

**FR. PETER MARY  
MERMIER**

**THEMATIC QUOTES  
FROM VARIOUS  
SOURCES**

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**APPRECIATION of Confreres**

“It is a pity that thy had to go away without bidding you adieu. But thanks to the powerful voice which bade them : ‘GO’ They have not shown the least weakness. Their happiness made them stronger than any one of us. ...” [to Fr. Cheminal, at Notre Dame de la Gorge, about the departure of pioneering mission team to India, Jean REY, p. 75]

“It was yesterday evening that I received the sad news that was sent from India; Fr. Martin is no more in this world ! He is no longer at the head of his group of volunteers ! He has left them orphans ! He has preceded them ! He beckons to us : Courage, follow me ! Sovereign God, good and just give eternal rest to your servant who has not only persevered in faith, but who has left all for the salvation of his brethren, in order to establish our Congregation in these far away regions.” Jean REY, p. 79

“You have done well, Fr. Gaiddon and yourself, to accept the hospitality of your dear parents to console them, to compensate this devout mother who is entirely devoted to the missions, to edify also the poor inhabitants of the countryside. They easily persuade themselves that we do not respect poverty and we are afraid of imitating our divine Mater who used to converse with the poor.” 79 [Let Fr. Petitjean, 05-12-1844]

“Your letters have loaded me with solace, especially the one to the Rev. Canon Bernex, where you point out the qualities necessary for a missionary called to work for the conversion of no-Christians in the midst of so many dangers of every kind. What a help for him to belong to a Congregation which is devoted to him for time and for eternity, which prays for him, which works for him, which assures him of assistance which fulfils him, which helps him with all its strength, which shares his sufferings as well as his works.” 111 [let to Fr Thevenet, 14-06-1848]

“Everyone asks here for more detailed news about your Mission, your works, the difficulties which your glorious and painful ministry meet with. Do not regret about the moments which you ought to give to writing some letters as you are doing. The more they are desired, the better they are received and the more the good they do. It is then quite a good work since it does not hurt your essential duties.” 112 [let to Fr Thevenet, 14-06-1848]

“Our confrere Neyret is a man full of the Spirit of God and of extraordinary discretion. He told me many beautiful things about the esteem he has for our Holy Rules. I trust that you all have the same. Your delight and the precious advantages which you draw from them become for your riches in your isolation.” 103 Let to Fr. Tissot, 12-09-1847

“The most serious news is the death almost sudden but not unforeseen of the revered and worthy *Fr. Lamouille*, Superior of the Major Seminary. The passing away of this man to a better life is an immense loss for the diocese. As for me, I do not know how to express myself; I lost a friend and my most reliable adviser. The Lord gave ... let it be ... You must know how much you are indebted to him, do not forget him.” 10 CIRCULAR to the Missionaries in India, 10-04-1851

“... you ask me pardon. You think that I want to punish you by my silence. My friend, if it is my thought, it is too much. .. It has never entered into my spirit. I have nothing but thanksgiving, blessings, words of encouragement and comfort for you but they do not reach you. What a terrible disposition of the divine Providence. We had taken every kind of precaution, we had stamped our letters, some of them till ... and everything is in vain whereas we receive regularly all your letters in around 40 days. ... If there is my fault, the correction is severe ... But may God be blessed and may his most loving will be done; may our beloved deceased (Fr. Martin) rest in the peace of the Lord.” 105 Let. to Fr. Tissot, 23-07-1846

[*On the death of Fr. Cheminal, at the age of forty-eight.*] “What a loss for our mission work ! He was our living Providence – what a loss for the poor ! in spite of our slender means, he was a father to the poor. But what bitter and frightening soul-searching I’m doing. Apart from the help and assistance I used to get from our deceased, I used seriously to think of being replaced and having him elected in my stead as Superior of the Congregation. My conduct seems so little in conformity with our Rules – that accounts for the many defects in the members, in the subjects.” [From Fr. Mermier to Bishop Neyret, 27/28-04 and 30-04-1852, (Duval, Mermier, p. 206)]

“Whenever you write to us (Fr. Mermier told the Missionaries in India) you do us a great service. Most of your letters are read, not just by our own members, but in seminaries and communities by the people who are most attached to our Mission.” [CIRCULAR to the Missionaries in India, 1852, (Duval, Mermier, p. 207)]

**(On the death of Father Sermet)** The news you give me of your dear departed and their precious death is so lovely and worthy of envy that I have not been able to regret their departure.

