PART ONE

GENERAL HISTORY

CHAPTER ONE

THE FOUNDER AND HIS WORK

1. Biographical Sketch of Father Claude Poullart des Places

Fl. 18 ff.

Claude Francis Poullart des Places was born in Rennes, Brittany, on February 26, 1679.\(^1\) His father, one of the richest mer-

\(^1\)The traditional date is February 21. However, the original baptismal record, dated February 27, clearly states that Claude was born on February 26. This document bears the signature of several persons of high standing in addition to that of the priest who performed the baptism. It is unlikely that such a solemn memorial would be mistaken about the date of Claude's birth. A photocopy of this document is reproduced opposite p. 4. We transcribe here the text and its translation:

Claude françois né du jour d'hiers fils de n(oble) h(omme) claude françois poullart, ad(vocat) en la cour et d(emoiselle) Jannes (Le) Meneust sa compagne s(ieur) et dame des Places a esté Baptizé en cette Eglize par n(oble) et d(iscret) M(essire) Julien Roussigneul R(ecteur) d'icelle et tenu sur les S(aint)s fonds baptismaux par haut et puissant Seig(neu)r Messire Claude de Marbeuf Chevallier Seig(neu)r de L'Aille, du gué et autres lieux, Con(selle)r du Roy en ses conseils et président de son parlement de Bretagne, parrain et demoiselle Françoise, Truillot dame de ferret marraine, lesquels ont signé ce Jour vingt et septième de feuvrier mil six cent soixante et dix neuf, avec plusieurs autres personnes de qualité.

Claude Francis, born yesterday, the son of nobleman Claude Francis Poullart, lawyer at the Court, and Madame Jeanne Le Meneust, his spouse, Lord and Lady des Places, has been baptized in this church by the noble and illustrious Sir Julian Roussigneul, its Rector. He was held over the holy baptismal font by the exalted and puissant Lord, Sir Claude de Marbeuf, Lord of Laille, Gué and other places, member of the King's Council, President of his Parliament in Brittany, Godfather; and Madame Francoise Truillot, Lady of Ferret, Godmother, who together with several other persons of quality have affixed their signatures this day, February the twenty-seventh, 1679.

(signed) Claude de Marbeuf (President of the Parliament)

François Truillot (Lady of Ferret)
(Claude) de Marbeuf (Abbot of Langonnet)
F. Thounenin, Marie Le Gouverneur, François Gouyon de Beaucorps, Gillette Lexot, Ferret, J. Roussigneul, Rector of St. George.
chants in the town\textsuperscript{2} and a respected lawyer in the Sovereign Parliament of Brittany, stemmed from a family that proudly traced its patents of nobility back to the Middle Ages. His mother, also of noble lineage, was the daughter of a prosperous businessman.\textsuperscript{3}

Claude's earliest years were blessed by a careful and pious upbringing at home. At the age of eight he was enrolled as a day-student in the famous Jesuit Academy at Rennes. Aside from the remarkable intelligence which he displayed from the very inception of his schooling, this bright little boy revealed a phenomenal degree of religious zeal by quietly organizing some of his fellow-pupils into a society whose members devoted their free time to prayer, penance, and devotional exercises.

At the amazingly early age of twelve he had already finished the classical course, but since everyone felt that he was too young to start studying philosophy, his parents sent him to the College of Caen to take an advanced course in oratory, a discipline for which he appeared to be especially gifted. As at Rennes, Claude distinguished himself among the two thousand students of this college also by his piety as well as by his success in the strenuous studies to which his young mind was subjected. At the conclusion of this interlude, he returned to Rennes for a two-year course in philosophy.

It was during this time that he became the intimate friend of a boy, six years older than he, who was destined to make history in the Church under the name of St. Louis Mary Grignion de Montfort, the apostle of Mary and the founder of at least two religious orders: the Society of Mary and the Daughters of Wisdom. The two boys had been classmates all through their classical studies, but at that time they knew each other only superficially as close competitors for first place in examinations. Now that Claude had reached the age of thirteen and was giving evidence of a maturity that would have done credit to a much older boy, it did not take the two very long to realize how much they had in common.

