

**DOCUMENT SIGNED BY THE FIRST SISTERS OF THE COMMUNITY**  
**MARGARET LESTOCQ'S MEMOIRS**  
**NO ENDOWMENTS**

**DOCUMENT SIGNED BY THE FIRST SISTERS OF THE COMMUNITY**

**Introduction**

This is the oldest of the foundational documents of the Infant Jesus Sisters. It was written in Rouen in 1669.

Already, seven years before, some women from Rouen had come together to further the human and Christian formation of young and adult women, who, because of the poverty and deprivation of the period would not otherwise have had the opportunity to be educated.

It was now three years since these women had accepted 'wholeheartedly to live in community, trusting fully in Divine Providence, desiring to seek no rewards (M.L.).

This group, which had come together in response to N.Barré's initiative, took on values and a way of life quite demanding for women at that time : a spirit of disinterestedness is not being concerned about rewards or results, not seeking any security, total trust in God, and orientated towards mission. Accepting to live without any security would have been particularly difficult for them in the historical context of the time.

**Historical context:** During the second half of the 17th century, France experienced great insecurity.

**Political Insecurity** : Louis XIV was a conquerer. He was to say of himself at the end of his life : 'I have loved war too much'. Of his sixty-one years as ruling monarch only ten were to enjoy peace. It was a dreadful existence for the people : fields devastated, taxes that became more and more crushing, men leaving home to go to war...

**Economic Insecurity** : epidemics and famines were rife, particularly in certain regions. Thus in 1662 - the date which was to mark the origin of the Institute with the mission to Sotteville (Rouen) - half the children in Rouen died of famine.

**Religious Insecurity** : Here again there was a lot of unrest and instability : theological debates on sin, grace, frequent communion; Jansenism with all the anguish it sowed about salvation; the most bloody and unjust struggles against Protestants...

In this context, religious life lived by women, only within the monastery walls, gave to its members a certain security, sometimes even sought by those who entered :

- security given by the protective walls of the monastery, by the big properties and wealth which some of them enjoyed. Young girls from the poorer milieu found their livelihood assured, while those from noble families found a revenue and a social status. This led in some cases to a life of decadence.
- spiritual security, where the focus was often only on personal sanctification

The work begun by N. Barré, which offered a different style of community life without vows or cloister, could also lead to expectations of the same guarantees as those of monastic life. After three years' experience, it was necessary to have, in writing, a clear-sighted and unambiguous reminder, both for those who wished to join and for those who, after a few years in the community, ran the risk of lessening the challenge presented to members.

This document could be considered as the first Statute of the Institute. It expresses the aim and distinguishing features of the Institute. There was no title in the original edition. The present title was added in the nineteenth century.

There are forty-three signatures. We do not find all the names of those who were known to be among the first Sisters, e.g. Marguerite Lestocq, Françoise Duval and Anne Le Coeur. The word «Sister» appears before seven names which probably indicates those who had already made a commitment. The others were probably being admitted, having been informed of all that is basic to the spirit of the Institute. We note the names : Louise Robache who was N.Barré's niece; Catherine and Marie-Madeleine Tiberge whose brother was a Director of the Institute in Paris at the beginning of the eighteenth century; Marie-Anne Le Teinturier to whom N.Barré wrote a letter. It is one of only two letters with his signature which we still have.

## DOCUMENT SIGNED BY THE FIRST SISTERS OF THE COMMUNITY (F.S.)

### JESUS

1. The spirit of the Institute of the Holy Infant Jesus Sisters of the Charitable Schools is to teach the basic elements of Christian doctrine to their neighbour (1). They do this in an apostolic way and in that same spirit of faith that does not seek reward (2) which impelled the apostles to instruct the whole world. Therefore all those who ask to be admitted and are accepted should be well informed about the spirit of the House (3) and of the Institute which unlike those of other Institutes, is not a fixed and permanent establishment where they will be taken care of for the rest of their lives, or even for a long period. In fact there is so little material security (4) that the superiors cannot promise to recompense them for their services, in the event of their dismissal (5) from the Institute.

