Louis Brisson

1817 - 1908
Catholic priest from France
Founder of the Oblate Sisters and the Oblates of Saint Francis de Sales
Louis Alexandre Sosthène Brisson was born on June 23rd, 1817, in Plancy, a village in the Champagne, near Troyes, in France.
Childhood

- **Baptism** in the parish church of Plancy on **June 29th 1817**
- **First communion** on **March 22nd 1829**
- **Confirmation** in **June 1829** in Troyes
Childhood

- **1823 to 1831** School in Plancy
- **Private lessons** by the parish priest Maudier: love for mathematics, the sciences and astronomy.

Trying to invent gunpowder there is a small explosion in the parish house.
Despite his preference for sciences Louis wants to become a priest.

Shortly after his First Communion in 1829, Brisson tells years later, he prayed in front of the altar dedicated to the Mother of God in his parish church and feels that he is called to teach a great number of souls how they should love God.
Becoming a priest

- **1831 to 1835** minor seminary in Troyes.
- They continue to cultivate the love for sciences in him very much.
- At the end of his schooling Louis is awarded a price for outstanding performances.
- On **July 13th 1835** Louis receives the **tonsure**.
Becoming a priest

- In January 1836 Brisson joins the seminary of Troyes.
- 1836 – 1838: Study of philosophy
- 1838 – 1840: Study of theology
- July 6th 1838: Minor orders
- May 25th 1839: Ordination: Subdeacon
- December 21st 1839: Ordination: Deacon

Brisson as young cleric
Ordination to priesthood

- **December 19th 1840:** Ordination to priesthood in the neighboring diocese Châlons, because Bishop Seguin des Hons of Troyes was sick.

- Brisson remembers that day because on that day it was **27 Degree Celsius below zero**, the superior of the seminary gave a threatening speech and his Father almost lost the way on the way home for the first mass in Plancy and they nearly froze to death.
Chaplain of the Visitation

- Louis **Brisson’s health** wasn’t the best. During his life he had to **stay at health resorts** again and again. Nobody would have thought he would one day turn 90.

- For that reason the bishop as well as Brisson himself didn't find it advisable to assign Brisson a difficult place of chaplaincy.

- This is why Brisson taught religion and sciences in the boarding school of the Visitation monastery in Troyes after his ordination.
The inventor

- Brisson constructs from 1852 – 1860 an **astronomic clock**, that indicates the sidereal time, the solar time, the world time, the absolute time and the mean solar time of all countries of the world.
The inventor

- Brisson also invents a **dough machine**, a **drying room for clothes** and an own construction for a **soft bed**.
Chaplain of the Visitation

But more important for his life was, that he also became the **Chaplain of the Sisters of the Visitation in Troyes.**

Visitation monastery Troyes – Choir stalls of sisters

Convent church of the Visitation
Meeting
Mary de Sales Chappuis

- Upon the request of the Visitation sisters Fr. Brisson travels to Paris in 1842 to meet the "Good Mother" Mary de Sales Chappuis. She has been in Paris as the Superior of the Visitation monastery there since 1838.

- This meeting changes Brisson’s life.
Mary de Sales Chappuis

- Sister Mary de Sales is convinced to have found in Louis Brisson the priest, who would help her in the realization of her "project": the foundation of a religious community in the spirit of St. Francis de Sales.

Chappuis believes to act in the name of Jesus.
Meeting
Mary de Sales Chappuis

- Louis Brisson is not at all enthused by this plan Chappuis.
- He is 25 years old and a down-to-earth man, interested in sciences. He doesn't know how to deal with visions and divine mandates even more so when they come from a nun who is more than 50 years old.

Louis Brisson and Mary de Sales Chappuis (detail of the altarpiece in the Crypt of the Oblate Sisters in Troyes)
The three miracles

- **1844** Mary de Sales Chappuis becomes again the superior of the Visitation in Troyes.
- Immediately she starts talking Brisson into realizing this idea of the foundation of a religious community.
- Brisson resists vehemently. He even begins to evoke **divine miracles.**
The three miracles

- If this idea is truly of divine origin... then **money for the rent** of a poor family **needs** to be in the alms box. The next day the money was found there.

- ..., then Fanny, one of the weakest students, shall tell a sentence of St. **Thomas Aquinas** in Latin in the confessional. She did it.