\textsuperscript{2}The size of his fortune may be gauged from the fact that at his daughter's marriage in 1705 he gave her a dowry of one hundred thousand livres plus ten thousand livres worth of silverware and furniture. For purposes of comparison at present day values, two thousand livres were considered adequate compensation for maintaining a noble family with their coachmen and servants for a period of six months.

\textsuperscript{3}Claude had two younger sisters, one of whom died in infancy.
they joined in prayer and pious works, the future apostle of Mary kindled in the heart of his young companion that flame of great devotion to the Blessed Virgin which was to remain burning forever in his soul and which prompted him later to add her Immaculate Conception to the title of his Congregation.

This pious association with the future saint should not lead us to believe that Claude was a shy and withdrawn youngster who loved to be alone with his thoughts or to share them only with a favored few. Although he practised penance to the extent of giving up wine altogether—which in a Frenchman would be comparable to an American boy’s forsaking ice cream and soft drinks—he liked company and pleasure. In fact, he looked forward with enthusiasm to the long vacations away from school, for it was during those months of leisure that his parents did their best to endow him with every social refinement one would expect of a member of the city’s leading family. Travel, marksmanship, riding, hunting, and dancing constituted his favorite recreational activities during these carefree days.

He especially loved play-acting and had a real talent for dramatic activities. On one occasion this penchant for drama nearly resulted in very real tragedy. While he was earnestly trying to study an assigned role, his little sister kept teasing him with childish interruptions. At length, he threatened her with what he thought was an empty gun and pulled the trigger. The household was terrified when a bullet passed between his sister and his mother, missing their heads by a few inches! The careless use of firearms appears not to have been unusual in those days for, on another occasion while Claude was hunting with a few friends, he was felled by a shot in the abdomen from a distance of ten feet. Divine Providence evidently wanted to save him for his future work, for when his frightened comrades rushed to the prostrate body, they found that he had sustained only a superficial wound.

Aside from vacation periods, however, Claude studied seriously and with great success. Although he was the youngest of all, he placed first among the hundreds of students who took the final examination at Rennes. For that reason he was chosen to be the defendant in the customary philosophical debate at the end of the academic year in 1694. At the time, such disputes were held with much more solemnity than obtains nowadays in
seminaries where the custom still survives. Weeks beforehand the theses were advertised in detail on bill-boards throughout the city, invitations were sent to learned societies, and no expense was spared to make the assembly as solemn as possible. The pageantry of these sessions surpassed by far the color and solemnity that attends commencement exercises in modern American universities. Along with the full faculty and student-body, kings and nobles, members of Parliament, bishops and canons, and cultured society in general came to these affairs and took an active part in the argument.

On Claude’s big day everything took place with the customary pomp and ceremony. Dedicating his defense to the King’s son, Louis de Bourbon, the fifteen year old boy thrilled and charmed his audience by the clarity and simplicity of his replies, the breadth and depth of his knowledge, the charm of his youth and the grace of his eloquence. With little or no help from his professor, he deftly disposed of his opponents by a shattering display of logic. Then, as the thunderous applause died down around him, this stage of Claude’s career came to a brilliant and memorable end.

Exceptionally intelligent, charming in manner, handsome, richly endowed with material goods, universally beloved, he had the world at his feet. Now it was time for him, his parents thought, to enter society, relax from the drudgery of seven years’ intensive study, and become an “accomplished gentleman.” In a city which feverishly tried to emulate the social amenities of Paris, invitation followed invitation: a party here, a banquet there, the chase, the concert, the ball, the theater—every host and hostess clamored for his company.

It would be dishonest to pretend that Claude did not feel deeply gratified by all this adulation and that he spurned the pleasures held out to him on all sides. In fact, his earlier thoughts about becoming a priest seemed at this point to have faded completely from his mind. Highly pleased with himself and his achievements, he began to look around for a career that would offer him a chance to fulfill his ambitions for more honor and glory. To this end, friends of the family suggested that it might be advantageous to attach the young man to the Versailles Court in the service of the Duke of Burgundy, grandson of King Louis XIV. The marvellous defense of his theses had already attracted
the Court’s attention.4 There was nothing left but to arrange for Claude’s marriage to one of the Princess’s ladies-in-waiting in order to assure such a position for this promising scion of an ancient and noble line.