2. N. Barré, their admirable Founder, was intent on making them totally dependent on the wise, loving and all-powerful Providence of God so that they would rely upon it continually, uniquely and always for their maintenance and upkeep. He was firmly convinced that since their services for God and their neighbour were given freely and out of pure love, they would receive a recompense which would be beyond human power to give. In fact, they would become worthy and certain of the great and admirable rewards that God promises to give in this life and in the next to all those who seek only to advance His Kingdom in others (6).

3. From the very beginning all those who join the community will be made aware of what is set out in this article since it is fundamental to the spirit of the Institute. Thus there will be no reason for complaint if it should happen that they are sent away later on because of their failures and repeated infidelities. They will know clearly that they are accepted only under the following conditions :

- firstly, that it is in faithfully serving God and their neighbour that they are really working at their own sanctification;
- secondly, that they will not expect any material rewards for services rendered to the Institute, no matter how long and considerable these may have been;
- thirdly, that just as they will be free to leave the Institute when they please, so also the superiors will be fully entitled to dismiss them, after several years of service and without recompense, if they do not find them worthy and capable of the task entrusted to them (7).

4. We, the undersigned, having read and re-read what is written above, have accepted these conditions and acknowledge that we have entered the community of the Charitable Schools only on the above conditions.

Sr Anne Corneille	Sr Catherine Leheu
Sr Marie Deschamps	Sr Heleine Carnin
Sr Marie Anne Teinturier (8)	Sr Catherine Lamy
Sr Elisabeth Goupil	Anne De Lespinay
Marie Forfait	Catherine Tiberge (9)
Marie Marthe Malmaison (10)	Marie Magg Thiberge (9)
Elisabeth de la Couture	Anne Thérèse Duquesne
Thérèse	Magdelaine Guérard
Catherine Le Raistre	Marieane
Marthe Allain	Jeanne Goupil ditte Barthelemy
Marguerite	Marie Susanne Rohée
Louise Robache	Suzanne C.
ditte de St. Paul (11)	Charlotte Simon
Madeleine	Marianne Aubry
Françoise Quesnel (12)	Marie Thérèse Leger
Margueritte	Charlotte
Louise Le Raistre	Barbe
Marie	Marie Goupil
Jeanne Bulée	Margueritte Lefeuve
Anne	Margueritte Mancel
Renée Le Chevalier	Marianne Panel St. Benoît
Anne de la Croix	Marie Deschamps (12)
Catherine Grémont	

#### NOTES

1. The original has : «to their neighbour of their own sex.†» The norm of the day was that boys and girls be educated separately. This was also the rule of the Church.
2. The word 'disinterestedness' used in the original is here translated as 'faith that does not seek reward'.
3. 'House' is used in the scriptural sense of community
4. c.f. FM 3, 4; R.E.
5. The reasons for dismissal are referred to in S.R. 3 :7; 6 :4; 14 : 14; T.S. 18. They show very clearly the challenges presented to a person joining the Institute. Dismissal should only take place after a Sister has been invited and helped to 'repent and believe the Gospel'.
6. Mt. 6 : 33; Lk. 12 : 31; Mk. 10 : 30
7. This refers primarily to the attitudes with which one is expected to live out one's mission.
8. The recipient of L. 60
9. Both were sisters of Louis Tiberge, a priest of the Foreign Missions, who was spiritual director for the Institute 1700 - 1730
10. There is a + after this name in the original
11. N. Barré's niece, his sister Catherine's daughter
12. Both these names had a line through them in the original

## MARGUERITE LESTOCQ'S MEMOIR (ML)

### Introduction

This document is the oldest record we have of the history of the Institute. It is of special value because it was written during the life time of N. Barré himself. Marguerite Lestocq, who signed the document on the 22nd November, 1681, wrote solely from experience, giving a record as it were of what she had seen and heard.

We can learn something about Marguerite Lestocq from the archives in Amiens and Rouen (Sisters of Providence). She is referred to in the account books of the early communities in the Rouen archives. Marguerite was born at Amiens on the 8th May, 1642 and her sister, Catherine, on the 26th May, 1638. They were related to N. Barré and the families often met. This accounts for the fact that the two sisters were among the early group who worked under his direction. When Françoise Duval, the first superior of the community, was sent to Reims in December 1670, it was Marguerite who replaced her in Rouen. The community membership grew - there were more than twenty schools in the town of Rouen alone. The main house, which was also the house of 'formation' was at Mme de Grainville, opposite the Minim monastery. After a period of ten years it was moved to rue de l'Épée. Her companions naturally turned to Marguerite to write an account of the beginnings of the Institute. She was twenty years of age in 1662 and thirty-nine when she wrote this record.

