiate in 1666, became Bishop of Troyes in 1679. After his retirement in 1698, he notarized the contract that brought the Brothers to the diocese in 1703. Meanwhile he had been succeeded in Troyes by his nephew Denis-François who was equally well disposed to the Brothers. In 1722 both prelates wrote laudatory letters to Rome that

were influential in obtaining the Bull of Approbation for the Institute.

Pierre de Langle had just completed the Sorbonne doctorate in 1670, only a few months before De La Salle arrived to begin his studies there. De Langle became Bishop of Boulogne-sur-Mer in 1698. One of his first priorities was to open a Christian school in Calais, but it was not until 1710 that De La Salle was able to send any Brothers. When they did arrive, the bishop received them cordially and housed them in the seminary until a suitable residence could be obtained. A few years later a second school was opened.

At first, Bishop De Langle, together with the commandant of the town, was a powerful protector of the Brothers. However, when the Bull *Unigenitus* was published in 1713, he opposed the papal position and joined with those appealing against the Bull. He tried in vain to get the Brothers to side with him. When they refused, he did all he could to have De La Salle withdraw the Brothers from the city. Eventually the case went to court; the bishop lost the case, and the Brothers remained, with the Jansenist bishop hostile to them until his death in 1724.

Guillaume-Ignace de Mérez was a fellow seminarian with De La Salle at Saint Sulpice. By the year 1707 he was vicar-general of the diocese of Alès in southern France. In that year he wrote to De La Salle in a letter quoted by Blain: "I'm not sure, Father, if my name is still familiar to you or if you still remember me at all. But I have never forgotten you and I often recall you fondly from the days when I saw you at S. Sulpice. You were at the time a canon of Reims; it was in 1671" (CL 8: 51).

De Mérez goes on to ask De La Salle to send some Brothers to that remote region in southern France where Catholic teachers were needed to overcome the gains made there by the Protestants. Blain remarks that De La Salle was "happy to satisfy his zeal for the destruction of heresy and happy also that the Brothers had been selected to go to attack heresy in the places where it had become entrenched" (CL 8: 51). De La Salle sent two Brothers to Alès immediately. In the following year, the Bishop of Alès, François Chevalier de Saulx, a doctor of the Sorbonne in 1678, told De La Salle how happy he was to have these Brothers.

Another companion of De La Salle at the Sorbonne in 1670–1672 was Claude de Précelles. He was a brilliant student and

ranked as tenth out of 93 candidates for the licentiate in theology in 1676. The doctorate came a year later. In his capacity as *Censor librorum* he granted in 1696 the coveted Sorbonne *Nihil obstat*, testifying that the text was free from doctrinal error, to the early editions of prayerbooks that De La Salle composed for use in the schools. Louis-Ellies du Pin, a doctor of the Sorbonne in 1684, exercised the same function in 1702-1703, granting church approval to other writings of De La Salle, including a catechism, a practical manual on the rules of Christian politeness, and later editions of the books of prayers and hymns for use in the schools.

Among those who came to the Sorbonne in later years, one of the most distinguished was Jacques-Nicolas Colbert. He ranked first in a class of 69 candidates for the licentiate at the Sorbonne in 1678 and received the doctorate in the following year. After becoming Archbishop of Rouen in 1691, he was in a position to provide De La Salle with an alternate center for his Institute in 1705 when the situation in Paris became intolerable. It was he who authorized the acquisition of the property at Saint Yon and the establishment of a novitiate and boarding school there.

His successor as Archbishop of Rouen in 1708 was Claude-Maur d'Aubigné. A doctor of the Sorbonne since 1688, he had been vicar-general at Chartres under Bishop Godet des Marais, where his attitude towards the Brothers had been quite hostile. He apparently carried this animosity with him to Rouen. When the pastor of the parish in which Saint Yon was located accused De La Salle of lying about the terms of a contract, it was Archbishop D'Aubigné who finally deprived the dying De La Salle of his ecclesiastical faculties in March of 1719. De La Salle died on April 7 of that year, to be followed to the grave only 15 days later by D'Aubigné himself.

Such, then, were some of the notable prelates who would have been known to De La Salle from the Sorbonne, as well as the dominant theological issues, the specific courses of study, the professors, and some of his fellow students.

The career of John Baptist de La Salle as a theological student in Paris came to an abrupt end in April 1672 when he learned of the death of his father. Since he would never again have the leisure to carry on full-time theological study, this period in his life and this stage of his theological formation must have been somehow significant in preparing him to meet the challenges that Providence had in store for him.

But there was more to the Paris experience than the courses in academic theology at the Sorbonne. The spiritual formation that De La Salle received at the Seminary of Saint Sulpice during this same period would have an even greater impact on his personal development and his vocation to be the priest, the educational leader, and the Founder of a religious Institute that he was destined to become.

4

Student Seminarian

To those only vaguely familiar with the steps in the process by which John Baptist de La Salle advanced towards the priesthood, it may come as surprise to learn that he was a seminarian for a relatively short time: for only 18 months to be exact, from October 1670 until April 1672. During that time he was enrolled in the Seminary of Saint Sulpice in Paris and profited by the spiritual training offered there. The rest of his spiritual formation and his theological education, both before and after the Paris years, was centered in Reims, where he continued to live at home.

The spiritual formation provided at the seminary in Paris was concentrated and intense: it engaged De La Salle totally. Without doubt the seminary experience contributed in a special way to his personal development at the time. More than the theology courses, the spiritual doctrine he assimilated in the seminary had a lasting influence as the foundation for what was to become his life's work and his major achievement.

When John Baptist de La Salle arrived at the Seminary of Saint Sulpice in 1670, the building was not quite 20 years old. Nothing remains of it today. Since it occupied part of what is now the great square in front of the present parish church of Saint Sulpice, it was demolished in 1803 to give the square its perfect rectangular shape. A new seminary building replaced the old in 1820 on the south side of the square.

The present church of Saint Sulpice is also relatively new. The construction was only beginning when De La Salle was a seminarian. Although the cornerstone had been laid in 1646 by Anne of Austria, the Queen of France, the work on the building itself moved slowly. The nave was not complete until 1736; the twin towers date from 1788. In De La Salle's day only part of the present choir and the sacristy were available for use.

The presence of De La Salle at Saint Sulpice is permanently memorialized in a chapel just to the right of the entry to the church. The chapel is dominated by the familiar statue of the Founder of the Brothers by Jean Falguière. A marble inscription notes that De

La Salle was an exemplary seminarian and that the first schools he founded in Paris were in the parish of Saint Sulpice.

The Society and the Seminary

The seminary in Paris was under the direction of the priests of the Society of Saint Sulpice, which had been founded only a generation earlier by Jean-Jacques Olier. The idea for the foundation of a new society to train priests came to Olier after a long series of spiritual, psychological, and physical crises.

Sulpician Spirituality

In the course of his long spiritual odyssey, Olier had come under the influence of Charles de Condren, who trained him in the principles of the spirituality of the French school that originated with Cardinal Pierre de Bérulle (d. 1629). A year after the death of De Condren in 1641, Olier founded his first small seminary at Vaugirard, a suburb of Paris. His appointment as pastor of Saint Sulpice in 1646 was the occasion for establishing the seminary and founding a Society based in the parish from which it took its name.

The spirituality of Olier, derived from De Condren and Bérulle, was dominantly Christocentric, focusing on the "mysteries" of the life of Christ. The central element in this "mystery" was that of *kenosis*, the total abnegation or self-emptying of the Divine Word in the Incarnation. The classic text was the kenotic hymn in chapter 2 of Saint Paul's letter to the Philippians: "Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus . . . becoming obedient unto death, even the death of the cross." The meditative prayer practiced in the Bérullian school aimed at cultivating this self-abnegating attitude of Jesus.

Such total emptying of self was seen as the promise and condition of deep personal union with God. Thus the events in the life of Christ were looked upon in their aspect of "mystery," as successive manifestations of the mind of Christ, his divinity visible only to the eyes of faith, hidden as it was beneath the external limitations of a weak human nature. In each event, therefore, from the birth of Jesus through his hidden life in Nazareth, his preaching

and miracles, to his death and resurrection, the mystery of the Incarnation could be contemplated. This mystery illumined the path from a total giving of self to ultimate glorification and union with the divine.

The Society of Saint Sulpice had as its purpose to train parish priests in line with the reforms inaugurated a century earlier by the Council of Trent and implemented so effectively in Milan by Saint Charles Borromeo. The goal was to produce priests who would be committed to a life of self-sacrifice and self-discipline, zeal for the salvation of souls, especially the poor, and exactitude in living up to the demands of the clerical state.

Seminary Life

On October 18, 1670, the feast of Saint Luke, John Baptist de La Salle came from Reims to Paris to enroll in the Seminary of Saint Sulpice. Before being formally accepted, he had a lengthy personal interview with Father Alexandre de Bretonvilliers, the Superior of the Society. The purpose of this interview was to assess the motives of the young seminarian to be sure that he was prepared voluntarily to follow the regulations of the seminary in their smallest detail. Hesitation or expressions of uncertainty would have been grounds for refusal of admission. Any seminarian who later on proved to be incapable of following up on his resolve would be summarily dismissed.

The days following admission were occupied by an intense spiritual retreat, which apparently coincided with the beginning of classes at the Sorbonne. Thus fortified and well-motivated, De La Salle would have been caught up at once in the seminary routine. In its external features it was not very different from that of Catholic seminaries everywhere in the world, at least up until Vatican II.

It was early to bed (night prayer was at 8:00 P.M.) and early to rise (5:00 A.M.). There were the customary spiritual exercises: vocal and mental prayer, daily Mass, the Divine Office for those obliged to recite it (the rosary in common for the others), and spiritual reading. Silence was imposed and strictly observed, even during meals. The seminarians were expected to serve at table in their turn, to work at chores around the house, and to keep their own living quarters clean.

The fees at the seminary were relatively high, so much so that only wealthy clerics could afford to live there. A successful sojourn at Saint Sulpice set the young cleric apart and was practically a guarantee of high ecclesiastical position afterwards. Despite the elite quality of the clientele, there was emphasis on the common life: professors and students alike were expected to live simply and to observe exactly every last detail of the seminary regulations.

Seminary discipline was strict. All were expected to be serious and modest in their external demeanor. The golden rule was to do nothing without permission. Specifically forbidden without special authorization were the following: visiting or even entering the rooms of other seminarians; absence from spiritual exercises or recreation; writing or receiving clandestine letters; going into the city or eating in town; visiting the parish church apart from the community; going independently to the kitchen or the infirmary; receiving books, documents, medicines, or money from outside sources (OL 1: 246).

When De La Salle came to Saint Sulpice, the memory of Jean-Jacques Olier was still fresh; the spirituality bore his distinctive stamp. Special attention was given to the practice of meditation and prayer, with oral demonstrations and practice sessions on Tuesdays and Saturdays. Each seminarian was assigned a spiritual director. This was considered an important means of forming the young candidates in the virtues thought to be proper to the clerical state: humility, modesty and, above all, an obedience that was "prompt, exact, and blind."

The external schedule, the rules and regulations, and the discipline, would all have been monotonous and well-nigh insupportable were it not for the intensity of the spiritual motivation, the interior sense of peace and joy in the presence and in the love of God.

In his memoir on the life of Olier, Father Henri Baudrand, who would later become one of De La Salle's spiritual directors, gives a summary of the sort of attitude that the seminarians were expected to develop:

> The intense vigilance which must be constantly exercised over oneself in the seminary does not prevent a person from bringing to it a very strong sense of freedom, since he considers his duties a matter of conscience and honor. Since the majority

of those in the seminary come to the point where they voluntarily shed the mentality of a child or a schoolboy, it is no longer a matter of the oppressive character of the orders given that concerns them but rather how to accomplish them perfectly.

