



The Messenger

A LASALLIAN PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT RESOURCE



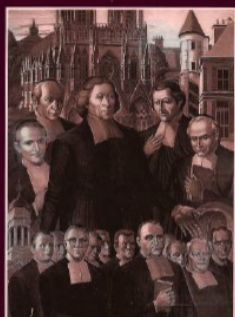
A TIME OF CRISIS

Dear friends, welcome to Issue Six of "The Messenger". As always, we begin by answering our discussion questions from the previous issue - A Time of Crisis. Br. Henri L'Heureux was the Brother elected as the Superior General to replace De La Salle in 1686. This was short lived through as the Archbishop Le Tellier would not allow a mere Brother to be in control of a priest. DLS sort to retrain Br. Henri as a priest himself and then have him re-installed as the Superior. Sadly, this was not to be. Henri fell gravely ill and his death deeply affected DLS and "broke his heart". At Vaugirard, on Nov. 21st, 1691 - DLS and two other Brothers (Nicholas Vuyart and Gabriel Drolin) took what is now known as the "Heroic Vow". Forever binding themselves to the society, no matter what it might cost them, no matter if others should abandon it, and even if they had to live on bread alone! DLS suffered from

extreme rheumatism and also suffered an extreme cure - being placed on a hardwood grid over burning coals with juniper leaves and herbs to draw out the inflammation! The 1694 election of a new Superior upset DLS, as the Brothers, via ballot, re-elected him into office twice. In the end, he had to give in. But not before making it clear - no future Superior would be allowed to be a priest.

THE WORK IS YOURS

The Life of
Saint John Baptist de La Salle



Luke Salvo, FSC
Second Edition

Issue 6: Experimentation and Expansion

Live Jesus in our hearts!

Mr. Kane Raukura

Chairperson - NZMAC

(NZ Mission Action Committee)



Q1. What was the 'Grande Maison' and how did it have a connection to King James II?

Q2. What did the Bishop of Chartres (Paul Godet) try to convince DLS to do?

Q3. Who remained in Rome, loyal to DLS and the institute for over 26 years?

Q4. Avignon was a papal state. Why was it significant that DLS established a school there in 1703?



Experimentation and Expansion (1698–1703)

The presence of a new pastor in the parish of Saint Sulpice seemed to augur well for the future of the Brothers in Paris. In the fall of 1697, less than a year after taking office, Father De La Chétardie agreed, on De La Salle's suggestion, to open yet a third school in the parish, this one on the Rue Placide. Many students flocked to it, and it was not long before the number of Brothers assigned there had to be increased from four to six.

As had happened before, this success served only to reignite the fury of the Masters of the Little Schools when they saw so many of their pupils transferring over to the school of the Brothers. The first challenge came in the form of a physical attack on the school and its furnishings. De La Salle arrived on the scene as the schoolmasters and their henchmen were making off with whatever they could lay their hands on. Utterly defenseless, the holy priest retained his usual calm. "Here I am, take me along too," he is reported to have said to them.

The Brothers were summoned into court, and all their schools in the parish had to be shut down for three months. The issue centered on whether or not the Brothers were accepting fees from those who could afford to pay. The schoolmasters presumed that they did. In an eloquent defense, De La Salle won the case by challenging the schoolmasters to show that the Brothers received a single penny from the pupils, or that they profited financially in any way. This victory only served to enrage the schoolmasters all the more. They would be heard from again before long.

The Grande Maison

By 1699 the number of young men wanting to join the Brothers had increased to such an extent that De La Salle began to search for a new and more suitable site for a novitiate. After seven years, Vaugirard had more than outlived its usefulness. There was within the limits of the parish of Saint Sulpice a sizable property that had once belonged to a small congregation of nuns. Known as the *Grande Maison*, the house

was surrounded by open spaces and extensive gardens that were protected by solid gates and thick walls.

The asking price was rather more than De La Salle could afford, but Father De La Chétardie came to the rescue by raising the salaries of the Brothers, so happy was he to have the novitiate back within the confines of the parish. He also put the Founder in touch with a wealthy widow, Madame Voisin, known for her support of charitable causes. She agreed to supply the furnishings for the house at the cost of 7,000 livres, a large sum indeed, since 200 livres was the customary annual stipend for each Brother. The large chapel that had previously been used by the nuns was blessed anew by the vicar-general of the archdiocese and placed under the patronage of Saint Cassian, who from that time on has been considered a patron of the Institute. It is easy to understand why, since Saint Cassian was an early Christian teacher who was ordered to be bound and put to a slow and painful death by his students.