Claude travelled by coach to Paris where he took up residence with friends of the family. As soon as he arrived, the best drawing-rooms of the capital quickly opened their doors to him and before long he was presented to the Duke of Burgundy at the Court of Versailles. The splendor of the court made a deep impression on him and he would have been glad to plunge into its endless round of glittering events but for the fact that the proposed marriage was not to his liking. As his first biographer expresses it: “He passionately desired glory and renown. But becoming involved with a woman in marriage was an obstacle rather than a means to the attainment of such a goal.” Moreover, his lordly old father did not relish the idea of Claude’s “spending his life in antechambers, courtyards and staircases.” He wanted something better for this son of whom he was immensely proud. As a result, it was decided that Claude should leave the Court, at least for a while.

The sacrifice was a painful one because he realized that, with his talents and charm, success would not have been slow in coming. Somewhat reluctantly he returned to the less glamorous surroundings of provincial Rennes to start once more on the old routine of parties and social affairs. After all, he was the son of the richest man in town, and what else could be expected? Although his parents provided him with a generous allowance for his social life, Claude wanted only the best of the best, and the best costs a great deal of money. Soon he had to resort to borrowing to keep abreast of the mounting bills, meanwhile engaging in all kinds of camouflage to hide his insolvency from his father who, he was well aware, would have strongly disapproved of such prodigality.

Qualms of conscience began to follow these financial worries. Although the piety of his early youth had safeguarded him thus far from the dangerous pitfalls so common in a life of this sort, Claude felt ill at ease. He realized that he was no longer as intimately united with God as before. With a feeling of longing his thoughts returned to the days when all his young heart had desired

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4 This may seem unlikely in our days. Yet in those times intense interest was displayed in these tourneys of the mind. One of the reasons why Emperor Charles IV founded the University of Prague was his desire to have similar intellectual duels in that city.
was God and God alone. He who had thought of becoming a priest
was now rapidly drifting closer to the raging torrent of pride and
worldly concupiscence, and this uneasiness induced him to make a
retreat to examine his conscience and decide what to do with his
life.  

During those days of recollection he saw how unfaithful he had
been to grace and how much he had exposed himself to the danger
of sin. He again felt the call to God's service. Now he was going
to become a great preacher for God. In his imagination he saw his
pulpit surrounded by thousands of entranced listeners, swayed by
his powerful eloquence and eager to return to their Heavenly
Father. He would study theology at the Sorbonne, renew there
his academic triumphs, and then begin the conversion of France.
Sincere as his desire was for the priesthood, he did not realize how
much his ambition for personal glory played a part in these dreams.
Nonetheless, he at last decided to confide the plan to his doting
father.

It was a rude shock for the man who had pinned on this
only son all his worldly dreams of glory and renown for the des
Places family, but he was too good a Christian to oppose the idea
openly. Instead of antagonizing Claude and thus strengthening
his resolve, the father thought it would be best to postpone a de-
cision. Accordingly, he quietly suggested that such a step should
be taken only after long and careful deliberation. Furthermore,
he said, to become a good preacher one did not have to study at
the Sorbonne. "I have heard quite a few doctors preaching ser-
mons," the old man observed, "and none of them was any better
because he had a degree." While testing his vocation, Claude
could study law. That would be useful for him either as a priest
or as a man of the world. If he still insisted on being a priest after
that, parental consent would not be withheld. Claude saw the
reasonableness of his father's proposal. Besides, the effects of the
retreat were beginning to wear off anyway, and he welcomed a
chance to have more freedom than he could enjoy at Rennes under
the eyes of his parents. Accordingly, he accepted the offer and

5The first retreat houses had been established in the seventeenth century
throughout Brittany by the efforts of Father Kerlivio, Father Huby, and
Mother de Francheville, who founded the still vigorous Congregation of the
Daughters of Our Lady of the Retreat. Probably Claude made this retreat
in their local retreat house in Rennes.
went off in October 1697 to the School of Law at the University of Nantes.