One cannot but be impressed by the sincerity and simplicity with which she wrote and by the delight she shows at seeing the work of God evolving and developing.

## MARGUERITE LESTOCQ'S MEMOIR (ML)

*JESUS AND MARY*

*22nd November 1681*

*Feast of St. Cecilia*

### The schools of Jesus Humiliated (1)

1. They began in the year 1666 (2) at Sotteville (3), if I am not mistaken, about two and a half miles from Rouen. There were some wonderful conversions of men, women and older girls and many people made a general confession. The 'little schools' (4) continued there for about a year with widespread approval and praise. I am sure I could say that almost the whole village was converted.

2. Later, similar schools were set up in the town of Rouen, near the monastery of the Penitential Fathers (5) at the home of Mme de Grainville - a very holy woman full of the love of God and extremely zealous for the salvation of souls. The superiors were Father Barré, a very saintly man, and the late parish priest of Saint Amand (6), who was so zealous that he devoted his whole life and all his energy to the conversion of sinners.

3. We were four or five sisters living in total abandonment to Divine Providence. We did not all live together; two were teaching in the school near the Carmelites and three at Mme de Grainville's. Father Barré came from time to time to give us talks. He also helped us organise our life and set a time for the spiritual exercises. We ran the 'little schools' from 8 a.m. to 11 a.m. Then the children were taken to Mass, about 130 or more of them. We took the older girls for reading and catechism from midday until 2 p.m., and then the little ones until 5 p.m.

4. Afterwards we would go from house to house to instruct the poorer people, teaching them the principal mysteries of religion, and especially how to make their confession and communions properly. We helped people to make a general confession (7) - those who needed it or those who had never made one before.

5. At the start, at least 400 made their confession, having had some informal instruction in preparation. Above all we advised them never to allow boys and girls to share the same bed or allow children to sleep with their fathers or mothers. We did this with gentleness, respect, charity and simplicity and pointed out the risks involved. How extraordinary! These poor mothers, not having proper beds for their children, put them sleeping on straw or used chairs to make beds. The children wanted to sleep on our school benches through fear of having to sleep with their parents, brothers or sisters. We had to help the very poor so that they could have beds (8).

6. Nothing that I write comes from myself; it is God who is directing my hand to write down the truth. There was such great ignorance in Rouen that most people knew little or nothing about God. For example, when an old woman of eighty was asked how many Gods there were, she said that she knew well there were three. Having said this she lost consciousness and fainted. When she came to herself again, she said she wasn't an ignorant woman, but that she got a fright at being questioned and at the answer she gave. (Her presumption was the cause of her punishment). I cannot recount here all the extraordinary things that happened.

7. We taught catechism on Sundays and feast days. So many people came that we had to take away partitions and enlarge the rooms in order to make space for them. It happened that the priests of the parish tried to create difficulties for us regarding the teaching of catechism on Sundays. They said we were taking over their work and this was causing confusion. We explained our position with such sensitivity and respect, with all the deference that is their due and showing ourselves ready to accept their decision, that they gave their approval. We were freely allowed to continue our teaching (9). This was especially true in the case of the late parish priest of St. Vivien, a very noteworthy theologian and canon. The children we had prepared for first Communion were examined thoroughly by him, in the presence of several priests. They were able to answer so well, even in matters of theology, that he gave us full permission to teach throughout his parish and gave us his blessing.

8. That is more or less how the schools began in Rouen. We worked at Mme de Grainville's house for several years without living in community. It was the intention of N. Barré and of the parish priest of St. Amand to send Sr. Françoise Duval (10) to set up a similar school at Reims. She was one of the first to be involved in the schools. But God called the parish priest of St. Amand to Himself. As soon as N. Barré heard of his death he sent Sr. Françoise to Reims as they had planned.