"Happy these fortunate men who received through God's grace and his infinite mercy to keep themselves pure and who went to wash themselves from the least stains in the long and painful pilgrimage to India. Their charity grew to the heights of God's own charity. They died for the Lord; today they live in the life of God himself.

"How great our joy should be when we learn that one of our brothers has arrived at the final port which is there to welcome all the others; once again, we are crossing this short passage only to reach the haven of this port. It is there, our concern. It is the concern of all the members of the Congregation.

"It will always be a consolation for me when, learning about the death of any of you, I will be able to say : Precious in the eyes of the Lord is the death of his Saints." p 75 [CIRCULAR to the Missionaries in India, 16-04-1851]

## COMMUNITY

At La Roche, for four years (1834-1838) the first band of missionaries resided as a ‘*religious*’ community striving to create a tradition in keeping with the spirit and spirituality of St. Francis de Sales. The details are presented by Fr. Petitjean : “There reigned between the members a sincere cordiality, simplicity and modesty cementing their unity, . Their spirit of zeal animated their activities and they shared all their experiences. In the art of preaching and in being all to all. They made their meditation together, as well as their examen and spiritual reading. Every Friday they attended a conference given by Fr. Mermier. ... It was some of the happy moments of their first fervor.” [Jean REY, 1960, p. 36]

Fr. Mermier returned to La Feuillette from Rome on 27<sup>th</sup> July 1843, to a hearty welcome by the community. Fr. Gaidon greeted him with the words “Father and Friend”, “Founder and Master”, “Leader and Model”, and punning on his name Peter, he added “you are the rock of our Community.” Indeed, Fr. Mermier was more than the founder of a community, he was its soul. Like the yeast, his spirit of zeal penetrated it and sustained it in fervor and in action. Was not the success of the Missions and the retreats preached in Savoy the principal alleged motive for obtaining the “great Commendation” from Rome for the Congregation ? Jean REY, 1960, p. 70

“Indeed, I have been really upset to be cut off at one fell swoop from my dear confreres – and my dear children, since our common Superior has appointed me their Director. I am happy to be the first to have a job and to try on my own to see if a priest can live a holy life when he is unable to go to confession for such a long time. Out of obedience to the Church I shall not make my Easter duties this year ... but, for all that, I shall not cut myself off from the true God whom I wish to serve until I die.” ... “Why is that ? Have we lost our friends and confreres who urged us so much to write to them ?” [NB - Since the arrival in India, the team had not received any communication from Europe, except for a letter from Bishop Rendu. The Fathers in Europe, on the other hand, received a copious mail from their confreres in India. Only after many months was it noticed that the letters from Europe were inadequately addressed ! [From Fr. Martin to Fr. Cheminal (Duval, Mermier, p. 127)]

“Monsieur le Superieur, we still haven’t received a letter from Europe since our departure. When you do us the favour of writing to us please give us news of our blessed Congregation and of the deaths of our relations, friends and acquaintances.” [From Fr. Lavorel to Fr. Mermier, 27-02-1846, (Duval, Mermier, p. 129)]

We belong not only to God but to our brothers, as Christians and even more as missionaries. [Let. Fr. J. THEVENET, April, 1855]

We belong not only to God, but to our brothers; we are members of one another – in Community. [LETTERS, pg. 15, no. 27]