- But Brisson still isn’t convinced.
The three miracles

On **February 24th 1845** Brisson tells angrily to Mary de Sales Chappuis:
I will not found this order, even if a **dead** should **rise from death**.
The three miracles

- Right after that, Louis Brisson reports, **Jesus Christ** really appeared to him and looked at him sternly.
- From that moment on he gave up his resistance.
- But it still took almost 30 years until the plan became reality.
Church renewal and young workers

- In between Brisson takes especially care of those young men and women, who migrated from the country side to the city at the beginning of the industrialization to find work. They often didn't have proper quarters.

A weaving mill in Troyes
Church renewal and young workers

- **1857** Louis Brisson becomes the director of the Catholic Association of St. Francis de Sales.
- It is the goal of the association, to foster anew the fervor of the faithful by prayer and by works of charity.

Louis-Gaston of Segur (1820-1881), Bishop and Founder of the Catholic Association of St. Francis de Sales
Church renewal and young workers

- Four branches grow out of this association: the movement of pious life, the movement of the soldiers, the movement for missions and the movement of young workers, whom Brisson pays special attention to.
Church renewal and young workers

- From 1858 to 1863 Brisson establishes four boarding schools, where in a special way young female workers shall find a solid home.
Foundation of the Oblate Sisters of St. Francis de Sales

- The direction of his new boardings shall be assumed by capable women.
- This is how the idea of the foundation of the Oblate Sisters of St. Francis de Sales comes about.
- Louis Brisson founds them together with Saint Leonie Aviat.
Foundation of the Oblate Sisters of St. Francis de Sales

- **April 11th 1866:** Leonie Aviat and Lucie Canuet take over the direction of the home for young workers St. Jean.

- **October 30th 1868:** Leonie Aviat (Sr. Frances de Sales) and Lucie Canuet (Sr. Jeanne-Mary) begin their novitiate. This is the day of foundation of the Oblate Sisters of Saint Francis de Sales.

Sr. Frances de Sales Aviat with another sister.
Foundation of the Oblate Sisters of St. Francis de Sales

- **May 20th, 1890**: The constitutions of the Oblate Sisters are approved by Rome.
- **1911**: The final papal approval takes place.
Oblate Sisters of St. Francis de Sales

- Around **350 sisters** are working **worldwide**.
Foundation of the Oblates of St. Francis de Sales

- In 1866 **Gaspard Mermillod** (1824-1892), Bishop of Geneva and Lausanne, encourages Louis Brisson to found a Congregation of men in the spirit of St. Francis de Sales.

Foundation of the Oblates of St. Francis de Sales

- Emmanuel-Jules Ravinet, Bishop of Troyes, asks Louis Brisson to save the only catholic High School in Troyes.
- The institution that had been founded in 1859 was bankrupt because of bad economic leadership and had to close its doors by the end of 1868. The building was sold.
Foundation of the Oblates of St. Francis de Sales

- Brisson accepts the challenge.
- He looks for new teachers, buys the property **Ma Campagne** and establishes there the new school.
- On December 8th **1869** the **Collège St. Bernard** is solemnly inaugurated.
- Brisson and his co-workers will become the first community of Oblates of St. Francis de Sales.
Foundation of the Oblates of St. Francis de Sales

- **On October 1st 1872**
  Bishop Ravinet grants the first Oblates permission to live a religious life.

- **On October 12th 1873**
  the first six Oblates begin their novitiate. Today this day is celebrated as "Founders' day".

The first Oblates at the Golden Jubilee celebrations of the priesthood of Louis Brisson in 1890
Foundation of the Oblates of St. Francis de Sales

On April 11th 1875 Louis Brisson visits Pope Pius IX. in Rome. The Pope is delighted about the foundation of the Oblates and promises papal approval.

Answering the question of the Pope why he had been waiting for such a long time, Brisson replies: „Holy Father, if my bishop or my spiritual director would have spoken to me, I would have surrendered; but it was a woman; therefore I couldn’t give in.”
Death of the „Good Mother“ 
Mary de Sales Chappuis

Mary de Sales Chappuis’ life mission is completed. She passes away on October 7th 1875 and is buried in the cemetery of the Visitation of Troyes.

