Lasallian Studies

5

AN INTRODUCTION TO THE HISTORY OF THE INSTITUTE OF THE BROTHERS OF THE CHRISTIAN SCHOOLS

THE ORIGINS 1651-1726

Brother Henri BÉDEL, FSC

Translated by Brother Allen Geppert, FSC

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LASALLIAN STUDIES 5

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Crêpy engraving, before 1730, based on the deathbed portrait. Photo E. Rousset, CL 49, 47.

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FOREWORD

The Origins 1651–1726 is the study of a period in the history of the Institute which the Lasallian Studies team is pleased to offer its readers in the three official languages of the Institute.

A few lines will be sufficient to outline the characteristics of this new **history of the Institute**. It is not meant to be an exhaustive work: its aim is rather to stimulate readers to pursue their studies further.

Brother Henri Bédel, the principal author of the work, is a trained historian. He became Visitor of Besançon when he was quite young, attended the 1967 General Chapter as a delegate, and was headmaster of a technical school. In order to improve the readability of his manuscript, he asked a group of experts and formators to read through his text and suggest improvements. I can vouch for the meticulous care with which he revised his text: he added new material, simplified certain sections and made it more accessible. The process followed calls to mind our predecessors who produced textbooks signed by "a group of teachers".

This will be even more the case when a manual of the whole history of the Institute is published. This manual will be aimed in particular at young Brothers whose mother tongue is not perhaps French, English or Spanish. The present book is the work of an historian who is anxious to put his readers into contact with the founding documents as accurately as he can. We are confident that this work will be of interest to a wide circle of educated readers, in particular among the Brothers and their Lasallian colleagues. If readers are interested, the team is prepared to publish three other volumes like the present one.

This volume, which begins with the birth of John Baptist de La Salle and ends with the granting of the Bull of Approbation, is not primarily a life of the Founder of the Brothers, even though it is mainly concerned with him. Its main purpose is to show, by telling his life, **how the Institute of the Brothers of the Christian Schools came into existence** and developed its organisational structures. It is unfortunate perhaps that the description of the principal Brothers is fairly superficial, and that the history of the various houses is only alluded to. They figure in our story, of course, but only insofar as they contribute to the birth of the Institute, whose history is traced in the course of this volume.

A consequence of this approach is that the material is both too abundant to be included in its entirety, and yet limited enough to be outlined in summary form. When the gradual development of a group of persons is involved, facts assume meaning only within the temporal framework of this development. Given this, we have organised chapters according to a fairly strict chronological order and, at certain points, have **inserted more detailed supplements** on topics which the committee thought needed fuller treatment.

These supplements can be omitted at a first reading. The table of contents at the beginning of the volume indicates where they are to be found.

Some readers may be surprised to find **some interpretation** of facts in our treatment of these historical documents. We believe that we have to show the same kind of critical judgment with regard to these documents as we do when reading a newspaper. The search for truth calls for the use of intelligence: it is not something that can be dispensed with. Our aim is to enable the reader to tackle the actual source documents by himself one day and not have to rely entirely on manuals which, by their nature, are obliged to adopt one or other point of view without giving sufficient reasons for their choice.

By adopting this approach, we hope to encourage **the critical judgment that is necessary**. We are convinced, as the Rule says, that the Holy Spirit manifested himself in a special way in the life, work and writings of St John Baptist de La Salle and subsequently in the living tradition of the Institute (Rule, art. 4).

BROTHER ALAIN HOURY
DIRECTOR OF LASALLIAN STUDIES

PREFACE

THE SOURCES OF OUR KNOWLEDGE OF THE ORIGINS OF THE INSTITUTE

Introduction

Before beginning a study of the origins of the Institute, it is useful to ask ourselves on what our knowledge is based. Initially, the history of these origins is closely bound up with that of the Founder of the Institute, St John Baptist de La Salle. This explains the exceptional importance of the information provided after his death by those who knew him. The essential elements of this information are to be found in the works of the first three biographers, hence their importance.

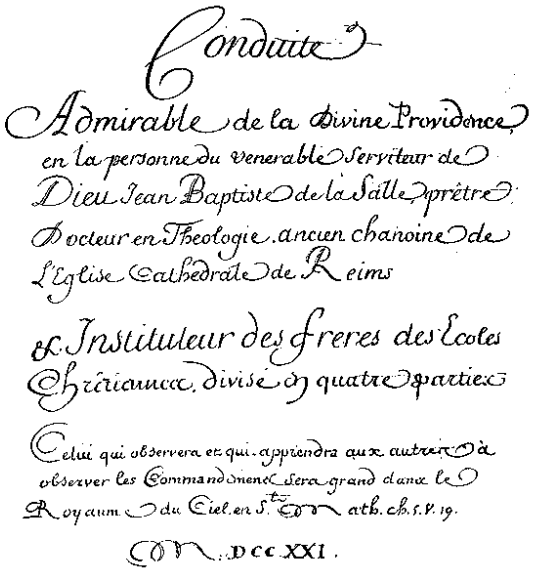
The knowledge we gain from the first biographers is complemented and extended by the documents and various writings of John Baptist de La Salle, and by others relating to the origins of the Institute. These documents, which were used to a greater or lesser extent by the biographers, are a most valuable source of information.

We have also at our disposal the results of research into other contemporary documents. These documents can help to corroborate or correct the information used by these biographers, and fill out the information contained in documents relating to the beginnings of the Institute.

The writings of the first biographers

Shortly after the death of John Baptist de La Salle, Brother Barthélemy, his successor as head of the Institute, set about gathering information from those who knew him, and other documents, with a view to having his life written.

Brother Bernard, entrusted with the task of collating the material gathered, produced a first text which was limited to the years 1651–1687. The title page is reproduced here.


Conduite
Admirable de la divine Providence
en la personne du venerable Serviteur de
Dieu Jean Baptiste de la Salle prêtre
Docteur en Theologie ancien chanoine de
l'Eglise Cathedrale de Reims
& Instituteur des freres des Ecoles
Chrétiennes divisé en quatre parties
Celui qui observera et qui apprendra aux autres à
observer les Commandemens sera grand dans le
Royaume du Ciel. en S.t Matth. ch. 5. v. 19.
M. DCC. XXI.

Two years later, in 1723, he produced another text which this time was complete. De La Salle's brother, Canon Jean Louis de La Salle, was asked to look at both manuscripts. The family and friends of the Canon were not happy with the texts. As a consequence, **Dom François Elie Maillefer**, a nephew of John Baptist and Jean Louis, undertook to write a life of John Baptist de La Salle (*La Vie de Monsieur Jean-Baptiste de La Salle*), basing himself closely on Bernard's texts. Maillefer's text was ready to be printed in 1723, but remained in manuscript form.

The superiors of the Institute obtained the Maillefer text and entrusted it, together with the material gathered by Bernard, to a priest from Rouen, a certain **Canon Jean Baptiste Blain**, asking him to write a life along the lines they specified. In 1733, a work in two volumes was published in Rouen with the title *La Vie de Monsieur Jean-Baptiste de La Salle, Instituteur des Frères des Écoles Chrétiennes.*

Dom Maillefer, unhappy that his text had not been returned to him, produced another one in 1740, which included certain modifications.

The following table shows the relationship between these different texts:

	Bernard	**Maillefer**	**Blain**
1721	1st text — partial		
	↓		
1723	2nd text — complete →	1st manuscript	
		↘	
1733		↓	Printed life
		↙	
1740		2nd manuscript	

♦ Maillefer uses Bernard's texts as his chief source of information.

♦ Maillefer's first manuscript is given to Blain who borrows from it.

♦ Maillefer obtains a copy of Blain's printed text. In the introduction to his 1740 manuscript, Maillefer complains that Blain "had no scruples about copying my work word for word in certain sections, and did not think it his duty to inform me of this" (CL 6, 17).

♦ Maillefer, in his turn, borrows certain things from Blain, which he incorporates into his 1740 text.

The short summary above is sufficient to show that, either directly or indirectly, all three biographers used basically the same source material. They each used the material in a way that suited them, and at times they contradict one another.

Since the value of their texts depends on the accuracy with which they used the information they were given or the documents they used, it is important to check this accuracy as far as possible.

One way of doing so is to check the information provided by the biographers against original documents or trustworthy copies that have come down to us.

In the 17th and 18th century, the title of ***Instituteur**** of the Brothers of the Christian Schools, given to John Baptist de La Salle by his biographers, was understood as meaning "a person who institutes, who establishes something".

In our own days, we say that he is the Founder of the Institute. In the 17th and 18th century, this term had a different meaning which will be explained later. That is why, at least in the first part of this work, this term will be avoided. Instead we will use De La Salle, or John Baptist de La Salle. The term "saint" will not be used to refer to him in the part of the work dealing with his life.

For the sake of simplification, the biographers will be referred to as Bernard, Maillefer and Blain.

The other sources

A certain number of documents go back to the beginning of the Institute, and these are a good source for the history of the origins of the Institute. Others come from De La Salle himself. Others come from persons who had them in their possession, like those who had received letters from him. And there are also official documents.

We do not know what proportion of the original documents going back to the origins of the Institute is now in our possession. The reason for this is that a great number of the Institute archives were destroyed or dispersed during the French Revolution. It is fortunate that the most precious documents were saved by a certain Brother Vivien who, throughout this troubled period, kept guard over a trunk filled with documents and objects that had been entrusted to his care.

As time went on, other biographies of St John Baptist de La Salle appeared, in which their authors attempted to complete or check the information given by the first biographers, on the basis of research into archival material.

More recently, research material has been published in the form of historical studies of John Baptist de La Salle and of the Institute. In particular, our knowledge of the origins of the Institute has been refreshed and completed on certain points, thanks to systematic research into such areas as De La Salle's family, friends and social background.

The present work will draw on these various sources, by using works which make them accessible. However, every now and then, we will make use of specific research regarding one point or another in order to complete the information currently available.

For quotations or references to the first biographers or various sources, we will use first and foremost the **Cahiers lasalliens**. Since 1959, most of the texts or documents concerning John Baptist de La Salle and the origins of the Institute have been published in this series. It has the advantage also of drawing attention to other works dealing with the same topics.

Quotations or references to this series will be indicated by the letters **CL** followed by the number of the Cahier (for example: CL 6, which contains Maillefer's biography).

The present work appeared after the completion of the **Complete Works** of John Baptist de La Salle (one-volume edition in French). When a text of De La Salle is involved, references to this work, either in its written or computerised form, will be given before those to the Cahiers lasalliens.

There are other references to a limited number of works which are thought to be easily accessible. These are almost all in French, and the references are to the standard edition. References to Poutet 1 or Poutet 2, are taken from one or other volume of *Le XVIIe siècle et les Origines Lasalliennes* (Rennes: Imprimeries Réunies, 1970).

The references given in the text are included in the bibliography .

INTRODUCTION

HISTORICAL CONTEXT

The period in which the Institute of the Brothers of the Christian Schools came into existence — a process intimately linked for the most part with the life of its Founder John Baptist de La Salle — has as its immediate context the history of France in the second half of the 17th century and the first quarter of the 18th.

In this introduction to the first volume we shall concentrate on two aspects of this context:

- a. The Socio-Political Context: the France of Louis XIV
- b. The Religious Context: the Spiritual Renewal in France in the 17th Century

a. The Socio-Political Context: the France of Louis XIV

In the wider context of Western Europe, the situation in France at the time we are concerned with was not much different from that of the other countries. However, in the second half of the 17th century and at the beginning of the 18th, during the reign of Louis XIV, the economic, social and religious situation in France was particularly significant.

The Economic Situation

In 1680 or so, with its 19 million inhabitants, France was the most highly populated country in Europe. Of this population, about 15 million were **peasants** whose work on the land produced between 80% and 85% of the total wealth of the country. Methods of farming had not changed since the 12th century when the discovery of how to harness horses made the use of the plough possible. The yield, however, remained low, and farming was to a great extent at the mercy of the elements. Most of these peasants lived in the country, although some (gardeners, vine growers) could be found on the outskirts of towns.

Craftsmen lived mostly in towns and exercised a multitude of crafts. Some of these sold what they produced (e.g., bakers) and were like **shopkeepers**, running small businesses. These activities had changed very little since the Middle Ages.

Other workers were employed in small workshops where they produced goods like textiles for **traders** who conducted trade both in their own country and abroad. This kind of work, known as ***manufacture****, was done in towns, but in some areas it was also done at home. It created wealth — at least for the traders — but this form of production readily slowed down or stopped completely in times of crisis or war.

All in all, it could be said that "of King Louis' subjects (Louis XIV) nine toiled in obscurity so that the tenth could indulge himself freely in more middle class or noble activities, or rather in idleness pure and simple" (Goubert 1966, 34).

The Social Situation

In 17th–18th century France, society was made up of **orders**, that is, of social groups organised according to a hierarchical scale, and to which members belonged not because of their productive work or trading, but because of acknowledged rights. This social order "which had been inherited from a tradition which recognised three basic roles in society — praying, fighting, working — was no longer comprehensible in modern times" (Mandrou, 90). It still existed, however, but it had undergone some changes since the Middle Ages.

The first order in terms of dignity was that of the **clergy**. Within this order, there were two groups which differed in both number and wealth. On the one hand, there was the "upper clergy". This group numbered about 100 members (bishops, abbots of large monasteries, canons, parish priests of well-endowed town parishes) who enjoyed large *bénéfices** (income resulting from the position they held).

On the other hand, there was the "lower clergy", a vast mass of village parish priests and priests attached to chapels who, in most cases, had to make do with the bare minimum of 200 livres a year that was provided for their upkeep.

The second order was that of the **nobility**. Some were nobles by reason of the property they possessed in the country. This property, which had been either inherited or acquired, entitled the owner to the title of "Lord", to certain rights and to a certain proportion of the produce of his land. There were nobles also who had become so by the purchase of a position which gave a right to the title (e.g., the position of Secretary to the King).

The third order, called the **third state**, included the rest and the vast majority of the population. Within this order there were two distinct groups.

The richest and most influential group was that of the **middle class**. This group consisted of members of the legal profession (notaries, lawyers), persons employed by the law courts or the royal administration, persons professing the liberal arts (doctors, writers) or connected with printing (printers, bookshop owners). Included in this group there were

also those who dealt in goods (traders, ship owners, bankers). Members of the middle class lived in towns, ran the town and parish councils, as well as charitable institutions and schools.

Below the middle class there were the **craftsmen**. These formed highly exclusive *corps** within their respective professions. There were the confraternities, concerned mainly with providing mutual aid, and the corporations, whose chief concern was the defence of the interests of the profession. Each group had its "master craftsmen", "companions" (workers) and apprentices.

There was also a well-established hierarchy among the various crafts, which depended on their profitability and the esteem in which they were held. Thus a shoemaker was more highly regarded than a cobbler who mended shoes. Craftsmen lived normally in towns, but some could be found in larger villages also.

The vast **peasant** population lived in the country. Of these, some were richer, as for example, those who could afford to feed draught animals. The poorer peasants were *manouvriers** (manual workers) whose only asset was their physical strength, and *journaliers** (journeymen) who were hired by the day.

Both towns and the country had their **poor**. These had no steady income and were supported by the local community. They were different from beggars and vagabonds, who did not belong to any social group.

The Political Situation

From the Middle Ages onwards, the Kings of France had enforced respect for their authority by means of the landed nobility, provincial governors and *parlementaires** (members of the *Parlement*). During the minority of Louis XIV, this structure of authority had almost been destroyed by various revolts known collectively in France as the *Fronde*.

When Louis XIV finally took over control of the affairs of the kingdom in 1661, he succeeded in imposing the principle of the divine right of kings. Believing that his relationship with his subjects was that of God's representative, he felt he was answerable only to God. However, "around the king, the fount of all law, but bound by the law of which he was the final court of appeal, a complete hierarchy of councils, bodies, posts and "charges amovibles"* (permanent positions) formed a bulwark against the arbitrary" (Chaunu 1966, 57).

There were three kinds of jurisdiction in the kingdom: **military** and local government; **judicial** *ressorts** dispensed by the parlements, presidial courts, bailiwicks or seneschalsy courts; **financial**, administered through treasury subdivisions. Each of the latter had an *intendant** (a direct representative of the King). The position of this representative had become a permanent and increasingly powerful post. The administration of the kingdom became more and more centralised.

The **first 25 years** of the personal reign of Louis XIV (1661–1685) were a period of great glory. As a result of two successful wars, the kingdom increased its size by almost a fifth. This period was characterised by great literary and artistic activity: it was at this time that the palace of Versailles was built. The country did not experience any great calamities or food shortage (that of 1684–85 was restricted to certain areas). On the other hand, the results of his minister Colbert's efforts to develop industry and commerce did not come up to expectations.

The final years of this period proved to be a turning point. With the encouragement of his minister Louvois, Louis XIV pursued a policy of annexation of towns (Strasbourg, for example), which led to the formation of a league of European nations opposed to France. At the same time, discriminatory measures against the Protestants became more frequent and culminated in the revocation (1685) of the Edict of Nantes with all its consequences.

The **second part** of the reign (1685–1715) was more difficult. In two long periods of war (1689–1697 and 1701–1713), France had to stand alone against a coalition of enemy nations. To meet the cost of these two wars, Louis XIV imposed new taxes (in particular, the capitation tax, payable, in theory, by all the members of the different orders). France went through two particularly disastrous periods: the famine of 1693–1694 which, together with the diseases that accompanied it, killed a million and a half inhabitants; and the extremely cold first months of 1709 whose consequences were still felt in 1710. The war led to the ruin of a certain number of manufacturing businesses which could no longer sell their goods. The revocation of the Edict of Nantes led to the departure of a section of the population that was particularly industrious, and resulted in the revolt of the Camisards in the Cévennes.

Moreover, the king's policies were beginning to arouse opposition in certain people like Vauban, for example, the builder of a number of forts. The king had to cope also with the opposition of the Jansenists when he tried to make them accept the Bull *Unigenitus*, in which the Pope condemned in 1713 the works of Quesnel. (The religious implications of this question will be dealt with later).

When the king died in 1715, the situation in France did not look promising at all, especially as his successor was his 5-year-old great grandson whose survival was in doubt.

As far as the life of John Baptist de La Salle and the beginnings of the Institute are concerned, it should be noted that Part One, entitled "**Preparations**", covers the period which includes the minority of Louis XIV and the first years of his personal reign.

The really significant part of the history of the beginnings of the Institute occurs in the second half of the reign, that is, during the period when France was experiencing major difficulties.

b. The Religious Context: the Spiritual Renewal in France in the 17th Century

The life of John Baptist de La Salle and the history of the origins of the Institute are closely connected with the spiritual renewal which bore much fruit in France, especially after the decisions of the Council of Trent were applied.

In a wider context, the spiritual renewal which characterised 17th-century France was part of a wider reform movement begun in the Church as a whole in the 16th century, in order to counteract, in particular, the advance of Protestantism in the Christian countries of the West.

The Catholic Reform movement which preceded and followed the Council of Trent and which affected mostly Italy and Spain in the 16th century, really got under way in France only in the 17th century.

The need for such a reform was deeply felt in the country. The intellectual elite had gone over to Protestantism; religious orders were very lax; the secular clergy were inadequate; the hierarchy, organised on the basis of the 1516 Concordat and recruited from among the nobility, lacked apostolic motivation; the laity had lost their Christian faith and were reverting to superstitious practices, even though they lived in a religious framework which had survived from the Middle Ages. It could be said that at the end of the 16th century, France was passing through a period of dechristianisation.

At the beginning of the 17th century, the Catholic Reform had not yet made much of an impact in France:

♦ "in French-speaking countries, people who wanted to lead a more active and profound Christian life had succumbed to the seduction of the Protestants" (Chaunu 1966, 485).

♦ the wars of religion which raged during the second half of the 16th century served to increase the fanaticism of the opposing parties rather than to deepen their faith.

♦ there was a delay in implementing the decisions of the Council of Trent. When these decisions were communicated to the Assembly of the Clergy held in 1615, the Church in France could in theory go ahead with their implementation. However, in virtue of "the freedom of the Gallican Church" (see *Gallicanisme**), the King did not consider these decisions to be binding: all decisions of the Holy See had to be officially ratified before they could have the force of law in the Kingdom.

The Catholic renewal movement in France went through **three main stages**.

The **first** consisted in the re-organisation of **religious orders**. Monastic reform had already started by the beginning of the 17th century. It affected the old monastic orders of

men, in particular the Benedictines, whose reformed monasteries grouped themselves into "congregations" (that of St Maur was founded in 1615). Abbeys for women religious were reformed also (Port Royal in 1609). Reformed orders or newly founded orders from Spain and Italy were introduced into France: the Capuchins arrived in 1573, and the Jesuits returned in 1603. "The most striking contribution involved women religious" (Chaunu 1966, 486): the Ursulines spread all over France from 1596 onwards, and the Spanish reformed Carmelites came to Paris in 1604.

The **second phase** of the Reform was characterised by "the establishment of a strong **secular clergy** dependent on a reformed hierarchy and accompanied by serious dogmatic reform" (Chaunu 1966, 486). The reforming decrees of the Council of Trent were intended above all to bring about this renewal. A large number of bishops began to implement decrees spelling out their duties regarding residence, pastoral visitation, the holding of synods. A parallel process of renewal began to restore dignity to the "lower" clergy: "ecclesiastical communities" were formed (e.g., St Nicolas du Chardonnet) and seminaries such as St Sulpice were established.

The **third stage** of the Reform stimulated by the Council of Trent had a profound effect on the **Christian laity**. This was the aim of the renewal of the clergy. Their efforts were directed towards infusing Christian life with a new vigour. And so, attempts were made to stimulate parish life and popular piety especially by means of "missions". However the most urgent task was to restore the faith as a guiding principle in the life of the people, for while the visible framework of life was Christian, the underlying reality was not. This explains the importance attached to the teaching of Christian doctrine to adults as well as to children.

By the time the Christian renewal movement had achieved its aims, its principal instigators had disappeared. However, the movement continued even after 1680, with men such as the Abbé de Rancé, the reformer of the Cistercians, with his base in the monastery of La Trappe; St Grignon de Montfort, who continued the work of the parish missions; and St John Baptist de La Salle.

But with time, this movement lost its impetus. Louis XIV's choice of bishops did not always coincide with the interests of the Church: some bishops spent more time at court than in their diocese. The support of the clergy for Louis XIV in his dispute with Pope Innocent XI from 1676 to 1689 served to weaken Catholicism. The Jansenists demonstrated their opposition to the Pope as well as to the king by rejecting the Bull *Unigenitus* in 1713, in which Pope Clement XI condemned Quesnel's *Réflexions morales sur le Nouveau Testament*. The division brought about by Jansenism among Catholics became worse. The disagreement between two leading bishops, Bossuet and Fénélon, on the question of Quietism wasted their efforts in a pointless exercise.

There was also Bossuet's attack on the Oratorian Richard Simon because of his critical approach to Scripture, which deviated from the Church's current interpretation. The first part of the century had seen the rise of rationalism. One of its chief exponents, Descartes, had tried to build up a theory which reconciled rational thought with Christian revelation and the teaching of the Church. Now, however, the teaching itself — still based on a system of theology established in the Middle Ages — was called into question.

Finally, the "libertinism" of the heirs of the Renaissance movement of neo-paganism, which had remained dormant during the last years of the reign of Louis XIV, came out into the open when Philippe d'Orleans, one its exponents, became regent during the minority of Louis XV.

The spiritual renewal which took place when the Catholic Reform finally reached France gave rise to a particular theological and moral movement.

Christians have always wondered what was the role of man in God's plan of salvation for him, given God's all powerful grace. There has always been the tendency to over-emphasise either man's contribution or the overwhelming power of God's grace.

And so, when this question was discussed in the 17th century, some people, and in particular the Jesuits (like Molina), insisted on the need to respond to God's grace in order to have salvation.

Others, in opposition to this first group, insisted they had found in the writings of St Augustine, and in particular in those condemning Pelagius, a doctrine according to which man, because of his irretrievably corrupted nature "was saved by grace alone" (cf. Chelini 1993, 199). They based themselves, in particular, on a work written by a Dutch bishop called Jansen (or *Jansenius* in Latin), entitled **Augustinus**.

At a time when the teachings of the Fathers of the Church were used more as authoritative arguments than as a witness to the faith of the early Church, St Augustine was an obligatory point of reference. **Augustinianism** inspired a very demanding morality and produced many examples of sanctity. However, when an excessively radical form of Augustinianism made its appearance in theological and, even more so, in political debates, it was called **Jansenism**.

PART ONE

PREPARATIONS (1651–1680)

1 Origins

Introduction

For a long time, our source of information regarding the birth, childhood and youth of John Baptist de La Salle was almost exclusively what his first biographers had written about him.

They had based themselves on first hand information brought to them or which they had gathered. Bernard, who admitted the lack of information at his disposal, wrote in his *Remarks on the life of M. de La Salle*:

> For this reason, letters were sent to Rheims to his brother and to Jean François his cousin. The latter wrote back giving some details about John Baptist's piety when he was very young (CL 4, 102).

The brother mentioned here is Jean Louis. As for his cousin Jean François, the only one of his 25 or so first cousins to have this name is Jean François de La Salle (1649–1726), the son of Simon de La Salle and Rose Maillefer (cf. CL 26, 43, Note 1, and CL 52, 22), who lived in l'Hotel de La Cloche with the family of Louis de La Salle. He was two years older than John Baptist and lived with him during his childhood (cf. Poutet 1970, 1:36), up to 1665, when John Baptist's family went to live in rue Sainte Marguérite.

Most of the authors correct Bernard's text by putting "Jean François, his nephew", and thus making him Jean François Maillefer, whose mother was Marie de La Salle, the sister of John Baptist.

The biographer Maillefer had contact with the people concerned, and yet he gives very few details about this part of his hero's life. Blain had at his disposal the information gathered by Bernard as well as Maillefer's first text. On the whole, however, the information provided by the biographers is fairly limited.

Fortunately, documents brought to light, in particular, by Brother Louis Marie Aroz, constitute another source of information which makes it possible to check or complete what the biographers wrote.

Birth

From the first biographies, we know that John Baptist de La Salle was born at Rheims, in Champagne, on April 30th 1651.

John Baptist was the first child of Louis de La Salle (1625–1672) and Nicole Moët de Brouillet (1633–1671) who were married on August 25th 1650.

The biographies agree that he was baptised on the day of his birth in the church of Saint Hilaire.

In the register which records his baptism, the entry for April 30th 1651 reads as follows:

> The same day, John Baptist, son of Monsieur Louis de La Salle, King's Councillor at the Court of Appeal, and Nicole Moët. Godparents, Jean Moët, esquire, Lord of Brouillet, Councillor at the above Court, and Perette Lespagnol, his wife. (CL 26, 228)

This document confirms the date of birth given by the biographers. In fact, in cases where the day of baptism did not coincide with the day of birth, church registers mentioned the fact explicitly (cf. CL 26, 229).

It also gives us a few extra details:

- about the parents,
- about the godfather and godmother. We are not told, however, that they are also the maternal grandparents of the child.

> Studies on the subject show that John Baptist de La Salle was born at the Hôtel de La Cloche or "de La Croix d'Or", on rue de La Chanvrerie, where his parents shared accommodation with the paternal grandmother, Barbe Cocquebert. This house has now become the Hôtel de La Salle. Another wing was occupied by Louis de La Salle's elder brother, Simon, and his family.
>
> John Baptist was baptised in the church of Saint Hilaire even though his house was in the parish of Saint Pierre le Vieil. In accordance with a custom of the time, children were baptised in the parish church of the godfather (cf. CL 26, 239).

The three biographers agree that John Baptist de La Salle was the eldest of seven children: five boys and two girls. Other sources indicate that four other children, three brothers and a sister, died shortly after their birth or at a very early age.

John Baptist was godfather to two of his brothers: Jean Louis, the second, and Pierre. His signature appears also as that of a witness on the burial certificate of his young brother, Simon (cf. CL 27, 65, 110–145).

Close relatives of John Baptist de La Salle

Grandparents	Lancelot de La Salle (1582–1651) + Barbe Cocquebert (1595–1653)			Jean Moët (1599–1670) + Perette Lespagnol (1614–1691)			
Parents	Louis de La Salle (1625–1672) + Nicole Moët (1633–1671)						
Surviving children	John Baptist 1651	Marie 1654	Rose Marie 1656	Jacques Joseph 1659	Jean Louis 1664	Pierre 1666	Jean Remy 1670
Other children	Remy 1652	Marie Anne 1658	Jean Louis 1663	Simon 1667			

Youth

Regarding the **childhood** of John Baptist de La Salle, the intention of the biographers was to edify their readers, and they restrict themselves to mentioning examples of his piety (cf. CL 4, 11 and CL 7, 118–119):

♦ his liking for church ceremonies: he re-enacts them when playing; he likes to attend them with his father; he is allowed to serve Mass at a very early age.

♦ he is interested in serious reading like the lives of the saints.

Bernard notes also his precocious mind:

> He gave the impression of having already reached the age of reason and, by the age of four or five, he had left his childhood and childishness behind (CL 4, 11).

As for Blain, he stresses John Baptist's lack of liking for music. In this he was different from his father.

A better knowledge of the setting in which John Baptist de La Salle lived enables us to picture his life as being less austere than what his biographers describe. For example, we

can imagine him staying with his maternal grandparents at their house at Brouillet, or going with them to the wine harvest at Rilly la Montagne (cf. CL 26, 132 & 134). There is mention also of his taking part in family celebrations as well as sad occasions.

We have to admit, however, that our knowledge of John Baptist de La Salle's childhood is at best sketchy.

Regarding his **youth**, the biographers speak of the beginning of the intellectual formation of the young John Baptist. Maillefer tells us that his father "saw to his education till he reached the age for starting his studies" (CL 6, 19).

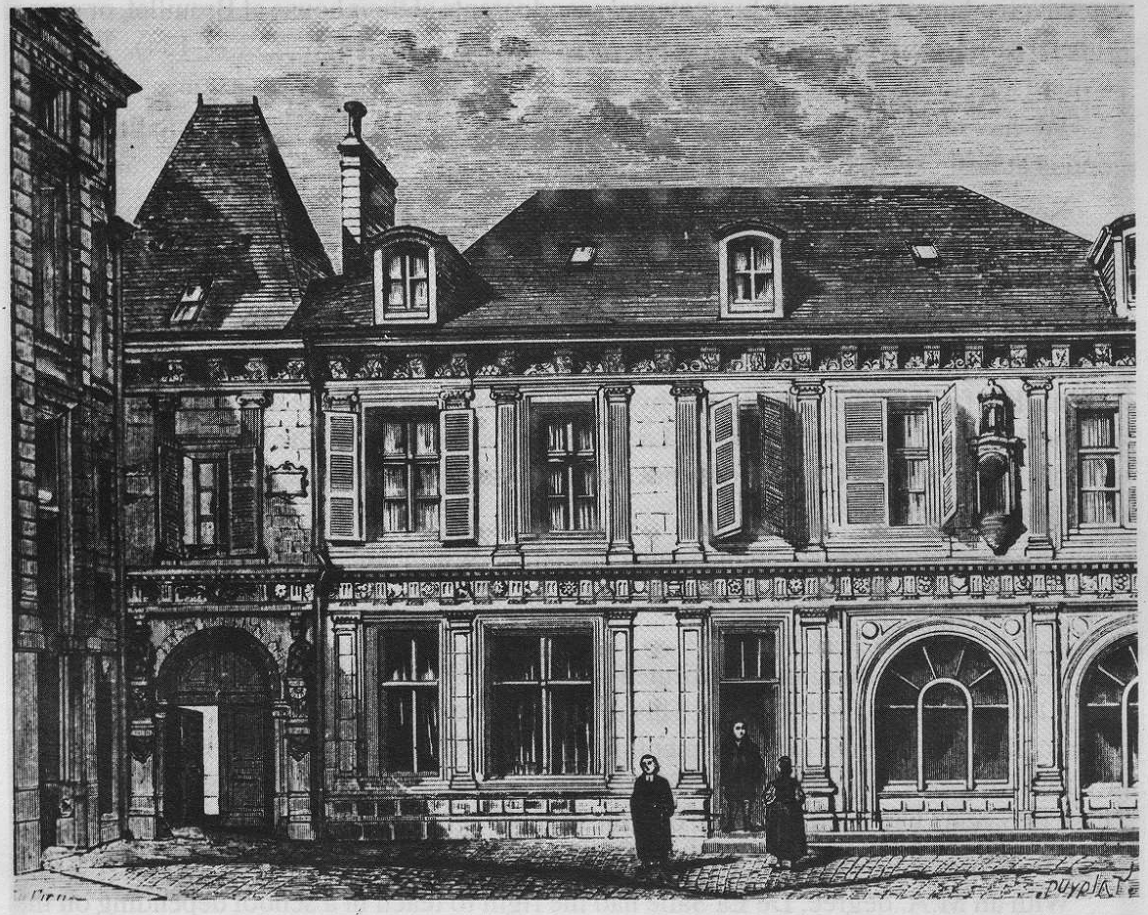
This means that, after learning some rudiments of knowledge at home, probably with the help of a private tutor, John Baptist began his studies, properly so called, by going to a *collège*. His father chose the one run by the University, the *Collège des Bons Enfants*, and not the Jesuit school. As Louis de La Salle was a member of the town administrative council, on which this *Collège* depended, it is possibly for this reason that he preferred to place his son there.

According to Bernard, John Baptist joined the school when he was 8 or 9 years old. Maillefer tells us that "after finishing his philosophy course he took his Master of Arts degree at the age of 18" (CL 6, 20).

Maillefer's information is confirmed by the original copy of the M.A. certificate, dated July 10th 1669 (cf. CL 41-2, 212). This document shows that De La Salle had passed the examination *summa cum laude*. It mentions also that he had followed a course in philosophy for two years from 1667 to 1669, beginning and ending with the feast of St Rémy. These two years had been preceded by four years of "grammar" and two years of "letters". This means that De La Salle joined the *Collège* in 1661.

With an M.A. degree, De La Salle had the right to teach in a school depending on the university and to join one of its faculties. He chose the Faculty of Theology.

At the same time, the young De La Salle was also gradually preparing himself for the priesthood. This will be dealt with in the following chapter.



Engraving of front view of the Hôtel de La Cloche. Photo E. Rousset.

— Supplement —
Family Background

The better knowledge we now have of the family situation in which John Baptist de La Salle spent his childhood and youth enables us to fill in some details.

Social Position

John Baptist's father, Louis de La Salle, was descended both on his father's side (Lancelot) and his mother's (Barbe Cocquebert) from a rich merchant family. He was the first in his family to be a magistrate. In 1647, his parents had acquired for him the position of *Conseiller au Baillaige et Siège Présidial** (Councillor of the Court of Appeal of Rheims) (CL 26, 208). This meant that as a *Conseiller du Roi** (Councillor of the King), he worked in a court of law and handed down the final verdict on cases which could be referred to a court of appeal after a sentence delivered by a lower court.

Nicole Moët was descended from the landed nobility on her father's side: Jean Moët was Lord of Brouillet and other places. On her mother's side (Perette Lespagnol), she was descended from a middle class family. While her mother had joined the nobility by her marriage, Nicole Moët lost her noble title by marrying a commoner.

John Baptist de La Salle could lay no claim to nobility on his mother's side, and his father's ancestors had lost their right to the title by becoming merchants. In any case, his father's employment did not permit him to be a noble. And so, De La Salle did not belong to an ancient noble family nor to one that had acquired a noble title (cf. CL 41-1, 74–75).

The titles of "honourable person" and "Sir" attributed to Louis de La Salle indicated that he was "a person of quality", as was said in those days (cf. CL 27, 111).

> The name "**de La Salle**" which once indicated nobility was not changed when this nobility was lost. We shall continue to use the "**de**" in our text.

Standard of Living

The marriage contract signed by Louis de La Salle and Nicole Moët on August 20th 1650, five days before their wedding, stipulated that they should each receive 16,000 livres from their respective families. And so, they started their married life with a joint capital of 32,000 *livres**.

On the death of his mother, Barbe Cocquebert, in February 1653, Louis de La Salle's capital increased by 5,000 livres.

Converted into perpetual annuities, as was customary in those days, the interest on these sums at a rate of 5% could produce some 1,850 livres per year. After being married for a few years, De La Salle's parents had a regular annual income of at least 2,000 livres to live on. This was almost ten times the sum of 200 livres which priests demanded as their annual income in order to live decently.

Even when more and more children were born, the De La Salle-Moët family could live comfortably without touching their capital.

> As the word "income" will occur from time to time, it is necessary to understand what is meant by it.
>
> In the Catholic Church, obtaining interest on a loan was forbidden. On the other hand, one could "buy in part or completely the rent of a building in exchange for a payment in cash" (Corvisier 1992, 43). The income obtained annually was calculated normally as 5% of the sum paid (the capital which generated the income). For an example, see CL 42-1, 127, or the whole of CL 33.

Position in Local Administration

By their family ties and the connections on which their social position was based, the parents of De La Salle were involved with the people who, generally speaking, ran the City of Rheims.

By tradition, the members of the family to which Louis de La Salle belonged, on both the father's and the mother's side, held positions in the city administration such as *lieutenants des habitants* (civic officers), or as members of the *Conseil de Ville** (City Council). His wife's family was involved in the same way. He himself served as a *Conseiller-Échevin** (municipal magistrate) in 1666 and 1669 and in this way was involved in local administration.

The form town administration took at that time was the result of a reform brought about by a great-uncle of John Baptist de La Salle on his mother's side, Claude Lespagnol. In 1636, the position of *échevin* (financial administrator) was merged with that of City Councillor (responsible for public order): the City Council had six of these merged positions (cf. Poutet 1970, 1:89).

Christian Roots

In the extract that follows, Blain, as usual, wishes to show the influence exerted on the young John Baptist by his parents. He does not say much, but it is enough to reveal that this influence stemmed from the very strong Christian convictions of both parents.

> His father, who was profoundly religious, took great pleasure in the natural goodness and the happy dispositions of his son. . . . The father, who was delighted to fulfil his own religious duties while at the same time satisfying the inclinations of his son, took pleasure in attending divine office with him. His mother, whose piety was even more tender, constantly sought to sow its seeds in this youthful soul, and she saw them flower far beyond her expectations (CL 7, 120).

We should mention also the important role apparently played by the Moët grandparents in the Christian upbringing of their grandson.

Bernard tells us that the grandfather, who had made it his duty to recite the office of the Church daily, introduced the young John Baptist to this practice (cf. CL 4, 12). This is a clear indication that the grandfather's practice of the faith went well beyond the strict minimum.

An anecdote told by both Bernard and Blain shows us John Baptist asking his grandmother to read to him from the lives of the saints because he found a family celebration boring. If nothing else, the incident shows the close ties the child must have had with his grandmother.

This closeness can be explained by the fact that John Baptist no longer had his paternal grandparents, and also possibly by the relative youth of his grandmother, who was only 36 when her grandchild was born.

The information given by biographers about the parents and grandparents of De La Salle shows that they belonged to a family that contributed to the religious renewal which took place in France in the 17th century, once the Council of Trent had borne its fruit there.

This is confirmed also by the number of priests and religious among John Baptist's more or less close relatives (cf. CL 26, 168), and the involvement of the lay members of this family in charitable works and parish activities. For example:

♦ Louis de La Salle was the administrator of the General Hospital of Rheims in 1662 and 1665, and "audit commissioner" for the parish of Saint Symphorien from 1666 to 1671.

♦ Jean Moët was administrator of the *Hotel Dieu* in 1643.

It is perhaps useful to point out the difference between the two institutions we have just mentioned.

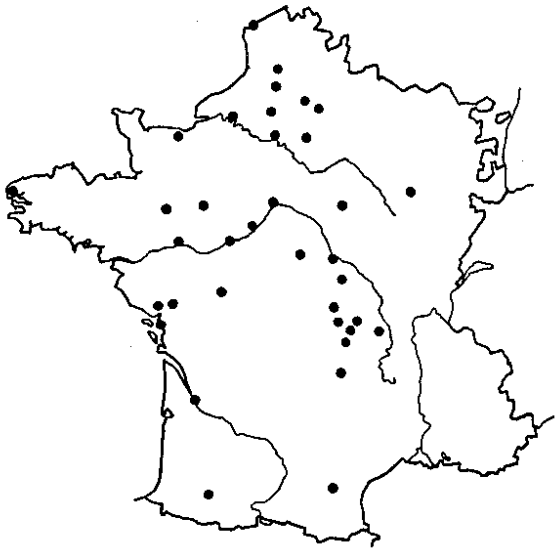
The General Hospital was initially intended for "locking up" beggars. In practice, it was a sort of hostel taking in infirm and old people without resources, as well as an orphanage for abandoned children or those whose parents had died.

The *Hotel Dieu* looked after poor sick people or those without enough money to cope with the results of illness. It was what we now call a hospital.

Conclusion

The fact that John Baptist de La Salle belonged to a "better class" of family, that is, to one that was socially respectable and enjoyed a comfortable standard of living, did not prepare him for his future mission in life.

The strength and form of its Christian commitment, however, prepared him to follow a path that reflected the Christian character of this family and which began with his entry into the clerical state.



General Hospitals founded in France between 1657 and 1690, information based on issue of Letters Patent (cf. Mandrou 1971).

2 Vocation to the Priesthood

Introduction

Thanks to the firsthand information used by the biographers, it is easy to show that De La Salle was attracted to the ecclesiastical state at a very young age, and to describe the first steps he took along this road.

However, in describing the way in which he prepared himself for the sacred ministry and went through the various stages leading to the priesthood, despite all the obstacles he encountered, we cannot rely completely on his biographers. At times they disagree, and at other times they make mistakes, as reference to contemporary documents shows.

To complete the picture, we need to look at the life of John Baptist de La Salle and pick out the main characteristics of a vocation which, while not being exceptional, is special in its own way. This we will do in a supplement at the end of this chapter.

Early Attraction

As the first biographers tell us, John Baptist's attraction for the ecclesiastical state was revealed at a very early age by the games he played and later, by his wish to serve on the altar.

When he was not yet eleven years old, he asked to receive the tonsure* as a sign of his intention to be a cleric (*cléricature**). As Maillefer points out, his parents raised no objections "even though he was the eldest of his brothers" (CL 6, 19).

When he was still 15, he was able to take a further step along the road he had chosen. On July 9th 1666, he was offered the **canonry** (*canonicat**) of Pierre Dozet, a cousin of his paternal grandfather. He was inducted on January 7th 1667.

We are certain that he received **minor orders** (*ordres**) in Rheims on March 17th 1668, while he was following his two year philosophy course (cf. CL 41-2, 195ff). According to Maillefer and Blain, he received these orders at the same time as the subdiaconate in 1672, but this is clearly not the case.

The Road to the Priesthood

Qualified as an M.A. (the modern equivalent of a baccalaureate in philosophy), De La Salle decided to study theology "to acquire the knowledge suited to an ecclesiastic" (CL 6, 21). He began his studies in 1669 at the University of Rheims, and then went to Paris to continue them at the Sorbonne.

During this period, he entered the seminary of St Sulpice, for, at the same time, he wished to obtain a solid preparation for the priesthood and to fulfill his father's wishes. As the seminary register shows, he took this step on October 18th 1670.

According to Maillefer, De La Salle was preparing for the subdiaconate when he received the news of his mother's death, which occurred on July 19th 1671. "Although this was a difficult blow to bear, he did not interrupt his studies, but he did shelve his plans for a while" (CL 6, 21). It would seem that this trial made him hesitate a little.

The following year, on April 9th, his father died. His death forced John Baptist to return to Rheims and serve as *tuteur** (guardian) to his brothers and sisters, in accordance with his father's will. He left Paris on April 19th 1672.

Despite this new trial and the further hesitation that perhaps it caused, he went ahead and was ordained **subdeacon** on June 11th 1672, the vigil of Trinity Sunday. In taking this step, he was advised by the spiritual director he had found in Rheims, Nicolas Roland. The ordination itself took place in Cambrai because there were no ordinations that year in Rheims.

De La Salle finished his year of theology by following courses at the University of Rheims (cf. CL 41-2, 367). He began these courses in October 1673 after an interval of a year.

After three years of theology and two of advanced philosophy, he obtained his Baccalaureate in Theology in August 1675, and two years later, in January 1678, his Licence in Theology (cf. CL 41-2, 58). At this point, he could have obtained his doctorate quite rapidly, but, probably because of pressing commitments, he waited till 1680 before completing the required formalities (cf. CL 41-2, 468).

At the same time as he was preparing his licence in theology, De La Salle was also getting ready for the priesthood under the direction of Nicolas Roland.

On March 21st 1676, he was ordained **deacon**. Maillefer tells us in his first manuscript: "he went to Paris to be ordained deacon" (CL 6, 23). As Mgr Le Tellier, the Archbishop of Rheims was absent from Rheims, this ordination did in fact take place in Paris (cf. CL 41-2, 403). According to Bernard, De La Salle went again to Cambrai "because the archiepiscopal see continued to be vacant" (CL 4, 15). This has proved to be incorrect on two counts.

The **ordination to the priesthood**, on the other hand, was performed by Mgr Le Tellier, his Archbishop, on April 9th 1678, the Vigil of Easter, in the chapel of the Bishop's Palace in Rheims. The following day, the new priest said his first Mass in the cathedral, but, as Maillefer points out, "without solemnity" (CL 6, 25), a detail made much of by Blain.

Conclusion

A few days later, De La Salle lost his spiritual director Nicolas Roland. In accordance with the latter's wishes, he added to his other obligations that of looking after an undertaking to which Nicolas Roland had dedicated himself and which needed to be completed.

For Canon de La Salle this would be the first step along a path he had not planned to follow, and to which nothing in his personal vocation had up till then drawn him.

Nicolas Roland (1642–1678) was born in Rheims to a well-off family. He was the nephew of Matthieu Beuvelet and was precocious as a child. He studied for the priesthood in Paris under the direction of Fr Bagot. While in Paris, he came into contact with St Sulpice, St Lazare and St Nicolas du Chardonnet. He subsequently spent six months with the parish priest of St Amand in Rouen and made contact with Fr Barré.

He was awarded his doctorate in theology at the age of 21, and in 1665 he was a canon of the cathedral of Rheims. His time was taken up with sermons, parish missions and the training of priests. The publication of the *Rémontrances* of Démia caused him to become interested in popular education. In December 1670, he prevailed upon Fr Barré to let him have two Sisters from Rouen to extend the work of the orphanage run by Mme Varlet. This marked the beginning of the Sisters of the Child Jesus. Between the end of November 1677 and April 6th 1668, he tried in vain to contact his archbishop in Paris in order to obtain recognition for this community. He returned exhausted to Rheims, took to his bed on April 19th and died on April 27th at the age of 35. He was beatified on October 16th 1994 (see CL 38, 53–92).

Photo E. Rousset

— Supplement —
Some Characteristics of This Vocation

To complete the description we have given of how De La Salle followed his vocation, it seems a good idea to say a few words about three things that made this vocation somewhat special.

A vocation that is unusual given the common practice of the times

We have already pointed out that Maillefer—at least in the 1740 manuscript—stresses the fact that John Baptist's parents did not object to his priestly vocation even though he was the eldest son.

Maillefer 's few words are a summary of Blain's longer and not very convincing account:

> If God had left his parents the choice of the victim they had to offer him, their choice would no doubt have fallen on some other child of theirs, and they would have kept the eldest, who is normally the most cherished, being the first fruit of their married love (CL 7, 121).

What is true, however, is that, at the time when the biographers were writing, it was customary among "better class" families not to allow their eldest son to become a priest or a religious. On the other hand, it was an honour for one or other of the younger children to do so. It could be thought of also as a way of assuring their future.

Such considerations did not influence the decision of John Baptist's parents, since they had accepted at a very early stage that he would become a priest. This did not subsequently prevent one of their sons, Jacques Joseph, from becoming a Canon Regular, another, Jean Louis, from becoming a priest, and their daughter, Rose Marie, from becoming a Canoness of St Augustine.

The reader may be surprised to learn that John Baptist received the tonsure when he was still 10 years' old, and became a canon (*chanoine**) when he was 15.

At the time, there was nothing exceptional or shocking about this. It has to be said, however, that, as far as canonries were concerned, the wish to obtain the *prébende** (income) which went with the post could attract people to the ecclesiastical state without a real vocation.

What we know of De La Salle's parents makes it most unlikely that their motives were anything but pure when they accepted Canon Dozet's decision to resign (*résigner**) from his canonry in favour of his young relative. Their motives, like their son's, were inspired by their profound Christian faith.

Attraction for "officiating at divine worship"

A quotation from M. Olier, the Founder of the Priests of St Sulpice, will help us to understand what is meant by this expression:

> The sacerdotal and clerical state has two principal functions. The one that concerns itself especially with God is the one exercised by priests whom God calls to perform the external worship that is his due. The other is that of priests involved in the care of souls (quoted in Broutin 1956, 264).

What has been said about John Baptist's vocation shows that he was more attracted to the first of the functions described.

Circumstances, no doubt, had their part to play in this, but, as the biographers tell us, the way in which the young cleric (*clerc**) saw himself as "consecrated to public prayer" (CL 6, 19) and the way in which he fulfilled his duties as canon, justify our belief that these satisfied his taste for prayer and, in particular, for the divine office to which he had been introduced at a very early age by his maternal grandfather.

This attraction was not exclusive, however, for when he was at St Sulpice, he took active part in the life of the parish, and taught catechism in the parish "charity schools" (cf. Poutet 1970, 1:344 and 350).

And then, when his spiritual director Nicolas Roland suggested he exchange his canonry for "a living involving the care of souls" (*bénéfice**), as Maillefer put it (CL 6, 25), which actually meant the position of parish priest, he was amenable to the idea. The parish (*cure**) in question was that of St Pierre le Vieil in Rheims, as Blain and Maillefer tell us.

This happened in 1676, the year in which De La Salle was ordained deacon. When this ordination took place, the parish priest of St Pierre le Vieil declined to make the exchange. This was the reason why the plan failed and not, as Blain and Maillefer noted, because permission was refused by the archbishop of Rheims, following pressure put upon him by John Baptist's family (cf. CL 26, 257–258).

Canon De La Salle continued, therefore, to fulfil his duties at the cathedral, while at the same time pursuing his studies at the university. The only reason why he had wanted to become parish priest was "because he had thought God was telling him to by the mouth of M. Roland" (CL 7, 136).

Serious studies

De La Salle began his theological studies at the University of Rheims. After one year, he went to the Sorbonne to continue these studies. What was the reason for this change?

It might be thought that the reason for his decision to change universities was that there had been a certain amount of unrest at the University of Rheims during the year he was there (cf. Poutet 1970, 1:229; CL 41-2, 221).

However, the reputation enjoyed by the University of Paris was a sufficient reason for John Baptist and his father to make the change. Blain, with his usual grandiloquence, called it "the fount of knowledge". Although the Sorbonne had its problems also, its reputation was in fact good.

It would seem that De La Salle's two teachers—Guillaume de Lestocq and Jacques Despériers—had a good influence on him, if only because they passed on to him their opposition to Jansenism and their respect for papal authority (cf. CL 41-2, 63ff).

According to Maillefer and Blain, the choice of the University of Paris led naturally to the choice of the seminary of St Sulpice. Maillefer writes as follows in his 1740 manuscript:

> Monsieur de La Salle, his father, always solicitous about his being well-prepared beforehand for the state he had embraced, instructed him to go to the seminary of St Sulpice (CL 6, 21).

Doubtlessly the choice of this institution stemmed from his desire to ensure that his son received both a solid spiritual formation as well as a good preparation for ecclesiastical functions. The seminary of St Sulpice played an active part in the religious renewal that took place in France in the 17th century, and it attracted young men from numerous dioceses in France and abroad who wished to prepare themselves for the priesthood.

It should be added also that, unlike the community of St Nicolas du Chardonnet, which trained the "minor clergy", St Sulpice prepared young men for more elevated positions in the Church (cf. CL 3, 61).