9. I would like to say very simply that some time later N. Barré told us that he felt very strongly and deeply that we should form a community! He put his idea before us like this : 'Go and have dinner with your sisters who teach at the Carmelites,' he said, 'then invite them to come and have dinner with you at the Penitents and see if you can live in union with one another.' We did what he asked through obedience, but quite blindly, not understanding the mystery. Later, N. Barré asked us : 'Do you want to live in community, on the understanding that you will not have any security? (11) You will have enough to live on, but only just enough. If you fall ill you will be sent to the local hospital (12). You must be ready to die by the wayside, abandoned by everybody and remain in this attitude throughout your life. 'Well then', said N. Barré, 'what is your answer to be?' We answered wholeheartedly : 'Yes, we are willing to accept this and to abandon ourselves to Divine Providence in complete disinterestedness.' (13) No sooner said than done. We became one community under obedience to a superior, who at the time was Mme du Buc (14), a very saintly woman. We lived in a blessed harmony of gentleness, humility and concern for each other, and in an atmosphere of recollection and silence.

10. I would like to point out that there were no difficulties among the Sisters for several years. The community continued to grow in number, the schools multiplied, and the graces of God abounded. However, after a number of years serious problems occurred, arising sometimes because of the parish priests and other churchmen, sometimes because of the religious or lay people, all of whom sorely tried the patience of Fr. Barré causing him much suffering (15).. He sweated and toiled and sacrificed himself to get the Institute established. He wore himself out and ruined his health so as to encourage us in a holy and supernatural way, filling our hearts and minds with everything needed for our own salvation and that of our neighbour. It is difficult to put into words the suffering which Fr. Barré experienced. Our benefactors were and still are M. de Touvens, M. de l'Espinay and others whom you also know well. Blessed be the holy name of God.

11. This is the witness that I, Marguerite Lestocq, feel obliged to give to all who want to know, since I was the first to be blessed with the happiness of being one of the community, though I am unworthy. Even now, I do not deserve to have been the first. The Sisters show great kindness in putting up with me.

## NOTES

1. Officially all the schools were known under the one name : 'Charitable Schools of the Holy Infant Jesus.' In practice, the Mistresses, benefactors, clergy and the public gave them different names such as : 'The Schools of Jesus Humiliated', 'Schools of Providence', 'Sacred Heart Schools' etc. The title given by Marguerite Lestocq reflects Article 2 of the Statutes and Rules (SR 1 : 2).
2. The schools actually started in 1662. 1666 was probably the year the sisters came to live together..
3. A very poor manufacturing district of Rouen.
4. The primary purpose of these schools in the 17th century was catechesis as well as reading and writing. Sometimes they existed only for a few months or a year, a time of concentrated evangelisation. Later they were established in a more permanent way.
5. These were Minim Fathers. Their monastery was in the same street as Mme de Grainville's house. Mme de Grainville was one of the first of N. Barré's collaborators. Her son was an Administrator in the Rouen General Hospital.
6. This was Antoine de la Haye who introduced N. Barré to Nicolas Roland. The latter was interested in providing education for children in the poorer areas of Reims.
7. A text written by St. Vincent de Paul (c.1660) throws some light on this preoccupation. 'Many of the poor rural people were ashamed to confess their sins to their parish priests, hence they were not in a state of grace. When one of the renowned men of the time was asked if anything could be done to help these people, he replied that with the help of a general confession, they could be saved - on condition there was a sincere sorrow for sin.'
8. Promiscuity was very prevalent in situations of extreme poverty and limited space.
9. This consisted of sowing the seeds of faith or of awakening that which was already there, i.e. teaching the way of salvation.
10. She was the first to respond to N. Barré's appeal. In December 1670, she was sent to Reims with Anne Le Coeur to help N. Roland set up the Sisters of the Infant Jesus in Reims. In 1684, she was in Lisieux helping to set up the Sisters of Providence of Lisieux.
11. These terms were usually used when setting up contracts. Here there would be no guarantees given.
12. This 'hotel-dieu' was a centre where public service was offered to children or young people who were abandoned, the homeless, travellers who were on pilgrimage to holy places or people who were ill. (The hospital section opened on to the chapel).
13. Without seeking any profit or advantage for ourselves.
14. Mme de Buc was a Lady Associate who looked after temporal matters.
15. The association of Writing Masters was very critical of N Barré's work - seeing it as a threat. Others, who could not see his project working out, criticised him to superiors and bishops.

