



The Messenger

A LASALLIAN PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT RESOURCE



Famine, Fame and Defamation

Dear friends, welcome to Issue Eleven of "The Messenger" and our final issue for 2014. As always, we begin by answering our discussion questions from the previous issue - Famine, Fame and Defamation. The winter of 1709 was terrible, it led to wide spread famine, food riots in the streets, plundering and pillage, overflowing hospitals, expensive poor quality bread and no meat or vegetables anywhere. The Brothers suffered badly but handled the situation better than most with meagre rations and periodic fasting. A year after the famine, fame of the institute continued to spread and De La Salle was asked to take over the running of the Deer Park School in Versailles. Two young Brothers were tasked with the job but one acquired a taste for the high life and left. This was after De La Salle recognised the approaching situation but the local pastor insisting all was fine and resisting the young Brothers transfer. The pastor learnt his lesson and didn't interfere in JBDLS's decisions again. The last school JBDLS was involved in was Bologne-sur-Mer, a seaport on the English Channel. Many years later, on his return, he was received with great honour and enthusiasm.

The Clement Vendetta was when JBDLS was wrongly accused and dragged through court by a well connected noble family the Clements. Sadly, JBLDS, lost a school and a Brothers residence.

Issue 11: Seclusion in the South

Live Jesus in our hearts and a warm

Merry Christmas!

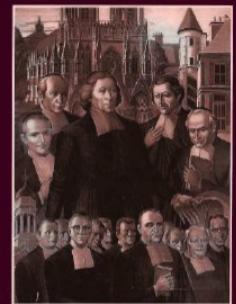
Mr. Kane Raukura

Chairperson - NZMAC

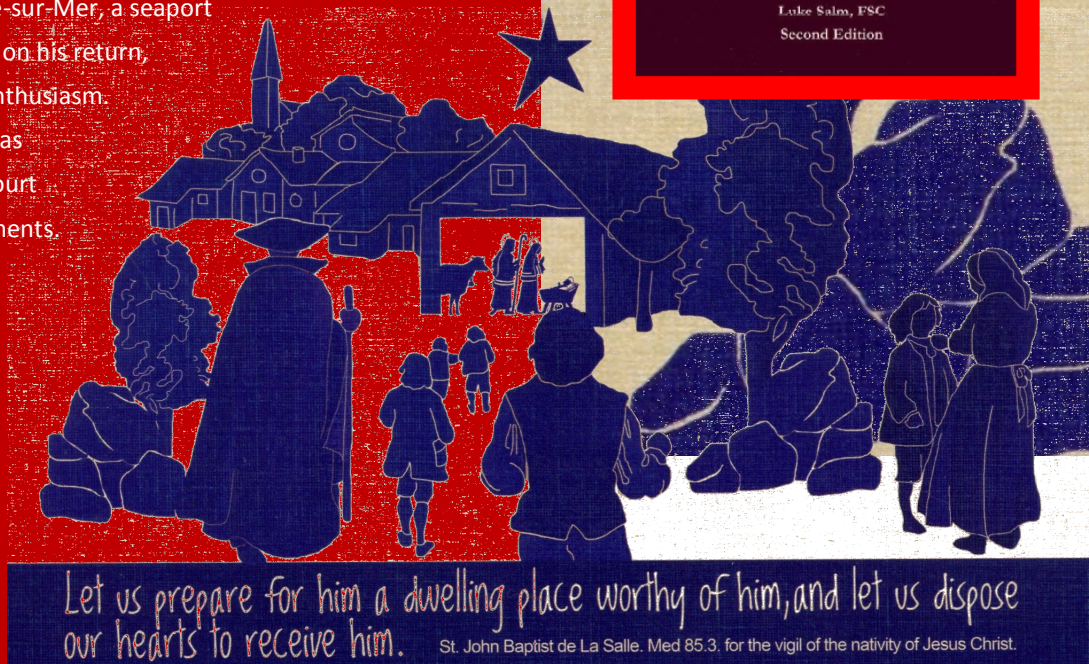
(NZ Mission Action Committee)

THE WORK IS YOURS

The Life of
Saint John Baptist de La Salle



Luke Salm, FSC
Second Edition



Let us prepare for him a dwelling place worthy of him, and let us dispose our hearts to receive him.

St. John Baptist de La Salle. Med 85.3. for the vigil of the nativity of Jesus Christ.