We are strong because we are united. This union of hearts is a great grace. [Fr. Martin to Fr. Mermier, 09-01-1846]

Bad temper, sadness, a certain bitterness of heart when the will consent to it, could be called the eighth capital sin, so hurtful is it for ourselves and for those with whom we live. [let. 29-12-1857]

The greatest evil in communities and in individuals is not that of having defects, but that of being unaware of them [let. 11-01-1858]

"I mention these misgivings simply to show the risk in many communities. Immediately you have a community, you must have a rule and even a rather strict one; otherwise, you will have disorder." [Duval, Mermier, p. 195]

Community is where the religious spirit should reign, where all the members are so many brothers, where we tend towards the same goal, where we employ the same means, where perfect harmony reigns, where the prayer of the Divine Saviour is accomplished "*That they may be one like us*" [Let. to Fr. Jean THEVENET, 14-06-1848]

"I think you have many reasons for your lamentations. Though I fear that there is a bit of exaggeration in your many complaints, they seem to be well founded. ... Whether it is through your fault that things are not better, I will not dare or be able to say so; not only do your Sisters esteem you, they love you, they admire the virtues by which you set them an example and the corrections you give them. I am not aware that among themselves they censure and criticize them. ...

*"You would like to have more exterior mortification; yet you notice that all or nearly all ruining their health, and live in a very frugal manner in the parishes where they work; ... You wish that they possessed more virtues, above all solid virtues, .... But let us be reasonable. ... Al these girls come from working class families; they have not received any education, they come to you at a certain age, after having already got used to the behavior and even the coarse and perverse ideas of the world which has become like second nature to them. We must hope that they will become better with time, with patience and with all the attention we give them. ...*

"What is the conclusion ? That you alone are right, that you cannot be mistaken ? Is it not at least a great imprudence ? I understand that a woman understands her sex; however, the Gospel sends her to a priest as the other part of the human kind. St. Paul forbids women to preach in the Church. I tell you this on the spur of the moment, in order to make you sympathize with human frailty without, however, going to the other extreme, as it is said : allow the water to seek its own level. *We must be firm, but reasonable and firmness must be tempered with kindness.* I say more : if, unfortunately you are severe, the Superior on his side equally brusque, the poor things will be between the devil and the deep blue sea; they will not be able to stand it."

Let us pray to God. Let us go forward always with new confidence, let us hope that we do His work and that He will sustain it." FAMILY ANNALS, I, Re. Disappointment with COMMUNITY, Correction : [p. 204-205, Annecy, to Mother Foundress, 27 April 1855]

Basing himself on the Council of Pondicherry, Fr. Mermier thought that a great part of the teaching in the Indian Mission (*as he planned for the girls' schools, in Savoy, with the Daughters of the Cross of Chavanod*) would be entrusted to the Brothers; those who lacked the required skills could be trained. He remained convinced that the Brothers played an indispensable role in the Congregation's life by the sanctity of their lives and by the example of their piety and their love for work.

The brothers numbered ten, in 1846. Two or three of them could read, write, know their French grammar, and had some idea of Latin grammar, and could do simple arithmetic. However, all were well disposed to interior life and recollection; to community life and to etiquette which makes community life pleasant and offers edification to visitors.

Towards all the Brothers, he showed a respectful affection for their characters, their temperaments, their inadequacies, their want of formal education. He carried patience and kindness to their extremes. [Duval, Mermier, p. 202]

"Keep the four great precepts of charity according to the precept of the prince of the Apostles : *Before everything else having charity towards one another among yourselves*, that is to say : esteem one another, to respect one another, to love one another, to assist one another in mutual love, obliging one another, bearing with one another in such a way that no one ever may perceive the least difference among you. Oh ! how important is this advice ! It is that of Joseph to his brothers : what am I to say ? It is that of Jesus Christ to his apostles !" 80 [Counsels given on 19 June 1848]