The Brothers had barely settled in the Grande Maison when De La Salle was asked to provide instruction and lodging for a group of 50 or so Irish boys who had followed King James II of England into exile. This was the first time that boarders had ever been accepted in a Brothers' school. Yet De La Salle felt compelled to yield to the request of the archbishop and the pastor, who were finding it difficult to provide for the education of these young refugees. Furthermore, these boys were somewhat beyond the elementary level in their education and in need of more advanced instruction, quite possibly including Latin, which had been forbidden to the Brothers. For these reasons, De La Salle took charge of them himself. This incident is a good example of the Founder's willingness to adopt innovative procedures as Providence provided new opportunities and challenges in the ministry of education.

In due time King James, accompanied by Archbishop, now Cardinal, Noailles and Father De La Chétardie, came to visit the school. The king expressed complete satisfaction with the care being taken of his young subjects and the progress they were making in their studies. On this occasion, some of the Brothers wanted to ask the king to use his influence in Rome to obtain papal approval for the Institute. The Founder dissuaded them, however, preferring to wait until Providence should provide a more favorable opportunity to have the Institute formally approved on its own merits.

The Grande Maison provided other opportunities for the Brothers to expand their educational horizons by innovative programs of a

practical nature that would enable the sons of poor and working class families to earn a decent living. Thus in 1699 a manual training program was introduced at the Grande Maison, motivated by and modeled on the success of the similar program at the Rue Princesse.

The Christian Sunday School

It was most likely in 1699 also that a Sunday School, the "Christian Academy," as it was called, was opened at the Grande Maison for young men under 20 years of age who were occupied during the rest of the week in earning a living. The school was soon filled to capacity, with some 200 students divided into several classes. Some learned how to read and write for the first time. The more advanced followed courses in practical drawing, geometry, or other branches of mathematics. Classes began at noon on Sunday, lasted for two hours, and were followed by a Catechism lesson that concluded with a spiritual exhortation given by one of the Brothers.

De La Salle had assigned two of his most talented Brothers to this work, and even provided them with advanced training in their special fields. One of them was particularly gifted in art, the other in mathematics. Unfortunately, after a few years, these Brothers began to realize that their talents could be used to their personal profit elsewhere. Finding the temptation too great, they left the Institute. As a result, the Christian Academy had to close temporarily. It was some time before De La Salle was able to find a qualified Brother to continue the program on a modified basis.

A New Teacher-training Program

A work that had always been dear to the heart of De La Salle was the training of lay teachers for the rural schools. He preferred to restrict the Brothers to city parishes where three or more of them could conduct schools "together and by association." Most country schoolteachers, by contrast, had to maintain a school singlehandedly and in isolation. A program to train teachers for the rural schools had been one of De La Salle's first ventures in the early days in Reims, but it did not long survive his departure. Ever since, he had been looking for an opportunity to revive it.

In 1699, at the request of Father Lebreton, the pastor of Saint Hippolyte, De La Salle sent two Brothers to take over a school in the remote Parisian suburb of Saint Marcel. The pastor was so pleased

with the results that he consulted with the Founder on the possibility of opening in his parish a center for training lay teachers. De La Salle was more than willing to cooperate. The pastor was able to enlist the help of generous donors: a devout layman provided a house on the Rue de l'Ourcine; another, a priest, volunteered an annual sum to support the project. De La Salle agreed to screen the applicants. In addition, he sent one of his best teachers and longtime associate, Brother Nicolas Vuyart, to take charge of the program.

The student teachers followed much the same program that had been in use at Reims. They continued to wear secular dress, but otherwise they followed much the same schedule as the Brothers: early rising, extended periods of prayer and spiritual reading, together with courses in subject areas and in educational methods. Since the house was adjacent to the parish school, there was an opportunity also for supervised practice teaching.

The teacher-training program prospered for five or six years, and then the pastor died. He had wanted it to continue after his death and so tried to insure its survival. Realizing that the Institute of the Brothers had no legal status, the pastor had decided to name Brother Nicolas Vuyart as heir to the invested funds that supported the program. This seemed like a sensible arrangement. Brother Nicolas, after all, had vowed "heroically" with De La Salle and Gabriel Drolin in 1691 to stay together, no matter what might happen, in order to establish the Institute. Not only was he an effective teacher himself, but he had a talent, besides, for passing on his skills to others. Under his direction the teacher-training program had made great progress.