Where Chappuis passed away

Original tomb
Foundation of the Oblates of St. Francis de Sales

- **December 21st 1875:** "Decretum laudis". The Oblates of St. Francis de Sales are recognized as Congregation of papal right.
- **August 27th 1876:** Fr. Brisson and the first DeSales Oblates make their first vows.
- **December 1897:** The constitutions of the DeSales Oblates are approved definitively.
Around 550 Oblates are working worldwide.
The last 30 years

- The last thirty years of the life of Fr. Brisson were quite dramatic – as predicted by Mary de Sales Chappuis. Reasons for that were ecclesial and political:
  - Conflict with Bishop Cortet
  - Beatification of the Good Mother
  - Struggle between the Church and the State of France
French State against French Church

- **October 28th 1900:** Prime minister Pierre Waldeck-Rousseau starts his political fight against religious congregations engaged in schools and education. He is already supported by his successor **Emile Combes.**
- **July 1st 1901:** Law to abolish Religious Congregations.
- **March 24th 1903:** the Oblates of St. Francis de Sales are abolished.
- **June 5th 1903:** the Oblate Sisters of St. Francis de Sales are abolished as well.
- **December 11th 1905:** Separation of State and Church under **Aristide Briand**
French State against French Church

- At that time Fr. Louis Brisson has already retired to Plancy.

- On **August 21st 1903** he visits Troyes once more and must find out that everything he had built up during his lifetime is now either empty or demolished.

In 1902 Louis Brisson moves into the house of his grandfather in Plancy
French State against French Church

- The political sanctions have also a positive effect on both Congregations.
- Their **dispersion to other countries** quickened. Fr. Louis Brisson: "Without those trials we would have been endangered to disperse only in this country."
French State against French Church

- Despite these positive developments it was a **painful experience** for Fr. Brisson. "His" apostolate which he had built up in France was destroyed.

- On **April 30th 1907** the court rules that all property still belonging to the Oblate Sisters and to the Oblates shall be confiscated and nationalized immediately.
French State against French Church

- On **January 12th 1908** Fr. Brisson must witness the public auction of his house in Plancy in which he was living. He collapses four days later because of ill health.
Confidence in God

- Nevertheless Fr. Louis Brisson remains confident in God; this is a conviction he expresses addressing the DeSales Oblates like this:

- “If everything seems lost, ... and everybody has already surrendered his hope, the Lord will show his might and his influence. Then it must become clear to everybody that the decision lies only in His hands and we are capable of nothing.” (Chapter 1391)
The death

- **On January 16th 1908**
  doctors diagnose Fr. Brisson with an untreatable intestinal obstruction.

- **On January 23rd 1908**
  Fr. Brisson cannot anymore receive holy communion.

- **On January 28th 1908**
  he looses his speech.

- **On February 2nd 1908**
  at **10.34 AM** Fr. Brisson passes away in his house in Plancy, that doesn't belong to him anymore.

The clock in the death room of Fr. Brisson is stopped shortly after his death.
The death

- On **February 4th 1908** his body is laid in a lead coffin that is put in an oak casket. A pall is laid upon his head.

- **February 5th 1908:** Requiem in Plancy. Since Oblate Sisters and Oblates do not officially exist anymore, they cannot exercise any liturgical functions.
The death

- **February 6th 1908**: Solemn funeral in Troyes; Bishop Monnier of Troyes is present.
- The casket is buried at **St. André cemetery** where his parents are buried as well.

Brisson’s tomb in St. André
The death

- On **April 10th 1961** the corpse of Fr. Brisson is transferred into the **Crypt** of the Mother House of the Oblate Sisters of St. Francis de Sales in Troyes.

- His mortal remains are laid to rest next to **Saint Léonie Frances de Sales Aviat**.

- The **process of beatification** for Fr. Louis Brisson has been opened.
Thoughts

„All our activities are based on the principle of love.“
Prayer for beatification

Lord, please visit and protect the family of the Oblate Sisters and of the Oblates of St. Francis de Sales, which is the vine your powerful hand has planted through the work of your Servant Louis Brisson. For the glory of your Name, make this family grow in your love, and grant to it, for the joy of the whole Church, the recognition of the untiring zeal of its Founder for the Gospel and of his heroic courage in the midst of trials. Amen.