

The Attempts to establish societies of Priest-Victims in Nineteenth Century France

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I. SOME ORIGINS OF THE VICTIM-SPIRITUALITY IN FRANCE

1 Among the representatives of the victim-spirituality in nineteenth century France we can mention Julie-Adele de Gérin-Ricard (Mother Mary-Victim of Jesus Crucified; 1793-1865), Luis-Marie Maulbon d'Arbaumont (Father John of cred Heart; 1813-1885), Father Sylvain-Marie Giraud (1830-1885) and Caroline Lioger (Mother Mary-Veronica of the Heart of Jesus; 1825-1883). The latter were formed and directed by priests of St Sulpice. Their victim-spirituality uses the terminology of the French School, especially that of M. Olier.

2 St Michael Garicoïts (1797-1863), founder of the Priests of the Sacred Heart of Betharram, owed much to the works of Bossuet who was, in his own original way, follower of Bérulle.

3 There were others in the nineteenth century who were more directly related (though not exclusively) to the movement of Paray-le-Monial; they include Marie Deluil-Martiny (Mother Mary of Jesus; 1841-1884), Madame Royer (1841-1924) and Fr. John Leo Dehon (1843-1925).

4 The spirituality of a victim found particular expression in the works of Fr. Giraud which were read extensively in the circles where this spirituality was practised. Fr. Giraud, in his turn, derived much of his inspiration from M. Olier.

Pierre de Bérulle (1575-1629)

5 From his childhood onwards he had consecrated himself to the Lord. His whole life was influenced by this act of "religion" the meaning of which became clearer to him all through his life in the mystery of the Incarnation,

in the “Ecce Venio” of Jesus. Our very existence depends completely on God who alone *exists* by right. This relationship to God is our grandeur; we must accept it peacefully and lovingly. The Jansenists were later on to present this relationship in a cold, intellectual fashion, and this led to give a false interpretation of the virtue of religion, separating it from the theological virtues. Bérulle and his followers did not view their loyalty to God in this way: for them it is an attitude which should deeply animate our prayers; it is a matter of “abandoning oneself, giving oneself to God, aware that we are truly nothing before Him”¹. But all this is done lovingly, for the love of the Lord creates “a certain equality between the soul who loves and God who is loved... in such a way that, just as one is God by nature, so the other is God by love...”². Bérulle, like St Paul, had meditated deeply about the *kenosis* of Christ (Philipp. 2,7). This state of humiliation of the Word threw Bérulle into raptures of adoration, thanksgiving and return of love. If he aspired to a certain “self-annihilation”, this is not to be compared with the ideal of Buddhism; it aimed at pure openness to the Lord:

6 “When will it happen, O Lord, that there will be nothing left of me in myself?... When shall I come to that state wherein there is nothing more in me than a nothing, and when that nothing is a mere potentiality of being filled by you?”³.

7 Bérulle wanted to make Christians understand how much they owe to Jesus Christ. Sin has brought us into a tragic, absurd “*aversio a Deo*”, a nonsense, a loss of the “right to exist”. Bérulle wrote: “This right to exist is given to Jesus Christ when God gives him human nature and puts him at the head of mankind; in Him the right to exist has been returned to us”⁴. The Risen Christ is “the true centre of the world, and this world must continually move towards Him”⁵.

8 The spirit of immolation which characterises the victim-spirituality of the 19th century has its best foundation in the christology of Bérulle. From the grace of being a member of Christ’s Body he deduced the need to renounce ourselves, to abase ourselves: this must be one of the unchangeable elements of our spiritual life. “We must dispossess ourselves from all attachment to our own opinion, to all property, so that the Spirit of the Son of God can take possession of us”⁶.

¹ Bérulle, *Opuscules de piété*, Ed. Migne, col. 1191.

² Bérulle, *Opuscules de piété*, Ed. Migne, col. 1238.

³ Manuscript 233 of the National Archives (unedited works of Bérulle). Quoted by Cochois, *Bérulle et l’Ecole Française*, Paris 1963.

⁴ Bérulle thinks, as is known, of the existence of Jesus’ human nature by the “subsistence” of the Word.

⁵ Bérulle, *Discours de l’état et des grandeurs de Jesus*, 161.

⁶ Bérulle, *Opuscules de piété*, 115.

9 Bérulle deeply and lengthily contemplated the mystery of the adoration given by the perfect religious of the Father, Jesus Christ, as we find it expressed in St John's Gospel: "I honour my Father... I keep his word... I do always what pleases him" (John 8, *passim*). The entire Christian liturgy is built upon the filial devotion of our great High Priest Jesus Christ who is the One to make atonement, "the centre of the world, on whom all depends..., the soul and intellect of the universe"⁷. Later on we shall have occasion to discuss the efforts which the spiritual writers of the 19th century made to create a new Institute of "Priest-Adorers". Bérulle and his School, Olier in particular, were already deeply concerned to penetrate to the heart of the Christian liturgy, "the work of Christ the Priest and of his Body the Church, as the Second Vatican Council was to say later on"⁸.

10 Bérulle even thought that each Christian, when he becomes an adult, should fully ratify the grace of his baptism by consecrating himself to the Lord, and that this consecration should be a pledge to follow Jesus Christ, by being more fully at his disposal⁹ in imitation of Our Lady whose life, he wrote: "was a continual striving, without interruption or relaxation, towards Him who is the life of the Father and will soon be her own life"¹⁰.

11 We know that Bérulle and the spiritual writers of his time frequently meditated on Jesus' infancy which invites Christians to live without pretence, sacrificing themselves in a state of "servitude", in total availability to the divine life.

Charles de Condren (1588-1641)

12 He has perhaps influenced posterity more than did his master Bérulle, because he formed numerous and fervent disciples. There was also a posthumously published book: *The Idea of the Priesthood and of the Sacrifice of Jesus Christ*¹¹. He has been reproached for a certain deviation from Bérulle's doctrine, by over-insistence on "self-annihilation". As his biographer Amelote says: "It seemed to him that there was only this pure being (God) who could continue to exist, and that the whole universe had to be destroyed for His glory"¹². Self-abandonment in the spirit of a victim is

⁷ Ibid., 1137.

⁸ Constitution on the Liturgy, 7.

⁹ Bérulle gave this consecration a name which was already by some of his contemporaries regarded as offensive: the vow of "slavery" or "servitude".

¹⁰ Bérulle, *Vie de Jesus*, 431.

¹¹ This work was published 36 years after Condren's death. We cannot be certain that the text is authentic throughout; it is possible that certain passages have been given a harder expression.

¹² Amelote, *Vie de Charles de Condren*, p. 41.

recommended in Condren's letters in a form which reminds the prayer: "*O Jesu, vivens in Maria, veni...*: May Jesus live in you in the fullness of His life and of all that He is... Allow the Son of God to be in you in such a state that it will please Him and in such a way as He would like it"¹³.

13 Condren's letters usually begin with this wish: "May Jesus Christ live in you in the perfection of His ways and in the holiness of His spirit"¹⁴. Jesus glorifies the Father by being Victim. It is up to us to enter into this spirit of sacrifice which prepares us to give God his due, for it shows us that he alone is worthy of existence. St Augustine had put it better by speaking of the religious value of sacrifice a sacrifice in which he included all that we do, so that we may cling to God (*ut inhaereamus Deo*).

Jean-Jacques Olier (1608-1657)

14 He became a follower of Condren after his "conversion" from the spirit of the world. His numerous works, written in a clear style, spread among seminarists and priests the very Christocentric doctrine of the French School. Olier did not stop at Condren's idea of a destructive sacrifice. He speaks of "victims of love" who, through conversion and mortification, throw themselves into the fire of charity which will enable them to glorify the Lord, "to share in (Jesus Christ's) service of God, to make of us in Him... a true religious of His Father"¹⁵. M. Olier did much to spread the cult of the Holy Eucharist among the clergy: the cult of the Eucharistic celebration and that of the "visit to the Blessed Sacrament". And this in order that Christ may have "as many bodies, as many mouths, as many hearts as He has subjects in the Church, to immolate Himself in them to the glory of the Father..., and thus to spread his love and his service of God among all the districts of the world..."¹⁶. The Second Vatican Council also underlined this purpose of the Eucharistic Celebration, namely: to multiply the number of souls who offer themselves to God. The Constitution *Sacrosanctum Concilium* invites the faithful to take part in the Eucharist, so that they may learn "to offer themselves and..., through Christ their Mediator, to be drawn into an ever more perfect union with God and with each other, so that finally God may be all in all..."¹⁷.