Unfortunately, as we shall see in a later chapter, it was just at this time that the definitive judgments against De La Salle were handed down by the tribunals in Paris. Perhaps Vuyart thought that he might salvage the enterprise by dissociating himself from De La Salle and taking charge of the program himself. In any case, he decided to put aside the Brothers' habit and send away the Brother who had been working with him in the parish. When the priest who had provided the annual income to support the teachers in training heard of it, he revoked his donation. The center had to close as a consequence, much to the regret of De La Salle, who was helpless to prevent it.

Vuyart continued to maintain the parish school at Saint Hippolyte on his own for the next 20 years. At one point he even applied for readmission to the Institute. Although De La Salle was willing to forgive and forget, the Brothers advised against it. Blain's judgmental and vindictive description of the fate of Vuyart is worth quoting, as much for its dubious theology as for its rhetoric:

The perfidious disciple of whom we have spoken survived his master, but not for long. After continuing the school in the parish of Saint Hippolyte for over 20 years, he fell ill of a mortal ailment the day after De La Salle died. The Servant of God died on Good Friday, April 7, 1719; and it seemed that on the very next day he interested heaven in avenging a crime which during his life he had pardoned so wholeheartedly. The former Brother fell ill on Holy Saturday, the day the Servant of God was buried; and after five months of suffering, he went to give an account to his Judge for the tremendous injustice he had been guilty of toward the Church, for the affront he had offered his Superior, for his scandalous desertion which had shocked his Community, and for the complete ruin of the training college for the country schoolmasters which he had brought about.

This second attempt to establish a permanent teacher-training center proved to be relatively short-lived, as were the innovative programs at the Grande Maison, the secondary instruction for the Irish boys in a resident setting, and part-time courses on Sundays for working teenagers. But these ventures illustrate a certain openness on the part of the Founder and the Brothers to explore new possibilities in the field of education as the seventeenth century turned into the eighteenth. At that same moment, the Institute was beginning to move into new geographical areas as well, beyond the confines of the parish of Saint Sulpice and the Archdiocese of Paris.

Chartres, 1699

As the reputation of the Brothers began to spread, the first prelate to call them to his diocese was Paul Godet des Marais, the Bishop of Chartres. This was not surprising. He had been a companion of De La Salle in his seminary days, and later served as the effective intermediary between De La Salle and the authorities in securing permission to open the novitiate and later the chapel at Vaugirard. His appeal to the Founder for Brothers for his diocese came at a particularly good time since the schools in Paris were closed over the trouble with the schoolmasters. Furthermore, the bishop's request was supported by a petition signed by the pastors of Chartres, urging quality schools for the poor. Before making a move, however, De La Salle called the Brothers together to get their consent.

Just prior to the arrival of the Brothers, the bishop issued a pastoral letter to the clergy and the people of Chartres explaining how important it was to have good schools, for boys as well as girls, especially for the children of working parents who had neither the time nor the talent to educate them at home. On October 12, 1699, two Christian schools were opened in Chartres, one in the parish of Saint Hilary, the other in Saint Michel parish. There were seven Brothers in all, three for each of the schools and a serving Brother to take care of the temporal needs of the community.

Bishop Paul Godet was a remarkable man in many ways. An ardent defender of orthodox doctrine, especially against Quietism and other exaggerated approaches to spirituality that were current at the time, he yet had the common touch and moved easily among his people. He took particular care of the Brothers, saw to their every need, and was most solicitous when some of them fell sick. He did what he could to mitigate the austerity of their lifestyle and to moderate their penchant for bodily mortification. He would say to them: "If you are unwilling to fatten up the victim before immolating it, you should at least give it enough to eat."

On one occasion, when De La Salle came to the bishop's residence to pay his respects, Godet tricked him into staying for dinner by having all the doors locked behind him. Present also for the meal was the vicar-general, Father D'Aubigné, who would one day become the Archbishop of Rouen. Already at Chartres, he did not conceal his disdain for the shabby appearance of De La Salle and his Brothers.