It was not long before his high ideals and noble aspirations began to fade from his mind. Human respect and the sarcastic remarks of fellow students did the rest. Claude began to set aside his religious practices so that he might indulge in the frivolous pastimes of his friends. He tried desperately to be one of the crowd, but in the midst of it all, his conscience gave him no peace. Remorse so completely spoiled whatever pleasure he engaged in that, as he himself said later in describing this dark period of his life, "it cost me considerable trouble to sin." "How often did I not find grace surrounding me like a wall of steel and setting up an obstacle which a thousand times in succession crushed my criminal efforts and turned me away from my irregularities." The thought of the priesthood began to haunt him again and its insistent gnawing increased his uneasiness. He longed to break away from his present surroundings and to be alone with God.

Fortunately, Divine Providence soon provided an opportunity. His father wanted him to transfer to Paris and there receive the best legal training France had to offer. Paris! That was the place where Father Descartes⁶ was presently stationed. The good Jesuit priest had directed him in his early years at school in Rennes and could be counted on now to provide the spiritual guidance that he needed so much. Claude readily obeyed his father's command and set out for Paris at once.

The sincerity of his desire to be really faithful to God this time is demonstrated by the fact that he refused to have his own apartment in Paris. Experience had taught him to fear the freedom of bachelor quarters and for that reason he humbly asked the Jesuits of the College of Louis the Great⁷ to allow him to board with them while he pursued his legal studies at the Sorbonne. Under the saintly guidance of Father Descartes, his spiritual life now began to flourish once again. By the time he had received the licentiate in law (1700), he was ready for another retreat.
During the course of this one he would really probe his soul and do his best to emerge with a definite vocational objective. The decision could not be postponed any longer.

After all, he had fulfilled all the requirements necessary for the position to which his father had destined him and would be expected to make his grand entrance into the world of law very soon. On the other hand, his old desire for the priesthood had grown extremely keen again with the renewal of his spiritual life. Carefully and methodically examining himself in the light of God and eternity, Claude finally excluded a worldly career for once and for all. With characteristic honesty he decided to abandon himself unreservedly to God's grace in order to prepare himself for the divine call. Rosy visions of personal fame and accomplishment were at last resolutely set aside.

Only one obstacle remained to be overcome—his parents. Since they were totally unaware of their son's decision, they had been busily arranging for him to take his place as a lawyer in Parliament. His mother had even bought an official barrister's gown for him and had it hung out ready to wear. To please her, Claude put on the garment, took a long look at himself in the mirror, then quietly turned and told his parents the shocking news. Although it broke his heart to be the cause of disappointment and sorrow to his mother and father, his decision remained irrevocable. Des Places père did everything he could to make Claude change his mind, but realizing at last the uselessness of his opposition, he finally gave in. He even generously consented to his son's apparently quixotic idea of setting aside all hope of ecclesiastical preferment so that he might devote himself entirely to God's service as a simple priest.

To break more definitely with the past and with family ties, Claude resolved to study theology in Paris, far away from his father's home. Since the theological faculty of the Sorbonne was then tainted with Gallicanism, and since Claude was seeking moral and spiritual training as well as theological erudition, he gave the University a wide berth and returned instead to the College of Louis the Great. In this institution, the Jesuits conducted a theological school for the best students of their own society and a limited number of outsiders. By studying here, Claude automatically excluded himself from obtaining a recognized degree in theology, for the Sorbonne jealously monopolized the granting of doctorates.
The Baptismal Certificate of Claude Francis Poullart des Places.
(Courtesy Institut de Recherches Historiques, Faculté des Lettres, Rennes, and Father Coudray.)
Since a Sorbonne degree was the open sesame for ecclesiastical advancement, his entrance into this seminary in 1701 caused much excited wagging of tongues and shaking of heads in the fashionable salons of Paris. Claude, who had at last definitely broken with the world, took no notice of the gossip. Only God mattered for him now, and every day found him drawing closer to his Creator in prayerful union. Filled with sorrow for his past aberrations, he tried to make up for them by severe penance and thus become ever more like the suffering Christ whom he felt he had offended so much.