If, as we know, De La Salle had to leave Paris after 18 months and subsequently continued his studies in Rheims, he was nonetheless much influenced by his stay at the seminary of St Sulpice. As Blain wrote:

> The spiritual sons of Monsieur de La Salle, who so often heard him open his heart regarding this holy house, remark that what one can say in praise of the seminary of St Sulpice, is that it was this house "that gave him the spirit of God; that it was there that he acquired the virtues that throughout his life shone with such brilliance in him. He had a special affection for this holy nursery of apostolic workers, and he always spoke of it with great esteem and respect" (CL 7, 127).

3 Initial Involvement with Schools (1678–1680)

Introduction

There was nothing that predisposed De La Salle to become involved with schools for poor children, and still less, no doubt, to take responsibility for teachers called to run such schools.

He could not have been unaware, however, that Nicolas Roland had founded a community of Sisters who ran free schools for girls.

The biographers show how, at the request of his former spiritual director, De La Salle had completed the work begun by the latter; and how he had been led to involve himself with the opening of schools for poor boys in Rheims, after being approached for this purpose by a certain M. Nyel.

There followed a series of connected events that drew De La Salle along a road that, as he himself admitted, he had not planned to take.

Completion of the work of Nicolas Roland

Canon Roland had played an important and even decisive role in the final years of De La Salle's formation. We are told that, as he lay on his death bed, Roland chose De La Salle as one of the executors of his will (*exécuteur testamentaire**), and entrusted to him "the care of the Community of the Sisters of the Child Jesus which he had just founded" (CL 6, 27).

> The precarious position of this community is highlighted by various biographers, who describe the hostility of the magistrates in the city of Rheims, and in a wider context, of the royal authorities, to the establishment of new religious communities (cf., e.g., CL 7, 140). Their proliferation in towns took up available space and cut down their income. There was a fear also that their presence would increase expenses if they applied for help from the municipality.

The steps that had to be taken in order to assure the future of the work that Roland had undertaken are described by Blain: "Permission had to be obtained from the City, consent from the Archbishop, and Letters Patent from the King" (CL 7, 140).

After the two executors of Nicolas Roland's will had submitted a report on the *bien-fonds** (financial position) of the community of Sisters, the city magistrates officially approved the foundation.

The approval given by the city authorities enabled the archbishop, who was in favour of the foundation, to take responsibility for requesting the King for Letters Patent. As Mgr Le Tellier was the brother of Louvois, Louis XVI's minister, he had no difficulty in obtaining the official document which gave legal existence to the community "instituted by Nicolas Roland". The Letters Patent (*lettres patentes**), dated February 1679, were registered (*enregistrer**) by the Parlement of Paris on the 17th of the same month, and all this at the expense of the archbishop.

Basing himself on "memoirs" on the life of Nicolas Roland, to which he certainly had access, Blain comes to the following conclusion: "And so, if this community owes its origin to Monsieur Roland, its growth it owes to the painstaking work of Monsieur de La Salle" (CL 7, 142).

De La Salle continued to show interest in the new community. For two and a half years he administered its temporal affairs (cf. CL 38, 106), and tradition has it that over a period of years he celebrated Mass in the Sisters' chapel. On the other hand, their school activities do not seem to have aroused much interest in him. In this context, Bernard's comment is all the more significant:

> Several of his acquaintances, who had had connections with the late Nicolas Roland, had suggested to him on various occasions to found schools for boys just as Roland had done for girls. However, he had never taken these suggestions seriously, nor had he had the least intention of acting on them, especially as he had a living, was responsible for the orphaned community of Sisters, and had his family to care for (CL 4, 30).

Help given to Adrien Nyel

When Nicolas Roland set up the community of the Sisters of the Child Jesus in Rheims, he did so with the help of Father Barré, a Minim, who had himself established a similar community in Rouen. He had also been in contact with a certain Madame Maillefer in Rouen. This lady, originally from Rheims, was a great supporter of Barré's work.

According to Blain, Madame Maillefer and Nicolas Roland had planned to establish "schools for boys" in Rheims, but the death of the latter had caused this plan to be shelved (cf. CL 7, 159).

It was very probably Madame Maillefer's wish to resurrect this plan that led her to send to Rheims a certain Adrien Nyel, who had opened several schools for poor boys in Rouen.

It is not surprising that when Nyel arrived in Rheims, he was invited to go and see Françoise Duval, superior of the Sisters of the Child Jesus, since she had been sent by Barré to help Nicolas Roland to set up his congregation.

On the other hand, the meeting between Adrien Nyel and De La Salle on the doorstep of the Sisters' house was quite fortuitous. At the request of the superior of the Sisters, De La Salle gave his opinion regarding the motives behind Nyel's visit to Rheims. As it happened, the latter had brought a letter for the Canon.

Conscious of the difficulties he had had to overcome in order to assure the future of Nicolas Roland's foundation, De La Salle advised Nyel to be very cautious, and for this reason invited him to stay at his house. It was this same cautiousness that led him to advise the people with whom he discussed this plan "to place the schools under the protection of one of the parish priests in the city" (CL 6, 37).

After mature reflection, Fr Dorigny, the parish priest of Saint Maurice, was chosen. (The report of the deliberations in Bernard's text is censored, probably because it was too frank; cf. CL 4, 27.)

According to Maillefer, this priest

> expressed his impatience to see schools established in his parish, and to speed the process up, offered to lodge in his house the teachers due to teach in them. As a result, the schools opened in that same year of 1679.

The biographer goes on to say:

> De La Salle, who had made most of the arrangements, thought that God wanted nothing else of him and withdrew. The most he did was to visit the teachers from time to time to encourage them and help them with his advice. It did not occur to him that this involvement would increase. God, however, soon opened up for him a whole new career. (CL 6, 56)

Hearing that a certain Dame de Croyères wished to start up a school for boys in the parish of Saint Jacques, Nyel went to see her. He spoke to her also of De La Salle. The lady expressed the desire to meet De La Salle and offered to pay for the upkeep of two teachers. At first De La Salle was reluctant to support the venture, but he finally did so. As Blain tells us, a second school was opened in the September of that same year of 1679.

The success of the two schools entailed further consequences for De La Salle. Blain explains why:

> As the number of pupils in the school at St Jacques increased every day, so the need to increase the number of teachers likewise grew. There were five of them and they lived with the parish priest of St Maurice, who now said he could not feed them for only 50 ecus, and demanded 200 livres per year for each of them. (CL 7, 167)

John Baptist provided the outstanding 250 livres and brought the total up to the 1,000 livres demanded by the parish priest of St Maurice (50 *ecus** = 150 livres).

Also, as Nyel left the teachers too much to their own devices for the liking of De La Salle, he saw a need "either to draw closer to them or to draw them closer to himself" (CL 7, 170). And so he provided accommodation for them in a house on rue Sainte Marguérite close to where he lived with his brothers. This happened "at Christmas, 1679", as Blain tells us.

In this house, which was in the parish of St Symphorien, Nyel opened a third school. Maillefer tells us that De La Salle "who had no objections gave a helping hand. In a very short time it had more pupils than the other two" (CL 6, 38), and he adds in the margin that the date was 1680.

Conclusion

And so, in the space of one year, De La Salle had found himself involved with the opening of several schools and taking interest in their teachers.

As he admitted in a "memoir" quoted by Bernard and Blain:

> I had imagined that my involvement with the schools and the teachers would simply be on a superficial level which committed me only to providing for their upkeep and ensuring they performed their duties with piety and application (CL 7, 167).

All this time he had continued to fulfil faithfully his duties as a canon and to see to the education of his brothers. From 1676, he was no longer their legal guardian, but during the course of 1680, he took up again the guardianship of his three youngest brothers. Having completed his doctorate in theology, he may have thought he would have more time available.

— Supplement —
John Baptist de La Salle and Teaching the Poor

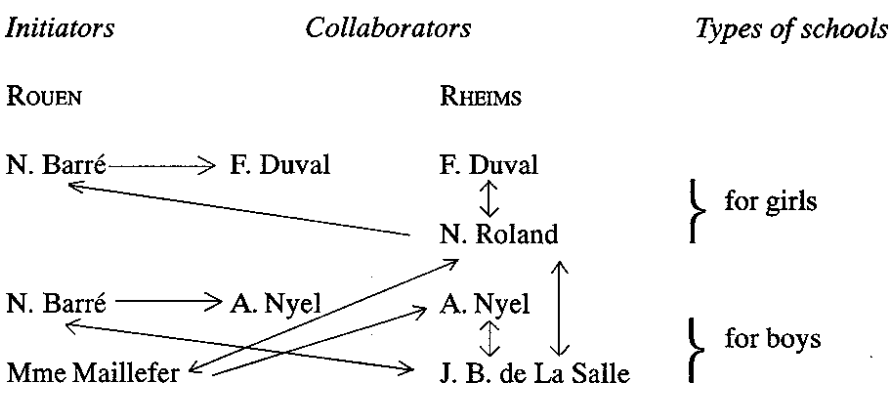
The previous chapter showed how De La Salle became involved with the opening of schools for the poor children of Rheims. It is important to understand the situation as it was. At this point he is still not taking the initiative, but is simply supporting work undertaken by others:

- he completes the establishment of the community founded by Nicolas Roland;
- he helps Adrien Nyel to implement the wishes of Madame Maillefer.

In addition, through a network of relationships shown in the table below, he comes into contact with Barré:

- the founder of a community of "schoolmistresses";
- the supporter of a group of teachers running schools initially under the responsibility of Adrien Nyel.

Network of relationships



Barré, like Roland, was part of a widespread movement concerned with the education of the children of the poor, which developed in France during the 17th century. De La Salle also, through his connection with these two persons, was unwittingly drawn into this movement.

To understand the positions he took up later, it is necessary to recall the essential aspects of the situation in which he found himself and which he had to take into account.

The development of schools for the children of the poor

One of the most important tasks of those who had sought to apply the decisions of the Council of Trent in France had been to renew the teaching of religion to the faithful and, in particular, the teaching of catechism to children.

However, a certain number of those involved in the 17th century Christian renewal considered the results achieved by Sunday catechism lessons to be inadequate. In their eyes, a school was a means not only of teaching catechism every day, but also of teaching children to live like Christians. And so, during the course of the century:

♦ Bishops and diocesan synods encouraged the establishment of primary schools.

♦ Leading proponents of the Christian renewal, like St Vincent de Paul and Olier helped to found "charity schools".

♦ A number of priests wrote books on the topic, which were widely circulated, e.g., the *Rémontrances* by Charles Démia.

♦ Religious communities or similar groups (like groups of lay women teachers), dedicated to the teaching of girls, proliferated.

Those who established schools did so above all for apostolic reasons and for the children of the poor. The teaching of the rudiments of knowledge was considered as a means of attracting children in order "to instruct them in the truths of salvation and the principles of religion" (CL 7, 34).

The means for acquiring **rudimentary knowledge** certainly existed in those days:

♦ We know, for example, that De La Salle certainly began his intellectual formation at home with the help of a tutor.

♦ Courts of law had a group of experts at their disposal to draw up documents. These also taught "the art of writing" and bookkeeping, which involved arithmetic.

♦ At least in the more important towns, there existed a network of schools supervised by the *Grand Chantre* (cathedral precentor). These schools taught reading, writing and "grammar".

♦ In the country, the parish priest's assistant, in addition to his duties as sacristan and cantor, would "demonstrate" reading and writing to children when they were not needed for work in the fields.

In the schools supervised by the cathedral precentor tuition fees were charged, although teachers were not supposed to charge fees in the case of children from families known to be poor. However:

♦ this discrimination between the children discouraged parents from sending their children there.

♦ and probably a more important reason was that the teaching given there was unsuitable. The poor needed a type of teaching that prepared them more directly and rapidly for life.

And so, other kinds of schools were needed if the poor were to be educated. Because of the apostolic aim which these schools were intended to have, and because of the need to protect them against the jealousy of teachers running schools as a livelihood, the task of opening these schools had been entrusted to parish priests.

De La Salle understood this well and Blain, describing the occasion when it was a question of opening the first school for poor boys in Rheims, attributes the following thoughts to him:

> (Since a good parish priest) has the power to provide instruction for his parishioners, and his title of pastor authorises him to give them teachers capable of teaching them Christian doctrine, no one has the right to prevent him from doing so (CL 7, 163).

The proliferation of free schools

The development of schools for poor children was possible only on one condition: the schools had to be free for everyone, meaning that parents were not to pay the teachers.

Others, therefore, had to fund the teachers and the running costs of the schools.

♦ These could be public bodies, like town councils, parish funds (*fabriques de paroisse**), the Poor Office (a group of people coordinating help for the poor).

♦ Or individual benefactors.

In the latter case, benefactors often ensured the continuation of their funding by a "foundation". What is meant by this is made clearer by the following extract from Maillefer which describes the opening of a school in the parish of Saint Jacques.

"I must", she (Mme Croyères) told him, "take advantage of such an opportune moment, because God has been inspiring me for a long time now to found a school in my parish. . . ." She guaranteed a sum of 500 livres to be taken from her funds each year for the upkeep of two teachers. She also promised to set up a fund amounting to 10,000 livres to provide income in perpetuity. As she was elderly, she urged haste in settling the matter, but despite strenuous efforts, arrangements were completed only after her death. This took place six weeks after she had made known her intentions. Her heirs made it their duty to carry out faithfully the terms of her foundation (CL 7, 39).

We can see from the above example that *fonder** (to found) a school meant to set up a capital "fund" whose interest would be used to finance the running of the school.

So, in those days, the word "found" and its derivatives had a precise meaning which is different from the present one. To express the modern meaning of the word, the biographer used the verbs: begin, form, open, establish (cf. CL 6, 35–39).

In a work entitled *An Historical Treatise on Episcopal and Ecclesiastical Schools* (1678), one of the precentors of Paris, Claude Joly, defends the rights of the teachers he is responsible for against what he considers to be the encroachment by teachers of three other types of schools.

The reader might be interested to know how the author describes the schools he refers to, and how he distinguishes one from another.

In the first place:

♦ He says that the term "**little schools**" was given to "grammar schools belonging to the precentor of the Church of Paris" (270).

♦ He explains that among the rights the latter has over the "grammar schools now known as little schools", is that "he alone can authorise persons to teach children of both sexes in the town, outlying districts and suburbs of Paris, excluding the **colleges of the university**" (304).

♦ He mentions also persons with "**boarding school** permits" (347), that is, teachers who had permission from "the precentor of the cathedral church" to teach the children for whom they provided lodging.

In the second place:

♦ He deplores the proliferation of "so-called **charity schools**" set up by parish priests in Paris (376), which "ruin the local ones" dependent on the precentor of the Church of Paris (377).

♦ He is of the opinion that, while parish priests "are obliged to teach catechism to the children of their parish", they do not have "the right to establish independently schools that teach reading, writing, grammar, arithmetic and the other liberal arts that are taught in the little schools" (385).

♦ and, if "the masters of the Church of Paris" opened schools, "it was in order to teach all children and especially the poor ones" (389).

In the third place:

♦ Since "writing is one of the first sections of grammar", he does not accept that the *écrivains jurés** (members of the Writers' Guild) have the right "to call themselves Masters of **writing schools**" (471).

♦ These claim to have the right to teach spelling, on the pretext that "it is a part of *écriture parée** (embellished writing) which the writing masters profess to teach". Joly does not accept they have this right: this teaching can be given only by "an expert grammarian" (480).

Of all the different kinds of schools and teachers mentioned by Joly, it is sufficient for our purpose to retain only the following terms describing the kinds of teachers:

♦ **Teachers of the Little Schools**, supervised by the precentor. With these we can include the Boarding School Teachers.

♦ **Charity School Teachers**, organised by parish priests to teach in schools for the poor of the parish.

♦ The **Writing Masters**. The term "master" has the meaning of "master craftsman" (see above, page 3).

On the basis of this principle, "charity schools" or "charitable schools", for which the parish priest was responsible, catered exclusively for children from families recognised as being poor. These poor families were easily identifiable because often they were given help on a permanent basis and so were listed in the "alms register".

It is likely that the first schools which were opened for poor boys in Rheims and for which the parish priests were responsible, were originally organised along these lines.

However, whereas in Rouen Nyel depended on the Poor Office which administered all charitable institutions, in Rheims he had more freedom of movement. Probably because of this and because of De La Salle's influence once he had started caring for the teachers, their schools also were known as "charity schools".

While still observing the principle of gratuity, it seems that these schools fairly rapidly opened their doors also to children from families that were not officially registered as poor, and that the teaching given in them was less restricted than in "charity schools".

> Was it in order to distinguish these first schools from the "charity schools" that the biographers called them "gratuitous schools" (Bernard and Maillefer) or "Christian and gratuitous schools" (Blain)?
>
> Or did these biographers, who were writing some time after these early days, give the expression "gratuitous school" a meaning that it took on only later when the schools run by the followers of De La Salle were clearly different from the "little schools" and the "charity schools"?
>
> We shall leave the answer to these questions for some other time.

Conclusion

Opening schools for the children of the poor presupposed also that the teaching given in them was adapted to the needs of those that such schools wished to attract. This being so, what was taught there had to be more directly usable in everyday life, and not be considered as a preparation for further studies leading to the liberal professions.

Teaching methods also had to be devised that would enable large classes of children to be taught, and relatively rapid results obtained with children who could not attend school for any length of time.

Such methods had already been adopted by certain promoters of education for the poor, especially in schools for girls.

And so De La Salle did not have to devise a completely new approach. However, in a number of areas, he did bring about some truly radical changes.

Part Two

Beginnings (1681–1694)

4 Formation of a "Community" of Teachers (1681–1682)

Introduction

During this period, De La Salle became increasingly involved with the teachers of the first schools opened in Rheims for poor boys.

Closely linked to this increasing involvement was the gradual transformation of the group of teachers into a kind of community (*communauté**).

At the same time, Adrien Nyel continued to establish new free schools for boys in and around Rheims.

De La Salle becomes increasingly involved with the teachers

Towards the end of 1679, De La Salle had lodged the teachers of the first schools in a house close to his own.

Seeing the teachers at close hand, he was able to observe the unhappy effect of Nyel's frequent absences as he sought to open new schools, as well as of his marked tendency to leave them to their own devices (CL 4, 35).

Wishing to remedy the unsatisfactory situation of the teachers, De La Salle gave the matter a great deal of thought. For example, when the lease of the house he had rented for the teachers expired, should he renew it and so allow the situation he had noted to continue? Or should he invite the teachers into his own house where he could take greater care of them? The matter was not urgent, however, since he had taken out an 18-month lease.

As Maillefer tells us, he began by "inviting the teachers to take their meals with him" (CL 6, 40), but he does not tell us the date when this started. In an extract from the *Memoir* quoted by Blain, De La Salle tells us, "When I first invited them to my house, I experienced great difficulty. It lasted two years". For the teachers to have been able to frequent De La Salle's house for two years, they must have begun to do so in June 1680.

According to Bernard, it was six months before the lease expired that he began "to wonder whether he should continue to rent a house for them, or lodge them in his own house" (CL 4, 36). As he had to go to Paris, he took the opportunity to consult Fr Barré about his quandary. This journey must have taken place either at the end of 1680 or the beginning of 1681. Fr Barré, who had been able to give only distant support to the teachers recruited by Adrien Nyel in Rouen, advised De La Salle "to lodge the teachers in his own house" (CL 4, 37). De La Salle, however, continued to hesitate, and this "uncertainty and indecision" lasted for a further three months (CL 4, 39).

A recently discovered piece of information can help us to understand the hesitation of De La Salle. The house where he lived on rue Sainte Marguérite was in fact part of the common inheritance of Louis de La Salle's children. John Baptist, who had become his brothers' guardian again in 1680, found himself being taken to court in January 1681 by his sister Marie and her husband Jean Maillefer. They did this in order to secure the sale of the property held in common and to ensure they received their share (cf. CL 52, 58).

And then an opportunity occurred to try an experiment. During Holy Week in 1681 (March 30th–April 6th), with Nyel in Guise arranging for the possible opening of a school, De La Salle had the teachers stay in his own house outside of school hours and during the night.

As Bernard tells us, it was a chance for De La Salle

> to see if he could lodge them in the house all the time, and accustom them to live there with him; and also to find out by experience if there would be any difficulties. If there were some insurmountable difficulties, he would have to rent the same house again or some other that was vacant (CL 4, 40).

When Nyel returned, having failed to open a school, De La Salle continued to invite the teachers to the house he shared with his brothers. Finally, on June 24th 1681, he moved the teachers permanently into his own house, in spite of the problems this might raise, for, if the house were sold, he would have to move out.

Regarding the date of June 24th, feast of St John the Baptist, Bernard has the following to say: "This day is special, because this saint, whose name he was given at baptism, was his patron, and he had a special devotion to him" (CL 4, 41). The other biographers drew attention also to the fact it was on this feast day that the teachers came to live in the De La Salle family house.

The truth of the matter is that De La Salle had not renewed the lease on the house in which the teachers lived, and which ended on the feast of St John the Baptist. "On this day leases are taken out on houses in Rheims" (quoted in CL 52, 37, note 94).

Although De La Salle's brothers and the teachers lived in different wings of the house, they all came together for meals. Several members of his family objected to this. Jean Maillefer arranged for Pierre, one of De La Salle's brothers, to come and stay with him. The youngest, Jean Louis, became a boarder at Senlis, in the house of the Canons Regular, where his brother Jean Jacques already was. Jean Louis, on the other hand, remained with his elder brother.

One year later, on June 24th 1682, John Baptist, together with the teachers and his brother, Jean Louis, moved out of the house in rue Ste Marguérite and went to live in rue Neuve, in a district that was further from the cathedral. Unlike Bernard, Blain mentions this change of house (CL 7, 77), but only Maillefer in both his manuscripts gives the date of the move (CL 6, 44 & 45).

By moving out of the family house in this way, De La Salle simply anticipated a decision which the sale of the house at the end of July 1682 would have made necessary. On July 30th, the proceeds of the sale of the property jointly inherited, amounting to 16,073 livres (cf. CL 52, 42 and 138), were shared out between the five children of Louis de La Salle who were entitled to a share. Rose Marie, who died in 1681, would not have been entitled because she was a religious (*profession religieuse**), and this was the case also for Jacques Joseph.

The group of teachers takes the form of a community

De La Salle's aim in involving his own life more and more with that of the teachers was to lead the latter to adopt a form of life which, in his eyes, was more in keeping with the profession of a teacher in "the Christian schools".

♦ In the house which he had leased for them, he had already tried "to establish for them a uniform and regular form of life" (CL 7, 170).

♦ When he had invited the teachers into his own house, in Holy Week 1681, he had obliged them to follow the regulations he had already established there, and they had taken meals together.

♦ When he had given them a permanent home, "he set about organising properly the life of his small community", Maillefer tells us. He accustomed them, in particular, "to follow a series of exercises" (CL 6, 45).

At the same time, according to Bernard, De La Salle invited the teachers to choose a confessor who would be the same for all. At first, it was the parish priest of St Symphorien who provided this service, but later De La Salle himself took over this role. As the biographer is at pains to point out, these were still "teachers", "since they were not yet Brothers and did not wear the habit" (CL 4, 44). Blain seems to support Bernard in this (CL 7, 177). However, according to Maillefer, it was only when the teachers were at rue Neuve that De La Salle became their confessor (cf. CL 6, 47).

This difference in chronology between Bernard and Blain on the one hand, and Maillefer on the other, can be seen also in a series of other facts.

The table that follows shows these differences. We shall limit ourselves to making a few observations at this point.

First of all, the three biographers refer to the same facts.

♦ The teachers recruited by Adrien Nyel and obliged to live a "regulated life" to which they were not used, soon became tired of it. Several left De La Salle. Others he sent away, because "they had neither talent nor vocation for the schools, even though they had sufficient piety" (CL 4, 46; cf. CL 7, 179 & 184 — the same fact being mentioned twice — and in CL 6, 50 & 51).

♦ New teachers came forward who, as Bernard tells us, "had talent for the school, piety and the disposition to live in community" (CL 4, 47; cf. CL 7, 179 & 185; CL 6, 52 & 53).

♦ This group of new teachers "takes the form of a community", in the words of Bernard and Blain (cf. CL 4, 47; CL 7, 179), or, as Maillefer put it, "formed a more numerous and more perfect community" (CL 6, 52).

However, although Bernard says very clearly, and Blain does so in a somewhat confused way, that the original teachers left after they had gone to live in De La Salle's house (cf. CL 4, 46; CL 7, 178), Maillefer maintains this happened after the move to rue Neuve (cf. CL 6, 51).

If we choose to accept Blain's version, which is perhaps the best solution,

♦ it was in the second half of 1681 that the first teachers left De La Salle and the new teachers arrived.

Comparison of the chronologies adopted by

Bernard	Maillefer	Blain
	1680	
	De La Salle invites the teachers to take their meals with him.	Two years before June 24th 1682, De La Salle begins to invite the teachers to his home (CL 7, 169).
Six months before the end of the lease, De La Salle hesitates to renew it. ◊ He goes to consult Barré.		(?) De La Salle goes to consult Barré.
	1681	
Holy Week: Nyel goes to Guise.	Easter time: Nyel in Guise.	Holy Week: Nyel goes to Guise.
◊ De La Salle invites the teachers to his own house. June 24th: he gives the teachers accommodation in his own house.	◊ De La Salle brings the teachers to his own house. June 24th: he gives the teachers accommodation in his own house.	◊ De La Salle brings the teachers to his own house. June 24th: he gives the teachers accommodation in his own house.
After June: the teachers choose the same confessor. ◊ Departure of the first teachers.		After June: departure of the first teachers. ◊ Arrival of new ones (CL 7, 179).
Around Christmas: Nyel is in Rethel.		End of 1681–beginning of 1682: the group begins to form a community.
	1682	
Beginning of the year: arrival of the new teachers. The teachers are called Brothers	(?) Opening of a school in Rethel. (?) Opening of a school in Guise.	(?) Opening of a school in Rethel. (?) Opening of a school in Guise.
	June 24th: move to rue Neuve.	(?) Move to rue Neuve.
	◊ The teachers take De La Salle as their confessor.	July: opening of a school in Chateau Porcien.
	End of the year: negotiations begin to open a school in Laon.	End of the year: negotiations begin to open a school in Laon.
	Following the opening of the schools: ◊ Departure of the first teachers. ◊ Arrival of new teachers. ◊ They adopt a distinctive habit and the name of Brothers of the Christian Schools.	

Note: (?) indicates that the date is not given and that the event is allocated to a date given elsewhere.

♦ and that "it was towards the end of the year 1681 and at the beginning of the following one, that the house of the schoolteachers began to take on the form of a real community" (CL 7, 179).

According to what the first biographers say, from now on, the group of teachers formed a *communauté** (community):

♦ As before, they led a "regulated" and uniform life.

♦ Each day was punctuated by "exercises" performed in common. According to Bernard, it was at this time that the exercises which were always performed afterwards were first practised (cf. CL 4, 47).

♦ It was doubtlessly at this time also that they adopted the "short black habit" with a "rabat", which is mentioned in Bernard (CL 4, 69), but, contrary to what Maillefer says (CL 6, 53), such a dress did not set them apart from seculars.

♦ Was it from this time onwards that they "were called Brothers", as Bernard tells us, or did they take at this time, as Maillefer maintains, "the name of Brothers of the Christian Schools?" It would seem this was a little bit of anticipation, as we shall see later.

To an observer, the way the group of teachers lived could give the impression that they were already some form of religious community.

However, from what we know of the period, this group resembled more the "community" created in Rouen by Pierre Lambert, a priest who was in charge of the Poor Bureau, or the one established by two seculars (lay persons), Laurent and François de Bimorel, who in 1657 had decided to live together "in order to give — as in fact they did — a part of their wealth and all their attention to the poor" (quoted in Poutet 1, 492), and whose work centred on poor schools.

Opening of new schools

Side by side with the developments mentioned above, and sometimes involving them, new schools were being established by Nyel's driving energy, but also with the help of De La Salle.

On learning that the magistrates of the town of Guise wanted to open a "free school", Adrien Nyel went to this town during the Holy Week of 1681. De La Salle had tried to dissuade him from going. In fact, the undertaking was premature and failed. The town of Rethel, wanting to open a school, contacted De La Salle. At first, De La Salle put off making a decision. Finally, yielding to a number of requests, he sent Nyel to the town

around Christmas 1681, as Bernard tells us. Nyel and another teacher opened the school at the beginning of 1682.

For their part, the magistrates of Guise proposed their plan again. Nyel went to negotiate with them and opened a school in the June of the same year. De La Salle had to send two teachers to Rethel, one of whom was Nicolas Vuyart (CL 37, 26).

Blain is the only one to mention that in July 1682 a school was "undertaken" in Chateau Porcien. However, an autographed letter of De La Salle, dated June 20th 1682, confirms this fact. This letter promised two teachers from the "community" of Rheims to the town magistrates (cf. LA 111 = Letter 111 in the 1954 critical edition).

Towards the end of the same year, Fr Guyart, the parish priest of the Parish of St Pierre in Laon, asked De La Salle for two teachers. Nyel left Guise and opened a school in Laon, his native town. Maillefer tells us that "De La Salle sent two teachers to Laon, who opened a school in the following year, 1683" (CL 6, 51). Nyel was one of the two.

Having mentioned the opening of this group of schools (excluding the one in Chateau Porcien), Bernard concludes, "And so Nyel was in charge of the three schools we have just mentioned, while De La Salle directed and built up the one in Rheims" (CL 4, 45).

However, it is likely that the teachers at Rethel, Guise and Laon kept in contact with the community in Rheims, while Nyel saw to the running of these three schools.

As we see the succession of events which affected De La Salle and his teachers in 1682, it is worth taking a closer look at what happened towards the middle of the year.

On June 24th, the "community" in Rheims moved to rue Neuve: it consisted of six or seven teachers. At the end of June–beginning of July, two teachers were sent to Rethel and two to Chateau Porcien. On the other hand, on May 14th there occurred the death of "Christophe, a teacher at M. de La Salle's school" in Rheims, as we learn from the parish register of St Symphorien (CL 37, 27; or CL 26, 189). This indicates there had been a slight increase in the number of teachers.

These new recruits could only be the "new teachers" with whom De La Salle was beginning to form a "community". This confirms what we read in Bernard and Blain, as opposed to Maillefer's text, regarding the time when the group of teachers was joined by new recruits.

(An observation inspired by Gallego 1986, 1:153).

Conclusion

And so, at the end of three years, De La Salle had a "community of teachers", even if these were not the same ones who had started running the schools in Rheims, but others who had arrived later.

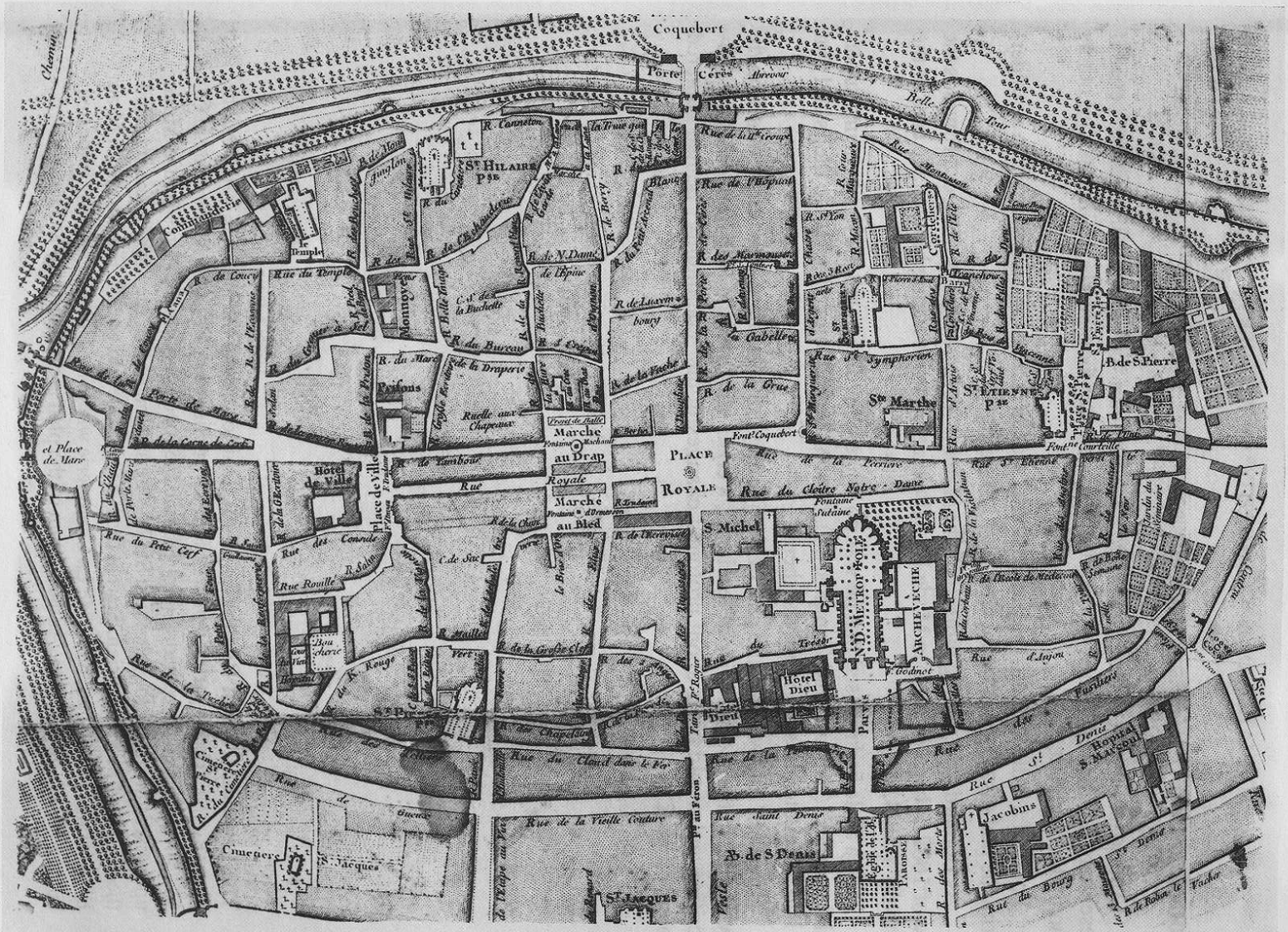
For De La Salle himself, the process reflected his increasing commitment to an undertaking he had discerned as being God's will for him.

As Bernard says, basing himself on the *Memoir* we have already quoted, "Towards the end of 1682, it became clear to M. de La Salle that God was asking him to take care of the schools" (CL 4, 49).

De La Salle had realised that he was no longer "involved with the teachers in a superficial manner" (Sauvage and Campos, 51), but that he had joined his fate to theirs and that he had to devote himself entirely to them.

However, this was not the end of the journey for him, for a new crisis was already developing in the "community of teachers", a crisis which would lead him to further self-sacrifice and would bring about profound changes in the "community" he had gathered around himself.

The Legendre Plan of Rheims (page 40). District around the Hotel de Ville and the Place Royale. This is part of a plan of Rheims published by Br Louis Marie Aroz in CL 52, 24. Try to find the cathedral (Notre Dame Métropole) and the Bishop's House. Move up towards the top of the map, find Ste Marthe and, on its left, rue Ste Marguérite. Find the church of St Symphorien. Start at the Place Royale and go left. Find the Marché au Bled (grain market) and the rue de La Chanvrerie where the Hotel de La Salle is located, but not shown on this plan. At the bottom of the plan is the church of St Jacques.



The Legendre Plan of Rheims. Photo L. Aroz, CL 52, 24.

— Supplement —

The *Memoir on the Beginnings*

This is the name used in the Institute to describe a document which Bernard and Blain tell us was drawn up by De La Salle himself. This is the *Memoir* which is considered to be one of the primary sources of our knowledge about the beginnings of the Institute. We do not possess the original text, but we know of its existence through the biographers (CL 4, 22; CL 7, 167). Thanks to the use they made of it, we can reconstitute, at least in part, its contents, and so assess its importance.

The document itself

Contents

Thanks to the use the biographers say they made of this document, we can arrive at some idea of its contents.

Bernard refers explicitly to the "manuscript" he has made use of. In general, except in a passage where he speaks in the first person, he tends to use the original text as it stands rather than quote from it. Other passages also, in which he says he is reporting what De La Salle said, would seem to originate from the "manuscript". In spite of the fact he says he is going use it as a basis for "all that we are going to describe up to the 14th year" of the beginnings of the Institute, it is difficult to distinguish what he borrows from it.

Blain tells us on several occasions that he is quoting what De La Salle said in his *Memoir*. The use of the first person singular in these passages gives the impression that in fact they are extracts from this document. Another passage seems to come from it also, in spite of the fact it is in reported speech and not attributed to the *Memoir*.

Other sections of Blain's text are definitely based on this same document, although it is not easy to see this. Sometimes observations or conversations attributed to De La Salle are enclosed in inverted commas. Their style, however, is too obviously that of the biographer for them to be considered quotations from the *Memoir*, even if their author based himself on it.

The sections that we can be most sure about as coming from the document are the passages that Bernard and Blain attribute or seem to attribute explicitly to the document they were using. We thought it would be interesting to reproduce these passages here — at least the most important ones — setting them out in the form of parallel texts, and following the order in Bernard, even though this means changing the order in Blain. We will use these texts subsequently to determine to what extent they enable us to discover, at least in part, the contents of the original document.

Bernard

This is how God used these two persons, that is, M. Nyel and Mme Eveque, to lead M. De La Salle to take charge of these schools, something which, as we have already said, and as he mentions in his manuscript, was far from his mind. It is true that several persons he knew and who had been close associates of the late M. Roland had, on a number of occasions, suggested that he ought to establish schools for boys, as M. Roland had done for girls. However, he had never given this suggestion a second thought, and had never had the slightest intention of acting upon it, especially as he now saw that he had a benefice, was responsible for the (orphaned) Sisters and had to look after his family. If he had thought at that time that this commitment would oblige him subsequently to live with these teachers, he would never have undertaken to take care of the teachers or of the schools. As, quite naturally, he did not have a high opinion of these teachers who were quite uneducated, it would obviously have been quite unbearable for him to think that he would have to live with them. And, when they came to live with him two years later, this was initially a great source of suffering for him (CL 4, 30).

God, he said, who conducts all things wisely and gently, and who is not accustomed to impose his will upon people, wishing me to commit myself completely to taking care of the schools, did so in an imperceptible way and in a short period of time, so that one commitment led to another, without my having foreseen any of this initially (CL 4, 33).

He had imagined, as he himself tells us, that his involvement with the schools and the teachers would be only superficial, and that it would not commit him in any way in their regard, except to the extent of going to see them occasionally and making sure they did their work piously and carefully, and that they had enough to live on (CL 4, 34).

Towards the end of 1682, it became clear to M. De La Salle that God was asking him to take care of the schools. And he understood that, being obliged to be the first at the exercises that he had established in the house, and to give an example to those for whom he had established them, he could not do this while being at the same time assiduous in his choir duties [as a canon]. His confessor would never approve such conduct, because he was most insistent that he fulfill his duties assiduously (CL 4, 49).

Blain

It was (he said in the *Memoir* we have mentioned) as a result of these two events , that is, my meeting with M. Nyel and the suggestion made to me by this lady, that I began to take care of the schools for boys. It had not occurred to me previously to do so. It is not as if it had not been suggested to me. Several of M. Roland's friends had tried to suggest this to me, but the idea had never taken root in my mind. It had never occurred to me to act upon it. If it had occurred to me that the care I was taking of the teachers through pure charity would oblige me one day to live with them, I would have put a stop to everything. As I quite naturally considered those I had to employ in the schools, especially at the beginning, as quite inferior to my valet, the very thought of having to live with them would have been quite unbearable. In fact, during the first two years when they first came to live with me I suffered a great deal.

It was apparently for this reason that God, who conducts all things with wisdom and gentleness, and who is not accustomed to impose his will on people, wishing to make me take complete charge of the schools, did so in an imperceptible manner and over a long period of time, in such a way that one commitment led me to another, without my having foreseen any of this initially (CL 7, 169).

I had imagined (he said in a *Memoir* written in his own hand to show the Brothers in what way divine Providence had given birth to their Institute) that the care I was taking of the schools and of the teachers would be simply superficial and would not commit me to more in their regard than simply providing them enough to live on and making sure they acquitted themselves of their duties with piety and assiduity (CL 7, 167).

Towards the end of the year 1682 (he said this himself), it seemed clear to him that God was asking him to take care of the schools; and that being obliged to be first at the exercises of the community, he could not attend to his choir duties as assiduously as his confessor wanted (CL 7, 193).

If we compare the two texts quoted, we can see that, on the whole, the contents are the same. When, occasionally, Bernard speaks in the first person, as Blain does normally, the words used are very similar. Even if they used it differently, the two biographers seem to have relied on the same source.

Two differences, however, need to be mentioned.

According to Bernard, it was in an imperceptible manner and **over a short period of time** that God "led M. De La Salle to take care of the schools". Maillefer says the same thing when he quotes this passage, while Blain says it was done "in an imperceptible manner and over **a long period of time**". This second version seems more logical. However, there is no way of telling what the original text said!

Speaking of the difficulty De La Salle had living with the first teachers, Bernard writes, "And, when they came to live with him **two years later**, this was initially a great source of suffering for him". Blain, on the other hand, says, "In fact, **during the first two years** when they first came to live with me, I suffered a great deal".

In the first case, the biographer seems to refer to the opening of the first school in 1679. In the second, as was noted in the preceding chapter, the indication given would help us to fix June 1680 as the date when De La Salle first invited the teachers to take meals with him. Which of the two biographers has given us the true version of the facts? We do not know.

Regarding these two points, it is not possible to know what the original document said.

As for the rest of the texts, although it is sufficiently clear that they are both based on the same document, we can say that Blain's is closer to the original document:

- it is written in direct speech;
- the style is sober;
- the terms used in speaking of the first teachers have not been toned down in any way.

And so it is very likely that, in Blain's text, we can find some elements of the *Memoir* drawn up by De La Salle.

Apart from these elements and other short references in Blain's text, we cannot be sure exactly what De La Salle wrote. On the other hand, what is sure, thanks to De La Salle's text, is that Bernard and Blain were able to describe in the way they did the various stages in De La Salle's gradual commitment to the work of the schools and the formation of a community, first of teachers then of Brothers, dedicated to this work. When the Superiors of the Institute began gathering material for a life of M. de La Salle, there remained very few contemporary witnesses, like Jean Louis de La Salle and Pierre Guyart, of the period covered by the *Memoir*.

The importance of the document

The elements that we can consider as coming from the *Memoir* written by De La Salle enable us to assess the importance that this document has for us.

Its importance lies in the fact that it is an **autobiographical document** written by De La Salle. In it we find not only what he recalled of a certain number of events, but also the way in which he subsequently understood them.

Recollection of events

The texts we have quoted provide us with De La Salle's own recollection of a certain number of events:

- the way in which he became involved in opening schools for poor boys in Rheims;
- the pressure that had been put on him with regard to this matter;
- the gradual change in his attitude towards the schools and especially their teachers;
- his attitude towards persons of a social class different from his own.

Without De La Salle's own recollections, we would never have known of his reactions to these events. We would have had only some vague idea.

According to what Bernard said — he drew material from it "covering the first 14 years" of the Institute — the "manuscript" would seem to include the period from 1679–1680 to 1693–1694. It would seem also that the document was written in 1693–1694, if it is true that it remained hidden for 20 or so years and was discovered only during the Founder's journey to Provence in 1712–1714.

And so, at the very most, 14 years separated the most distant events from the writing of the manuscript. Moreover, at the time of writing, De La Salle was only 42 or 43 and had not yet reached the age of what we call "selective memory"!

Understanding events

The texts we have quoted enable us also to understand the way in which De La Salle himself subsequently perceived the meaning of the events which he had doubtlessly not understood at the time they occurred. With De La Salle, we can see:

- how he was gradually led along a path he had not planned to follow;
- how, from a "superficial involvement" in the schools and with the teachers, he progressed to a personal commitment which involved him totally.

He re-interpreted his past experience in the light of faith and discovered in it a meaning he had not perceived previously.

This way of recognising in events "the conduct of God in his regard" and of responding to it by a new commitment, which characterises De La Salle, can be found throughout the *Memoir* he wrote.

This fitted in well, of course, with the biographers' tendency to interpret all events in terms of Providence (*interprétation providentialiste**), even though in educated society this kind of interpretation was going out of fashion. Nonetheless, even if we have to make allowances for what the biographers added, their writings can still show us how De La Salle's habit of searching for God's will in his regard and of responding to it faithfully guided him throughout his life.

In conclusion, having limited ourselves as far as possible to a factual survey of the events, we were able to look at the facts in the way in which the Founder did.

For our own personal life, we can find in the *Memoir on the Beginnings* a fine example of interpreting events in the light of faith, which could be an inspiration for us.

5 Birth of a Kind of Religious Community (1683–1690)

Introduction

During this period we see the transformation of the community of teachers, which had formed around De La Salle, into what we would call a religious community, by the adoption of certain basic characteristics which distinguished religious communities at the time.

This transformation is closely linked to a number of personal decisions taken by De La Salle, which led him to share the conditions of his followers, and to link his life increasingly with theirs.

This chapter includes three parts:

- a. Decisive choices (1683–1684)
- b. The community of teachers becomes a community of Brothers (1684–1687)
- c. New developments and the assertion of the particular character of the community (1687–1690)

a. Decisive choices (1683–1684)

The anxiety of the teachers

The biographers agree that, despite their generosity, it was not long before the new teachers who had joined De La Salle became anxious about their future. As Bernard says:

> From the time the teachers began to live with M. de La Salle to the end of 1682, he noticed that several of them were tempted not to stay, because, they said, they found no security in their situation (CL 4, 47).

Blain gives further details:

> Reduced to the bare minimum, with no fund or income, they considered their uncertain future. In their anxiety and lack of trust, they saw that their only source of livelihood in old age would be shameful begging. The devil exaggerated in their minds their reasons for mistrust: he showed them only a picture of their future misery, a hospital when they fell sick or became old, and this would be the reward for their work (CL 7, 186).

Although the description given by the biographer dramatises the situation, it is nevertheless true. Receiving just enough to live on from those who supported the schools in which they taught, the teachers shared the lack of security of many of their contemporaries.

As they had no funds to fall back upon, anything that prevented them from working — illness, infirmity, old age — would force them to rely on the distribution of alms. In the case of illness, they would have to seek admission to a hospital or, if they were infirm or old, to a General Hospital.

As they began to form a community, the teachers could hope to receive a regular income in the form of an annuity.

If we follow Bernard's chronology, the new teachers arrived at the end of 1681–beginning of 1682. It was probably after the move to rue Neuve (June 24th 1682) that De La Salle began to become aware of their anxiety, and in order to dispel it, he urged them to trust Providence. His exhortations proved ineffective.

The reasons for his inability to convince them became clear when the teachers became bold enough to tell him what they thought. Blain attributes the following words to them:

> You find it easy to speak, they said to him, since you lack nothing. With a good canonry and an equally good inheritance, you have security and are in no danger of poverty. If our establishment falls, you remain standing; if our situation is ruined, yours remains unaffected. Where will we go, what will we do, if the schools fail or people lose their taste for us? We are people without money, without income and even without a profession. Poverty is all that awaits us, and begging is the only means of alleviating it (CL 7, 188).

At first, De La Salle was surprised by what the teachers thought, but then he began to wonder whether he should give up his wealth and his canonry (*canonicat**) so as to be poor like them and give them an example of complete trust in Providence (CL 7, 188).

However, according to the three biographers, De La Salle's first reaction was to calm the anxiety of the teachers by using his wealth to endow the schools and thus ensure their future. He consulted Barré who dissuaded him from doing so and suggested he give up not only his inheritance (*patrimoine**), but also his canonry.

De La Salle prayed and thought a lot about this piece of advice. The outcome was that he gave up his canonry first, even though he had first thought of starting by giving up his inheritance.

Giving up the canonry

If we accept what the biographers say, what led De La Salle to give up the benefits (*bénéfice**) of his canonry had less to do with his desire to share the condition of the teachers than his need to be more free to lead a community life with them.

According to a passage in Bernard and Blain, which seem to us to be based on the *Memoir on the Beginnings*, De La Salle had come to the conclusion towards the end of 1682 that "God was asking him to take care of the schools".

In the light of what was said in the preceding paragraph, it is easy to understand why De La Salle decided at that point to involve himself more fully in looking after the schools and the teachers. To make himself more available he had to give up his position as canon (*chanoine**). This involved also losing a regular and considerable income.

The three biographers are unanimous when they say that it took De La Salle nine or ten months to give up his position as canon. This means that, when his decision became known, he encountered much opposition to his plan, in particular from Jacques Callou, the superior of the seminary in Rheims, in whom he had confided his intentions. The latter finally gave his permission in July 1683.

De La Salle approached the Archbishop concerning the matter, but, as the biographers note, the latter was in no hurry to accede to his request. Finally, however, Mgr Le Tellier accepted that M. de La Salle "give up his benefice" as canon in favour of M. Faubert, a priest whom he had chosen in preference to his brother Jean Louis. The new canon took office on August 16th 1683.

Following the opposition aroused by his decision and his choice of a successor, and wishing to keep a promise made to M. de La Barmondière, the parish priest of St Sulpice, De La Salle wished to go to Paris to direct a school there. However, he was dissuaded from doing so by his spiritual director, who considered his continued presence necessary for his teachers. Barré, who supported this plan, was very put out.

Giving up his inheritance

In the months that followed his resignation from his canonry, De La Salle returned to his first intention of giving up his inheritance so as to convince his teachers by his example "to put all their trust in God" (CL 4, 58). As Blain says:

> Grace led the holy priest to believe that, when his followers saw him become by choice what they were by necessity, they would no longer find it difficult to follow his example and abandon themselves totally to Providence. In a word, M. de La Salle, wishing to be like his brothers, following the example of Jesus Christ, wished to become poor with the poor, so as to make them love their state of poverty (CL 7, 215).

He remained undecided, however, on how to use his wealth. As Blain says:

> It is true that, having resolved to give up his wealth and his inheritance, M. de La Salle had not decided what use to make of it. He had only two choices possible. The first was to distribute it all to all kinds of poor people. The second was to use it for the benefit of those he had charge of (CL 7, 216).

♦ The first choice meant following the teachings of Barré, who wanted the work of the schools to be founded solely on trust in Providence.

♦ The second meant following the example of Nicolas Roland, who had "founded [endowed] schools for girls" (CL 7, 217).

As was his custom in such circumstances, De La Salle had recourse to prayer. The prayer that Bernard and Blain put on his lips shows what his dispositions were at this juncture:

> My God, I do not know whether I should endow or not endow. It is not for me to establish communities, nor to know how they should be established. It is for you to know and to do so in a way that pleases you. I do not dare to endow, because I do not know your will. I shall therefore not contribute anything to the endowment of our houses. If you endow them, they will be endowed. If you do not endow them, they will remain unendowed. I beg you to let me know your holy will (CL 7, 218).

We cannot say whether this prayer was composed by De La Salle himself. The form it takes, however, deserves a few comments.

We should note in particular that what is involved here is "establishing communities", "founding houses", while in our last reference to Nicolas Roland, it was said that he had "endowed the schools for girls".

In fact, what was involved there was the endowment of the community of the Sisters of the Child Jesus, for which Roland had allocated 43,000 livres, which would produce about 2,200 livres annually, and so had ensured the future of the "free schools" for the girls of Rheims (cf. Poutet, 1992:39).

It would seem that the real dilemma facing De La Salle was as follows: should he use his wealth to produce a regular income for his communities, for his "houses", that is, for the groups of teachers (later Brothers) running schools; or should he leave them to continue depending for their livelihood on what those who had asked them to run schools were willing to give them?