Q1. JBDLS resumed his tours of the South. Why was this difficult and dangerous?

Q2. "God be Blessed, I am back from Rome!" - What was going on here?

Q3. What is the Sainte Baume? And JBDLS decision to withdraw?

Q4. Who was Sister Louise?



Seclusion in the South (1712–1714)

Without waiting for the final judgment in the Clément affair, toward the end of February 1712 De La Salle had abruptly left Paris and headed once more for the foundations in the South. This second journey was to be rather prolonged—it lasted more than two years—and during most of this time the Brothers in Paris did not know where he was. This has raised many questions about the Founder's motives in leaving the Brothers in the North to their own devices at such a critical moment and for such an extended period of time.

There was no need for De La Salle to wait in Paris for the judgment in the Clément trial: it was a foregone conclusion. Without support or defense, betrayed by his own lawyers, already deprived of the right to teach and to train teachers, De La Salle knew well what the verdict would be. The failure of the pastors of Saint Sulpice and Saint Denis to come to his rescue was further evidence that some ecclesiastics in Paris wanted to bring the Society of the Brothers under clerical control. De La Salle himself may have begun to wonder whether his continued presence in the capital was doing more harm than good in the struggle to preserve intact the special character of his Institute.

According to Blain, the Founder's greatest suffering at the moment was caused by the impression he had, which later proved unfounded, that the majority of the Brothers in Paris were beginning to side with those who wanted to impose another form of government on the Society. This suspicion was strengthened when Brother Barthélemy thoughtlessly forwarded to him the court summons in which De La Salle was addressed as the "superior of the Brothers in Reims," not Paris. As Blain puts it: "With a feeling of abandonment by his Brothers, conscious of the silence of Jesus before his accusers, but also blaming no one but himself and thinking only of the good of the Institute, De La Salle left Paris for the South of France at the beginning of Lent in 1712."

Avignon

Toward the end of Lent, De La Salle had arrived in Avignon, where he remained for about a month. He devoted all his time to the Brothers, who received him graciously. His main concern was to encourage them in their vocation and in fidelity to their religious duties. On one occasion he took over the primary class as a replacement for a sick Brother. Each day he said Mass in the church of the Augustinians, only the tower of which still stands today.

There were opportunities to meet with Monsieur Chateau-Blanc, who had been instrumental in bringing the Brothers to Avignon, as well as with the clergy and the notables of the papal city. The Brothers had been so successful in their schools, founded almost a decade earlier, that De La Salle was well received everywhere in the city. Avignon always had a special meaning for the Founder. Not only was it the channel for communication with Rome, but it fostered in him the hope that he might himself some day make the journey to the eternal city. In his history of the Institute, Rigault remarks that the Founder left a piece of his heart in this papal city, which would one day become the center of the Institute in the South of France.

A Difficult and Dangerous Tour of the South

Once he had sufficiently recovered his spiritual and physical forces, and much encouraged by the friendly reception accorded him by the Brothers and the people of Avignon, De La Salle determined to resume the tour of the southern communities that had been interrupted the year before. The Brothers tried to dissuade him by pointing out the perils of such a journey. The terrain to the west was rugged: the steep mountains of the Cévennes were surrounded by high tableland and cut by deep canyons with overhanging cliffs that one had to descend and ascend continually—a journey that still today is difficult over paved roads that did not then exist—to say nothing of undertaking it on foot or even on horseback.

More dangerous still were the roving bands of Camisards, so called for the special shirts they wore identifying them as members of a militant Huguenot force of armed resistance. The route offered endless opportunities for ambush. Travelling priests were a special target for robbery, violence, and sometimes execution.

The first stop was the community at Alès, where Bishop De Saulx, happy at the progress Catholicism was making in his diocese, received the Founder most graciously and attributed the success in large measure to the work of the Brothers in the schools. To express his gratitude, the bishop had just recently provided a new and more comfortable house for the Brothers.

From Alès, De La Salle set out for Les Vans, some 30 miles to the north and deeper into the country of the Camisards. En route he stopped at Gravières, where he stayed at the house of the pastor, Father Pierre Meynier, who was in charge of the legacy left by Father Du Roure, the recently deceased founder of the school at Les Vans. At the time of De La Salle's visit, Father Meynier was the spiritual director for the Brothers in Les Vans. The pastor received the Founder with unusual signs of veneration and respect, for example, reserving for himself the honor of serving the Founder's Mass. This sort of treatment embarrassed De La Salle and, if anything, only served to shorten his visits and make them less frequent.