## REASONS FOR NOT ACCEPTING ENDOWMENTS (R.E.)

### INTRODUCTION

This text, together with many others, was published in 1694 by Servien de Montigny under the general title of 'Maxims of Nicolas Barré'. Montigny was Director General of the Paris branch of the Institute 1688-1699.

The book on the Maxims of N. Barré consisted of seven chapters of which the first four chapters were Maxims in the strict sense.

In this document (Ch. 6 of the above) Montigny portrays N. Barré's thinking on abandonment and disinterestedness, in connection with his resistance to endowments and official recognition by means of Letters Patent.

The issue of endowments was the subject of much discussion during Nicolas Barré's life time. Pressure to get rid of these principles became even stronger after his death. Seeking to benefit from the king's approval would carry with it the risk of accepting pledges and security.

Montigny summarises clearly and concisely the reasons why N. Barré did not want to accept endowments and invited those who would have known him to give their opinions on the subject.

An endowment: the legal investment of capital (money or house, lands, etc.) under contract. The terms of the contract were clearly defined e. g. the interest or revenue to be used for a specific work in specific circumstances. These terms could never be changed without the authorisation of the donor. Endowments were a very good source of income for congregations; but there were a number of restrictions going with them. They were not free to move from one place to another in response to a greater need etc. The accumulation of income would have offered security to the members and made the discernment of vocation more difficult.

Under Louis XIV, groups were forbidden to accept an endowment contract unless they were officially and legally recognised i.e. have Letters Patent - official document with a government seal, recognising their existence legally.

### REASONS FOR NOT ACCEPTING ENDOWMENTS (R.E.) FOR THE CHARITABLE SCHOOLS OR EVEN OWNING A HOUSE

1. The apostolic spirit which N. Barré always kept in mind is a spirit of disinterestedness and detachment.
2. God has always encouraged renunciation : the wonderful way in which N. Barré's schools have been and are blessed seems to flow from the spirit of disinterestedness, which was so energetically promoted by their founder. We must therefore be on our guard lest the sources of all these graces be dried up, by accepting endowments which would make us too dependent on this kind of support.
3. If the Sisters feel assured of their future security, they will no longer surrender fully to Divine Providence or to their superiors, whatever may be said to the contrary.
4. The spirit of the Institute draws its strength from disinterestedness, love of poverty, sincere desire to work for the salvation of one's neighbour, together with self-abandonment to Divine Providence. This strengthens the Sisters'



vocations and keeps them firm and constant in their zeal. On the contrary, if we had some establishment and material securities for the future, we would find as has happened elsewhere, that girls who have no means of livelihood would seek to enter the Institute so as to have enough to live on and to escape from their needy situation. They would show great zeal and would hide their true state of mind so well that it would no longer be possible to distinguish between vocations which are genuine and those which are false and self-seeking. When the intentions of the Mistresses are no longer pure, their zeal in work and mission will quickly diminish, and the abundance of heavenly graces, for which the Charitable Schools of the Holy Infant Jesus have been esteemed up to now, will cease to be evident.

5. N. Barré often said : 'It is better for the school to last only ten or fifteen years without endowment, keeping alive their initial zeal, than to last longer and become lax as has happened in so many other institutes that promise security.'

6. So many times he said to different people : 'I want no endowment at all.' He even warned the Sisters of the institute in these terms : 'If you accept endowments, the Institute will crumble.'

7. He also said to the Sisters : 'In your zeal for the Institute you will totally oppose endowments that anyone offers after I have gone. If in my lifetime I should weaken in this respect, then you must strongly oppose me, otherwise the spirit of the Institute would not be preserved. If we were to accept endowments, everything would change in a short space of time.'

8. When N. Barré was being persuaded by many people to have at least one permanent house for the Sisters, he would only give in on condition that the house belonged to one of the Directors, or alternatively to a trusted friend, who would then rent it or lend it to the Sisters, who would not own it.

9. A month before his death, his provincial and the Father General of the Minims (1) again urged him to allow endowment of the schools of the Institute. He replied 'It is better to fall into the hands of God, having no human security, than to fall into the hands of human beings through endowment.'

10. N. Barré knew very well that human prudence favours establishment. Filled with the spirit of God, he would oppose this, saying : 'Wretched human reason, which spoils everything! It must be put on trial and proved wrong in order to preserve God's work in its entirety.'