Over dinner, Bishop Godet made three recommendations to the Founder concerning the Brothers. He thought that the Rule ought to be modified to mitigate the much too austere lifestyle of the Brothers, especially in the matter of penitential practices. Secondly, he asked the Brothers to attend Mass on Sundays and feasts in each of the city parishes in turn so that people might profit by their good example. Finally, he argued that in the schools, the Brothers should adopt the traditional practice of having the students learn to read Latin before studying French.

Once again, the Founder felt compelled to hold his ground. To the first point, he replied that the Rule had been adopted after consultation with all the Brothers and could not be changed without their consent; that, in any case, there was no corporal penance required by the Rule. To the second point, De La Salle replied that such a procedure would put an intolerable burden on the Brothers; in addition, the Rule required that they be in church with their pupils on Sunday morning and then teach them catechism for an hour

and a half. Sunday afternoons before Vespers were to be free for the recreation and spiritual renewal of the Brothers in the community house.

Concerning the teaching of Latin, De La Salle promised to reply more at length, which he did in an extended memoir addressed to the Bishop of Chartres in 1702. His arguments against the use of Latin as a vehicle for elementary education were of a practical order: French is easier to learn than Latin, it takes less time, it is more useful, it is a vehicle for learning Latin, it is a necessary tool for learning Christian doctrine both in school and in later life; Latin, by contrast, is more difficult, there is no time to master it before the students have to leave school to go to work, it is of no use to working class people in later life, those with only a smattering of Latin make fools of themselves when they try to use it.

The bishop seems to have accepted these responses, such was the great respect he had for De La Salle, his character, and his vision. He continued to support the Brothers as long as he lived, doing whatever he could to make their life more bearable and their work more productive and appreciated.

Calais, 1700

While Chartres is not far from Paris, only a few miles beyond Versailles to the southwest, Calais is a port town on the English Channel far to the north. In 1700 the pastor of the principal church and dean of the clergy in Calais was a certain Father Ponton. His nephew, also a priest and a student of theology at Saint Sulpice, had been attracted by the Brothers and their work with the children of the parish. He wrote such glowing reports back to his uncle that the pastor urged him to do all he could to interest the Brothers in coming to Calais, noting that the local schoolmaster had just died. To help move the negotiations along, the pastor persuaded the city magistrates to enlist the support of the Duke of Bethune, the Governor of Calais, who was living in Paris at the time.

The duke invited De La Salle to come to his palace in Paris to discuss the matter. Arriving somewhat too early for his appointment, De La Salle stopped in the nearby church, only to find the duke himself attending Mass and receiving Communion with the greatest fervor. This helped the negotiations on both sides: De La Salle disposed to accommodate such a devout Christian gentleman, the duke willing to grant all the support and approval that the Brothers would require. By

July 1700 the arrangements were complete, and two Brothers arrived in Calais to take over the parish school. One of them was Brother Gabriel Drolin, who had made the heroic vow in 1691.

At De La Salle's insistence and before beginning their mission, the two Brothers went to Boulogne to receive the blessing of Bishop Pierre de Langle in whose diocese Calais was located. Not only did the bishop bless the Brothers, but he issued a proclamation to the people of Calais urging all the parents to send their children to the Christian School. The civil magistrates, the clergy, and the people of the city joined in making the Brothers feel welcome.

Although ample housing had been provided for the Brothers, it seems that there was no dependable source of revenue to guarantee that the school could continue. Feeling that death was near and wanting the work to continue, the pastor wrote to the Marquis de La Vrillière, who promised to bring the matter up at the next meeting of the king's council. King Louis XIV responded favorably and in the next two years saw to it that the Brothers were given a considerable sum derived from the sale of the confiscated property of the Calvinist Huguenots.

At the same time, Father Le Prince, chaplain of the port district, began a campaign to have a Christian School for the children of the sailors. Through the good offices of the Minister Pontchartrain, Chancellor of France and the official responsible for the port, the school was opened in 1705 in an old guardhouse adapted for the purpose. A regular income was provided for the Brothers by royal decree and augmented by the city officials from import duties on goods entering the city.

Troyes, 1702

In 1702 De La Salle received a request for Brothers from the pastor of Saint Nizier at Troyes in the province of Champagne. A pious lady had left an annuity of 200 livres to the pastor, Father Le Bé, to be used for a gratuitous school for the parish. Although the sum was less than what was customary and necessary for the support of the Brothers, De La Salle agreed on condition that housing should be provided for them. This was no problem since the pastor preferred to live in the seminary, and so the rectory was available for the Brothers.