*From the very beginning of their apostolate, the Missionaries felt the need of a common life. During the first years of their existence, they lived as a community in the Seminary of Annecy. But Fr. Mermier aspired towards a greater autonomy. The community is transferred, in 1834, to La Roche-sur-Foron where they live under better conditions; their life there consists of common prayers, collaboration in the preparation of the RULES and continual exchange of views. This community life will further be strengthened when the Missionaries will be housed at La Feuillette.*

"The sincere and constant wish of the Missionaries has always been to live closely united together and to form a solidly established Congregation". [MEMORANDUM]

"I end my letter in asking you, dear Missionaries, to imitate the Holy Trinity, that all may be one- that they may be one as we are one: that is my prayer on this beautiful feast of the Holy Trinity." p 35-36 [let Fr. CHEMINAL, 10-06-1843]

"You will remain perfectly united, at all times showing a warm and cordial regard for one another like brothers who love each other and possess the true zeal of Jesus Christ and of Saint Francis de Sales our glorious and illustrious patron, and who wish to seek nothing else but the greater glory of God, the salvation of souls as well as their own salvation." p. 36 [let To msfs of La Feuillette, 20-09-1842]

"Nothing new in Hindustan. I am already finding the time too long, even though I am not worried about anything. With great pleasure we receive news from the different stations where our confreres are working in these distant places. We have to go on offering our prayers to the ONE who keeps us united in charity Distance has not destroyed this love, it admits neither separation nor division" p. 36 [let to Fr. NEYRET, 30-07-1842]

"Everybody here asks for more ample news about your Mission, about your work, the difficulties you meet with, about your glorious and difficult ministry. Don't regret the time you spend to write letters as you seem to do. The more they are desired the more are they avidly read and they do a lot of good. If you really knew how much people pray, make sacrifices for our Missionaries! It is then a great work so long as it doesn't come in the way of your essential duties". p. 36 [let to Fr. Jean THEVENET, AT Arangabad, 14-06-1848]

"We live for the Lord. The news of the love that binds you together and makes of you one single unity - that we may be one - even though you live miles apart, is just wonderful. "Every one of your letters - and in less than a year I have received them from all of you - each of these letters and all of them together tell me in a very persuasive manner that you are all happy and contented in your vocation, under the leadership and dependence of your Superiors, of Mgr. Neyret, our honourable and good bishop, of the loving and prudent Fr. Tissot, Superior appointed to give a helping hand to the Bishop. How happy your obedience makes me. What is it that you have not been given so as to be able to come together more often in the house of your family to give one another the strength of this ineffable charity which unites you, even though you are spread out and dispersed.

"How happy you are and contented in the observance of your holy Rules, which are our link, our focus, our direction. Your reports are to us eloquent and persuasive lessons reproaching us for our ignorance and our cowardice. "Finally, how happy and contented you are in the performance of your ministry in spite of the countless and constant difficulties that you encounter...I shall not speak of this forced isolation in which you are obliged to remain so often and so long alone, away from your confreres. God adjusts his help according to your needs". p. 38-39 [Circulat to the MSFS in India, 16-04-1851]

Your letters have filled me with joy, especially the letter to Canon Bernex, wherein you speak about the needs of a MISSIONARY called to work for the conversion of pagans, in the midst of dangers of all sorts. What a great strength it gives him to belong to a Congregation which is devoted to him in time and in eternity, which prays for him, works for him, assures him all support, comforts him, helps him with all its strength, which is with him in his difficulties and labours". p. 39 [let to Fr. Jean THEVENET, AT Aurangabad, 14-06-1848]

"The common and individual happiness of those who live in a under the sweet yoke of the Rule, in perfect accord of will and action, keeping themselves free from the least of the stains which weaken charity, sadden the soul and makes it slothful in God's service, but preserving the interior joy and confidence which produce harmony and tender cordiality between them" p. 39-40 [let to Sister Jeanne BELLEVILLE, 16-06-1847]

**COMMUNITY PRAYER** : *During his sojourn in Rome, Fr. Mermier reflects over the way of animating the prayer of the community and how to associate the faithful who visit the sanctuaries confided to the Congregation to this prayer.*

- In his INSTRUCTION FOR NOTRE-DAME DE LA GORGE :

"Community of, at least, two Missionaries or two Brothers, or at least two Missionaries and one Brother, or two Brothers and one Missionary at the shrine.