¹³ *Lettres*, edited in 1943 by P. Auvray and A. Jouffray, 214.

¹⁴ Some religious Orders of the 19th Century, inspired by the victim-spirituality, made of this phrase a motto, a form of greeting; it must then be seen not as an acclamation but as a wish to participate in the life of Jesus.

¹⁵ Olier, *Introduction à la vie et aux vertus chrétiennes*. Ed. Migne, 53.

¹⁶ Olier, *Explication des cérémonies de la grand Messe de paroisse*, 432-433.

¹⁷ Constitution *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, 48.

Saint John Eudes (1601-1680)

15 At the Paris Oratory he had Bérulle himself as his master, and later on also Condren. When giving his “missions” to the people, he brought the priests (who were very numerous at the time) together for special conferences. He founded the Congregations of Jesus and Mary particularly to help the priests and give them a better formation; in this work he was encouraged by Marie des Vallées. He read St Paul very carefully, and as a result he extolled, more than anyone else, the spirituality of baptism, which was for him a “contract of alliance” (as he put it in the title of one of his many works). St John Eudes insisted especially on the union with Jesus, with the “Holy Spirit of Jesus” which is for him “the greatest of all devotions, the best of all practices so that the Lord finding you without any attachment to your own spirit... will have the full power and liberty to act in you in accordance with his wishes...”¹⁸.

16 St John Eudes was particularly attracted by the symbolism of the heart. For him, the heart is the principle of life, the seat of love, and also the interior of each loving person; he calls this “the spiritual heart”. Note the special vocabulary of St John Eudes: he speaks of the “Heart of Jesus and of Mary”, and by this he does not mean merely the love of Jesus and of Mary, but especially “Jesus living perfectly in Mary”, to the point where He is “the heart of her heart”, her Life, her Light, her Truth.

Paray-le-Monial

17 Devotion to the Heart of Jesus was very much alive in the 17th Century, before St Margaret Mary (1647-1690). It was particularly during the years 1673-1675 that our Lord made known to her “the miracles of his love and the inexplicable secrets of his Sacred Heart”¹⁹. He asked her to be the victim of his Heart: “Do not hold on to anything; be empty and stripped of everything; in everything, pay attention only to Him...”²⁰. The reason: he wanted her to make up for the ingratitude of men to the best of her ability.

18 In their Sacred Heart Encyclicals the Popes have underlined the mission of St Margaret Mary. She was asked to make known the Lord’s wish that men should honour in the symbol of his Heart his love which is so much disregarded. As Pope Pius XII said: “with definite and repeated words Christ pointed to his Heart as the symbol by which men should be attracted to the knowledge and recognition of his love...”²¹.

¹⁸ St John Eudes, *La Vie et le Royaume de Jesus*, I, 452.

¹⁹ Gauthey, *Vie et Oeuvres de St Marguerite-Marie Alacoque*, Paris 1920, II, 70.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, II, 102.

²¹ Encyclical *Haurietis Aquas*, 52.

19 It could be said that the “spirit of victim” became part of Christian piety as a result of the spiritual writers of the French School and the movement of Paray-le-Monial. St Margaret Mary asked for immolation in many of her letters. Thus she proposed a consecration to the Heart of Jesus in a formula such as this: “I consecrate to the Heart of our Lord Jesus Christ my person and my life, my actions, cares and sorrows, so that my whole being may be entirely in the service of his love, honour and glory. It is my irrevocable decision to belong to him completely and to do all things for the love of him...”²².

20 The religious sentiment which underlies this “consecration” has always existed in the Church. One could quote very expressive texts of St Paul which fit into this line of thought. But the spiritual writers of the French School and those who belonged to the movement of Paray-le-Monial have helped to make it more explicit. Thus St John Eudes made a vow “to offer himself to the Lord as a sacrificial victim to be offered to his glory and his pure love”²³.

21 Paray-le-Monial also contributed to a development of the spirit of reparation. The Lord asked St Margaret Mary to make herself answerable for the poor sinners, to be surety for them, but she declared in words which showed her sane theological outlook: “I shall pay you only with your own goods the treasures of your Sacred Heart”²⁴.

22 The life of victim as recommended by St Margaret Mary is identical to a positive spirit of abandonment, as we find it often formulated in her writings in one form or other: “Do as you please, Lord, I want nothing else”. Contrary to what some people suppose, St Margaret Mary did not indulge in any sort of “*dolorism*”, a spirit of victim which wants to shut itself up in a grey monochrome. She advised Fr. Croiset to turn aside from his mournful thoughts. She advised her novices to be happy and content, for God wants to be served in peace and contentedness²⁵.

23 The spiritual trend which came from Marseille and the south-east of France led later on to a popular devotion to the Sacred Heart which involved a spirit of victimhood and oblation motivated by penance. Thus, in Marseilles, people made acts of reparation (*amendes honorables*), consecrated themselves to the Heart of Jesus while expressing their resolve to be entirely and without reserve in his service in order to make up for their past faults.

24 We should also note the influence of the Apostleship of Prayer which instilled Christians with the awareness of their personal responsibility for the

²² Gauthey, op. cit., II, 332.

²³ S. John Eudes, *Oeuvres completes*, XII, 135.

²⁴ Gauthey, op. cit., II, 108.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, II, 663.

work of salvation in the world and taught them the importance of apostolic prayer, particularly of the daily offering of their activities and afflictions.

II. THE ATTEMPTS TO ESTABLISH PRIEST-VICTIMS OF THE SACRED HEART

1. The Priests of the Sacred Heart of Marseilles and other attempts

25 In 1729 abbes Truilhard and Dandrade came together with some friends to organise a work which would take care of abandoned youths. They put this work under the protection of the Heart of Jesus. The seal of the Institute, which was a Society without public vows, showed a heart surmounted by a cross and had as motto "*Pati et contemni pro te*".

26 During the Revolution these Priests of the Sacred Heart remained faithful to the Church. Abbé Allemand (1722-1336) gave strong support to the Institute and spent himself to reconstitute it after the shocks of the Revolution. The Institute made an effort to bring together youths from the lower middle class in order to give them a good Christian education. The result was the formation of an elite of lay helpers.

27 We must also mention that in 1790 Father de Clorivière a former Jesuit, planned a Society of Priests of the Sacred Heart. The Statutes of this Society were later on taken over by the secular Institute of Priests of the Sacred Heart which aimed at supporting the spiritual life of the secular clergy.

28 A young refugee-priest, Leonor de Tournély, founded during the Revolution the "Society of the Sacred Heart" which wanted to re-establish the Society of Jesus under the aegis of the Heart of Jesus. When Fr. de Tournély died in 1797, Fr. Varin continued his work.

29 During the Revolution there were also some ladies at Poitiers who, under the direction of Abbé Coudrin, came together to honour the Sacred Heart and to pray for a return to Christian peace. On Christmas Day, 1800, they made their religious profession together with Abbé Coudrin and so established the "zealous workers (*zélateurs*)" for the love of the Sacred Hearts of Jesus and Mary". This was the origin of the Fathers and Sisters called after the me Picpus in Paris where they established themselves in 1804.

30 We may also mention the foundation of the "Society of the Priests Adorers of the Sacred Heart of Jesus" by Abbé Garat in 1822 in the diocese of Bayonne; it ceased to exist after the revolution of 1830.

2. St Michael Garicoïts (1797-1863) and the Priests of the S. Heart of Betharram

31 In the Institutes we have mentioned so far, there is no marked victim-spirituality, except among the Priests and Sisters of the Sacred Hearts (Picpus). Father Coudrin, in a request to the Holy See submitted in 1801, declared that the Society's members had as their aim "to offer themselves as victims in a perpetual act of reparation..."²⁶.

32 Abbé Michael Garicoïts served an ancient shrine of our Lady at Betharram (Pyrenees-Atlantiques). Around 1832 he planned a "Society of priests whose programme would be the programme of the Heart of Jesus itself the Eternal Priest, the Servant of the heavenly Father: absolute devotedness and obedience, unchanging gentleness"²⁷.