11. If you were to allow your community to be endowed you would no longer enjoy the freedom to change a neighbourhood or parish. We already know from experience that this has sometimes been necessary.

12. N. Barré was ready to try anything that would further the establishment of the kingdom of God. For this reason he submitted to the setting up of something permanent in Rouen, but in Paris he insisted that he wanted nothing that would provide security. 'We have†', he said, 'walls and outer walls; Rouen is the outer wall, the outskirts of the holy city. Paris must be the wall which shelters the apostolic spirit in its purity.'

13. Following the permanent set up in Rouen, N. Barré would say, in his own way, when talking to the Sisters : 'You see how a curse has fallen upon the house in Rouen, because it has its security.' He spoke this way having seen the progress taking place in Paris which was much more considerable than in Rouen, where the Institute began.

14. Everyone agrees that there is a blessing guaranteed when the intentions and ideas of founders are followed. St. Paul assures us that they have received the first fruits of the Spirit. Their way of looking at things should be regarded as divinely inspired.



It is therefore evident that one should never lose sight of N. Barré's insights and desires. He was inspired by God to set up the Charitable Schools without security or endowment. He received the richness of the spirit of the Institute which should be our guiding rule in everything, but especially in such an essential and fundamental issue as this.

The Charitable Schools of the Holy Infant Jesus are the work of God and, if human beings put their hand to it, God will withdraw his. As soon as they take upon themselves the role of making it a permanent means of support, God will leave it to them. Since Divine Providence no longer recognises it as His work, He will cease to grant it that very special protection which gives the Institute its distinctive character.

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Opinions of some reputable people who supported the 'Reasons for not accepting endowments' given above.

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R.E. (a)

Letter from the Abbot of La Trappe (2) to Father Servien de Montigny

Father,

Since you asked for my opinion on this question and having given it due consideration, I believe that in the case of a work that originates from God, it is better to follow the intentions of those whom God has chosen to establish this work. It is they who have received the spirit and the mission. We believe that it is through their ministry that He wants to make known His will and to indicate the ways that people involved in this ministry should follow. As long as the original rules were faithfully kept everything prospered and was blessed in a special way. God protected his works, sustained them and furthered their growth. Experience has shown us only too clearly that as soon as the vision of founders is abandoned, other maxims observed and ways introduced which would have been unknown to the founders, even the holiest of Institutions has degenerated and become weak. In a word, human wisdom has spoiled what was established and what should have continued solely through Divine Providence.

The same applies to N. Barré's work as to so many others. It will be of use to the Church as long as it remains in God's hands, in the purity and abandonment with which it came to birth. When people interfere with it more than they should, it will no longer be the same. As soon as your schools become rich and are endowed, they will lose their fruitfulness, and there will be an end of the great benefits which up to now have been spread throughout the different regions of the country.

I am merely expressing my thoughts to you rather than giving you the more formal opinion (3) you requested, because, as far as possible, I do not wish to become involved in things which do not concern me.

F. Armand Jean, Abbot of La Trappe

12 th August, 1673 (4)

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Letter from Father Alexis du Buc - Superior of the Theatines (5) of Paris.

Having read and examined N. Barré's reasons for not wanting to accept endowments for the Charitable Schools of the Holy Infant Jesus, I found them very sound. It is true that though they are contrary to human prudence, they are based on the Word of God : «Seek first the Kingdom of God and His justice and all these things will be given to you.» Providence which takes care of animals, will surely take care of human beings, for whom the animals are created. How can Providence, which prepares good things for us in eternity, refuse us what is necessary now? If life is a pilgrimage, Providence is its staff. If it is a war, Providence is its shield. If it is a ship, Providence is its pilot. It is a mother in whose bosom we find rest. In a word, it is an infinite treasure which fills us with all kinds of good things. So we throw ourselves into the arms of Providence with great trust, confident that it will not draw away from us and let us fail.

Alexis du Buc

Superior of the Theatines (5) of Paris

Letter from M. d'Herbelot (6), a distinguished scholar

Paris, 31st August, 1688

I remember, Sir, that this issue was discussed during N. Barré's lifetime and that I agreed with his opinion. The main reason I gave was that natural and moral things were preserved by the same principles which had brought them into being. I am still of this opinion and am all the more convinced of it when I see the blessings God has increasingly poured out on the work as it is. We do not know what would become of it if any considerable change were to be made.