"Every Friday, an exercise in honour of Our Lady of Seven Sorrows. On this same day a Way of the Cross will be held several times in private or in public.

Two Stations of the Cross, one within the Church and the other outside; "An exercise in honour of the Sacred Heart will be held in public every first Friday of the month.

- The above INSTRUCTIONS also be observed AT THE CHAPEL OF LES ALLINGES.

- AT THE MOTHER HOUSE AT ANNECY “Every day Masses are said at different hours of the morning for the convenience of the people living in the city.

“The subject of the morning meditation is repeated in a loud voice at 5 o’clock in winter and in summer at 4.30.

“Every Friday exercises in honour of our Lady of Sorrows. “Every first Friday of the month or the following Sunday, exercise in honour of the Sacred Heart.

Every year, the novena to the Holy Family, before or after the feast. “Another novena to our LADY OF SORROWS at one of the two feasts in honour of the Mother of Sorrows.

*p. 43-44* [Cf. CAYERS 14, 1643]

## CONGREGATION (SCC)

... *since our work is eminently the work of God, I am convinced that we can do nothing, we will obtain nothing without prayer.* That is why I propose to you a novena to Our Lady of Compassion that we shall begin this evening and end on the eve of the feast, which falls on 19 September this year, a week hence from this Sunday. Here are the exercises for this novena : in the morning, meditation on one sorrow of Mary and in the evening, the Litany of the Blessed Virgin, prayer to Our Lady of Compassion, the subject of next day’s meditation, daily mortification in the perfect accomplishment of the Rule.” FAMILY ANNALS, I, Re. the Third step taken for obtaining the APPROBATION OF THE CONGREGATION: [p.152, Annecy, to Mother Claudine Echernier, 10 Sept. 1847]

... I. Before everything else, may the name of God be sanctified and not yours; May His kingdom come, not yours; May His will be done on earth as in heaven, and not yours.

Oh ! My sister, what a language ! What a lesson ! Everybody knows it and hardly anyone understands it. Whose fault ? Ours. We are without intelligence because we do not wish to understand, we do not wish to do ...

Let us begin, then, with ourselves. Let us not be satisfied with knowing. Let us do : saying and doing do not go hand in hand. To be ignorant without one’s fault is neither good nor bad. But to know and not to do is evil. Here is disorder; here is sin. How do we stand ? Being so proud, thinking ourselves learned, having so little humility, so few virtues ! Let us be abashed. Let us say with more humility than ever : Forgive us our sins, etc. ...

You will have to be the mistress of novices. What does this mean ? You will begin and continue to sanctify yourself more and more, each day. That is not enough. Let us say : it is nothing. It is not enough to save oneself, it is not enough to know, to love and serve God. WE must also love and serve the neighbor – not in a general and common manner – as it is said. You must love your novices – all and each one of your novices; that is to say, pray for them. Without the grace of God, of Jesus and of Mary what will you do ? The Master has said : ‘without Me you can do nothing. To your capacity as the Mistress of Novices, it will not be enough to know to write, to calculate, etc. You must learn everything, correct everything, admonish, even punish. An whom ? The children of Adam and Eve; teach them to pray, to meditate, to work, to suffer, to please God and not men, to avoid all that is evil even its shadow; to practice goodness and all the virtues. Above all that, they must avoid giving scandal and occasions of sin. You will find them even amidst your students, your novices. My God ! what vigilance, what wisdom, what prudence ? You must see that everything goes on in perfect order. The least fault is a disorder. The Mistress, from afar or close by, will be obliged to supervise, to reprove, to correct.