The stone church at Gravières still stands in the shadows of a high cliff of the Cévennes. In the sacristy there hangs a portrait of De La Salle, discovered in a granary in Les Vans in 1882. The portrait depicts a distinguished-looking person with a serene countenance and wearing secular clothes. When the church acquired the portrait, the pastor at the time, Father Canaud, had it cleaned only to discover at the bottom a legend identifying the subject as John Baptist de La Salle.

The fact that De La Salle was portrayed in secular clothes gave rise to two theories, repeated until recently by the modern biographers, but since proven to be without foundation. At first it was thought that the portrait was evidence that De La Salle travelled through the Cévennes and the Gévaudan disguised as a layman so as to avoid the Camisards. More recently, however, infrared photos reveal that the secular dress was in fact painted over at a later date; underneath, the Founder is visible in soutane and rabat. The other theory was that the portrait was one supposedly painted clandestinely by a retired soldier of the neighborhood during De La Salle's visit to the house of Monsieur Jauffret in Les Vans. However, studies have since shown that the portrait is not contemporary with the Founder but was made somewhat later. Subsequently, perhaps at the time of the French Revolution or even later still, it was apparently used as a base for a fresh portrait of some distinguished gentleman of the region.

The road westward toward Mende, the capital of the Gévaudan, was the longest—about 100 miles—the most difficult and perilous of

all. Miraculously, De La Salle arrived safely at Mende, where Brother Timothée had replaced Brother Antoine, one of the founding Brothers in 1694, as Director. This Brother Timothée would prove to be a loyal supporter of the Founder in the difficult times ahead, and would himself one day become the second Superior General of the Institute. There was a new bishop at Mende as well, Bishop Baglion de La Salle, but no relation to the Founder.

The reception at Mende was so cordial, as it was everywhere on this tour of the cities where the schools were flourishing, that De La Salle felt it necessary to shorten his stay and to depart in semisecrecy lest he have more honors and accolades thrust upon him.

En route back eastward to Marseille, the Founder stopped briefly at Uzès to greet Bishop Michel Poncet de La Rivière, in whose diocese was the school at Les Vans. The bishop expressed his pleasure at the success of the Les Vans school. The bishop then asked that the Brothers there be given permanent assignments so as to assure the continued progress of the school. To this the Founder could not agree. When he explained his reasons in the light of the nature and purpose of the Institute, the bishop did not insist.

This sense of possessiveness on the part of sponsoring ecclesiastical authorities, a problem in Reims and Paris from the beginning, remained a continuing source of misunderstanding in many of the Lasallian foundations in the provinces. Not all bishops and pastors would be as obliging in the matter as Bishop De La Rivière. More than likely, even he found it difficult to understand how a Society of lay Brothers, without canonical or legal status, could demand such autonomy or even hope to survive in the church structure of the time. De La Salle, however, had always realized that his Institute could achieve its mission effectively only on condition that the association of the Brothers be independent of diocesan or parish control.

Reception in Marseille

Arriving in Marseille in late June or early July of 1712, De La Salle was as cordially received by Bishop Henri-François-Xavier Belsunce as he had been on his previous visit a year earlier. The Brothers' school in the parish of Saint Laurent had been functioning well from the time of its foundation in 1706. Now plans were under way to have the Brothers take over the schools in the parishes of Saint Martin and Notre Dame des Accoules.

Ever since he took possession of the see in 1709, Bishop Bel-sunce had been negotiating with De La Salle to open a novitiate of the Brothers in his diocese. If the Brothers were to be put in charge of the schools in the four quarters of the city—the “old city,” as it is now called, surrounding the horseshoe-shaped harbor—it would be necessary to have a suitable number of Brothers recruited from the Marseille area. The language, culture, and lifestyle in Provence were so different from those in the North that it would be unrealistic to expect teachers from Reims, Rouen, or Paris to be effective in such a strange environment. It is not surprising then that the influential townspeople were generous in their support of the new novitiate project. When it opened in August or September of 1712 many candidates presented themselves for admission to the Society.