The majority of those in the seminary are either bachelors, licentiates, or doctors of theology, and so are well-educated and, in addition, they have lived for many years in the seminary. They constitute a group of persons who are among the elite; they are reasonable and fervent; they have less need of prodding to make them advance in spirituality than they have of a rein to moderate their zeal.

All the virtues are practiced continually in the seminary. The most humiliating actions are embraced with joy, such as sweeping the corridors or cleaning out the washrooms. Obedience is prompt, exact, and blind. Most live it with such a spirit of submission that they are disposed to set off for seminaries in the provinces, in Canada, or in China, at the slightest suggestion that might be made to them.

Those in the seminary ought to be totally devoted to the worship of the Most Holy and Most August Trinity. Their silence and their recollection in the seminary ought to honor the silence and the repose of the three divine Persons in heaven. Since all the treasures of nature and of grace, and all the mysteries of the Man-God, flow from and are dependent on this one great mystery, every action of the seminarians and all their conduct ought to contribute to the honor of the Trinity. Jesus Christ, sovereign priest, likewise holds a special place in their hearts.

The priests in the seminary ought to be priests and victims consumed in the fire of the love of Christ. . . . Their relation to the mother of Jesus ought to be continual. They should recognize that whatever power they have is only an extension of her divine maternity. . . . Their desires and their spirit are the desires and the Spirit of Jesus living in his holy mother. (OL 1: 240)

Some relief from the monotony of the seminary routine came on Sundays and the solemn feasts with the splendid liturgies that surrounded High Mass and Vespers in the parish church on those days. Another feature of Sundays and feasts that provided a break

in the routine was the opportunity to teach catechism in the various centers scattered throughout the large parish.

The seminarians were prepared carefully for this catechetical ministry by a faculty member specially charged to supervise both the content and the method of instruction. The seminarians usually worked in pairs: one would explain the lesson of the day while the other kept the children quiet and orderly during the presentation. Although not obligatory, these sessions attracted large numbers. The children were divided into three grades: beginners, those preparing for first Communion, and those who were more advanced.

During the time De La Salle was a seminarian in Paris, the catechetical program was under the direction of Father Antoine Dargines. As the years went on the system was expanded and improved. By the time De La Salle and the Brothers had charge of the schools of the parish, the program was functioning exceptionally well under the direction of Fathers Claude de La Barmondière and Jean-Jacques Baüyn.

There is no evidence, however, that in his seminary years De La Salle ever thought of the ministry of teaching Christian doctrine as a vocation in itself. To him at that time it was just one more aspect of seminary life, challenging and agreeable, perhaps, but only a passing phase in his formation for the priesthood.

In order to appreciate more fully the impact that the Sulpician seminary had on the young John Baptist de La Salle, it is important to have some idea of the reputation and character of the Sulpicians who held important positions in the seminary while he was a student there, many of whom he would encounter again at significant moments in the development of his own life and that of the Institute he was to found.

The Superiors and the Professors

Alexandre Le Ragois de Bretonvilliers (1621–1676)

At the death of Jean-Jacques Olier in 1657, De Bretonvilliers became Superior of the young Society of Saint Sulpice. He came from a wealthy family, and used his immense personal fortune in the service of the Church and the Sulpicians. Thus he financed the

construction of the seminary in Paris with a gift of 90,000 livres (close to one million U.S. dollars). He also used his personal wealth to purchase the site of the new Sulpician foundation in Montreal and to build there a church, seminary, school, and rectory. He was successful in obtaining royal letters patent (equivalent to incorporation) for the young Society. During his generalate the seminaries at Le Puy, Clermont-Ferrand, Limoges, and Lyon were brought under Sulpician control.

Gifted as he was as an administrator, he had an equal ability as a master of the spiritual life. In the tradition of Bérulle and Olier, his conferences were centered on Christ, on the importance of devoting all of one's thought, affection, and action totally to the service of the divine Master. He had a particularly fervent devotion to Jesus living in Mary's womb, an aspect of Marian devotion that had been spread widely by Olier and that would have its echoes in the writings of De La Salle.

De Bretonvilliers was insistent on the importance of spiritual direction, which for him was grounded in the doctrine of the Incarnation and the indwelling of the Spirit in the soul of the Christian. The Sulpician superior considered the practice of spiritual direction "extremely useful and indeed indispensable both for those who are just beginning to serve God, as well as for those who desire to attain to a high degree of perfection" (CL 41 II: 81).

This total submission of his interior life to the control of a superior or spiritual guide would ever remain for De La Salle a characteristic of his personal spiritual journey. He would one day propose an adaptation of this practice, in the form of reddition to the Brother Director, as one of the interior supports of his Institute.

It was this De Bretonvilliers, then, who admitted John Baptist de La Salle to Saint Sulpice in 1670, after having examined him on his motives for entering the seminary. The Superior would then have assigned the young seminarian to one of the priests available for spiritual direction.

It is not known for certain to whom De La Salle was assigned for spiritual direction. It could have been either Father Claude de La Barmondière or Father Henri Baudrand, both of whom would later become pastors of Saint Sulpice and in that capacity play an important part in the history of De La Salle and his Institute. However, most authors think that it was Father Louis Tronson to whom De La Salle was assigned.

Louis Tronson (1622–1700)

At the time De La Salle entered the seminary in Paris, Father Tronson was the senior spiritual director. On the death of De Bretonvilliers in 1676 he would succeed as the Superior General of the Sulpicians, the third to hold that office.

The reason for supposing that De La Salle might have been assigned to Tronson for spiritual direction comes from a passage in Blain's biography of the Founder. In connection with the controversial memoir on the habit of the Brothers, Blain writes:

> This document seemed to be so logically thought out and so strongly worded that the person to whom the holy Founder showed it, and whose advice he sought, urged him to be firm on this point. It is true that De La Salle does not tell us the identity of this person whom he consulted, saying only that he was considered very wise. But by this laudatory epithet he really indicated the celebrated superior of the Seminary of Saint Sulpice, Father Tronson, whose prudence was widely acknowledged throughout France.
>
> It was to him that De La Salle had recourse in all his major difficulties, considering him as a source of enlightenment and as a man who had a reputation for being one of the oracles of the French clergy. Since De La Salle had been one of his students and had the good fortune to be under his guidance while at the seminary, and since Tronson combined great depth of knowledge and penetration of mind with a high degree of humility and virtue, it was only natural for him to ask his advice.
>
> So long as Tronson lived, De La Salle did in fact turn to him for counsel; he often went to discuss matters with him at the seminary at Issy where he then lived. When he could not secure the advice of this enlightened man, he would consult Baüyn, then director of the Seminary of Saint Sulprice, whose holiness was recognized by all those who dealt with him. (CL 7: 300)

Whether or not Tronson was actually the spiritual director of De La Salle in the seminary, his influence would have been considerable. He gave conferences to the seminarians that were noteworthy for their precision and the telling impact they had on his audience. His extensive writings on various aspects of seminary life

Louis Tronson of the Society of Saint Sulpice

became classics in their own time and were eventually published in Paris as part of the Migne collection of 1857. Tronson was described by Father François Leschassier, his successor, as "a very lovable priest whose advice was wise, whose demeanor was calm, and whose conversation was charming" (CL 41 II: 86 n.).

The spiritual doctrine of Tronson was in the tradition of Olier and De Bretonvilliers. Traces of it are not hard to find in the writings of De La Salle, including some aspects that strike the modern ear as strange. In the theological and spiritual climate of the time, there was a characteristic mistrust of self, of human nature, and the "world," excessive value placed on prompt and blind obedience, as well as a tendency to define perfection in terms of the exact observance of regulations and the duties of one's state.

Thus Tronson wrote of his own entrance into the seminary that "it was not for worldly reasons, not to satisfy vanity or avarice, not to become more learned, but to enroll in the school of Jesus Christ, to accept Christ as his only Master, and to try to become imbued with his maxims." "Without such a purpose," he wrote, "it would be better never to have entered the seminary, since a person is there only to make progress in virtue."

"It is not enough just to be there," he continued, "since it is impossible to profit by the life of the seminary without submitting oneself to the prescribed routine and the regulations, carrying them out in their entirety, punctually, voluntarily, and with love" (CL 41 II: 86).

In his treatise on obedience, Tronson devoted an entire section comprising 17 chapters to the topic of submission to regulations. He pointed out how important was the seminary rule, the need to pay attention to the smallest details, rejecting all pretexts for being excused. He endorsed the doctrine of Saint Francis de Sales that "the perfection of a soul in community is dependent on the observance of the rules."

Similar emphasis was placed on separation from the world. When giving conferences to the seminarians, Tronson encouraged them "to live in the world without being corrupted by it, just like the springs of fresh water in the sea that are not tainted either by its salt or its pollutants." "Serve God," he told them, "as if the world contained nothing else but God and yourself."

In the *Manuel du Séminariste* (CL 41 II: 87ff.), Tronson described meditative prayer as the "sun of our soul, the food that

nourishes it, a medicine that cleanses its impurities, the nerve that supplies its energy without which the soul could not live." A priest who does not meditate, he wrote, is "like the heavens without a prime mover, a ship without a rudder, a soldier without weapons."

He describes the particular examen as "one of the principal instruments of perfection . . . a divine seed which, although it is very small, nevertheless bears very abundant fruit." Spiritual reading he considered to be one of the most important exercises on the schedule. In order to ascertain whether the seminarians derived full benefit from their reading he encouraged them to ask themselves: what did you read? why? when? how?

Like his predecessors, Tronson considered spiritual direction as absolutely essential, since the spiritual life "cannot be guided by flesh and blood." Direction, he thought, was as necessary for the spiritual life as the alphabet for learning to read. Spiritual direction was an obligatory part of the program at Saint Sulpice, but directors were always assigned according to the personal qualities and needs of the seminarians.

The characteristic mistrust of the body and its functions is likewise evident in Tronson's manual. Concerning eating, he says that this is a "notably base, earthbound, and animal action where there is no difference between man and beast." He notes the danger of sins of intemperance in eating and drinking. The seminarians are urged to take their meals in a Christian manner, that is, by having "before, during, and after the meal the dispositions of Jesus Christ, namely, obedience, frugality, penance, modesty, and sacrifice."

Concerning sleep, the manual describes it as "the most earthbound, the most gross, the most animal-like of all our actions." It is the last act of the day and often of our lives. In order to go to bed in a religious spirit, the seminarian should "consider the bed as a coffin, the bed coverings as a shroud, the body stretched out as a decaying corpse, without beauty, without life, without movement."

By way of balance, Tronson recognized that the priest had to be not only a man of faith and virtue, but a student and a man of learning as well. One of his favorite maxims was, "Learning without piety produces a proud cleric; piety without learning produces a useless one." Knowledge, he insisted, was necessary if the priest was to fulfill his role as a "leader of people, a doctor for souls,

a judge of consciences, a guardian for the house and city of God, a herald and ambassador of the divine majesty, a master and teacher for all nations."

Before becoming a master, the seminarians were reminded, one must first be a disciple. Hence the need to be diligent in the study of Sacred Scripture, the mysteries and articles of faith, the science of moral and sacramental theology. At the same time, Tronson would insist that the obligation to study did not dispense from the need for prayer. In his scale of values, sacred science enjoyed first place; human learning, although indispensable, remained secondary.

In addition to the manual for seminarians and the treatise on obedience, Tronson wrote several series of meditations: "On the Mysteries of Christ," "On the Ecclesiastical State," "On Retreats," "On Humility," "On Subjects for Particular Examen," "On the Rule," "On Christian Recreation."

Tronson fell seriously ill for the first time in 1687 but recovered promptly due to the ministrations of the famous Dutch Doctor Adrien Helvétius, who would later prescribe painful but effective remedies for De La Salle. In 1697, at the age of 75, Tronson retired to the seminary at Issy where he died three years later.