De La Salle's dispositions convinced his spiritual director, and he "allowed him . . . to sell and to distribute all his goods to the poor" (CL 7, 219).

The distressing conditions brought about by a famine soon offered him an occasion to fulfil his plan. The supplement at the end of this chapter will deal more fully with this.

Conclusion

Having adopted in full the condition of the teachers to whom he had united his life, De La Salle was able to induce them to commit themselves more fully to the process of turning the community they formed into a kind of religious community.

Nicolas Barré (Amiens, December 17th 1621–Paris, May 31st 1686) joined the Minims in 1641.

In 1659, he was a teacher, confessor and preacher in Rouen. In 1662 he preached a parish mission in Sotteville lez Rouen. Two women helpers, Françoise Duval and Marguérite Lestocq, gave religious instruction in their homes and then opened a school for poor girls in Rouen. This was the beginning of the Daughters of Providence in Rouen.

In December 1670, Nicolas Roland obtained two Sisters from Fr Barré. One of them, Françoise Duval, left the Sisters of the Child Jesus in 1683 to help to found the Daughters of Providence in Lisieux.

In 1674, Fr Barré was sent to Paris. He brought two Sisters from Rouen in order to open a free school and a novitiate: the Sisters of St Maur. In 1686, Démia obtained a Sister from Fr. Barré to start up the future Sisters of St Charles. Fr Barré died before he could see De La Salle fulfil his promise and come to Paris with his Brothers.

Photo E. Rousset

— Supplement —
De La Salle Distributes His Goods to the Poor

This title is taken from a passage we have already quoted from Blain, which says that De La Salle's spiritual director allowed him "to sell and distribute his goods to the poor, exposing himself to the risk of all that could happen and all that could be said" (CL 7, 219).

We shall deal with two aspects of the distribution made by De La Salle of his goods:

- the circumstances,
- the method.

The circumstances

Blain describes them in a passage which includes details about:

- the situation in which the distribution was made,
- the date on which it was made.

With regard to this, the text in question has the value of a document. It needs to be compared, however, with other sources of information.

> 1684 was a year filled with misfortune. Champagne was not spared the misery that prevailed throughout the Kingdom following a succession of failed harvests. The poor flocked to the city from the countryside and, joining those of the city, turned Rheims into one big hospital. Most of the inhabitants became beggars, as big increases in prices and the rigour of the winter caused workshops and other forms of work to stop. With great shame, they begged for bread from the rich, whereas the professional poor did so without embarrassment. The famine was so great and so cruel, that many rich people were unable to provide against it and were reduced to the ranks of the poor, and having no bread, were too ashamed to beg for it. The exorbitant prices of produce and food soon exhausted reserves and savings amassed over the years. Those who were only moderately rich were soon reduced to hunger and misery (CL 7, 219).

The situation

We can summarise the situation described by the biographer in the following way:

Causes	Characteristics	Consequences
"succession of failed harvests"	"misery"	The poor from the countryside join those of the towns
"*cherté** (increase in prices) and the rigour of the winter"	"Workshops and other forms of work stop." "famine" "exorbitant food prices"	Most of the inhabitants of Rheims are reduced to begging. Rich people become destitute. Reserves and savings of several years are exhausted.

This description, characterised by the figures of speech and ways of seeing things typical of the time, indicates the factors which, together or separately, caused shortages in less serious cases, and famine, in the worst.

♦ Bad climatic conditions, decrease in agricultural production, scarcity of grain for making bread, increase in the price of bread, increase in the number of those unable to buy enough of it to live, dependence by an increasing number of people on distribution of bread, increase in the number of beggars from elsewhere.

♦ Rigorous winter, decrease in economic activity, reduction in the resources of those who depend totally on their work, their difficulty in finding enough bread (especially as its price was increasing at the same time).

The biographer shows us how all these factors coming together produced a particularly difficult situation. The following section will give more details.

Date

There are two pieces of information regarding this in the text we have quoted:

♦ "1684, a year filled with misfortune. . . ."

♦ "The rigour of the winter. . . ."

This is useful information, but which winter are we referring to: 1683–84 or 1684–85? One answer to the question lies in the records of **temperatures** kept at the time by the observatory of St Maur, near Paris. A recent book, based on these records, gives us the following information:

> It was a well-defined winter, lasting from December 1683 to February 1684. In Paris, the average temperature was minus point 8 degrees centigrade (in a normal winter it was 3.5°C). . . . From January 10th onwards, it became very cold: in the countryside around

Paris, the temperature dropped to -20°C. In the first 10 days of February, the temperature dropped to -10°C. On February 2nd, 3rd and 4th, the temperatures recorded are between -16°C and -17°C (Lachiver 1991, 77-79).

This winter is referred to as being an exceptionally cold one in a ten-year period which was rather mild. As the climate of Rheims was harsher than that of Paris, one can be justified in thinking that the winter of 1683–84 corresponds to the one whose "rigour" was a joint factor with the "big increase in prices" (*cherté**) in the text quoted.

Another source of information is a record of the **prices** of various agricultural products which was brought up to date each week in the Rheims market. The chart that follows shows the change in prices of two cereals (wheat and rye) over the period June 1683–June 1686. The prices used are the highest reached each month. The chart shows quite clearly a period during which the price of both cereals remained high, reaching a peak in December 1684. A prolonged period of high prices like the one shown is typical of a time of shortage linked to bad harvests.

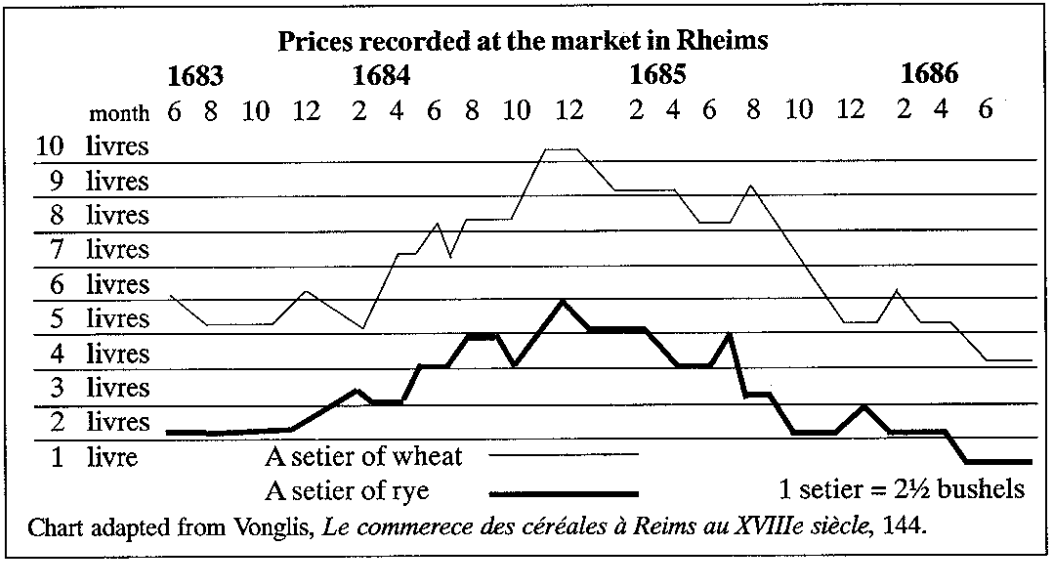


Chart adapted from Vonglis, *Le commerece des céréales à Reims au XVIIIe siècle*, 144.

We can suppose, therefore, that the year of "successive bad harvests" was 1684 and that their dire effects were felt in particular during the winter of 1684–85. According to the figures we have shown, the "rigorous winter" and "high prices" due to bad harvests were not contemporaneous but successive. Probably, a frost killed the cereals sown in autumn and this produced a bad harvest in 1684.

This confirms the information given by the biographer when he says that there was "a period of shortage lasting two whole years". When it became clear at the beginning of 1684 that the harvest would be a bad one, those who still had stocks of grain kept them, anticipating and provoking a rise in prices. It was only in Autumn 1685, after a satisfactory harvest, that prices stabilised

at a lower level. This view would need to be cross-checked, but this is outside the scope of this supplement.

Clearly, what we have said does not alter in any way the action taken by De La Salle in these circumstances. However, it is useful to give as clear an idea as possible of the context of his action, so that we can assess more fully its significance.

The chart shows that persons who had just enough money to buy bread when the price of rye was 2 livres per setier, could no longer do so when the price had doubled or tripled, as was the case in Rheims from April 1684 to July 1685.

The method

The description given by Blain gives the impression that De La Salle organised the distribution in a way that was usual for the times, that is, in the normal way for the poor who were included on the "almsgiving list", or in addition, for those who were reduced to poverty in times of famine by the increase in prices or a reduction in resources.

On two occasions, the biographer tells us that the poor were given "a portion of bread". This was quite in keeping with the customs of the times, given the importance bread had in the diet of the people of those days and, in particular, of the lower classes.

During the famine, there was an increase in the price of whole meal bread, which was a staple part of the diet. It was cheaper than white bread, and was made from a mixture of flour from wheat and rye. There was less of it available; it was of poorer quality and it cost more. Although there was not enough of it to satisfy needs, the distributions of bread that were organised enabled a good proportion of the population to survive.

There is reason to believe that De La Salle did not restrict himself to distributing bread, but that he also gave money away. Blain's text informs us, moreover, that De La Salle divided up his gifts among the "three classes of poor people he wished to help" (CL 7, 220).

The first consisted of the children who attended the schools, "boys and girls", Bernard tells us (CL 4, 61). Thus his understandable generosity regarding the boys was extended to include girls, presumably those who went to the schools run by the Sisters of the Child Jesus.

The second group consisted of the "ashamed" poor people. This was the usual name given to people who had once been well off and who had become poor as a result of a change in their situation (due to illness, old age, for example), or because of unforeseen circumstances (unemployment, increase in prices). These hid their change in fortune, and it was easier to help them with gifts of money. The others were the habitually poor who were known as such, or those who joined their ranks in times of famine.

How much wealth was given away?

If we are to believe Blain, De La Salle's inheritance amounted to about 40,000 livres. It is not known where Blain got this figure from.

To know exactly what De La Salle gave away, we would have to know the size of the sums he was able to withdraw from his inheritance, either by transferring to others his investment contracts for ready cash, or by obtaining a reimbursement of the sums invested, plus the interest. A receipt signed by De La Salle on January 19th 1685, would seem to be an example of this (cf. CL 42-1, 235ff).

On the basis of documents brought to light by Br Louis Marie Aroz, a number of attempts have been made to calculate the wealth De La Salle could have had at his disposal around 1684 (cf. CL 42-1, 184 and 223–226; or Poutet 1992, 41–42).

The results of this research seem too uncertain for us to be able to draw any satisfactory conclusions.

Conclusion

The above study, however useful, should not make us lose sight of the events we have tried to understand. When we see the chart showing the fluctuation in the price of cereals, we should try to imagine the lack of security and the great privations experienced by those who lived through the situation we have analysed. There is no doubt that De La Salle was sensitive to it when he contributed to the alleviation of this suffering, and before he chose to share it himself.

This was, in fact, the inevitable final step, the culmination of his various acts of detachment between 1683 and 1685:

♦ By giving up his benefice as a canon, he had deprived himself of a regular and safe source of **income**.

♦ By using all the part of his share of the inheritance that he could, he had abandoned **reserves** that would have been particularly useful in a difficult period like 1684–1685, or in the very severe famine of 1693–1694 and of the winter of 1709–1710 which he experienced with his followers.

Sharing now the condition of his followers and of many of his contemporaries, he could appreciate how **precarious** it was.

Blain tells us that, after distributing all his goods, De La Salle himself begged for bread. By this humble gesture, he joined the ranks of the poor. By doing so, he imitated his Master, Jesus Christ who, by willingly giving up in the Incarnation the "rank which made him equal to God", took on the poverty of man's condition. Having taken the Gospel seriously himself, De La Salle now stood more of a chance of being listened to by his followers when he invited them not to worry about the future and to put their trust in their Father in Heaven.

b. The community of teachers becomes a community of Brothers (1684–1687)

The decisive choices made by De La Salle seem to have made a strong impression on the community he had formed around himself.

The biographers are in agreement regarding most of the facts relating to the transformation of this community of "seculars" into a kind of religious community. As far as the chronology of events is concerned, however, there is much less agreement.

As a way of dealing with the difficulties that this discrepancy poses, it would seem to be a good idea to use Blain's text to give a general idea of how the transformation took place, before going on to deal with particular aspects of it.

The general picture

At the end of chapter one and at the beginning of chapter two of part II of his work (CL 7, 231–232), Blain describes a whole series of events around which everything else revolves during the period we are studying in this part of the chapter (1684–1687).

The responsibilities of De La Salle are increased

The biographer begins his account by showing how De La Salle was obliged to take over responsibility for the schools at Rethel, Guise and Laon. Chateau Porcien is not mentioned.

Earlier on in his account, Blain had anticipated events by saying, in connection with the opening of a school at Laon in 1683, that Adrien Nyel remained two years in that town, and that in 1685, wishing to return to Rouen, he went to see De La Salle to ask him to look after the three schools which, if he left, would have to fend for themselves (cf. CL 7, 183).

De La Salle's reaction to the request was cautious, but he had been presented with a *fait accompli* and Nyel had left for Rouen. We learn from a document that he was there on April 26th 1685 (cf. CL 48, 31).

At the urging of a number of persons, in particular of his friend Pierre Guyart, the parish priest of St Pierre in Laon, De La Salle accepted responsibility for the schools opened by Nyel outside Rheims. It is clear that when the school year started in 1685, De La Salle had taken over these extra responsibilities.

The intention to form a small community

Blain establishes a very clear relationship between this increase in De La Salle's responsibilities and his intention to transform the community, which up till now had been formed of the teachers in Rheims, into a sort of religious community. This community would include all the teachers in the schools for which he now had responsibility. The biographer describes this as follows:

> Seeing that he was responsible for a number of teachers working in several different towns, M. de La Salle considered it appropriate to form them into a small congregation, and to prescribe for them a uniform style of life (CL 7, 231).
>
> His task consisted, therefore, in forming the group of teachers into a regular community, in giving them a habit, rules and constitutions, and in establishing in all things a uniformity that was perfect and suited to their vocation. It consisted also in inspiring them all with the same spirit, the same sentiments, the same dispositions, the same views, and in giving them one heart and one mind, following the example of the first Christians who, in forming the primitive Church, provided the centuries to come with the model of a perfect community (CL 7, 232).

On the basis of what Blain says, it seems, therefore, that in the course of 1685, the community of teachers that had formed around De La Salle in Rheims, was extended to include the teachers from Rethel, Guise, Laon (and perhaps Chateau Porcien), and had begun to take on more and more the features of a community that could be called religious.

Convocation of an Assembly

After outlining De La Salle's plan, the biographer goes on to say, "However, he did not think he had to make any personal contribution in order to make it successful". In the following paragraph we read:

> The humble Founder called his 12 principal followers and held an assembly with them. His purpose was to discuss together with them the means to give the establishment a form, to define the vocation of its members and to give them stability. (CL 7, 232)

Blain tells us that this Assembly "began on the eve of the feast of the Ascension 1684 and was due to finish on the feast of Pentecost, but was prolonged till Trinity Sunday".

According to the chronology of events established, the date given — 1684 — seems to be a mistake. Maillefer's date for the Assembly — 1686 — fits in better and is normally accepted as being correct.

Various aspects

Blain continues his account of the Assembly of the 12 "principal followers" of De La Salle:

> We are not able to report all the topics that were treated in this Assembly of 12, nor what were the results. We know only that agreement was reached on a number of regulations, and that there were deliberations about the changing of the habit, the name the teachers would subsequently adopt, the food they should eat and the question of making vows (CL 7, 233).

We shall use the list given in the passage as a guide for our study of various aspects of the process which transformed the community of teachers into a community of Brothers. However, we shall treat the question of regulations and food together, and will deal with a new attempt by De La Salle during an Assembly to have a Brother elected as Superior.

Choice of a habit

The same biographer tells us that, although during the Assembly of the 12 the question of a choice of habit was broached, no decision was made regarding the matter. During the following winter, at the suggestion of the mayor of Rheims, De La Salle had cloaks made of black material, which were similar to the *capotes* worn in Champagne. And then he gave his followers "a cassock of the same black material, similar to what ecclesiastics used to wear and which are still worn in some communities, which was closed in front with metal hooks and eyes" (CL 7, 238).

Information given elsewhere regarding the date of the Assembly would seem to point to the winter of 1684–1685 as the date when the new habit was adopted. Since doubts have been raised about 1684 as the correct date, we cannot rely on it. We cannot rely either on what the other biographers tell us about the matter.

However, there is another source on which we can rely regarding this. At a certain point, De La Salle saw himself obliged to defend his choice of habit, and he set his reasons down in a document which subsequently became known as the *Memoir on the Habit*, of which we have a preliminary draft.

♦ This text confirms that the habit in question consisted of a cloak also called *casaque* and *capote*, and a short cassock.

♦ It says that the cloak was worn first over the "jerkin" (*justaucorps**) worn by the teachers.

♦ It says that at the time this *Memoir* was written, this habit had already been worn for five years in five towns.

It is thought that the *Memoir on the Habit* was written at the end of 1689–beginning of 1690. The *Memoir* would seem, therefore, to indicate that the habit was being worn at the end of 1684–beginning of 1685, and not only in Rheims, but also in the four towns where Adrien Nyel had opened a school. This would mean that it was being worn before the teachers had come together to form a "small congregation".

However, at the date indicated, the teachers wore simply a cloak over the jerkin: the short cassock was introduced only subsequently.

Whatever the truth of the matter may be, it is clear that, as soon as the teachers began to wear it in its entirety, this "unusual dress" (unusual because it differed from what was worn by seculars and ecclesiastics) was one of the most visible signs that the community of teachers had been transformed into a sort of religious community (an expression that is used in the *Memoir on the Habit*).

The change of name

"The change in dress led to a change of name", Blain tells us (CL 7, 240). This would mean that the change of name must have occurred at the end of 1684–beginning of 1685. This seems more plausible than what the other biographers maintain, namely, that it took place several years earlier, immediately after the arrival of the new teachers.

In fact, it is difficult to know exactly when "the teachers were called Brothers", as Bernard writes (cf. CL 4, 47). We can be certain, however, that the adoption of the name "Brother" served to give a new appearance to the community gathered around De La Salle.

The importance of this fact will be highlighted in the supplement entitled "Brothers of the Christian Schools" which will follow this part of the present chapter.

A decision regarding "regulations"

In the course of this same Assembly, the question of establishing "regulations" appears to have been broached. According to Blain, "M. de La Salle was in no hurry to give regulations to the Brothers: it was easier to draw them up than to make them practised" (CL 7,

234). Following his usual practice, he preferred to allow the Brothers to experiment before drawing up regulations.

All the same, the Assembly did draw up some rules concerning meals. It appears that the intention was to establish some kind of uniformity regarding food among the various houses (local communities) where the Brothers lived.

A decision to bind themselves by vows

The three biographers are in agreement when they say that, during the first Assembly of the "principal Brothers" (according to Blain and Maillefer) or during the Brothers' retreat (according to Bernard), the Brothers discussed the "plan to make vows", as Blain puts it.

It was in fact a way of identifying more closely with the so-called "regular communities", as well as of "procuring stability for those who belonged and would belong to the Institute" (CL 4, 72).

According to Maillefer, the Brothers were "resolved to pronounce the three vows of poverty, obedience and chastity for life" (CL 4, 75). Bernard and Blain mention only the vows of obedience and chastity. Finally, De La Salle convinced the Brothers to restrict themselves to the vow of obedience.

On the feast of the Holy Trinity, De La Salle and the Brothers present took this vow for a year (according to Bernard and Maillefer), or for three years (according to Blain).

Blain tells us, that a year later, on the feast of the Holy Trinity, De La Salle and 8 of the 12 Brothers who had made a vow of obedience a year previously, renewed it. This renewal is still a custom in the Institute.

> Even if they had pronounced this vow for three years, as Blain says, the Brothers renewing their vow for one year extended it by that period. In fact, they gave it an indeterminate duration.

An attempt to have a Brother appointed Superior

All three biographers mention the fact that, during another Assembly, De La Salle wanted a Brother to be elected in his place as Superior of the new community.

They do not agree, however, on the date of this second Assembly. According to Maillefer, who we think is right, it was held on the feast of the Holy Trinity in 1687 (cf. CL 6, 76-77).

In justification of De La Salle's wish to be replaced as Superior, the biographers speak of his wish to practise the vow of obedience he had made. We can also mention the disinterestedness and clear-thinking of this young man — he was only 36 — who did not wish the work he had undertaken to be dependent too much on himself.

The Brothers accepted the reasons put forward by De La Salle and, in his place, elected Brother Henri Lheureux, who was 24 years old.

However, the decision was premature. As soon as the Vicar Generals of Rheims became aware of it, they obliged De La Salle to take up his position as Superior again (CL 7, 270).

Conclusion

The various decisions taken in the course of the years we have just considered had given the community gathered around De La Salle characteristics which made it similar to the religious communities of the period. However, there were differences.

What distinguished the community of Brothers even more than its external characteristics was the fervour of its members. Blain, in particular, draws attention to this by speaking of the young Brothers who died in the course of the years: Jean François in 1684, Nicolas Bourlette in 1686, Maurice on May 1st 1687 (cf. CL 7, 247ff).

Side by side with the "regular communities" which made "solemn" vows and which, in the case of women, were cloistered, there appeared at that time the "secular communities" whose members made "simple" vows, or sometimes made no vows at all. Thus the Sisters of the Child Jesus of Rheims were described in an official document as "secular women" (CL 38, 91). This was the case also of the Daughters of Charity of St Vincent de Paul.

We are therefore justified in saying that the community of Brothers as it was in 1686-1687 was a "secular community". Blain, on the other hand, mistakenly refers to it as a "regular community" (cf. CL 11, 104–105).

— Supplement —
Brothers of the Christian Schools

If we accept what Maillefer says, this is the name De La Salle gave to the teachers that took the place of those who had left at the end of 1682–beginning of 1683. However, there is reason to doubt that De La Salle gave this name to the teachers at the time indicated by the biographer.

This does not change the fact that, at one time or another, this was the name adopted by the followers of De La Salle.

But how was it and when was it that they began to call themselves and to be called by this name? These questions deserve an answer, and this we should like to provide at this point, by considering each element of the name separately and then the name "Brothers of the Christian Schools" as a whole.

Brothers

The **change of name** referred to earlier is certainly connected to the fact that the teachers gathered around De La Salle "took the form of a community". It is connected more particularly, however, with the fact that the teachers, at some particular point, began calling one another **"Brother"**, and that those who observed them called them by that name also.

This is clearly shown by Bernard's text:

> It was at the end of the first six months and at the beginning of the year 1682 that new candidates appeared. . . . And it was then that a true form of community began to appear in the house. It was also at the beginning of that same year that what were known as exercises began to be practised, and the teachers were called Brothers (CL 4, 47).

Even in his first manuscript, Maillefer tells us that De La Salle gave the name of "Brothers of the Christian Schools" to the teachers, and then he goes on to say:

> This name seemed to them more unassuming and more appropriate to the common life they had adopted, and more capable of maintaining the union that reigned among them. The effects of this change appeared at once, although on the face of it, it was not a great one.

When he goes on to describe these happy effects in the following paragraph, it is clear that he sees a connection between the changes that had come about in the community and the fact that from now on the teachers called themselves Brothers.

> The Brothers (that is how I shall refer to them in the future) had one heart and one mind. They lived in peace with one another, helped one another with tender and compassionate charity. All they had became common property, no private interests distracted their minds, and in this way the regularity of their conduct was a vivid image of the life of the first Christians (CL 6, 54).

The reference to the community of the first Christians was, no doubt, part of the hagiographer's stock-in-trade. However, we are probably right in thinking that the biographer is actually describing a point in our early history when, by their lifestyle, the first Brothers deserved to bear this name.

For the teachers gathered around De La Salle, the fact of being called "Brothers" indicated their intention to go beyond what already held them together, that is, life in community and the exercise of a common profession. Taking the Gospel as their sole source of inspiration, they wished to found their community on the command of mutual love received from Christ.

The text in which Blain speaks of "the change of name", which according to him, followed "the change of dress", is somewhat long. All the same, it deserves to be quoted in full and studied carefully.

> The change of dress led to the change of name. That of Brothers was chosen as it was appropriate, and the name of Schoolmasters was left to those who taught for their personal gain, and for whom charity and humility had no place. Such a name had never suited persons who professed to run schools for the sole purpose of making Jesus Christ reign in them and of teaching Christian doctrine there gratuitously. Even if this name had been tolerated up till then in a house in which uniformity and equality in all things had not yet succeeded in bonding together persons wavering in their vocation, it was no longer so now that they had united to form one sole body. Consequently, the name of Brothers, which nature bestows on children who have the same blood and the same father on earth, and which charity applies to those who have the same spirit and the same Father in heaven, truly belonged to them.
>
> In this way, the nature of the sons of M. de La Salle was reflected in the title of Brothers of the Christian and Gratuitous Schools, and from now on we shall not call them by any other name. This name is appropriate because it includes a definition of their state and indicates the commitments of their vocation. This name teaches them that the charity which brought their Institute into existence must also be its life and soul, preside over all their deliberations and inspire their plans. It must also be the force that impels them to work and act, which must regulate all the steps they take and animate all their words and

> actions. This name teaches them the excellence of their commitment, the dignity of their state and the holiness of their profession. It tells them that, living as Brothers, they owe one another mutual signs of tender, but spiritual friendship. Since they must look upon themselves as the elder brothers of those they teach, they must exercise this ministry of charity with a charitable heart. (CL 7, 241)

In this text, Blain explains first of all why the followers of De La Salle adopted the name of "Brothers" in the place of "Schoolmasters".

His gives two reasons for this which the following questions can help us discover. (The answer can also be found in *Lasallian Themes 2* 1995, 19).

- What difference does the biographer establish between the two names?
- What made this difference more obvious?

The biographer goes on to justify the name "Brothers of the Christian and Gratuitous Schools" which he uses.

- How does he do this?

The following questions concern the name "Brother":

- What does this name recall to those who bear it?
- What does it invite them to do?

After studying this text, we can conclude that Blain follows Maillefer in stressing that the change in name from "Schoolmasters" to "Brothers" represented for the followers of De La Salle the transition from **life in common** to **fraternal life**.

The biographer noted also how "Brothers" was an appropriate name for men one of whose most striking characteristics was, and had to remain, the type of **fraternal relationship** they maintained with their pupils.

Of the Christian Schools

What we have said above should be enough to explain how the teachers who formed a community with De La Salle came to call themselves "Brothers".

It remains now to see why these "Brothers" were called "of the Christian Schools", since any specification used needed to be sufficiently different to distinguish them from others. An explanation is needed because, in those days, all schools properly so called could be called "Christian".

They all depended, in fact, on the Church authorities, that is, on the "precentor" for the "little schools", and on local parish priests for parish schools and, in particular, for the "charity schools".

Moreover, Christian doctrine was taught in all of them. In this regard, Protestant schools also (till they were suppressed) could be called Christian.

And yet, in 1677, Barré had drawn up statutes and regulations for "Christian and charitable schools". It seems certain that De La Salle himself, once he had become involved with a number of schools, was quick to call them "Christian schools". The use of this descriptive term was, therefore, evidently a means of distinguishing them from others.

What was so characteristic about the term "Christian schools" that it could serve to make them distinctive?

In order to explain the difference between "Little Schools" and "Christian Schools", Blain has the following to say in a passage from the *Treatise on the institution of the Masters and Mistresses of Christian and Gratuitous Schools* which preceded his life of De La Salle:

> By **Schools** should be understood places where young people go to learn how to read, write and count for a fee. By **Christian and Gratuitous Schools** should be understood places where they go to acquire Christian instruction and a holy education for no payment. The former by comparison with the latter, should be considered profane and secular, because children go there to receive a fairly indifferent sort of profane instruction. (CL 7, 34)

The biographer's description of what he called "schools" must have applied to groups of pupils, or rather apprentices, who were taught the art of writing by the Writing Masters and whatever else they added. Their only aim, in fact, was to transmit practical skills.

In the Little Schools dependent on the Church authorities, the teachers were not supposed, in theory, to limit themselves to teaching only the rudiments of knowledge. In practice, however, their main concern was to earn their living by transmitting this knowledge.

On the other hand, in Christian Schools, the chief concern was to impart "Christian instruction and a holy education". In this they were similar to the Charity Schools, whose owners promoted these same aims.

However, contrary to what Blain's text could lead us to believe, while the teaching of catechism and Christian formation were considered important in Christian Schools, special attention was also given to profane teaching. As opposed to what happened in the Charity Schools, this teaching was not considered simply as complementary to that of catechism, in particular where reading was concerned. In practice, it was even more effective than the teaching given to individuals or small groups of pupils by the Writing Masters or the teachers in the Little Schools.

Finally, a more detailed study reveals that, for De La Salle, what made a school deserve to be called "Christian" was above all the extent to which it created an environment in which the children could experience Christian life in the very framework of their school activities.

What we have just said is only a brief sketch of a topic which will be given more ample treatment later. It enables us, however, to understand what made the schools run by the Brothers sufficiently different from other schools to enable them to call them "Christian Schools", and for their teachers to be called "Brothers" of the "Christian Schools".

Brothers of the Christian Schools

Composed of the two elements we have just considered, the name given to the followers of De La Salle described them well.

This is what Blain claimed in the text we quoted earlier regarding the name of "Brothers of the Christian and Gratuitous Schools" which was given to the "children of M. de La Salle". He wrote, "This name is appropriate because it includes a definition of their state and indicates the commitments of their vocation".

The name of "Brothers of the Christian Schools" recalls that those who bear this name:

♦ belong to a "community" founded on evangelical charity, in which its members try to live according to the Gospel;

♦ have "as their mission to give a Christian education through the school" (*Lasallian Themes* 2 1995, 22).

As was pointed out in the preceding chapter, we do not know exactly when and how the name "Brothers of the Christian Schools" was adopted.

What we can affirm, on the other hand, is that it existed and already had some kind of official status in 1690, when De La Salle wrote the *Memoir on the Habit*, of which we spoke earlier. In it he uses the name "Brothers of the Christian Schools" on two occasions when speaking of the members of what he likewise called the "Community of the Christian Schools".

c. New developments and the assertion of the particular character of the community (1687–1690)

Expansion in Rheims

As the new "community" continued to develop, it was led to associate with itself two other groups of persons who, without becoming a part of it, completed it.

The community of Brothers

When we read Blain, we could think that, once De La Salle had given up his canonry and his inheritance, "his flock was increased by several young people who were inspired to give up everything following his example" (CL 7, 224). However, if we read the passage carefully, we will see that it refers to the arrival of the new teachers, which came before and, as is said here, led to the move to rue Neuve in 1682.

This does not mean to say that there were no new arrivals during the years in which the community of teachers evolved into a form of religious community. In fact, it was at this time that Gabriel Drolin arrived (around 1684), followed by Jean Partois in September 1686 (cf. CL 3, 32).

Towards 1685, the community gathered around De La Salle in Rheims, together with the teachers in the schools in Rethel, Guise, Laon and perhaps Chateau Porcien, numbered in all at the most about 15 persons.

It does not look as if this number increased during these same years. While there were new arrivals, there were also new gaps. De La Salle mentions the death of Cosme Boiserin on March 24th 1684, Jean Lozart on June 26th 1685 (cf. CL 37, 39), Brother Henri Lheureux and Jean Morice on May 1st 1687. There is also mention of a death "at M. de La Salle's house" on September 30th 1685 (cf. CL 37, 40). Because of these deaths, even De La Salle was obliged to teach in the parish school of St Jacques in Rheims (cf. CL 7, 244).

There were departures too. According to Blain, of the 12 Brothers who first pronounced the vow of obedience, only eight renewed it the following year, and the four who did not left the community shortly after (CL 7, 237).

The difficulty that the community appears to have had in increasing its numbers probably explains why no new schools were opened during this period, at least apart from the one in the parish of St Sulpice, of which more later.

De La Salle had not abandoned his plan to go to Paris, and so, when Mgr Le Tellier "offered to endow schools for him provided he gave up other establishments", he declined the offer (CL 6, 79).

And so, during the period we are considering, there were no new developments in either the community of Brothers properly so called or in the schools.

The group of young people

Bernard, who is the first of the three biographers to mention it, describes as follows how De La Salle brought together a certain number of young men in the house on rue Neuve.

> A young man aged 15 came forward to join this Institute. He was sent to the Servant of God, still in Rheims at the time, who accepted him even though he was not accustomed to accepting such young persons. A short while later, three more came to him for the same reason. And so, the Servant of God, realising that the acceptance of these young men was an opportunity provided by God for the good of his Institute, resolved to form a small community of these four and of those who might subsequently join them. In the course of two months, God blessed his undertaking to such an extent that this small community numbered 12 young men. He gave them a rule and appointed one of the most senior Brothers to direct it. (CL 4, 84)

The first we know to have become part of this group is Jean Jacquot who "joined the community in the year 1686, in the month of October, having completed his 14th year" (taken from the *Register of Brothers*, quoted in CL 3, 32).

In his first manuscript, Maillefer refers to this group as forming a "junior seminary", and in the second, a "novitiate" (CL 6, 79-80). One could accept his comparison with a junior seminary, but not a novitiate. At the most, one could speak of a pre-novitiate.

The seminary for country teachers

De La Salle was asked by various parish priests of country parishes, who wanted a teacher capable of running a school, to send them a member of his community. But, "as he had made an absolute rule never to send a Brother anywhere by himself", as Blain tells us (CL 7, 278), he declined to accede to their requests.

On the other hand, he was ready to accept young men sent to him by parish priests for training. And so in 1687 (Maillefer is the only one to give a date) there was opened what was called a "seminary for country teachers".

Placed under the direction of a Brother, these future teachers learnt "plain chant, writing, arithmetic and the method they should use to teach the children who would be entrusted to them" (CL 6, 81). They kept their secular dress but wore the *rabat* and formed a separate group in the house on rue Neuve.

With the help of the Duc de Mazarin (already involved in the opening of the school in Rethel), De La Salle had already planned to set up a "seminary for teachers", but the plan drawn up in 1685 failed to obtain the approval of the Archbishop of Rheims. It was therefore a similar establishment that came into existence in 1687.

> And so, before the Servant of God went to live in Paris, there were three communities in Rheims: the Brothers', that of the young men we have mentioned, and the latter which was called the seminary for schoolmasters. These three communities numbered 50 persons in all. This shows well enough the work of God's Providence in favour of his Servant since, not having the wherewithal to provide for the Brothers, he fed and supported these two communities, without their ever lacking anything that was absolutely necessary. (CL 4, 86)

This is the conclusion drawn by Bernard, and with it ends the part of his manuscript that has come down to us.

Establishment in Paris

After declining the offer made to him by Mgr Le Tellier, which would have limited his work to the Rheims diocese, De La Salle finally went to Paris in 1688 to take over a school in the parish of St Sulpice, and thus fulfilled a plan he had abandoned in 1683.

The cleric in charge of this parish school was a certain M. Compagnon. In 1687, he had contacted De La Salle through the intermediary of his brother, Jean Louis, who was at the seminary of St Sulpice at the time, and had asked for a Brother. He had even gone to Rheims for the same purpose, but De La Salle had been absent at the time.

When he heard of these moves, De La Salle "wrote to this cleric saying that he would be pleased to give him satisfaction if it was agreed that he could send two Brothers" (CL 6, 82). M. Compagnon agreed.

De La Salle, however, wanting to have an explicit request from the parish priest of St Sulpice, asked his brother Jean Louis, who was returning to the seminary, to pass on the request.

M. Compagnon left matters in abeyance for two months and then wrote to De La Salle. His letter was not what De La Salle wanted and so he took no further action.

Finally, the parish priest of St Sulpice asked one of his curates, M. Baudrand, "to ask De La Salle for two Brothers on his behalf" (CL 7, 287).

These two Brothers and De La Salle arrived in Paris in February 1688. After waiting for a few days, they began their work in the school on rue Princesse.

A novel situation for the Brothers

The situation was, in fact, a very delicate one. They had come to teach in a school which was run in a way different from what they were used to. What is more, this school "included a sort of wool workshop to occupy the poor pupils" (CL 6, 82).

> The practice of making children work in this way, while at the same time giving them instruction, existed in a number of institutions such as, for example, the "General Hospitals".
>
> It was justified in the eyes of the school authorities (in this case, M. de La Barmondière, the parish priest of St Sulpice) as being a means of "accustoming young people to work and stopping them from being idle", as Blain tells us (CL 7, 289). The purpose was not to teach the children a craft: that was the function of apprenticeship.

The first changes introduced by the Brothers caused an influx of pupils. One of the Brothers found he could not cope and De La Salle had to take his place in class.

The Brothers' position remained difficult till M. de La Barmondière let them take over the running of the school and agreed to pay for a third Brother.

During this same period, De La Salle and the Brothers had to suffer the schemings of M. Compagnon whose assistants they had been up till then. His intrigues would have driven the Brothers out had not the parish priest taken action.

The arrival of M. Baudrand as the new parish priest in January 1689 seemed to bode well for the future.

- The difficulties in the school on rue Princesse diminished.
- At the beginning of 1690, a new parish school was entrusted to the Brothers in the rue du Bac (cf. CL 7, 296; CL 6, 53 & 78).

It was not long, however, before another problem arose.

The special character of the "community" is called into question

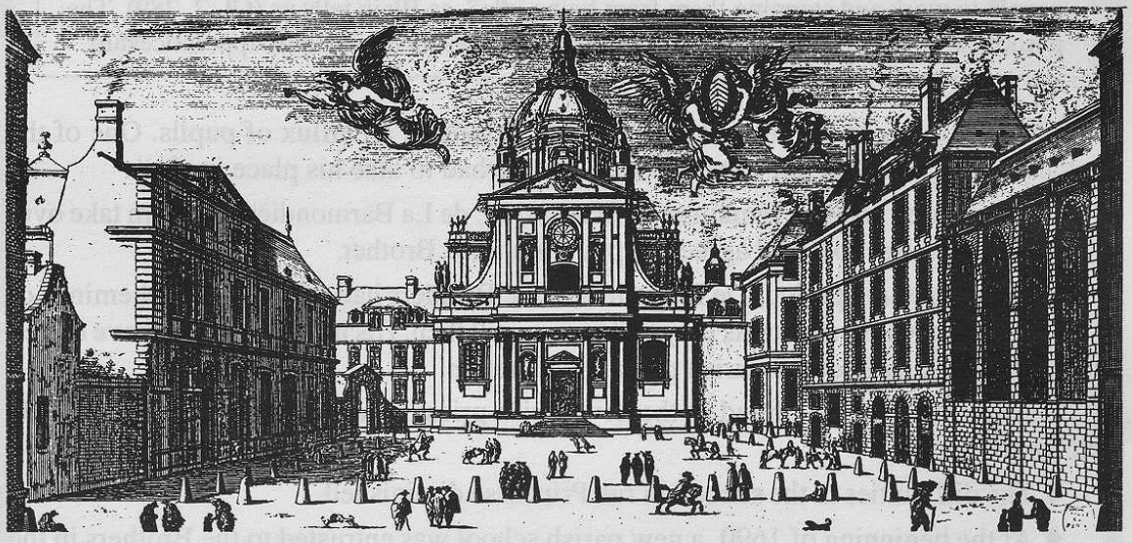
In Paris, the Brothers wore the habit they had adopted in Rheims. This seems to have caused no problems till the day M. Baudrand wanted to make a change in the habit. De La Salle opposed this move.

It was probably after the Brothers took charge of the school in the rue du Bac that the parish priest of St Sulpice decided on this change. The Brothers had to walk a fair distance to get to the school and to come back. The strangeness of their habit, which had not been particularly noticed before then, was very much so now.

What was at stake in this conflict was important: M. Baudrand's wish for the change reflected a desire on his part to become involved in the running of the community to which the Brothers belonged.

The *Memoir on the Habit*, which was written at this point, was as much, if not more, concerned with defending the autonomy and the special character of the "Community of the Christian Schools", as with justifying the reasons for maintaining the habit of the Brothers.

The importance of this document written by De La Salle justifies the inclusion of a supplement on it in the next part of this chapter.



The Sorbonne, reconstructed according to Lemercier's plans. Building began in 1626. The Faculty of Theology located in the Sorbonne and known as the "Permanent Council of the Gauls" was considered by the clergy of France and by the monarchy as the official body responsible for the formulation and overseeing of doctrine (Bluche 1990, 1459).

— Supplement —

The *Memoir on the Habit*

Having outlined the circumstances in which this text was written, it now remains to ascertain its importance as a document before we go on to analyse the contents and draw a few conclusions.

The document

We know from the biographers that De La Salle composed a document to justify the choice of the habit worn by the Brothers.

The document, in De La Salle's own hand, takes the form of two folded sheets with seven sides completely filled with writing and the eighth with only the top part filled. It is reproduced in full in CL 5, 285-301. A typographical transcription makes the text legible.

The handwriting has been identified as De La Salle's. The numerous erasures and corrections are his also. There is, however, at least one passage that was erased by someone else.

Date

In the previous chapter, we accepted the hypothesis that the problem which De La Salle wished to resolve occurred following the opening of a school in the rue du Bac "in January 1690", as Maillefer tells us in his first manuscript. The text would have been written, therefore, a little later.

The text itself contains two details which can help us date it. We read:

♦ "This habit has been worn for five years now in five different towns, both in the diocese of Rheims and that of Laon". As this indication has been used already to help us establish the date when the habit was adopted, we cannot use it again.

♦ "It is almost two years now that the Brothers of the Christian Schools have been employed in Paris with this same habit".

We know from Maillefer that the Brothers arrived in Paris in February 1688. Blain adds the detail that the actual date was the vigil of the feast of St Mathias (February 24th). So, according to our hypothesis, these **two years** would have more or less passed if the *Memoir* was written at the beginning of 1690.

To whom was the text addressed?

The text does not tell us to whom it was addressed, but it would appear that it was not to the Brothers, as otherwise it would not have been so necessary to go into such detail when describing the community and the habit.

The people involved were doubtlessly persons who could put some pressure on the parish priest of St Sulpice to make him change his mind. These belonged probably to the seminary of St Sulpice. Bernard tells us, in fact, that De La Salle submitted his ideas to "the directors and superiors of the seminary of St Sulpice, who agreed with them wholeheartedly" (CL 4, 70). According to Blain, he consulted M. Tronson, the superior of the seminary (CL 7, 300).

Did he give a copy of the text to M. Baudrand? Probably not, judging by the way he speaks of him in it. In any case, the arguments put forward seem to have made him back off, even if they did not convince him.

The following summary is intended to make the analysis of the text easier. It is based on the outline given by Brother Maurice-Auguste Hermans and published in CL 5, 302. We use his system of numbering.

1. **The Community of the Christian Schools**
   It includes:
2. The community of the Christian Schools properly so called
   · it is not endowed,
   · a rule is observed,
3. · its members conduct schools gratuitously in towns, and they teach catechism every day.
4. The group of country schoolmasters:
   · they stay for a limited time,
5. · they keep their secular dress,
6. · they learn what is necessary in order to conduct a school and assist the parish priests of country parishes.
7. The group of young people:
   · they prepare themselves to join the community, but they are still too young to do so,
   · they are trained in all the aspects of the life of the Brothers.
8. · the group is distinct from the community itself.
9. The members of the community:
   · are all lay, and have not undertaken studies leading to the clerical state,
   · those who had done these studies did not remain,
10. · those who come after such studies will have to discontinue them, because:
    they would not be useful for their work,
    they could encourage them to leave,
    the priestly ministry is incompatible with this work, which needs **the whole man.**

11. **The Habit**

This includes:

· a short cassock, which is different from clerical dress:

by its appearance: length, fastenings,

12. by the name given to it: "robe";

13. · a mantle serving as a cloak (as worn in Champagne):

14. thrown over the shoulders out of doors,

15. used inside the house in winter in unheated classrooms.

16. This mantle was preferred to the clerical cloak, because:

17. · it was more practical than the cloak,

· it would have made the Brothers look like clerics, which they are not,

· those who left would be tempted to take it with them.

18. It was therefore preferable to give the Brothers a habit which distinguishes them from clerics and seculars.

19. **Reasons for not changing the habit**

20. Generally speaking, changes in a community are harmful:

21. · they denote a lack of constancy,

22. · they lead to other changes,

23. · they cause disorder.

For these reasons:

24. · before introducing changes, there has to be reflection about them and then the matter should not be raised again,

25. · one can take inspiration from the example of the Jesuits who were not willing to modify their Constitutions in order to introduce changes.

26. In particular, as regards the habit:

27. in communities changes are avoided:

· by fixing the form of the habit,

· by keeping the original habit.

As far as the habit of the Brothers is concerned:

28. · it has been worn in five towns for five years,

29. · it suits their state and their employment,

30. · people have become used to this habit,

31. · the Brothers have been in Paris for 2 years with this habit and no one has complained about it.

32. If there were complaints regarding this matter, they should have been made before the Brothers began teaching in the school.

33. **Reasons for the choice of an unusual habit**

34. In all communities:
· a particular habit is adopted,
35. · it is better to do this at the outset.

36. As far as the Brothers are concerned:
37. · it helps them to become aware that they belong to a community,
38. · St Vincent de Paul saw in it a means to "keep" the members of his congregation,
39. · those who join are encouraged not to be concerned about finding out whether the community is endowed or not,
40. · because of this habit, the Brothers are seen as "persons separated and withdrawn from the world".

41. Regarding this choice of an unusual habit, it has led to three changes:
Before, it could be thought that one was not obliged to observe a Rule.
42. Now, this causes no problems.
43. Before, people joined to be schoolmasters and even asked for wages.
44. Now, people come to join the community.
45. Before, many left with the habit they had been given.
Now, this habit keeps the Brothers from leaving.

46. **Disadvantages of the clerical habit**

47. It is not suitable for lay people:
· who cannot exercise a function in the Church,
48. · the bishops would not allow them to do so,
49. · the superior of the community could not justify the wearing of this clerical habit by persons who are not clerics,
50. · all the more so, because bishops would not agree even to give them the tonsure.

51. It must be possible to distinguish the Brothers from clerics, otherwise:
52. · since they accompany the children to holy Mass,
53. when the Brothers accompany them there, parish priests would ask them to exercise clerical functions,
54. · there was a risk this would happen often,
55. · the teachers would be tempted to do so,
56. · they would not be able to look after their pupils, and yet this is the reason why they accompany them to church,
57. · there have already been opportunities to weigh up these disadvantages.

58. If the Brothers wore the clerical habit:
· they would be tempted to become clerics,
59. · they would have too much contact with the clerics, and that would distract them from their work.

60. The clerical cloak would not suit them:
61. · it would get in the way when lining the pupils up,
62. · they could knock over the smaller pupils with it,
63. · during class hours,
64. they would not be able to use this cloak to keep themselves warm as they can with the mantle.

The text

Written in the French of the late 17th century, but especially in handwriting that is made difficult to read because of over-writing and ink stains, this text had to be transcribed.

A transcription is given in CL 5, 256ff. It includes the corrections made by its author, uses modern spelling and introduces numbering for paragraphs.

Remarks

This text, which is so rich in teachings, deserves a detailed analysis. All we can do here is to make a few remarks about its most striking points.

The description of the **community properly so called** provides confirmation for a number of points already mentioned:

♦ the term "community" describes all the Brothers as a whole (1). It is the only term used in this sense;

♦ its name is "Community of the Christian Schools" (2). Subsequently, its members are called "Brothers of the Christian Schools" (14);

♦ its principal characteristics are given:

it is not endowed, that is, it does not have any resources of its own (2), since De La Salle refused to use his inheritance to finance it;

it is similar to "religious communities" by its Rule, regulated life. . . (2);

its members conduct schools "gratuitously" in towns only (3) (so that there will be enough pupils to justify the presence normally of 4 Brothers); they teach catechism every day (3);

all its members are laymen (9).

The studies mentioned in 9 and 10 refer to the programme of studies based on a knowledge of Latin, leading, in particular, to the clerical state.

Such studies were not only not necessary for a schoolmaster, but were also considered dangerous. They could lead teachers to give up their job in order to become clerics. For De La Salle, the clerical ministry was incompatible with the way in which the Brothers went about their work.

The description of the Brothers as having "very mediocre minds" was not in any way pejorative in the language of the times: "mediocre" meant average, ordinary. Doubtlessly the Brothers tended to be people with a lot of common sense and practical, rather than with brilliant minds. It should be said, all the same, that some proved to be very competent in their work.

In the section referring to the **habit of the Brothers** we can note:

♦ in the description of the "short cassock" what is stressed is the way in which it differed from the clerical habit (11 and 12);

♦ regarding the mantle, what is important is the use it is put to (13 and 15);

♦ this mantle was given to the Brothers before they wore the "short cassock" (14). This means the habit was adopted only gradually. An indication given in 17, 4 in the text, confirms that the mantle was first worn over the "jerkin" which was the "under-garment" of the teachers.

♦ The observations made in 16 and 17 (and throughout the text) show that the problem that had occurred had to do in particular with the choice of mantle. In Rheims, it was not out of place: in Paris, it could seem strange.

We have to admit that in 17 we are given a glimpse of De La Salle's feelings regarding the first teachers.

Wishing to justify why the clerical cloak had not been given, De La Salle first gives some reasons of a practical nature. He then goes on to another consideration. He pictures his followers wearing the "short cloak" of the clerics, and imagining themselves to be "court clergy", as he calls them. However, he must have changed his mind, because this passage has been reworked extensively, so much so in fact, that it is difficult to make out what was written originally.

Moving on to a fourth reason, he describes how certain members of the community, who were from a poor background, left, taking with them the "short cloak" and the "jerkin", and returning home "dressed like gentlemen".

This paragraph reflects the period when the teachers began to wear the cloak, rather than the one when De La Salle wrote the *Memoir on the Habit*.

The arguments put forward in the sections entitled "**Reasons for not changing the habit**" (19) and "**Reasons for the choice of an unusual habit**" (33) refer very clearly to a community which is similar to the "religious communities" of his day.

The references made to the Jesuits (25), to "Regular Communities" (27) and to the "Congregation" of St Vincent de Paul (38) show that De La Salle was aware of the differences between these different types of "religious communities", as he called them in 27.

Among the reasons given for choosing an unusual habit, De La Salle says that, for the Brothers, it is a means of "impressing upon them that they belong to a community, in order to make them join it, and to keep them from leaving it" (36). At a time when the Rules were not yet properly established, the habit constituted an external sign of belonging to the community and served to strengthen it.

In this paragraph and in 38, certain expressions are used which may be thought very unflattering regarding the Brothers. They need to be understood, however, in their original sense and not according to their present-day meaning:

grossier (uncouth) = without elegance or refinement;
sans élévation d'esprit (not highbrow) = unpretentious, simple;
sans étude et sans lumière (without studies and dull) = without very extensive intellectual formation.

In part 5, entitled "**Disadvantages of the clerical habit**" (46), it is worth noting De La Salle's insistence on showing the confusion that wearing the clerical habit could cause and the disadvantages that would result.