When Le Bé died and the new pastor took over the rectory, the Brothers had a difficult time for a while. But then the townspeople came to the rescue with an annual sum to rent a house for them.

Soon after, an Oratorian priest named Chantreau came back to Troyes, his native city, and began a campaign of preaching in favor of gratuitous schools for the poor. The citizens this time raised enough money to support two more Christian Schools, one in the parish of Saint Mary Magdalen, the other in that of Saint John.

Rome, 1702

As the network of Christian Schools began to spread throughout France, De La Salle began to think seriously about establishing a foothold in the Eternal City. From his seminary days, he had always had a high regard for papal authority, contrary to the Gallican tendencies of some of his professors and most of the higher clergy of France. A foundation in Rome would be a symbol of the attachment of the Institute to the Apostolic See founded on the rock of Peter and his successors. At the same time, it might eventually pave the way for the papal approval that alone could guarantee the Institute its autonomy and freedom from the perennial threat of control by local bishops and pastors.

In the summer of 1702, De La Salle decided it was time to act, despite the difficulties that such a project entailed, not the least of them financial. Brother Gabriel Drolin was summoned from Calais, and on one September morning he and Brother Gérard Drolin, his blood brother, set out from the Grande Maison with the blessing of the Founder and only 100 livres between them for expenses. It was not nearly enough but it was all that the hard-pressed Superior could afford. He urged them to rely on Providence, which did not fail them, but neither did it spare them the perils and the fatigue of the long journey, most of it on foot.

When they finally arrived in Rome, total strangers, unexpected, and unprovided for, unable to speak the language, and dressed in a garb that even the blasé Romans found strange, the Brothers might well have thought that getting there was the least of their problems. To make matters worse, César d'Estrées, the Cardinal Bishop of Albano, who was also French Ambassador to the Vatican, and to whom they had a letter of introduction, was away on an extended mission. His vicar managed to get them settled for the time being, but it was clear that any possibility of establishing a permanent foundation would be a long way off, if not impossible.

The school system in the Papal States at the time was complicated and tightly controlled. The traditional regional schools in the 14 sec-

tors of the city were under the control of the rector of the University of Rome, La Sapienza. The recently-established papal schools were open only to girls. In addition, there were the Pious Schools for the poor conducted by the priests of the congregation founded by Joseph Calasanzius. In short, the Brothers found that there was little need for their services and little interest in breaking from the tradition in Rome that teachers in schools for boys should be clerics.

The situation was so unpromising that, after a few months, Gérard Drolin, discouraged and unable to adapt, headed back for France, where he soon left the Institute. Gérard had once been with the Trappists. De La Salle remarked that he should have left him there, that Gérard was not suited to live as a secular, but could not make up his mind what he wanted.

Gabriel Drolin remained at his post. Shortly after his brother left Rome, Gabriel found a fellow countryman, Claude de La Bussière, who offered him a permanent place to stay. But it took a long time before he could break through the highly organized and clerically dominated school system of ecclesiastical Rome. In 1705, he was accepted temporarily as a teacher in the regional schools; it was not until 1709 that he obtained his license to teach in one of the papal schools, which by that time had begun to accept boys as well as girls.



Painting by Mariani (1906) of the departure of the Drolin brothers for Rome in 1702