In a letter dated July 1712 and addressed to Brother Gabriel Drolin in Rome, De La Salle refers to the plans for the novitiate and his hopes to be able to send a Brother from the novitiate to join the lonely exile in Rome. Early that fall, De La Salle himself was preparing to leave for Rome when, in the act of saying goodbye to Bishop Bel-sunce, he was persuaded to stay to arrange for the opening of the school in the Accoules. That evening he returned to the Brothers’ community where they had wished him a “bon voyage” only hours before. He is reported to have greeted them with the words: “God be blessed! Here I am back from Rome”—a rare bit of evidence that De La Salle had a sense of humor.

A Change in Attitude at Marseille

This atmosphere of support, of expansion, of great plans for the future, was suddenly dissipated as the mood of the clergy and the people of Marseille began to change. The school in the Accoules was never opened. The school proposed for the Brothers in the parish of Saint Martin was put in charge of a young seminarian. Financial support for the novitiate dried up and postulants no longer presented themselves. A wholly new attitude toward De La Salle had developed in the few months between September 1712 and March 1713. What had happened?

The traditional interpretation put forth by both the early and the modern biographers has been to blame the Jansenist party for instigating a whispering campaign against De La Salle because of his loyalty to the papal doctrine. More recent critical studies find this explanation too oversimplified. For one thing, the publication in

France of the Bull *Unigenitus* condemning Jansenism was still a year away. The issue of Jansenism, although certainly in the air, was not that acute in the Marseille of 1712 and the early months of 1713. Additional reasons are needed to explain the sudden change in attitude.

Part of the explanation may lie in the expectation of the prominent townspeople of Marseille. They may have been willing to support a novitiate to supply native teachers for their own schools in their own city. When they heard that De La Salle was considering assigning some of the Marseille novices elsewhere, they began to withdraw their support. Once again, the issue was control as the price to be paid for patronage.

There were policy differences as well. The school board at Marseille was much under the influence of the catechetical center in Lyon, where the system, inherited from Charles Démia, favored the use of seminarians as the preferred catechists in the schools for the poor. Some seminarians had been so engaged in Marseille before the Brothers arrived there; it is altogether likely that these young ecclesiastics would have supported any movement to discredit the Brothers who had replaced them. There was, in fact, a legal technicality involved. Many of the legacies and foundations that provided the funds to support the Brothers and their novitiate stipulated that the monies be used to engage "ecclesiastics" for teaching the poor. When De La Salle refused to have the Brothers take the tonsure to cover this technicality, he was accused of obstinacy.

Little by little, the pastors of Saint Martin and the Accoules began to side with those who preferred the Lyon-Démia model that employed candidates for the priesthood as the ideal teachers for the parish schools. Although Bishop Belsunce made clear his personal preference for the Brothers, he had no legal control over the money that was made available for their support.

These policy differences might not have loomed so large if another more painful and embarrassing human factor had not entered the picture. It involved the two Brothers who had been conducting the school in the parish of Saint Laurent for six years before the Founder arrived in Marseille. During that time they had become accustomed to a great deal of independence and freedom. Many of the obligations of the Brothers' Common Rule and the practices of community life were impossible to maintain with only two together: such things as the accusation of faults, advertisement of defects, community recreation, reading at meals, and the like. In addition, these Brothers had developed a strong following among the people of the parish.

When De La Salle insisted that they join the novitiate community and resume the regular routine of community life, they objected strenuously. They complained to the people of the parish that they were being taken away from the center of parish life, forced twice daily to walk the long distance between the school and the novitiate, and thus less at the disposal of the parish that supported them. The parishioners sided with the two Brothers and made their representations to De La Salle. The Founder refused to yield, citing the central importance of community life in the vocation of the Brothers. Again, he was accused of intransigence.

When news of the dispute reached Avignon, even the nominal superior of the Brothers of the Region, Brother Ponce, who ought to have been more loyal, sided with the disgruntled Brothers. The Brothers were said to have challenged the Founder openly, saying in effect: "Everything here was going along fine until you came along. Why do you come here to destroy the whole enterprise instead of helping to make it grow?"

The Decision to Withdraw

In the face of all the opposition, De La Salle began to blame himself. Maillefer quotes him as saying: "I was convinced that my absence would calm my enemies and inspire them to think positively about my spiritual children." Taking the pilgrim's staff, he quietly left Marseille and climbed the steep 30 miles or so leading to the Sainte Baume, the sacred grotto halfway up a vertical cliff where Mary Magdalen is said to have spent the last years of her life in repentance. Popes, kings, and saints had made the pilgrimage before De La Salle, and many of the great and not-so-great have done so since.