Tronson was succeeded as Superior of Saint Sulpice by François Leschassier, who praised his predecessor in these words:

> His learning was very extensive and there was nothing that he did not know that ought to be taught to clerics in a seminary. In such matters he was a master. His virtue was solid, often tested, and consistent. What is even more rare is the fact that during 40 years we never saw any indication of a difference between his words and actions: it can be truly said that he practiced what he preached. (CL 41 II: 92)

Any French author, reflecting on Tronson's influence on De La Salle, might well be tempted to apply the maxim, *Tel père, tel fils.*

Claude Bottu de La Barmondière (1635–1694)

Two years after attaining his doctorate in theology at the Sorbonne in 1662, De La Barmondière joined the Society of Saint Sulpice. He was a holy man, kindly to others but severe on himself. One author wrote of him that "he fasted very often and practiced austerity

to such an extent that he looked like a dead man more than a living human being" (Grandet in CL 41 II: 96).

De La Barmondière's doctoral thesis was a vigorous defense of papal infallibility, well ahead of its time and not a particularly popular theme in view of the Gallican tendencies of so many doctors of the Sorbonne. In January 1663, when the decree of the French Parliament was issued requiring that the University of Paris teach and defend the exemptions of the Gallican church, De La Barmondière voted against accepting it.

One of the prime minister's partisans reported to his chief in these words:

> Father De La Barmondière, a young man about 30 years old, is a resident at Saint Sulpice and he makes profession of that ardent zeal which animates that virtuous community. But this zeal, rather badly out of control, led him to advocate before the entire Sorbonne a surprising theory. He said that he did not see how anyone could vote for accepting the decree without by the very act committing mortal sin.
>
> When the pastor of Saint André tried to make him see how rash was this judgment, he would not listen to the advice of this wise and learned man but replied angrily that the pastor was out of order for interrupting him. (CL 41 II: 97)

At the seminary, De La Barmondière had the reputation for being a good teacher, knowledgeable, methodical, and willing to adapt his classes to the abilities of the students. He taught his theology courses at the seminary to those seminarians who did not go to the Sorbonne to earn degrees in theology from the university. It can be assumed that these were not among the more intellectually gifted of the seminarians; they were interested only in fulfilling the minimum academic requirements for ordination.

De La Barmondière taught these courses for the first time as a young doctor of theology in 1664. The first two-year cycle was deemed such a success that Father De Bretonvilliers, the Superior, decided to extend the cycle to three years.

For those seminarians who, like De La Salle, attended courses at the Sorbonne, the seminary offered a supplementary course in theology that was given three times a week. De La Barmondière taught this course from 1665 to 1673, and it was in this capacity that he probably had De La Salle as a student.

Years later, shortly after he became involved with the teachers in Reims, De La Salle would return to Paris to seek out the advice of this former teacher and also that of Father Nicolas Barré. The problem he was wrestling with was the agonizing decision whether or not to resign his canonry. Blain notes in this connection that De La Salle "considered Father De La Barmondière and Father Barré as two saintly men, two of the greatest servants of God to be found in Paris" (CL 7: 211).

De La Barmondière was made pastor of the parish of Saint Sulpice in 1686. Within two years he was able to persuade De La Salle to keep a long-standing promise and bring two Brothers to Paris to take charge of the parish school on the Rue Princesse. Forced by illness to resign his pastorate in 1689, De La Barmondière continued to serve as a consultor for the Sulpicians until his death in 1694.

Henri Baudrand (1637–1699)

When De La Salle was a seminarian at Saint Sulpice, Father Baudrand was one of those assigned to spiritual direction. He had joined the Sulpicians in 1663 and received the Sorbonne doctorate in 1666. There is no evidence to indicate what, if any, influence he had on De La Salle during his seminary years.

In 1675 Baudrand was named superior of the Sulpician seminary at Clermont. He was recalled to Saint Sulpice in 1684 to become one of the spiritual directors at the seminary. In 1689, only a year after De La Salle had returned to Paris to take over the parish school at Saint Sulpice, Baudrand succeeded Father De La Barmondière as pastor of the parish.

Blain describes the impressions of the new pastor:

> The new parish priest was no less pleased when he came to visit the classes. Seeing the good done, he could not restrain his joy; and he felt a stronger determination to support and multiply the schools. At this time he resolved to open a new school in the Rue du Bac, near the Pont Royal. He suggested this to De La Salle, who was happy to go along with the idea. In fact, it was De La Salle who had first thought of this foundation and had mentioned it to De La Barmondière; but the idea had not been pursued any further at that time. This new school

> was opened early in 1690. Baudrand was delighted; for he soon saw it filled with students and producing all the good results he had hoped for. (CL 7: 296)

However, it was the opposition of Baudrand that prompted De La Salle to write his famous treatise defending the distinctive garb of the Brothers, the oldest of the Founder's original writings in his own hand that has survived. Blain writes:

> We must state things as they are. The person whom he [De La Salle] had to contradict was a man who enjoyed great esteem in Paris and was well thought of. The Brothers' habit, which at the same time seemed so unusual and drew down on them the raillery of the common people and the derision of the worldly, he found displeasing. He was afraid that this lack of respect for the Brothers personally might extend to their ministry. . . .
>
> So Baudrand, as parish priest of the parish where the Christian schools were located, as their protector and benefactor, and as the spiritual director of the Servant of God, felt that he had a right to impose this change and to demand this act of submission and condescendence from De La Salle. He wanted the Brothers to adopt the long ecclesiastical mantle and habit. . . . Thinking no doubt that Baudrand, who desired only what was best, who loved De La Salle and was genuinely interested in his work, would understand his reasons and accept them, the Servant of God took up his pen once more, to state fully and clearly the reasons which had induced him to give the Brothers their special habit. (CL 7: 299)

Despite these many problems and differences of opinion, Baudrand served as confessor and spiritual director for De La Salle during that difficult period. Speaking of that moment in the Founder's life, Maillefer says "Father Baudrand knew how virtuous De La Salle was and he held him in great honor;" and "knew him better than anyone since he was his confessor" (CL 6: 89).

Afflicted with paralysis and rheumatism, Baudrand had to retire after only seven years as pastor. He died very strangely in 1699. Sent into the room of a winery where the grapes were fermenting in the hope that the steamy air would alleviate his rheumatism, he choked on the fumes and died of asphyxiation as he was trying to escape through the door.

Jean-Jacques Baüyn (1641–1696)

Born at Basel in Switzerland, Jean-Jacques Baüyn was raised and educated in the Protestant religion. While he was still young, his older brother went to Paris, was converted to Catholicism, entered the seminary of Saint Sulpice, and was ordained to the Catholic priesthood. Much distressed by this conversion, the father sent the young Jean-Jacques to Paris to try to persuade his older brother to give up his Catholicism. Instead, Jean-Jacques himself was converted by a priest of the Oratory. In 1663 he too entered Saint Sulpice and in 1676, after much hesitation on his part, was accepted into the Society.

His conversion was radical and complete. Thus when he inherited a large sum of money at the death of his father, he gave every bit of it to the poor. He became interested in the missionary activity of the Church and became noted for his zeal for the conversion of the Protestants.

Baüyn was not a particularly brilliant student. He ranked 79 out of 93 candidates for the theology licentiate in 1676. He never went on to complete the minimal requirments for the doctorate. On the other hand, he had extraordinary spiritual gifts and a reputation for great holiness. The documents in the Sulpician archives speak of "his great love of God," and his "infinite love of neighbor"; he practiced "austere mortifications" and was noted for his "profound humility."

At the same time the sources emphasize that Baüyn was not a gloomy person. The records show that the young seminarians "enjoyed very much being with him" and that "to cheer them up he always had some amusing stories to tell them that would at the same time carry a useful lesson" (CL 41 II: 362).

In 1672 Baüyn was appointed by Father Tronson to take charge of the catechetical program for the children in the parish of Saint Sulpice. He organized things so well that within a short time the program was on a firm basis and functioning smoothly. It was very popular with the older boys and girls of the parish, who much preferred the catechetical lessons to the Sunday sermons in the parish church. The program was a well-established tradition by the time De La Salle took over the parish school in 1688.

In time Baüyn became involved in the Community of Poor Clerics founded by Antoine Brenier in 1687. Even though Baüyn

was also the superior of the junior seminary, he was willing to make his contribution to the spiritual and temporal welfare of the 15 or so impoverished seminarians whose poverty would otherwise have made it impossible for them to study for the priesthood. When Brenier was transferred to Angers in 1695, Father Baüyn took over the full direction of the Community of Poor Clerics.

During this same period, from 1691 to 1695, when De La Salle was consolidating his young Society at Vaugirard, Baüyn served as his spiritual director. The two men were in frequent contact as Blaine relates:

> Baüyn, the celebrated spiritual director, whose eminent virtue shed such luster on the seminary of Saint Sulpice, also came from time to time to visit the "Bethlehem" of Vaugirard and to converse with its Superior; but before asking for him, he was always careful to inquire whether he might be at prayer or engaged in some exercise which required his presence. If such was the case, he did not allow anyone to inform De La Salle of his arrival, and contented himself with asking after his health. . . . If he was told that De La Salle could easily leave off what he was doing, he would go into the garden, and kneeling would wait there for his disciple; for it was he whom the pious Founder had chosen as his spiritual director in lieu of Tronson. As the Brothers' community at Vaugirard was not far from the country house belonging to the junior seminary of Saint Sulpice, which is located in the neighborhood, De La Salle sometimes went there to consult Baüyn, the superior of this establishment, replacing Brenier who at that time resided at Angers. (CL 7: 330)

Blain describes an occasion in the summer of 1695 when the two priests brought their communities together:

> Once, during those same holidays, the ecclesiastics of the Saint Sulpice minor seminary and the Brothers saw their two superiors officiate one after the other, celebrating the sacred mysteries. This was on the feast of Saint Lambert, the patron of the Vaugirard parish. The Blessed Sacrament was exposed. Baüyn had brought his community there to attend Mass, and De La Salle had done the same with his group. . . . Baüyn celebrated holy Mass first and gave communion to his seminarians. . . . De

> La Salle celebrated Mass in his turn and gave communion to his followers. . . . On beholding these two saintly priests one might have thought he saw two seraphs. (CL 8: 104)

Shortly after this incident, Father Baüyn's health gave out, and he died on March 19, 1696. Father Tronson, in a letter dated a few days later and addressed to one of the priests under his direction, wrote as follows: "You should not forget what we owe to our dear departed Father Baüyn. One of the last things he said was that he could die in peace because he had always lived under obedience. That is my wish for you, that you should one day die as he did after having lived as he did" (CL 41 II: 364 n.).

François Leschassier (1641–1725)

Born in Paris of parents whose families were ranked among the nobility "of the robe," he entered the seminary of Saint Sulpice in 1660. He joined the Sulpicians five years later and received the doctorate in theology in 1668, ranking as 7 out of 78 candidates. Over the years he exercised various functions for the Society of Saint Sulpice, including managing its finances, acting as consultor to the Superior General, and serving as spiritual director of the priests' community.

In the year 1700, Leschassier was elected to succeed Father Tronson as Superior General of the Sulpicians. The greatest challenge he had during his generalate was to maintain the strict doctrinal orthodoxy of the Sulpician establishments in the face of the Jansenist tendencies of Cardinal Noailles, the Archbishop of Paris. Leschassier died in 1725 at the age of 84.

There is no evidence to indicate that De La Salle had any significant contact with Leschassier during his stay at the seminary. Even later on, when De La Salle had to deal with Father De La Chétardie, the successor of Baudrand as pastor of the parish and De La Salle's "secret enemy," as Blain calls him, it does not seem that Leschassier in his role as Superior became involved in these disputes.