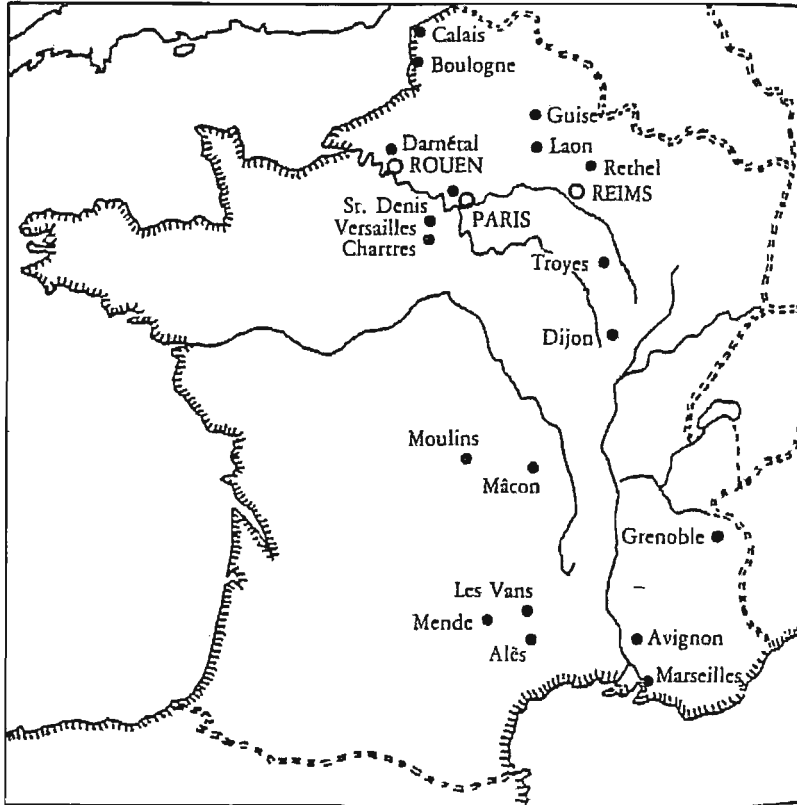
Drolin remained alone in Rome, faithful to the Institute, to his mission and his vows, for 26 years until he was recalled by Brother Timothée in 1728. Of the many letters written by De La Salle to his isolated disciple, 20 have survived. The Founder kept promising to send another Brother, and even to come to Rome himself, but he was never quite able to do either. And although he sent news and words of encouragement, De La Salle seems never to have completely understood the problems Drolin had to face, often showing impatience at Drolin's lack of progress in establishing a school in Rome that the Brothers could call their own.

Avignon, 1703

The establishment of a Christian School in Avignon was significant in many ways. It marked the expansion of the Institute for the first time into the southern part of France known as Provence. Since Avignon had long been a papal city and part of the Papal States, it afforded a direct connection between France and Rome. Whatever the Brothers were able to accomplish in Avignon was bound to be known and recognized in Rome; in one sense, the schools in Avignon carried more weight in the Vatican than anything Gabriel Drolin was able to do in Rome itself.

The idea of founding charity schools for the poor of Avignon originated with the wife of the papal treasurer, Jean-Pierre de Château-Blanc. When she died she left a legacy so that her husband could carry out her dying wish. By then the reputation of the Brothers had already penetrated that far south, but the Founder was slow in responding to the initial appeal for Brothers. But when Gérard Drolin was on his way back to Paris from Rome, he stopped at Avignon and lodged with Château-Blanc. He agreed to act as intermediary with De La Salle and was eventually successful in this, his last act of service for the Institute before abandoning it.

All the arrangements were complete by 1703. The Archbishop of Avignon at the time was Laurent Fieschi, who had a residence in Paris where he also served as papal nuncio to France. Speaking of the Brothers he had chosen for this mission, De La Salle wrote enthusiastically to Gabriel Drolin in Rome: "I presented them to His Excellency, the Archbishop of Avignon, Extraordinary Nuncio to France. He received them cordially and gave them his blessing before they left [for Avignon], and he did so with great pleasure." De La Salle also told Drolin to keep the matter secret.



Brothers' communities at the death of De La Salle in 1719

This blessing was important to De La Salle, since Fieschi could not have been ignorant of the difficulties De La Salle was having at the time with the church authorities in Paris. The blessing implied more than approval of the three Brothers: it could be interpreted as some kind of approval for the distinctive lifestyle and the legitimate autonomy that the Founder wanted for his Institute.

When the Brothers arrived in Avignon they were well received by Antoine Banquieri, the vice-legate in charge of the papal territory in the city and its surroundings. As happened almost everywhere, the school was an instant success and soon had to be expanded. In 1705, De La Salle could write to Drolin: "The schools in Avignon are going well. We have four Brothers there now and we will soon have a house that can accommodate as many as 20."

Eventually Fieschi was summoned to Rome and made a cardinal, while Banquieri was named Governor of Rome. Both became powerful advocates for the Institute at the papal court. The favorable testimony of Archbishop François de Gontery, who succeeded Fieschi in Avignon, had great weight in obtaining the Bull of Approbation for the Institute after the Founder's death.

But that is to get ahead of the story. There were many more trials to be endured before the Institute would be so firmly established. Meanwhile, during all the time De La Salle was negotiating for these new foundations to the north, south, and east, his personal reputation, as well as the distinctive character and autonomy of his Institute, were all in serious jeopardy back in the capital.