33 For his rules, the holy Founder got his inspiration from St Ignatius, while his spiritual ideal owed much to Bossuet. He attached particular importance to the contemplation of the *Ecce Venio* of Jesus at his Incarnation (Hebr. 10,7): "the very programme of the Heart of Jesus". The Basque Saint aims therefore with his foundation at a spiritual ideal, namely Jesus' life of a victim totally consecrated to obeying his Father. The *Ecce Venio* inspired his spiritual life and was the reason for his Institute's existence.

34 He wrote to his religious: "They shall call themselves Priests of the Sacred Heart, surrendered as he was, annihilated as he was, obedient as he was. They shall be men of the *Ecce Venio*, dedicated as their model was to the complete carrying-out of the divine will"²⁸. Michael Garicoïts wanted to found an apostolic Institute and gave his followers this advice: "Always prefer, as much as possible, to serve in obscurity, abasement and contradiction. We are following the Lord's example; we are not at all allowed to be his disciples and yet have sentiments, claims or views which differ from his"²⁹.

35 For Garicoïts the virtue of religion is deeply influenced by love, which means he avoids a jansenist interpretation of Bérulle. For him the name *Priests of the Sacred Heart of Jesus* recalls beautifully "the sentiments of charity, humility, gentleness, obedience and devotedness implied by that first act of the Sacred Heart of Jesus. Here I Am"³⁰. By the word "*devotedness*" which belongs to the "victim language of the time, we must understand the total oblation of oneself to the Father's will, in accordance with the definition of St Thomas: *Prompta voluntas tradendi se ad ea quae pertinent ad Dei*

²⁶ *Cahiers de spiritualité* (of the Picpus Fathers), 10, 150.

²⁷ Quotation from Duvigneau, *Un Maître spirituel du 19^{ème} siècle*, Paris 1962, 48.

²⁸ Duvigneau, op. cit., p. 61.

²⁹ Quotation by Duvigneau, op. cit., from a manuscript of the Saint, p. 170.

³⁰ Duvigneau, op. cit., p. 173.

famulatum (“the will to do promptly whatever the service of God demands”, see 2a 2ae, q. 82, 1). The Saint of Betharram touched on one of the most valuable elements of the spirituality of a victim when he contemplated, as he loved to do, the *Ecce Ancilla* of the Blessed Virgin.

36 As regards the question of offering oneself as a victim, with or without a vow, St Michael was of the opinion that “one takes up one’s cross, i.e. the cross imposed by one’s circumstances, and not the cross one fabricates for oneself”³¹.

3. Louis-Marie Maulbon d’Arbaumont, Father John of the Sacred Heart (1813-1882) Founder of the Priest-Victims of the Sacred Heart

37 He was a young and brilliant engineer who constructed bridges and roads. He abandoned his faith when at school, returned to it later and entered St Sulpice in 1837. After his ordination in 1841, the Bishop of Dijon, Mgr Rivet, took him in his service as his private secretary.

38 1848 was a year of great tension throughout Europe. The young offered himself to God as a victim for the well-being of the Church. To find out better what this involved, he wrote to the Foundress of the Sisters Victims of Marseilles, Mother Mary-Victim of Jesus Crucified (Julie-Adèle de Gérin-Ricard). He subsequently affiliated himself to the Institute and found there some friends, including M. Galais, his director at St Sulpice.

39 As he wanted to become a religious, he obtained permission from his bishop to enter the Capuchin Order at Aix-en-Provence. But he could not find there the peace he was looking for. He returned to Marseilles with the ideal of becoming a Priest-Victim. Mgr de Mazenod, bishop of Marseilles, rejected the idea at first, but later on agreed to refrain from interference: he could do as he wished, but at his own risk. When he heard there were plans to open a “house of priest-victims” at Tours, Abbé d’Arbaumont went there in 1850, but when he found they were concerned with reparation to the Holy Face in accordance with the ideas of Sister Mary of St Peter, he went to see his director, M. Galais, who encouraged him to start his own foundation. Back in Marseilles, the abbé began his project in a simple house built in the grounds of “*la Maguelonne*” where Melle de Gérin had been with her foundation, the Sisters Victims, since 1840.

40 The abbé took the religious habit and the name “John of the Sacred Heart”. The Vicar General of Mgr de Mazenod received him as a postulant. He was appointed the Sisters’ confessor and gave them numerous instructions on the religious life and the life of a victim.

³¹ Ibid., p. 290.

41 When he became a postulant, he expressed his spirit in this prayer: “My Jesus, I desire nothing so much as to enter into your views and to copy, in the eyes of the heavenly Father, your life of a humiliated and suffering victim, so that I become a single offering together with you. I want to follow your way, be with you a perfect victim, offered and consecrated to God, immolated for God, destroyed for his sake and transformed into him... living in your spirit of sacrifice...”³². Clearly we find here the sacrificial doctrine of M. Olier: immolation, destruction, transformation, and total consumption. Fr. John of the Sacred Heart explained his doctrine in a: *Introduction a la vie de victime* which was printed only in 1912, but seems to date from before 1865. There is here a close link between the spirit of victim and the devotion to the Heart of Jesus, a devotion which for him means “dedication” to this divine Heart which is so grieved and little thought of, and thus implies “a perfect community holding the same views, having the same sentiments, affections, interests, joys and sorrows”. Appropriately he quotes the text of St Augustine: “The sacrifice of Christians consists in being together one body in Jesus Christ” (De Civ. Dei, X, 6). And he insists on the dynamic force of the Eucharist which makes Christians into a living sacrifice enabling them to do the holy will of the Father in all things. He was particularly inspired by the Letter to the Hebrews, and so was prevented from laying too much stress on human worthlessness as in De Lugo’s theory of sacrifice³³.

42 Fr. John thought that an Institute of Victims has a vocation in the Church: it reminds people that one can follow Christ only in humiliation and deprivation, i.e. it loudly proclaims with St Paul: “I made up my mind to forget everything while I was with you except Jesus Christ, and especially his death on the cross...” (1Cor 2,2).

43 The Institute of the Priest-Victims of the Sacred Heart reached its largest number of members in 1861, namely six. They were all very zealous, very mortified. When all the others died prematurely, Fr. John alone remained (1875), morally and physically isolated on the cross which he had sought as his only portion. He had never shown great zeal to find followers; he left it to the Lord to call them. On the other hand, during the First fifteen years of his religious life he had spent himself in the apostolate of the word, especially for his brother-priests. One may ask whether Fr. John of the Sacred Heart thought he had the charism of a founder. It would seem he regarded himself rather as a hermit, as Charles de Foucauld did later on, trying to imitate in lowliness the humility and poverty of our Lord.

³² Norbert, *Vie du Serviteur de Dieu, Louis-Marie Maulbon d’Arbaumont*, Lyon-Paris, 1910. Quotation from page 175.

³³ He does, however, not escape this altogether; here he followed in the footsteps of his master, M. Olier.

44 At any rate, up till his death he provided a great stimulus to the Institute of the Sisters Victims of the Sacred Heart of Jesus whose only monastery has remained faithful to its mission in the Church ever since.

4. Mgr John-Felix Luquet (1810-1858) attempts the foundation of a Society of Priest-Adorers in Paris

45 John-Felix Luquet was born at Langres. His family was christian, but he, too, lost his faith while at secondary school and even became an anti-religious sectarian who destroyed sacred emblems. He became an architect and designer, but during a journey to Italy, as he himself wrote later on: “I suddenly felt my heart completely changed... And at that very moment I made the irreversible resolution to put into practice without human respect all the duties imposed on men by the holy law of Jesus Christ...”³⁴.