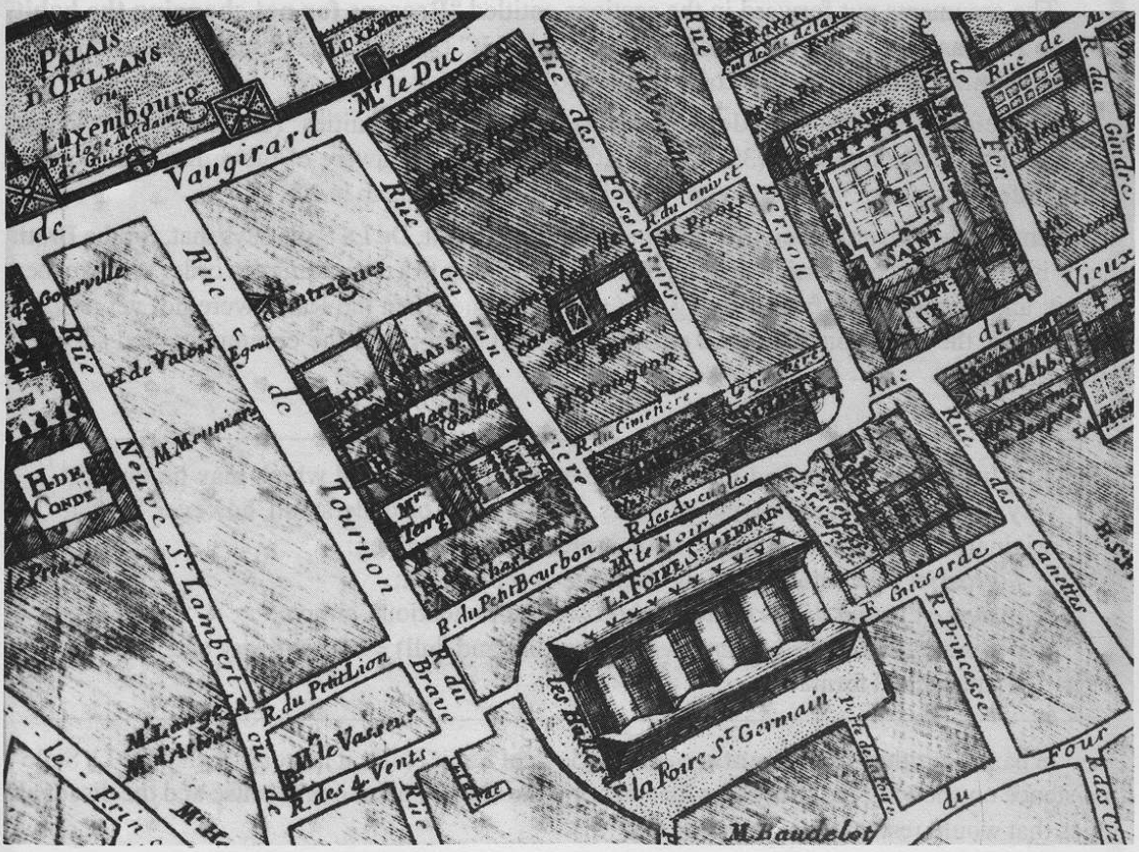
In particular, certain parish priests, in parishes where the Brothers accompanied their pupils to Mass, were tempted to use them to undertake various tasks like singing, while in the meantime the pupils were left to themselves.

Problems such as this occurred in a number of places. It seems that in Chateau Porcien the demands of the parish priest led, if not to the closure of the school, at least to the withdrawal of the teachers De La Salle had sent there (cf. Rigault 1, 152).

According to the *Memoir*, there were some bad experiences at St Jacques in Rheims and in Laon. There are no other references to this.

This explains in part the peremptory prohibitions in the Rule: "They cannot be priests, nor aspire to the clerical state, nor even sing or wear the surplice, nor exercise any function in the church" (CL 25, 26).

Further material on this matter can be found in CL 5 and 45.



Plan of the St Sulpice district in Paris, drawn up in 1696 at the request of M. Baudrand. North is at the bottom of the plan. To the right of the Foire St Germain is the rue Princesse. Photo E. Rousset.

6 Laying the Foundations of a Religious "Society" (1690–1694)

Introduction

During the period we have just described we saw how the "community" which had formed around De La Salle had progressively taken on the characteristics of so-called "religious communities" without, however, losing its own distinctive character.

All the same, although the Brothers were attached to De La Salle and some of them had made a vow of obedience, the cohesion of the community depended more on the personal relations of the Brothers with their Superior than on any true bonds of association among themselves (cf. CL 2, 41).

By the end of the period we are studying in this section it will be clear that De La Salle has given his "community" the form of a "Society", that is, of a body characterised by both unity and diversity.

This "Society" will still lack the necessary official recognition of ecclesiastical and civil authorities for it to be considered as definitively established. The new institution will have acquired, however, the distinctive characteristics of its final form.

As has already occurred at various points, this new transformation will be the result, not so much of the deliberate choice of De La Salle, as of the accumulation of threats to existing works.

This chapter has two parts:

- a. Reasons for constituting a religious "Society" (1690–1691).
- b. Formation of a religious "Society" (1692–1694).

a. Reasons for constituting a religious "Society" (1690–1691)

Threats to existing works

We saw how De La Salle, having faced the difficulties connected with the installation of the Brothers in the parish of St Sulpice, then had to deal with M. Baudrand's attempts to involve himself in the running of the "Community of the Christian Schools". While this interference enabled the community to affirm its distinctive character, the basic problem that it raised remained. Subsequent events served to highlight it.

External attacks

The success of the schools in the St Sulpice parish made the teachers of the Little Schools afraid that some of their pupils would leave them to go to the Brothers' schools. Maillefer describes their reaction in February 1690 (CL 42, 254):

> At first they resorted to physical means and had all the furniture removed from the free schools. Then, they reported De La Salle and the Brothers to the Church precentor of Paris for infringing their privileges. At the request of the teachers, the precentor decreed the closure of the free schools (CL 6, 91).

Faced with the closure of the schools which he had so much at heart, De La Salle was advised by M. Baudrand to appeal to the Parlement against the sentence.

De La Salle had recourse to the means he always used in such circumstances — prayer and action. With his Brothers, he went "on foot and fasting to Notre Dame des Vertus, a famous place of pilgrimage two leagues from Paris" (CL 6, 91) at Aubervillers. He also prepared his defence in writing.

His main line of reasoning was that, since the schools in the parish of St Sulpice were "charity schools", they depended on the parish priest and not on the precentor. The latter, therefore, had no authority to make decisions about these schools.

Justice won the day, but the very basis of De La Salle's reasoning raised a very important question of principle: if the schools depended on the priest in charge of the parish, did he have authority over the Brothers who taught in them?

This question was all the more crucial as the "community" to which they belonged was not recognised by either the ecclesiastical or the civil authorities. The pressure that M. Baudrand had exerted to have the Brothers' habit changed showed that this question was more than a theoretical one.

Internal crisis

At the same time, in addition to difficulties from external sources, there were others that were internal. They resulted both from De La Salle's departure for Paris and from certain decisions that he had been led to take.

Rather than follow a strictly chronological order of events which, in any case, would be difficult to establish, we shall describe what took place first in Rheims and then in Paris.

In Rheims

According to Blain, the "seminary for country teachers" did not last long after De La Salle's departure (cf. CL 7, 279). However, it is still mentioned in the *Memoir on the Habit.*

The Brother put in charge of the house on rue Neuve, Brother Jean Henry, proved to be too strict. And so, according to Blain, of the 16 Brothers who were there when De La Salle went to Paris, eight apparently left "through the fault of the one he had appointed as their superior, who was a hard and indiscreet man" (CL 7, 312). However, although Blain says these events took place in 1688, it would seem that Brother Jean Henry's appointment was made at the beginning of 1690. Judging by what Maillefer says, the departure of the Brothers was spread out over the period 1688–1692 (cf. CL 6, 92).

Blain adds:

> As a further source of sorrow, for four years, that is from the year 1688 to the year 1692, this great gap in the house continued, and only one candidate came forward to take the place of the deserters (CL 7, 312).

De La Salle, who had left the group of young men in Rheims, decided to bring them to Paris. He no doubt wished to keep a closer watch on them even though they had been entrusted to the care of a Brother. Perhaps the Brother in question was Brother Henry Lheureux whom De La Salle called to Paris so that he could complete his studies for the priesthood. We shall treat this matter more fully later on.

In Paris

The two Brothers who went to Paris with De La Salle objected strongly when he appointed a third Brother summoned by him to be superior of the community on rue Princesse (cf. CL 7, 292 & 301).

The group of young men, even if they had not all left, as Blain seems to maintain (cf. CL 7, 281), was certainly greatly reduced in number. The life of these boys had been greatly

disturbed by the obligation imposed upon them at the request of the parish priest of St Sulpice and of his sacristan, to spend the morning in church serving Mass (cf. CL 7, 312).

The conclusion drawn by Blain in the face of all these facts is one we can probably share:

> This was the sad situation in which the pious Founder found himself at the end of 1690. After so many sacrifices, after so much suffering and effort, after so many crosses and persecutions, after so many apparent successes, he found himself in almost the same situation as 10 years previously, with few Brothers, with his work having made hardly any progress, and fearing he would see it disappear. (CL 7, 312)

Concern for the life of De La Salle

As regards De La Salle himself, towards the end of 1690, he came close to dying. Blain describes what happened (cf. CL 7, 302).

During a journey to Rheims, De La Salle fell ill and had to take to his bed.

Hardly had he recovered, than he returned to Paris on foot. There he had to spend a further six weeks in bed. The state of his health grew worse to the extent that he prepared himself for death. Fortunately, he received some very effective treatment from a certain Doctor Helvetius, a famous Dutch physician, which enabled him to recover (cf. CL 6, 96-97).

Having escaped death himself, De La Salle now had to come to terms with the death of the person he had chosen to succeed him.

While he was travelling to Rheims once again, he received news first that Brother Henry Lheureux had fallen ill, and then that his condition had deteriorated. In spite of this De La Salle did not think it necessary to hasten his return. When he returned to Paris, he learnt that Brother Henry Lheureux had been buried two days before.

His death had a profound effect on De La Salle, for it meant the loss of one of his most faithful followers. It caused him also to return to his original idea regarding the exclusively lay status of the members of his "community".

Following his attempt to have himself replaced as superior by a Brother, De La Salle had in fact planned to prepare a Brother chosen by the Assembly of 1687 for the priesthood.

If the *Memoir on the Habit* was written at the beginning of 1690, it is difficult to reconcile De La Salle's insistence in it that the members of the "Community of the Christian Schools" were all lay, since at the time he was writing it Brother Henry Lheureux was preparing for the priesthood. The composition of the *Memoir* should perhaps, therefore, be placed at the end of the year 1690.

The disappearance of his virtual successor, his own escape from death and the threats to his work led De La Salle to consider how he could ensure the survival of the work he had undertaken.

A new decisive choice

While De La Salle was deeply affected by the trials he underwent, he was not crushed by them. In the months that followed — in 1691 — he intensified his prayer and use of penance.

"After much thought regarding how he could prop up a building which threatened to fall down as it was being built" (CL 7, 312), he made a number of decisions which he implemented either before the end of 1691, as will be discussed shortly, or the following year, as will be examined at the beginning of the second part of this chapter.

First of all, he looked for a place where the Brothers of Paris could restore their physical and spiritual strength. He finally found a house in Vaugirard, which at that time was a village near Paris.

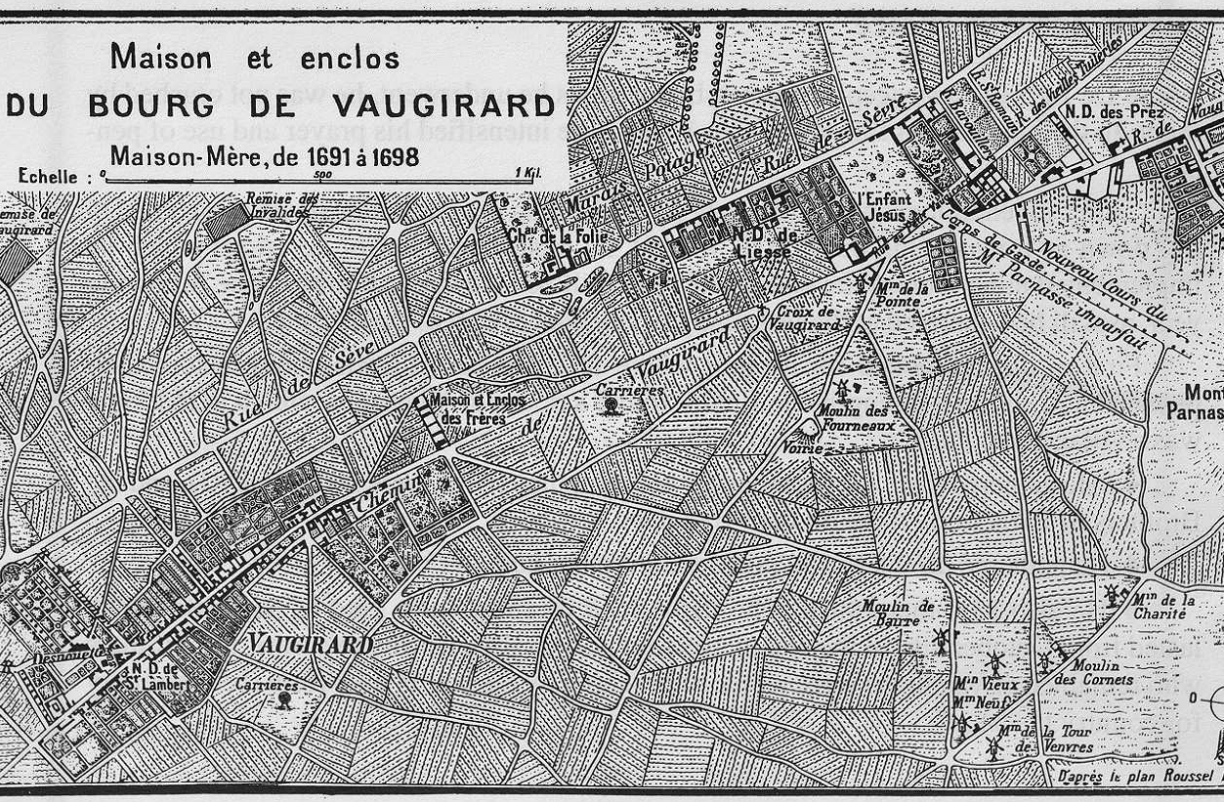
- "He gathered there the members of his community who were ill" (CL 6, 93), and the Brothers of Paris came there on their free days.
- He gathered all the Brothers there during the holidays.
- He also kept there those who had joined recently, for a kind of novitiate which lasted from October 8th till the end of 1691 (cf. CL 7, 315). During this time, the Brothers who remained at Vaugirard were replaced in school by the young men from the "seminary for country teachers".

But above all, in order to ensure the future survival of his community, he was inspired to associate with himself the two Brothers he thought most suited to the task of supporting the new-born community, and to bind them and himself by an irrevocable commitment to work for its establishment (CL 7, 312).

On November 21st 1691, the feast of the Presentation of Our Lady, Brothers Nicolas Vuyart and Gabriel Drolin together with De La Salle bound themselves by vow to form a partnership and to remain together "to bring about and maintain" the establishment of the Society of the Christian Schools, "at a time when there was no indication that the Institute could survive", as the biographer adds (CL 7, 313).

By this act of association, the future of the "community" no longer depended solely on De La Salle, nor on any successor, as in the case of Brother Henry Lheureux.

Given the importance of the document which put the seal on the association of De La Salle and the two Brothers, we have devoted a supplement to the question.



House and property of the Brothers at Vaugirard. *Essai historique sur la Maison Mère.*

— Supplement —
The Vow of 1691

The preceding chapter described how De La Salle and two of his followers vowed before God on November 21st 1691 to "bring about . . . the establishment of the Society of the Christian Schools". It would seem to be important to examine this event more closely and to spend some time on the text composed and used on this occasion, as well as on the step taken by its three signatories.

The fact

Of the three biographers, Blain is the only one to report this incident in the life of De La Salle and in the early history of the Institute. He heard about it probably from one of the three persons concerned, Brother Gabriel Drolin. The latter must have kept the text he had used on that occasion and, on his return from Rome in 1728, it is likely he had spoken of it to the Superior General, Brother Timothy. He in his turn informed Canon Blain.

The other Brothers did not become aware of the commitment made by the three associates in 1691 till Blain's work appeared. The event had been kept a secret. This means also that De La Salle did not mention it in the *Memoir on the Beginnings*.

The text

Source of our knowledge

Blain gives the text used by De La Salle and the two Brothers on November 21st 1691 between inverted commas. This is the source of our knowledge. The original has not come down to us, but we can be sure, for the following reasons, that the biographer has provided us with a trustworthy text:

♦ The form of this text is too different from Blain's normal style for him to have been its author or to have adapted it.

♦ The biographer certainly had first-hand contact with the original text. As we have already seen and will see again, whenever Blain copies texts under such circumstances, he always does so with great accuracy.

♦ Brother Timothy, who had seen the original and had checked Blain's work, would never have allowed the biographer to alter Brother Gabriel Drolin's text.

Presentation of the text

Rather than reproduce the text in the form given by Blain, we thought it preferable to present it in a way that highlights its structure and enables us to make some observations. Our presentation is based by and large on the results of an analysis of the text made by Br Henri Delachaux, in a thesis entitled *The Origins and the Founding Texts of the Brothers of the Christian Schools*.

The 1691 formula of vows

Most Holy Trinity Father, Son and Holy Spirit	I, J. B. de La Salle priest, I, Nicolas Vuyart, and I, Gabriel Drolin,	
	We	**We**
Prostrate with the most profound respect before your infinite and adorable majesty,	from now on and for always till the last survivor or till the entire completion of the establishment of the said Society,	
we *consecrate ourselves* entirely to you	*make vows* of association and union	*promise*
to bring about	**to bring about** and maintain	**to do**
with all our power and all our efforts		unanimously and with common consent
the **establishment** of the Society of the Christian Schools	the said **establishment**	all that
in the manner which will seem to us	without any possibility of dispensation	we will think in conscience
to be the most pleasing to you and the most beneficial for the said Society		and without any human consideration to be for the greatest good of the said Society
	even if there remained only the three of us in the said Society and we were obliged to beg for alms and to live on bread alone	
		Done this 21st November day of the Presentation of the Most Blessed Virgin 1691
And for this purpose	**In view of which**	**In virtue of which** we have signed

This way of presenting the text shows it can be divided up into four parts:

♦ the invocation to the Trinity and the expression of a total **consecration** to God in order to "bring about . . . the establishment of the Society of the Christian Schools",

♦ the explicit reference to a **vow** "of association and union",

♦ the formulation of a **promise** describing how the vow will be implemented,

♦ the authentification and ratification of the document.

Thanks to the way this text has been set out, it is possible to see a certain number of connections between the principal parts of the text:

♦ In the presence of the Holy Trinity, invoked at the beginning of the document, the signatories define themselves as "**we**" in each part, even though at the beginning of the second part each of them gives his name and one of them specifies he is a priest.

♦ Setting out on the same line the three verbs which are an essential **element** of the text:

"we consecrate ourselves"
"we make vows"
"we promise"

shows how the initial act of consecration is later expressed in a specific way through a vow and a promise.

♦ It becomes clear also that each of the three forms of commitment made to God has as its aim the fulfilment of a single **objective**: the "establishment" of a "society".

♦ There is a similarity between the expressions used in the first and third part to give greater **strength** to the commitment of the three signatories:

"with all our power and all our efforts"
"unanimously and with common consent"

♦ The same can be said regarding the way in which the **means** to achieve the common purpose are to be determined:

"in the manner which will seem to us to be the most pleasing to you
and the most beneficial for the said Society"
"all that we will think in conscience and without any human consideration
to be for the greatest good of the said Society"

♦ In the second part, the expressions which precede or follow the actual terms of the vow define the **scope** of the commitment undertaken.

This way of setting out the text highlights also the expressions used to **link up** the different parts of the text:

♦ "and for this purpose": this establishes a link between the first and the second part;

♦ "In view of which": this links the second part to the third;

♦ "done" and "in virtue of which": these expressions introduce formulas meant to give weight to the document as a whole.

The significance of this step

In yet another difficult situation, De La Salle reacted in his usual way.

Since God had "led" him to involve himself with running schools and, as a natural consequence, to form a community of teachers which became a community of Brothers, it was to God that he turned first when he saw his work threatened, to discover what his will was in his regard.

When he perceived what God wanted of him, he renewed his commitment to his work unreservedly and made decisions that he considered were most suitable in the circumstances. (One can recall at this point, for example, his attitude during the crisis provoked by the doubts of the teachers in 1682, and the consequences for the community gathered around him.)

What was new in 1691 was that he persuaded two of his followers to take the same step as himself.

The step they took together on November 21st 1691 was an eminently **religious** one. It was a response in faith to what was, in human terms, a desperate situation.

A passage from the book by Brothers Michel Sauvage and Miguel Campos, *Jean-Baptiste de La Salle; Annoncer l'Evangile aux pauvres* (1977), will help us to understand more clearly this first aspect of the step taken by the three signatories in 1691:

> The formula of vows opens with an invocation of the Holy Trinity, to whom the commitment in all its parts is directed. It was God who had called De La Salle to be an educator. He never seems to waver in his belief that this is God's will for him. However dark the night, he is determined to follow this path, drawing confidence from this deep conviction. For, what is at stake, is God's work that has to be accomplished. He cannot give up. The living God who was there at the beginning and is still with him in the depths of this night, and who speaks to his heart, will always be there. He will continue to call upon him to be creative, and will give him the necessary light and strength to respond in a concrete manner. Seen from this point of view, this Lasallian step is transcendental (372).

De La Salle and his two followers made themselves totally available to God so that, through their contribution, the work of salvation, with which he had wished to associate them, would continue.

Their action was at the same time deeply **human**.

Their purpose was the continued existence of the Christian Schools. As Blain rightly said, speaking of De La Salle:

> The cause he pursued was that of the poor and of the public at large. . . . It was a question not of his own interests, but of theirs alone. Having involved himself with the instruction of ignorant and miserable youth, he could not, without cowardice and pusillanimity, send them back to their original ignorance and bad education (CL 7, 298).

To do this, the community of Brothers needed to be consolidated, since without official approval, it was at the mercy of external forces. Moreover, "it was not sufficiently strong internally, for while its members were dedicated to its work, they had not yet made a commitment to it" (CL 2, 41).

There was a need, therefore, to establish between its members bonds that were typical of a "society", bonds that were based on more solid commitments than the vow of obedience that some of them had pronounced and renewed from 1686 onwards. What is more, such a "society" would have some hope of seeing its existence formally approved.

What is characteristic of the commitment made by De La Salle and the two Brothers is that it **brings together** the two **aspects** we mentioned earlier.

Addressing themselves to the Trinity in an attitude of profound adoration, John Baptist de La Salle, Nicolas Vuyart and Gabriel Drolin placed themselves together in the hands of God, so that, belonging to him entirely, he could ensure through them the continuation of the work that was his.

They believed that the means of ensuring this continuation was the expansion of their "community" into a "society". As they said, their specific commitment was "to bring about with all our power and all our efforts the establishment of the Society of the Christian Schools".

Having been led to consecrate themselves to God, they go on to state their commitment in more specific terms by pronouncing a vow. However, unlike the vows that are usually made, their vow "does not involve clearly defined obligations which it would be sufficient to observe". Instead "it sets out a precise plan": to form an association and to remain associated irrevocably, whatever it cost them, in order to bring to fruition the undertaking for the sake of which they had made a total gift of themselves to God (Sauvage and Campos 1977, 377).

The signatories complemented the vow they had made by a promise to do together and by common consent whatever they thought would be most likely to fulfil their aims.

Finally, their whole act of commitment was dated, but also set within the context of the religious feast of the day, the choice of the feast reflecting the intentions of the three associates. The occasion that was being commemorated was not unconnected with their own action on that day.

> Sulpicians renewed their clerical promises on the feast of the Presentation of Our Lady (cf. CL 2, 39, note 2).
>
> In the *Meditations for the Principal Feasts of the Year* written for the Brothers by De La Salle, the meditation for November 21st stresses the fact that they have consecrated themselves to God, following the example of the Virgin Mary.

Following established procedure which gives a document its validity (although the text reproduced for us by Blain does not indicate the place), De La Salle and the two Brothers ratified with their signatures the document by which they made a commitment both to God and to one another.

The step they had taken for religious motives had, nonetheless, the value of an act which formally constituted an association which was intended to give birth to a much more extensive society.

Conclusion

As Canon Blain points out clearly (cf. CL 7, 312), the step taken by the three associates in 1691 was only one element, although the most essential one, of the plan De La Salle had drawn up to give new dynamism to a work which he had been "led" to undertake.

From now on, the future of this work no longer depended on him alone, nor even on an eventual successor. With two Brothers, he had set up an association whose only object was the "establishment" of a "Society" of men who together would take responsibility for their future.

The Assembly, which would be held in 1694, and the making of vows that would follow, would mark the effective beginning of this "Society".

Earlier, he had already taken the steps necessary to strengthen those who were already working at his side. Thanks to the purchase of the house in Vaugirard:

- the Brothers who were physically exhausted were able to recover their health;
- as was already the custom, all the Brothers had made their retreat there;
- the most recently arrived candidates had stayed several weeks for a kind of novitiate;
- De La Salle had asked those who had followed this extended retreat to write to him once a month to tell him about "their interior dispositions and to obtain his advice" (CL 7, 315);
- in addition to this personal follow-up (perhaps all the Brothers were involved) De La Salle would visit "the schools and the Brothers" once a year.

Subsequently, a permanent novitiate was opened for the first time in the house at Vaugirard. A specific amount of time was allocated for the formation of the new Brothers. Up till then, this formation had taken place in the various houses.

This was the means of ensuring new members for the "Society" whose "establishment and maintenance" was to be brought about.

Although the total commitment of the three signatories of 1691 was secret, a new impetus had been given to their undertaking to continue with the work, through which they believed God had associated them with his plan of salvation.

b. Formation of a religious "Society" (1692–1694)

The purpose of the vow made by De La Salle and two of his followers was the "establishment of the Society of the Christian Schools" (CL 7, 313).

The major events of the period which followed this vow, later called "heroic", are all connected with the fulfilment of this purpose.

The opening of the novitiate

The only way to ensure the future of the "Society" whose establishment De La Salle and his two companions had vowed to "bring about and maintain" was the creation of a novitiate.

De La Salle had thought of setting up a novitiate in 1691, but he had encountered opposition from the parish priest of St Sulpice in whose parish he had wished to establish it. M. Baudrand probably feared that he would have to provide financial support for an undertaking which would prepare Brothers to teach in schools not restricted to his parish (cf. CL 7, 315–316).

Faced with this opposition, De La Salle "had recourse to fasting, prayer, nights of prayer and penance" for almost a year, as Blain tells us (CL 7, 317).

He finally overrode this opposition by obtaining permission from Mgr de Harlay, the Archbishop of Paris, to be the superior of the community of Brothers. This permission enabled De La Salle to set up the novitiate without having to refer to any other authority apart from that of the Archbishop.

> That is Brother Yves Poutet's explanation in his *Le XVIIe siècle et les Origines Lasalliennes* (1970), of what we read in Blain on this subject (CL 7, 318), or of what Maillefer said in his first document (CL 6, 90) where, it would seem, the permission given by the Archbishop of Paris was seen as constituting a kind of recognition of the community formed by the Brothers.

The novitiate was opened in Vaugirard in September 1692. As Blain tells us, "M. de La Salle gave the habit to five novices and a serving Brother on November 1st 1692" (CL 7, 325). We see from the reference to "serving Brothers" that De La Salle had created a

special category of Brothers who would relieve the teaching Brothers of the concern for matters of a material nature (CL 6, 95).

During the winter of 1693–1694, severe famine forced the novitiate to move to the rue Princesse in Paris. Blain tells us that "the Brothers in the Paris schools used to collect food remaining over in the various communities and give it through charity to the novices at Vaugirard" (CL 7, 320). However, since those who brought them this food were robbed on a number of occasions, it was thought safer to have the novices in Paris (cf. CL 7, 333).

In the early part of 1694, the novitiate was able to return to Vaugirard. De La Salle found it was a suitable setting for the formation of the novices, and the Paris Brothers could go there every week (cf. CL 7, 339).

This move enabled De La Salle to put some distance between himself and the parish priest of St Sulpice. Relations had relaxed a little between them, but there were still problems frequently. For example, during the famine, in addition to the problem of finding food, there was also M. Baudrand's reluctance to pay salaries in full to the Brothers who taught in the schools, or to help them by some kind of gift (cf. CL 7, 335–337).

Blain was not averse to stressing the poverty and austerity which characterised the house in Vaugirard. Both these characteristics were a great help in discerning vocations, for those who lacked motivation could not put up with them for long. In the case of the others, they served to strengthen their vocation. "Of the original 12 there remained only one or at the most two. This little group of chosen souls increased to 35 and persevered". As the biographer points out, "only two of this number were poor" (cf. CL 7, 325).

The 1694 Assembly

Even before the end of the period of famine, De La Salle was considering how he could pursue the "establishment" of the "Society of the Christian Schools". Finally he decided to bring together the "twelve principal Brothers", as Blain called them.

According to Maillefer, "as was his custom around the feast of Pentecost, [De La Salle] assembled all the Brothers of his Institute in Paris to make the annual retreat and to renew their vow of obedience" (CL 6, 115). This gathering of all Brothers was not therefore as exceptional as Blain would have us believe.

If we accept what Blain says, the importance that De La Salle attached to this Assembly explains the long period of preparation he imposed on those he wished to attend.

♦ Each of them in turn, between the beginning of the year and the feast of Pentecost, made a retreat (cf. CL 7, 342).

♦ They all made a retreat together from Pentecost to the feast of the Holy Trinity.

♦ De La Salle increased his own prayers and penances.

The purpose of the Assembly was to make a decision regarding vows. It is possible even that De La Salle decided to call his principal followers together in response to the wish of the Brothers to make perpetual vows (cf. CL 7, 342).

Blain tells us that the result of the several sessions during the Assembly at which the question was discussed, was that "the noble fervour to make perpetual vows would be restricted to obedience and stability" (CL 7, 343).

These were the two vows pronounced by De La Salle and the 12 Brothers when they made their commitment for life on Trinity Sunday 1694.

However, in order to bind themselves together by an indissoluble bond, they also added a promise and a vow of association. In this way, even though the ten Brothers who now joined the three associates of 1691 were not aware of any commitment previous to this one, the "Society of the Christian Schools" was beginning to take shape.

Appointment of the Superior of the "Society"

Now that the foundations of the new society had been laid, De La Salle was able to return to his previous intention of resigning from his position as Superior in favour of a Brother.

The day after he and his twelve companions made their vows, De La Salle tried to convince them to choose one of themselves as Superior (cf. CL 7, 343).

He was thwarted in his plans, however, because the Brothers voted for him twice over (cf. CL 7, 346–347).

Forced to accept the decision of the "body" of the Society, he had each of the voters sign the election document and append a document in which they declared:

> We the undersigned . . . having associated ourselves with M. de La Salle, priest, by the vows we pronounced yesterday, to conduct the Gratuitous Schools together, recognise that, as a consequence of these vows and of the association we have contracted by them, we have chosen M. John Baptist de La Salle as Superior, and we promise to obey him with complete submission, and those he will appoint as Superiors over us. We declare also that we do not intend the present

> election to set a precedent for the future. Our intention is that after the above mentioned M. de La Salle, and forever in the future, no one will be accepted among us, nor chosen as Superior, who is a priest, or who has received holy orders; and we will neither have nor admit any Superior who is not associated and who has not made vows like ourselves and like all those who will be associated with us in the future. Done at Vaugirard, June 7th 1694. (CL 7, 348)

The photocopy of the original, published in CL 40-1, 101, shows how closely Blain copied it.

"Regulations" are drawn up for the new Society

According to Blain, it was at this time that De La Salle, enjoying the tranquillity of Vaugirard,

> felt inspired to take advantage of it to work on a rule. As he had made sure that the regulations he wished to draw up had already been followed in practice, his work consisted solely in writing down the practices which fervour had already dictated. (CL 7, 339)

Are we justified in thinking, therefore, that when Blain says "in an Assembly of all the senior Brothers, he presented them with the collection of rules, which still exists today, to read and examine" (CL 7, 340), he was referring to the 1694 Assembly? Or should we believe Maillefer, who says the draft was not presented to the Brothers as a whole on the occasion of the 1694 annual retreat (cf. CL 6, 114 & 115)?

This last view fits in with what is normally accepted, and that is, that De La Salle made the first draft of the Rules in 1695. What may have happened, as Blain tells us, is that De La Salle, having presented a draft to the Brothers, was asked by them to produce the draft that appeared in 1695.

Whatever the precise date may be, the first draft of the *Rules* should be seen as being closely linked with the decisions of the 1694 Assembly. It serves as a complement to it. What is more, it reflects De La Salle's usual practice of involving his companions in all major decisions concerning their common undertaking.

Conclusion

It is clear that the decisions we have described are very important. They provided solid foundations for the "Society" and, by doing so, contributed to its constitution and complete establishment.

The essential characteristics of the "Society of the Christian Schools" can be outlined as follows:

♦ At its head there is a Superior, chosen by its members, and whose successors will always be chosen from among the Brothers.

♦ The Assembly of the "Principal Brothers" seems to be an essential element of the life of the Society. In 1691, De La Salle had relied on the support of two Brothers. In 1694, the basis of support had risen to 12.

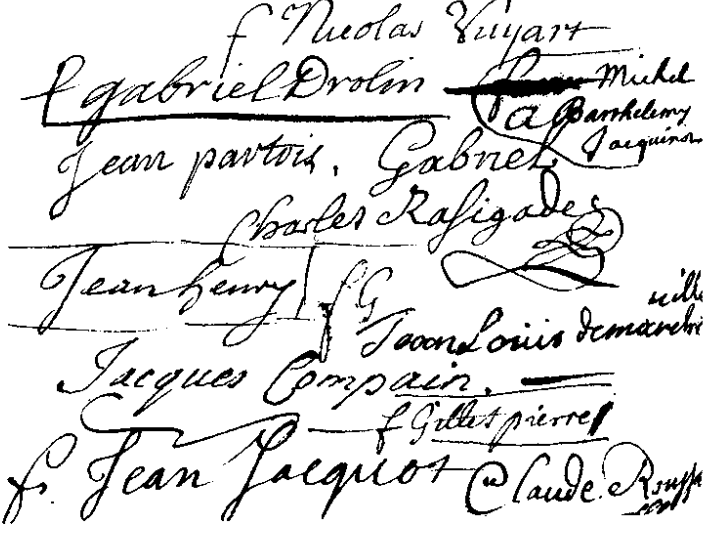
♦ The vows constitute a commitment not only to God but also to the Society, to which they bind each member closely.

♦ There is a house, distinct from the ordinary communities, in which those who wish to join the Society can prepare themselves by following the exercises of the novitiate.

All this does not yet constitute complete "establishment", which called for official recognition. The fact of not having legal existence would continue to cause problems for some time.

However, the Society now had a clearly defined character, which was easily distinguishable and which enabled it, by this very fact, to extend its influence beyond the restricted context in which it had existed up till then.

This would not be an easy process, for the new society would have to pass through a period of growing pains before it became fully mature.



Signatures on the document declaring the election of M. de La Salle, priest, as Superior of the Society, dated June 7th 1694. Photo E. Rousset.

— Supplement —
The Vows of 1694

What has been said about the years 1692–1694 highlights the importance of the 1694 Assembly. In particular, it was at the end of this Assembly that De La Salle and 12 Brothers pronounced perpetual vows of association, stability and obedience. It would seem useful to take a closer look not only at the formula used on this occasion, but also at each of the three vows made.

The formula of vows

The text has come down to us, on the one hand, in the form of folded sheets of paper written out and signed by De La Salle, and on the other, in 13 similar formulas copied into the *Register of first vows*. This booklet contains the formulas of perpetual vows made by the Brothers from 1694 to 1705 (cf. CL 3, 7). Although the 13 formulas vary to a certain extent, they are all very close to the text drawn up by De La Salle. The fact that we have De La Salle's original text means that there is no problem about authenticity, and that we have a reliable text.

The text

The formula reproduced here is the one written by De La Salle, in the transcription given in CL 2, 42. With it, we give also the 1691 formula, even though the vows made in 1694 were not of the same nature as those of 1691, and only the three who pronounced this 1691 vow were aware of its formula. The comparison between the two formulas is simply a convenient way of drawing attention to the contents of the 1694 one.

Comparison with the 1691 formula

Displaying the two formulas in parallel columns highlights a real **similarity** between the two:

♦ Certain passages are identical in both formulas. These are shown in bold type.

♦ Other passages, although not repeated word for word, are identical in meaning in both texts. These are in italics.

♦ Overall, the two texts share the same structure. This should be noted, as also the part played by link expressions.

The formulas are far from being identical, however, and **differences** can be noted:

♦ in their style,

♦ in the content. Note them, especially in expressions introduced by the word "for"/"to" (*pour*).

The formulas of vows

1691

Most Holy Trinity, Father Son and Holy Spirit,
Prostrate with the most profound respect
before your infinite and adorable majesty,
we consecrate ourselves entirely to you

to bring about
with all our power and all our efforts
the establishment of the Society of the Christian Schools in the manner which will seem to us to be the most pleasing to you and the most beneficial for the said Society.

AND FOR THIS PURPOSE

I, John Baptist de La Salle, priest,
I, Nicolas Vuyart and I, **Gabriel Drolin,**
We from now on and for always
till the last survivor or till the entire completion of the establishment of the said Society,
make vows of association and union
to bring about and maintain the said establishment without any possibility of dispensation,
even if there remained
only the three of us in the said Society
and we were obliged to beg for alms
and to live on bread alone.

IN VIEW OF WHICH

We promise
to do unanimously and with common consent all that we will think in conscience and without any human consideration to be for the greatest good of the said Society.

Done this 21st November day of the Presentation of the Most Blessed Virgin 1691.

In virtue of which we have signed.

1694

Most Holy Trinity, Father Son and Holy Spirit,
Prostrate with the most profound respect
before your infinite and adorable majesty,
I consecrate all of myself to you

to bring about your glory
as much as it will be possible for me
and you will ask of me.

AND FOR THIS PURPOSE

I, John Baptist de La Salle, priest,
promise and *vow to unite myself and live in society with Brothers* **Nicolas Vuyart,**
Gabriel Drolin, Jean Partois . . .
to conduct together and by association gratuitous schools wherever this may be,
even if I were obliged in order to do so
to beg for alms and live on bread alone,
and to do in the said society whatever I shall be assigned either by the body of the Society or by the superiors who will direct it.

THIS IS WHY

I promise and vow obedience to the body of this society and to the superiors,
which vows of association and of stability in the said society and of obedience
I promise
to keep inviolably during all my life.
In virtue of which I have signed.

Done at Vaugirard this Sixth of June,
day of the feast of the Most Holy Trinity,
in the year 1694.

A comparison of the two formulas enables us to draw two conclusions.

The **differences** appear to be connected with a change of perspective.

In 1691, the three associates committed themselves "to bring about . . . the establishment of the Society of the Christian Schools". The whole formula centres on this.

In 1694, they took part, even if most of them were ignorant of this fact, in the accomplishment of the objective fixed in 1691. There was therefore no reason to mention it. On the other hand, it was possible to state clearly what was only understood in 1691, that is:

- that to consecrate oneself to God, is to set oneself "totally and exclusively apart for (his) glory" (*Lasallian Themes 1* 1992, 100);
- that the final purpose was to ensure the continued existence of the work of the "Gratuitous Schools".

The **similarity** between the two texts comes, of course, not from the fact that there are identical or similar passages and expressions, but in particular from the way in which the two texts are structured (cf. *Lasallian Themes 1* 1992, 102:6).

A parallel structure in their construction can be shown that suggests they were composed by the same person. There is no doubt in fact that John Baptist de La Salle, who wrote and signed the formula of 1694, is also the author of the 1691 formula.

The vows pronounced in 1694

The choice of these vows

Before considering the content of the vows we need to answer some questions.

In the first place, **what vows** did De La Salle and the 12 Brothers make on June 6th 1694?

According to Blain, the deliberations which had preceded the making of the vows in 1694 had resulted in the decision that "the noble fervour to make perpetual vows would be restricted to those of obedience and stability" (CL 7, 343).

On the other hand, when the vows pronounced are referred to a second time just before the final promise in the formula of vows, three are mentioned: association, stability and obedience.

In fact, outside of this reference, there is no mention of the first two. Only the vow of obedience is explicitly mentioned.

These first two vows were in fact made when each of the Brothers making vows said, "I promise and vow to unite myself and live in society". "To unite myself" expressed the idea of association, and "to live" that of stability.

Another question we should ask ourselves is: **Why** were **these vows** chosen?

It seems they were chosen because they contributed elements that were necessary for the constitution of the Society planned in 1691.

The purpose of **association** was to do God's work by making schools available for poor children as a means of salvation.

This presupposed two conditions:

♦ The continued existence of the Society which conducted the schools had to be ensured. This required the **stability** of each of its members.

♦ The agreement to observe the rules according to which the Society was run. This required **obedience**, understood more as a means to fulfill the purpose of the society than as a means of personal salvation.

We can also ask: **Why vows**?

When M. Olier set up the Society of St Sulpice, he had a notarised document drawn up, and the members of the Society made no vows.

When St Vincent de Paul founded the Congregation of the Priests of the Mission, he chose to constitute his Society on the basis of statutes suited to a society of common life whose members did not pronounce public vows, although they did make private vows (cf. CL 11, 279–280).

The Sisters of the Child Jesus, on the other hand, made vows from 1684 onwards.

By pronouncing vows, the 13 must have wished to give greater force to the commitment they were making, and greater solidity to the Society in whose establishment they were cooperating. They wished also to stress the religious dimension of their commitment, for the Society they intended establishing would be composed of men whose lives were consecrated to God. And if their intention was to ensure the future of the Christian Schools, it was because they were a means of putting the salvation brought by Jesus Christ within the reach of children who were far from it.

Content of the vows

When De La Salle and his companions pronounced their vows of association, stability and obedience, what did they wish the scope of these vows to be?

The formula of vows gives us some idea of their intention. We can find further information about this matter in De La Salle's *The Obligations of the Vows of the Brothers of the Christian Schools*, which he composed shortly after 1694. This explanation can be found in a short work he wrote for the Brothers, *Collection of Various Short Treatises for the Use of the Brothers of the Christian Schools* (CL 15, 4).

The vow of association

When each of the Brothers making the vows in 1694 said, "I promise and vow to unite myself . . . in society", he cooperated by that very fact in "the establishment of the Society of the Christian Schools" which the three associates of 1691 had committed themselves to "bring about". What is called the "vow of association" in the *résumé* part of the formula had the effect therefore of forming De La Salle and the 12 "principal Brothers" into a "Society", while waiting for others to join this "Society" by making the same vows.

All the same, the constitution of this "Society" was not desired as an end in itself. It was a means of ensuring more fully the future of the schools. These were considered to be a means of procuring God's glory, by enabling children to attain the salvation brought by Jesus Christ. And so, when De La Salle and the 12 Brothers made a vow "to unite in Society" or, with the same meaning, "to become associated", they stated that they did so "in order to conduct gratuitous schools together and by association".

There was, therefore, a close link between the vow of association and the promotion of the work of the "gratuitous schools". The definition given in the *Collection* of the obligations of the first vow pronounced by the Brothers was that of "conducting schools by association, with those who had associated themselves with the Society, and with those who would do so in the future" (R 2, 1 = CL 15, 4).

What we read in §1 of the explanation of the obligations of this vow in the *Collection*, that is, that the vow obliges Brothers "to conduct schools by association", would lead subsequently to a change of emphasis.

In a later explanation of the vows, there will be question of a "vow to conduct schools gratuitously by association", and a distinction will be made between the obligations entailed by a "vow of association with the Brothers who have associated themselves to conduct gratuitous schools" and those entailed by a "vow to teach children gratuitously" (cf. CL 3, 20).

In the 1726 Rule, the "vow of association" is no longer mentioned. On the other hand, among the five vows made by the Brothers we find one "to teach gratuitously". And yet, in the chapter entitled "The obligations of the vows", we find a "vow to teach gratuitously and to conduct schools by association".

It is clear, therefore, that very rapidly the idea of "association" became blurred in the Institute, although in the formula of vows Brothers continued to say: "I promise and vow to unite myself and live in society with the Brothers of the Christian Schools who are associated to conduct together and by association gratuitous schools".

It is only recently that attention has been drawn once again to the fact that "association" is a constitutive element of the Institute, and not only a means of achieving its aims (cf. *Lasallian Themes 1* 1992, 38-43).

The vow of stability

Even if this vow were not explicitly pronounced, the fact of committing oneself "to live in society" was equivalent to promising "to remain fixed in the said society", as §2 of the *Collection* text tells us (R 2, 2 = CL 15, 4).

To vow "stability" in a "Society" like the one the Brothers intended to form could result only in contributing to increase its solidity.

To pronounce this vow was to promise in practice "to remain fixed in the said society all the time for which one had committed oneself, without the possibility of leaving of one's own accord for any reason whatever" (*idem.*).

According to §3 of the same text, one had to be ready "to lack everything and to beg for alms and live on bread alone, in order not to abandon the said Society or the schools" (R 2, 3).

The vow of obedience

In the 1694 formula, the vow of obedience is seen as a consequence of the other two vows which are pronounced first. Obedience is considered to be a means of fulfilling the obligations entailed by these two vows, that is:

- conducting "together and by association gratuitous schools, wherever this may be",
- or doing "in the said Society whatever I shall be assigned, whether by the body of the Society, or the Superiors".

Going to wherever one is sent, and doing whatever one is given to do, presupposes, in fact, having to refer to some form of authority which has the power to make these decisions.

And so, obedience in the formula of vows was intended to promote "the mission of the Institute rather than the practice of religious life" (*Lasallian Themes 2* 1995, 264).

As for the obligations of this vow, §4 of the *Collection* text summarises them in one word: "Obey!".

On the other hand, when De La Salle mentions obedience in his writings — and he does so often — what he stresses is the fact that it is a virtue proper to religious and persons living in community.

Conclusion

In the second part of the study we have just completed it was stressed that the vows pronounced in 1694 were chosen because they were of a nature to give greater solidity to a "Society" made up of men who would have to move from place to place to conduct gratuitous schools or to do there whatever they were asked to.

From what we know, at least from Blain, certain Brothers wished to make a vow of chastity. It appears they were convinced by De La Salle that it would be better not to take this vow (cf. CL 7, 343).It is not clear whether the biographer is saying that the Brothers concerned wished to pronounce a "vow of religion", and that the Founder was against the idea. There is not enough evidence for us to affirm this.

The fact remains that the vows made in 1694 did not take the form of traditional vows. The Brothers, nonetheless, practised the corresponding virtues. In the *Rule* drawn up at about the same period, a chapter is devoted to each of them.

Like other Founders of his day, De La Salle doubtlessly did not consider it necessary for his Brothers to pronounce "vows of religion" in order to be considered members of a religious Society.

It can be seen from the formula used (based closely on the 1691 one and probably also on that of 1686), that those who made vows in 1694 made a total gift of themselves to God, and that this gift not only preceded but also included the vows by which they put into more concrete terms their consecration to God.

It has to be said also that De La Salle considered all the Brothers, even those who did not make vows, as being "consecrated to the glory of God from the moment they joined the Society" (*Lasallian Themes 2* 1995, 263, 4.1). Other writings of the Founder also speak in these terms, although it is true they were written at a later date (*Lasallian Themes 1* 1992, 100-101, 5.1 and 5.2).

PART THREE

CONSOLIDATION (1695–1714)

In the course of the last period we studied, we saw how the group of teachers associated with De La Salle had finally grown into a form of religious Society.

The period we are now going to consider was a time of development and consolidation for the Society.

It was a time of **development** because, not only did the work of the schools spread geographically, but also there appeared a certain diversification in the types of teaching provided.

As for **consolidation**, this took place in the internal organisation of the Society: various aspects of religious and school life were fixed, and differentiation between functions was introduced into the Society.

This expansion of the work and internal consolidation were both characterised by unswerving fidelity to the constitutive principles of the new Society: internal autonomy, organic unity, specific mission. This fidelity was maintained through successive periods of crisis during which these principles were called into question.

These various challenges provide a convenient way of subdividing this new period into a number of main sections.

7 Progress in Spite of New Threats (1695–1703)

Introduction

It would seem that the years following the 1694 Assembly were a very favourable period for the growth of the newly constituted Society.

However, the same factors which led to this success carried within themselves the seeds of a crisis which would break out after a few years.

In the long term, however, one result of this crisis was a clear confirmation of the solidity of the progress that had been made.

The chapter is divided into two parts:

- a. A favourable period for the new Society.
- b. Serious threats to the cohesion of the new Society.

a. A favourable period for the new Society

A certain number of circumstances were conducive to the growth of the Society. These circumstances can be reduced to two parallel sets of factors.

External support which helped the work of the schools to spread

Cardinal de Noailles, Archbishop of Paris since 1695, endorsed the decision of his predecessor regarding De La Salle's role in the community of the Brothers and, in February 1696, gave him wide powers in his diocese (cf. CL 41-2, 491).

In 1697, he allowed a chapel to be opened in the Vaugirard property. This was a favour, because he had only just decided to close a good number of private chapels, and this favour was contrary to the wishes of the parish priest of Vaugirard, who was very irritated by the decision.

The new parish priest of Saint Sulpice, M. de La Chétardie (installed in 1696) showed great interest in the work of the Brothers. His goodwill towards them made possible a number of new ventures in his parish:

- In **1697**, a third school was opened on rue Placide, in the district of the *Hôpital des Incurables**.
- In **1698**, at a cost of 1,600 livres per year (CL 7, 360), he obtained the use of a house for the Brothers which was in a better state than Vaugirard. This was the Grand'Maison, and a class was opened in it.
- That same year, he arranged for the Brothers to be entrusted with the education of 50 young Irishmen whose parents had followed King James II of England into exile. These parents were mostly soldiers and officers and their wives with very limited resources. The boarding fees of these young men in the Grand'Maison were paid by Louis XIV.
- In **1699**, another school was opened in the parish on rue des Fossés Monsieur le Prince.

♦ That same year, a "Sunday School" was opened. It was called the "Christian Academy" and was open to young men "who were under 20 years of age" (CL 7, 389). In this connection, Blain has the following to say:

> Two hundred students, divided up into a number of classes, received instruction there that was suited to their age and their ability. The more backward learned to read and write. The others were taught mathematics, and a number, drawing. This first session, which lasted about 2 hours, was followed by catechism, which itself was followed by a pious exhortation given by one of the Brothers. (*Idem*)

Blain and Maillefer's second manuscript say this opening took place in 1709. On the other hand, Maillefer's first manuscript says the date was 1699. This latter date fits in better with the facts. 1709 may be the date when an attempt was made to re-open this Sunday School.

External support from other sources enabled other schools to be opened in Paris and in different towns in France.

♦ In **1698**, M. Lebreton, the parish priest of Saint Hippolyte, obtained two Brothers to run a school. He also supported De La Salle's wish to open a new "seminary for teachers" in his parish. This "seminary" was entrusted to Brother Nicolas Vuyart.

> These schools were located in the same building. One of the two classes was run by the second Brother, and the other by a "seminarist" supervised by the tutor. All the young men took turns to practise teaching, so that they could be trained and instructed in the method of running a school successfully (CL 7, 365).

♦ **1699** saw the successful conclusion of a process begun five years earlier (according to Blain, CL 7, 370) by the Bishop of Chartres, Mgr Godet des Marais, who had been in contact with De La Salle. With the support of the parish priests of his cathedral city, he obtained seven Brothers, and with these he was able to open two schools. However, as the biographer tells us, De La Salle "wanted the consent of the Brothers before promising to send any of them to the Bishop of Chartres" (CL 7, 370).

♦ In **1700**, the wishes of the senior parish priest of Calais, supported by the Governor of the town, the Duc de Béthune, were finally realised when a school with two Brothers was opened. In the years that followed, this school was funded out of the royal purse with "money confiscated from members of religious sects".

The term "members of religious sects" (*religionnaires*) refers to Protestants who, following the Revocation of the Edict of Nantes in 1685, were no longer allowed to practise their religion in France. Some had left the country and their goods had been confiscated.

A second school was opened in Calais (in 1705, according to Blain, but more likely in 1703) in the dock area. The royal purse awarded the teachers 150 livres "in view of the care and trouble they took to teach sailors serving on His Majesty's ships" (CL 7, 384).