It was only after De La Salle's death, that Brother Jean, the Assistant Superior General to Brothers Barthélemy and Timothée, wrote to Leschassier asking for any information he could supply on the life and character of the Founder of the Brothers.

Leschassier replied graciously. He supplied from the seminary record (in Latin) the dates of entry (October 18, 1670) and departure (April 19, 1672). Then in French and in his own hand he added the following:

> He was first of all a faithful observer of the rule and exact in following the exercises of the community. He seemed very quickly to become detached from the world, even more than he had been on his arrival. His conversation was always pleasant and straightforward. It appeared to me that he never displeased anyone and neither did he do anything to bring reproach upon himself.
>
> When he came [back] to Paris, I noted how greatly he had made progress in all the virtues. All those who had known him saw the proof of this in all his conduct, above all in the patience with which he endured the attacks that were made upon his person and the setbacks he had to endure. (CL 41 II: 269)

This testimony of the fourth Sulpician Superior General is an indication of the high regard in which De La Salle was held in the seminary. Blain quotes the Brothers to show that their Founder for his part regarded the seminary just as highly:

> "It can be said to the credit of the Seminary of Saint Sulpice," declared the spiritual sons of De La Salle, who so often heard him express his inmost thoughts on the subject and listened to the praise he lavished on this great institution, "that there he acquired the spirit of God, that from Saint Sulpice he learned the virtues which all through his life shone forth in him with such luster. He always loved that training school for evangelical laborers and never spoke of it except with the warmest expressions of esteem and respect." (CL 7: 17)

There could be no better way to conclude this study of the years that De La Salle spent as a seminarian at Saint Sulpice in Paris than by the two testimonies just cited: the one of the seminary for the seminarian, the other of the seminarian for the seminary.

5

Candidate for Ordination

When John Baptist de La Salle entered the seminary of Saint Sulpice in 1670, he had already taken several preliminary steps toward the priesthood that today would be permitted only within the confines of a seminary. He had received the clerical tonsure when he was not quite 11 years old, had been installed as a canon in the cathedral of Reims at the age of 16, and a year later in 1668 he had received the four minor orders of porter, lector, exorcist, and acolyte. The circumstances and significance of these events have already been described in a previous chapter.

During the 18 months he was a seminarian in Paris and studying theology at the Sorbonne, De La Salle took no further canonical steps toward the priesthood except to follow the courses and profit from the formation program offered in the seminary. Both Blain and Maillefer, his early biographers, indicate that he was considering ordination to the subdiaconate when he learned of the death of his mother in July 1671.

Vocational Decisions

Less than nine months later, during the Holy Week retreat at the seminary, he learned that his father had died on April 9 after a brief illness. It must have been a shattering experience for the young De La Salle to have all his plans so totally disrupted, to have the very possibility of continuing on to the priesthood thrown into doubt.

His departure from the Paris seminary was for good. Maillefer describes it in these words:

> He resolved then to leave Paris, after being at Saint Sulpice for only 18 months, to return to Reims. His presence was needed at home in these circumstances. He was only 21 years old when he thus took charge of the family mansion and the education of his orphaned brothers, not to mention the domestic cares

> of the household. In all this his thought was of the will of God, which orders all things, and he submitted himself to it. (CL 6: 21)

This succinct statement glosses over the complex responsibilities that were suddenly thrust upon the young canon. For one thing, he was named in the father's will as executor and had therefore to see to the equitable distribution of the family inheritance. It now fell to him to collect and manage the revenue from the family's property holdings and investments. Although himself legally a minor —the age of majority at the time was 25— he assumed legal guardianship over his four brothers and two sisters. He not only had to provide for their education but also for the necessities of daily life and the little luxuries to which the family was accustomed.

It might easily be presumed that in the circumstances, De La Salle would have struggled through something like a vocational crisis. Even religiously, he might well have been inclined to interpret these events as a sign that God was directing him along another path. His contemporary biographers as well as more recent authors tend to stress this point. However, the documentary evidence would seem to indicate that he did not delay in taking measures to keep open the possibility of the priesthood as a viable option.

It was no doubt with this in mind that he determined at once to continue the theology courses that he had begun the previous autumn. In that way he would at least finish out the academic year, his third in theology. Since it was out of the question to return to the Sorbonne, he enrolled once more in the faculty of theology at Reims. The course then underway was being taught by Father Daniel Egan.

Ordination to the Subdiaconate

It was one thing to finish out the basic three-year requirements in theology; it was quite another to seek ordination to the subdiaconate. This has always been considered to be a major and definitive step toward the priesthood, a point of no return. The order of subdeacon carried with it then, as it still does today, the obligation of celibacy, obedience to the bishop, and the daily recitation of the Divine Office. De La Salle would not make such a decision lightly, nor would he make it alone. Blain tells us:

> Finally, he was accustomed to the Sulpician practice of not doing anything without permission and of sanctifying the least actions by performing them through obedience; hence he took care not to proceed in a matter of such supreme importance on his own initiative. Filled with these convictions, but being no longer a seminarian, he looked about for a man endowed with the spirit of Saint Sulpice to become his spiritual director. He found one in Nicolas Roland, a canon like himself and a theologian of the cathedral chapter. (CL 7: 128)

Maillefer tells us the result of the consultation:

> De La Salle, guided by this spiritual director, decided to overcome his own hesitancy. He was counseled to receive holy orders as soon as possible. As these were not given at Reims, he left in June of 1672 for Laon, but since ordinations were not being held there he went to Noyen, and from there to Cambrai, where on the feast of Pentecost he received the four minor orders and the subdiaconate. (CL 6: 23)

In this regard both Blain and Maillefer are in error concerning the conferral of minor orders. As we have seen in an earlier chapter, De La Salle had already received minor orders at the hands of the Bishop of Soissons in the palace of the Archbishop of Reims on Saint Patrick's Day in 1668. A document attesting to this event was submitted to the Congregation of Rites in 1835 as part of the process of canonization. Furthermore, in the personnel records of Saint Sulpice, De La Salle is listed as a seminarian with the titles of canon and acolyte (CL 41 II: 268).

The accounts of Blain and Maillefer are otherwise supported by a series of documents published by Brother Léon Aroz in the *Cahiers lasalliens* (CL 41 II). From these sources it is clear that after having obtained "dimissorial letters" from both the vicar-general of the Archdiocese of Reims and from the dean of the canons of the cathedral, De La Salle presented himself for ordination to the Archbishop of Cambrai, Ladislas Jonnart. The ceremony took place at Cambrai in the chapel of the archbishop's palace on Saturday of the ember week after Pentecost, the eve of Trinity Sunday, June 11, 1672.

In view of the canonical and symbolic importance of the order of subdeacon, the dates of these documents are worthy of some

Portrait of Nicolas Roland

attention. The dimissorial letters, clearing the way for ordination outside the home diocese, were issued in Reims on May 24 and May 27, 1672, little more than a month after De La Salle had returned to Reims following the death of his father. The ordination to the subdiaconate followed two weeks later.

This raises the question of just how much hesitancy, if any, De La Salle felt in taking such a decisive step toward the priesthood. Part of the reason for moving so quickly might have been the pressure of time. If he had delayed, he would probably have had to wait a whole year before ordination, scheduled by custom only during the octave of Pentecost, would again have been available. Roland might well have advised him not to let a whole year pass without a definite commitment to his sacerdotal vocation, despite the conflicts with the heavy and distracting duties laid upon him by his responsibilities to the family.

In this connection, it might be noted that Brother Bernard, the first of De La Salle's biographers, has the facts all wrong. Speaking of Saint Sulpice he says: "It was there in that house of God that he consecrated himself to God's service by receiving the order of subdeacon." Then Bernard begins his next chapter: "Our fervent subdeacon returned to Reims, but soon after left again for Cambrai . . . because the archiepiscopal see of Reims was still vacant. There he received the diaconate" (CL 4: 12).

There are three errors here. De La Salle was ordained a subdeacon not in Saint Sulpice but in Cambrai. The see of Reims was not vacant at the time, since Charles-Maurice Le Tellier had become archbishop in 1671. It was not the diaconate but the subdiaconate that De La Salle received in Cambrai.

While De La Salle was making arrangements for his ordination to the subdiaconate, he was also kept busy taking over the management of the De La Salle household and the care of his two sisters and four brothers. His youngest sister, Rose-Marie, had earlier in 1672 been accepted as a postulant by the Canonesses of Saint Augustine in the convent of Saint-Etienne-les-Dames at Reims. She was 16 years old at the time. Then on June 24, only two weeks after the ordination of John Baptist as subdeacon, Marie, the older sister, went to live with the maternal grandmother, Perrette Lespagnol, the widow of Jean Moët de Brouillet, who had died in 1670. She took with her their youngest brother, Jean-Remy, who was not quite two years old.

This left John Baptist with only three of his younger brothers to care for in the mansion on the Rue Sainte-Marguerite: Jacques-Joseph, who was 13 years old; Jean-Louis, who was 8; and Pierre, who was 6. But John Baptist remained the legal guardian responsible for the three siblings living away from home. Meanwhile, until August of that year, 1672, he continued to follow the theology courses of Daniel Egan at the University of Reims in order to complete the academic year that had been interrupted by the death of his father.

Resumption of Theological Studies

The only extended interruption in De La Salle's theological studies came in the academic year, 1672–1673. Although he did not reenter the university that year, there are some clues that he was preparing to resume his studies very soon. In December of 1672, he solicited from his former companions at the Sorbonne the certificates, referred to in a previous chapter, to prove that he had regularly attended the theology courses at the Sorbonne between October 1671 and April 1672. Then in July 1673 he obtained from Daniel Egan a certificate attesting to the fact that he had finished the remainder of the courses at Reims from April to October of 1672.

It might be well at this point to provide an outline or an overview of the entire course of De La Salle's theological studies. This may enable the reader to follow more easily the connection between what follows and what has gone before. Also, in view of the frequent intrusion of non-academic affairs into the life of De La Salle during this period, it is otherwise difficult to understand how his theological education had any unity or consistency. The best reconstruction possible on the basis of the documentary evidence is as follows:

1669–1670: First-year theology at Reims
1670–1671: Second-year theology at the Sorbonne
1671–1672: Third-year theology at the Sorbonne (interrupted in April 1672)
1672 (April–August): Completed third-year theology at Reims
1672–1673: Interruption; gathering documents
1673–1674: First-year advanced philosophy at Reims

1674–1675: Second-year advanced philosophy at Reims
1675 (August): STB—Bachelor of Sacred Theology
1676: First-year program for the licentiate at Reims
1677: Second-year program for the licentiate at Reims
1678 (January): STL—Licentiate in Sacred Theology
1680 (?): STD—Doctor of Sacred Theology

A parallel outline can help in following De La Salle in the canonical steps that he took toward the priesthood:

1661, March 11: Tonsure at Reims (age ten)
1667, January 7: Canon of the Reims cathedral
1668, March 17: Minor orders at Reims
1672, June 11: Ordained subdeacon at Cambrai
1676, March 21: Ordained deacon at Paris
1678, April 9: Ordained priest at Reims

Bachelor of Theology

Armed with the necessary documents, De La Salle was ready in October 1673 to resume his studies with a view to completing the requirements for the degree of Bachelor of Sacred Theology. What will strike the present-day academician as rather strange is the requirement of two years of advanced philosophy following upon three years of theology. This would seem to indicate the rudimentary nature of the courses in the first two years of philosophy and the three of theology. Additional grounding in more advanced philosophy was evidently looked upon as a necessary preparation for the advanced theological study required for the next degree, the licentiate.