I remain your humble and obedient servant.

Herbelot

Reply of a clergyman in response to a question he was asked regarding the Charitable Schools set up by N. Barré i.e. should they be in receipt of endowments or not.

I totally disagree that these schools should be endowed. To mention endowments is to introduce canvassing and intrigue in order to find positions for those who, far from being suitable for the holy and noble work expected of good mistresses, will only be obstacles to this work, and critics of the pure zeal which should be the sole motive of those who intend to devote themselves to this task. Similarly, superiors should have no material interests in admitting those who present themselves. On the contrary, they should not invite them to take part in this holy work without explaining to them the rejections and sufferings which are to be found in it and warning them, if such is God's will, to be prepared to spend their whole life in constant suffering.

For after all, when a weak woman or a man sets out to gain eternal life, what comforts do they need? Let cowardly and wicked mistresses avoid difficulties through their worldly intrigues. Let them go, like Judas, to ask money from the Jews. For I cannot regard all this in any other way. It is not they whom God will allow to reach the state of abandonment which is awarded only to the greatest saints and to whom God very often adds his sweetest consolations.

One mistress alone, deprived of all help, is better than a hundred, or even a thousand, who, in spite of all the help they receive, have difficulty in accepting patiently the most ordinary things that inevitable arise with endowments. If a mistress deprived of all human help were to have only straw, planks, rags, vermin, or a stable, they would be worth more than all the treasures that could be hoarded up. As regards those who see to the upkeep of the schools, if they can foresee being able to keep them going for even seven or eight years, they need not be afraid; that is sufficient time for God's Providence which can do so much in a short time and which can provide for the least thing. If these good women persevere in accomplishing their duties in as holy a way as they have done up to now, we must not fear that they will lack bread.

O my God, how I pity those who have this fear! I go on my knees before God and implore Him to rid them of their worries. If they are faithful to their Institute, they will become rich rather than deprived. And if God wants them to remain poor so that their work will be blessed, and wants each Sister to be disinterested like St. Paul (7), who will condemn that as imprudent or rash? Regarding the legacies which will be lost, the devil knows very well what he wants. It is not blessings on this work. If the Mistresses are not devoted to the glory of God and the salvation of their neighbour, it is better to dismiss them. Are there not enough priests and other people to take on this work? What need is there of multiplying idle people? But if they are what they should be, they will be well able to say with St. Paul : «Nothing therefore can come between us and the love of Christ, even if we are troubled or worried, or being persecuted, or lacking food or clothes, or being threatened or even attacked.» (8)

Finally, I believe that the Mistresses' work is God's work and that the devil is impatient with their poverty and abandonment. There is nothing he will not devise in order to make them rich and attached to worldly good.

This is what God has inspired me to write to you.

De Moulin  
3rd September, 1689

#### NOTES

1. *Fr. Giry was the Provincial and Fr. Antoine Perier was the Father General.*
2. *The reference is to Fr. Armand Jean Le Bouthillier de Rancé, Abbot of the Trappists (1626-1700). He was responsible for the reform of the Cistercian Abbey of Notre Dame de la Trappe in Normandy.*
3. *This would have been an official document set out in legal terms. The Abbot of La Trappe was more interested in a letter which would focus on the spirit to be kept.*
4. *The date given here is obviously false, since it would have been written after N. Barré's death (c.f. Positio page 317). Another letter written by de Rancé exists. It was his reply to Montigny after he had received the account of N. Barré's death. It was written in June 1686.*
5. *Alexis du Buc was born in Sens about 1638 and died in Rome in 1709. He was a theologian who sought to convert Calvinists. He wanted to preserve the integrity of the faith and contested Jansenism and Gallicanism. We do not know if he was related to Madame du Buc, the first Lady Associate in the Institute.*  
*The Theatines were a religious order of priests founded in Italy in 1524 by Gaetan de Thienne and Pierre Carafa. The latter was to be future Paul IV.*
6. *Bartholomew d'Herbelot of Molainville was born in Paris in 1625 and died in 1695. He was a famous oriental scholar.*
7. *1 Cor. 9 : 15-18; 2 Cor. 12 : 14*
8. *Romans 8:35*