2. The Foundation of the Seminary and Congregation of the Holy Ghost

A Humble Beginning. With the growth of Claude’s severity in his own regard, his goodness and charity towards others developed apace, thereby constituting an unmistakable sign of his virtue’s supernatural character. Soon his attention began to be drawn to the poor little Savoyards who worked in Paris as chimney-sweeps and tried to earn a few sous for their destitute families at home. Lonely, abandoned, and homesick, they desperately needed a friend who would preserve their faith and morals. Claude induced a few friends to help him teach them reading, writing, and the elements of religion. Little by little he began providing for their material needs as well.

After he was formally inducted into the clerical state by the reception of tonsure in August, 1702, he seems to have become increasingly aware that some of his fellow-students were almost as needy as the little chimney-sweeps. Seminaries as we know them now were not yet the general rule in France at that time. Students attended lectures at the university or at other theological institutes but they were free to live wherever they wished. For many of the poorer ones, this often involved a precarious state of affairs whereby they snatched a few courses when they were free from the menial jobs that enabled them to eke out a living. It will readily be seen that this procedure was not only detrimental to their health and studies, but also, especially in such a licentious city as Paris, it seriously jeopardized their morals.

While it is true that charitable persons had already founded a few houses to take care of these unfortunates, there were not nearly enough to accommodate their increasing numbers. Claude
had only to look around him to see scores of these pale and exhausted young men. With the approval of his director, therefore, he began by secretly helping some with the savings he managed to squeeze from his father's modest allowance. Soon he went farther and gave them the food that was served to him at the College, satisfying his own wants with a few leftovers from the Jesuits' table. There was not yet any thought in his mind about setting up a new foundation. As he himself wrote later: "There was question only of quietly providing the necessary food for four of five poor students." Soon, however, other people began to share his interest and offered their help. It was a big step forward, for instance, when Father Peter Megret told him that he might have whatever remained after the meals of the six hundred boarders.

With a growing number of dependents on his hands, Claude felt the need of feeding their souls as well as their bodies, for many of them gave evidence of a woeful lack of spiritual training. After he had rented a house in the Rue des Cordiers, he selected a dozen of them and on Pentecost Sunday, May 27th, 1703:

Mr. Claude Francis Poullart des Places . . ., then only an aspirant to the ecclesiastical state, began the establishment of the said community of the seminary consecrated to the Holy Ghost under the invocation of the Blessed Virgin conceived without sin.8

A short time before, he had preached a retreat to the little group, applying to them the Gospel text: "He hath sent me to preach the Gospel to the poor." At its conclusion, they observed the feast of Pentecost by going to the Church of St. Etienne des-Grès and there, in the chapel of Our Lady, these ardent young souls consecrated themselves to bring the Glad Tidings to the poor. Back at their modest home, a quiet but happy celebration closed the first day of a foundation that was destined to write brilliant and glorious chapters in the history of the Church.

Because Claude could not bring himself to refuse anyone who fulfilled his stipulated conditions, their little establishment in the

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8The traditional date is May 20th. However, in 1703 Pentecost fell on May 27th. According to Father John Letourneur, C.S.Sp., who is preparing a special study on the early history of the Congregation, the expression "Seminary of the Holy Ghost" indicates the official title of the Congregation.
Rue des Cordiers was soon outgrown. Just then a few generous friends came forward, and the young seminary found itself installed by 1706 in much better accommodations on the Rue Neuve Sainte Geneviève, now Rue Tournefort. Henceforth, the Congregation of the Holy Ghost would move forward on its own initiative.

Poullart des Places and St. Louis de Montfort. Shortly after Claude began his theological course, his friendship with St. Louis de Montfort took on new life. In 1702 the Saint returned to Paris and visited his friend. Just at that time he was seriously thinking of organizing missions and retreats all over France so that the rural population might be saved from immorality and degradation. For this work he obviously needed collaborators and Claude, with his splendid oratorical gifts, would have been just the man to help him start it. They discussed their views, took counsel, and prayed for divine guidance. But in the end, Claude had to tell his friend that he did not personally feel called for the preaching of missions. All his time had to be spent in providing future priests with a decent home and an adequate training for their sublime task. However, he made this promise:

If God gives me the grace to succeed in this, you can count on missionaries. I will train them for you, and you will put them to work. In this way both you and I will be satisfied.