46 A “second conversion” brought him in 1838 to the seminary of St Sulpice where there were many young men, real adults, who wanted to consecrate themselves generously to our Lord, while there were teachers such as Galais, Icard, Garnier, Carrière who were outstanding in knowledge and virtue. After his ordination to the sub-diaconate, abbé Luquet went to the seminary of the Foreign Missions Society. With M. de Bresillac (+ 1859), the future founder of the Foreign Missions Society of Lyons, he became deeply interested in the question of a native clergy and did research into the archives on the subject. Sent to the Indies in 1842 he made a strong plea during the Synod of Pondicherry (1844) for a native clergy with residential bishops. It was then thought good to send the young missionary to Rome to plead for this with the Congregation of the Propaganda Fide. He did that so well, that Cardinal Mai advised Gregory XVI to consecrate him a bishop. However, the Society for the Foreign Missions thought his return to the Indies a little premature and made him their procurator in Roma. Shortly afterwards there was a revolution in Rome (1848-1849) during which Mgr Luquet courageously defended Pius IX, then in exile in Gaeta, in *L'Osservatore Romano* (the predecessor of the *Osservatore*). After this he disappeared from the limelight, occupying himself with the priestly ministry and the publication of lives of the saints. It was at this time that he came into contact with Mother Mary-Teresa of the Sacred Heart (Théodelinde Dubouché, 1809-1863). This Sister came from a rather worldly family and for some time was interested in painting and showed some talent. Though her religious practices were meagre, she did have a serious interior life and one night, when 26 years old, grace struck her like a thunderbolt and filled her with love of God. She bought the *Manuel du Chretien* and was enraptured with delight

³⁴ Quoted from R. Roussel, *Un précurseur, Mgr Luquet*, Langres, 1960, p. 8.

reading the gospels and particularly our Lord's "Farewell Address" after the last Supper, as found in St John. A confessor made her receive Holy Communion more often. In 1847, while prolonging her adoration before the Blessed Sacrament in the chapel of the Carmelites (Rue Vaugirard) she had a vision in her mind of the Holy Face. She made a picture of this and it became for her and some of her companions an object of reparatory devotion. During June 1848 she organised days of reparation before the Holy Face in the chapel of the Carmelites of the Rue d'Enfer (she had taken an apartment in one of the outhouses of the convent)³⁵. There she received enlightenment on what our Lord wished her to do: viz. to begin a society of eucharistic adoration combined with a religious life led in simplicity and humility in imitation of Nazareth. Her religious ideal resembled closely what Charles de Foucauld was to realise much later: a contemplative life which did not exclude contact with the neighbour, used work to support oneself and did not distinguish between different classes of religious. Mgr Sibour approved the "Congregation of Reparatory Adoration" in December 1851. The Foundress called for a "male branch", for "Priests of the Blessed Sacrament"³⁶.

47 In 1855 Mother Mary-Teresa travelled to Rome to refute some criticisms of her work. Octave de Villequier, a fervent Parisian Christian, accompanied her and housed her with his sister who lived in Rome. It was there that Mgr Luquet met her. At that time the saintly prelate was longing for a religious life full of self-effacement, obscurity and poverty. He was therefore attracted by the "Little Nazareth for men" of which Mother Mary-Teresa was thinking. During August 1855 he brought some postulants together in an annex to the convent in the Rue d'Ulm, while M. de Villequier went to the Marists for his studies. But a serious accident occurred. The lights around the Blessed Sacrament set fire to the hangings, and they in their turn set the woodwork alight. The Foundress wanted to save the monstrance, but was badly burned in the process, which reduced her to inactivity for many months. The Priest-Adorers, deprived of her support, did not survive. Mgr Luquet returned to Rome where he found almost all doors closed. Only the French Seminary was good enough to receive him. There he died in 1858 of cancer of the mouth, an affliction which he underwent humbly and in a spirit of faith. Fr. Freyd, superior of the French Seminary, did afterwards witness several favours obtained on the tomb of the saintly Prelate³⁷.

³⁵ The "Rue d'Enfer" (from the ancient name "Via Inferior") is now called "Rue Denfert-Rochereau".

³⁶ St Julian Eymard (1811-1868), a former Marist, founded the "Priests of the Blessed Sacrament" at Paris in 1856. At about the same time the Baroness d'Hooghvorst (Mother Mary of Jesus) began the "Sisters of Mary Reparatrice", first in Paris, then in Strasbourg.

³⁷ Fr. Freyd had helped Mother Mary-Teresa with his advice during the last years of the Foundress' life.

**5. The attempts of Priest-Victims in the diocese of Grenoble:
Father Sylvain-Marie Giraud (1830-1855);
Mother Mary Veronica of the Heart of Jesus (1825-1883);
Mgr Fava (1826-1899)**

Father Sylvain-Marie Giraud

48 Fr. Giraud was born near Aix-en-Provence and studied at the two seminaries of that city, both of which were under the direction of the Fathers of St Sulpice. He was ordained in 1853 and deeply imbued with the priestly spirit as he had found it in the works of M. Olier. On the day of his ordination he chose to become “a victim, wholly sacrificed as was (his) Lord and Master Jesus Christ..., entirely devoted to his glory, for the salvation of souls and without any concern or consideration for himself”³⁸. Since he was very talented and had exceptional gifts, Abbé Giraud showed himself soon to be a first-class preacher. For his spiritual orientation during the first years of his priesthood he owed much to Mother Saint-Clare, Abbess of the Capuchin Sisters at Aix. She turned him away from all striving after success and so helped him to remain faithful to his grace of self-sacrifice and victim in poverty and silence.

49 In August 1857 Abbé Giraud made a pilgrimage to La Salette and seemed to find there his vocation “to be a missionary of the tears of Mary and of her Sorrows”. It was at about this time that Mgr Ginoulhiac gave permission to Melle Lioger (the future Mother Mary-Veronica) to begin a Congregation of Sisters Victims.

50 It was with difficulty that Abbé Giraud obtained permission from his diocese to join the “Missionaries of La Salette”, towards the end of 1858. He was the first who wanted to make a full novice which ended with his first profession on February 2nd, 1860.

51 Father Giraud dedicated himself completely to his task of preacher, but gradually the state of his health, a persistent eye-disease and a rather precarious atmosphere in the community helped him to become detached from his ministry, so that he wanted to be no more than a poor, simple and readily accessible priest.

52 Soon he began a fruitful career as a spiritual writer, by providing material for some simple reviews: *La Pieuse Adoratrice* and *Les Annales de N.D. de la Salette* (1865).

53 An important event in his life was his meeting with Mother Mary-Veronica at Avenières (diocese of Grenoble). He was a man who easily

³⁸ Quoted by Jaouen, after a handwritten biography preserved in the archives of the bathers of La Salette in Rome, Vol. II, p. 130 (*Vie et Oeuvre du P. Giraud*).

became enthusiastic, and so he was soon full of deep admiration for the “Society of Sisters Victims” and their Foundress. He wrote on this occasion: “Our Lord has given me here a grace which may well be the greatest of my life...”³⁹.

54 Father Giraud had lived his vocation of victim already for some time, so his joy was great when he found in the Church a religious community which had made this its rule of life. Fr. Giraud often visited Avenières, sometimes as preacher, sometimes as confessor on Ember Days. Mother M.-Veronica entrusted him with “the notebook which sets out the spirit of our Society” as she herself said. Later on Fr. Giraud was to ask the nuns for the notes they had taken during the conferences of the Mother Foundress⁴⁰.

55 In 1870 Fr. Giraud published the first of his major works: *De l'union à Notre Seigneur dans sa vie de victime* (“About the union with our Lord in his life of victim”)⁴¹. Mother M.-Veronica expressed her joy when she saw it: “If I had found this book at the beginning of my vocation, I think I would have been overjoyed, and how useful would it have been!”⁴². In due course she wanted each sister to have a copy, for she was delighted to see affirmed in broad daylight what she had lived for many years and taught to her religious. Mother Veronica lived her spirit of victim, with special stress on holy surrender: “Surrender yourselves”, she said to her Sisters: “surrender yourselves without sadness, without expecting anything in return, without ‘but’ or ‘if’, without making any exceptions, and God will bless you”⁴³. To a priest who asked her for advice she recommended the greatest possible purity of heart, meaning total consecration, complete self-sacrifice: “Our divine Master desires too much to reign alone than that we should rob him of some part of our existence through even the slightest act of our will contrary to his will”⁴⁴.

56 In a later book: *De l'esprit et de la vie de sacrifice dans l'état religieux* (1873) Fr. Giraud showed that the need to be a victim which applies to every baptised person is particularly urgent for a religious. But his contacts with the Visitation had led him to read St Francis de Sales, and so we see that he is now lessening the rigidity of his earlier book. There is no doubt that one ought to be a victim, but “all this must be done with love”. He also wrote a book for superiors, and this book is still of topical interest. In *Immolation et*

³⁹ Quoted by Jaouen, op. cit., p. 210 (Letter of 23rd Febr., 1867).