In **1702**, according to Maillefer, two Brothers were sent to Troyes "to establish a free school there at the request of the municipality. This request was supported by the local Bishop, Boutiller de Chavigny" (CL 6, 133).

At the beginning of **1703**, negotiations undertaken the previous year by the Seigneur de Château Blanc, Papal Treasurer for the Comtat Venaissin, finally bore fruit and a school was opened in Avignon, in the Papal State. The opening of this school was the prelude to the spread of the "Christian Schools" in the South of France. Initially, De La Salle had been opposed to sending Brothers to "an area contaminated previously by heresy" (CL 7, 395), and where Protestantism continued to be active.

Relative tranquillity permitting consolidation of the Institute

As we saw in the last chapter, after the 1694 Assembly, De La Salle took advantage of a period of tranquillity to codify the current practices of the new Society.

It was probably in 1695 that the first manuscript text of the *Rule* was produced. This text has come down to us in the form of a booklet, dated 1705 and entitled *Rules of the Institute of the Brothers of the Christian Schools.*

The title given to the booklet containing the *Rules*, which has come down to us in manuscript form, proves that by the date given (1705) the "Society", whose constitution we have studied, was already known as the "Institute of the Brothers of the Christian Schools".

Not knowing exactly when the word "Institute" came into use, we have not used it in this work up till now, even though the biographers used it regularly to refer to the Society in its earlier stages.

While "Society" and "Institute" are identical in meaning, De La Salle seems to have preferred the latter term in legal documents.

We learn from Blain that, around 1700, De La Salle composed also the *Rule of the Brother Director*. Copies of this document were apparently sent to all the houses of the Institute (CL 8, 146).

We read also the following in Blain:

> After M. de La Salle had set out to his satisfaction all the practices and customs of the community in a collection of rules, it occurred to him to supplement it with several other works which would be of great use to the Brothers and their schools. These works included *Christian Civility*; instructions regarding Holy Mass and how to follow it properly; instructions regarding how to approach the Sacrament of Penance and the Eucharist with piety; Catechisms of all sorts, small ones for children, others for the Brothers, which were more complete, deeper, more learned and which contained moral injunctions and pious practices. (CL 7, 341)

These works and others which were produced during the period we are now studying will be treated in more detail in the supplement which follows this chapter.

As the work developed, De La Salle sought to involve the Brothers more closely with it.

♦ Those who had made vows with him in 1694 were divided up between the five houses which made up the Institute at this time (cf. CL 7, 356).

♦ In the Grand'Maison, Brothers began to be given specific roles: one was put in charge of the novitiate; another, in charge of the young Brothers who were starting to teach; another to look after the material needs of the house; another to look after the sick.

It seems also that the Brothers at this time, more so than De La Salle himself, wanted their existence to be officially recognised (cf. CL 6, 137).

According to Maillefer, it was for this purpose that two Brothers were sent to Rome. One of these we know was Gabriel Drolin, and the other Brother Gérard, who was possibly his brother. The latter returned to France after a short time and, if we are to believe the biographer, once Gabriel Drolin was on his own "he forgot totally about the purpose of his mission" (CL 6, 137). According to Blain, the two Brothers were sent in 1702 (cf. CL 7, 392).

If it is probable that De La Salle left this Brother in Rome because he wished to demonstrate his and his Brothers' loyalty to the Holy See, it is much less likely that he wanted him to take steps to obtain official recognition for the Institute. In fact, he even wrote to him to tell him not to pursue this matter (cf. LA 24, 7).

— Supplement —
School Texts and Pedagogical Works

The biographers, and Blain in particular, state on a number of occasions that De La Salle took advantage of a relatively quiet period to compose, or put the finishing touches to, various works for the Brothers or their pupils.

Of these works, some were quickly printed, while others remained in manuscript form and were edited during the lifetime of their author. Others were edited only after his death by his immediate successors.

These works are normally classed under one or other of two headings, according as they are either **pedagogical** or **spiritual** works. In some cases, this distinction is somewhat blurred, in the sense that there are books in each of these categories which contain elements rightly belonging to the other.

We shall refer to the pedagogical works which were used in school by the pupils and the teachers as **school texts**.

List of works

We list here the **school texts** composed by De La Salle. In addition to the full title, we give the date of the first known edition.

Title	**Date of 1st edition**	**Reference**
French spelling book	1698	CL 48, 111
Exercises of piety which are made during the day in the Christian Schools	between 1696 and 1702	CL 18, III
Instructions and prayers for holy Mass	between 1698 and 1702	CL 17, III–IV
Methodical instructions for making a good Confession	between 1698 and 1702	CL 17, III–IV
Instructions and prayers for Confession and Communion	between 1698 and 1702?	CL 17, III–IV
The Duties of a Christian towards God and the means to be able to fulfil them well (also called: Christian Instructions)	May 1703	CL 20, III
The Duties of a Christian towards God (also called: Catechism for the Brothers of the Christian Schools)	May 1703	CL 48 CL 20, IV
The external and public worship that Christians are obliged to give God and the means of doing so	July 1703	CL 22, III
Large abridged version of the Duties of a Christian towards God	between 1703 and 1705	CL 23, III
Small abridged version of the Duties of a Christian towards God	between 1703 and 1705	CL 23, III
Hymns	between 1705 and 1706	CL 22, III
The Psalms of David and the Office of Our Lady	between 1705 and 1706	CL 48
The Rules of politeness and Christian civility	1703	CL 19

A number of these works went through many editions and so became widely known. For example:

- *Exercises of Piety*: about 120 known editions.
- *Duties of a Christian* (*Christian Instructions*): 270 known editions (CL 20, III).

Br Manuel Magaz mentions 302 editions before 1900, representing a million copies (*Lasalliana*, May 1990, article 18-5-A-71).

In addition to this collection of works used in the Christian Schools, there was also one that was properly speaking **pedagogical**: *The Conduct of the Christian Schools*.

While the works we mentioned above were printed relatively early on, the first edition of *The Conduct* appeared in print only in 1720. Up till then, the Brothers had passed the manuscript copy around and had copied it. A manuscript copy dated 1706 has come down to us. It would seem that the work first appeared around 1695.

In fact, De La Salle had been loath to give the contents of this pedagogical guide a definitive form too quickly, so that, with the help of the most experienced Brothers, he could gradually improve it. Before its first edition, the material had been revised with the agreement of its chief author. The 1720 text was therefore the result of a long period of collaboration between the Founder and his disciples.

The purpose of the works

Why did the Founder compose a series of books for the use of the pupils and of the Brothers?

As far as the "school texts" were concerned:

- no texts existed that fitted in with the educational methods of the Brothers, in particular, for example, regarding the teaching of reading in French;
- these texts served as a means of training the Brothers or the teachers they trained;
- it was a way for the Brothers as a group to make their methods known and have them adopted by other teachers.

Regarding *The Conduct of the Christian Schools*, it was quite natural for De La Salle to want to put into writing, with the help of the most experienced Brothers, the instructions that were given to the Brothers to help them in their ministry as teachers; as well as to ensure a degree of uniformity among the schools, so that Brothers could be more easily moved from one to another.

It is true that similar works existed, and we know, for example, that De La Salle obtained copies of Demia's work through the good offices of Bishop Godet des Marais (cf. Poutet 1970, 1:711, and CL 56 on Demia's *Journal*). The difference, however, was that these works were all based on a type of experience that was not shared by the Brothers of the Christian Schools.

Without going into details, it would be useful to give some idea of the purpose of **each of the works** we have mentioned. Regarding the school texts, *The Conduct of the Christian Schools* helps us to divide them up into **three groups**. *The Conduct* itself can be considered as the basic text for what we have come to call Lasallian pedagogy.

1. Books for the teaching of reading

Spelling Book

In the schools run by the Brothers, display cards were used to teach pupils first the alphabet and then basic syllables.

They then went on to study the "French spelling book". We have no copies of this book, but research shows that:

- it contained only French syllables;
- its only purpose was to teach reading, unlike other spelling books which included prayers also.

The "second book"

After the spelling book, a "first book" was used. This was written in continuous prose and was used for spelling by syllables.

Next came a "second book" which served to teach pupils first how to spell, then to read syllable by syllable, and finally to read without spelling. To prevent pupils from guessing words, a new text was used. According to *The Conduct of the Christian Schools*, this text was supposed to be a book of *Christian Instruction*. It is thought that the work referred to here was *The Duties of a Christian in continuous prose*, in spite of, or because of the difficult nature of this text.

The Psalter

The choice of the third reading book was left to the Director or his substitute in each school.

It was only at this point that pupils, who could read French perfectly, were taught to read Latin. For this they used the *Psalms of David*.

A later edition of this book has an introduction on the "manner of reading Latin well". It points out clearly also that this stage of learning how to read was just that. In particular, there was no intention of teaching Latin as a language to prepare pupils for further studies in a *collège*.

Civility

After studying Latin pronunciation and beginning to learn how to write, pupils were prepared for the reading of manuscripts by an intermediary stage. During this stage, they used a text written in special characters known as "gothic" and later as "civility". The latter term was used because this particular type face was used almost exclusively in a book entitled *Rules of Politeness and Christian Civility* and in other similar books.

The reading of this book served at the same time to introduce pupils living in towns to the rules of politeness and to social conventions observed by educated and distinguished persons in the high society of their days. "In order to prevent the children of artisan and working-class families being despised or feeling ill at ease in the presence of well-off people, there is a need for a type of education suited to their future needs" (Poutet and Pungier 1976, 33).

De La Salle's intention, however, regarding this social training went further: he wished also to christianise these conventions, while rejecting those that were unworthy of Christians.

2. Books for catechism

The list of books given earlier mentioned four works dealing with the *Duties of a Christian towards God*. To those works we now add *The External and Public Worship*. . . .

How were these different books used?

Given the method recommended in *The Conduct of the Christian Schools* for teaching catechism, the Brothers used the *Duties in the form of questions and answers* and its second volume, *External and Public Worship*, to prepare their lessons. During the lesson itself, they used the two *Abridged versions*, which the pupils also had and which they used for learning catechism.

As regards the *Duties of a Christian in continuous prose*, this was the "second book" for reading that we mentioned earlier. It is thought that the Brothers used it also to study catechism, which they were obliged to do every day.

3. Books of piety

Under this heading we obviously have to include the *Exercises of Piety*. The pupils were given copies of this little book, which contained the prayers, in both French and Latin, that all Christians should know. It contained also numerous "acts" which summarised, in the form of prayers, what the pupils had been taught during catechism lessons, or which were associated with various times of the day or certain actions.

We must also mention here the various booklets in the series *Instructions and Prayers*. The purpose of these printed booklets was to induce pupils, who had copies of these works, to receive the sacraments of the Eucharist and Penance in the way they had been taught in catechism. These booklets also contained numerous prayers to strengthen their faith in these sacraments, and to help them participate in them.

We can also include under this heading a printed book of *Hymns* intended for the use of Brothers and pupils.

4. The basic work

This is *The Conduct of the Christian Schools*. It contains all the guidelines and instructions necessary to ensure that schools are well run.

It is not a completely original work, for much of the material contained in it was borrowed from the various 17th-century pioneers of education for children from poor families, as for example, from Demia's *École Paroissiale, Règlements* (cf. Pungier 1980, 37) or from St Pierre Fourier's *Vraies Constitutions des Chanoinesses de Notre Dame*.

Its value lies mainly in that it makes a synthesis of these borrowings and of the new elements introduced by De La Salle and his followers. It was a synthesis that was adapted to the needs of schoolmasters teaching the "children of the artisans and the poor" in towns at the turn of the 17th century.

As one might expect, *The Conduct* designated what subjects should be taught and how they should be taught. However, while it was customary at that time to teach pupils individually, in the Christian Schools, children were taught together in a classroom. They were divided up into smaller groups, following different "lessons" and "orders", according to the progress they made.

The rules governing the teaching of catechism were intended to make the pupils understand and learn the material of the lesson more easily. For example, this material was divided up into small sections to make it more accessible for young minds.

The Conduct laid down also a succession of "exercises of piety" to be followed during the school day. This enabled pupils to put into practice what they were taught during catechism. They were also given an opportunity to experience social life inspired by Christian principles. And so the lunch pupils had to eat together at school became an occasion for them to learn a number of rules of politeness, as well as to practise sharing with others according to the spirit of the Gospel. They were also given various jobs to do as a form of service to others.

Part of the text was devoted to a consideration of certain conditions the teacher had to observe in order that lessons were conducted in an orderly and calm fashion, ensuring in this way that pupils made progress and were consequently stimulated to work hard.

When it came to offering incentives and especially to punishing, teachers were told to take into account the individual characters of their pupils and to adapt their approach accordingly. This type of concern, as well as the teacher's general attitude towards the pupils, was to be inspired by the great respect that was due to the dignity and destiny of these children, in the light of the Gospel.

Signs permanently displayed in classrooms (cf. CL 24, 131 = CE 12, 6, 3)

left to right, top row:

You must work hard in school to learn your lesson
You must take notice of the signs
You must always write without wasting time

left to right, bottom row:

You must listen attentively during catechism
You must pray to God with piety in church and in school
You must neither absent yourself from school nor arrive late without permission

b. Serious threats to the cohesion of the new "Society"

Reasons for these difficulties

Some were due to the success of the schools.

At the end of **1698** and the beginning of 1699, the "Paris schoolmasters", worried by the success of the Brothers, emptied the school in rue Placide of all its contents and brought a court case against the Brothers on the pretext that they had accepted fees from some of their pupils. The court case lasted three months during which time the school remained closed.

The parish priest of St Sulpice came to the help of De La Salle, asking Madame de Maintenon to intervene on his behalf by approaching the President of the Parlement (text in Rigault 1937, 1:283). De La Salle had no difficulty in winning his case before Parlement, challenging the "teachers of the Little Schools" to prove their accusations.

In May **1699**, an agreement was reached between the Grand Chantre and the parish priests of Paris regarding the "Charity Schools". Parish priests were given the right to be responsible for the schools in their parish. They had the right to appoint and dismiss teachers without permission from the Grand Chantre, but they could accept only genuinely poor children into their schools whose names appeared in a special register. Schools had to have a sign saying: "Charity School for the Poor of the Parish". The other teachers, for their part, were to stop harassing the Charity Schools.

The main source of difficulty, however, was a twofold threat to the society founded by De La Salle and the Brothers.

On the one hand, the protection they had from the parish priest of St Sulpice was not all that it seemed. As an excellent pastor of souls, M. de La Chétardie appreciated, at its true worth, the work of the Brothers in his parish schools. Blain describes his great satisfaction on visiting these schools, and how he would organise "a sort of procession for the children from the various schools on the first Saturday of each month" (CL 7, 363).

However, together with his interest in these schools, "M. de La Chétardie appeared to envy De La Salle for having the honour of giving the Church an Institute that was so necessary" (Blain, CL 7, 355). Such an attitude could lead him to wish to take over De La Salle's position as Superior of the Brothers' community (cf. Rigault 1937, 1:212).

On the other hand, the Institute was experiencing difficulties that are typical of all young organisations. De La Salle had at his disposal only a limited number of Brothers, in

many cases, untrained. This was the case, in particular, of Br Michel, the new Director of novices, and of Br Ponce, the Director of the house in rue Princesse. Both had a fiery temperament and were still too impetuous to hold such positions.

The plot against De La Salle

A combination of all these difficulties brought about a crisis that posed a serious threat to the new Society. Towards the end of 1702, there was a plot to replace De La Salle by some other ecclesiastic as Superior of the Society.

According to Maillefer, De La Salle's enemies

> found the means to turn his superiors against him. They were induced to think of him as a person who was stubbornly attached to his own opinions, full of himself, hard, showing no pity for the Brothers of his community, punishing the slightest of faults with a crushing severity, refusing to excuse any human weakness. They did not fail to take advantage of an over severe reprimand given by the Brother in charge of the novices in the absence of M. de La Salle (CL 6, 140).

Blain is more precise: he speaks of the bad way in which two novices were treated, one by the Director of novices, and the other by the Director of the rue Princesse, when the novice came to try his hand at teaching at a time when De La Salle was absent.

These two novices complained to a person called by the biographer "the enemy of the Servant of God", who drew up a *mémoire** which he submitted to Cardinal de Noailles, the Archbishop of Paris. Blain also adds:

> To make matters worse, the complaints of the two Brothers reached the ears of M. de La Chétardie. The malcontents showed him the bloody marks on their shoulders from the beating they had received, provoking not only his compassion, but also his indignation. In spite of De La Salle's innocence, their account made him the principal object of the indignation of the parish priest of St Sulpice (CL 7, 404).

It was inevitable that the latter, who already thought that the Superior of the Brothers was too demanding in their regard, should have his convictions reinforced by this event.

The Cardinal sent one of his Vicar Generals, a certain M. Pirot, to question the Brothers. He was favourably impressed by the Brothers, but his report to the Archbishop omitted

to mention this and spoke only of the complaint of the two novices. The Archbishop decided to replace De La Salle as Superior by another ecclesiastic, and he informed De La Salle of this when De La Salle went to see him.

A few days later, M. Pirot came to the Grand'Maison to present the new Superior to the Brothers, a certain M. Bricot. As Maillefer tells us:

> When the Vicar General Pirot introduced him as such to the community, all protested, saying that they recognised no other Superior than His Eminence and M. de La Salle (CL 6, 142).

In spite of De La Salle's intervention, the Vicar General failed to obtain the agreement of the Brothers. Although unhappy to have to report these events to Mgr de Noailles, he could not help admitting that "if all those living in community were as attached to their Superior as these good Brothers were to M. de La Salle, one would find only sources of consolation everywhere" (*idem.*).

According to Blain, the Brothers running schools in Paris wished to arrive at a compromise:

> After fasting on bread and water the day before their visit, and spending the night taking turns to pray — all this on their own initiative and without M. de La Salle being aware — they went to meet his fearsome adversary (CL 7, 422).

But to no avail.

They went also to see the parish priest of St Sulpice. In spite of his animosity towards De La Salle, he arranged for one of his curates, a certain M. Madot, to try to find a solution acceptable to the Brothers.

This priest won over the Brothers by saying that De La Salle would stay with them, and that the new Superior would visit them only once a month. Blain then tells us that the Brothers went to the Vicar General to beg his pardon for their behaviour towards him, but not before they had obliged M. Madot to put down in writing the promises he had made to them.

When the new Superior, M. Bricot, was presented to them for the second time, they accepted him and all went to the chapel to sing the Te Deum. Maillefer writes as follows in his first manuscript:

> All these problems disappeared of their own accord. M. Bricot was never seen again in the house. The two novices who had caused all the trouble were dismissed. M. de La Salle continued to direct the community as before and the Rules were observed as usual (CL 6, 148).

This was not the end of it, however, because the decision of the Archbishop had not been rescinded and could still be enforced.

According to the biographers, further secret intrigues on the part of the "enemy" of De La Salle caused the departure of a number of Brothers. These included those running the Sunday School, and the Director of novices and another Brother tried to enter a Trappist monastery.

These intrigues also caused De La Salle to lose "a sum of 5,000 livres a rich person had left him in order to buy the novitiate house which was on sale" (CL 6, 151). According to Blain, the sum was 50,000 livres (cf. CL 8, 3).

In the end, he and the Brothers had to leave this house. They found another which was "not very suitable", as Blain tells us (CL 8, 15), in the rue de Charonne, in the Faubourg St Antoine. Here, the Sunday School was started up again, and a school opened for the children of the district, in spite of the opposition of the "faubourg boarding masters" (CL 6, 153). This took place in 1703.

Conclusion

It would be fair to say that it was the Brothers' reaction to the attempt to impose a Superior in the place of De La Salle that saved their young Society.

What was at stake was not only the principle of the independence of the Society, but also its unity. If the views of De La Salle's "enemy" had won the day, views that wanted the Brothers' community in St Sulpice to depend on the parish priest, then there would have occurred a disastrous fragmentation, since each local community would have been at the mercy of the parish priest in whose parish its school was.

In the same way as De La Salle had been the main obstacle to the imposition of a new form of organisation, so his continued presence at the head of the Institute was its best guarantee of unity.

The crisis had been painful, and some of its consequences bad, and yet, the demonstration of the attachment most Brothers felt for their Superior resulted in a strengthening of their Institute as a result of this difficult period.

Blain concludes the first volume of his work by showing how the Brothers' attitude derived from their fidelity to the decisions taken in 1694 regarding the choice of their Superior:

Never had attachment been more sincere or more generous, than that of these good children for their good Father. . . . Grace which severs even the bonds of nature had united them to him. What is more, they had made it a law for themselves not to submit themselves to a Superior who was an outsider, when they vowed not to accept any that did not belong to their Body. This vow, which was made and signed by them in 1694, and which was mentioned earlier, serves to excuse their constant refusal to accept M. Bricot as their Superior. Their conscience, which was bound by this commitment, would have considered itself violated had they accepted this choice. Divine Providence intended to ensure the safety of their state when it inspired them to make this vow at a time when neither they nor M. de La Salle could have foreseen what was going to happen (CL 7, 443).

The parish priests of Saint Sulpice in Paris

Claude Bottu de **La Barmondière** (October 30th 1636–September 18th 1694), originally from Lyon. As parish priest of St Sulpice (November 29th 1678–January 1st 1689), he had to interrupt the building of the church (there was a debt of 500,000 livres). Building work started again 40 years later. It was he who invited De La Salle to send a Brother to the school in rue Princesse. The promise to do so made in 1683 was honoured only in 1688.

Henri **Baudrand** de La Combe (January 3rd 1637–October 19th 1699), born in Paris. He was Superior of the seminary in Clermont in 1675, then director of the seminary house at St Sulpice in 1684. Finally he was chosen by M. Tronson to replace M. de La Barmondière as parish priest of St Sulpice (**1689–1696**). He published very useful regulations regarding the administration of sacraments and helping the poor. Suffering from creeping paralysis, he resigned from his parish in favour of M. de La Chétardie in exchange for the priory of St Cosme les Tours.

Joachim Trotti de **La Chétardie** (November 23rd 1636–June 29th 1714). He was born in Exideuil (Charente) of a family belonging to the minor nobility of the Limousin province. He was successively director of the seminaries of Limoges, Le Puy and Bourges. In 1688, the Archbishop of Bourges gave him the task of publishing diocesan catechisms. These were often reprinted and revised. As parish priest of St Sulpice from **1694** to his death in **1714**, he set up a number of religious communities and schools. He played an important role in the events of the time: he was imposed as a confessor on Mme Guyon; he gave a judgment on the *Maximes* of Fénelon even before they were published; he was given the task of investigating the miracles which people were claiming to have obtained at the tomb of James II, who died in 1701; he was Madame de Maintenon's spiritual director from 1709 and at times an adviser of King Louis XIV; in 1712, he was the mediator in the conflict between Cardinal de Noailles and the bishops of Luçon and La Rochelle regarding Quesnel's doctrine.

Jean Baptiste **Languet de Gergy** (1675–1750). His brother Jean Joseph became successively Bishop of Soissons (1715) and Archbishop of Sens (1730). Jean Baptiste took over from M. de La Chétardie in **1714** and proved to be one of the great parish priests of St Sulpice.

— Supplement —
The Letter from the Parish Priest of Villiers le Bel

When Blain spoke of what we called earlier "the plot against De La Salle", he mentioned "a letter that the parish priest of Villers [sic] in the diocese of Paris wrote to the parish priest of the town of Laon" (CL 7, 418). Maillefer mentions the letter in both his manuscripts (CL 6, 147, 149).

There is a copy of this letter in the Institute Archives. It is a more complete version than the one given by the biographers. When the superiors of the Institute decided to publish a life of M. de La Salle, they certainly obtained the original or a copy of this letter from Canon Pierre Guyart who had received it when he was parish priest at St Pierre de Laon.

Text of the letter

Letter from Charles Delagrange, parish priest of Villiers le Bel, to Pierre Guyart, canon of the church of Notre Dame in Laon.

I was no less moved and surprised than you, my very dear Sir, by the news you sent me of M. de La Salle. As I respect and esteem him no less than you, I shared and continue to share in all the sufferings that have been caused him.

I have had the honour of meeting him: one could not have been more edified than I was at his bearing, his firmness, his resignation and his total abandonment to Providence. When I speak of his eminent virtues I am not saying anything you do not already know: your awareness of his rare qualities is not something recent.

I went to see His Eminence the Cardinal and M. Paulet, and I hope that, with time, His Eminence the Cardinal will reconsider the unfavourable opinions he has been given about M. de La Salle.

There is no question of Quietism. He is accused simply of being too strict towards his Brothers, of imposing excessive penances and of being too fond of doing so.

There are those who would like His Eminence the Cardinal to think that he is a person not suited to directing others, and especially as one who is extraordinarily attached to his own opinions and who behaves, and directs the Brothers to behave, as only he sees fit.

His great crime, as far as I have been able to ascertain, is that he does not act in accordance with the ideas of the parish priest of St Sulpice, who would like to take over

the direction and internal organisation of the Brothers, and this is what, up to the present moment, M. de La Salle has refused to allow.

I know only too well how this business will end — you yourself know well enough what the spirit of St Sulpice is like. For M. de La Salle, it constitutes the main problem. If he were in agreement with the parish priest he would have no problems with the Archbishop.

Two or three novices have left M. de La Salle's community and have complained that they were badly treated. The parish priest of St Sulpice enlarged upon their complaints and, after making further enquiries, drew up a document based on them, which he then presented to His Eminence.

On receiving this document, his Eminence the Cardinal appointed one of his Vicar Generals, a certain M. Pirot, to visit M. de La Salle's community and question the Brothers. During the course of a second visit, following instructions from His Eminence, he presented M. Bricot to the community as their temporal Superior.

When the word "Superior" was mentioned, most of the Brothers protested that they recognised no other Superiors except His Eminence and M. de La Salle. The Vicar General told them they had to obey His Eminence and, showing them the document signed by His Eminence the Cardinal, said that, if they refused to obey him, they would be punished as rebels.

The Brothers replied that they had great respect for His Eminence, but that they could not bring themselves to accept any other Superior except M. de La Salle; that they preferred to die rather than have any Superior apart from him; and that they were prepared to go to prison or to leave the Kingdom, or to go wherever it pleased His Eminence to send them, and even to die.

The Vicar General tried to calm them down and make them change their mind, describing to them the good external and internal qualities of this new Superior. The Brothers replied that M. de La Salle had not only all these qualities, but many others also which were far superior.

And then they began to enumerate them and say, among other things, that he was gentle and kind to others but hard and severe when it came to himself; that he neither commanded nor ordered them to do anything he had not done himself nor continued to do; and that they could not be given anyone that would be his equal, both as regards the way in which he directed them, and his excellent virtues and qualities.

M. de La Salle was present there as these Brothers gave their answer. Kneeling, weeping, with his hands joined, he begged them to submit to the commands that His Eminence had communicated to them through the Vicar General. They replied that they would obey him in everything else, but regarding this question they could not and would not do so.

The Vicar General saw that he could not change their minds nor make them obey the orders of His Eminence the Cardinal, either by his own reasoning nor by M. de La Salle's intervention. On the contrary, his words served only to make them more angry and to strengthen their resolve. And so, with M. Bricot, the would-be new Superior, who was covered with shame and confusion, he left not only the presence of the Brothers but also their house.

M. de La Salle accompanied them to the door, weeping at the disobedience and stubbornness of his Brothers (if indeed we can describe as such their zeal and affection for M. de La Salle, and their firmness and resolve to maintain his authority as Superior). He begged their pardon and apologised profusely for their refusal to submit to their authority.

In fact, he seemed to wish to be divested of his authority; it was something that would have given him great pleasure and intense satisfaction.

Immediately on his return, the Vicar General made known and praised the attachment and affection the Brothers had demonstrated for M. de La Salle. Speaking to His Eminence, he said, "If all the persons living in community, both men and women, were as united and affectionately disposed towards their Superiors as these Brothers are towards M. de La Salle, there would not be so much disorderliness in Paris".

He then described to him all that had happened, and said that the Brothers had refused to see reason regarding the acceptance of this new Superior.

His Eminence was so angry on hearing this that he immediately sent a messenger to the Parlement to see how he could remedy this situation and punish the Brothers for the lack of submission they had shown to his orders.

Some time later, the Vicar General went to see M. de La Salle to tell him that, if he did not make the Brothers obey the orders of His Eminence, he had orders from His Eminence to send him into exile.

M. de La Salle replied that he (the Vicar General) knew perfectly well the extent to which he had pleaded with them and that he had been unable to win them over.

Regarding his exile, he was quite ready to go wherever it pleased His Eminence to send him. What consoled him was that he would find God wherever he went; it would be a pleasure for him to suffer; and, regarding food and clothing, he could hardly have less then he had at present.

The Vicar General left [illegible word] without executing the orders he had brought and in admiration at his disinterestedness and detachment.

On hearing of these events, the Brothers decided to spend the whole day and night in prayer, neither eating nor drinking, to implore God's help in their anguish and affliction. The following day, they decided to close their schools and to leave their house in Paris.

As they set about to implement their decision, news of what they were doing reached the parish priest of St Sulpice, who went immediately to find M. de La Salle and asked him to make them change their mind and to stop them.

At the same time, His Eminence sent orders to Parlement not to pronounce the sentence of exile but to leave things as they were.

For some time after these events, M. de La Salle and his Brothers enjoyed a period of rest.

All the same, during this same period, De La Salle and some of his principal Brothers took part in a number of meetings at the residence of the Vicar General, and in other meetings in M. de La Salle's house with several ecclesiastics sent by either the Vicar General or the parish priest of St Sulpice, who spoke to each Brother individually.

Some 8 or 10 days later, on the 9th of the month, the Vicar General came back to see M. de La Salle, accompanied by M. Bricot, and the Brothers were all assembled. They were given innumerable promises. These included that there would be no innovations; that they would always keep their Rules; and that M. de La Salle would not be taken away from them. They were told also, however, that they had to obey and accept the priest in question as Superior. They would always have the consolation of having M. de La Salle with them, and the priest would visit them only once a month.

They accepted him on these conditions, or at least they did not put up the same resistance as the first time; and if the proverb "silence means consent" is true, then they accepted the appointment of this priest, since not a single Brother said anything.

That is how things are at present. No one believes that they can go on like this, and all hope that matters will rest there. The first step has been taken and the wish is to go no further for the moment. The only thing that can be done is to wait for a favourable moment to convince His Eminence of the truth and to bring to light all the qualities of M. de La Salle.

This is what I have tried to do and shall continue doing at every opportunity that Providence sends me. I owe him this in justice and, what is more, the interest you show makes me undertake this task with even greater zeal.

The interest of the letter

It comes from the fact that this letter is a firsthand account, written by a contemporary, of events known to us through the works of the biographers. What happened was that M. Guyart, parish priest of St Pierre in Laon asked M. de La Grange, parish priest of Villiers le Bel (the present-day name of a town in the Ile de France near Roissy) to obtain information for him about the measures taken by the Archbishop of Paris regarding their mutual friend, M. de La Salle. This detailed letter is in answer to the request of the parish priest from Laon.

It gives us an **outline of the facts**:

♦ denunciation of De La Salle to the Archbishop of Paris following the complaints of the two novices;

♦ the decision of the Archbishop to appoint another ecclesiastic to be Superior of the Brothers;

♦ the resistance of the Brothers when the new Superior was presented;

♦ the displeasure of the Archbishop on receiving the Vicar General's report;

♦ the search for a compromise and the acceptance by the Brothers of the ecclesiastic as Superior.

It explains the **origin of the problem**:

♦ it was not because De La Salle had subscribed to Quietism (a spiritual trend that was suspect at the time);

♦ it stemmed from the claims of the parish priest of St Sulpice, who wanted to involve himself in the "internal conduct" of the Brothers, that is, in the government and internal organisation of their community.

♦ the complaints of the two novices would seem to have been simply the excuse used by the parish priest of St Sulpice to denounce De La Salle to the Archbishop of Paris.

It proves the **attachment of the Brothers to De La Salle**:

♦ they dare to oppose the decision of the powerful Archbishop of Paris;

♦ their way of speaking about their Superior is in direct contrast with the accusations made against him of hardness and severity;

♦ the Vicar General himself cannot hide from the Archbishop his own admiration that the attitude of the Brothers inspires in him;

♦ the Brothers running schools in the parish are not afraid to defy the parish priest of St Sulpice by threatening to leave his schools.

It highlights the **contrasting attitudes of De La Salle**:

♦ the origin of the problem lies in his firmness in opposing the claims of the parish priest of St Sulpice; and yet, on a personal level, he is willing to withdraw.

♦ he suffers on account of the "disobedience and stubbornness of his Brothers" and begs the Archbishop's representative to forgive them; but he does not seem to be affected by the fact that his entreaties to the Brothers prove unsuccessful.

♦ he is prepared to go into exile; but he accepts a compromise as soon as the parish priest of St Sulpice comes to ask him to prevent the schools from closing.

Use of the letter by the biographers

Maillefer, in his two manuscripts (CL 6, 146ff), and Blain (CL 7, 418–419), mention the events referred to in the letter from the parish priest of Villiers le Bel, and quote sections from it.

A comparison between the passages quoted by the biographers and the complete text of the letter leads us to make the following observations:

On the whole, the passages quoted follow closely the text of the letter. There are some changes in the language but not in the contents of the text.

♦ This can be seen by comparing quotations made by the biographers and the text of the letter.

On the other hand, there is **one passage** that is not reproduced identically by the two biographers. This is the passage which begins with "His great crime, as far as I have been able to ascertain, is that he does not act".

♦ In the complete text this is followed by "in accordance with the ideas of the parish priest of St Sulpice";

♦ In Maillefer's first manuscript by "persons who overwhelm him";

♦ In Maillefer's second manuscript and in Blain by "M. X".

The general agreement we have observed in the texts is all the more striking by contrast with the differences we have just noted. Why did the biographers not follow the author of the letter and mention the parish priest of St Sulpice?

Could it be because M de La Chétardie was not the cause of the problem? The point is worth making, especially as Blain's text, in particular, gives the impression that it was not the parish priest of St Sulpice who plotted against De La Salle, but someone else.

♦ This can be seen in the way events were presented in the preceding chapter, or by referring to the biographers.

> If it was not the parish priest of St Sulpice who was "the enemy of M. de La Salle", who was it?
>
> ♦ In Poutet 2, 100, note 74 refers to a Sulpician called Jean Bernard Oursel, a supporter of Jansenism and a friend of the Archbishop of Paris, Mgr de Noailles. He had to leave the Company in 1714 (date corrected by the author).
>
> ♦ Gallego 1, 368–369, identifies this "enemy" as M. Brenier, a companion of De La Salle's at the seminary of St Sulpice and at the Sorbonne (cf. CL 41-2, 308ff) who, significantly, held the position of "Visitor" in the Company of St Sulpice.

From what has been said, it would seem that, regarding the identity of the person who plotted against De La Salle, we are faced with two versions of the same event.

Which is more likely to be true? Is it the version of the biographers who, it would seem, based it on the firsthand account of a Brother who was involved, like Brother Jean Jacquot? Or is it the version of the parish priest of Villiers le Bel, a contemporary of the events in question, but who obtained his information from ecclesiastical circles and was not personally involved in the business?

Conclusion

And so, what seemed quite clear after reading the text of the letter appears open to question now that we have compared it with the abridged text given by the biographers and their version of the events.

The supplement we have just completed does not diminish the inherent interest of the text of the letter.

It provides a contemporary firsthand account of relatively recent events. The bonds of friendship which linked the author to the person under attack did not seem to prevent him from assessing events at their true value and making balanced judgments about the persons concerned.

We have noted that, when the biographers reproduced passages from the text, they were, on the whole, faithful to the original. Their unwillingness to name the person behind the problems we have been examining has made his identification practically impossible.

We have been led to think that perhaps M. de La Chétardie did not play the role in the plot against De La Salle that has usually been ascribed to him. However, the question of who the person was remains unanswered.

Whatever the answer may be, it is fairly clear that there was someone connected with the parish of St Sulpice who wanted the Society of the Brothers to disappear, because it was too independent. Or at least, there was someone, like M. de La Chétardie, who wanted to form a separate community of Brothers who would teach in the parish, and so enable him to direct it as he saw fit.

Since such a plan was contrary to what De La Salle and the principal Brothers wanted, that is, to form a Society consisting of all the Brothers, the "enemies" of De La Salle had first to dispose of him before carrying out their plan.

In the period that followed, such ambitions on the part of others continued to constitute a threat for the Institute, and they disappeared only in the last years of De La Salle's life.

In contrast, the letter from the parish priest of Villiers le Bel indicates that the Founder of the Brothers had some good friends among the clergy, such as Charles de La Grange, or his correspondent, Pierre Guyart.

8 Opposition in Paris, Expansion in the Provinces (1704–1707)

Introduction

The chief characteristic of these few years was above all the opposition encountered by De La Salle and his Brothers in Paris.

These difficulties were unlike those experienced in the preceding period because they mainly concerned the schools. They were not unconnected, however, with those of that period: if De La Salle had enjoyed the protection of the parish priest of St Sulpice the onslaughts of the teachers' guilds would not have been so violent.

Even though it was the schools in Paris that were under threat, it was also the whole Institute that was in danger.

In spite of the opposition encountered and, to some extent, even because of it, De La Salle made decisions which ensured the continued development of his work. The Institute continued to spread throughout France, ensuring it a solid foundation for the future.

The chapter is divided into two parts:

- a. Hostility of the teachers' guilds in Paris
- b. New opportunities to spread throughout France

a. Hostility of the teachers' guilds in Paris

There had been instances of this hostility before, in 1690 and 1698–1699, but in the period 1704–1706, it was marked by greater persistence and intensity.

Reasons for the increase in the hostility of the teachers' guilds

Previously, attacks on the Brothers' schools had had to do with the conflict between the teachers of the "Little Schools", supported by the Grand Chantre, and the parish priests who ran the "Charity Schools". The Brothers' themselves as a group had not been under attack, and when De La Salle had defended himself in court, he had had the support of successive parish priests of St Sulpice.

Now, however, the situation was different:

♦ As we saw in the last chapter, an agreement had been struck in 1699 between the Grand Chantre and the parish priests of Paris.

♦ Because of a change in M. de La Chétardie's attitude towards De La Salle, the latter and the Brothers were in a more isolated position.

♦ The two teachers' guilds, the Writing Masters and the teachers of the Little Schools, which had previously been in conflict, were now working together. Although the two groups acted on their own, they coordinated their attacks in order to destroy the schools run by the Brothers.

♦ In their attacks on the Brothers, they would no longer accuse them, as they did in 1698–1699, that they were damaging their profits, but that they taught children who did not belong to families registered as being poor.

Manifestations of the hostility of the teachers' guilds

Over a period of three years (1704–1706), the Writing Masters and the teachers of the Little Schools brought a whole series of court cases against De La Salle and the Brothers. In an attempt to explain what happened, we shall take each of the three years, 1704, 1705 and 1706, separately, and try to unravel what took place in each.

1704

The first attack was against **the school in the rue de Charonne**, in the Faubourg St Antoine.

The parish priest had allowed the school to be opened, but that was all. The school was located in a house shared by the novitiate, which trained Brothers who would be so many potential rivals for the other teachers. There was also a "Sunday school" in the house. The teaching given to the young people who attended it — arithmetic, technical drawing — infringed on the monopoly which the Writing Masters claimed for themselves.

On the one hand, the Writing Masters had recourse to the civil courts.

♦ On February 4th, they submitted a complaint to the Lieutenant of Police d'Argenson, in which they accused De La Salle of accepting children in his schools, whose parents could afford the fees of these Masters.

♦ As a result of this complaint, the Lieutenant of Police* had the teaching materials of the school in rue de Charonne "seized" and ordered (*assigner**) De La Salle to appear before the Châtelet court.

Although the Brothers' school no longer had the legal ownership of the material "seized", the material itself was not removed till the end of 1705.

The Châtelet was a lower court dealing in civil and criminal cases. Its name came from the fact it was located in a building that had once been part of the fortifications of Paris.

♦ On February 22nd, this Court judged that the seizure of the material was valid and declared that: "charity schools could accept only children whose father was genuinely poor, and these children could be taught only subjects relating to their father's profession" (quoted in Rigault 1937, 1:240).

At the same time, the **teachers of the Little Schools** made representations to the Grand Chantre:

♦ On February 14th, the Grand Chantre forbade De La Salle "to teach, have others teach, or to conduct schools" in Paris and its suburbs "without being assigned to a district by the Chantre of Notre Dame" (quoted in Poutet 1970, 2:98). In addition, De La Salle was condemned to pay a fine and to have his school material confiscated — a sentence that reflected the verdict of the Châtelet court.

♦ On March 19th, De La Salle appealed against these sentences before the *Parlement** of Paris. Two years would pass before it declared its verdict.

The next attack was against all the 18 Brothers who were teaching in Paris. **The school in the parish of St Hippolyte**, which housed also the seminary for teachers, was particularly affected.

On June 7th, in another complaint to the Lieutenant of Police, the **Writing Masters** called for the implementation of the decision of February 22nd and claimed swingeing damages: 500 livres for "each of the offenders" and 2,000 livres for De La Salle.

♦ A decision of the Châtelet court, dated July 11th, awarded damages, but in a considerably reduced form.

♦ Worried by the attack launched against the Brothers, the two parish priests who supported the school in the parish of St Hippolyte, made representations in favour of the Brothers, but in vain. On August 29th, the Châtelet court exacerbated the situation even more by forbidding "the Brothers of the Charity Schools to live together till such time as they had obtained Letters Patent from the King" (quoted in Poutet 1970, 2:104, and Rigault 1937, 1:243).

♦ On the other hand, the verdict upheld the right of parish priests to choose teachers for their schools. And so, in order to keep the school in the parish of St Hippolyte open, the

parish priest kept on Nicolas Vuyart, who dissociated himself from the other Brothers. The seminary for teachers disappeared once again.

During the school holidays, the **two teachers' guilds** joined forces and attacked the **schools in the parish of St Sulpice** in a more direct way.

♦ On September 30th, the Writing Masters collected evidence from a number of teachers from the Little Schools in order to prove that the Brothers, despite the verdicts of February 22nd, July 11th and August 29th, had continued to allow "children of the bourgeoisie" into their schools.

♦ In October, M. de La Chétardie, in a move intended to placate the plaintiffs, closed the most recently opened school in rue des Fossés Monsieur le Prince.

At the end of the year, the representative of the Writing Masters called on the forces of public order to remove the material "seized" in the school in the rue de La Charonne, and to have the sign taken down by the front door, which said: "The Brothers of the Christian Schools". The school closed down, and the Sunday School, which could no longer be maintained, disappeared for good.

1705

At the beginning of January, De La Salle left the house in the rue de La Charonne to go to the rue Princesse with the novices. He stayed there only long enough to find another place to set up house. The parish priest of St Roch asked him for two Brothers, and so he went with them to a house in the rue St Honoré, near the Jacobins Convent belonging to the Dominicans.

The **Writing Masters** continued their attacks against the **schools in the parish of St Sulpice**.

♦ They constantly came into the classrooms to check on the "status" of the pupils.

♦ On August 4th, their representative had the furniture in the rue Princesse house "seized".

♦ On November 19th, the parish priest of St Sulpice decided to react. He saw the Lieutenant of Police and asserted his rights: the Brothers were his representatives in the schools.

1706

The Parlement, to which De La Salle had appealed two years earlier, delivered its judgment.

♦ On February 5th, it pronounced in favour of the **teachers of the Little Schools** and confirmed the verdict of the Grand Chantre of February 1704.

♦ On March 19th, this decision of the Parlement was communicated to De La Salle and the Brothers.

At the beginning of the year or in July (the uncertainty comes from the fact that Blain reported the same facts twice), the Brothers in the **three schools in the parish of St Sulpice** still functioning asked De La Salle to be sent elsewhere. De La Salle agreed and divided them up among the other schools that still existed.

Complaints from the parents led M. de La Chétardie to write to De La Salle to ask him to bring his Brothers back to the schools of the parish. De La Salle agreed on condition they would not be harassed any more.

The parish priest of St Sulpice came to a kind of agreement with the other teachers, according to which a curate of the parish would keep a register of the pupils admitted to the schools and give a note to each of these pupils confirming that they belonged to the "poor".

After an interruption of three months (or three weeks), 12 Brothers returned, but only 10 of them to teach, and classes started up again. The curate Languet de Gergy, who was responsible for giving out the admission notes, gave these notes also to the "pupils whose alleged wealth had served as an excuse for the court case brought by the Masters" (CL 8, 43). The demands of the Writing Masters were met, at least to all appearances, and it was not the responsibility of the Brothers to ensure that they remained so.

The conflict died down, but the schools of St Sulpice "were very much depleted", as Maillefer says (CL 6, 174, 175).

The Brothers teaching in the parish of St Sulpice had been living for 18 years in the house in rue Princesse. Now a more "suitable" house was found near the Sèvres gate, on rue de La Barouillière (now rue St Jean-Baptiste de La Salle), which M. de La Chétardie agreed to rent in 1707.

The Brothers, and in particular, Brother Thomas, who was in charge of the material needs of the house, still had M. de La Chétardie's confidence. However, the parish priest's prejudices against De La Salle had not disappeared.

— Supplement —
Gratuity in the Christian Schools

It is clear that the conflict which existed between the Writing Masters and the teachers of the Little Schools, on the one hand, and De La Salle and the Brothers, on the other, originated in the way in which the latter applied the principle of gratuity in their schools.

It is worth going deeper into this question. In fact, we need to explain a little more clearly what was the position of De La Salle and the Brothers regarding the application of this principle. Since the way in which they applied it had an effect on recruitment to their schools, it is important to understand how important it was.

Procedure for admitting pupils to the Christian Schools

A previous supplement entitled "John Baptist de La Salle and teaching the poor" indicated what was the basis of the principle of gratuity applied in the schools opened for poor children in the 17th century.

We saw that, at least initially, De La Salle and his followers worked within the framework of what were known as "Charity Schools", even if the biographers, referring to the very first schools De La Salle was involved with in Rheims, called them "gratuitous schools" or "Christian and gratuitous schools".

When De La Salle and his followers opened their first school in Paris in 1688, it was a Charity School. In both Rheims and Paris, it was not long before they began infringing on the strict obligation to admit only pupils from families registered as poor.

The complaint sent to the Grand Chantre in 1690 by the teachers of the Little Schools was intended to prevent the Brothers from teaching in the two schools in the parish of St Sulpice, and from admitting pupils whose families were not registered as poor.

Parents not registered as poor had obviously wanted their children to attend these schools. This stemmed from their success and from the fact that all children attending them had to be cleanly dressed and vermin-free (CE 22, 3, 6 = CL 24, 258).

What were the reasons which led De La Salle and his Brothers to open the doors of the Christian Schools to these children?

The biographers, and Blain in particular, go to some lengths to justify what was the practice in these schools regarding gratuity.

We cannot be sure that what we read there represents exactly what De La Salle thought. However, the following passage from Blain, describing the renewal of attacks by the Writing Masters in 1705 against the schools in the parish of St Sulpice, will give us some idea of his thinking.

The text

> We have seen that the Writing Masters, not having succeeded in destroying the Gratuitous Schools, as they had attempted to on several occasions, changed tactics and demanded that the Brothers be forbidden to accept pupils in their classes, who were not publicly recognised as poor. This request seemed quite reasonable. There were reasons to believe that when M. de La Salle established the Christian Schools he had in view the instruction of only poor children, since the rich had the means to obtain instruction. However, this request which seemed so reasonable was in reality very evil. . . .
>
> M. de La Salle, who was aware that a trap had been set for him in the form of a request which, on the surface, seemed reasonable, refused to countenance it, and rightly so. If he had accepted it, he would have imposed limits on his charity and, by a specious arrangement, would have decreed the ruin of the Christian Schools and offered his opponents a source of endless confrontations, and his Brothers, never-ending court cases.
>
> Even if M. de La Salle had not been aware of the evil intentions of his opponents . . . could he ever have let himself be bound by such troublesome conditions? Was it up to him to show partiality when admitting pupils? Was it proper for him to make judgments about poverty or about the wealth of their parents? Would he ever have hazarded to make such a judgment? If he had accepted to do so, what would have people said? Does not everyone have the right to ask for gratuitous instruction in schools open for the public? If those who teach **gratuitously** have a talent for teaching, which those who sell their services do not, does the person who appears to be rich, but who often is not so at all, have to choose the ignorant teacher, because his name does not appear in the register of those who receive alms? (CL 8, 36)

De La Salle's attitude

After reading this text, we can make the following observations:

♦ While it is an undeniable fact that De La Salle established the Christian Schools for the poor, he did not limit admission to them to the children of publicly registered poor people whose names appeared in the "register of those who receive alms". He knew enough about social conditions to realise that many other families not registered in this way could suffer from poverty habitually or for shorter or longer periods.

♦ De La Salle refused to accept this restriction. He refused also to make his Brothers responsible for assessing the financial resources of the parents when deciding whether to admit their children or not (3rd §, 1st part). Moreover, such assessment would have led to endless arguments with the Writing Masters and the teachers of the Little Schools (2nd §).

♦ If it were a question only of secular subjects, some parents, it is true, had the means to have their children taught in other schools (1st §). However, when certain parents, seeing that the Christian Schools were better run than the others, decided to have their children taught together with children from poorer families, De La Salle and the Brothers put no obstacles in their way (3rd §, 2nd part).

♦ Also, it is understandable that De La Salle did not wish to restrict "instruction" given in the Christian Schools to poor children only. (The word "instruction" was often synonymous with teaching catechism.)

Consequences

The position adopted by De La Salle resulted, therefore, in an extended application of the principle of gratuity. Children could be admitted to the Christian Schools whatever the economic or social status of their parents. The teaching was **gratuitous** for all.

This meant that, even if parents had enough money to pay for their children's education, they were not asked to pay. In this way there was no discrimination between pupils.

All the same, it can be deduced from the first known text of *The Conduct of the Christian Schools* that children of parents who had the means to do so had to pay for their books and, if they wrote, for the paper, pens and inkstand that they needed (CE 22, 4, 5 = CL 24, 259). Ink was provided free by the Brothers to all the pupils (RC 7, 9 = CL 25, 36).

The gratuity which was practised in this way went much deeper, however. Since the Brothers considered their work as schoolmasters as a "ministry" which made them the channels of God's salvation, they wished to exercise this ministry gratuitously in their dealings with all the children who came to their schools.

In one of De La Salle's *Meditations for the Time of Retreat*, he speaks as follows to his Brothers:

> With joy, then, say as he does [St Paul], that the greatest cause of your consolation in this life is to announce the Gospel free of charge, without having it cost anything to those who hear it (MR 207, 2).

The effects of practising gratuity in this way

The way in which gratuity was practised in the Christian Schools resulted necessarily in a wider catchment area for recruiting pupils than that of the Charity Schools. How wide was this catchment area?

To answer this question with as much precision as is desirable, we would have to have a great deal of detailed information about the economic and social background of a number of families whose children went to the Christian Schools. Unfortunately, for the period that interests us, no information is available.

Strange as it may seem, the only information that we do have comes from enquiries made in the schools run by the Brothers by their opponents, or at their request, as in the case of the Writing Masters.

And so we read in Blain that, in order to lend credence to their first complaint (February 4th 1704), the Masters had included "a list containing the names, status and addresses of the pupils who, in their opinion, had no need of charity" (CL 8, 8).

The information included in this list was used again in the complaint made on June 7th of the same year. It is worth referring to this document which is known from another source. It includes:

> M. de La Roche, living off his income; Chevillot, master surgeon; Piquet, master cartwright; Dortant, master locksmith, with two houses in Paris; Arnault, wine merchant; Levasseur, grocer; Lequin, goldsmith; Roger and Lévêque, caterers; Laronde, master surgeon; all well off people (quoted in Rigault 1937, 1:24).

Blain made use of the essential elements of this information, so he must have obtained them first hand.