St. Louis went back to Poitiers and in 1703 laid there the first foundation of the Sisters' Congregation of the Daughters of Wisdom. After Easter, however, he returned to Paris for at least a year to aid Claude in the foundation and organization of his Seminary. In fact, it was under his impulse that Claude decided to expand his charitable activities in behalf of theological students by renting the house in the Rue des Cordiers. St. Louis' influence can be seen also in the dedication of the new foundation to the Holy Ghost and Mary's Immaculate Conception. Because of this close association, therefore, and because the Saint had come to Paris for the sole purpose of assisting his friend in establishing the new foundation, there can be little doubt that he was present at the official opening of the institute on the day of Pentecost, 1703. Moreover, since he was the only priest in the group, it is more than likely that he said Mass for them at the Church of St. Etienne-des-Grès before they dedicated themselves to the apostolate.
Ordination to the Priesthood and Death. Despite his preoccupation with the new seminary, Claude continued to prepare himself for his ordination, for he was still a simple cleric. Then suddenly God withdrew from him those consolations which He uses in the beginning to attract fervent souls to Himself. It was in the purifying loneliness of aridity that Claude had to prepare himself. Qualms of conscience about the past rose up to plague him and he reproached himself bitterly for having started his seminary without being sufficiently prepared for such a great responsibility. Convinced of his own unworthiness, he kept postponing his ordination to the priesthood for three years. In the end, however, his director was able to calm his fears and restore peace to his troubled soul. On December 17th, 1707, he became a priest forever, together with the charter members of his foundation who were now aiding him in the task of organizing the new work.

Less than two years after his ordination, God called him to his heavenly reward. Exhausted by the cares and worries of the growing foundation (at his death there were already seventy students) and weakened still more by his severe and incessant penances, he had driven himself to a premature death. At the end of September 1709, pleurisy and an abdominal disease attacked his emaciated body. He suffered terrible pain, but in the midst of all his suffering he repeated over and over again: "Quam dilecta tabernacula tua, Domine Virtutum. Concupiscit et deficit anima mea in atria Domini" (How lovely are thy tabernacles, O Lord of Hosts! My soul longeth and fainteth for the courts of the Lord. Ps. 83, 1.) Four short days of illness sufficed to snuff out the spark of life in his enfeebled body. On October second, at five o’clock in the afternoon, his soul quietly went forth to the lovely dwellings of the Lord.

Father Poullart des Places has never been formally proposed for canonization although there appears to be substantial evidence that his brief span of years encompassed a record of heroic virtue. Up to the present, historical developments have been inimical to the introduction of his cause. The orphaned seminary which he left behind in a still precarious financial condition was scarcely able to undertake such a process. Then, just as it had achieved a measure of security and stability, the social upheavals of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries consigned to oblivion many of the documents that would have been invaluable
to the biographer. Lastly, the advent of Father Libermann and his confreres of the Holy Heart of Mary caused the Founder to be almost forgotten in the flood of veneration shown to the saintly Restorer. It is only since the beginning of this century that the original Founder is being accorded the attention which he so richly deserves.

In 1959 the spiritual children of Father des Places will celebrate the two hundred and fiftieth anniversary of his death. Perhaps this observance will initiate the long-postponed introduction of his cause. The late Cardinal Vivès was very much in favor of it and insistently urged the Holy Ghost Fathers to proceed energetically toward that much-desired end. May Divine Providence look kindly upon it when the proposal becomes a reality.

3. Purpose and Organization of Father des Places’ Foundation

*A. D. 3 ff.*

A candidate for admission to the Holy Ghost Seminary had to fulfill two conditions over and above the usual requirements: he had to be poor, and he had to be willing to consecrate himself to the most difficult and most abandoned works in God’s vineyard. The requirement of poverty echoed a decree of the Council of Trent which, in ordering the erection of seminaries, specified:

In general, the Council recommends that the sons of the poor be selected, although it does not exclude those of richer families, provided that they pay their board and give evidence of true zeal for the service of God and the Church.

*Fl. 269 ff.*

It is not hard to understand the reason for this directive. Through the right of primogeniture, the eldest sons of noble and wealthy families inherited nearly everything and, as a result, it was common practice for such families to destine their younger sons for the army and the Church. Ambitious to achieve honor and riches, these young men had little or no interest in the care of souls and thought only of becoming beneficiaries, abbots and bishops.