⁴⁰ According to Prévot, *Vie de la Servante de Dieu Marie-Veronique du Coeur de Jesus, Caroline Lioger*, Paris 1913 (2nd ed.) p. 331.

⁴¹ Fr. Giraud's works appeared at La Salette, except *Prêtre et Hostie*, Paris-Lyon, 1885.

⁴² Archives of La Salette, Rome, R53 (Letters of 20 and 23 April, 1870).

⁴³ Prévot, op. cit., p. 485.

⁴⁴ This was written to abbé Gervais, priest from Aix, Arch. Sal., R53 Letter of 26th October, 1870.

charité dans le gouvernement des âmes he warns superiors to guard against a return of self-love: “I have seen superiors who seem to admire themselves in their community... they are always talking about my community, my daughters...”⁴⁵. In 1885 Fr. Giraud’s greatest work appeared: *Prêtre et Hostie*. In it he shows that “the priest whom Jesus Christ allows to participate in his priesthood, is also made a participant in his state of Victim... The priest should be as much a Victim as he is a priest”⁴⁶.

*Fr. Giraud and Mother Veronica
plan the foundation of Priest-Victims*

57 It seems that around 1852 Caroline Lioger asked Fr. John of the Sacred Heart to start Societies of Sisters and Priest-Victims in Lyons. Fr. John answered: “I am too insignificant... to work on my own for the development of such Societies... I am merely an ill-natured hear hiding in his hole... As regards the Sisters, there are too few of them to provide the necessary staff... Your soul has remained very dear to us...”⁴⁷.

58 Later on, after she had met Fr. Giraud, she spoke to him about her project: “Our work”, she wrote, “needs this Society of Priest-Victims to direct it and to maintain its spirit”⁴⁸. Mother Veronica was afraid that when a fine plan had been worked out, she would be given the glory. She said to Fr. Giraud: “It is up to you to fix everything in secret with those whom you have in mind”⁴⁹. Mother Veronica submitted a rough draft to Fr. Giraud; in it she mentioned the apostolic works which the Priest-Victims should aim at: sanctification of the clergy, education of future priests, retreats and spiritual assistance to religious sisters. For her, the life of a priest-victim should be in accordance with the description which M. Olier gave in his treatise on Sacred Orders. Fr. Giraud took this to heart and began to write a Rule for Priest-Victims. In September 1867 he gave it to Mother Veronica to read. We still have a text dated Christmas 1868 in which Fr. Giraud proposes two congregations in addition to the “Religious of Our Lady of La Salette”⁵⁰. There were to be “Priest-Victims of our Lady of La Salette” and “Priest-Missionaries of our Lady of La Salette”, united under a single Superior General. The former would lead a mostly contemplative life in assiduous

⁴⁵ Giraud, *Immolation et charité dans le gouvernement des âmes*, 271 (ed. of 1929).

⁴⁶ Giraud, *Prêtre et Hostie*, Preface. For a more complete analysis of this work, see M. Denis, *La spiritualité victimale en France; ses sources et son développement au 19^{ème} siècle*.

⁴⁷ AD, B 35/9 copy of the original. Mlle Lioger had tested her vocation with the Sisters Victims of Marseilles in 1850.

⁴⁸ Arch. Sal., 50 letter of 21st June 1867.

⁴⁹ Ibid.

⁵⁰ Fr. Giraud thought this referred to the Sisters of Avenières.

meditation on the life of Jesus, Priest and Victim. The latter were to be apostles of the Apparition in order to respond to the request of the Virgin: “You must pass it on to my people...” The rules and constitutions of the Society of Jesus would be adapted for use of the proposed Society, but the venerable Society of St Sulpice was given as its model, because of its “priestly” spirit.

59 Fr. Giraud consulted his directors at Aix, MM. Désobeau and Lucas, and also Fr. John of the Sacred Heart. The two priests of St Sulpice said they had no special insight authorizing them to give any advice; they recommended prayer and silence. Fr. John of the Sacred Heart “does not seem to have had the same views”⁵¹. The latter had anyway already sent a long letter to Fr. Giraud when he had received his book: *De l’union a N.-S. dans sa vie de vie de victime*; in that letter he had indicated the reservations he had regarding the vow of victim⁵².

60 During his annual retreat in 1868 Fr. Giraud had written: “I am thinking of the Priest-Victims. When shall it be? Again, Amen...”

61 During the summer of 1868 two very fervent adherents of the life of a victim came to the “Holy Mountain”: Abbé Robert (from the diocese of Reims) and the first promoter of the “Guard of Honour”, M.elle Deluil-Martiny from Marseilles, the first cousin twice removed of the Venerable Anne-Magdalen Rémusat.

62 Fr. Giraud regarded this as a sign of the times and worked to complete the Rule for Priest-Victims, wanting to give it a more or less definitive form. Abbé Robert began to write numerous letters to Fr. Giraud in which he shows his steady interest in the foundation of a Society of Priest-Victims. He saw Mother Veronica simple and joyful as a child, as he wrote to Fr. Giraud, and after visiting Sister Mary of the Sacred Heart, Foundress of the “Guard of Honour”, he could state that the views of Fr. Giraud agreed with hers⁵³.

63 During the twelve years which followed, Sister Mary of the Sacred Heart (of Bourg) continued to encourage Fr. Giraud to plan the foundation of Priest-Victims; her idea was that, together with the Sisters Victims, they would be the crowning achievement of what the “Guard of Honour” was trying to do. On behalf of the “Guard of Honour” she also sent requests to Mother Veronica who, however, preferred her Institute to remain autonomous.

64 Mlle Deluil-Martiny (the future Mother Mary of Jesus) was no less ardent in her wish for an Institute of Priest-Victims of which another Congregation (which she called the “Mary-Priests”) would be the female counterpart.

⁵¹ According to a letter of M. Lucas, superior of the Major Seminary of Aix, Arch. Sal. R51. Letter of 26th April, 1868.

⁵² Arch. Sal., J135. Letter of 26th June, 1870.

⁵³ Arch. Sal., R 51 Letter of 15th July, 1868.

65 In the autumn of 1868 Fr. Giraud had the chance to discuss his plans with Fr. Calage (who was Miss Deluil's spiritual director) and with his own two directors. Fr. Calage opposed the idea of going to Rome for informations. The beginnings should be small and humble "mere existence" should suffice as a start⁵⁴. The priests of St Sulpice (Désobean and Lucas) thought that nothing should be started unless there were interior or exterior assurances that God wants it and demands it⁵⁵. As regards the projected rule of the Priest-Victims (called "the book of the foundation" by Fr. Giraud), the director of the Major Seminary, Fr. Lucas, thought that it was "very good indeed"; but, he added, *perfection paucorum est*⁵⁶.

66 This set Fr. Giraud thinking, so much so that in August 1870 he admitted: "I am unable to fulfil my task, let alone to take on the direction of any other work"⁵⁷. He was here referring to his very bad health at the time. He ceased his relations with Mother Veronica's foundation, though he continued to admire her. In a letter to a religious he expressed his admiration for "the odour of holiness and religious life which exudes from that holy cloister"⁵⁸.

67 Later on Fr. Giraud was asked by Mgr Paulinier, Mgr Ginoulhiac's successor on the See of Grenoble, to provide more complete Constitutions for the small Society of Missionaries of La Salette. But it was only Mgr Fava, a former missionary bishop (1826-1899), who effectively interested himself in the matter when he became bishop of Grenoble in 1875. He expressly demanded that the community of La Salette became a religious Congregation. A special Chapter was convoked which took Fr. Giraud's proposed text as subject of its discussion. There was agreement as regards the apostolic organisation of the Institute, but when they came to the spirit which should animate the members of the Society, some priests opposed Fr. Giraud's ideas. They shared the hostility which some members of the secular clergy had against Mother Veronica's Congregation, namely that it was too severe. In fact Mother Veronica had dealt very strictly with the vocations which had come to her. Now Fr. Giraud was accused of trying to impose on the Society the spirit of the Sisters Victims with its "inhuman" demands. The result of this opposition was that the Chapter restricted itself to the passing of some practical rules and that the Religious-Victims of our Lady of La Salette did not come into existence. All the same, the works of Fr. Giraud served as a spiritual directory for many Institutes whose orientation was towards the spirit of victim.