It was either there, in the hostel adjoining the grotto, or, more likely, in the monastery of Saint Maximin on the plateau beneath that De La Salle experienced what the biographers have called "the dark night of the soul." Blain describes this as a time when the Founder saw himself at the crossroads, full of doubts as to which way to turn, seeking to find the will of God in solitude and prayer.

The withdrawal of De La Salle from the scene of controversy gave some credence to the rumors that began to circulate in Marseille that the Founder was about to abandon the Brothers and leave the Institute to the designs of Providence and its own fate. Even Blain admits that there was an element of truth in this: the Founder, he says, had indeed been thinking from time to time that he might someday

retire to a remote parish and there work for the conversion of hardened sinners. But, as Blain hastens to add, these musings never came to anything in practice. It may well be, however, that the rumors that De La Salle was about to retire permanently only strengthened the resolve of the many Brothers who wanted to keep him at the head of the Institute he had founded.

Trouble at Mende

Whatever the state of the Founder's mind at the time, or however resolved or unresolved his doubts may have been after the weeks of retreat, De La Salle left the Sainte Baume, probably in June 1713, and headed for Mende, far to the west, where the community appeared to be in deep trouble. The sources are sometimes obscure and sometimes conflicting on the details of the situation, but there is a certain consistency in the accounts.

The villain of the piece seems to have been a certain Brother Médard. After being transferred from Calais to Marseille in 1708 and from there to Grenoble, he decided to leave the Institute. Welcomed back by De La Salle at Marseille in 1712, he again took the habit in the novitiate there and, quite possibly, became identified with the malcontents. Sent by Brother Ponce from Marseille to the school at Mende, he soon resumed his errant ways. He gradually won over his companion, Brother Isidore, to an easy lifestyle and the cultivation of extensive social contacts with the notables of the town. The errant Brothers resisted all attempts of the Director, Brother Henri, to bring them to order. To make matters worse, Brother Ponce, who as regional superior should have dealt with the situation, was on his way back to Rouen, where he soon left the Institute.

When news reached Mende that De La Salle was on his way, Brothers Médard and Isidore hurried to the bishop and the mayor to get their support for maintaining the status quo. Thus, when the Founder arrived on the scene, he was utterly frustrated in trying to deal effectively with the problem. He did not want to alienate the new bishop, Pierre Baglin de La Salle, by insisting on the Institute policy of assigning Brothers where they could do the most good. The bishop and the mayor, for their part, pointed out with some reason that in the six years since the school had been opened far too many Brothers had been transferred elsewhere or had left the Institute.

It was a further blow to the Founder to be told point blank that he could not be accommodated in the Brothers' house and that the

community did not have the resources to provide his meals. Forced to seek hospitality with the Capuchins for a time, De La Salle was then invited to stay at the house of Mlle Lescure, Foundress of the Ladies of the Christian Union, a new congregation similar in many respects to that of the Brothers. De La Salle was happy to assist her in composing a Rule for these Sisters. Otherwise, during the two months that he stayed in Mende, De La Salle devoted himself to solitude and prayer, apart from the Brothers, and still undetermined about what it was God wanted of him.

During this time, Brother Timothée came from Marseille to Mende looking for his Superior. Turned away from the community of the Brothers as the Founder had been, he found De La Salle at the Lescure house. He brought the news that the Marseille novitiate, where he had been Director, was now completely empty of novices, and he asked for a new assignment for himself. Blain quotes the Founder's response: "Why do you come to me with all of this? Don't you know that I am not competent to give orders to others? Are you not aware that there are many Brothers who no longer want to have anything to do with me? They say they no longer want me as their Superior. And they are right. I am really incapable of that any more." There is good reason to accept the authenticity of the account and the substance of the quotation, since Blain was writing under the direction of the same Brother Timothée, who had by that time become Superior General.

Maillefer's version of this incident is even more forceful. He situates it in the context of the Founder's stay at Saint Maximin near the Sainte Baume rather than at Mende. In this version, the Founder says to Brother Timothée (who is not named but identified simply as the "superior of the novitiate at Marseille") that "he was surprised" that the Brothers were still thinking about him; that "he had hoped by leaving Marseille and retiring into solitude that people would soon get used to forgetting about him altogether;" that he found his hideaway so much to his liking that "he was resolved to stay hidden there and to condemn himself to perpetual silence."