But you tell me : I am only a child, how could I fulfil such a task ? No other answer then ... you are the mistress and the Mistress of Novices, God wills it. What is impossible for man is not impossible for God. ... You will have enough to do before God and men. But since it is God’s will and nothing is impossible for men of good will, we must have confidence. As for you, particularly as Mistress of Novices, let your work be to form and reform those young girls ... according to God’s grace and your natural forces. FAMILY ANNALS, I, Advice on her employment / Organisation of the Administrative Council of the Congregation : [p. 259-262, to The Mistress of Novices, 20 September 1859]

... II. For the Directresses and all those who are in charge of convents and of teaching : (1) Concerning interior life above all - No one is good for another if he is not good for himself; (2) About their instruction and their science – How can they instruct others if they do not themselves know what they teach ? Apart from the four parts of the Catechism, they must know thoroughly everything regarding teaching in the school, from the alphabet, etc. (3) About the way in which each one manages, administers, preserves, economises her little possessions – like the poor. ... God asks for nothing impossible. His graces are abundant, but that is to make us humble. FAMILY ANNALS, I, Request for special account of each Sister - Instructions and Exhortation for the Mother Superior, Novices, Sister teachers; Sister Workers : [p. 263-266, Our Revered Mother Foundress, Annecy, 10 November 1859]

... You know where you stand. In proportion as you can free yourself from exterior affairs, busy yourself more seriously with your religious exercises. You must know enough, except to love and serve God. All the rest is nothing. FAMILY ANNALS, I, Re. Accounts : [p. 258, Sr. Marie Pecllet, 12 November 1859]

... The Superior must keep herself informed about everything. She must see everything; she must know, act in everything and everywhere. That is her office, her duty. It is really so essential to know that the smallest failure is a disorder.

You will tell me : how can a Superior know everything, busy herself with everything, etc. I will reply : It is impossible. Let us say it : it is impossible. We do not want to understand. This is ignorance, pride. We do not reflect. The Superiors do not see the full gravity, the obligation of their charge; it is certain that they will have to submit to a terrible judgement. *Judicium durissimum*.

I know well, that a Superior cannot do everything all alone. What must she do then? She must have the help of the Directresses, the Mistresses, the novices, etc. She must make them her helpers, she must supervise them, make them act, instruct them, etc.; but always in perfect harmony, and in accordance with the Rules and the established customs.

Without that all of you together will ruin the community and you will ruin yourselves. It will not be, as Our Lord tells us, because you will have called : Lord, etc.

... In speaking to the Mother Superior, it may seem to you that the Mother is going to do everything; that she is going to handle everything. Far from that. I want her to understand, if she is wise, that alone she can do very little. If it is the question of the convent, all must be done harmoniously by the Superior in agreement with the Directress. And with regard to the Novitiate, in agreement first with the Mother, and the Mother with the Directress, the Directress with the Mistress of novices.

The father Superior will be there to know how you relate yourselves between the three of you. Do not be too surprised with my embarrassment. The future difficulties will prove to us that I have hardly begun. Pay attention to it. We learn to live happily with one another if we know how to benefit by it. I always experience my ordinary difficulties in writing to you. May God be blessed in everything and may He deign to bless us always. FAMILY ANNALS, I, (COMMUNITY) Re. Unity between the Superior and Directress : [p. 268-270, Reverend Mother Foundress, 30 November 1858]

From October 1882, Fr. Tissot started his method of Probation for the Sisters. He told them, as reported in the Family Annals : “During the holy exercises of the Retreat, is sown the seed of the Word and inspirations. It has to be watered by grace and helped to grow and fructify by personal work. ... perfection cannot be acquired in a single moment, nor put on as a dress, but defects have to be conquered and virtues acquired one by one ... That’s why it seemed to me according to God’s good pleasure, my dear Sisters, to invite you all, with fatherly entreaties, to take advantage of the fervor kindled by a retreat to work under the protection of our gentle Queen, to acquire one after the other the virtues more in conformity with your holy vocation. You will spend three months in working towards the acquisition of each of these virtues, and you will call them three months of probation”. Cf. MOGET, in MSFS, p. 146