⁵⁴ Arch. Sal., R 51 Letter of 25th Jan., 1869.

⁵⁵ Arch. Sal., R 51 Letter of 29th Jan., 1869.

⁵⁶ Arch. Sal., R 51 Letter of 3rd Febr., 1869.

⁵⁷ Personal note of Fr. Giraud, Arch. Sal., E76.

⁵⁸ Letter to Mother Mary-Teresa (3rd Order of La Salette), 19th Oct., 1871.

68 Mgr Fava did not see this as a tragedy and when in 1880 the Fathers of La Salette held another Chapter, he made a proposal which surprised many of the Chapter members. It had come together especially to examine the “*animadversiones*” which accompanied the *Decree of Praise* they had obtained thanks to the intervention of the bishop of Grenoble. The bishop now wanted to raise up “The Institute of Priests of Reparatory Adoration” which he then proposed to call “Priests of Reparatory Adoration of our Lady of La Salette”.

69 But the priests of La Salette, including Fr. Giraud, remained reserved on this point, even though Mgr Fava had taken Fr. Giraud to Paris and Rome in the hope that this would give the idea a start under the aegis of Fr. Schwindenhammer, Superior General of the “Holy Ghost Fathers”. He also obtained a special blessing of the Holy Father for this; but after all these efforts Fr. Giraud remained unresponsive and gave the bishop his reasons: the Society which had been planned in Paris would not be the one they were looking for, but a dependency of the Congregation of Reparatory Adoration, founded by Sister Mary-Teresa of the Sacred Heart (see above). Moreover this work had been placed under the patronage of the Superior General of the Holy Ghost Fathers, without any reference to the grace of La Salette.

70 Fr. Giraud was also approached by the “Community of the Purification” of Tours which had been founded in 1834. The archbishop of Tours, Mgr Morlot, had authorised it to have the name “Victims of the Heart of Jesus”, the name they had wanted from the start. The Sisters had a chapel dedicated to our Lady of La Salette, and asked Fr. Giraud to found at La Salette the “Priests-Religious of the Purification, Victims of the Sacred Heart of Jesus”. But Fr. Giraud, who was going through a very difficult time both physically and morally, did not carry out these wishes.

Further attempts around Mother Veronica after the withdrawal of Fr. Giraud

71 Fr. Giraud had frequent contacts with the priests of his diocese of origin and to several of them he had spoken about Mother Veronica, especially to his spiritual directors. Some priests who belonged to a small, intimate brotherhood of priests were interested in the project of Fr. Giraud and Mother Veronica.

72 And a few of them began to correspond with the Sisters Victims of Avenières; they included the abbes Gervais, Mansis and Abeau... The latter told the Foundress of his desire to dedicate himself to helping “fallen priests” and to the giving of retreats to priests and sisters. Abbé Gervais related to Fr. Giraud the precious advice which Mother Veronica had given him for his spiritual progress.

73 In May 1877 she was happy to inform Abbé Mansis that “the bishop of Grenoble (Mgr Fava) is wholly in favour of the work”. And she added: “He is waiting for you”⁵⁹. Mgr Fava had also written to Mother Veronica that Mgr Mermillod, then Vicar Apostolic of Geneva, was asking for information about a Society of Priest-Victims which would be concerned also with fallen priests⁶⁰. In her answer to Mgr Fava, Mother Veronica showed her disquiet: “I am overjoyed to see how the idea of Victimhood is spreading among priests and in the Church, but perhaps all this might be no more than a straightforward illusion if obedience does not enter into it and this, Monseigneur and venerated Father, I am coming to look for from your Lordship...”⁶¹. But Mgr Fava also had projects of his own, as we have seen, he restrained somewhat the ardour of the superior of Avenières: “Let us not go too fast; let us keep our secret; let us rely on God alone and work as willing instruments in his hands”⁶².

74 Mother Veronica also stimulated abbé Robert, a follower of Fr. Giraud: “Mgr Fava is impatiently waiting to see this elite army set up. He wrote me about it with words that came from his heart; in him you have a Father if ever there was one...”⁶³.

75 Unfortunately things went wrong during the year 1877. Abbé Dumont, foreseeing that he would become the superior of the projected Society, withdrew. On the other hand, some exploited against the Sisters of Avenières and especially against Mother Veronica, the serious difficulties which had been raised against their foundation at Lyons. Sister Mary of the Sacred Heart who favoured a Society of Priest-Victims affiliated to the “Guard of Honour” (in the hope that Fr. Giraud would be its mainstay) turned some priests away from the Society promoted by Mother Veronica (such as the abbés Gervais and Robert)...

76 Another attempt to start a foundation of Priest-Victims began when the Sisters Victims made a foundation in Rome at the request of a certain Countess who was interested in the life of a victim. This foundation had to be suspended later on, but contacts were made with some priests, particularly with Fr. Laurençot, S.J.⁶⁴.

⁵⁹ AD, B 35/9, file of Fr. Jacques, p. 23.

⁶⁰ Mgr Mermillod, after he was expelled from Geneva, was appointed bishop of Lausanne and Geneva, with residence in Fribourg where he founded his famous “Union of Fribourg” for the study of social questions.

⁶¹ AD, B 35/9 letter of 27th Jan., 1877.

⁶² *Ibid.*, letter of 12th Febr., 1877.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, file “Victimes” letter of 18th Febr. 1877. She sent him “two chapters taken from the programme (of the Priest-Victims)”.

⁶⁴ Fr. Joseph Laurençot, S.J., had in Rome the function of substitute (or secretary) of the French Province of the Jesuits. He returned to France in 1885.

77 In August 1877 Fr. Laurençot wrote to Mother Veronica that he had carefully read the plan for an Institute of Priest-Victims, and added: (this project) “corresponds fully with the ideal I had myself...”⁶⁵. This priest took the matter very much to heart; he considered it as his mission to start a Congregation of Priest-Victims. He tried to recruit possible vocations, wrote to several bishops to obtain permission for some candidates to leave their respective dioceses. He translated the Rule of the Priest-Victims into Latin. In addition he planned to call some interested priests to Rome to start the Society. In fact, one of them, abbé Prévot, came to Rome on February 25th, 1878, accompanied by an aspirant brother. The saintly abbé edified many, made on everyone the impression of being a saint, according to the Cistercians with whom he lodged in the Lateran quarter. He had already obtained his doctorate in theology at the university of Aix, but completed his formation by following the course at the Gregorian University. Fr. Laurençot tried also to get other priests to come to Rome, but in vain. Fr. Prévot came again in the beginning of 1879, without having succeeded in founding the proposed Institute.

78 Another attempt was made at Aix-en-Provence where a holy priest, abbé Peilin, had started a kind of orphanage with the help of some dedicated young people. In the grounds of his property this priest had built a large house where he could accommodate priests who had fallen away but wanted to return to a regular life. Some priests came to join forced with abbé Peilin and two repentant priests were received in the house. Everything seemed to go well when, on August 12th, 1881, abbé Peilin died... No one was capable of taking his work on, so it was given into the hands of the Institute of M. Timon-David.

Father Leo Dehon (John of the Heart of Jesus) founds the Priests of the S. Heart

79 Abbé Prévot tells us that Mother Veronica told him in 1877 how she had prayed that the Society of Priest-Victims might begin somewhere away from her circle, was precisely at that time that a curate at St Quentin, the young Canon Leo Dehon, founded an Institute of Priests aiming at making reparation - the very Institute which abbé Prévot was to join after the death of Mother Veronica.

80 Leo Dehon was born at La Capelle (Aisne) in 1843. He made his secondary studies at the same college as M. Lemire, the democratic abbé⁶⁶.

⁶⁵ AD, B 35/9, file “Victimes”, letter of 8th Aug., 1877.

⁶⁶ At Hazebrouck, under the wise direction of M. Dehaene, whose life was written by Lemire in 1891.

He obtained a doctorate in civil law at the university of Paris to satisfy his father's wish, and then went to Rome where he took lodgings at the French Seminary and followed the courses of philosophy, theology and canon law. All these studies he completed with a doctorate. Having come to Rome in October 1865, he left in August 1871. He had a deep respect for the then superior of the French Seminary, Fr. Melchior Freyd; later on he was to say that under his direction he had made a noviciate lasting six years.