Whether the interview with Timothée took place at Saint Maximin or Mende, the latter being the more likely since Blain was close to the source, it would seem that the Founder's sense of abandonment and betrayal carried from the one place to the other. The cool reception from the Brothers at Mende would have done nothing to dispel it. Mlle Lescure meanwhile was trying to induce De La Salle to settle permanently in Mende, promising to provide him with room and

board for life and, after his death, to subsidize another Brother for the school.

Brother Timothée's visit came at a providential time. According to Blain, it took all of Timothée's powers of persuasion to convince De La Salle that the Brothers still needed him and wanted him to continue at the head of the Society. So encouraged, De La Salle refused the tempting offer of Mlle Lescure, yet he was still not entirely certain about what he eventually ought to do. When it came time for him to leave Mende, Mlle Lescure, though somewhat disappointed, graciously provided a horse for his long journey back to Avignon and Grenoble.

An Extended Stay in Grenoble

Arriving finally at Grenoble, sometime in August 1713, De La Salle was well received by the Brothers teaching there in the school of Saint Laurent. The house still stands at 40, Rue Saint Laurent in Grenoble, with an identifying plaque over the doorway. It is still possible to enter the inner courtyard and ascend the granite stairway leading to the upper floors. An even narrower stairway leads up to an isolated cubicle in the recess of the tower. This was the place that De La Salle selected to remain in solitude and in prayer and to work on the revision of his writings, especially *The Duties of a Christian to God*, which he soon had ready to send to the papal legate at Avignon for approval.

Maillefer again emphasizes the desire of the Founder to continue to remain aloof, but this time within the community of the Brothers. Thus he says:

He withdrew to Grenoble, where he found the Brothers very much at peace. He resolved to stay with them as long as he could. He chose the most remote and least accessible room in the house where he could devote himself to mental prayer. He remained there for several months, unknown and practically forgotten. He made no visits, received no visitors, and left his room only to be present at the appointed time for the usual exercises of the community.

This description conveys in a general way the attitude and the lifestyle adopted by the Founder during the months he spent in Grenoble.

Aware that he was only a short distance away from the monastery of the Grande Chartreuse, De La Salle decided to go to make a

retreat there, probably during the school vacation period in September 1713. The Carthusians were important for De La Salle, not only for their austere life of solitude, but also because Saint Bruno, their Founder, had been like himself a canon of the cathedral chapter of Reims. Taking another Brother with him as a companion, De La Salle expressly forbade him to reveal their identity. The two pilgrims were graciously received by the monks, who were so impressed by this humble and self-effacing priest that they begged him to stay on indefinitely. The biographers seem to imply that De La Salle would have preferred to stay longer if his characteristic piety had not revealed his identity. Whether he was weighing the Chartreuse as a place to retire to definitively cannot be known for sure, but it remains a possibility.

There are indications, however, that he was actively seeking to keep in touch with what he had already undertaken and, at the same time, keep open the options for the future. Shortly after the opening of school late in September 1713, De La Salle became disturbed at the news that filtered through about the trouble that was brewing among the Brothers in the North. He sent Brother Jacques, the Director of the Grenoble school, to investigate. This Brother was a good man, dependable and discreet. During the Director's absence, De La Salle himself took over the classes in the school. During this time he also led the school children to the nearby church of Saint Laurent, where he celebrated Mass for them. For years the townspeople of Grenoble preserved the memory of the fervor with which he celebrated the Eucharistic liturgy.

What contacts there were with Paris, especially with Brother Barthélemy, who was nominally in charge, or what report was given by Brother Jacques on his return, remains uncertain through lack of evidence. But for the most part, as the sources seem to agree, the Founder remained isolated during the long winter of 1713 to 1714, devoting his time to prayer and to revising his written works for the schools and the Brothers.

Eventually the long hours of work and prayer in the drafty old "hole in the wall" at the top of the tower took their toll. In February 1714, De La Salle began to experience anew attacks of rheumatism so acute and so painful that it was thought he might die. At this news, the whole city of Grenoble became concerned about his recovery. Prayers were offered everywhere as if for an important matter of public interest, led especially by his two friends, Fathers Yse de Saléon and Claude Canel, the two canons of the church of Saint André who had been instrumental in bringing the Brothers to Grenoble. Once

again De La Salle endured the remedy that had been used before in Paris whereby he was stretched over a grill beneath which were medicinal herbs steaming over burning coals. Torture though it was, the remedy was effective, and the Founder gradually began to recover.