No documents have been found to provide precise information about the content of the advanced philosophy courses that De La Salle followed from October 1673 until August 1675. All the records of such courses in similar institutions suggest that the course material was heavily dependent on Aristotle. It is not clear, in fact, how much time was devoted to formal instruction and how much to directed, personal study. At every stage of the program there was considerable time assigned for exercises in scholastic disputation and formal debate.

In August 1675, De La Salle was ready to present himself for the examinations for the bachelor's degree in Sacred Theology. According to the statutes, three examiners were appointed to verify his eligibility based on his clerical status, on certification that he had completed three years of theology and two of advanced philosophy, and on letters of recommendation from his professors.

The final examination proper, known as the *Tentative,* was public and oral. It could last as long as four hours. The session began with an exposition by the candidate of some thesis in the field of dogmatic theology taken from the *Book of Sentences* of Peter Lombard. Objections to the thesis would then be raised by both the professors and the more advanced theology students. The candidate would be judged by his mastery of the material, his ability to connect the thesis to related aspects of the field of theology, and his ability to respond to the objections using the dialectical skills proper to philosophical and theological reasoning.

At the end of the session, all those who had participated would then cast a secret ballot in writing. The successful candidate, as John Baptist de La Salle undoubtedly was, would then be given the diploma of Bachelor of Sacred Theology. As of August 1675, De La Salle could add this title to those of canon and subdeacon when required formally to identify himself.

De La Salle might have terminated his theological studies at this point since he had already completed more than was required for ordination to the priesthood. However, he decided to continue without interruption to meet the requirements for the licentiate. There was much prestige, of course, attached to the possession of academic degrees in theology, and they certainly enhanced the prospects for eventual promotion to high ecclesiastical rank. It is reasonable to think that at this time De La Salle had not altogether excluded that possibility.

Since the program for the licentiate was a two-year course reckoned by the calendar year, De La Salle would have presented himself for admission sometime before January 1, 1676. To be accepted, he had to submit to yet another oral examination by three professors to prove his competence in the areas of historical theology, speculative theology, church history, and Sacred Scripture.

Again, not very much is known about the precise content of the program of studies during this two-year period. Each candidate

had to prepare three theses: one in doctrinal theology, one in moral theology, and one on a controverted theological subject. These theses were not research projects in the modern sense of the word, nor were they written out or published. The emphasis was on thorough mastery of the topic in preparation for an intensive oral defense. It would be fascinating indeed to know what topics De La Salle chose to defend. Unfortunately there is nothing in the documents that have survived to give even a clue.

Apparently not much, if any, course work was involved in the licentiate program. The candidates prepared themselves for the most part by private study under the tutorial supervision of the professors. In addition they were required to participate in the frequent public theological disputations; candidates for the licentiate were specifically expected to raise oral challenges to the theses of the candidates for the baccalaureate.

The Offer of a Parish

In view of the emphasis on personal study, it is possible to understand how De La Salle could have found the time during his first year in the licentiate program to devote to other matters concerning his future career in the priesthood. He had barely been accepted at the university as a candidate for the licentiate when, in January 1676, he became involved in a bizarre plan that could have affected the entire course of his priestly life.

It seems that Father André Clocquet, onetime professor of philosophy at the Bons-Enfants, who was also a doctor of theology and pastor of the old Saint Peter's church in Reims, decided that it was time to retire to a life of solitude, prayer, and study, something he had long been looking forward to. He was trying to find someone to succeed him as pastor, someone of quality like himself, someone who would be worthy of the position. The post, incidentally, carried a reasonable stipend with no other duties, not even that of residence, except to see to it that Mass was celebrated twice a week in the parish.

The search for a successor rapidly focused on John Baptist de La Salle. Ever since his father's death, the young canon had for some years placed himself under the spiritual direction of Father Nicolas Roland, a fellow canon and the official theologian of the cathedral

chapter. Roland, only slightly more than eight years older than De La Salle, had never been content merely to fulfill his obligations as a canon in the formal liturgies of the cathedral. His apostolic zeal sought additional outlets in a variety of good works, notable among them the direction of a Community of Sisters devoted to the education of poor girls.

When Roland learned of the retirement plans of Father Clocquet, he sensed that here was a God-given opportunity to point his younger protégé toward a more apostolic ministry. The fact that De La Salle was only a subdeacon at the time was not an obstacle nor was it unusual for a cleric not yet ordained to the priesthood to be considered for a pastorate. It could always be arranged to engage someone to provide the minimal sacramental ministry until such time as De La Salle would receive sacerdotal ordination.

To give up the position of canon, however, in exchange for a pastorate was quite another matter. Blain explains:

> It is well-known how people in general look upon a canonry at Reims and in most provincial cities. To obtain one is the aim of all those whose families destine them for service of the Church and the desire of their families as well. Most of the time their ambition stops there. A canon's prebend fulfills their highest hopes for an established position. . . . By proposing that De La Salle should leave his canonry in order to become a parish priest, Father Roland was suggesting to him to come down a step or two in the ecclesiastical world and take a lower place in order to give the higher spot to another. (CL 7: 135)

There was a third party to the affair. Nicolas Roland had a friend, a certain Father Remy Favreau, who had the title and the revenues attached to the chapel of Saints Peter and Paul in the cathedral of Reims. To succeed to the canonry occupied by De La Salle would be a decided promotion for him. Favreau was apparently as anxious to become a canon of Reims as Clocquet was to retire to solitude, and as willing as De La Salle was to follow in blind obedience the advice of his spiritual director.

Accordingly, on January 20, 1676, the principals met at Châlons-sur-Marne in order to avoid undue pressure or publicity. A three-way contract was drawn up whereby De La Salle would surrender his canonry to become pastor of old Saint Peter's, Favreau would replace him as canon in the cathedral chapter, and Clocquet

would get title to the chapel of Saints Peter and Paul in the Reims cathedral. The document was signed by all the parties, notarized by Guillaume Rogier, the lawyer, and sent to Rome for ratification.

When word of the plan leaked out to the De La Salle family, the reaction was negative and intense. John Baptist, ever anxious to discern the will of God in such crises, found it necessary to make a trip to Paris to consult with his Archbishop, Charles-Maurice Le Tellier who, as a member of the royal court, spent a good deal of his time in the capital.

De La Salle no doubt expected that the archbishop would approve, especially since he was following the advice of his spiritual director and acting from the loftiest motives in his willingness to renounce his canonry. Furthermore, the contract had already been signed and forwarded to Rome. Le Tellier, however, had quite other views. Influenced perhaps by the De La Salle family, he commanded the zealous young subdeacon to abandon the project and not even to think about it any further.

Blain comments on De La Salle's response:

> This decision by the prelate was accepted by John Baptist as an order from God himself, and he submitted to the voice of his archbishop with the same docility that had made him obey the voice of his director. He had wanted to be a parish priest only because he thought that God was asking him through Canon Roland to make the change. As soon as Archbishop Le Tellier told him to forget about it, he no longer wished to be a parish priest. Later on he declared several times that he seemed to hear an inner voice which spoke in the same vein as the archbishop, one which told him that he was not called to be a parish priest. (CL 7: 136)

It is fascinating to speculate what might have been the outcome had the archbishop responded otherwise.

Meanwhile, Father Clocquet himself seems to have had second thoughts. He had been led to believe that the chaplaincy at the cathedral was a simple benefice similar to his own, with no obligation either to residence or regular sacramental ministry. When he learned that the title to the chapel carried with it the obligation of residence as well as a certain number of hours in attendance each day, he lost interest. This was the very burden he was trying to get away from. The lawyer Rogier was again called in. On March 3, 1676,

notice of termination of the contract was sent to the vicar-general of Reims, to De La Salle by way of his brother, Jacques-Joseph, and to Remy Favreau (CL 41 II: 374).

The Archbishop of Reims who effectively put an end to this strange affair was Charles-Maurice Le Tellier. His father had filled several important posts at the French court, including those of secretary, chancellor, and keeper of the royal seals. His brother Michel was the Marquis of Louvois and Minister of War under King Louis XIV. Once he entered upon an ecclesiastical career, Charles-Maurice himself was showered with rich benefices, including several wealthy abbeys. In addition, he managed to obtain the doctorate in theology from the Sorbonne in 1666 when he was 24 years old.

Two years later, in 1668, Le Tellier was appointed Coadjutor Bishop of Langres and only a few months after that was named Coadjutor with the right of succession to the Archbishop of Reims. His ordination as bishop took place in the chapel of the Sorbonne in the presence of the French queen. When Cardinal Barberini, the Archbishop of Reims, died suddenly in Italy in August 1671, Le Tellier came to Reims to take formal possession of the see.

His contemporaries describe Le Tellier as a man with many good qualities but also with some outstanding defects. He was noted for his haughty manner, his insistence on his privileges, both real and imaginary, his insensitivity to the feelings of others, and his hatred for and antipathy to those who opposed him. He was likewise a staunch defender of the rights of the Gallican church. At the same time, however, he was zealous for high standards in theological study and clerical discipline; he was faithful in making the canonical visitations and fulfilling his pastoral duties; he had published a series of liturgical manuals as well as catechisms for use in his diocese.

Le Tellier was influential at the royal court in Paris where he preferred to spend much of his time. He played an important part in drafting the response to the papal Declaration to the Clergy of France in 1682. He also played an influential role in the subsequent history of John Baptist de La Salle, helping him to obtain letters patent from the king for the Sisters of the Infant Jesus. He would also one day resist, albeit unsuccessfully, the determination of De La Salle to resign his canonry in 1683 in order to cast his lot with the teachers who had decided to call themselves the Brothers of the Christian Schools.

Major Orders and Advanced Degrees

Ordination to the Diaconate

There was yet another development in the year 1676 that may have been somehow connected with the collapse of the earlier plan to have De La Salle renounce his canonry in order to become pastor of the old Saint Peter's. On Saturday, March 21, 1676, the eve of Passion Sunday, less than three weeks after receiving notice of the termination of the contract notarized by Rogier, De La Salle was ordained a deacon. The ceremony took place in Paris, in the chapel of the archbishop there, and was presided over by a Capuchin, Bishop François de Batailler, acting for the Archbishop of Paris, François de Harlay de Champvallon.

Before being accepted for ordination, De La Salle had to obtain dimissorial letters similar to those allowing him to seek the subdiaconate outside his home diocese. One was issued by Charles-Maurice Le Tellier himself, who happened to be in Paris at the time. It is dated March 9, 1676. The other, from the dean and the canons of the cathedral chapter at Reims, is dated March 13 (CL 41 II: 383ff.).

The dates on these documents raise some interesting questions. Why, for example, did De La Salle delay four years after his ordination to the subdiaconate before receiving the next order in the sequence of holy orders? Possibly he was too occupied with family duties and his studies, especially in view of the time needed to prepare for the baccalaureate examination in 1675. Furthermore, why did he go to Paris to be ordained a deacon? Was it because he was already in Paris to consult with his archbishop on the pastorate of Saint Peter's that had been offered to him? Was Le Tellier's objection to the contract drawn up at Châlons related in any way to the decision to assume the diaconate, at once and in Paris? Was it Le Tellier's suggestion that De La Salle take this step then and there? Lacking any further evidence, the answers to these questions must be left to speculation.

Finally, after all this controversy and confusion, and more deeply committed than ever to his priestly vocation by ordination to the diaconate, De La Salle was able to resume a somewhat more normal routine. Blain tells us simply: "On his return home De La Salle

Charles Maurice Le Tellier, Archbishop of Reims

applied himself once more to his duties as a canon and to preparing himself through continual study, retirement, and prayer to carry out to the fullest extent the vocation God had given him" (CL 7: 136).

Maillefer says: "If this setback checked his ardent zeal, it did not disturb his routine. He continued to fulfill his duties as canon, to be faithful to the offices, and to persevere in his studies for the licentiate which he had begun the previous year" (CL 6: 25).That is not quite accurate: the formal program for the licentiate would have begun the previous January, not the previous year.