After speaking ironically about the schoolmasters' attempts to assess the wealth of the people concerned, the biographer attributed a whole line of reasoning to De La Salle, which ended as follows:

> Finally, he came to the conclusion that there was no likelihood that rich and well off parents would want to send their children to schools attended by sons of soldiers, porters, barrow-men and the dregs of society (CL 8, 9).

Even if the biographer's final words are somewhat contemptuous, he probably gives a fairly accurate description of the social status of many of the parents whose children attended the schools in the parish of St Sulpice.

There is also some interesting material from a later period (July 4th 1718), taken from the report of an enquiry made at the request of the Writing Masters of Dijon, by "Jean Rouget, Attorney to Parlement, Magistrate of the City of Dijon":

I went to the house in which the "doctrinaire" Brothers living in the parish of St Philibert conduct their school. While I was there and after speaking with Brother Barnabé and Brother Christophe, "doctrinaire" Brothers teaching in the school of St Philibert, I ascertained in their presence that the school in question had 172 pupils, in which the above-mentioned Brothers told me they taught through charity, according to the foundation established by M. Rigolley. The pupils are for the most part the sons of vineyard owners, artisans and people without the means to send their sons to school. Enquiring about the social status and professions of the parents of these children, I discovered many who told me that they were the sons of vinegar makers, inn-keepers, coachmen, carpenters and potters. I communicated this information to the lawyers of the Writing Masters. . . .

Having arrived at 10 o'clock in the morning at the school in the parish of St Nicolas conducted by Brother Antoine of the Christian Schools, I found 70 pupils there, all taught by the above-mentioned Brother Antoine in accordance with the foundation established by M. Clerget. Having enquired about the status of the fathers of these children, I discovered that most were children of artisans, and that there were 8 or 10 whose fathers had the means to have them taught by the Masters. In testimony of which I have signed with the aforementioned Brother Antoine, the aforementioned lawyers and the aforementioned Brother. . . . (Archives of the City of Dijon, G 39; copy in the Institute Archives, BJ 506, dossier 9).

As it stands, the information provided by this enquiry seems somewhat meagre, but, when complemented by information from other sources, it serves to indicate the diversity of the social conditions of a certain number of parents whose children went to the Brothers' schools, as well as to assess the relative importance of the social categories represented in these schools.

Diversity of the social backgrounds of pupils

Basing ourselves on the documents we have quoted, we can make the following observations:

On the one hand, there were people who had professions which were considered sufficiently lucrative to enable them "to pay the Masters". Their work involved either a craft: that of cartwright, locksmith, surgeon (Paris), vinegar maker, carpenter, potter (Dijon); or the running of a small business: wine merchant, grocer, caterers (Paris), inn-keepers (Dijon).

The persons conducting the enquiry into the financial resources of parents, were able, at least in Dijon, to obtain further information from the tax registers, in which contributions were based on an assessment of the wealth of the persons concerned.

A further indication of resources could be found in the hierarchical list of professions which existed at the time. While this list was based on the social status attached to the various professions, it also indicated their income.

Normally speaking, persons belonging to the top two classes given in the table below were considered to be well off.

On the other hand, the porters and the barrow-men mentioned by Blain had the strength of their arms as their only asset and depended on finding new work each day. They were typical of the numerous workers hired by the day who struggled to earn a living and who were constantly at the mercy of chance or the economic situation.

Between these two categories of people, but closer to the second than to the first, there were the "vineyard owners" and "artisans" referred to by the Dijon inspectors. The former, who were still quite numerous within the city walls, produced wine on the neighbouring hills, which was of a very ordinary quality. They were very much dependent on weather conditions, and they shared the precarious lifestyle of the "artisans" who earned their livelihood from one or other of the professions followed in a town which was not known for the production of anything in particular. (See a list of these professions in Poutet and Pungier 1976, 29).

On the whole, the reports of the Paris and Dijon inspectors were accurate: the Brothers taught both pupils from poor backgrounds and those whose parents could afford to pay fees to other teachers.

Classification of professions according to a ruling made by the Dijon city council on January 21st 1711.

These professions are divided up into 4 classes.

The **first** includes certain liberal professions: printers, booksellers, surgeons, chemists, haberdashers, drapers, goldsmiths, ironmongers, carters, button makers.

The **second** class includes all professions to do with food (bakers, butchers, confectioners, pork butchers, cooks, wine merchants) and the following: saddle makers, leather merchants, shoemakers and weavers.

The **third** class included most metal workers and furniture makers.

In the **fourth** class are included building workers, poor craftsmen like cobblers, bespoke tailors and farm workers.

For each of these classes, the city council ruling laid down the fees to be paid for admittance to an apprenticeship and to the rank of master craftsman. Fees for becoming a master craftsman of the first class were 90 livres, 60 livres for the second, 32 for the third and 16 for the fourth. (Roupnel 1955)

Relative importance of social categories in the Christian Schools

While it is true that the children who attended the Christian Schools in Paris and Dijon came from a variety of social backgrounds, it is worth examining the relative importance of the social categories found in these schools.

In the first place, what **percentage** of the pupils admitted came from families that could afford to pay fees for their schooling? The enquiries made in Paris and Dijon do not give us a clear answer.

However, the list we saw, of fathers whose profession was considered lucrative enough, tends to prove that their children were in a minority in the schools in question.

On the other hand, the part of the report referring to the school in Dijon in the parish of St Nicolas makes a point of saying that, according to the inspectors, those who were better off numbered only 8 or 10 on a total of 70 pupils, which is a fairly low percentage.

In the second place, it is worth considering the actual **gap** between the various social categories mentioned.

Of course, the difference between the master craftsmen, mentioned by the enquiry in Paris, and the daily hired workers, referred to by Blain on two occasions, was relatively great.

If the former were not necessarily "very well off" as the inspectors called them, the profession they had provided them not only with what they needed to live, but enabled them also to make sufficient savings to tide them over difficult periods.

The latter not only had the daily prospect of not finding work, which in any case was badly paid, but also of joining the ranks of those who, not having a guaranteed source of income, were considered poor and depended habitually on charity.

Between the relative wealth of the former and the precarious lifestyle of the latter there was a whole series of social conditions which become progressively worse as they approach the lower end of the scale (cf.*Lasallian Themes 1* 1992, 25-26, quoted from Goubert 1969, and the end of the §).

However great the **gap** may seem, it should not be exaggerated. Seen in the wider context of the social hierarchy of the times, the categories referred to by the inspectors in Paris and Dijon fitted into a relatively narrow band.

Not included in these categories were professions requiring a certain level of education provided by the collèges and the universities: doctors, lawyers, holders of office in law courts or in administration. Those who were considered by the inspectors as being "very well off" were exceptions, because many families in such circumstances preferred to send their children to the collèges to pursue studies considered as a stepping stone to a higher social level.

If we use the classification drawn up in Dijon, we can say that there were pupils in the Brothers' schools from the social categories of the second class, but not higher.

The analysis we have made would seem to justify the expression used by De La Salle when he described the pupils attending the Brothers' schools as being the "children of the artisans and the poor".

By using this expression, he made a distinction between the economic and social conditions of the children so described, but he also implied the closeness of the two social groups.

By doing so, De La Salle highlighted a characteristic shared by both groups, and one which he mentioned in the *Rule* he had composed shortly before the period we have been studying.

> There is a great need for this Institute, because the artisans and the poor being normally little instructed and occupied all day long earning their living and that of their children, cannot themselves give them the instruction they need nor a good and Christian education (RC 1, 4 = CL 25, 16–17).

In practice, therefore, whatever income they earned — when there was work — the people De La Salle called "artisans and poor" had one characteristic in common: they had to work all day long. Moreover, in many professions, both parents had to work together. The result was that they could not look after their children.

De La Salle made no distinction between the parents of these children. When their parents asked for their children to be admitted, they were accepted by the Brothers, and all benefited from their gratuitous teaching.

b. New opportunities to spread throughout France

The Institute moves its centre of operations

When De La Salle came to Paris, his intention was to consolidate further the small community he had brought into existence in Rheims. First at Vaugirard and then at the Grand'Maison, he had opened a novitiate, held regular meetings with the Brothers, and had created a number of common services. The loss of this house put an end to the facilities it offered.

The difficulties he was encountering in Paris were another reason why he wished to move elsewhere. In particular, he wanted to establish his novitiate on a more solid basis.

Favourable circumstances enabled De La Salle to fulfil his plans in a number of stages.

Darnétal

During the course of 1704, a certain M. Louis des Hayes had taken steps to open a school at Darnétal, not far from Rouen. In spite of what Blain says, this priest did not know De La Salle at the seminary of St Sulpice, but he may have seen his school working in rue Princesse (cf. CL 41-1, 358).

The school opened in February 1705, De La Salle having agreed to accept the previous teacher's salary of 50 écus (150 livres) for the two Brothers he sent there. De La Salle was clearly keen to take advantage of an opportunity to establish the Institute in Normandy.

Rouen

Maillefer tells us in his first manuscript that, when Mgr Colbert, the Archbishop of Rouen, saw the success of the school at Darnétal, "he resolved to entrust to the Brothers the schools that had been established in Rouen by M. Nyel according to the ideas of Fr Barré" (CL 6, 158). As Rigault points out (cf. Rigault 1937, 1:283), the way these schools worked left a lot to be desired.

In Rouen, the charity schools depended on the Board for the Ablebodied Poor, administered by the General Hospital. With the support of M. de Pontcarré, the President of the Parlement, Mgr Colbert summoned the administrators of the Hospital to acquaint them of his intentions.

The General Hospital served not only as a hospital but also as an orphanage for the so-called "ablebodied" poor. This term distinguished it from hospitals properly so-called, which looked after ill and infirm people.

After much hesitation, the administrators finally decided at a meeting on March 31st 1705 "to send for two Brothers from the charity schools in Paris, who are excellent persons for the instruction of youth, and to put them in two of the said schools", adding that the Brothers "will have board and lodging at the Hospital and will receive 36 livres each per year for their maintenance" (quoted in Rigault 1937, 1:284).

The Archbishop then asked De La Salle to come "to speak to him about establishing his Brothers" (CL 8, 17). Unlike his usual practice, De La Salle made the journey by coach. The interview took place shortly before Easter. When De La Salle returned to Paris, he received a letter from the Vicar General, saying that Mgr Colbert urged him to come with his Brothers. De La Salle wasted no time in doing so.

In the meantime, the teachers who ran the schools revived the misgivings of the administrators. The latter called a meeting which De La Salle attended and decided on a trial period.

It was decided to accept two Brothers. The register containing the deliberations of the Board on May 19th 1705, mentions that "one will be sent to the school of St Maclou and the other to that St Godard" and that, "outside of school hours, they will be employed like the other teachers in serving the poor, as is customary in the said hospital, both during meals and by giving the usual instruction, and they will be lodged and nourished in the normal way " (quoted in Rigault 1937, 1:284).

Before the end of 1705, according to Blain (CL 8, 23), the number of Brothers had risen to five. Four of these went to each of the Charity Schools in the town, and the fifth remained in the General Hospital to teach the children. Outside of school hours, however, all five had to look after the poor lodged in this establishment.

The lifestyle imposed on the Brothers quickly exhausted them, and De La Salle had to change them frequently. Their duties, moreover, were incompatible with community life. In spite of this, the situation lasted two years.

At the end of this period, at a meeting of the Poor Board on August 2nd 1707, a proposal put forward by De La Salle was accepted. According to this proposal, "he would provide ten Brothers annually to run the said four schools, two in each district, and two others to teach the poor boys lodged in the said hospital, for a sum of money judged sufficient to cover the cost of their board and lodging in a private house" (Rigault 1937, 1:289). The Board fixed the sum at only 600 livres per year for the group of ten Brothers.

The Brothers left the General Hospital and went to live in a house rented by De La Salle. Eight Brothers took over the Charity Schools of the town. As for the other two, who were due to teach the children in the General Hospital, they stopped doing this work by the end of September 1707.

St Yon

It could be thought surprising that De La Salle accepted the conditions offered him at Darnétal and especially at Rouen. It is clear, however, that he wanted to seize the opportunity offered to establish himself in Rouen. According to Maillefer and Blain, De La Salle had a feeling "that God destined him to run the schools established by M. Nyel" (CL 6, 161).

It was also a means for him to escape from the problems encountered in Paris. Above all, the fact that De La Salle accepted such unusual conditions was an indication that he hoped to find somewhere there to set up the **novitiate**. His hopes were soon fulfilled.

In July 1705, through the intermediary of Mgr Colbert and the help of M. de Pontcarré, De La Salle took possession of the house at St Yon, in the Faubourg St Sever, just outside Rouen. He set up his novitiate there, entrusting its care to a Brother who had entered the Institute only two years previously, Brother Barthélemy. The Brothers, apart from those who were too far away, would come here for their annual retreat.

Shortly afterwards, he agreed to accept young men from the well-off families of the town and area who wished to complete their education. These young men did not follow the normal course of studies provided by the collèges. In addition to these, other young men considered to be "dissolute" were sent to the Brothers to be "corrected".

The Institute once again had a fixed base. With the return of a calm atmosphere, recruitment became easier, and 11 candidates entered in the first few months after the opening of St Yon (cf. CL 3). De La Salle was at last free of the constraining patronage of the parish priest of St Sulpice and of certain members of the Paris clergy. The parish priest of St Sever, however, was not slow in raising a few points regarding parish jurisdiction.

Opening of schools

From 1705 to 1707, a relatively large number of schools was entrusted to the Brothers. Most of these schools were opened in the South of France rather than in the North, following the foundation in Avignon in 1703.

In the course of the years, the following schools were opened.

In **1705**, in a move that was unconnected with the opening of the school in Paris in the parish of St Roch and the transfer to Rouen, the Secretary for the States of Burgundy, a certain M. Rigoley, was responsible for the opening of a school in Dijon to which two Brothers were sent. In the same year, M. de Chateaublanc obtained two new Brothers for Avignon.

In **1706**, a body set up two years previously by the chief citizens of Marseilles for the purpose of creating a school for the children of the sailors of the Vieux Port, decided to ask the Brothers to take over a school in the parish of St Laurent. Two Brothers from Avignon began teaching on March 6th.

In **1707**, the Brothers were called to a number of towns in the South. From a letter from De La Salle to Gabriel Drolin, we know that a school was set up before spring in Valréas, in the Papal territories (cf. LA 26). The Brothers did not remain there long.

At the request of Mgr de Piencourt, Bishop of Mende, who was anxious to acquire good teachers for the schools of his episcopal city, Brother Ponce was sent there to teach. In the course of the same year, two other Brothers arrived. Before dying, the Bishop took care to "found" the school, that is, to set up a fund whose revenue would enable it to continue.

Around October 1707, two Brothers were sent to run a school in Alès, in a strongly Protestant part of the country. The first Bishop of the diocese created in 1694, Mgr François Maurice de Saulx, has set up schools for which he wanted trustworthy teachers. Having heard of the Brothers in Avignon and Marseilles from the Vicar General, who had known De La Salle at the seminary of St Sulpice, he had obtained some Brothers for his episcopal city.

It was at this time also, in 1705, that Gabriel Drolin, in his far outpost in Rome, succeeded in obtaining the headship of a small school (cf. LA 17). The disciple, like the master, had known some difficult times. The progress that had been made served to encourage both of them to be confident about the future.

— Supplement —
St Yon

In the preceding chapter, we saw how the novitiate moved to St Yon and how other types of work were organised there as soon as the Brothers settled in this house.

It would be useful to have a closer look at each of the various kinds of work going on at St Yon, even if it means going ahead a little of the period we are studying at the moment (the first years of the 18th century).

The novitiate

Blain tells us that as soon as De La Salle heard that the property of St Yon was up for rent, he wasted no time in taking the necessary steps to secure it. He was offered the property for an annual rent of 400 livres for a period of 6 years. The biographer gives us the following details:

> M. de La Salle completed the transaction with such alacrity and in such secrecy that his enemies, who could have obstructed it or even perhaps made it fail, did not suspect it was going on. He showed the same promptitude in bringing to Rouen all the furniture he had stored in the Faubourg St Antoine and he furnished the new house with it. In this way, the community was already settled in at the gates of Rouen before they knew in Paris that it had left.
>
> It was at the end of August 1705 that M. de La Salle and his companions took over the house which God destined them to possess. (CL 8, 30)

He was in a hurry to give stability to the novitiate following all the moves that had taken place in Paris. He entrusted it to the care of Brother Barthélemy, but continued to involve himself with it whenever he was there.

Numbers in the novitiate increased. In the four years up to 1709, when the famine forced the novitiate to move to Paris, at least 32 candidates joined, and most of these went on to become valuable members of the Institute.

The novitiate returned to St Yon in October 1715. De La Salle joined it later and was involved in the formation of the novices till the end of his life.

When Brother Barthélemy was elected Superior of the Institute in 1717, De La Salle remained in charge of the novitiate, although in practice, his assistant, Brother Irenée, often had to take over

(cf. La Salle 1954, 23). The novitiate was the most important section of the house of St Yon because it ensured the continued vitality of the Institute. This was true even though it housed a number of central services, and other activities also took place there.

The educational work of St Yon

Very soon after the Brothers arrived at St Yon, many of the business people of Rouen asked De La Salle to take in their children as boarders. As Blain says, "he welcomed this request which fitted in with his views" and in October 1705, "he was glad to throw the house open to all the children that parents wished to send there so that they could be brought up and educated in innocence and the knowledge of religion" (CL 8, 32).

Seeing the success of this work, other parents who were having problems with the education of their children, entrusted them to the care of the Brothers.

An increase in the number of these insubordinate, unmanageable, dissolute (*libertins**) and intractable children or adolescents, as Blain described them, made it necessary to form them into a separate group, at least outside of classtime.

The same biographer goes on to say:

> The success of this desperate educational work with dissolute children attracted to St Yon people who were much more difficult to reform. Professional rakes were locked up there, some sent by a decision of the Parlement, others by Court orders, and several on orders from their parents. (CL 8, 32)

In fact, young men were sent there because they "had caused some scandal or had compromised their own honour or that of their family. Grown up men were sent there as an alternative to facing the shame of being condemned in court and sent to prison" (*Lasallianum N° 15*, "La pédagogie de Jean-Baptiste de La Salle", 76).

Having had occasion to help prisoners himself, De La Salle could well understand the need to remove such people from prison, even if the main concern of the families involved was to safeguard their own respectability. Although this kind of work went beyond the scope of the normal apostolate of the Brothers, De La Salle accepted it.

We are not sure exactly when this "forced confinement" section was begun, but it seems it was set up before the death of De La Salle.

The description given by Blain gives us good reason to think that the three different boarding sections were in existence when the biographer's work was published in 1733.

It is worth taking a closer look at the organisation of the activities that went on at St Yon at that time and before, and examine the features that characterised them.

Organisation

And so, as we have said, when the work at St Yon was completely organised, there were three different groups of boarders. There was some degree of contact between the first two, but the third was entirely separate.

The "ordinary" boarding school section

The children and young adolescents in this section were there to be taught and to receive a Christian education.

Basically, the programme of studies followed was that of the Christian schools. In addition, the pupils were prepared also for their future professional life. The programme included, in addition to the recitation and explanation of catechism and the Scriptures, such subjects as secular history, geography, literature, rhetoric, bookkeeping (*tenue des livres**), accounting, geometry, architecture and natural history. Certain pupils followed courses also in hydrography, mechanics, cosmography, differential and integral calculus, music and foreign languages (Rigault 1937, 1:400). However, there was no Latin.

This boarding section seems to have developed quite normally from 1705 till the death of De La Salle. And when, in 1708, as a result of some complaints, the chief administrator of Normandy visited St Yon with M. de Pontcarré, they were very favourably impressed.

The "corrective" boarding section

This section was for "dissolute" young people who were there to be "reformed" (terms employed by Blain, CL 8, 32).

These boarders were constantly supervised by a Brother and followed their own timetable. However, they followed more or less the same lessons as the ordinary boarders and attended religious exercises together with them. Boys in this group would join the normal boarding section when they had improved their ways sufficiently.

Contact between the two groups did not make the task of the Brothers any easier. This contact was undoubtedly the cause of the problems that arose subsequently in the ordinary boarding section.

The "custodial" boarding section

This section was for those whom Blain called the "incarcerated" (CL 8, 33). These were persons who instead of being incarcerated in a prison were held in custody at St Yon. Their number included some insane people.

These special boarders were lodged in a separate building and when they arrived they were locked up in their rooms. Subsequently, they were able to take part in activities with others, follow courses or do manual work. Throughout their stay, their personal details were kept secret. They were each given a first name preceded by the word "Saint". They were never called by their real names, and so these remained a secret.

More so than for the other groups, the educational qualities of the Brother in charge was an importance factor in ensuring the smooth running of this custodial boarding section. It was inevitable that there would be problems eventually. In the 18th century, there were some escapes and revolts.

Timetable of custodial boarders who had permission to take part in activities with others

Workdays		**Sundays and Feastdays**	
06.15	Rise		Up to breakfast, same as on workdays
06.45	Prayer together		
07.00	Mass — breakfast		
08.00	Work either	08.00	Return to rooms
	in class	10.45	Spiritual reading together
	in the workshop		(except when there was High Mass)
	or in the room		
10.00	Return to rooms		
11.30	Prayer together	11.30	Prayer together
	Lunch — recreation		Lunch — recreation
13.00	Prayer together		
13.30	Work, same choice	13.30	Prayer together
	as in the morning		Return to rooms
16.00	Return to rooms	15.00	Vespers — recreation
17.45	Spiritual reading together	17.45	Return to rooms
18.30	Supper — recreation		The rest as on workdays
20.00	Prayer together		Holidays: Wednesday or Thursday afternoon,
	Return to rooms		with the same timetable as on workdays,
20.45	Bedtime		except middday recreation went on till 15.00.

Material taken from Br Othmar Würth's study in *Lasallianum N° 15*, 84.

Characteristics

If we look at the overall work done at St Yon, we can say that, by comparison with other schools or establishments run by the Brothers, the work done there was, in some respects, special to it, and, in others, similar to that of the schools.

Regarding other schools, the basic **difference** lay in the social background of those who were in the various boarding sections. Even if in the schools there were some children of artisans who were better off, there were none from ship owner or merchant families, as there were at St Yon. Nor, with yet stronger reason, were there any children from noble families, as was the case in the custodial boarding section.

Likewise regarding the course of studies offered the ordinary boarders, it began with the course offered in the schools, but went further. The intention was to train the ordinary boarders, and those in the corrective boarding section who studied with them, for the professions chosen for them by their parents.

The corrective and custodial boarding sections were more clearly centred on moral reform than were the schools, although they also made it their concern to some degree.

Another aspect of these two boarding sections was the way in which the lifestyle imposed on the boarders was altered according as they improved.

Not everything was new about the work done at St Yon.

♦ Locating a boarding school next to the novitiate had already been done at the Grand'Maison with its"boarding school for the Irish".

♦ The more advanced programmes of study were probably inspired partly by the "Sunday schools" that had been set up in various parts of Paris.

♦ The ability to adapt to particular needs had already been shown by the creation of "seminaries" for country schoolmasters.

♦ The guidelines laid down in *The Conduct of the Christian Schools* regarding the way to treat school children could be transposed quite easily to the treatment of the boarders in the corrective and custodial boarding sections (cf. *Lasallianum N° 15*, 43ff).

However, the **main characteristic** is to be found in the purpose of the work undertaken.

There is no doubt that the boarding school sections next to the novitiate at St Yon were set up for financial reasons. Taking in boarders provided funds to run the novitiate and the general services of the Institute. We should remember in this connection that the Poor Board of Rouen gave only 600 livres per year for the upkeep of 8 or 10 Brothers. De La Salle never hid the fact that funding was a worry, but, as far as one can judge, this concern was never an overriding factor either for him or the Brothers.

In the ordinary boarding section we find the same concern as in the schools to provide effective teaching, solid religious instruction, a "good Christian education". However, the most important aspect of the education provided for the young people who were at St Yon for their "correction", and even more so than in the case of the children in the schools and in the ordinary boarding section, was the concern to make them rediscover a life that was worthy of their vocation to be children of God, and to convert their hearts to live according to the spirit of Jesus Christ.

9 The Benefits of Further Difficulties (1708–1714)

Introduction

The period we are going to study in this chapter is marked even more than preceding periods by the paradoxical way in which God works. It was a time when the Institute continued to make progress while its Founder went through a period of great doubt and uncertainty.

These two ways of seeing the period are closely linked. De La Salle clearly saw that his Institute was making progress, but he was unwilling to sacrifice its real interests for the sake of it.

Continuing success did not prevent him from thinking about the future and preparing for it. Many of the decisions taken during this period are incomprehensible unless they are seen in this light.

Finally, it is clear that it was De La Salle's disinterestedness that made his actions during this period so effective. The difficulties he caused the Institute by his personal conduct enabled it to mature and hastened the day when the Brothers would assume responsibility for their own destiny.

The chapter is divided into two parts:

- a. Further progress
- b. A period of uncertainty

a. Further progress

New schools

Many new schools were established at the beginning of the present period.

In **1708**: two Brothers arrived in Grenoble in September to run a school in the St Laurent parish, a working class district on the banks of the Isère (cf. La Salle 1954, 137). Their arrival marked the successful outcome of negotiations begun the previous year be-

tween De La Salle and members of a "Christian society whose aim was to help the poor and provide instruction for young people" (CL 8, 54).

In that same year, a school was opened at St Denis, on the outskirts of Paris. The school owed its existence to the generosity of a certain Mlle Poignant who died, however, before she was able to set up a first foundation fund for the school. It was only at the insistence of the Prior of the famous abbey of St Denis that De La Salle was persuaded to take the school. As Blain tells us, De La Salle "did not like such small places where two Brothers were left to themselves and ran the risk of losing their fervour. He was beginning to lose interest in these small establishments which had difficulty in supporting themselves" (CL 8, 55).

> De La Salle considered it desirable to have four Brothers per community, plus a fifth one to see to the material needs of the house and to replace one of the four when necessary. If initially he sent only two Brothers to a house, it was usually because it was close to a large community, or as a temporary measure till such time as he could increase their number. However, this did not always happen, especially in small localities. (Cf. La Salle 1951, 319.)

In **1709** (or at the very beginning of 1710, according to De La Salle's letter to Gabriel Drolin dated February 14th 1710, LA 27), a school was opened in Mâcon, in the South of Burgundy. However, it seems that it ceased to exist some time in 1711 (cf. Poutet 1970, 2:248–250).

In **1710**, the Brothers arrived in Versailles at the request of the parish priest, a certain M. Huchon, who belonged to the Congregation of the Mission founded by St Vincent de Paul. Initially one school was opened, but then, on the death of a teacher in another school, two Brothers were sent to take his place.

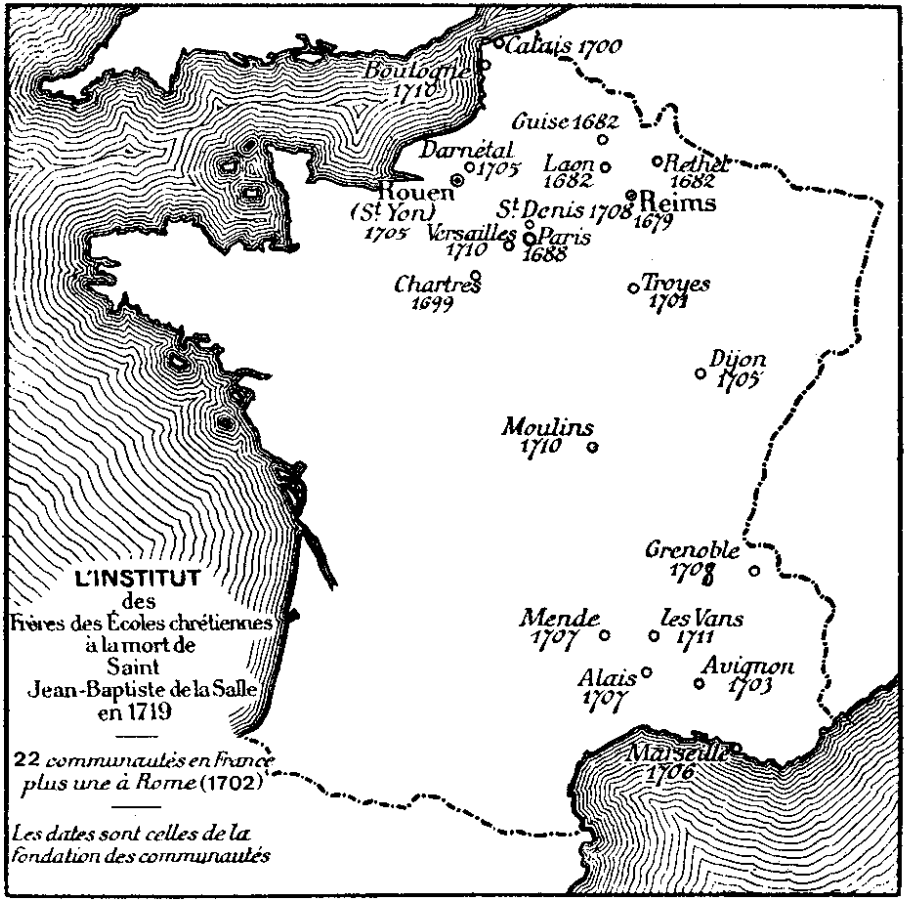
In October of the same year, four Brothers were sent to Boulogne sur Mer at the request of another priest of the Congregation of the Mission. His plan to establish a school was supported by an assistant of the chief administrator of Picardy (*subdélégué* de l'Intendant*), a certain M. de La Cocherie. Soon after, two other Brothers were entrusted with a school in the upper part of the town. The Bishop of Boulogne gave these Brothers the same warm welcome he had given the Brothers in Calais.

According to Blain, in that same year, De La Salle agreed to send Brothers to a school in Moulins, in the Bourbonnais province, which had been opened by a certain priest by the name of Louis Aubery. The school was run along lines inspired by *The Conduct of the Christian Schools*, but there were some differences. The Brothers began by following the

established pattern but soon their own methods took over. The Vicar General of the Bishop of Autun asked the Brothers to show the young clerics and catechists of his town how to teach catechism to children (CL 8, 89–90).

In **1711**, two Brothers opened a school in Les Vans, a small town at the foot of the Cévennes. This was made possible by a provision in the will of a certain Fr Vincent du Roure, who had bequeathed all his possessions to the Brothers of the Christian Schools so that they could establish a school in the town.

This was the last new town in which the Brothers opened a school in the lifetime of De La Salle. If other schools were opened, it was always in towns where the Brothers had a school already.



Map showing Brothers' communities in France at the death of the Founder. Photo E. Rousset.

A new "seminary for teachers"

In the spring of 1707, when De La Salle was forced to remain in Paris following a knee operation (cf. LA 26, 3), he was visited by a young cleric by the name of Jean Charles Clément, who said he was interested in helping the work of the Brothers. De La Salle gave him a "memoir" on the aims of the Institute, but took the matter no further.

Shortly afterwards, this young man indicated that he was prepared to help with the establishment of a "seminary" for country schoolmasters. In spite of his insistence, De La Salle was in no hurry to take further action regarding this proposal, all the more so because the Parlement of Paris had renewed its decision, on February 5th 1706, forbidding him to run such an establishment.

Finally, De La Salle agreed to the establishment of the seminary and, on October 24th 1708, contributed 5,200 livres for the purchase of a house at St Denis, costing 13,000 livres. The purchase contract was in the name of a certain M. Rogier, because Clément was still a minor and could not buy property. Clément promised, however, to pay back the loan when he reached his majority.

The "seminary" for teachers opened in 1709. It had to close during the famine of 1709–1710, but after that it developed and earned the encouragement of the Archbishop of Paris, Cardinal de Noailles, and the support of Madame de Maintenon, who obtained for it an exemption from billeting troops in transit. The seminary did not last long, however, because of a change in the attitude of Jean Charles Clément.

In 1709, Clément acquired the benefice of the Abbey of St Calais (near Le Mans, cf. CL 41-1, 172) and became the Abbé Clément. In spite of the income (*commende**) he received from this benefice, he did not repay the money he owed. The father of the young Abbé maintained that when his son contracted the debt he had not reached his legal majority (25 years), and went on to accuse De La Salle of "suborning a minor and extorting funds".

Progress in the overall organisation of the Institute

The growth in the number of schools and, therefore, of communities, and their geographical dispersion, called for a higher degree of organisation in the Institute as a whole.

There was a need for some decentralisation. It was during the period that we are considering at the moment that there came into existence a position that was intermediate between that of Superior of the Institute and that of Director of a community — that of

Visitor. Those who were appointed were given responsibility for supervising a certain number of "houses" and making decisions about current administrative matters.

By an obedience dated July 15th 1708, Brother Joseph (Jean Leroux) was given the task of visiting the schools in the province of Champagne. The obedience was renewed on July 30th 1709, and extended on November 16th 1711 to include all the houses in the North and Centre of France (cf. LA 135, 136, 137 = La Salle 1951, 41a, b, c).

There is a document in the Institute Archives known as *Manuscript 103* which poses the following question: Does it tell us of some more ambitious plans De La Salle had for the organisation of the Institute?

This document begins by speaking of the "houses of the Brothers living in community, conducting gratuitous schools, especially for the poor and in towns only" and of "seminaries for country schoolmasters". It then goes on to envisage the establishment of a "community or society of priests who, possessing the same spirit of community as the Brothers, would lead and direct them. . . . This society would provide the Brothers and those in the seminaries with external direction . . . and provide also confessors for the Brothers, those in the seminaries and the pupils in their schools" (quoted in CL 11, 73).

What we read in *Manuscript 103* recalls the fact that De La Salle was in the habit of having other priests help him in his priestly ministry to the Brothers and their pupils. There is no proof, however, that he intended to establish a "community" or "society" of priests to ensure the Brothers had a constant supply of priests.

As Br Maurice Auguste Hermans wrote, we should consider this document as being "one of the draft plans for a new form of government for the Institute, which were drawn up after the events of 1702 and especially in the years 1710–1713. This document would seem to have retained the idea of having an outsider, ecclesiastical or not, as a superior for the Brothers, which was not what the Holy Founder intended at all" (CL 11, 74, note 1).

In addition, we cannot use as evidence the fact that Adrien Vatel, a Holy Ghost Father from the Poullart des Places community, exercised his priestly ministry among the student teachers at St Denis, and most probably helped to train them in view of their future role as assistants to the clergy. And even if this priest "was the confessor of the Brothers of the Christian Schools in their novitiate house" in Paris at the end of 1714 and the beginning of 1715 (quoted from Joseph Michel, *Poullart des Places*, note 9, 231–232), this collaboration was only occasional (cf. CL 48, 173–178).

As early as December 30th 1707, De La Salle wrote to a Brother in Mende, telling him that his Director, Brother Ponce, had the responsibility of "doing in that part of the country whatever he judged to be for the good of the Brothers" (LA 44, 5, quoted in Rigault 1937, 1:356). Brother Ponce was involved in the opening of various houses. In the minutes of a meeting of the Town Council of Les Vans, Brother Ponce is referred to as the "Visitor of the aforesaid Brothers" (cf. Rigault 1937, 1:369).

The establishment of a new novitiate was becoming necessary. De La Salle thought it important for the schools in the South of France to be run by Brothers from that part of the country. This is what he wrote to Gabriel Drolin, most probably in July 1712:

> I will find it difficult to send you another Brother before I have begun a novitiate in this province. I intend to establish one immediately, since men from this province are needed because of the difference between the language here and that of the rest of France (LA 30).

The opening of this novitiate was certainly one of the reasons why De La Salle undertook a journey in February 1711 to visit the Brothers working in the South.

During this journey, De La Salle no doubt stopped at Moulins, where he was able to discuss the school "regulations" with M. Aubrey. He then went on to Mâcon, and was in Grenoble in March. From there he went on to Avignon where he spent some time.

Next he went to Alès and Mende. He met the Bishop of Uzès to discuss the opening of a school in Les Vans, which was due soon. He was back in Avignon in July, just when the Writing Masters were trying to regulate the admission of pupils to the Brothers' schools.

We know from a letter sent to Gabriel Drolin that De La Salle was in Marseilles on August 24th 1711, having already been there a month, and that he was getting ready to "return to France" (LA 29, 12). He seems to have returned via Dijon, Troyes and Rheims, and was back in Paris at the end of September.

> According to information provided in 1742 by Brother Bernardin, a Director, it was probably during this period that De La Salle was offered a bishopric (cf. CL 40-1, 171).
>
> For this information, as well as the route of De La Salle's journey, see Gallego 1986, 1:462ff.

De La Salle had to shorten his journey to the South because of the accusations brought against him by Abbé Clément. The fact that the affair was going badly for De La Salle probably made him decide to undertake another journey in 1712.

Brother Gabriel Drolin: The fourth of 12 children born to Etienne Drolin (1633–1681) and Claude Salmon, Gabriel was born in Rheims in 1664 and baptised in the church of St Jacques on July 22nd. He must have done classical studies because he knew Latin (LA 13, 11 and 18, 6). In 1684, at the age of 20, he joined the Community of the Christian Schools in rue Neuve.

He was certainly in the same community as Brother Bourlette, replacing Nyel at the school in Laon when the latter returned for good to Rheims in 1685. Brother Bourlette died like a saint in 1686. On November 21st 1691, Brother Gabriel was at Vaugirard for the (secret) vow with De La Salle and Nicolas Vuyart. He was the second Brother to sign the perpetual vow document on June 6th 1694, and the document recording the election of the Superior of the Society the following day. There was a Brother Gabriel who was Director of Laon from 1696 to 1698, and at Rethel in 1699. In July 1700, Brother Gabriel Drolin was sent to Calais.

It was from there that De La Salle sent him to Rome, probably during the summer holidays of 1702. The Brother who went with him did not stay. As a consequence, Brother Gabriel remained alone in Rome for more than 20 years. In 1709 he obtained a steady job as headmaster of a Papal school, receiving a monthly salary of 15 livres. At the age of 64, he was recalled from Rome. On September 21st 1728, he pronounced his vows in Avignon according to the Bull, and was sent to the community at Auxonne, where he died in 1733, just before the publication of Blain's biography.

— Supplement —
Schools for the Children of "New Converts"

In a certain number of towns, the Brothers were involved in the fight that was waged in France against the Protestants, following the Revocation of the Edict of Nantes by Louis XIV in 1685, which suppressed the rights guaranteed by the Edict to the reformed Churches.

Some historical background

In the second half of the 16th century, Protestantism spread throughout Europe, in the form either of Calvinism or of Lutheranism.

Wars broke out in various parts of Europe between Catholics and Protestants. In France, the Edict of Nantes of 1598 put an end to 50 years of bitter fighting. It guaranteed Protestants freedom of conscience and political rights, but limited their freedom to worship.

In the first half of the 17th century, war in Europe rekindled religious strife. At the end of this period of war, the sovereign leaders of countries adopted the principle of making their own religion the religion of the State. The result was religious intolerance.

In France, the political guarantees of the Edict of Nantes were suppressed in 1629, but the clauses referring to religion were maintained. In about 1680, the King, Louis XIV, adopted the attitude of the rest of Europe. He tried to win over the Protestants to his way of thinking by force. In October 1685, he abrogated the Edict of Nantes.

Many Protestants fled abroad. Some adopted more or less willingly the Catholic faith, and were known as the "new converts". Others resisted by force: in the Cévennes, the "Camisards" (the name comes from the white shirt they wore as a distinguishing sign) waged war against the royal troops from 1702 to 1705.

Officially, the "Supposedly Reformed Religion" no longer existed. After the "Revocation", all children had to be baptised and instructed in the Catholic faith. However, many of the "new converts" remained attached to Protestantism.

In Calais, the first school entrusted to the Brothers was funded by a royal grant established with money confiscated from Protestants who had fled abroad. This school, however, was not set up especially for children of parents who belonged or had belonged to what was officially known as the R.P.R. (*Religion Prétendue Réformée*: Supposedly Reformed Religion).

In was especially in the South of France that the Brothers were involved in supporting the efforts of the civil and ecclesiastical authorities in their fight against Protestantism. In this part of

France, 20 years after the Revocation of the Edict of Nantes, Protestantism not only had not weakened its hold, but had actually increased it. The revolt of the Camisards broke out in the Cévennes in 1702. Partly by a show of force and partly by negotiation, the Maréchal de Villars obtained some sort of peace, but the volcano was only dormant.

Blain describes in his own way the measures taken by the royal authorities to overcome the Calvinists, whom the Catholics called by the insulting name of "Huguenots".

> This great King, who had finally exterminated the error of free-thinking, which had disguised itself under the name of the Reform, which had made his ancestors tremble, and which had ravaged France for so long, wished to triumph over it as a Christian Prince. For the spilled blood of his subjects, the sole revenge he demanded was the conversion of those who had shed it, or who had helped to shed it. The plan was infinitely praiseworthy and in keeping with the religion of the one who had conceived it, but it was not easy. . . .
>
> This was, however, the pious plan that Louis XIV conceived, and to implement it, he took the most just of measures. He needed two very distinct kinds of persons to make his plan succeed: soldiers and Gospel workers. The former were to ensure the mutineers did their duty; the latter were to instruct them and explain to them the error of their ways. Without the former, the latter were in danger of becoming the victims of a misguided zeal, which is easily rekindled. Without the latter, the former would serve only to encourage disorder and increase irreligion. (CL 8, 50)

Blain does not express any reservations regarding the policy he describes. Did De La Salle approve the coercive methods employed by Louis XIV? There are no proofs that he did. On the other hand, it is a fact that he agreed to let his Brothers take their place among the "Gospel workers" mentioned by the biographer in Alès, and in the relatively nearby town of Les Vans.

Alès

The Bishop's request

In 1694, Louis had obtained permission from the Pope for a new diocese in Alès (or Alais). Quite naturally, the first Bishop of this diocese, François Maurice de Saulx, a former "Head of royal missions in the country", and his Vicar General, M. de Méretz, continued the fight against Protestantism that they had previously waged when they belonged to the diocese of Nîmes.

One of the means advocated for destroying heresy was the proliferation of schools open to all children, in which Catholic doctrine was taught. And so, when the Vicar General of Alès had to replace teachers, he wrote to De La Salle in the name of the Bishop. He had known De La Salle in

the seminary of St Sulpice. The text of this letter which Blain says he copied (CL 8, 51) shows clearly what was expected of the Brothers. They had:

♦ to conduct a school open to all children. The upkeep of the teachers was assured by "the community" of the inhabitants, thanks to a royal grant;

♦ to attract to it the children of the New Converts (called "Huguenots" in the text), by giving good teaching there, especially by training "good writers"; the parents were artisans and lower middle class rather than poor;

♦ to "re-establish religion" by the education of the children, in the Catholic faith, obviously. For, as M. de Méretz wrote, there were preachers for the parents, but no catechists to instruct the children.

De La Salle's reply

De La Salle replied favourably without too much delay. His answer was as follows:

♦ once the principle of gratuity was accepted, De La Salle was ready to allow his Brothers to teach even children who were not poor;

♦ he agreed to send a Brother capable of giving the type of teaching which responded to the expectations of the parents;

♦ his main consideration in making the decision was undoubtedly his wish to contribute to the restoration of Catholicism "by the education of children".

Two Brothers took the school over in October 1707. As this school benefited from a grant "by order of the King", it had the official title of "Royal School". As Blain tells us, the two Brothers proved satisfactory:

> It was not long before the first Bishop of Alais realised how well he had been inspired to bring the Brothers to his diocese. Greatly impressed by the way they taught, and seeing personally the good they did, he wanted no one else to teach except them, and he forbade all the other schoolmasters to teach. His plan was to fill the classes of the Brothers with the pupils of the schoolmasters, and his hopes were not denied. (CL 8, 52)

In order to bring this about, Mgr de Saulx invoked a royal document which recognised a Bishop's right to appoint teachers (cf. Poutet 1970, 2:211).

The increase in the number of pupils led the bishop to ask for more Brothers. In a letter dated January 28th 1708 and quoted by Blain, he says:

> We have here, Sir, your Brother schoolmasters, and we are very pleased with them. For this reason, I should like to have several more of them to send them to our towns in the Cévennes and to all the larger villages. If I had 30 of them I could put them all to good

> use. I have the honour to thank you for those we have, and I ask you for more of them" (CL 8, 52).

A third Brother was sent to Alès, and De La Salle sent a fourth to assist the others (cf. Poutet 1970, 2:204).

However, De La Salle did not take up the proposal made by Mgr de Saulx to send Brothers to the towns and large villages of the Cévennes. He was not prepared to sacrifice the principle of not dispersing the Brothers, in order to support the zeal of the Bishop.

On another point, De La Salle was prepared to accede to the wishes of the Bishop of Alès, who, as Blain tells us:

> used the authority of the Prince to oblige parents to send their children to the Brothers' catechism classes on Sundays and feasts or pay a fine. They were obliged to obey, and zeal for the False Religion (as is usual) gave way to self-interest". (CL 8, 53)

Even though the biographer mistakenly bases his conclusions on an edict which was not issued till 1724 (cf. Poutet 1970, 2:206), Mgr de Saulx did in fact arrange for pupils not taught by the Brothers to attend the catechism lessons they gave their own pupils on Sundays and feasts.

This new responsibility did not make the task of the Brothers any easier. The parents were already unhappy at not being able to have recourse to other teachers, which would have exempted their children from having to attend the normal catechism lessons of the Brothers. Some complained that the "Brothers in Alais were not very good at teaching writing". The Bishop's answer was that "he had not brought them to make good writers out of their children, but to make them good Catholics" (CL 8, 53). And the decisions he had made continued to apply.

When De La Salle made his journey in 1712, he went to pay his respects to the Bishop of Alès, who told him how satisfied he was. Blain describes the scene as follows:

> Of all the gracious things that the pious Bishop said to the holy priest, none gave him more pleasure than the praise he had for the application of the Brothers to the conversion of the heretical children, whose number had decreased since they had begun teaching them. Since the salvation of souls was the sole object of his concern, it was also the sole object of his joy. (CL 8, 82)

Regarding the children, one cannot speak of conversions, properly so called. Those who were pupils from 1707 onwards would have been born after 1685 and therefore would have been obliged to receive Catholic baptism. It was a question of winning their hearts over and overcoming the prejudices of their parents. The way in which the Brothers normally ran their schools was such as to enable them achieve these two aims.

Les Vans

The presence of the Brothers in this small town in the diocese of Uzès was not due to any civil or ecclesiastical initiative, but was the result of a provision in a priest's will.

This priest, Vincent de Saint Jean d'Elze du Roure, belonged to a family that had been partly responsible for the local population becoming Calvinist. The family had subsequently returned to Catholicism and had brought a part of the population back to the Catholic faith (cf. Rigault 1937, 1:368).

On July 20th 1708, he drew up a will in which he bequeathed his modest fortune (7,000 livres) to "the Brothers of the gratuitous schools for boys, conducted at present by M. de La Salle, priest, their Superior General, residing in Paris, wishing that by means of my bequest they be constrained to establish gratuitous schools in the town of Les Vans, in the diocese of Uzès, in which they will keep at least two of their Brothers, who will be entrusted with the care of instructing the youth of the said town in order to train them in piety and teach them the principles of the Catholic religion" (quoted in Rigault 1937, 1:367).

On the death of this priest on September 19th 1710, when his intentions came to light, the necessary steps were taken to implement his wishes. De La Salle accepted the bequest, and Brother Ponce was given responsibility for settling the business. And so two Brothers arrived in Les Vans in 1711 in time for the re-opening of schools.

According to Maillefer, they encountered opposition from the Calvinists, and the forces of public order even had to suppress an open revolt. At the request of the Bishop of Uzès, the chief administrator of Languedoc punished the culprits (cf. CL 6, 195 or 197).

Whatever the truth of the matter — Rigault plays down the importance of the event (Rigault 1937, 1:370) — it appears that hostile parents sent their children "to study out of town" on the pretext that the Brothers "taught reading badly, writing even worse, and very little arithmetic" (quoted in Poutet 1970, 2:223).

During his 1712 journey, De La Salle was forced to make representations to the Bishop of Uzès in defence of the Institute practice of moving Brothers from one house to another, and ask him to stop the depletion of numbers in their school. The Bishop, however, "waited till 1717–1718 before forbidding children in Les Vans from attending schools outside the town" (Poutet 1970, 2:224).

And when Blain, speaking of De La Salle's visit to the community, said that he "was impressed to see with what patience these good Brothers applied themselves to the instruction of the heretical children" (CL 8, 82), it seems he had good reason to stress their perseverance.

Conclusion

After the death of De La Salle, two other schools were entrusted to the Brothers in the same diocese, one in Uzès itself, and the other at St Ambroix. There will be a further opportunity to speak of this aspect of the Brothers' apostolate in the 18th century.

Regarding the period we have been studying, it is difficult to assess the impact of the Brothers on the children of families which had once belonged to the "Supposedly Reformed Religion". This is difficult even in Alès, where Mgr de Saulx was very satisfied, and even more so in Les Vans.

By its very nature, the Brothers' normal approach tended to calm minds and to win over the hearts of the children. When they taught Catholic doctrine in catechism, they did so without polemics. When the book they used spoke of heretics, it did so in general terms, and never used the words "Protestants", "Calvinists" or "Huguenots". De La Salle did not use these terms in his writings.

By making the Gospel the rule of all their conduct, as was recommended to them, the Brothers could give a picture of Catholicism different from the one prevalent among Protestants.

The attitude of the Brothers regarding a particular area of religious sensitivity contained in embryonic form the ability of their successors to educate children and work with teachers from non-Catholic religions.

b. A period of uncertainty

Persistent causes of difficulties

In spite of the fact that much progress had been made, the Institute was still threatened from various quarters.

De La Salle's departure from the parish of St Sulpice, and then from Paris, had not led certain "Gentlemen of St Sulpice" to abandon their pretensions. The return of the novitiate to Paris on account of the famine during the 1709–1710 winter, gave an opportunity to the "enemy" mentioned by Blain to make himself felt once again. He supported the separatist activities of a Brother who accused his Superior of admitting too easily, in those difficult times, those who asked to join, and of making the novitiate live off the Brothers teaching in schools (cf. CL 8, 64).

In the years that followed, De La Salle's opponents not only continued to try to separate the communities in Paris from the rest of the Institute, but almost succeeded in doing so.

The fact that the Institute had no legal status made new developments in the Clément affair even more dangerous. Like the young Clément, the Institute too could not acquire premises to house the new seminary for schoolmasters in its own name, but had to use a certain Louis Rogier as intermediary.

When De La Salle returned from the South of France in the autumn of 1711, he tried at first to settle the affair amicably with the various persons involved. As they proved intransigent, De La Salle prepared his defence. He supplied all the necessary documents to the persons he had entrusted with his case, but they betrayed his trust.

♦ On January 23rd 1712, he was summoned to the Châtelet court.

♦ On February 17th, the Chancellery (*chancellerie**) declared null and void the commitments signed by the Abbé Clément.

♦ On May 31st, the Châtelet confirmed the ruling of the Chancellery and obliged De La Salle to return to the young Abbé his promissory note and to restore the sums of money received from him for the seminary for schoolmasters. The judges also passed the following ignominious sentence: "We forbid the said M. de La Salle to make such demands on minors, demand money from them, and to behave in this way" (quoted by Rigault 1937, 1:252).

♦ On June 15th, the court assigned the house bought in St Denis to M. Rogier, in whose name it had been purchased, and ordered De La Salle and the Brothers to leave it. (See the reference to these decisions in CL 40-1, 171ff).

On February 18th, De La Salle left Paris for another journey to the South of France, doubtlessly considering his continued presence not absolutely necessary for the defence of his case. He took up, in fact, the journey he had had to interrupt when the Clément affair first came to light.