Fully acquainted with the social fabric in which he lived, Claude intended to bar the way to those who were more interested in a career than in souls by requiring poverty as a condition for admis-
Moreover, his concept of poverty did not involve, as the Jansenists later charged, recruiting priests from the lowest strata of society. He always thoroughly investigated the background of an applicant’s family and admitted only those aspirants who came from decent, if humble, surroundings. As long as their families could not pay the board required in other institutions, such candidates were welcome in his seminary. Because families were usually quite large and because, as we have seen, the inheritance laws assigned nearly everything to the oldest son, even many children of noble birth might be regarded as poor in this sense.

Thus “poor” did not necessarily mean “destitute.” In fact, it was applicable to that great segment of the population which earned its bread by any sort of toil: teachers, shopkeepers, craftsmen, farmers, etc. Briefly, it applied to what we would now call the middle class. Even in our own day, few middle class families with numerous children are able to send their sons to a private boarding school. It was for vocations from just such people that Father des Places started his seminary. He wanted to train and educate them in a house that would maintain the modest standards of living to which they were accustomed, for experience had shown that once they were used to a richer and more abundant way of life in an institution for the wealthy, they refused to accept the humbler clerical assignments that carried too small an income for their expensive tastes.

It is scarcely necessary to point out that for Claude “poor” was not to be identified with “dirty” or “rude.” His rules stressed personal cleanliness and prescribed napkins for the students and clean white cloths for the tables. True to his early training, he always remained an “accomplished gentleman” and insisted that his students conduct themselves in genteel fashion at all times.

Father des Places’ second requirement for admission aimed at providing a remedy for the frightful lack of pastoral care from which much of France was then suffering. As has been pointed out, the younger sons of noble families used the Church to advance their own position and cared little about souls. Despite the fact that there were large numbers of these priests actively pursuing

_Fl. 324 f._

_N. E. 1743, p. 158_

_Fl. 329_

_Fl. 319 ff._

_MS. Rath, 62 f._

9Father des Places’ original plan made provision for the admission of wealthy students: he would welcome them if they were willing to help support their poor fellow students and share the way of life followed in the seminary. However, this provision had to be eliminated by his successor. Otherwise, the seminary’s legal recognition would have been jeopardized.
careers in all the large cities of France, the daily round of spiritual activity in the parishes received scant attention. Conditions were even worse in rural areas. Like absentee landlords, the appointed pastors lived in the city and sent ill-fed and poorly-prepared substitutes, scarcely able to read a missal, to take their place. As a result, in many areas ignorance of the faith was appalling and morals had sunk to frightful depths of depravity. The founder wanted his priests to be priests in the true sense of the term—good shepherds of the flock, not hirelings. This was the reason behind his specification that they should be willing "to accept and even prefer the most humble and difficult functions in the Church, for which it is difficult to find laborers."

The foundation of such an institute was very timely from the missionary point of view also. The great Seminary of the Foreign Missions of Paris had just then entered into a period of profound crisis. In 1695 only two Directors remained and its aspirants had dwindled to a mere handful. Shortly after Father des Places' death, three of its Directors had to be expelled for Jansenistic teachings; the number of its seminarians was often no more than five or six; sometimes there were none at all. Its situation remained most precarious throughout the eighteenth century. Fortunately, the flourishing condition of Holy Ghost Seminary was able to offset this weakness to some extent by recruiting vocations for the Foreign Missions from among its students.

From the beginning, the senior seminarians helped Father des Places with the administration of the new house. They assisted him especially as bursars and as tutors in philosophy and theology. From among these seminarians, in 1705, Claude chose Vincent Barbier and James Garnier as his first official associates and after a two-year period of trial they were formally admitted as members of the Congregation of the Holy Ghost. In Father des Places' mind, this was to be a society which would assure the survival, the proper functioning, and the expansion of the work he had founded. Thus there are two distinct though inseparable aspects to his foundation: the Seminary of the Holy Ghost and the Congregation of the Holy Ghost. By its very nature and purpose, the Congregation was to remain limited in number, at least as long as the original organization was preserved. It was an association of professors and directors chosen because of their particular ability and talents to teach, train and direct future priests.
Although its members were secular priests who did not bind themselves by the three vows of religion, they lived in common, promised obedience to their superiors, and surrendered the income from their ministry to a common fund. The congregation thus formed was a teaching society, and its educational activities were to be directed for the most part toward training priests for the domestic and foreign missions. To this day, both the Seminary and the Congregation still exist, but it was the Congregation that later developed, through the vivifying influence of the Venerable Francis Libermann, into the present world-wide organization known as the Holy Ghost Fathers or, more briefly, Spiritans.