Licentiate in Sacred Theology

Further proof that De La Salle wanted to resume his theological studies in earnest is the fact that on June 2, 1676, he formally relinquished the guardianship of his younger brothers to Nicolas Lespagnol, a cousin of his maternal grandmother, Perrette Lespagnol, widow of Jean Moët de Brouillet.

It is evident that for a long time John Baptist had been trying to juggle too many responsibilities: as canon he had to be present frequently for functions in the cathedral; as candidate for the licentiate he had to go regularly to the university; as candidate for ordination to the priesthood he had to develop a spiritual life under the direction of Nicolas Roland; as executor of his father's estate he had to manage the family's finances; as guardian and tutor of his younger brothers he had to provide for their education. On April 30, 1676, De La Salle arrived at his legal majority, and this may have been a contributing factor in his decision to divest himself of some of the responsibilities inherited from his father.

In order to be able to transfer the responsibility for his younger brothers to his 65-year-old cousin, De La Salle was required by the bailiff of the Archdiocese of Reims to render an account of his guardianship during the previous four years. This he did in great detail in a lengthy document dated October 2, 1676. The discovery of this document in the municipal archives of Reims in 1964 by Brother Léon Aroz is one of the most significant discoveries in contemporary Lasallian scholarship. It has been published with an introduction and commentary in Volumes 28 to 31 of the *Cahiers lasalliens.*

This is not the context in which to describe the rich detail contained in the document. Suffice it to say that it gives evidence of

the meticulous care and administrative acumen that John Baptist brought to this responsibility.

To protect the family revenues, he was rigorous in dealing with debtors. When one community of religious women was in arrears with the rent, he brought them to court; at the same time he was generous and considerate in providing for the needs of his younger brothers and sisters. The time and energy that De La Salle devoted to maintaining the accounts with such precision make it all the more remarkable that he was able, at the same time, to move forward in his vocation to the priesthood.

In many ways the year 1676 was a hectic one for De La Salle. Somehow, in the midst of all these events he had to find the time to devote to the requirements of the first-year licentiate program. Among these would have been the defense of one of the required theses, either the *Patricienne* or the *Grande ordinaire*.

The thesis to be defended in the area of speculative theology was known as the *Patricienne* because the examination took place in the presence of the prior of Saint Patrick's College, the center for the faculty of theology at the University of Reims. The *Grande ordinaire* involved the defense of a thesis in the field of moral theology. One or the other had to be defended during the first year of the licentiate program. It is not known which one De La Salle chose to defend in 1676.

In the second year of the licentiate program, 1677 in the case of De La Salle, there were two oral examinations. The first centered on whichever of the two theses had not been defended the previous year. The second was known as the *Mineure ordinaire* or the *Aulique* because it was held in the great hall (*aula magna*) of the archbishop's palace. This required the candidate to defend a thesis on some theological topic that was considered controversial. It would be interesting to know what topics De La Salle chose to defend in these examinations, but unfortunately neither records nor references have survived.

All that is known for certain is that De La Salle completed successfully these and all the other tests required by the statutes for the licentiate in sacred theology. In January 1678, therefore, he was ready for the final ceremonies leading to the conferral of the degree. Principal among these was the "paranymph," as it was called. It took place on January 26, 1678. A broadside in Latin advertising this

formally conferred. This ceremony usually took place on the Monday before Ash Wednesday.

Considerable importance was attached to the rank assigned to the newly licensed. The rankings of some of the classmates of De La Salle at the Sorbonne who went on to obtain the licentiate degree there have already been noted in a previous chapter. Unfortunately no records have survived regarding the ranking at Reims.

Brother Yves Poutet speculates that De La Salle was not honored with the first rank, being known "more for his solid content than for his brilliance." Poutet thinks that the honor of first rank went to Jean-Baptiste de Y de Séraucourt, especially in view of his subsequent career as a distinguished prelate (OL 1: 366). Brother Léon Aroz dimisses this as gratuitous speculation without solid proof, perhaps in the hope that someday a document may turn up to reveal a more favorable judgment on the Founder's respective merits (CL 41 II: 415).

Three of De La Salle's fellow candidates in the paranymph went on to obtain the doctorate in theology and had successful ecclesiastical careers at Reims. De Y de Séraucourt eventually became vicar-general of the archdiocese. Nicolas Bernard became a pastor, first at Saint Martin's and then at old Saint Peter's, succeeding Father André Clocquet in the post that had been once offered to De La Salle.

Simon Amé remained at the Abbey of Saint Denis in Reims, where De La Salle would one day have an occasion to consult him concerning the foundation of the Sisters of the Child Jesus. André Picotte was not from the Archdiocese of Reims and nothing is known of his subsequent history.

Ordination to the Priesthood

John Baptist de La Salle began the season of Lent in 1678 as canon and deacon with a licentiate in sacred theology. On the last day of Lent in that year, Holy Saturday, April 9, 1678, he was ordained to the priesthood. The ceremony took place, not in the Reims cathedral as Blain and some later biographers say, but in the palace of the archbishop. Charles-Maurice Le Tellier himself was the ordaining prelate.

The newly-ordained Father De La Salle celebrated his first Mass the following day, Easter Sunday. Blain describes it:

> He said his first Mass the day after his ordination in the cathedral [sic] with no special fanfare. He wanted it that way in the hope of maintaining himself in total recollection, union with God, under the fresh impressions of the grace of ordination, and in full attentiveness to the movements of the Holy Spirit. . . . The air of sanctity which he wore on the occasion of his first Mass was not something that he quickly lost. He never lost it. (CL 7: 131)

Tradition has it that the first Mass took place in a side chapel of the cathedral dedicated to Our Lady. In 1951, on the occasion of the 300th anniversary of De La Salle's birth, the Brothers erected there a marble statue of their Founder to commemorate the event.

Doctor of Sacred Theology

After his ordination to the priesthood, there remained one final step to be taken by De La Salle to complete his theological formation. He had to make up his mind whether to bring his theological studies to term by seeking the doctorate in sacred theology.

In the universities of France at the time, and this is still true to some extent today in ecclesiastical schools throughout the world, the doctorate in theology represented prestige and the ability to pay the high fees more than it required further research or a more thorough mastery of the field. It was the licentiate that required more intense preparation, more comprehensive mastery of theological science, and more exacting examinations.

At the Sorbonne, for example, the fees attached to the doctorate were so high, as was the prestige attached to the degree, that the spiritual masters at Saint Sulpice often counselled their priests to renounce the doctorate as evangelical witness to humility and poverty.

It was expected, furthermore, that those who intended to go on for the doctorate would do so at once. Both at Reims and at Paris, the candidate who ranked first in the licentiate paranymph was eligible to take the doctoral examinations within six weeks. The others could follow in order in the weeks immediately following.

In this matter, as in so many others concerning his priestly and academic formation, De La Salle did not follow the usual pattern. He allowed at least two years to elapse before presenting himself

for the doctoral examinations. Again, some questions arise. Did he initially renounce the doctorate through humility and then change his mind? Was he, at this stage, still thinking of a distinguished ecclesiastical career such as his family connections, his clerical rank, and his academic credentials might lead him to expect?

Or did the death of his spiritual director, Nicolas Roland, and especially his assumption of Roland's responsibility for the Sisters of the Child Jesus, enter into the decision to postpone further theological study? Or did his initial contacts with Adrien Nyel and the teachers have anything to do with either the delay or the ultimate decision to go ahead?

All that is known for certain is that he did finally earn the doctorate. Even at that, the date is doubtful: Maillefer says 1680, Blain says 1681. Thus, Blain:

> This care for the schools which De La Salle assumed as an additional occupation, not really as part of his duties, still left him all the time he needed to acquire the high degree of knowledge and of virtue which would become so necessary for him when the schools eventually became his only concern. He had secured the licentiate sometime before this; he now passed the examinations, upheld his thesis, and fulfilled all the other requirements usual in the Reims theology faculty as in that of Paris; but he still had not received the doctor's cap. This he finally did in 1681 at the age of 30. (CL 7: 167)

Maillefer puts it this way:

> While these foundations [the first schools] were being made in such a way that he could watch over them without getting too involved, the necessary time passed after the awarding of the licentiate. He had now finished all the courses and examinations customary at Reims as at Paris in the theology faculty, so in 1680, after two years of study, he presented himself for the doctor's hood. (CL 6: 24)

Brother Léon Aroz prefers the date 1680, since it was in that year that De La Salle felt free enough to resume the guardianship of his younger brothers. Also, in 1680, De La Salle's commitment to the schools was not so total or so permanent as to exclude other options for a lifetime career in which the doctorate would be an advantage. Finally, by 1680 two years had already passed since he

had received the licentiate degree; a delay of three years would have been most unusual (CL 41 II: 472).

Both Blain and Maillefer seem to presume that an extensive period of study was required as preparation for the doctorate. The normal procedure after the licentiate, described above, indicates otherwise. Likewise, the statutes of the university indicate that the requirements were minimal: nothing much beyond the crucial licentiate, the willingness to pay the fees (not so heavy at Reims as at Paris), and participation in yet another lengthy and public oral examination, covering much the same ground.

The required formalities that constituted the doctoral examination took place in a single day (CL 41 II: 468ff.). The procedure began with a series of questions presented to the candidate by two bachelors of theology who at the time were themselves candidates for the licentiate. This exercise, known as the *Expectative*, lasted two hours.

Then in the late afternoon came the *Vespéries*. For this part of the examination the candidate would have had printed in six columns a series of theses covering all of Sacred Scripture, church history, and moral theology. Two of the professors, doctors of theology themselves, would then question the candidate for half an hour each on any of the theses in the printed list.

The presumption seems to have been that, having come thus far, the candidate would pass. In any case, the solemn ceremony of conferring the degree on the successful candidate would usually take place on the day following the *Vespéries*. All the professors and advanced students assembled in the *aula magna* of Saint Patrick's College, which would have been richly decorated for the occasion at the candidate's expense.

The dean of the faculty opened the ceremony by giving an oration in praise of theological study to which the candidate would respond. Then, kneeling in academic robes before the chancellor of the university, the candidate, in this case De La Salle, would take an oath swearing to uphold the Catholic faith including the Apostles' Creed, the Ten Commandments, the decrees of the ecumenical councils, and the seven sacraments. He would swear to abjure heresy and not to allow his future students to read salacious or heretical books. He would also swear to uphold the privileges and statutes of the University of Reims, and to reverence the Archbishop of Reims and the university authorities.

CUM DEO

CONFLUITE PRIMATES REMI

PARANYMPHUM

ÆQUIS ANIMIS (UT VESTRI MORIS EST) AUSCULTATURI.

QUANTO JURE

VIRI EGREGIE CORDATI

F. ac M. ANDREAS PICOTTE
D. ac M. JOANNES BAPT. DELASALLE.
D. ac M. JOAN. BAPT DE-Y de SERAUCOURT.
D. ac M. NICOLAUS BERNARD.
F. ac M. SIMON AME'

IN STUDIA THEOLOGICA

POTISSIMUM INCUBUERINT,

ORATIONE TRIPERTITA DEMONSTRABIT

PAULUS PICOT REMUS

ARTIUM DOCTOR, SACRÆ THEOLOGIÆ BACCALAUREUS ET PHILOSOPHIÆ PROFESSOR.

In Aula Patriciana Collegij Vniverſitatis Remenſis. Die 26. Januarij an. Domini 1678. horâ de meridie primâ.

The announcement of the paranymph for licentiate in sacred theology

particular paranymph was discovered in a bookseller's stall on the banks of the Seine in 1908 (CL 41 II: 407ff.).