The 1712–1714 crisis

This journey took place in one of the most complex and mysterious periods of De La Salle's life. The biographers, and Blain in particular, describe it in very sombre terms. The Founder appeared to flee from the storm provoked by the Clément affair. He encountered systematic opposition, and came up against the resistance, if not revolt, of certain of his followers. He sought to lose contact with Paris, and abandoned a part of his defenceless Institute to the savage attacks of his adversaries, leaving it to Brother Barthélemy to look after, in particular, the Brothers he had trained in the novitiate.

However, while we must take all these factors into account and not minimise the crushing weight of the trials encountered, we should not try to paint too black a picture, nor exaggerate the extent to which De La Salle abandoned the Brothers in the northern part of France.

We can study this period of crisis by looking at the way it affected De La Salle, on the one hand, and the Brothers in Paris, on the other.

The crisis as it affected De La Salle

De La Salle's 1712 journey took him first to Avignon and he stayed the month of March there. From there he went to Alès, Les Vans and to Mende, where he spent the month of May. He returned to Avignon by way of Les Vans, Alès and Uzès, where he met the Bishop of the diocese. He finally reached Marseilles, spending the rest of the year there and the spring of 1713. He then returned to Mende (cf. Blain CL 8, 98), stayed there till the end of July, and then went to Grenoble. He stayed in this town till his departure for Paris, some weeks before July 17th 1714 (according to a letter written by Brother Barthélemy and dated that day).

De La Salle's stay in the South of France was certainly a **time of trial** for him.

On his first visit to Mende he received two summonses to appear (*comparaître**) before the Châtelet court (doubtlessly on May 31st and June 15th). In both documents he is addressed as the "Priest of the Rheims diocese and Superior of the Brothers of the said house" (CL 8, 79). There was no accompanying note of explanation from the Brothers in Paris.

The quandary for De La Salle must have been most painful: Did the Brothers believe the accusations brought against him? Were they ready to break away from him, accepting the plan of his "enemy", whose collusion with De La Salle's adversaries was so obvious to Blain (cf. CL 8, 79)?

In Marseilles, he found at first the support he needed to open a novitiate. There was a plan also to entrust a new school to the Brothers in the parish of St Martin. However, those who at first had supported him now were changing their views. The Brothers in the St Laurent school complained of having had to follow the "exercises" in the novitiate, and found support with certain persons who were turning against their Superior. They accused him of intransigence and stubbornness. Pamphlets expressing the same sentiments appeared in the town and surrounding areas. De La Salle replied, but to no avail. The Brothers in the school went so far as to say to him "that he had come to Provence only to destroy and not to build" (CL 8, 93).

For Blain, this opposition came from the Jansenists who did not appreciate the attachment of the Founder of the Brothers to the Holy See. Whoever the instigator was of the intrigue against him, the whole affair inevitably increased De La Salle's self-doubts. Did not the hostility he had encountered both in Marseilles and Paris indicate that his presence at the head of the Institute hindered its development? Would it not be better for him to disappear?

He withdrew for 40 days to the monastery of St Maximin, near La Sainte Beaume, a famous place of pilgrimage, some 40 kilometres east of Marseilles. When he left it, it was to go to Mende again, to help the school which had been badly shaken by the departure of its Director, Brother Médard.

Blain says that the Brothers in this town refused to give him accommodation. It is a fact that, during his stay in Mende, he lodged with a small community devoted to the education of girls whose parents had belonged to the "Supposedly Reformed Religion" (cf. CL 8, 99). However, this can be explained by the "unsuitability" of the Brothers' lodgings which, moreover, made it difficult for them to live a community life.

Should we see a connection between what Blain says and the letter Brother Barthélemy wrote to the parish priest of Mende, dated July 17th 1714, in which he referred to the problems which had recently affected the Brothers' community? The connection is too tenuous for us to accept the theory that it was during his return journey that De La Salle stopped in Mende for a second time.

It was at this time that Brother Timothy, whom De La Salle had put in charge of the novitiate in Marseilles, informed him that the venture had completely failed. Blain records the Founder's reaction, which betrays his great distress:

> God be blessed, my dear Brother! Well, what made you write to me? Are you not aware of my inability to command others? Are you ignorant of the fact that several Brothers wish to have nothing more to do with me, and that what the Gospel says could well have been written for me: Nolumus hunc regnare super nos. We no longer want him as our Superior. And he added: They are quite right, because I am not capable of being so. (CL 8, 92)

Also during this period, Brother Ponce, who was Director of the Brothers of Avignon and Visitor of the communities in the South of France, was behaving in an increasingly independent manner, and perhaps even showing hostility towards De La Salle. Finally, in 1713, Brother Ponce left the Institute, taking with him, as Blain points out, a considerable sum of money (cf. CL 8, 92).

However, in the midst of all his distress, De La Salle occasionally found **sources of comfort**.

On his journey South, he had been encouraged by the satisfactory reports parish priests and Bishops had given him about the work of the Brothers in Alès and Les Vans. Near Les Vans he had been very well received by the parish priest of Gravières, Pierre Meynier, a friend of the "founder" of the school of Les Vans.

In Marseille, the support of Mgr Belzunce had never been lacking. De La Salle had planned to go to Rome, and as he was about to embark, it was the Bishop's appeal to him to open a new school that had made him stay.

But it was above all during his long stay in Grenoble that De La Salle was able to find some peace. He found there the calm atmosphere and fervour of a community that was well led by its Director, normally thought to be Brother Jacques. He experienced the sympathy of a population that appreciated the Brothers. His love of silence and prayer could be given free rein there. He used the time also to return to his work of producing books for the pupils and the Brothers. He even took the place of the Director in class when he sent him on a mission to the North of France.

The three days he spent in the Grande Chartreuse do not seem to have offered him the same recollection provided by his stay in the monastery of St Maximin. Quite the opposite, as Blain tells us: "He left it after three days, not having devoted the time he would have liked to his prayer, but only what his Congregation's affairs allowed him to" (CL 8, 100).

Finally, on the hill of Parménie, near Grenoble, De La Salle seems to have found both enlightenment and serenity in his talks with "Sister Louise", a pious woman who had set up her hermitage there. In answer to De La Salle's questions, she had the following to say, as Blain tells us:

> You must not abandon the family whose father God made you. This work is yours. You must persevere in it till the end of your life, combining, as you have already done, the life of Martha and that of Mary. (CL 8, 105)

It was after this stay, that he met Claude du Lac de Montisambert, who would become Brother Irenée, and whom he received into the Institute.

The crisis as it affected the Brothers of Paris

According to Blain, when De La Salle left for the South of France, he more or less left the Brothers in the North of France to fend for themselves. During his stay in the South, he had not wanted the Brothers to know where he was and he had not replied to the letters that had been sent to him (cf. CL 8, 107).

In fact, however, this apparent abandonment was not as complete as Blain describes, for De La Salle had left instructions with Brother Barthélemy. We have proof that he kept up a correspondence with Brothers Thomas and Joseph, as well as with his own brother Jean Louis regarding the house in Rheims (cf. CL 42-1, 403). The journey made by the Director of Grenoble is also significant.

It is true that De La Salle had left his followers in a situation that was not at all clear. Brother Barthélemy, the Director of the Novitiate, which had moved to Paris in 1709, had, to all practical purposes, replaced De La Salle as Superior. But he had no explicit mandate to hold this position. There was Brother Joseph also, whose obedience as Visitor had been extended in November 1711 to include all the houses in the North and centre of France, with the exception of Paris (cf. LA 137 = La Salle 1954, 41c). The result was a certain amount of confusion among the Brothers and some took advantage of it to become relaxed. As a consequence, some ill-disciplined Brothers were dismissed by the "senior Brothers".

The most serious aspect of the situation was that it left De La Salle's adversaries a free hand with their dangerous intrigues.

His "rival", basing himself on the fact that the decision to appoint an ecclesiastical superior had not been revoked, tried to make the Brothers accept as their superior M. de Brou, a priest associated with the Company of St Sulpice (cf. CL 41-2, 357).

In order to limit the number of novices to what was needed for the schools of Paris, this priest asked Brother Barthélemy not to accept postulants without his authorisation.

He asked the Brothers also to change their rules. When Blain spoke of this for the first time, he said that the purpose of this was to introduce the changes advocated by De La Salle's "enemy", but that the Brothers had replied "that it was necessary first of all to obtain the views and consent of all the Brothers outside Paris" (CL 8, 114).

Brother Barthélemy, however, was in agreement with the persons who wished to change the form of government in the Institute, and wrote to the Directors of the other houses, inviting them to ask their respective Bishops for an ecclesiastic to be the "external superior" of their community. This was a dangerous proposal because it tended to replace the Institute by as many autonomous units as there were houses (cf. CL 6, 222–223).

Returning to the same facts later on in his work, Blain gives a different description of what happened. Towards the end of 1713, wishing to take advantage of the Archbishop of Paris's favourable attitude towards them, the Brothers, encouraged by M. de La Chétardie and M. de Brou, had wished to have their rules approved by Mgr de Noailles.

In view of this, Brother Bathélemy had gathered the Brothers of Paris, Versailles and St Denis to make some changes in the rules. The proposed changes tended to make the rules less demanding. The rules and the proposed changes were then submitted to the Archbishop, who entrusted the task of examining them to one of his Vicar Generals, François Vivant (CL 8, 149).

The danger inherent in all these measures was limited, however. According to Blain's first version, M. de Brou's plan had met with resistance from the Brothers. Some of them wrote to De La Salle to let him know what was going on.

The biographer, who was one of the local superiors appointed by the Bishops, takes pleasure in recording that several of these superiors sided with the Brothers in order to prevent the giving of this title from leading to dangerous consequences (cf. CL 8, 116).

The second version recalls that the Vicar General, who had been entrusted by the Archbishop of Paris with the examination of the Brothers' rules, "kept them for seven or eight months, during which time there occurred all the trouble in Paris over the Bull *Unigenitus* and the refusal of His Eminence to accept it" (CL 8, 149). Finally, he sent the rules to M. de Brou, together with a letter dated April 4th 1714, in which he said that the Archbishop of Paris did not think it proper "that anything should be decided or signed in his name, either regarding the Rules, or the changes to the Rules that were proposed" (CL 8, 149).

The consequences of the crisis

The crisis brought about by De La Salle's doubts and his disappearance did not produce only negative consequences.

For the **Brothers** of the oldest houses, the absence of their Superior was an excellent preparation for when they themselves would have to take responsibility for the fate of the Institute. The relative isolation in which Brother Barthélemy had found himself, however painful it may have been, was an excellent introduction for him to his future role.

The fruit of this maturing process was seen on the day that the Brothers of Paris, Versailles and St Denis, aware of the danger that threatened the Institute as a whole, were bold enough to write a letter to De La Salle, in which, in substance, they asked him in the name of the vow of obedience he had pronounced to take over once again as Superior of the whole Institute.

As this letter was written on April 1st 1714, its authors could not have been aware at the time of the decision of the Archbishop of Paris, which the Vicar General, François Vivant, would communicate to them on April 4th.

Because of the importance of this letter, the supplement that follows this chapter will look at it more closely.

As regards **De La Salle**, he was now in a better situation to return to Paris.

He had received reassuring news, in particular, regarding the discretion shown by all the local superiors appointed by the Bishops. The stay at Parménie had restored his peace of mind.

When the Brothers' letter reached him, he hesitated and took advice. Some of those around him wanted him to remain at Grenoble, but, encouraged in particular by Sister Louise of Parménie (cf. CL 57, 127), De La Salle decided to be obedient. In the meantime, M. de La Chétardie had resigned from his post for reasons of health.

Bidding farewell to the Brothers and his friends, De La Salle set out. The news of M. de La Chétardie's death on July 1st 1714, convinced De La Salle that it was the right time to return to the parish of St Sulpice, especially as the new parish priest, Languet de Gergy, was a friend of his.

After stopping in Lyons and Dijon, De La Salle arrived finally in Paris on August 10th 1714.

Conclusion

The events we have just referred to mark the end of a period in De La Salle's life and in the history of the origins of the Institute.

The Institute came out of the crisis strengthened. The structures established by De La Salle had held firm , even if those who had wanted to change them had seemed to have the upper hand, especially when the "external superiors" were appointed by the Bishops. The threats to the Institute had made the Brothers more aware of the bond of association which united them.

The relative state of abandonment in which De La Salle had left the communities in the North of France had led Brother Barthélemy and the "principal Brothers", those of Paris and the surrounding region, to assume responsibility for themselves, in spite of their hesitations and errors.

The disciples having proved themselves, the Founder could hand over to them completely the work which up till then they had pursued together.

— Supplement —
The Letter from the Brothers in 1714

The circumstances in which the letter was written were described in the last chapter. The aim of this supplement is to examine its contents and assess its importance. Much of what we shall say is based on Brother Michel Sauvage's study in CL 57.

We know the text of the letter from the biographers Maillefer and Blain. There are very few differences between the two texts. Maillefer gives the text in both his manuscripts, but it is not likely that he ever saw the original. He probably found the letter quoted in the complete text of Bernard, who had come to know of it from Brother Barthélemy.

Blain also saw the original letter, obtaining it from Brother Timothy. The text we give below is the one reproduced by Blain (CL 8, 118) and which Brother Timothy was able to check.

> Sir, our very dear Father. We, the principal Brothers of the Christian Schools, having in view the greater glory of God, the greater good of the Church and of our Society, believe that it is of the utmost importance that you take up again the care and overall direction of the holy work of God which is also yours, since it pleased the Lord to make use of you to establish it and conduct it for such a long time. We are all convinced that God has given you and continues to give you the grace and qualities necessary to govern this new company well, which is of such great use to the Church, and that it is just that we should state that you have always directed it with much success and edification. This is why, Sir, we beg you very humbly and we order you in the name and on behalf of the body of the Society to which you have promised obedience, to take up responsibility again immediately for the overall government of our Society. In virtue of which we have signed. Done at Paris, this first of April 1714, and, with the deepest respect, we are, Sir and our very dear Father, your very humble and obedient inferiors, etc.

Maillefer, whose text is identical, dates the letter April 1st 1715 in both his manuscripts (cf. CL 6, 226-227). This date is wrong.

Contents of the letter

The authors

At the beginning of the letter these define themselves as the "principal Brothers of the Christian Schools". We know that these Brothers belonged to the communities of Paris, Versailles and St Denis.

The inclusion of Brother Barthélemy in their number — his absence would have been inconceivable — guaranteed that the letter was not an act of defiance against the person who had replaced the Founder in his absence.

To what extent could the Brothers of these three houses consider that they had the right to speak "in the name and on behalf of the body of the Society"? It is unlikely that they had a mandate from the other communities. Perhaps they believed that together they constituted a part of the "body" of the Institute which could speak, because of the great urgency, "in the name and on behalf" of the body as a whole.

As they witnessed more directly the attacks levelled against De La Salle by his "enemy" and by those who shared his views (like M. de Brou), they were probably more concerned than the other Brothers by the threat they represented to the unity of the Institute.

Purpose

The purpose of the letter is clearly indicated: "it is of the utmost importance that you take up again the care and overall direction of the holy work of God which is also yours".

"Take up again" presupposes abandonment. To what extent was there actually abandonment? As was said in the last chapter, it was not as complete as the biographers would have us believe. However, the words used certainly give the impression that these Brothers felt that they had been left to fend for themselves for more than two years.

"Take up responsibility again immediately for the overall government of our Society". What the Brothers wanted De La Salle to do was to fulfil once again and personally his role as Superior of all the Brothers. He had continued to look after the Brothers in the South, even if Brother Ponce, and Brother Timothy after him, had exercised the roles of Visitor. In the North, on the other hand, although Brother Barthélemy had in practical terms taken the place of De La Salle, it did not change the fact that the latter's lack of contact with this part of the Institute was harmful.

Motive

The unusual step taken by the Brothers was motivated by the trust they had in their "father". "We are all convinced that God has given you and continues to give you the grace and qualities necessary to govern this new company well".

"All" is perhaps somewhat exaggerated, seeing that there were always those, including Brothers, who disagreed with him. It was at least true of the Brothers who remained attached to their Superior.

What is more, the letter revealed what the Brothers thought. Although De La Salle had doubted his own ability to direct the Institute, these Brothers had remained convinced of the contrary. This was not flattery on their part, even if their declaration introduced what followed.

Object

The object of the letter is expressed in the somewhat unusual words with which the Brothers address their Superior: "This is why, Sir, we beg you very humbly and we order you in the name and on behalf of the body of the Society to which you have promised obedience, to take up responsibility again immediately for the overall government of our Society".

The order they give is an explicit reference to the formula of vows that De La Salle and 12 of his followers pronounced for the first time in 1694, and by which they bound themselves for life. Probably some of those 12 were among those who signed the letter.

The importance of the letter

Immediate importance

What the Brothers wanted when they wrote to De La Salle was his return to Paris. The biographers say that De La Salle's first reaction on receiving the letter was surprise. Blain describes his initial reaction of mistrust:

> If he had not recognised the writing of the Brothers who had signed it, he might have been suspicious of it (CL 8, 119).

He then decided to do what the letter asked of him. As was mentioned in the last chapter, the letter from the Brothers was doubtlessly not the only factor that made De La Salle decide to return to Paris. On the other hand, it seems that it was a decisive factor, not only because of the order which it contained, but also because of the sign of attachment and trust that it represented for the one to whom it was addressed.

Wider importance

The letter from the Brothers was sufficient to dispel the doubts of De La Salle.

If he had ever thought that the Brothers of Paris had allowed themselves to be outwitted by his adversaries, the letter was a proof that they had no intention of breaking away from the rest of the Institute, since they wrote it to their Superior "in the name and on behalf of the body of the Society", and because they asked him "to take up responsibility again immediately for the overall government of our Society".

If he had had any doubts about his ability to direct the Institute, the letter was an affirmation of the contrary: "We are all convinced that God has given you and continues to give you the grace and qualities necessary to govern this new company well". This is the essential message of the letter.

At a deeper level, the terms used in the letter show that the Brothers had assimilated the teachings and example of their Founder. They showed they were capable of responding to his questions by reminding him of the choices he had made at certain decisive moments of his life.

De La Salle had urged the first teachers to put their trust in God, and he had led them to do so by divesting himself of everything. If, in 1714, the Brothers asked him to take up again "the responsibility and direction" of the Institute, it was not through fear of the consequences that his disappearance would have had for them. Their sole concern was "the greater glory of God, the greater good of the Church and of our Society".

During one of his journeys to Provence, the discovery of what is called the "Memoir on the Beginnings" had revealed to the Brothers how their father had recognised the "conduct of God" in his regard. In their letter, when they reminded him how God had made use of him to "establish" and "direct" his "holy work", and that for this purpose he had given him "the grace and qualities necessary", they were referring in some way to those early experiences.

In 1694, De La Salle and 12 Brothers had vowed to obey not only the Superiors, but the "body" of the Institute. By writing "in the name and on behalf of the body of the Society", the authors of the letter drew their authority from this vow to order the one who was their Superior.

The letter made no allusion, of course, to the document in which the participants of the 1694 Assembly, after electing De La Salle as their Superior, had declared that his successors had to be chosen from among the Brothers. However, fairly certainly, the Brothers who wrote the letter must have had it at the back of their mind.

Aware of the danger that the appointment of an ecclesiastical superior represented for the unity of the Institute, they had also been able to assess the danger, in particular in Paris, of seeing such a superior not only supplant De La Salle, but also prevent the choice of a Brother as his successor.

It was important therefore that the Superior who had been chosen by the Brothers should once again fulfil the function that had been entrusted to him. Even if De La Salle, from a personal point of view, wanted to be relieved of it, his presence guaranteed that his succession would take place in accordance with the 1694 document.

Conclusion

Seen from this point of view, the action taken by the Brothers proved they were able to assume responsibility for themselves. The action taken by the Brothers from Paris and the surrounding area in the name of the "body of the Society" showed that this body had the necessary resources to ensure its continued existence.

The period between the return of De La Salle to Paris and his replacement by Brother Barthélemy as Superior of the Institute would be one of transition during which the Brothers would gradually take into their own hands the destiny of their Institute.

Part Four

Completion (1714–1725)

In the preceding period, the Institute had shown its strength by resisting internal and external forces bent on its destruction, and had both grown and become more organised. There still remained, however, the complete "establishment of the Society" that the three signatories of 1691 had committed themselves to accomplish.

In other words, it was not enough for the "Society", that had been established by the free association of the Brothers, to be recognised simply by well-wishing civil and ecclesiastical authorities: it needed official legal documents signed by Church and State authorities.

The lack of this official recognition had been felt for as long as the new Society had existed. De La Salle had certainly understood the need to obtain it, as had the Brothers. De La Salle's own concern is revealed by his despatch of two Brothers to Rome and his own plans to go there. However, there is no proof that any steps were taken regarding the matter before 1714, the point we have reached in this history. Even though the existence of the Institute and its Founder was known, apparently to Louis XIV, and certainly to certain persons close to him, no steps had been taken to obtain the indispensable *Lettres Patentes**.

It was only after the death of the Founder that the Brothers took the matter in hand and successfully resolved it. It seems logical to include the period immediately after the death of De La Salle in a study of the origins of the Institute.

10 The Brothers Take Charge of the Institute (1714–1719)

Introduction

This period includes the last years of De La Salle's life. During this period, he gradually made way for his followers, who more and more assumed responsibility for the Institute.

However, even though he no longer had the responsibilities of a Superior, he did not remain inactive. In his changed situation, he continued to serve the common good of the Institute for as long as he lived.

This chapter is divided into two parts:

- a. The gradual transfer of responsibility for the Institute to the Brothers (1714–1717).
- b. The Brothers take over complete responsibility for the Institute (1717–1719).

a. The gradual transfer of responsibility for the Institute to the Brothers (1714–1717)

De La Salle and Brother Barthélemy share responsibilities

In response to the summons from the Brothers of Paris, Versailles and St Denis, De La Salle made his way to the novitiate directed by Brother Barthélemy in rue de La Barouillière, and said on arrival: "Well, here I am. What do you want me to do?" (CL 8, 120).

His intention was not to take up his position again as Superior, but to put himself at the disposal of his followers and, in particular, of Brother Barthélemy, the person they had turned to during his absence.

However, what the Brothers clearly wanted De La Salle to do was to take over as Superior again. In order to prevail upon him to do so, Brother Barthélemy asked the Brothers in the South of France to endorse the summons the Brothers of Paris, Versailles and St Denis had sent their Founder. For this purpose, he sent a copy of the letter of April 1st

1714, with just a few words changed, to the Brothers in the South. Instead of writing "We beg you to return", he put, "We beg you to take over again the direction of the Society". Blain concludes, "As soon as the Brothers in Provence received the letter, they signed it and sent it back to Paris". (CL 8, *Short Life of Br Barthélemy*, 19)

In practice, De La Salle and Brother Barthélemy shared responsibilities. Brother Barthélemy remained in charge of the novitiate, but was also responsible for day to day matters. De La Salle kept the title of Superior, but concentrated mostly on his priestly ministry to the Brothers.

In Paris

This sharing of responsibilities applied at first to Paris, where De La Salle had been living since his return.

Here he suffered the final attacks of those who wished to supplant him.

Even if, as Blain wrote, "his great enemy was dead", he had left "those who had inherited his spirit and his prejudices against the Servant of God" (CL 8, 121).

These things took place even though M. de La Chétardie was dead and his place had been taken by Languet de Gergy, who did not share his predecessor's views. The "enemy" in question had not been M. de La Chétardie, even though he had wanted to make the Brothers in the parish of St Sulpice an independent community with himself in charge. Those who, during De La Salle's absence, had tried to introduce changes which would have completely destroyed his work, did not stop their activities on his return.

And so Blain records how "the ecclesiastic who called himself Superior of the Brothers" (sub-title in margin, CL 8, 121), surprised to find De La Salle hearing the confessions of his Brothers, was even more surprised to discover the extent of the powers the latter had received from the Archbishop of Paris, Cardinal de Noailles.

The biographer says also that the same ecclesiastic had subsequently asked De La Salle a number of searching questions especially about the future government of the Institute. It was the Brothers who finally gave the priest an evasive answer (cf. CL 8, 124).

> Further on in his work, Blain tells us that the ecclesiastic in question is M. de Brou, and he speaks of him in favourable terms. Also, in a letter M. de Brou had sent to the parish priest of Mende, he had said he was prepared to give way to M. de La Salle. It is difficult to see therefore what M. de Brou's position actually was.

De La Salle and Brother Barthélemy remained together in Paris till October 1715 when the novitiate returned to St Yon.

Blain establishes a connection between the death of Louis XIV and this return to St Yon. Blain knew, as he wrote, that the grants from the royal treasury to cover the running costs of certain schools would now be stopped, and that a school in Fontainebleau, which had been due to receive royal funding, would not open now. Moreover, according to Maillefer, De La Salle would no longer receive for the house in Paris "help from his friend the Bishop of Chartres, who received gifts from the great monarch through the influence of Madame de Maintenon" (CL 6, 232 & 233). The transfer of the novitiate took place also because of the current economic situation.

De La Salle stayed on in Paris for a while. According to Blain, he did not wish to go without M. de Brou's permission. The latter, on the other hand, told him that the Brothers in Paris needed his presence. Finally, in November 1715, De La Salle also went to St Yon.

At St Yon

At St Yon, De La Salle devoted himself to intense prayer and ensured the spiritual foundations of the Institute by looking after the novices, although Brother Barthélemy remained their Director, and by putting the final touches to a number of works intended for the Brothers.

At the request of Brother Barthélemy, he started his travels again towards the middle of 1716 and went to visit the Brothers in Calais and Boulogne. This enabled him to meet M. Gense and M. de La Cocherie, two persons who were especially supportive of his work, and to make preparations for the opening of a house in St Omer (cf. CL 8, 406).

Undertaking such a journey called for a great deal of virtue on the part of De La Salle: it meant leaving behind the recollected atmosphere of St Yon, and the journey coincided with only a relative respite from the periods of illness he mentions in a letter to Brother Gabriel Drolin, dated December 5th 1716 (LA 32, 5).

His state of health forced the Brothers to decide to bring to an end a sensitive period which had continued even after the return of De La Salle in August 1714 (cf. CL 8, 123, sub-title IV). They were ready to choose one of the Brothers to be Superior.

The choice of a Brother as Superior

Preliminary arrangements

One of the things that characterised this event was the documents that were drawn up beforehand. The care that was taken to ensure the legal validity of these documents shows the importance they had in the eyes of De La Salle and of the Brothers. A set of legally drawn up documents deposited with a Rouen lawyer make it possible to follow in detail the successive stages of a fundamentally important event in the history of the origins of the Institute.

Putting a Brother in charge of the Institute was the issue at stake. Blain shows that such an event was not new in the history of religious Orders or Institutes (cf. CL 8, 131), but the difficulties encountered in Paris are sufficient proof that such an eventuality was still not easily accepted.

At a preliminary meeting held in December 1716 and attended by the Brothers of St Yon and Rouen, it was decided to send Brother Barthélemy to visit all the houses of the Institute and secure the agreement of all the Brothers to hold an Assembly of the "principal Brothers" (see the text of the deliberations in Rigault 1937, 1:406).

Between December 1716 and May 1717, Brother Barthélemy visited the communities, as had been agreed, and had each community state its terms of agreement in a "small register" and sign its statement. In all, 99 signatures were collected. (The details of this journey can be found in Rigault 1937, 1:407ff.)

The 1717 Assembly

The assembly was held at St Yon. It began on May 16th 1717, Pentecost Sunday, and was attended by 16 Directors. The Directors of six communities with only two Brothers did not attend. At the beginning of the Assembly De La Salle explained to his followers the importance of the decision he was asking them to make.

After two days in which prayer played an important part, the Brothers took a vote in which De La Salle did not take part. As expected, Brother Barthélemy was elected. At the latter's request, the assembly provided him with two assistants, Brothers Jean (Jean Jacquot) and Joseph (Jean Le Roux). They would continue to live in their present communities, the first in Paris, and the second in Rheims. The official document recording the proceedings,

dated May 23rd 1717, "feastday of the Most Blessed Trinity", was deposited with a lawyer (cf. Rigault 1937, 1:409).

And so from now onwards, the Institute would be governed as De La Salle had intended.

> To make clear that the fact that De La Salle had been Superior did not constitute a precedent, it is a tradition in the Institute to consider Brother Barthélemy as the first Superior General.

The Assembly then turned its attention to the second item on its agenda, the drawing up of the *Rules* in a form that would enable them to be approved by both royal and ecclesiastical authorities. As in the case of the election of the Superior of the Institute, De La Salle refused to take part in the deliberations.

However, as the Assembly was not in a position to make the revisions that had been decided, De La Salle was asked to undertake the task in accordance with the instructions of the Brothers present. The result of this revision was the text that Brother Barthélemy initialed and sent to all the houses of the Institute towards the end of 1718.

During the same Assembly, De La Salle was asked to revise also *The Conduct of the Christian Schools*, as we learn from the foreword to the 1720 edition (CL 24).

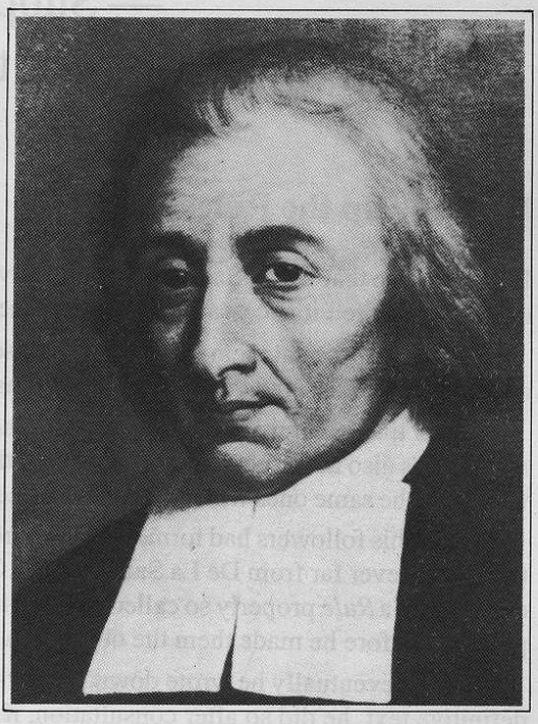
Visit to the houses of the Institute by the new Superior

In the same year as he was elected, Brother Barthélemy visited all the houses of the Institute. Although the Brothers had given their consent to whatever the assembly at St Yon would decide, the new Superior had his election ratified by the Brothers. At least we know that this happened in the Paris region and in the East. The declaration of the Paris Brothers, dated November 11th 1717, can be seen in the Institute archives (quoted in Rigault 1937, 1:413).

When Brother Barthélemy was in Paris, a new school was taken over by the Brothers in the Invalides district.

Brother Barthélemy, Joseph Truffet, was born with his twin brother on February 11th 1678 in Sains, in the diocese of Cambrai. His father was a schoolmaster. He had a classical education and studied theology in the Jesuit school at Douai. His attempts to withdraw from the world by going to the Grande Trappe or to the Canons Regular were not successful.

Then he heard of the Brothers, went to Paris and, on February 10th 1703, entered the novitiate at the Grand'Maison, the day before his 25th birthday, taking the name of Brother Barthélemy. After his novitiate, he was sent to Chartres "to make a person who was too introverted lose some of his reserve"(Blain 2ab, 11). Because of a "serious health problem" he had to undergo an operation and was no longer able to teach. He made his vows on June 7th 1705, but his future in the Society of the Christian Schools was still not assured, as some Brothers feared to be burdened with an invalid. At the age of 27, he was put in charge of the novitiate, which had been transferred to St Yon at the end of August 1705. "He seemed born for this job". He returned to Paris with the novices during the terrible winter of 1709. Because of his position, he replaced De La Salle during his absence, but without any mandate to do so. This could explain why he had so little room for manoeuvre and why he did not enjoy the confidence of some of the Brothers. Photo E. Rousset.



frere Barthelemy

— Supplement —
The Writing of the *Common Rules*

Drawing up the Rules

From the time that De La Salle became first involved with the teachers of schools for the poor boys of Rheims, he felt it necessary to accustom them to live a "regulated life".

When he brought them into his own house, he drew up a regulation for them, which took into account their duties and the way his home was run.

After the departure of the first teachers and the arrival of the new ones, we are told by Bernard that "it was also at the beginning of that year that there began what were then known as exercises, which are the same ones which are still practised in all the houses of the Institute today" (CL 4, 47).

Once his followers had formed a kind of religious community, the idea of drawing up rules for them was never far from De La Salle's mind. On the other hand, he did not wish to be too hasty in drawing up a *Rule* properly so called. As was his habit, he preferred the Brothers to try out various practices before he made them the object of a *Rule*.

When eventually he wrote down what was practised, and when he wished to draw up a more definitive text, he did so after consultation, if not with all the Brothers, at least with a number of them.

For the period corresponding to De La Salle's lifetime, we have three main documents which demonstrate how current practice in the houses of the Institute was codified in the *Rule*.

We will not examine at this point a fourth text entitled *Rule of the Brother Director of a House of the Institute*. The copy we have consists of a number of loose sheets followed by a letter from Brother Barthélemy, dated October 3rd 1718.

The basic texts

Practice of the Daily Regulation

This text has come down to us in a manuscript form dated 1713. It is kept in the Institute archives and is reproduced in CL 25. It is a copy of an earlier text of unknown date. Some sections of it go back to the earliest days of the Institute.

This document includes simply the details of the daily timetable followed by the Brothers on ordinary days, feasts and on a long list of special days. "The essential feature of the *Practice* is the daily timetable of the Brothers" (Rigault 1937, 1:524).

The so-called 1705 *Common Rules*

The copy we know of the *Common Rules of the Institute of the Brothers of the Christian Schools*, dated May 23rd 1705, is kept in the public library of Avignon as document 747. The text has been published in CL 25.

It seems that this manuscript is a copy of a text composed by De La Salle during a period of recollection and prayer which followed the 1693-1694 famine mentioned by Maillefer (CL 6, 112–113) and Blain (CL 7, 339-340). This text was submitted to the senior Brothers gathered in Assembly at the novitiate.

The *Rule* of the Brothers in this text is already in a very advanced form and there will be very few changes made in it in 1717–1718. The overall structure is already established.

♦ The first two chapters lay the foundations, as it were, for the rest of the *Rule* by explaining the purpose and spirit of the Institute.

♦ Under the heading: "Of the community spirit of this Institute and of the exercises that will be performed in it in common", there is a chapter on one of the strictest points of the *Rule*: the obligation to live always together. There follow several chapters connected with community life: exercises of piety, mortification and humiliation, recreation.

♦ There is a chapter dealing with the way Brothers should behave in school, which develops the section regarding the purpose of the Institute. Another chapter speaks of an assistant, called the "Inspector of Schools", for the Brother Director of large establishments.

♦ Three chapters deal with the personal relationships of Brothers with the Brother Director, other Brothers and other persons.

♦ Other chapters speak of the practice of certain virtues: of silence and of the three virtues characteristic of religious life, poverty, chastity and obedience.

♦ "Rules concerning the good order and conduct of the Institute" include chapters on the "sick", "journeys", "letters that Brothers must send every month to the Superior of the Institute" and "the Latin language", the study of which was forbidden.

♦ The final chapters deal with the "Daily Regulation" and the "Exercises for Sundays and feasts" and for "holidays", which reproduce the details given in the *Practice of the Daily Regulation*. The prescriptions relating to "holidays" do not come from this earlier text.

The *Common Rules* of 1718

There is a manuscript copy of the *Common Rules of the Brothers of the Christian Schools* in the Institute archives. The text was drawn up after the election of Brother Barthélemy as Superior in 1717 and sent to all the communities in 1718.

The copy we have was sent to the community of Troyes. Each sheet is initialed on the back, and there is an introductory letter from Brother Barthélemy dated October 31st 1718. This text is basically the same as that of the 1705 *Rule* and keeps its overall structure. There are a few corrections and additions. The whole of the *Practice of the Daily Regulation* is included in the text.

The table that follows will show how the 1718 text includes the *Practice of the Daily Regulation* and the 1705 *Rule*, while adding several chapters about school, a chapter on "Regularity" and another on "Modesty".

On the other hand, the table does not show certain modifications:

- An important preamble is added to the chapter on "The Spirit of the Institute".
- The list of the "things the Brothers should speak about during recreation" is left out.
- The "Rules which concern the good order and good conduct of the Institute" are altered considerably.

This 1718 text can perhaps be considered as the primitive *Rule* of the Institute.

How the three basic texts are related

PDR	1705	Chapters of the 1718 *Rule*
	*	1. Of the purpose and necessity of this Institute
	*	2. Of the spirit of this Institute
	*	3. Of the community spirit of this Institute and of the practices that will be performed there in common.
	*	4. Of the exercises of piety which are practised in this Institute.
	*	5. Of the exercises of humiliation and mortification which are practised in this Institute.
	*	6. Of the manner in which the Brothers must behave during recreation.
	*	7. Of the manner in which the Brothers must behave in school towards their pupils.
		8. Of the manner in which the Brothers must behave when correcting their pupils.
		9. Of the manner in which the Brothers must behave in school regarding themselves, their Brothers and outsiders.
		10. Of the days and times when Brothers teach in school and of the days when they give holidays to their pupils.
	*	11. Of the Inspector of Schools
	*	12. Of the manner in which the Brothers must behave towards the Brother Director.
	*	13. Of the manner in which the Brothers must behave towards their Brothers and of the union which must exist among them.
	*	14. Of the manner in which the Brothers must behave towards outsiders.
		15. Of the manner in which serving Brothers must behave.
		16. Of Regularity
	*	17. Of Poverty.
	*	19. Of Chastity.
	*	20. Of Obedience
	*	Of Silence
		21. Of Modesty
	*	22. Of the Sick.
*		23. Of the prayers that are to be said for deceased Brothers
	*	24. Of Journeys.
	*	25. Of Letters.
	*	26. Of the Latin language.
*	*	27. Daily Regulation.
*	*	28. Special exercises for Sundays and feasts.
*	*	29. Special exercises for the Time of Vacation..
*		30. Special practices to be included in the daily exercises on certain days of the year.
	*	31. Daily timetable for holiday time.
	*	32. Rules for the retreat in common which will be made during the vacation.

N.B. The asterisks in the two left-hand columns indicate the presence of corresponding texts in the *Practice of the Daily Regulation* (PDR) or in the 1705 *Rule*. The absence of chapter 18 in the 1718 *Rule* is not an error. This table is based on the one in CL 25, 163–164.

b. The Brothers take over complete responsibility for the Institute (1717–1719)

The election of Brother Barthélemy and the two Assistants represented an important change for the Institute. For the first time, in accordance with De La Salle's wishes, the responsibility for the Institute was entirely in the hands of the Brothers.

De La Salle, however, continued to contribute to the common good of the Institute as long as he lived.

The first Superior General of the Institute

For the Brothers, their new Superior was no stranger. During De La Salle's long absence, the Brothers in the North of France had had regular contact with him. Those in the South had met him on his visit to them before the 1717 Assembly.

In his relations with the Brothers, Brother Barthélemy attached particular importance to the letters he sent them. As an educated person (he had been a pupil of the Jesuits and had studied philosophy and theology), he wrote "with a quite lively and smooth style, with few long sentences" (Rigault 1938, 2:7). His letters gave an especially important place to the spiritual guidance of the Brothers.

Following the directives of the General Chapter which had elected him, the new Superior distributed the Rule revised by De La Salle. In 1718, he sent an initialed copy to all the houses of the Institute.

At the same time, he entrusted to some Brothers the task of revising *The Conduct of the Christian Schools*.

Regarding certain questions, after consulting his Assistants, Brother Barthélemy would ask for De La Salle's help and advice. De La Salle, however, made it very clear he had no intention of taking the place of the new Superior.

At the request of Brother Barthélemy, De La Salle went to Paris in October 1717 to accept a bequest left to him by Louis Rogier, one of the persons involved in the Clément affair, in reparation for the embezzlement in which he had taken part. What should have been a simple formality dragged on for several months. The problem was that De La Salle wanted an article changed in which he was called "Superior of the Brothers of the Christian Schools". Eventually the lawyer acceded to his request. As Blain concluded:

> And so M. de La Salle wrote out his receipt, and accepted what was truly a restitution under the appearances of a gift (CL 8, 157).

When De La Salle handed over the bequest to Brother Barthélemy, "he gave him also a document stating that he withdrew all his claims to it in favour of the Institute" (Maillefer 1, CL 6, 246).

During his stay in Paris, "in order to avoid all the marks of submission, respect and trust" the Brothers would have shown him had he stayed with them, De La Salle took lodgings at the seminary of St Nicolas de Chardonnet. As one of the superiors of the house wrote after De La Salle's death, he had edified them from October 4th 1717 to March 7th 1718 (text in CL 8, 155). Eventually Brother Barthélemy had to insist on De La Salle's return to St Yon. As the biographer tells us, he returned "thirteen months before his death".

As the house at St Yon had been put on the market, Brother Barthélemy asked De La Salle, who was still in Paris, to advise him whether he should buy it or not. In a reply to his letter, dated January 17th 1718, the former Superior wrote in particular the following: "It is not fitting that I should take any part in these matters, since I am of no importance, and you, being the Superior, are the one responsible" (LA 3). All the same, De La Salle was in favour of the purchase and said he would do anything he was asked to regarding it, but he did not want to sway the decision.

As the conditions offered the Brothers were favourable, they were able to buy the house and the surrounding property. The 15,000 livres needed were raised from an investment of 6,000 livres made by De La Salle when he was in Grenoble, from the 5,200 livres from the Rogier bequest, and from savings made by some houses.

When sale contracts were exchanged on March 8th 1718, the documents bore the signatures of Joseph Truffet (Brother Barthélemy) and Charles Frappet (Brother Thomas, Bursar of St Yon). A "declaration", drawn up on the following June 3rd, stated that "the 14 Brothers living in the said house of St Yon at the time the contracts were exchanged" (their names are given) had "all taken part in the acquisition of the said house". This was to make it quite clear that the property was owned in common (document quoted in Rigault 1, 417–418).

On one occasion, De La Salle abandoned his reserve. In a letter to Brother Gabriel Drolin, dated February 18th 1718, Brother Barthélemy describes a plan he has in the following words:

> It looks very much as if we shall soon have an establishment in Canada. We hope to be able to do this with the support of the Prince. He has already had the goodness to allocate 3,000 livres annually for the upkeep of the schoolmasters and of

> the new teachers who will be sent. We are asking for permission to train the latter in both France and Canada. This could help us greatly to establish ourselves solidly in France, if the scheme is successful (quoted in Rigault 1937, 1:419).

The plan gradually took shape: four Brothers were chosen by the Superior, and they would be accompanied by one of his Assistants. When the latter went to take his leave of De La Salle, he heard him say, "Oh my God, what are you doing! You are undertaking something that will cause you all kinds of trouble and will end badly!" (CL 8, 153).

These words were enough to stop a hazardous undertaking, for it had been planned to send the Brothers individually to various country parishes, just as De La Salle had feared (cf. CL 48, 296–362).

De La Salle's last contributions to the Institute

Released from all his responsibilities, De La Salle continued to contribute as much as his failing strength would allow, above all spiritually.

The example he gave of an intense life of prayer and a scrupulous regularity, in spite of his increasingly failing health, was a great stimulus to the community.

He continued to exercise his priestly ministry among the Brothers, and to give spiritual direction to those who asked. In particular, he took part in the formation of the novices. The teaching he gave the novices on mental prayer, and which he had developed over a period of time, was later published under the title of *Explanation of the Method of Mental Prayer.*

His zeal extended also to the boarders of the house and, in particular, to those in the "custodial" section, once this was established.

His advanced age (for the times in which he lived) and infirmities convinced De La Salle that his death could not be too far away. When he prolonged his stay at St Nicolas de Chardonnet, and then, when he returned to St Yon, he took advantage of the recollected atmosphere of these houses to prepare for death.

There were also arrangements to be made regarding the goods he still owned, or whose ownership was still made out in his name.

In 1718, a series of legal documents was drawn up:

♦ In August, De La Salle and Brother Barthélemy signed a document which made over to the latter the books from the library De La Salle had stored in the Brothers' house in the parish of St Sulpice (CL 26, 306).

♦ In November, he gave up the ownership of the furniture that was at St Yon in the novitiate house and in the Brothers' community (CL 26, 307).

♦ In September and November, he gave his successor a series of documents concerning various houses of the Institute, for which Brother Barthélemy gave him the appropriate legal receipts (CL 26, 309–313).

In March 1718, in a letter addressed to his brother, Jean Louis, De La Salle stated that he was giving away various goods to the children of his brother Jean Rémy. He asked his brother, whom he addressed as "Monsieur de La Salle, Canon of the Church of Rheims, my brother" to "distribute" these goods as he thought fit. Jean Louis took the necessary steps to ensure his brother's letter had legal value (cf. CL 41-1, 293f).

The goods De La Salle gave away in this way were a bequest he had inherited after he had distributed all his goods in 1684-1685 (cf. CL 41-1, 206 & 227).

The reason why these goods were given to the children of Jean Rémy was because the latter, a former "King's Councillor and his Attorney at the Mint of Rheims", had been institutionalized on account of his insanity. On November 28th 1716, John Baptist, Jean Louis, Pierre and their brother-in-law, Jean Maillefer, the husband of Marie de La Salle, had agreed to help the family of Jean Rémy by each assuming responsibility for a quarter of their living expenses (CL 41-1, 295).

On January 3rd 1719, Jean Louis de La Salle wrote to John Baptist, reminding him that the civil society, which had legal ownership of the Brothers' house in Rheims, now consisted only of themselves, and that there ought to be at least another member. He suggested to him also to make sure by means of a will that the Institute was not deprived of the goods he had "acquired for it in his name". He added that the reason for this was, "so that after you, those who act in the name of the children of my brother, because they are minors, or because their father is infirm, cannot make claims on these goods, and so that there is no ambiguity regarding the ownership [of the houses] (CL 26, 261). When De La Salle drew up his will he took this letter into account.

Four days before his death, De La Salle "wishing, as he said, to draw up a will to tie up any business I may still have" dictated its terms with the following preamble:

> I recommend to God, first of all, my soul and then all the Brothers of the Society of the Christian Schools with whom he has united me, and I recommend to them above all things to have always complete submission to the Church, and especially in these difficult times, and to show that they are not in any way disunited from it, always remembering that I sent two Brothers to Rome to ask God for the grace that their Society would always be faithful to it (CL 26, 286–287).

Next he confirmed all the "transfers and donations" he had signed in favour of Brother Barthélemy, and endorsed all the other documents which had been signed in his favour. Regarding the houses in Rheims, whose purpose he clearly indicated as being "to lodge the Brothers and to conduct schools", he stated:

> I appoint M. Delasalle, my brother, Doctor of the Sorbonne and Canon of the Church of Rheims, and those to whom, with him and after him, the said houses in Rheims will belong, to ensure that they are used according to the purpose indicated in the documents and contracts (CL 26, 288).

He made similar arrangements for the houses in Rethel.

Finally, he stipulated that if "the under-age children of my brother, the King's Attorney at the Mint, or their guardians" were to contest the provisions made, he would withdraw from them the goods he had made over to his brother Jean Louis for their sake (*idem.*).

And so De La Salle, having divested himself of all his material goods, could face the final act of renunciation represented by his death. However, he was not spared one final trial. A representative of the Bishop of Rouen came to tell him that the latter had withdrawn all the faculties he had given him.

It was the latest development in a dispute over parish jurisdiction which had been going on with the parish priests of St Sever since the Brothers had arrived at St Yon. It had begun with Jacques Hecquet and, on his death in 1716, had continued with his successor, Dujarrier Bresnard, who had arrived in the April of the same year. Among the clauses in the agreement drawn up with the first on March 22nd 1706, it was stated that, on Sundays, the Brothers would take their boarders to the High Mass at St Sever (Rigault 1937, 1:399). The presence of certain categories of boarders at St Yon made the application of this clause difficult.

Blain tells us, however, that when the parish priest came to administer the last sacraments to De La Salle (in accordance with the terms of the agreement which was the cause of the dispute) "he was inspired to end the little disagreement he had had with the holy man in charity and peace" (CL 8, 172). Was the cause of their dispute this disagreement or was it something else?

De La Salle was able to get up to celebrate Mass on the feast of St Joseph, whom he had always considered to be the patron of the Institute. It was the last time he was able to officiate.

He began his agony during the night of Holy Thursday and Good Friday. His final words revealed in some way the secret of what had sustained him throughout his life. When

Brother Barthélemy asked him if he accepted the sufferings he was enduring, his reply was, "Yes, I adore in all things the conduct of God in my regard" (CL 8, 174).

His earthly life came to an end on the morning of the day on which the death of Christ the Saviour is commemorated. With him, De La Salle began his Easter, he who had followed and imitated him so closely.

Conclusion

When De La Salle died on Good Friday, April 7th 1719, his Institute was sufficiently well established to continue without him.

As he had had the wisdom to hand over responsibility for the Institute to the Brothers while he was still alive, they were able to put the finishing touches to an undertaking to which their father had consecrated his life.

D.O.M.
HIC
EXPECTAT RESURRECTIONEM
VITAE VENERABILIS
JOANNES BAPTISTA DE LA SALLE
RHEMUS PRESBYTER, DOCTOR THEOLOGUS
EX CANONICUS ECCLESIAE METROPOLITANAE RHEMENSIS,
INSTITUTOR FRATRUM SCHOLAE CHRISTIANAE,
NATALIBUS CLARUS, VIRTUTIBUS CLARIOR.
OBIIT FERIA SEXTA PARASCEVES
DIE SEPTIMA APRILIS ANNO MDCCCXIX
IN AEDIBUS FRATRUM SANCTI YONIS HUJUSCE PAROCHIAE
ANNUM AGENS LXVIII.
DET ILLI DOMINUS INVENIRE REQUIEM IN ILLA DIE.
HOC PIETATIS ET GRATI ANIMI MONUMENTUM
APPOSUIT TAM PIISSIMO PAROCHIANO
LUDOVICUS DU JARRIER BRESNARD, ECCLESIAE RECTOR.

(Here awaits his resurrection John Baptist de La Salle, venerable in life, a priest of Rheims, Doctor in Theology, former Canon of the Metropolitan Church of Rheims, Founder of the Brothers of the Christian Schools. Noble by birth, and nobler still by his virtues. He died on Good Friday, April 7th 1719, in the house of the Brothers of St Yon of this parish, 68 years of age. May God let him find peace on this day. This monument was erected with pious gratitude to its most pious parishioner by Louis Dujarrier Bresnard, parish priest of this church. Epitaph in the church of St Sever, CL 26, 326.)

— Supplement —
Spiritual Writings

The purpose of this supplement is to examine the works and other writings of St John Baptist de La Salle relating in particular to the spiritual dimension of the lives of the Brothers.

Spiritual works properly so-called

The works referred to here are the *Collection* and the writings on mental prayer. The first was edited personally by De La Salle, while the others were published by his successors.

The *Collection*

The complete title of this work is *Collection of Various Short Treatises for the Use of the Brothers of the Christian Schools*. The oldest copies we have of this work date from 1711 and were printed in Avignon. The differences between these various copies indicate that there were successive editions of this work even though the date 1711 was kept.

The note at the end of the text reproduced in CL 15 (118) tells us that the work in question was approved by Pertuys, the Senior Vicar General, and the Inquisitor General, Pierre Lacrampe, representatives of the Pope in Avignon. In those days, the Comtat Venaissin belonged to the Papal States. A reference to this in a letter from De La Salle to Gabriel Drolin enables us to date this approbation as taking place in 1705 (cf. CL 15, VI, n.3).

Even if the manuscript that was approved had not been printed immediately, such an approbation was no doubt important for De La Salle, because it represented a sort of recognition by the Church of the Brothers' form of life.

This small book consists of a collection of short texts De La Salle thought useful for the Brothers. The source of some of these texts has been revealed (in particular in CL 16), and other sections were borrowed from a number of spiritual writers and, in particular, from Nicolas Roland. Other texts are De La Salle's own or adapted by him.