## CROSS

Once after erecting the Cross, he wrote : “The sermon had for its object, to make people understand that it is not enough to bear the cross; in order to honour it worthily, it must be borne with honour and pride and one must esteem oneself happy to follow the divine Master under His banner.” Jean REY, 1960, p. 71

“Not all crosses are wooden ones. ... I shall conclude with the saying of an old priest I knew : Crosses are to be kissed, not bitten. And I add, ‘Kissing them brings healing; they become soft and one learns to love them.’ ” [to Fr. Francis Decompoix, India, April, 1855, (Duval, Mermier, p. 268)]

Everything for the glory of God, in the shadow of the Cross, of which you have the happiness and glory to be a Daughter in company with the glorious Mary, Great Lady of Compassion, our common Mother. FAMILY ANNALS, I, Re. a Dismissal / Rules of Prudence VOCATION : [p. 172, Allinges, to Mother Foundress, 12 September 1851]

Your anxieties and perplexities are *crosses* – divine gifts. They represent the barren land which is to be made fertile by the sweat of your brow. ... You must *kiss* the crosses not *bite* them; when you kiss them they become pleasant and bring healing. [let. to Fr. Jean Nicolas Decampoix, 17-04-1855, p. 162]

In illness, you have recognized the hand of this skillful doctor who makes his patient suffer only to heal him. All *crosses* are not made of wood. There are crosses of all kinds for each one of us. Each of us are required to carry his own cross ... well. [LETTERS, pg. 14, no. 25]

All these worries and doubts are crosses, gifts of God. They are the talents given by the Lord. They are the barren field which you have to cultivate at the sweat of your brow, without the least impatience. [let. Fr. Francis Decompoix, April, 1855]

'Kiss your crosses, do not bite them'. When you kiss them, you are cured. They become pleasant. We learn to love them [LETTERS, pg. 14, no. 25]

If we are at times shaken by the winds of trials, it's the Father of the family who threshes his harvest and winnows the grain. [Let. Mother Echernier, 21-09-1853]

"Interior sorrows are an excellent cross which we should carry in a spirit of resignation and even of joy. Fear is the beginning of wisdom. Happy is the servant who lives constantly in fear. When St. Paul tells us to rejoice, he adds : 'in the Lord.' True joy is never without thorns and without sacrifices". p. 67 [let to Sister. Louise MERMIER, 18-04-1851]

"It is good that the divine Master asks greater sacrifices from you. "Even if it were your life itself, don't refuse him anything; in the example of the Divine Model, say to him: Yes, my Jesus, as you wish and not as I wish.

"Your whole life has been restlessness and trial, it is the life of the true servants of Jesus Christ, who, after his example, do not seek after relaxation in this vale of tears. What great consolations when you have endured everything out of love for Him! Continue as you have begun. Always be more a daughter of the Cross, unite your sufferings with those of Jesus dying on the Cross of Calvary and with those of our Mother of Sorrows standing by his Cross." p. 68 [let to Sister Jeanne BELLEVILLE, 17-04-1856]

"You know, if you can remember it, that I am passionately fond of ordinary proverbs: I am going to tell you one which is quite trivial: *All the crosses are not made of wood*. All your anxieties, perplexities are crosses, God's gifts, talents of the Lord, arid land which has to be made fertile by the sweat of your brow. "Since those are your crosses, you have to carry them all the time - let him carry his cross each day - but with patience, submission and even with love." ...