Parménie and Sister Louise

As soon as he felt that he was regaining his strength, De La Salle began to think about making another spiritual retreat. His friend, Yse de Saléon, suggested that he might profit by an extended stay at Parménie, a hermitage that served as a retreat center atop a high hill not far from Grenoble. The hermitage had recently been rebuilt on the ruins of a medieval monastery through the efforts of a devout and determined visionary who was known as Sister Louise. She lived on the premises, and her advice was much sought after by reason of her exemplary prayerfulness and the clarity of her spiritual vision. Father De Saléon came there regularly as part-time chaplain and spiritual director.

De La Salle accepted the invitation eagerly. Even though it was still toward the end of the winter season, the stay at Parménie proved beneficial to his health. The early biographers of De La Salle speak of an initial sojourn at Parménie for a retreat that lasted 15 days during which the Founder had extensive interviews with Sister Louise. There is reference also to subsequent exchanges, including even an exchange of letters or books, a strange arrangement since Sister Louise could neither read nor write.

The biographers of Sister Louise and the historians of Parménie however, indicate that De La Salle either remained at or returned to Parménie, where he spent considerable time during the spring of 1714, even that he was seriously considering retiring there permanently. Both Sister Louise and Canon De Saléon were hoping that he might take over as resident spiritual director for the hermitage. When De Saléon had to leave for Provence on church business, he left De La Salle in charge of the retreats at Parménie for a period of at least a month.

While De La Salle was at Parménie, a young pilgrim arrived dressed in peasant clothes. He turned out to be a man of aristocratic origin and gentlemanly upbringing, the son of Claude-Lancelot Dulac de Montisambert, Claude-François Dulac by name. His earliest youth had been spent in the army, where he fell prey to a gambling habit and other excesses. Seriously wounded in the battle of Malplaquet in



Parménie

1709, the young officer had time to reflect on the error of his ways. For the past two years, he had been travelling from one monastery to another seeking peace for his soul. After long conversations at Parménie to test the young man's virtue and determination, De La Salle brought him to the community at Grenoble where he gave him the religious habit and the name Brother Irenée. The date in the community register is June 6, 1714.

The Command to Return

Meanwhile, an event of the greatest significance had taken place. All during the time De La Salle was in the South, the affairs of the Institute in Paris were going from bad to worse. Brother Barthélemy, whose mandate to act for the Superior was never entirely clear in the first place, had been less than forceful in resisting the efforts of the Sulpician pastors to control the internal affairs of the Society. There was no place for the Brothers to turn for guidance in even the simplest administrative matters. In desperation, the Directors and the principal Brothers of the Paris region drew up a joint letter in which they addressed De La Salle and ordered him to return in virtue of the vow he had made to obey the body of the Society. The text follows:

Monsieur, our very dear Father: We, the principal Brothers of the Christian Schools, having in view the greater glory of God as well as the good of the Church and of our Society, consider that it is of the greatest importance that you return to the care and general direction of God's holy work, which is also your own, because it has pleased the Lord to make use of you to establish it and to guide it for so many years.

We are all convinced that God himself has called you to this work and that he has given you the grace and talents necessary for the good government of this new Society so beneficial to the Church. We acknowledge in all justice that you have always guided it with considerable success and edification. That is why, Monsieur, we very humbly beseech you, and we command you in the name and on the part of the body of the Society to which you have vowed obedience, to take up at once the general government of the Society.

The letter, dated April 1, 1714, was signed by all the Brothers present, and De La Salle could recognize the signatures of his sons. There was no longer any reason to hesitate or to consider other options for the future. When he explained the contents of the letter to Sister Louise, she pointed out that it was clearly God's will that he should not abandon the family God had given him, that he himself should now give an example of the obedience he had so often preached to others.

De La Salle did not return to Paris at once, however, since he had first to await the return of Yse de Saléon. The examination and reception of Claude Dulac may have caused further delay. There is evidence, too, that he made one last tour of the communities in the South before heading for the capital, stopping en route at Lyon and Dijon. He arrived in Paris on August 10, 1714, greeting the Brothers with the words: "Well, here I am. What do you want of me?"