In the most complete edition of the text we find:

- Chapters contained in the Rule or relating to it.
- Sections which are developed in other works.

- Easily memorised lists.
- Considerations regarding various aspects of the Brothers' life.

On the whole, the work is a series of reminders rather than a body of doctrine: by reading only the *Collection* one would not obtain a clear idea of what we can call Lasallian spirituality. By limiting oneself to these texts, one would obtain only a partial idea of what makes a Brother of the Christian Schools what he is.

On the other hand, if this work is accepted for what it is, namely, a complement to the *Rule* (several of the texts printed in 1711 serve as a sort of supplement for the 1705 *Rule*), and a practical means of recalling some principles of the spiritual life, it makes it possible to understand how the Founder of the Brothers envisaged certain aspects of their lives.

Writings on mental prayer

There are three works by De La Salle which have in common the fact that they refer to mental prayer, even though in different ways. The first gives a detailed explanation of the method advocated in the Institute for making mental prayer. The other two works offer reflections intended to inspire the Brothers when performing this exercise.

Explanation of the Method of Mental Prayer

At the end of his life, De La Salle devoted all his failing strength especially to the formation of the novices. An important part of this formation consisted in learning how to make mental prayer. Blain tells us that De La Salle gathered his teachings on this subject in a little book from which he read to the novices (cf. CL 8, 164). The same biographer tells us that apparently he "had the book printed for their use" (CL 8, 287), but to date no copies have been found.

The first edition of the *Explanation of the Method of Mental Prayer* that is known to us is that of 1739. It was printed following a decision made at the 1734 General Chapter. The editors certainly based themselves on material left by De La Salle, but they probably reworked it. And so, even if the authenticity of every single passage is not certain, the work as a whole can be attributed to the holy Founder.

The method of mental prayer advocated by him reflects a certain tradition. In particular it has many points of comparison with the method De La Salle used in the seminary of St Sulpice. However, it is adapted to the specific needs of the Brothers.

For example, one of its characteristics is the importance attached to putting oneself in the presence of God: given the kind of life they led, it was important for the Brothers to renew the motivation for their everyday work by calling to mind the presence of God.

Also the large number of "acts" suggested, in particular to beginners, could also be of help to Brothers who made their mental prayer in often difficult conditions — tiredness and cold in the winter, for example.

These acts were not supposed to be a barrier for the Brothers who, having gone beyond the need for them, had reached the stage of "the simple view of faith" or "simple attention", a stage towards which the method led in the case of those blessed by God.

This work was published in CL 14 and is studied in detail in CL 50.

Meditations for Sundays and Feasts

A few years after the death of the Founder, a work was published in Rouen entitled *Meditations for all the Sundays of the Year with the Gospels for all the Sundays*, by M. John Baptist de La Salle, Doctor of Theology, Founder of the Brothers of the Christian Schools.

There was a second part to the same work, entitled *Meditations on the Principal Feasts of the Year* (cf. CL 12, Introduction).

No date is given, but on the only first edition copy we know of we read: "For the Brothers of the Christian Schools, Nogent le Rotrou, 1731". The work was published before this date therefore, but not before 1726 (cf. CL 47, 3–4).

As the first part was explicitly attributed to De La Salle, one can take it for granted that he was the author of the second part too.

The Meditations for Sundays are preceded by the Gospel of the day. The Gospel passage serves as a jumping off point for some considerations on a spiritual theme connected with the passage, rather than as a commentary on it.

As a general rule, following the considerations on the chosen theme, Brothers are invited to apply to themselves what has been said. Sometimes there are no considerations and the Gospel itself provides the stimulus for reflection.

In the Meditations for Feasts, the subject matter for the feast of the day is always developed in preparation for the second part of mental prayer. This development is followed by reflections intended to lead to a final application.

While the subject matter may seem to reflect the age when it was written, the applications suggested, on the other hand, are most often quite relevant for our times.

These Meditations have been published in CL 12 and are studied at length in CL 47.

Meditations for the Time of Retreat

In Rouen also, a work was published for the first time, entitled *Meditations for the Time of Retreat, for the use of all persons who are employed in the education of young people, and in particular,*

for the retreat which the Brothers of the Christian Schools make during the holidays, by M. John Baptist de La Salle.

The date of publication is not given, but a passage in the introduction to the *Meditations for Sundays and Feasts* indicates that the *Meditations for the Time of Retreat* were published before them. This work must have been published then in 1730 or a year or two previously.

De La Salle seems to find his inspiration for this work in the basic themes of a similar work written by Fr Giry and inspired by the spirit and writings of Fr Barré. The *Meditations* written by De La Salle, however, draw to a greater extent on the epistles of St Paul, which he quotes in numerous passages.

The 16 *Meditations* go in pairs: the first is more doctrinal, while the second is more practical and constitutes a sort of application of the first.

A foreword to the *Meditations* tells us that M. de La Salle "thought it appropriate for the Brothers of the Institute of the Christian Schools to make them the subject of the afternoon mental prayer on the eight days of the retreat that they make each year during the time of the holidays, so that they may realise the greatness of their employment and the need they have to acquit themselves well of such a holy Ministry, and to fulfil faithfully all its obligations" (CL 13, 3).

In most cases, the three points of each Meditation include two different parts. The first offers reflections based generally on the doctrine of St Paul. The second invites those making mental prayer to apply to themselves what is said in the first part.

These Meditations have been published in CL 13. CL 1 studies the New Testament quotations in them, and CL 46 bases its study on them in order to define what the Founder "understands by the evangelical foundation of his existence and that of his Brothers" (CL 45, 358).

Other writings of a spiritual nature

There are also other writings by De La Salle of a spiritual nature. We have examined some of these already, but there are still others which deserve to be looked at.

The *Rules*

The purpose of the *Rules* is above all to specify the obligations of a life lived in a religious community. Consequently, we can say that those of the Brothers, taken as a whole, are a part of the spiritual writings of the holy Founder.

However, they also include some chapters that are more obviously of a spiritual nature. There are chapters, for example, which refer :

- to the meaning of the Institute, established for the salvation of abandoned children (chapter 1);

♦ to internal coherence with what constitutes the evangelical mission of the Institute: faith and zeal, whose source is the Gospel (chapter 2);

♦ to the evangelical style of educational relations (chapter 7) and relations between Brothers (chapters 13 and 16).

Letters

We have a certain number of De La Salle's letters. Most of them are answers from the Founder to the letters that the Brothers had to write to him regularly "to give an account of their conduct" according to a "directory" which was in an appendix to the *Collection* (CL 15, 122–123 = RD 1).

The answers given follow the list of topics in the "directory". Consequently, these refer mostly to the spiritual requirements of the personal and community life of the Brothers, as well as to their professional and apostolic activities.

> The present work does not include a detailed study of these letters. On the other hand, they are quoted on a number of occasions. It has to be said that those which have been preserved represent only a fraction of the Founder's correspondence with the Brothers. While those we have may lead us to think so, there is, in fact, no way of knowing whether they are representative of his correspondence as a whole.
>
> The study of these letters by Br Felix Paul has lost none of its value. It can be found in Circular 335 and in the work entitled *Les Lettres de Saint Jean-Baptiste de La Salle*, édition critique, Paris: Procure Générale, 1954.
>
> An English edition of the letters by Br Colman Molloy appeared in 1988, and an Italian edition by Br Serafino Barbaglia appeared in 1993. Both works have abundant notes. The Italian edition has many notes on the letters to Gabriel Drolin.

Catechetical and pedagogical works

Apart from their inherent interest, which was assessed in a previous supplement, these works were often of a nature that one could qualify as spiritual.

While *The Duties of a Christian* was composed to help Brothers teach catechism, this work provided them also (in its continuous prose version) with nourishment for their faith, and a stimulus to practise the Gospel and the teachings on the virtues, prayer and liturgy.

In the *Rules of Politeness* the Brothers learnt how to regulate human relations and social behaviour in an evangelical way in a given social situation. The Preface of this work has the following to say:

> It is a surprising thing that most Christians regard politeness and civility as a purely human and worldly quality and, not raising their thoughts higher, they do not consider it as a virtue which has to do with God, our neighbour and ourselves (CL 19, I = RB 0, 01).

The Conduct of the Christian Schools develops in a certain sense the prescriptions of the *Rule* relating to school. It seeks to make the Brothers permeate with an evangelical spirit the way they act and relate to their pupils. And so, in a work that was previously considered to be strictly pedagogical, we find teachings which reflect those included in spiritual texts properly so called. We note, for example:

- how the instructions regarding the keeping of certain registers (cf. especially CL 24, 236 = CE 13, 4, 1) require the Brother to know each of his pupils individually. The evangelical basis for this is given in the Meditation for Good Shepherd Sunday (MD 33);
- how what is treated at length in *The Conduct* regarding "correction" is reflected in a prescription of the 1718 *Rule* (cf. CL 25 38–40 = RC 8); or how the 12th *Meditation for the Time of Retreat* supports the text of *The Conduct* (cf. CL 24, 151–152 = CE 15, 3) by stressing that "corrections" must be applied in a Christian spirit.

Personal writings or autobiographical memoirs

Among the writings of De La Salle which have come down to us or which we know through Blain, the formulas of vows, whose importance we have already assessed, are a kind of résumé of the Founder's spiritual thinking.

The supplement devoted to the *Memoir on the Beginnings* showed clearly how this autobiographical text of De La Salle revealed the spiritual viewpoint which inspired his actions in the very early stages of what was to become the Institute of the Brothers of the Christian Schools.

Another biographical text which was preserved for us by Blain is what De La Salle called *Rules which I have imposed upon myself.* This text helps us to understand how its author intended to accomplish his task in order to respond to God's expectations as faithfully as possible. Certain elements in this text can be found also in the spiritual teachings the Founder gave his Brothers (cf. CL 45, 250f).

Conclusion

What we have given here is simply a descriptive introduction to these texts. It should be considered only as a useful introduction to the further study of the spiritual teachings to be found in these writings of De La Salle. The scope of this supplement is too restricted for us to undertake this task ourselves.

11 The Brothers Complete the "Establishment" of the Institute (1719–1726)

Introduction

After the death of De La Salle, Brother Barthélemy continued as head of the Institute. In 1720, Brother Timothée took over from him as Superior General.

During this period, urged on by its Superiors, the Institute continued the work of the Founder.

At the same time, Brother Timothée concluded negotiations to obtain official recognition for the Institute and so brought about the definitive "establishment" of the Institute.

First years after the death of De La Salle

It is easy to understand that Brother Barthélemy felt deeply the loss of the one he had to replace at the head of the Institute. We are given an idea of his feelings in a letter he wrote to a Brother:

> It was not without reason that you shed tears when you heard of the death of our very dear Father. I do not think there was a single Brother who could resist doing so. It was a very natural reaction. However, my dear Brother, when all is said and done, we have to recognise that this was God's holy will. Having given him to us for as long as was his pleasure, he then took him away to reward him for his labours and his holy life. We have to accept this and submit to his divine will. The holy Apostles of Our Lord were very sad also to be deprived of the visible presence of their divine Master, but he consoled them by saying: It is for your good that I go, for unless I go, the Holy Spirit will not come down upon you (CL 8, 180).

The death of De La Salle deprived Brother Barthélemy of his support and caused him to rely more on his Assistants. Blain tells us that, as they did not live with him at St Yon, "he was not content to consult his Assistants frequently by letter, but went often to Paris and Rheims where they lived to decide with their help what to do in difficult situations" (CL 8, ab 22).

It was not long, however, before Brother Barthélemy's work as Superior and especially his journeys took their toll of his fragile health, and he died on June 8th 1720, at 42 years of age.

The two Assistants announced the death of their Superior to the Brothers and called a General Chapter to elect his successor.

The General Chapter was held at St Yon. It was attended by 17 Directors who elected the new Superior on August 7th 1720. Agreement had been quickly reached regarding the choice of a successor: the Director of the house at Avignon, Brother Timothée. The two Assistants were confirmed in their position.

The capitulants adopted also a number of measures, one of which was no doubt inspired by the rapid decease of Brother Barthélemy:

> Given the heavy burden of mental and physical work of our dear Brother Superior of the Institute, he will take particular care to preserve his health and will follow the advice of the Brothers appointed for this purpose regarding this, for the greater good of the Society. He will normally travel by horse or coach (quoted in Rigault 1938, 2:44).

When De La Salle made his journey to the South of France in 1712–1714, he had been much impressed by Brother Timothée's ability to cope with difficulties. In addition to his work in Avignon, he was also Visitor for the houses in the South of France. As a consequence, he was very well informed regarding the most far-flung communities of the Institute.

Brother Timothée was deeply attached to De La Salle. When he took over as head of the Institute, he was relatively young, only 38 years of age, and he remained in office till the middle of the 18th century.

There are two factors in particular which had an effect on the history of the Institute in the first few years after the death of De La Salle.

Repercussions of the "problem of the day"

Brothers Barthélemy and Timothée were both involved in the aftermath of the publication of the Bull *Unigenitus* in France, in which Pope Clement XI condemned Jansenism.

A short while before his death, De La Salle had had to protest in a letter, dated January 28th 1719, against the allegations of the Dean of Calais that another De La Salle (possibly his brother, Canon Jean Louis), who supported the Jansenists, was the Founder of the Brothers (cf. CL 8, 224).

Brother Barthélemy showed a similar firmness against the Jansenists. In this connection, he publicised as much as he could De La Salle's will and testament (at least the first part).

Two notorious opponents of the Bull *Unigenitus*, the parish priest of Calais and the Bishop of Boulogne, reproached the Brothers for not going along with their views. Brother Barthélemy went to Calais to explain his position to the Dean (cf. Rigault 1938, 2:23). He wrote also to the Director of the community in Calais to remind him how he had always firmly opposed the Jansenists, in spite of the allegations of a certain Brother Romuald to the contrary (letter kept in the Institute archives and quoted in Rigault 1938, 2:24–27).

In answer to Mgr de Langle, who had complained about the Brothers in his diocese and had threatened to forbid them to teach, Brother Barthélemy replied with great deference and without indulging in polemics:

> However, our Brothers in Calais and Boulogne have informed me that they did not do all the things persons prejudiced against them have accused them of doing (CL 8, ab 33).

It was not long before Brother Timothée, in his turn, had his first conflict with the Bishop of Boulogne. On April 4th 1722, the latter informed the Brothers in his episcopal city that he was withdrawing from them the right to teach, and that he was replacing them by some Brothers from Paris, founded by a certain Abbé Tabourin, who supported the Jansenist cause. This seems to be the same person referred to by Blain when he wrote of "M. de La Salle's courage . . . in declaring himself opposed to the new doctrines" (cf. CL 8, 219). Believing that they had been treated unjustly, the Brothers of the Christian Schools appealed to royal authority. On May 27th 1722, they were reinstated in the schools of Boulogne (cf. Rigault 1938, 2:34ff).

Expansion and consolidation of the school apostolate

In the period that we are studying in this chapter (1719–1726), the *Register of the Brothers of the Christian Schools* shows that admissions to the novitiate were relatively higher than in preceding periods:

1720 — 9 1721 — 13 1722 — 12 1723 — 14 1724 — 18

Not all who entered persevered (cf. CL 3, 29), and not all made vows at the end of the novitiate. It was possible, however, to meet the needs of various persons who wished to provide instruction and education for boys who had none available.

In **1719**, Brother Barthélemy was personally involved in concluding negotiations which led to the opening of a school in St Omer. It was on the initiative of the local Bishop that the school was opened. As Blain tells us, the Bishop had discussed the matter with De La Salle when the latter visited Calais and Boulogne in 1716.

In **1721**, the Brothers were invited to Nantes by a magistrate of the Financial Court of Brittany. However, he had thought that funds offered by certain charitable persons would be enough for the upkeep of the teachers. In 1724, he was obliged to seek the help of the town authorities (cf. Rigault 1938, 2:51).

In **1723**, a school was opened in Auxonne (on the borders of Burgundy and Franche Comté), mostly thanks to the generosity of the brother of Cardinal de Bissy. When the latter was Bishop of Meaux, he had provided the Brothers with a very flattering testimonial letter, at the request of the Secretary of the "Congregation of the Council" (see below).

In the same year, a school was opened in Nogent le Rotrou, in the diocese of Chartres, thanks to a canon of the cathedral, the Archdeacon de Vendôme (cf. Rigault 1938, 2:52).

In places where the Brothers had been for a certain time, they had the assurance of being able to do their work without disturbance.

In 1722, at St Denis, the sister of the original founder of the school, wishing "to help the poor children . . . of St Denis in France, and through education, to procure for them the means to earn their livelihood", gave a house to the Brothers, in the person of Jean Boucton (Director of the community of St Denis) and Jean Jacquot (Director of the Paris community).

That same year, the Brothers acquired a house in Paris on the rue Neuve Notre Dame des Champs, called the "House of the Holy Spirit" (after the name of the congregation which had occupied it previously), to serve as a permanent location for the Brothers' community (cf. Rigault 1938, 2:56).

At St Yon, where the continued use of the property was guaranteed by Letters Patent obtained in 1724, the Brothers were able to pursue their educational work in all tranquillity. Moreover, the goodwill of the new Archbishop was shown, for example, by the permission he gave for the Blessed Sacrament to be kept permanently in the chapel, and for the Superior General to choose confessors for the house.

When finally in 1727, an agreement was reached between the parish priest of St Sever and the Brothers, the chapter was finally closed on the conflict regarding jurisdiction which had saddened the final moments of De La Salle's life.

This, however, belongs to the second volume of this history, which will be devoted to the 18th century.

What was most important for the Institute during this period was undoubtedly the steps taken to secure the official approval of the Institute and the successful conclusion of this process.

Definitive establishment of the Institute

We have mentioned on more than one occasion that the lack of official recognition was a great disadvantage for the Institute. It had finally overcome the various difficulties caused by this situation, but nonetheless, when De La Salle died, the basic problem still remained.

With regard to civil law, the position of the Brothers was not much different from that of other schoolmasters: they were totally dependent on those who required their services. The fact they belonged to a "Society" gave them no rights in their regard.

For the Institute to function, it needed a central organisation which formed a separate entity from the schools, and which was independent of the generosity of the benefactors which supported them. It needed to obtain legal status in order to be able to acquire and possess the goods it needed. For example, the expedient used to purchase the property of St Yon was too risky: after the death of Brother Barthélemy, Brother Thomas was the legal owner of St Yon. As the law stood, were he to die, the property could fall "into the hands of outsiders" (cf. Rigault 1938, 2:66).

In a diocese, each Brother in the community had an authorisation from the Bishop to exercise his apostolic mission in an area in which the parish priest also had certain powers. While all this was justifiable, it nevertheless left the Institute vulnerable to possible outside interference in its internal organisation.

What is more, the approval of the civil authorities was indispensable if the Brothers were to be recognised as a "religious community". The Edict of 1666, which still stood, made the foundation of any new "religious or secular" community dependent on royal approbation and on the possession of sufficient real estate (document quoted in Rigault 1938, 2:58).

The Brothers whose services were already approved locally by royal authority (for example, in Alès, Calais and Versailles) needed to be able to pursue their activity among poor children as members of a "community body". At the same time, however, they needed the approval of the pontifical authorities before this "community body" could qualify as a "religious Society".

The first steps

In 1713, while De La Salle was still alive, an attempt had been made in Rheims to obtain **Letters Patent**, which would give their Society the same legal status as an individual person (cf. CL 36, 324). It was Brother Timothée, however, in connection with St Yon, that set a process in motion in 1721 that would eventually reach a successful conclusion.

With the support of the various authorities in Rheims, the Brothers received a favourable response from the *Chancelier** (Chancellor) d'Aguesseau. The Duc d'Orléans, however, opposed the measure. As Regent of the Kingdom during the minority of Louis XV, he refused his permission or postponed the decision three times in the period 1721–1722 (cf. CL 8, 186–187).

In 1721, Cardinal de Rohan was due to go to Rome. Brother Barthélemy had already been in contact with him thanks to a Brother who had once been in the service of the Rohan family (cf. CL 8, 189). Brother Timothée and some of his close collaborators tried to take advantage of this journey to begin **negotiations with the Holy See**. Their request never reached the Cardinal, but was favourably received by the Abbé Jean Vivant, adviser to the Cardinal de Rohan.

That is why Jean Vivant received a letter from the Brothers during his stay in Rome, which said in particular, "We would like His Holiness to have the goodness to grant us Bulls indicating his approval for our rules, following the ordinary's agreement" (quoted in CL 11, 123). The letter listed also all the documents that were enclosed.

The visit of Cardinal de Rohan and Canon Vivant to Rome came to an end without anything having been done to satisfy the Brothers' wishes. "On his return to Paris, he [Jean Vivant] requested one of his friends, a *chargé d'affaires* to the Holy See, to deal with the matter" (CL 8, 190). This could not have been before February 1722.

> When the Brothers spoke of their intention to obtain "Bulls" from the Sovereign Pontiff, in their letter to Canon Vivant, they showed that they were well informed. They needed to obtain "not a congregational decree, which would have no authority in the dioceses of France, but a Pontifical document, a Brief or a Bull, entitled to endorsement by a Parliament court" (CL 11, 156). Such an endorsement would make it possible for a document of this nature to have legal value in the Kingdom of France.

The Brothers' dossier was entrusted to Joseph Digne, a French *expéditionnaire** who was to present their request in the form of a petition.

It seems that, after making enquiries, this "expéditionnaire" realised that the Holy See would not approve the Institute of the Brothers if they did not pronounce the three tradi-

tional vows of religion. It seems that, some time in 1722, he suggested to the Brothers dealing with this matter to include a mention of the vows of poverty and chastity in the summary of their rules (cf. CL 11, 159–160). As Blain says, "News had come from Rome that the Holy See would refuse its approbation for the Rules if they did not decide to make the three vows of religion" (CL 8, 191).

In August 1722, the petition and the dossier that accompanied it were submitted for scrutiny by the Sacred Congregation of the Council, that is, by the group of cardinals responsible for examining questions related to the decisions of the Council of Trent.

The secretary of this Congregation asked for a certain number of approbations for the submitted "statutes" to be furnished by Bishops, so that they could be included in the dossier. Brother Timothée and his collaborators hastened to see that that this was done. And then suddenly, the smooth progress of the negotiations was blocked.

In the final months of 1722, **two sets of negotiations** undertaken by the Brothers came to a standstill.

In France, the third attempt to secure the Regent's agreement failed in spite of a favourable decision by his council (CL 8, 187).

In Rome, the Abbé de Tencin, the King's representative at the Papal Court, "ordered those requesting the Bulls for the Brothers to suspend any further action till the King had given them Letters Patent" (CL 8, 191). In fact, without the Letters Patent the Brothers could not obtain a Bull of Approbation from the Pope, and such a Bull would have no value in France unless it was officially "registered".

Throughout 1723 and part of 1724, negotiations remained at a standstill.

Conclusion of negotiations

As regards the **Letters Patent**, the death of the Regent, Prince Philippe d'Orléans, on December 2nd 1723 removed the only obstacle.

A request submitted to the King's Council by the Archbishop-elect of Rouen, Mgr de Tressan, encountered no opposition. (As Bishop of Nantes, this Bishop had given his approbation to the Brothers' "statutes".) The official document that resulted, dated September 28th 1724, besides giving the Brothers the right to own St Yon and "the possibility of possessing all the funds and bequests which were made to them", gave them also legal existence as a properly constituted body.

Meanwhile in Rome, after the election of the new Pope, Benedict XIII, **negotiations started again**.

In July 1724, the dossier which had been waiting in the Secretariat of the Congregation of the Council, was passed on to Cardinal Corsini so that he could "present it to the Sacred Congregation".

The Cardinal presented his report to the Congregation during the session held on December 16th 1724. The report was approved, and on January 26th 1725, the Pope was able to sign the "petition" which had been submitted to him in the name of the Brothers. The text which had been approved was then written out in the form of a Bull during the month of February.

Various consequences of these decisions

Before **the two documents** could have the force of law in the Kingdom, they **had to be registered** (*enregistrer**) by the competent law courts.

Even though the Letters Patent of 1724 had been registered by the Parlement of Normandy on March 2nd 1725, the various claims made by the parish priest of St Sever, who was unhappy to see some of his parishioners escape from his jurisdiction, provoked the opposition of the "Court of Accounts, Aid and Finances" of Normandy, which also was affected by the royal edict. In the end, Brother Timothée was advised to appeal to the "King's State Council". This Council overturned the decision of the Court of Normandy, and restored the full authority of the Letters Patent (cf. Rigault 1938, 2:101ff).

The formalities regarding the Bull were simple. Once the King had given the order, the Parlement of Normandy registered it on May 12th 1725.

It now remained for the Brothers to **consider the consequences of these decisions.** This they did at a meeting of the "principal Brothers", held at the residence of the Superior General, that is, St Yon, and which began on August 9th 1725.

It was the members of this General Chapter who officially accepted the Bull of Approbation in the name of the Institute as a whole.

The Chapter made a certain number of decisions to bring the Institute into line with the pontifical text. The Brother Assistants would now have to live with the Superior General. For this position, the Chapter chose Brother Irenée, the Director of novices, and Brother Joseph, who was reappointed and became Director of the house of St Yon.

The *Rules and Constitutions* of the Institute had to be revised to bring them into line with the terms of the Bull. This work of revision was spread over 32 sessions, and the text that was finally approved by the Chapter was published in 1726.

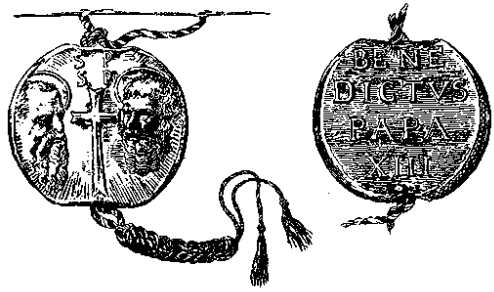
Also during the 1725 Chapter, on August 15th, the Vicar General, representing the Archbishop of Rouen, received the vows of the capitulants. It was the first time that vows were pronounced according to a formula in conformity with the Bull.

> The formula used included obviously the vows of poverty and chastity, as well as the vow "to teach gratuitously", as mentioned in the Bull.
>
> The so-called heroic clause of the 1694 formula had already disappeared. It seems that the Brothers removed it lest the civil authorities consider them to be a new mendicant order (cf. Rigault 1938, 2:114, note 4).

The capitulants took the opportunity also to use the authority of the Letters Patent in order to transfer to the Institute the goods acquired in the name of various Brothers at St Denis, Paris and, of course, at St Yon in Rouen.

To the transfer documents, Brother Timothée and his Assistants added a "general declaration" according to which "all that is given or acquired in the future remains for the benefit of the said community, in conformity with the Bulls and Letters Patent, as dated above, and the decision of the Council [of State] made as a consequence" (quoted in Rigault 1938, 2:113).

The houses owned in Rheims for the "benefit and preservation" of the schools, as well as those in Rethel, remained the property of the society that Pierre de La Salle, brother of John Baptist, had reconstituted on January 2nd 1725 (cf. CL 37, 59).



The seal of the Bull *In apostolicae dignitatis solio.*

— Supplement —
The Bull of Approbation

Although we have already described the various steps taken to secure official recognition for the Institute in the form of a Papal Bull, it seems a good idea to take a closer look at the document. We shall concentrate on two points in particular:

- The process of drawing up the document.
- Its significance.

The process of drawing up the document

From the very beginning of their negotiations with the Abbé Jean Vivant, the Brothers had made it clear that their intention was to obtain recognition for their Institute by the Sovereign Pontiff, and to see his intentions expressed in the form of Bulls which referred explicitly to their *Rules*.

The process leading to the acquisition of a Bull involved a number of steps beginning with the submission of a "petition" to the Roman Curia. Next the petition was examined by a "Congregation" of Cardinals and finally was signed by the Pope. The petition served as the basis for the text of the Bull properly so called.

Drawing up the petition

The petition submitted in the Brothers' name in 1722 was drawn up by Joseph Digne, one of the French *expéditionnaires** officially charged with this work. The petition was drawn up on the basis of a summary of the *Rules* of the Institute provided by the Brothers.

Using the summary, Joseph Digne, among other things, drew up 18 articles which he submitted as being the *Constitutions* of the Brothers (cf. CL 11, 172).

Although these articles were drawn up on the basis of the information provided by the Brothers themselves, they sometimes differed from the Institute documents then in force. For example, article II says that the Divine Child Jesus is the patron of the Institute, which is not supported by any other documents. Several articles dealing with the government of the Institute mention provisions which were not in force at the time.

The biggest difference occurred in article IX which added the vows of poverty and chastity to the vows already pronounced by the Brothers. This was an important addition to the original texts submitted by Brother Timothée. The reason for this addition was explained in the last chapter.

The way the *Constitutions* of the Brothers were presented gave the impression that the *Rule* of the Institute consisted simply of the 18 articles included in the petition. The truth was, of course, that the summary the Brothers had provided was simply an extract from their *Rule*.

It seems that, when the Brothers drew up the summary, they bore in mind the advice they had been given in order to facilitate the acquisition of the document they sought. With this in mind, they thought it preferable to insist in particular on the purpose of their Institute, which was the Christian education of poor children. On the other hand, they avoided giving the impression they were in any way connected with "Religious Orders". Regarding the vows they pronounced, they had to make it clear that these were not the "solemn" vows taken by the major Orders.

After listing the 18 articles, the author of the petition goes back to the standard phraseology of such documents. In the **clauses**, however, he includes two provisions which the Brothers considered important. One was the right to keep the goods already acquired by the Institute, and to acquire and own others "canonically". The other prevented Brothers leaving the Institute without the permission of the Superior General (cf. CL 11, 211).

The petition ended with a **summary** that was intended to catch the attention of the examiners. It included material that was thought most likely to win their support for the dossier submitted in the Brothers' name. It included the following:

> Years ago, in 1680, the pious servant of God, the late John Baptist de La Salle . . . founded in the city of Rheims . . . an Institute called "Brothers of the Christian Schools", whose Brothers were obliged to observe the simple vows of chastity, poverty, obedience, stability in the said Institute, to teach the poor gratuitously, and to observe the other things prescribed in the Constitutions. This Institute has spread to a number of dioceses in the Kingdom of France with the approval of the local ordinaries (for the French translation of the Latin text, see CL 2, 111).

Examination by the Congregation of the Council

Once drawn up, the Brothers' petition was sent to the Sacred Congregation of the Council. We have already mentioned that the Secretary of the Congregation asked for documents from a number of Bishops, confirming that the *Constitutions* submitted were actually practised by the Brothers. Brother Timothée or his representatives wasted no time in obtaining these documents.

For two years, negotiations remained at a standstill. Blain speaks of "almost four years", but his calculations refer to the whole period of negotiations, spring 1721 to the end of January 1725. This is not the place to discuss the reasons for this delay.

When the examination of the dossier was restarted at the end of July 1724, the Secretary of the Congregation of the Council asked Cardinal Corsini to draw up a report on the question for examination by the other cardinals of the Congregation.

The only information about the Brothers that the cardinal had consisted of the 18 articles and some historical facts provided by the petition. His attention was drawn to one point in particular: the Brothers had been founded and their community organised in view of a specific apostolate, namely, the teaching of Christian doctrine. The statutes submitted for his scrutiny "had therefore no other purpose except that of ensuring a good distribution of the work and more efficient teaching. Since everything was being done with complete compliance with the wishes of the ordinaries, there was no need for Rome to go deeply into the rules already approved by the competent prelates". (CL 11, 273)

This way of perceiving the Brothers led Cardinal Corsini to consider them similar to the Confraternity of the Christian Doctrine in Rome, which he knew personally. This was a factor that made him favourable to the Brothers.

The report he drew up as a consequence met with no objections from the 12 cardinals he submitted it to at the session of the Congregation held on December 16th 1724. (It was one of the 140 or so questions examined that day). The session was attended by Cardinal de Polignac, the representative of the King of France in Rome. His approval is noted in the dossier, where it says "recommended by the most eminent Polignac". His influence should not be exaggerated, however, if only because so little time was spent on examining the question (cf. CL 11, 285). Pope Benedict XIII signed the document on January 26th 1725. The Bull could now be drawn up.

It is worth noting how the Bull is dated:

"Given in Rome, at St Peter's, on the 7th of the Kalends of February, the 1,724th year since the Incarnation of Our Lord, the first of our Pontificate".

According to an ancient tradition, the day marking the beginning of the year was the Annunciation, March 25th, because that day marked the beginning of the human life of the Son of God.

Its significance

Immediate significance

As the text of the Bull repeated essentially the contents of the petition submitted to the Cardinals for examination and to the Pope for signature, the approbation and confirmation of the Sovereign Pontiff referred explicitly to these contents.

Since the petition had been phrased in the way it was to facilitate the acquisition of the Bull, it concentrated more on the apostolic purpose and the organisation of the Institute than on "the almost religious nature of the life of the Brothers, although the simple vows are mentioned" (CL 11, 300).

The Bull "confirmed with its authority the mission of the Brothers. It made it official and public" (Sauvage 1962, 818). Even if Cardinal Corsini's report limited this mission to the teaching of catechism in the "Sunday Schools", in the Bull it was defined clearly.

The 17th paragraph says clearly that catechism is taught daily, and the first, that "the Brothers should above all take care to teach children, especially the poor, to live in a good and Christian way".

If the reference to the teaching of the "humanities" at the beginning of the Bull hardly described the work of the Brothers in the 17th century, the Bull did go on to mention the teaching of reading, writing, spelling and arithmetic. These references showed quite clearly that the Brothers' apostolate was in the schools.

The 18 articles that were explicitly approved included all the essential points:

- gratuity of teaching (5);
- association in order to conduct schools and the obligation of having at least two Brothers in a community (6);
- the lay character of the Brothers (7).

The Bull also recognised that the Institute was organised as a hierarchical and centralised society, and defined it in some detail.

Besides making the addition of the two vows of poverty and chastity official, the Bull also approved the vows pronounced up till then, even though one of them was described as a vow "to teach the poor gratuitously".

Since the *Constitutions* of the Institute were thought to be limited to the 18 articles, the approbation and confirmation of the *Rule* by the Bull was limited to these *Constitutions* only. This meant they could not be changed without recourse to papal authority.

Wider significance

When the Brothers received the Bull from Pope Benedict XIII they were in no doubt that, as they had wished, not only the Institute, but the whole of the *Rules* had been approved by the Sovereign Pontiff.

Even though this was not the case, all their *Rules* still remained in force. However, the General Chapter could alter, without any reference to Rome, only those points of the *Rule* which were not mentioned in the Bull.

On the other hand, as Blain says, the approbation given by the Bull fulfilled De La Salle's wish to see his Institute numbered among the "religious Orders" (cf. CL 8, 191) and it was also what the Brothers wanted.

Since, in those days, a religious Order was defined as "a community of religious, living under a Superior, in the same way and wearing the same habit" (Furetière 1701), the Institute of the Brothers could be called a religious Order.

But was the Bull as significant as the biographer maintained? Brother Maurice Auguste Hermans was not so sure when he wrote:

> Borne along by their generous aspirations, victims of a general lack of precision, not trained to read the Bull with the rigour this demanded, our Brothers seem to have given the papal document in 1725 a significance it certainly never had (CL 11, 300).

What can be said is that, as one of the religious Orders of the day, the Institute had a specific character: its members pronounced only simple vows and were all lay.

What can be maintained without any difficulty is, as Brother Maurice Auguste Hermans wrote, that "even though its character is not entirely understood either in the text of the petition, or in Mgr Corsini's report, or in the papal Bull, the latter document certainly gave official approval to the Institute in the form in which De La Salle had created it and in the form it existed in 1722 or so, in 16 dioceses in France" (CL 11, 296).

The biographer Blain understood this well when he wrote:

> Their Rules were approved in the form M. de La Salle had left them, without addition, without limitation, without change, and without any sort of inclusion. This point was very important, and it seems that the holy man feared it might be put to one side. He had good reason to be apprehensive: his *Rule* could not be associated with any other that was of a different nature for, instead of strengthening it, it would change its form and ruin it. (CL 8, 191)

Even if some changes were made in previous practice, the Bull did not change the fundamental nature of the Institute De La Salle and the Brothers had established.

> Even though imperfectly understood by those who had promoted, recommended and then approved it, [the Institute] now had legal standing in the Church. It was for all its members a school of Christian perfection as well as a specialised apostolic fraternity. The papal document respected and even strengthened the indissoluble unity of the life of the Brother of the Christian Schools, consecrated to God by vow for a special task in the Church. It strengthened also the spiritual bonds that were so strong already between the Institute and the canonical state of full Christian perfection. (CL 11, 300)

Conclusion

Now that the Bull of Approbation had been granted, the *Rule* had to be made conformable to it. This led the members of the 1725 General Chapter to undertake the revision of the *Common Rules* of 1718 with a view to having them printed.

Many of the changes made were to do with editing. Some articles were added and the final chapters reworked.

The main change was the introduction of two chapters concerning the vows. The first was entitled "Of the Vows", and the other, "The Obligations of the Vows". Whatever concerned the vows now became, for the first time, part of the *Rule.*

On the whole, however, apart from the addition of the chapters on the vows, the 1726 *Rule* was not very much different from that of 1718. But it marked the beginning of a practice which has continued ever since: the original text was modified in such a way that it was not possible to distinguish what was part of the original text and what had been added.

The new *Rule* appeared in 1726 with the following title: *Rules and Constitutions of the Institute of the Brothers of the Christian Schools, approved by Our Holy Father Pope Benedict XIII.*

The actual text of the *Rule* was introduced by a Preface. There is no reason to believe that it is the work of Brother Timothée. Brother Jean Jacquot who "had the *Rules* printed" (CL 11, 126, note 2) could just as easily have written it.

If we compare this Preface with the writings of De La Salle, we cannot help noticing not only a difference in style, as is to be expected, but also a difference in tone which is noticeable in both the reasoning and the expressions used.

As was proper, this Preface was intended to urge Brothers to be regular. There are some echoes in it of chapter XVI of the *Rule*, but the motives proposed reflect rather the traditional teachings of a variety of spiritual writers.

The text makes much of the fact that the Institute has become a religious Order, a consequence, the Brothers thought, of the papal approbation. The result is that "the thinking of this Preface consists of considerations on religious life in general applied to the particular case of the Brothers of the Christian Schools" (CL 45, 354).

Noticeable also is the importance given to the "vows of religion". The text "insists in particular on the connection between the observance of the *Rules* and fidelity to the three vows" (CL 45, 355)

This difference in emphasis will influence to a certain degree the future history of the Institute. It will be important to pick out signs of it when studying the different periods of this history.

But it will be equally important to note the care the Brothers took to safeguard what was most important in the heritage the Founder left us.

General Conclusion

In 1726, the "Society of the Christian Schools" was fully established, and we can consider that date as marking the end of the period covering the *Origins of the Institute.*

If, having completed our study of this period, we now take an overall view of it, we can say that the creation of the Institute constituted a response to the various needs of the period in which it was founded. Moreover, De La Salle's work proved to be capable of facing a new situation which was already developing during the period in which the Institute came into existence.

Two responses to the needs of an age

In a very direct way, the foundation of the Institute by St John Baptist de La Salle was one of the ways by which the spiritual renewal which marked the 17th century in France reached the ordinary Christian population.

Fired with the spiritual energy of the promoters of the Catholic Reform movement in France, and sharing their apostolic zeal, De La Salle worked side by side with them, concerning himself especially with an area that up till then had remained largely untouched: the Christian education of the children of the poor, at least of the boys, through schools.

Taking advantage of institutional changes which accompanied the Catholic Reform movement, he provided these schools with teachers who dedicated themselves entirely and permanently to them, and who constituted a Society formed exclusively of lay persons totally consecrated to God, so that their work as schoolmasters was a true apostolic ministry.

In a wider context, by the creation of the Institute, De La Salle helped to bring about a number of social changes.

By providing schools that were generally accessible to those who were unable to go to existing schools, he helped to bridge the gap that existed between those who had access to learning and those who were deprived of it.

By opening these schools indiscriminately for those who had no intention of following a course of studies giving access to the liberal professions, he created a type of school which met the needs of families which wanted their children to have an education more easily usable in everyday life.

By providing these schools with teachers who devoted all their time and their whole lives to them, he set in motion the growth of effective popular education, and endowed the profession of schoolmaster with a dignity it had not had up till then.

And yet, while the creation of the Institute met evident needs in both the areas we have referred to, what was most significant about De La Salle's work took place at the meeting point of these two areas.

By wanting, for apostolic motives, the children of the poor to lead lives more in keeping with their dignity as children of God and disciples of Jesus Christ, he gave them at the same time a means to escape more easily from the situation in which they were trapped by their economic and social background.

Believing that a Christian school was not only a place where children were taught religion and made to practise it, he ensured that it was also a place where they could experience Christian life as they went about their school activities.

While he considered the school to be a means of making the salvation of Jesus Christ accessible to the children who were far from it, he did not do so simply in view of the afterlife, but as something to be achieved in daily life. The school was intended to train citizens for the Heavenly City, but also for society here below.

When he suggested to the Brothers to make the Gospel their "first and principal Rule", he wanted them to find in it an ideal to live by, not only within a community of Brothers, but also when exercising their "ministry" and fulfilling their professional duties as schoolmasters.

The ability to face new situations

The period to which the beginning of the Institute belongs was one in which changes began to appear, not only in France but in the whole of western Europe, and "stability began to give way to evolution" (Gil 1994, 180).

It is difficult to know whether De La Salle and the Brothers were aware of these changes whose first impact was on intellectual circles. Whatever the truth of the matter, it can be said that De La Salle's work was not unconnected with the transformation that had begun to take place at the time his Institute was growing.

As Br Pedro Gil says, there is a connection between "the change of outlook in Europe and the foundation of the Brothers' Institute":

> Anyone considering contemporary history will understand that, when the following phenomena all occurred within a period of 50 years, there had to have been a

> connection between them: the definitive adoption of the Copernican view of the universe, the birth of new scientific societies or academies, the redefinition of the French national economic policy, the revolution in physics with Newton and Leibnitz, the tentative birth of new biblical studies with Richard Simon, the monolithic restructurisation of the State after the revocation of the Edict of Nantes, the publication of the *Didactica Magna* of A. Commenius and of the *Dictionnaire Critique* of Pierre Bayle ... and the appearance of the modern primary school. (Gil 1994, 179).

It is clear that the creation of the Christian Schools as envisaged by De La Salle fitted in with the changes that were occurring at the time.

The changes in the material taught and the increase in the number of pupils reached by schools for the ordinary people gave further impetus to the evolution that was beginning in society. The established order that had been accepted was now beginning to be called into question.

These changes also had repercussions in the religious domain.

♦ Greater stress on rationality called traditional beliefs into question: the truths of the Christian faith were shaken.

♦ The encouragement to claim personal freedom led to a lowering of moral standards. This was contained so long as Louis XIV remained alive, but with the advent of the Regent Philippe d'Orleans, it became public.

It is true that these repercussions were felt with some delay by the working class population where the religious renewal movement was still having an effect. However, what was mostly stressed was religious practice rather than a deepening of the faith. The effect of this would be seen when the new ideas reached the Christian population.

Although the practice of religion was considered important in the Christian Schools, the fact that the Brothers were lay resulted in their not placing too much stress on this aspect of Christian life. On the other hand, the care taken over the teaching of doctrine and the concern to make the school a place where Christian life was experienced helped to strengthen the convictions of the pupils.

Not only did the Brothers help to prolong the effects of the religious renewal movement into the 18th century, but they also were able to provide an appropriate answer when the new ideas reached the working class population in the course of the century.

In practical terms, however, to what extent did this potential for good produce results? What really was the impact of the Brothers? This is not the place to assess it. It is one of the things that will be dealt with when we study the history of the Institute in the 18th century.

GLOSSARY

The meaning we give to the words and expressions below is appropriate to this text.

Assignation à comparaître: order given to someone to appear in a court of law to be judged on a fixed date.

Banquier en cour de Rome: *chargé d'affaires* living in France, who alone had the authority to undertake certain negotiations with the Holy See; there were 20 of them in Paris, four in Rouen; the position was created by the Edict of 1673.

Bénéfice: an ecclesiastical function to which were attached certain *bien fonds*.

Bien fonds: landed property whose income was allocated to certain persons.

Bulle: in general terms, an official document with a metal seal; more especially, a solemn declaration of the Pope written on parchment, with a lead seal.

Canonicat: canonry, a *bénéfice* of a canon (see **Prébende**).

Chancelier: strictly speaking, the person in charge of guarding the seals; in a wider sense, the assistant to a public figure, responsible for ensuring the validity of public documents and money. The Chancellor of France is the first of the chief Officers of the Crown and the chief judge, appointed for life.

Chancellerie: there were "various *chancelleries* in the Kingdom where royal documents and letters were sealed. These included edicts, declarations, letters of ennoblement, official recognition, letters of naturalisation, abolition, evocation, permission to print books, etc. The first and the oldest of the chancelleries was that of the Parlement of Paris. It was called the Chancellery of the Palace to distinguish it from the great Chancellery of France" (Marion 1969, 84).

Chanoine: canon, member of the Catholic clergy responsible for the public prayer of the diocese and, in the case of the canons of a cathedral, for advising the bishop; a canonry gave the right to a *prébende* which was often considerable.

Cherté: a considerable increase in prices, especially in food prices.

Clerc: name given to a person who enters the ecclesiastical state by being tonsured.

Cléricature: a word derived from *clerc* describing the condition of those who entered the ecclesiastical state. "The status of clerc was acquired by the tonsure, but the tonsure was not enough to ensure the privileges of the *cléricature*. For that, it was necessary, according to the terms of article 13 of the edict of April 1695, to be a person living as a cleric, 'being present and fulfilling the office, ministry or benefice held in the Church'". (Marion 1969, 94)

Commende: system by which income attached to the exercise of an ecclesiastical function was allocated to persons who did not fulfil those functions; for example, a *commendataire* abbot of a monastery.

Communauté: "a society of men who live in the same place and have the same laws and the same rules. These communities are of two kinds: ecclesiastical and lay. Ecclesiastical communities are either secular or regular" (*Dictionnaire de Trévoux* 1721, 2:37). The term "community" is used also to describe the meeting of several persons constituting a body and being able to discuss and defend their common interests.

Condition: social situation.

Conseil d'État du Roi: the Council of State, called also Privy Council or Council of the Parties, which handed down the private justice of the King as opposed to that of the Common Council represented by the Parlement. It settled disputes between parties, like the modern court of appeal, without making judgments about the matter involved (cf. Marion 1969, 138).

Conseil de Ville: every year, 18 town councillors were elected in Rheims by 120 leading citizens to administer public affairs (general order) for a year (cf. Poutet 1970, 1:89). In 1683, Colbert reduced the powers of mayors, *échevins*, consuls . . . who only too often were bad and dishonest administrators, and forbade them to spend money without there being first a deliberation of an assembly of citizens and written permission from the *intendant* (cf. Marion 1969, 387).

Conseillers du Roi: title given to numerous holders of office in the magistrature (cf. *Dictionnaire de Trévoux* 1721, 2:142).

Corps: an organised professional group. In the 17th century, various terms were used to describe this: "professional guilds", "professions", "guild-mastership", "community". The word "corporation" borrowed from English was not used in France till later, in the 18th and 19th centuries.

Cure: *bénéfice*, the holder of which is responsible for a parish.

Diligence: a boat, or more often, a rapid public coach for travellers.

Échevin: "a town magistrate elected by the citizens of a town to look after common interests" (*Dictionnaire de Trévoux* 1721, 2:1331). In practice, many *échevins* were appointed either by the King, or through the intermediary of his *intendant*, or by the local lord.

Écriture parée: embellished writing used generally in public documents.

Écrivains jurés: writing experts belonging to a guild or a professional association, whose members swore to safeguard their profession.

Écu: ancient coin bearing the French coat of arms. In the 17th century, the "white" écu was a silver coin worth approximately three livres. From 1689 to 1715, the value of the écu varied 43 times between three, four and five livres (Marion 1969, 384).

Enregistrer: make a copy of a document in a public register to give it legal status in a given electoral district (e.g., that of the Parlement).

Exécuteur testamentaire: the person appointed by the one making a will to execute it; executor.

Expéditionnaire français: a person who has authority to draw up documents for French citizens, to be submitted to the Holy See.

Fabrique de Paroisse: property and income intended for the construction and maintenance of a church, or in general, for the running of a parish.

Fonder: (see explanation in box on page 29.)

Gallicanisme: a belief that the French Church and the King were independent of the Holy See in some things.

Hôpital Général: General Hospital; (see explanation in box on page 16.)

Hôpital des incurables: establishment for patients with illnesses no one knew how to cure.

Inamovible: describes a person who holds a position that cannot be taken away from him.

Instance (première): first judgment given by a court, which can be appealed against in a higher court.

Instituteur: (see explanation in box on page xii.)

Intendant: the representative of the King in an electoral district called a *Généralité*, which normally corresponded to a former Province; his powers were greatly increased under Louis XIV.

Interprétation providentialiste: believing that God influences the events of history directly.

Jansénisme: (see explanation in box on page 7.)

Journalier: worker paid by the day and therefore paid only when he found work.

Justaucorps: sort of long jacket.

Legs: bequest in a will.

Lettres de maîtrise: a diploma giving the right to teach or to have apprentices.

Lettres patentes: a royal decision, countersigned by a Secretary of State, giving legal status to certain official documents. Letters Patent had authority only when they were registered by the Parlement of the place to which the decision applied.

Libertins: name given to persons who threw off all the constraints of religion and/or moral laws; by extension, the term was applied to all badly behaved persons.

Lieutenant de police: a representative of civil authority charged with maintaining public order; this position was created in Paris in March 1667 and in the main cities in October 1669.

Livre: a unit of weight varying from province to province (approximately 500 grams). It was also a monetary unit representing the value of a livre of silver and equivalent to a franc. The livre was divided into 20 *sols* or *sous*.

Manouvrier: a labourer; originally, a person working with his hands.

Mémoire: a dossier on a particular subject.

Manufacture: a workshop where several workers are involved in the same manufacturing process.

Office: a public position which was normally acquired by purchase; the person holding the position was called an *officier* (officer).

Ordres: "in a religious context, refers to the different ranks to which the sacrament conferring ecclesiastical power, in particular the priesthood, raises a person" (Rey 1992, 1378); in a social context, see Introduction, page 2.

Parlement: the superior court of justice, which had also political powers (it made decisions about raising or stopping taxes) and administrative powers (registration, public assistance and ecclesiastical discipline).

Parlementaire: a magistrate exercising his function in a Parlement; such a position was often bought for a very high price.

Patrimoine: "the sum total of the property and rights inherited from the father" (Rey 1992, 1452).

Poste: public passenger transport by coach or transport of mail by horse; hence the expression "to travel by post".

Prébende: income attached to a canonry.

Présidial: "association of judges created in large towns to act as a last court of appeal for judgments handed down in lower courts regarding matters of minor value" (*Dictionnaire de Trévoux* 1721, 4:818). The position of a *présidial* judge in 1700 or so had few takers because it brought no honours or benefits.

Profession religieuse: the act by which a religious pronounces his vows, in accordance with the Rules of his Order.

Régent: member of a royal family exercising authority in the name of the King who is still a minor.

Rentes: income; (see explanation in box on page 14.)

Résigner: an ancient term meaning giving up a position in favour of someone else on the condition that the donor survives for 40 days after the *résignation*.

Ressort: "limits of the competence of a judiciary body" (Rey 1992, 1982); also, the electoral district in which this competence is exercised.

Subdélegué: assistant responsible for executing the orders of an *intendant*.

Tenue des livres: drawing up accounting documents.

Tonsure: cutting hair on the crown of the head to show a person belongs to the Catholic clergy.

Tuteur: person responsible for the education and protection of the interests of one or several orphans.

Voeux solennels: vows of religion made in the Regular Orders. In France, in the 17th and 18th centuries, these had the effect of preventing permanently those who made them from exercising certain rights like marrying, inheriting ("civil death").

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