81 During the final years of his stay in Rome, abbé Dehon gave much thought to the intellectual renewal of his country in the Christian world. He considered assisting Fr. d'Alzon who wanted to start a Catholic university at Nîmes⁶⁷. But after a visit to Louvain he realised that this was such an immense task that only the French bishops could take the initiative with any hope of success, and then give it the necessary support. Therefore he put himself at the disposal of his bishop who appointed him curate at St Quentin. In his Memoirs he confesses that this was "absolutely contrary to what I had hoped for all these years, i.e. a life of recollection and study..."⁶⁸.

82 The young priest, now seventh curate in a very large parish, resolutely set himself to work and dedicated himself wholeheartedly to the working-class youth which was completely left to its own devices in that industrial city. Thus he began to organise many different works which aimed at helping these young people and also at educating those which were then called "the leading class". He started a youth club, meetings of young students, conferences for factory owners, etc. In 1874 he founded a diocesan bureau to coordinate social pastoral activity in the diocese. He also saw to the setting-up of a diocesan Oratory. Meanwhile M. Hautcoeur sent several urgent invitations to abbé Dehon, asking him to help him with the foundation of Lille University. But his ecclesiastical superiors were opposed to his leaving the diocese, particularly after Mgr Thibaudier had been appointed bishop of Soissons in 1876.

83 Abbé Dehon had a deep longing for the religious life. During 1876 he made several retreats with the Jesuits to obtain enlightenment on this point. In the end he and his spiritual advisers came to the conclusion that he should become a religious as soon as he could entrust his work to others; but when he tried to do this, it proved very difficult and had to be deferred indefinitely.

⁶⁷ See M. Denis, *L'orientation de l'abbé Dehon vers l'apostolat intellectuel*, Rome, Dehoniana, 1976.

⁶⁸ Mgr Dours was then bishop of Soissons. There was an unhappy relationship between himself and most of his clergy, because of the bishops anti-infallibility attitude at the Vatican Council. Old and sick, he left the administration of his diocese to his brother, a priest. See: *Notes sur l'histoire de ma vie* (NHV), book IX, p. 71. These "Memoirs" cover the years 1843-1888.

84 It so happened that abbé Dehon, together with Fr. Jenner, S.J., had helped to bring to St Quentin some Sisters from Alsace. There were called Franciscans, but were in fact autonomous under the name of “Sisters Servants of the Heart of Jesus”. In addition to his many other duties, the curate was made responsible for their spiritual care. Their inspiration was the spirit of love and reparation. For his instructions to the Sisters the abbé used the teaching he found in Fr. Giraud’s recent book: *De l’union a N.-S.-J.-C. dans sa vie de victime*.

85 The Sisters themselves wanted to see their spirituality supported by a movement among priests; they had spoken about this to their spiritual adviser, Fr. Jenner. Abbé Dehon, on the other hand, with his desire to become a religious, reflected on the teaching he gave the Sisters and was edified by their deep spiritual life in union with the Heart of Jesus. From his conversations with the Foundress, Mother Mary of the Sacred Heart, he concluded that there was a need for “priestly reparation for the priesthood, showing itself particularly by the reform for which all those who take part in this life of reparation will work, both through their interior life and through their activity...”⁶⁹. After lengthy reflection abbé Dehon asked himself whether the Lord was not requesting a new Institute consecrated to a life of love and reparation. He talked to his bishop about it. Now the latter had already agreed with abbé Dehon that St Quentin needed a Catholic college, so he proposed that the foundation of the Institute (of which he approved) could start under the cover of a college. In addition, the bishop wanted abbé Dehon to be in charge of this college. Thus it happened that the will of his bishop was the determining factor for him who later on counted himself happy at having started his new foundation with an act of faith: nothing human had entered into it. We can here call to mind the words of the Foundress of the Perpetual Adoration of Paris, Mother Mary-Teresa: “One of the most astonishing acts of faith, one of the rarest one can make in this dark land of exile, is to set up a Religious Order”⁷⁰. Fr. Dehon had now to organise the college materially (he called it the “Institute St John”), to recruit the teaching staff and to continue with his social works... To avoid duplicating an existing work he wrote (no doubt with the agreement of his bishop) to Fr. Giraud and to Mother Veronica to find out whether there was already an Institute which aimed at the spirit of immolation, *priestly* victims which offer themselves especially for the priesthood as he specified in his letter to Fr. Giraud. Fr. Giraud’s answer (he was still much sought after by Mgr Fava and again by Sister Mary of the Sacred Heart) avoided this question. And as for

⁶⁹ According to letters dating from those days. AD, B 34/5 letters of 1st April, and 25th May, 27th June 1877.

⁷⁰ Mgr d’Hulst, *Vie de la Mere Marie-Therese*, Paris, 1887, p. 439.

Mother Veronica, her answer came too late. Anyway, she asked for a personal meeting with Fr. Dehon which it was inopportune for him to accept⁷¹.

86 Thus it happened that the generous curate of St Quentin, though aware that he was taking a heavy cross upon himself, began his noviciate in July 1877 and made his first vows before the archpriest on June 28th, 1878, adding to them a private vow of victim. In fact he wanted to found a Society of Priest-Victims. He repeated this thirty years later to one of his best followers: “I never wanted anything else than a Society of reparation and victimhood... The only difference with the victims of Marseilles and Avenières is that I let our Lord handle the scourge... I am more in favour of patiently accepting whatever trials our Lord may send us...”⁷².

87 An excellent recruit came to the Founder in 1878. It was a priest who belonged to the diocesan Oratory, abbé Adrian Rasset (1843-1905), who was to be a firm support of Fr. Dehon when times were hard. It is interesting to quote a passage from a letter Fr. Rasset wrote to his Sister who was a member of the Congregation of St Joseph of Cluny. It contains Rasset’s judgement of the new Society in its first days: “If the good Lord allows me, I shall join abbé Dehon in a diocesan Congregation of Oblates of the Sacred Heart. This is the community our Lord asked of St Margaret Mary, a community of Priest-Victims which offer themselves to the Heart of Jesus to suffer with him...”⁷³. The new foundation started in a very discreet way. It was only in 1880 that the “Oblates” became known in St Quentin itself, outside the small circle of the initiated⁷⁴.

88 The foundation was made under the shadow of the cross. His many occupations weakened Fr. Dehon’s health, so much so that several serious spittings of blood brought him very close to death. It is reported that in the convent of the Sisters Servants there was great alarm and earnest prayers were said for the recovery of their “director”. One of them, Sister Mary of Jesus (with the permission of her superior, who happened to be her sister), offered her life to preserve that of “a very beloved priest”.

89 Fact is that this Sister died a few months later and that Fr. Dehon lived to be 82 years old...

⁷¹ Mgr Thibaudier had, before coming to Soissons, been auxiliary bishop to Mgr Ginoulhiac who had become unable to do any work. A rather serious conflict arose with the Sisters Victims and their “director”, M. E. Roux because of his libels against notorious gallicans. Mgr Thibaudier remained sympathetic to them.

⁷² AD, B 44/7.

⁷³ See R.P. Dehon, *Vie édifiante du P. A.-M. Rasset*, Paris-Lille, 1920, p. 119.

⁷⁴ According to what Fr. Dehon said to the novices in an instruction dating from the beginning of 1880.

90 A fire destroyed the new college. The anti-clerical press tried to make a scandal out of the deaths of some young Sisters Servants of the Sacred Heart. There were threats of expulsion in the air during 1880. In his letters Fr. Dehon also complained about heavy financial crosses. Debts had to be paid for the buildings erected for his social works, and for the college...

91 In 1879 a regular noviciate could be set up in a large building near St John's College. We are fortunate to have from this period the notes made by a talented novice. He made these at the request of Fr. John, as the Founder was called in the community of Oblates⁷⁵.

92 One is struck by the deep understanding which Fr. Dehon had of his vocation right from the beginning. It is all the more surprising, therefore, that abbé Dehon had not anticipated his calling to be a founder: it came to him somewhat unexpectedly.

93 He told his novices that our vocation consists of two things, or rather of two halves: "the first half is the offering of our own will (self-love); the other is the gift of our heart, love"⁷⁶. He also said that our special mission consists in representing Jesus in his love, his compassion for sinners, i.e. in representing the Heart of Jesus "in the Church". He urges his novices to react against the hardness of heart.