The text reads:

IN GOD'S NAME
the elite of Reims are invited to come together
with their customary goodwill to attend a
P A R A N Y M P H
in order to hear how well the following
gentlemen, learned and gracious, have devoted
themselves dilligently to the
STUDY OF THEOLOGY

ANDREAS PICOTTE, M.A., religious
JOANNES BAPT. DELASALLE, M.A., cleric
JOAN. BAPT. DE-Y de SERAUCOURT, M.A., cleric
NICOLAUS BERNARD, M.A., cleric
SIMON AME, M.A., religious.

This will be made evident in a tripartite oration by
PAUL PICOT OF REIMS
Doctor of Arts, Bachelor of Theology and
Professor of Philosophy.

The ceremony will be held in the auditorium of Saint Patrick's College of the University of Reims on January 26 in the year of our Lord 1678 at one o'clock in the afternoon.

The word *paranymph* literally means a bridesmaid or a best man at a wedding. In its academic usage at Reims the word referred to the orator of the occasion, as well as to his discourse and to the compliments and challenges he would address to the candidates. They in turn were expected to respond. The ceremony was very popular and usually well attended. To it would be invited the canons of the cathedral chapter, the provincial court, the town council, members of civic and learned societies, and all the important people of the town.

A jury composed of several doctors of theology would be appointed to rank the candidates. At a later date the ballots would be opened in the presence of the candidates and the university officials. The respective ratings would be announced and the degree

The chancellor of the university at the time was Louis-Eléonor Tristan de Muizon, whose controversial appointment ten years earlier may have been the reason De La Salle left Reims to study in Paris. It was his role to place on the head of De La Salle the four-cornered and red-tasseled biretta of the doctor of theology. As his first official act in that capacity, De La Salle presided at the *Aulique,* or the *Mineure ordinaire* examination of one of the candidates for the licentiate.

It was in such an atmosphere of academic and ecclesiastical splendor that John Baptist de La Salle brought to a close the years of his priestly formation. Still functioning as canon and priest, he did not have long to wait before divine Providence would call him to use his talents, his theological acumen, and his spiritual insight in a milieu quite different from anything the solemn ceremonies in Saint Patrick's Hall would have led him to expect.

6

Newly Ordained Priest

Whatever may have been the human joy and spiritual elation surrounding his ordination and first Mass, or the Easter celebrations of 1678, John Baptist de La Salle was confronted very soon with a tragic loss. On April 27, less than three weeks after De La Salle's ordination on April 9, Nicolas Roland, his spiritual director, died. De La Salle was left to finish the work that Roland had begun some years before in an attempt to organize a community of Sisters in Reims for the education of poor girls.

Ministry to the Teaching Sisters

The Influence of Nicolas Roland

Distantly related by marriage, De La Salle and Roland came from somewhat different educational backgrounds. Roland, born in December 1642, and the older of the two by more than eight years, received his education in the humanities at the Jesuit College in Reims, the archrival of the Collège des Bons-Enfants. He did his philosophical and theological studies in Paris, but it is not known exactly where. During that time he did not live in a seminary, but lodged as a boarder in the home of a carpenter (CL 38: 53ff.).

On his return to Reims, Roland was named a canon of the cathedral in 1665, about a year before De La Salle received the same honor. This circumstance would have brought the two more closely together. Most probably, however, it was not until De La Salle returned from Paris in 1672 that he took Roland for his spiritual director. Under Roland's guidance, De La Salle doggedly, if intermittently, pursued his priestly vocation during the turbulent years that culminated with his ordination in 1678.

More important still, Roland was a major influence in introducing an apostolic dimension into the spirituality of his young protégé. The abortive attempt in 1676 to have De La Salle exchange his canonry for the ministry of a parish priest is the earliest evidence

of this. The culmination came in Roland's dying wish to leave in De La Salle's hands the community of the Sisters of the Child Jesus and the fate of their apostolic work.

Roland himself had become interested in the apostolate of gratuitous schools for the poor as early as 1668. In that year Charles Démia had renewed his *Remonstrances* to the influential leaders of the city of Lyons, demanding that priority be given to the education of the children of the poor (CL 38: 53). Struck by the urgency of Démia's message, Roland went to Rouen where he made contact with Father Barré, whose Sisters of Providence were already actively engaged in schools for poor girls. There he met Madame Jeanne Dubois Maillefer, a distant relative of De La Salle, who shared with Roland her dream of establishing similar gratuitous schools for poor girls in her native Reims.

On his return to Reims, Roland found that the civil authorities were not at all enthusiastic about such a project: there were already too many religious and charitable institutions in the city for its limited resources to support. Not one to give up easily, Roland

The archbishop's palace in Reims, where John Baptist received tonsure in 1662 and was ordained to priesthood in 1678.

devoted more and more of his own time and money to assisting the orphanage for poor girls that had already been founded some years before by Madame Apolline Varlet.

Roland's plan was gradually to transform the orphanage into a center for the education of poor girls. For this to succeed, he realized that he needed a stable community of dedicated and apostolic teachers, similar to those he had seen at Rouen or, even earlier, at Saint Nicolas du Chardonnet in Paris.

A major step forward in the foundation of such a community came in 1670 with the arrival in Reims of two dedicated women, Françoise Duval and Anne Lecoeur, with considerable experience in conducting schools for poor girls in Rouen. The enterprise began to prosper. Despite his poor health, and sometimes to the detriment of his choir duties as canon, Roland was tireless in his efforts to overcome the considerable opposition of the city officials.

Roland was not entirely lacking in support for his venture. A solid financial base for the institution was provided through generous donations from Father Remy Favreau, the titular to the chapel of Saints Peter and Paul in the Reims cathedral, the very one who would have succeeded De La Salle in his canonry had not the ill-fated deal of 1676 fallen through. Roland was equally successful in winning the support of Archbishop Le Tellier for the new community, the Sisters of the Holy Child Jesus as they came to be called.

The next step would be to obtain *lettres de cachet* from the royal court. These were required before any application could be drawn up and supporting testimony obtained as a basis for granting the letters patent that would bring legal incorporation. Between November 1677 and March 1678, Roland was in Paris pleading desperately with influential friends and highly placed relatives to help him obtain the indispensable documents. But his entreaties fell on deaf ears.

Very much discouraged, Roland returned to Reims on April 6, Wednesday of Holy Week in 1678, to find that an epidemic of purple fever had broken out among the Sisters. Although in poor health himself and thoroughly exhausted from his labors in Paris, he devoted all his energy to the pastoral care of the sick Sisters. And surely he was present at John Baptist de La Salle's ordination on April 9 and at his first Mass the following day, Easter Sunday.

Executor of Roland's Will

Roland himself fell ill on April 19. De La Salle and Nicolas Rogier, a young deacon and fellow canon, came to visit him. Realizing that he was dying, Roland asked that they be the executors of his will. They agreed. The will was drawn up on April 23. Four days later Roland was dead. He was only 35 years old (CL 38: 93ff.).

There is reason to wonder why Roland chose De La Salle to be his executor. De La Salle was not yet 30, only recently ordained and relatively inexperienced. The fate of the Sisters' community and their apostolic work was very precarious at the time and a weighty responsibility for one so young.

There were others considerably more qualified: many of Roland's own relatives, for example. There was Father Remy Favreau, who had provided so generously for the financial support of the community; or Guillaume Rogier, son of the royal notary, the older brother of Nicolas, a doctor of theology, fellow canon of Reims and longtime friend and companion of Roland.

In hindsight, of course, it is easy to see the hand of divine Providence in Roland's choice of De La Salle. Perhaps some dying instinct prompted Roland to seize this last opportunity to engage the apostolic zeal of his young protégé in the work of education for the poor to which he himself had sacrificed his fortune, his energy, and his life.

Letters Patent for the Community of Sisters

Immediately after Roland's death, Archbishop Le Tellier took matters into his own hands. Nicolas Rogier was appointed to succeed Roland as theological preacher of the cathedral chapter. Since De La Salle was not of canonical age, Le Tellier appointed Guillaume Rogier to be the religious superior of the Sisters. De La Salle was, however, confirmed as executor of the will. In this capacity he was commissioned to see to the welfare of the community of the Sisters and "to negotiate with the various bodies in the city in whatever formal arrangements would be necessary to have the community legally established" (OL 1: 547).

Before any serious negotiations could begin, it was necessary to have the crucial *lettres de cachet* that Roland had been trying

in vain to obtain from the royal court. Once Le Tellier became personally involved, the documents came from Paris within a matter of days. On May 9, 1678, they were delivered to the city council of Reims by the archbishop.

It was at this moment that the real work of De La Salle and the young Rogier began. As he had done in the guardianship of his younger brothers and sisters, De La Salle proved himself once again to be an efficient administrator, thorough in his attention to detail, effective in bringing about results. The first task was to draw up for the council a full account of the assets, liabilities, legacies, and obligations of the Sisters' community. More difficult still was to draw up constitutional articles that would be faithful to the intentions of Nicolas Roland and at the same time satisfy the suspicious civil authorities.

Some of the major issues to be settled were the following: that the Sisters of the community retain their lay status without cloister and without solemn vows; that their number be limited to between 20 and 30; and that they be independent financially and responsible for finances only to the archbishop. Control over those to be admitted to the orphanage and to the classes, the age limits, and the disposal of patrimonial goods had to be shared with the city council. Finally, the conduct of the gratuitous classes was to be strictly limited to the Sisters themselves without outside assistance.

The preparation of all the necessary data and documents occupied De La Salle and Rogier for the better part of three months. It was only in August 1678, motivated no doubt by the support of the archbishop, that the city council and subsequently the assembly of all the pastors and religious superiors of Reims gave their consent. In an official decree, the council voted that the royal court in Paris should be notified that "the establishment of the aforesaid house and community of lay Daughters under the name of the Holy Child Jesus for the purpose of keeping gratuitous schools will be very useful and advantageous to the public at large" (CL 38: 98).

Six months later, in February 1679, the letters patent arrived bearing the signature of King Louis XIV and the royal seal, thus giving legal recognition to the community of Sisters and their apostolic work. As the *Mémoire* describing the history of Roland's foundation puts it: "The community owes its origin to Father Roland, it owes its progress to the conscientious efforts of Father De La Salle,

and its stability to Archbishop Le Tellier" (CL 38: 98). To this day the portraits of Roland and De La Salle hang side by side in the parlor of the Sisters' Motherhouse in Reims as testimony to the two men whom they revere as their cofounders.

In their biographies, both Blain and Maillefer give extensive treatment to the efforts of De La Salle on behalf of the Sisters and the importance of Le Tellier's influence in obtaining the letters patent. Sometimes, however, they give the impression that very little had been done until De La Salle took over the negotiations. On the contrary, documentary evidence shows that several years before his death Roland himself, and not De La Salle, had won Le Tellier over to the Sisters' cause. By that time Roland had also succeeded in considerably weakening the opposition of the city council, especially in view of the financial support he was receiving from Remy Favreau.

What is more important than De La Salle's admitted contribution to the Sisters is the effect on him of his involvement in their affairs. His desire to understand and to make his own the apostolic vision of Roland brought him into contact with Father Barré and his work with schools for the poor in Rouen. Since De La Salle had to prove to the authorities the urgency of gratuitous schools for the poor, he himself was forced to ponder the challenges in the *Remonstrances* of Charles Démia.

Furthermore, the negotiations for the letters patent brought De La Salle, just recently ordained, into closer contact with his own archbishop as well as with the civic leaders, the pastors, and the religious superiors of Reims. It would not be long before all of this experience would be relevant to an enterprise of his own.

De La Salle's contact with the Sisters did not end with the granting of the letters patent. He frequently said Mass for them and otherwise provided for their spiritual needs as a substitute for Father Guillaume Rogier, the titular chaplain and ecclesiastical superior, who had a parish of his own to care for. Although the Sisters had control of their own finances, De La Salle continued to act as advisor in this and other temporal matters that had been his responsibility during the time he was acting as executor of Roland's will (CL 38: 103).