Another feature of Father des Places' foundation merits our attention at this point, *viz*: his curious prohibition against taking degrees in theology. At first sight one would be inclined to regard this as a strange type of obscurantism, but as a matter of fact there were good reasons for the regulation. First of all, the Sorbonne, which at the time held a virtual monopoly on the doctorate in theology, had aroused suspicions as to its orthodoxy. With Gallicanism, Jansenism, and Quietism rampant in France, Claude preferred to see his students take their theology at the Jesuit College, whose loyalty to the Pope and whose purity of doctrine were beyond question. Then too, a cleric who could boast of a theological degree was eligible for one of the many benefices which were reserved for Sorbonne graduates. Those on whom degrees had been conferred usually became ambitious for ever higher and better paid positions and, since this would have destroyed the spirit of Claude's foundation, he wisely obviated the difficulty at its very source.

From all this it is clear that he was not opposed to degrees in principle. As a matter of fact, he allowed his students to take a degree in Canon Law, a field of study in which the above-mentioned objectionable features did not exist. Still less should his prohibition be seen as a manifestation of an anti-intellectual attitude which tries to be satisfied with the bare minimum. Aside from the fact that Father des Place's own intellectual brilliance would scarcely justify such an interpretation, the regulations he drew up for his seminary put great stress on experimental science and even added two years of special studies to the customary cycle.

10 As a rule, no one was allowed to begin his theology without having studied mathematics and experimental physics.
of philosophy and theology which other seminaries regarded as adequate. Intellectual minimalism would never have given rise to the excellent reputation for ecclesiastical erudition which his society enjoyed throughout the eighteenth century and which induced several bishops to offer the direction of their seminaries to the Holy Ghost Fathers and prompted others to take on des Places' graduates as professors of philosophy and theology in their own seminaries. This academic renown soon gained such wide currency that graduation from Holy Ghost Seminary was held equivalent to a degree from the Sorbonne.

All this clearly demonstrates, therefore, that the early prohibition against theological degrees must be regarded as a prudent safeguard against certain heretical tendencies of the age. Under no circumstances should it be interpreted as an example of that miserable obscurantism which sometimes dons the trappings of humility to maintain that knowledge endangers holiness. In fact, Father des Places is frequently quoted as having said:

A priest who is full of ardor for God's cause but who lacks learning is blind in his zeal, and a learned priest who lacks piety is close to falling into heresy and rebellion against the Church.

One might also ask why Father des Places, who gave his foundation the full practice of religious life, did not formalize it by directing the members to take vows of poverty, chastity, and obedience, and thus make it a religious institute in the technical sense of the term. There is a ready answer for this. In the first place, with few exceptions the old religious orders in France had entered into a state of regrettable decadence during the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries. We need not examine here the reason for this sad state of affairs. It is fully recorded by contemporary historical documents such as the ones which tell how an ecclesiastical committee of the period was busily engaged in abolishing all monasteries that did not have at least fifteen occupants. By reason of numbers alone, therefore, it would have been practically impossible for Claude to start his foundation as a religious order. Secondly, the establishment of new religious communities in France was expressly forbidden. Finally, the modern type of religious community known as a "Congregation" (in contradistinction to an "Order") hardly existed at that time. All the great religious foundations of seventeenth century France, such as the
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Oratorians (1601), the Vincentians (1625), the Sulpicians (1642) and the Foreign Missions (1660), were secular institutes with an intense religious life but without official religious vows. Any deviation from this pattern would have meant needless trouble for the nascent community of Father des Places. Suffice it to say, therefore, that while there was no question of public religious vows, the routine of religious life was fully observed.