94 Fr. Dehon knew very well that several Congregations were dedicated to the Heart of Jesus. He proposed to his novices the *Ecce Venio* which Jesus said on coming into this world (Hebr 10,7). "That is our vocation", he said. We must represent, imitate the Heart of Jesus who became a victim through his immolation in obedience⁷⁷. The *Ecce Venio*, practised all the time, must be "the basic of our life". Obviously not every love can be called authentic; that is why Fr. Dehon strongly insisted on "pure love". He made "pure love" the object of a daily examination of conscience by his religious. "Pure love", he said, that is what Jesus practised all his life. "It is the salvation of the Church and of the peoples"⁷⁸.

95 The particular life of Victim which Fr. Dehon recommended to his novices is that they put themselves completely at God's disposal and live in "holy abandonment" in accordance with "God's good pleasure". We know that this spiritual attitude has been the object of many studies concerned with the question of "pure love", and that abbé Dehon had read these during his seminary days and would read them again later on (de Caussade, Grou, Saint-Jure, and also Libermann...). He recommended the devotion to the Heart of

⁷⁵ Notebooks of Falleur (notes taken by a novice of that name (from 1879-1881), in AD, B 6/3.

⁷⁶ Ibid., instruction of 7th Jan., 1880.

⁷⁷ Ibid. Fr. Dehon shared this idea with the holy Founder of the Priests of the Sacred Heart of Betharram of whom we have already spoken.

⁷⁸ Notebooks of Falleur, *ibid.*, 25th July 1880.

Jesus, but not purely in the “devotional” sense of the word. He told his novices that the Heart of Jesus should take the central place in their lives; He should be their sun, their compass. One must live this devotion by loving, i.e., by giving oneself⁷⁹.

96 One of the most painful trials during the early days of the Institute of the Oblates of the Heart of Jesus had its origin in certain extraordinary events. An exemplary Sister Servant began to receive special spiritual enlightenment which was to some extent concerned with the new Institute. She told her superior about it and the latter, in her turn, referred the matter to the house’s spiritual adviser, Fr. Modeste⁸⁰ who consulted M. Didiot of Lille and others. He wrote to the superior: “Accept them (i.e., these communications) in all confidence and let your good religious profit from them with prudence, so that they will become holy victims of the Sacred Heart”⁸¹. It does, however, seem that too much importance was attached to these graces received during prayer; later on the Superior accused herself of having talked too much about them, even though she had done so with the best intentions. Meanwhile everyone has continued to have the greatest respect for this privileged soul. Sister Mary Ignatius⁸².

97 A very different case was that of abbé Captier (1831-1900). In 1852 he lived for a time with Fr. John of the Sacred Heart, but had to leave him because of a nervous illness⁸³. During the same year the holy parish priest of Ars assured him that one day he would be a priest in an Institute of the Sacred Heart which did not exist as yet. In 1869, after a great deal of travel, even through the East, he was accepted by the Congregation of the Missionaries of the Sacred Heart (of Issoudun) where he taught, first as a brother and then as a priest, after an American bishop had, with special permission of Pius IX, conferred all Orders on him within a week⁸⁴. After a fit of bad spirit against the Founder, Fr. Chevalier, he left his Institute in 1879, went to Ars, to M. Debeney, and then to Fr. Chevrier at Lyons where he asked Fr. Giraud for a “temporary” refuge. On the basis of “excellent references”⁸⁵ and doubtless on informations provided by Fr. Giraud to whom Fr. Dehon had written in

⁷⁹ Notebooks of Falleur, 20 April 1881.

⁸⁰ According to Fr. de Chazournes, S.J., Fr. Modeste was “the man who has, more than anyone else, the spirit of the Exercises and supernatural discernment” (Letter of Fr. Rasset, 22th June, 1881, AD, B 37).

⁸¹ AD, B 21/3 letter of 17th Sept., 1878.

⁸² Mgr Philippe, bishop of Luxembourg, who had known Sister Ignatius well, spoke highly of her in 1955 (see *Souvenirs*).

⁸³ AD, B 35/9 letter of 28th June, 1852.

⁸⁴ Fr. Jouet, a fiery southerner, wrote a long article in praise of Fr. Captier in the *Annales de Notre-Dame du S. Coeur* (April-May, 1874).

⁸⁵ These are Mgr Thibaudier’s own words, quoted in NHV XIV, 66 (letter of 16th May, 1881, to Fr. Dehon).

1877, Fr. Captier asked to be admitted to the Oblates of the Heart of Jesus. He did not draw any attention to himself till, probably as a result of hallucinations⁸⁶, he said he heard angelic voices. Matters grew worse so strikingly that Fr. Dehon had to warn him to be very much on his guard and to mistrust his own judgement “after all the imaginary and diabolical influences you have undergone for the last year”⁸⁷.

98 Mgr Thibaudier asked for information about these happenings and the pretended “angelic voices”. Regarding the enlightenment received by Sister Mary Ignatius the bishop had written: “I recognise with pleasure that the voice heard by Sister Ignatius in her solitude is very much in keeping with the voice which made itself heard at the beginning and which has continued to speak through the mouth of the Church...”⁸⁸. The bishop wisely advised to be very reserved. He consulted Mgr Langénieux of Reims on this subject and on the whole matter. A tribunal was set up at Reims which could only confirm that Fr. Captier suffered from illusions.

99 Mgr Thibaudier received the resolutions passed by the tribunal, but hesitated to communicate them to the person who ought to have received them. Having once been blamed by Rome for his dealings with the Sisters of Avenièrès, he now preferred to send all the papers to Rome. Rome, i.e. the Holy Office, made an investigation which resulted in a condemnation and the suppression of the Institute of the Oblates of the Heart of Jesus. Mgr Thibaudier, supported by Mgr Langénieux, went to Rome to give the Holy Office a better insight into the matter and this led the Holy Office in March 1884 to re-establish the Institute which it had suppressed a few months earlier, but now under the name of “Priests of the Sacred Heart”.

100 It should be added that some generous vocations who had come from Mgr Gay’s circle of friends had overcharged the spiritual climate of the Oblates by divulging what should have remained secret.

101 Now freed from various unpleasant situations, the new Institute made a good but modest start and obtained its first approbation from Rome four years later. Fr. Modeste, S.J., had written to Fr. Rasset: “The Institute is too beautiful and too necessary than that our Lord would abandon it”⁸⁹.

102 It was at about this time that the outstanding religious-victims of which we have spoken came to die: Fr. John of the Sacred Heart (15th Dec., 1882), Mother Veronica (8th June, 1883) and Fr. Giraud (22nd Aug., 1885). Another important event took place: some of the most generous Priest-Victims who had been with Mother Veronica entered the Priests of the Sacred Heart. The first was the distinguished priest Fr. Galley to whom Fr. Laurençot spoke of

⁸⁶ This is how Fr. Dehon saw it in his “Memoirs”.

⁸⁷ AD, B 20/7,2: Letter of 8th May, 1883.

⁸⁸ AD, B 21/3: Letter of 4th Nov., 1878.

⁸⁹ AD, B 37: Letter of 18th April, 1884.

his admiration for the work at St Quentin. Then there was Fr. Charcosset, a wise and balanced character who became Fr. Dehon's right-hand man. The last to come was Fr. Prévot in 1885. He fully recognised that the Congregation of the S. Heart Fathers corresponded to the ideal he had pursued for so long. He told the Superior General of the Sisters Victims, Mother Mary-Joseph, who would have liked to pursue the attempts of the Foundress. Fr. Prévot was a saint in the full sense of that term and was recognised as such at Aix, at Rome, and later on at Sittard where he was novice master for many a year⁹⁰. Fr. Dehon said of him that he was "the model of a Priest-Victim of the Sacred Heart".

103 The Congregation received a definitive approbation in 1906.

104 After a long life of prayer, immolation and apostolate, especially in the social field, he died at Brussels on August 12th, 1925. The informative process into the life of the deceased began at Malines in 1952, and his writings were approved in 1960.

(Translated by C. Sondermeijer, scj)

⁹⁰ "Was he not too holy to be a master of novices?", said Dom Wiart once to Fr. Dehon when he met him in the streets of Rome - he was then speaking in his jovial fashion as a former Captain with the zouaves.