It was thus in March 1679 that Providence provided the opportunity for the Sister Superior, Françoise Duval, to introduce De

La Salle to Adrien Nyel, who had just arrived from Rouen. That encounter in the parlor of the Sisters' convent was destined to change the entire course of De La Salle's life.

Priestly Ministry

Although the duties associated with his role as executor of Roland's will occupied a considerable amount of De La Salle's apostolic energy, it should also be kept in mind that he fell rather easily into the routine of priestly ministry, as any newly ordained priest might do today.

Sacramental Ministry

Central to this ministry would be the daily celebration of the Eucharist. That De La Salle was faithful to this practice is affirmed quite explicitly in the early biographies. Maillefer says:

> He appreciated the offering of the holy sacrifice so much that he made it a point to say Mass every day of his life. He never omitted it, except when forced to do so through sickness. (CL 6: 25)

Blain waxes eloquent on the devotion De La Salle brought to this sacred function:

> The air of sanctity which he wore on the occasion of his first Mass was not something that he quickly lost. He never lost it. . . . People used to come to his Mass to be edified and touched so as to share his piety. . . . They waited for him when he left the altar to profit by the graces which he had received during Mass. (CL 7: 131)

Besides these descriptions of his manner of presiding at the Eucharist, there are documents that help us to visualize more clearly some of the other ministries that De La Salle exercised during the first year or two after his ordination in 1678.

The first of these documents authorized De La Salle to preach and to hear confessions in the Archdiocese of Reims. It is dated June

29 (presumably 1678) and is signed personally by Charles-Maurice Le Tellier, the archbishop. These "faculties," as they are called, were valid until October 18, 1680, at which time they would be renewed (CL 41 II: 461ff.).

Canon of the Week

Another document from the year 1678 refers to one of the privileges De La Salle enjoyed when it became his turn to function as Canon of the Week from August 7 to August 14 of that year (CL 41 II: 428ff.). There were certain lucrative appointments, "benefices" as they were called, over which the cathedral chapter of canons had control. If a vacancy occurred, it was the Canon of the Week who had the right to propose a candidate for the vacant benefice. The appointment would then have to be approved by the archbishop.

In the document dated August 8, 1678, John Baptist de La Salle, who was then functioning as the Canon of the Week, proposed the name of Nicolas Jouet to fill the vacant benefice attached to the church of Vaux-en-Champagne. The document indicates that the archbishop confirmed the appointment.

The duties that De La Salle had to fulfill as Canon of the Week are known from other sources. These duties were mostly liturgical and ceremonial. Solemnly proclaimed on the previous Friday, the designated canon was then required to renew his tonsure and to shave his beard.

De La Salle began his turn as Canon of the Week by presiding at the solemn Sunday vespers in the cathedral. During the week he presided at a variety of liturgical offices, with special attention to devotional acts required by the wills and legacies of certain benefactors of the archdiocese and the cathedral. On Thursday he celebrated a votive Mass in honor of the Blessed Sacrament. On Saturday the Mass was offered at Our Lady's altar, the very altar at which De La Salle had said his first Mass.

On the following Sunday, De La Salle presided at the morning office in the cathedral and the blessing of the holy water. In August 1678 this particular Sunday fell on the vigil of the feast of the Assumption of Mary. It is likely, therefore, if the usual custom was observed, that De La Salle carried the Blessed Sacrament in solemn procession through the streets to the neighboring churches

and back to the cathedral. He then celebrated Mass at the high altar of the cathedral, and so terminated his functions as Canon of the Week.

It is an interesting coincidence that the week in August 1678, during which De La Salle functioned as Canon of the Week, was also the week when the local authorities met to pass judgment on the establishment of Nicolas Roland's congregation of Sisters. On Thursday, August 11, De La Salle read Roland's will in the city council and did his best to interpret his intentions. On Friday, August 12, he had the difficult task of persuading the pastors and religious superiors of Reims to give their support to the application of the Sisters (CL 38: 96). It must have been a busy week for Father De La Salle.

Reception of Converts

A third document from the same year authorized Father De La Salle to receive a Protestant woman back into the Catholic Church (CL 41 II: 439). The woman was Suzanne Périeux from Elmoru in the diocese of Châlons-sur-Marne. Little is known about her. She did have a sister named Marie who had also returned to the Church on the occasion of her marriage to a Catholic.

The dioceses of Reims and Châlons-sur-Marne were located in northeastern France, close to the German border. Part of the territory had belonged to Germany at various times and was heavily populated with Protestants. Both Archbishop Le Tellier of Reims and Bishop Vialart de Herse of Châlons had made it their policy to try to win the Protestants in their territory to the Catholic faith. Conversions of this kind, therefore, were not unusual.

This particular document involving De La Salle is dated December 22, 1678. It is essentially a printed form with names and dates filled in the blank spaces. It gave to John Baptist de La Salle the authorization "to absolve from reserved sins and cases reserved to the bishop, including that of heresy." It is signed by "De Y," that is, Jean-Baptiste de Y de Séraucourt, now vicar-general, who had been a candidate with De La Salle at the paranymph earlier in the year.

Like so many others, this document raises more questions than it answers. What were the motives for Suzanne's conversion? Had

she come to De La Salle for special guidance and instruction? Why did she come to Reims to be received into the Church instead of in her native diocese of Châlons? Was it because De La Salle had already a reputation for dealing with difficult cases in the sacrament of reconciliation? It is tantalizing to speculate on the possibilities.

Scandal in the Cathedral Chapter

There is yet another incident involving De La Salle as a young priest that can now be clarified and dated with accuracy on the basis of the documents that have recently come to light. Blain refers to it obliquely and tells the story in his typical moralizing style:

> On one occasion the young minister of the Lord gave proof of his zeal by censuring an ecclesiastic who gave bad example; this led to his being criticized and to a good deal of gossip on the part of those idle people who make slander their habitual occupation and are never inclined to give a verdict in favor of true piety. De La Salle tried in every possible way and in the gentlest fashion to make this man realize what he was doing. When he saw that his charitable admonitions were without result, he finally drew the weapons of zeal and showed the delinquent that charity can be stern; but this he did in secret in a personal conversation, as Jesus Christ ordains, for fear of embittering the guilty one and of scandalizing others.
>
> This secret rebuke having proved as unavailing as the previous admonitions, De La Salle judged that it was time to bring the matter into the open in order to do away with the occasion of scandal for others if he could not convert the scandal-giver. He did not succeed in this latter endeavor, but he met with success in the former; he reprimanded the incorrigible person publicly and with so much energy that the latter left Reims, preferring to change his residence rather than his way of living. (CL 7: 134)

The "ecclesiastic" in this case was a fellow canon of the cathedral, César Thuret by name. On August 16, 1678, De La Salle accused him in the cathedral chapter of living in concubinage with a servant girl. As a result of the denunciation, the chapter appointed two priests of the diocese to look into the matter. De La Salle was

Reims in the time of John Baptist de La Salle

not satisfied, since he did not trust the impartiality of the two investigators who had been appointed. Thereupon, on August 23, the chapter appointed Robert Le Large, the dean of the chapter, and Charles Bernier, one of the canons, to take charge of the investigation.

These facts are detailed in a document signed by Thuret, in which he protests his innocence and objects to the procedures established as a result of his denunciation by "Father De La Salle, a canon of the aforesaid church" (CL 41 II: 446ff.).

Apparently this denunciation of a veteran canon by the young priest was not well received in ecclesiastical circles. Blain has indicated that De La Salle's action was not very popular. Maillefer has a similar judgment:

> He was not likely to fall into that neglect of duty which occurs with churchmen who lead too secular a life. His zeal in bringing such men to task appeared excessive to the eyes of the worldly-minded, who judge of things only by their own passions, but he knew how to ignore the judgment of men when it did not conform to the will of God. (CL 6:27)

Popular or not, the investigation was thorough and lasted several months. It is described in detail in the document dated June 3, 1680, in which formal judgment is passed on the case. The delinquent canon was found guilty on the basis of the testimony of several witnessess, among them the girl herself, who came forward to testify against him.

Thuret was sentenced to make a yearlong retreat in a seminary that the chapter would designate. During this time he would be required to fast every Friday and to say the seven penitential psalms on his knees every day. He was enjoined not to leave the seminary under any pretext whatsoever. In addition all of his privileges as a canon were suspended, and he was forbidden to exercise any of his priestly functions for six months. He was warned that if he did not amend his life, more drastic penalties would follow.

Thuret refused to accept the sentence and appealed to Rome. The Vatican handed the case over to the ecclesiastical court in Paris. On May 12, 1681, that tribunal formally rejected the appeal. Whether or not, or in what place, Thuret performed the prescribed penance is not known. He resigned the Reims canonry the following August and accepted title to the chapel of Saint Gervais in Guise.

As Blain remarks in the passage cited above, "rather than change his way of life he decided to change his residence" (CL 7: 134).

Father De La Salle at Home

One more aspect of De La Salle's daily routine in his early years as a priest should be mentioned here. The biographers seem to suggest that he turned the family residence little by little into a center where some of his fellow priests could gather for longer or shorter periods to discuss common problems, to pray together and share a common community experience.

Blain quotes De La Salle's words to Adrien Nyel on the occasion of their first meeting: "Come and stay with me. My home is a residence where parish priests from the country and other priests, friends of mine, often stay" (CL 7: 162). In an earlier section of his work, Blain gives an idea of what the De La Salle household was like with John Baptist at its head:

> Young as De La Salle was, he always liked to live by rule; regularity, a cherished virtue, governed all his conduct. He had seen this attitude exemplified at Saint Sulpice and from the first had profited by this manner of acting. . . . He liked everything to be done at the proper time: rising, vocal and mental prayer, meals, spiritual reading, other exercises of piety, and the various actions of the day.
>
> His canonical office was the central factor and the prime regulator of all the rest. At table he had good books to read. The wonder of it is that the young canon, through his example and his appealing manner, had succeeded in persuading his three younger brothers who lived with him to follow a lifestyle which resembled that of a seminary rather than that of a well-to-do household. (CL 7: 142)

With this glimpse into the daily routine of John Baptist de La Salle as a young canon and priest, it is fitting to conclude this survey of the educational forces that shaped his life. The household routine on the Rue Sainte-Marguerite in one sense reflects the formative years; in another sense it sets the stage for the foundation of the apostolic communities of consecrated teachers that were to become his greatest achievement. The world in which he had grown up was

about to come into conflict with the world of the poor, in which he would live out the remainder of his life. The challenge to conversion, to live the Gospel radically, lay just ahead.

The last word should go to De La Salle himself. He wrote: "God, who guides all things with wisdom and serenity and whose way it is not to force the inclination of persons, willed to commit me entirely to the development of the schools. He did this in an imperceptible way and over a long period of time, so that one commitment led to another in a way that I did not foresee in the beginning" (CL 7: 169).

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Brother Luke Salm, FSC, a Doctor of Theology, is professor of Religious Studies at Manhattan College in New York City and past-president of the Catholic Theological Society of America. An elected delegate to the 39th, 40th, and 41st General Chapters of the Brothers of the Christian Schools, Brother Luke, through writing and lecturing, is currently engaged in making available to a wider public recent scholarly research on the life of Saint John Baptist de La Salle and the early history of the Brothers' Institute.He served as translator and editor of *Beginnings: De La Salle and His Brothers* (1980); and with Brother Leo Burkhard, FSC, coauthored *Encounters: De La Salle at Parmenie* (1983). A scholar and author, Brother Luke has also written biographies of Saint Brother Miguel, Saint Brother Benilde, Blessed Brother Arnold, Brother Scubilion, and more recently, of Saint John Baptist de La Salle.