La Salle Connection – Episode 2: De La Salle meets Adrian Nyel

"La Salle Connection" is a multimedia series designed to connect the Lasallian Family with historical events that continue to inspire Lasallians today.

In this episode of *La Salle Connections*, we are going to talk about an encounter that took place in March 1679, although we do not know exactly when. It was a very important encounter in the life of Monsieur de La Salle because it changed his life and thus ended up changing the lives of many others. It also changed ours.

It must have happened after 17 February, because on that day De La Salle completed the process that led him to obtain the Letters Patent for the Sisters of the Child Jesus, which had been founded by his friend Nicolas Roland. Nicolas Roland had died and left him in charge of executing his will and completing the process of founding the Sisters.

And what we are about to recount took place at the door of the Sisters' house. Roland had been, in a way, a disciple of Father Barré, who is also a founder of other Sisters of the Child Jesus. In fact, Father Roland's Sisters were founded with two Sisters from Father Barré's Community. Both Father Barré and Father Roland planned to include schools for boys in their programme of creating popular schools. However, Roland died before he could create them. What we are about to recount is precisely the episode that brings the two projects together: Father Roland's project in Reims and Father Barré's project in Rouen.

Father Barré had founded a Congregation, a Community of Sisters, and wanted to found a Community of Brothers. In fact, he had managed to get a teacher named Adrian Nyel to join this project. We know Adrian Nyel from the usual accounts, and he is often presented to us as a man who had many concerns and wandered from place to place, as if he had no plan. But in reality, according to some scholars, it seems that he did have a plan. A plan that was not only his own; it was also Father Barré's plan. The plan was to create this Community of teachers consecrated to God for the educational service of the poor. He had a lifetime contract with the General Hospital of Rouen. He had no vows. He signed 'Brother

Adrian Nyel' and his consecration had been that contract. He was the small nucleus with which Barré had wanted to found the Community of teachers.

He had already gone to Reims one day around Christmas to see the possibilities there for creating a school for boys. He had been supported by a relative of Father Roland and also a half-relative of De La Salle, a lady we call Madame de Maillefer. She supported Father Barré's schools and was interested in having one established in her hometown of Reims. So Barré seems to have devised this strategy to rely on a good person with many contacts in Reims, who was Monsieur de La Salle, in order to establish a school in his network there.

However, when Nyel arrived and met Monsieur de La Salle, De La Salle, who had just finished the process of founding the Sisters, felt that it was not a good idea to seek out many new developments and cause a stir in the city, because in fact there were already many schools, all of them parish schools, and the parish priests were very protective of their schools because for each of those parishes the school was a source of income.

So, De La Salle gathered a council of friends, mainly superiors of the city's monasteries, to ask for their help and see how this school could be founded. De La Salle was not particularly interested in schools; he says so in one of his memoirs in his own handwriting: that the concern for the education of the poor had never entered his mind, even though Father Roland and his friends had tried to convince him of its importance. He wanted to help. He was a friend to any good work that came his way. And, on the advice of his friends, he decided that the parish of Saint Maurice was the best place to start. And it was a great success. So much so that, little by little, other parishes began to decide to replace their teachers with teachers trained by Adrian Nyel. This was only the beginning.

Later, he would have to take charge of this thing he had helped to create, which was not at all part of his plans. But that is another story…

In the next episodes, we will continue to share other significant moments in the life and work of Saint John Baptist de La Salle. You can find them at www.lasalle.org and on our social media.