... "I end with the nice words of a venerable vicar whom I knew well: *you have to kiss the crosses, not bite them and I add;*" in kissing them you are healed, they become sweet, you learn to love them". p. 70 [let to Fr. Jean-Nicolas DECOMPOIX, 17-04-1855]

## ILLNESS / SICKNESS :

Fr Gaiddon described the last days of Fr Mermier's illness as one of purification and edification. These were days of agony marked with powerlessness, acute suffering, misfortunes of all kinds. The doctors promised no hope of recovery. Those who looked after him were often moved to pity or lost in admiration. But he always resigned himself to the will of God with great patience. Towards the middle of July there was an appreciable change. He made rapid progress. [Adrien Duval, *Monsieur Mermier 1790-1862* (Bangalore: SFS Publications, 1985), pp. 268-269] When Fr Mermier arrived at La Feuillette he had lost three-fourths of his sight and could read only with extreme difficulty. He knew that his head was becoming weak, incapable of prolonged reasoning. Although his mind was clear, he felt a certain heaviness. He was heard to say very patiently: 'How I was in need of this lesson! How good is God! I was proud; He humbled me! I was always on the move, always away from interior life, always active. He compels me to take rest. He binds me to inaction. He makes me retire within myself. Blessed be the name of the Lord!' [Francis Moget, *The Missionaries of St Francis de Sales of Annecy*, pp. 100-101]

"I hope that it will be so for the greater glory of God, for reparation of my past and improvement in the future, if it pleasing to Jesus, Mary and St. Francis de Sales". 34 [Personal notes, 18-08-1859]

"Sickness has the benefit of detaching us from created things. ." [to Fr. Thevenet, 28-03-1852, (Duval, Mermier, p. 267)]

"Illnesses are blessings from God to all who endure them in a spirit of sacrifice and love. As long as we do God's will, that's it. We do a lot in doing a little, if we do it for God, when and as He wishes. Nothing is more likely to bring the soul to this attitude of mind than the ordeal of sickness." ." [to Fr. Delalex, April, 1855, (Duval, Mermier, p. 267)]

To a confrere recovering from illness : "Providence has to make you go through trials in order to form that new man in you which makes you like Jesus Christ. Your path of sickness has greatly edified me. I have suffered with you and I have thanked God with you." " [to Fr. Guillermin, April, 1855, (Duval, Mermier, p. 268)]



“It is for your own good that the Divine Master asks you for the greatest sacrifices. Even if it is a question of life itself, do not refuse Him anything; after the example of your Divine Model, tell Him :*Yes, my Jesus, as you wish and not as I wish; whatever you wish and not what I wish for.* ... Your whole life has been one of anxieties and trials ... Go on as you have begun. Be always more a Daughter of the Cross, unite all your sufferings with those of Jesus dying on Calvary and of Our Lady of Compassion, standing at his feet.” FAMILY ANNALS, I, Re. Resignation in Sickness : [p. 207-208, Allinges, to Sr. Jeanne Belleville, 17 June 1856]

“Health is a benefit since it is a gift from God. Unfortunately, a great number of people misuse it, it is their sin which proves how precious it is for those who know how to make good use of it.” FAMILY ANNALS, I, Re. Advice on her Convalescence : [p. 214, Annecy, to Sr. Jeanne Belleville, 4 July 1856]

... In spite of my discomfort, I consider myself satisfied and happy to be a little useful to our good scholastics and our good Brothers. I have the happiness of being able to be a little quiet, to celebrate holy Mass, to hear the confession of our Sisters, to follow all the little exercises of our little community. I have also a little extra time to pray for you. Yes, my dear Sister, I am happy not to be able to do much, so as to do better while doing little. Wisdom does not consist in doing many things, we must do them well. FAMILY ANNALS, I, Re. on his life of sickness : [p. 258, Sr. Marie Peclat, 30 November 1858]

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"To those with the eyes of the *flesh* nothing more miserable and more humiliating than the life of the holy priest during his last two years. To those with the eyes of *faith*, nothing was greater, nobler and more meritorious". Jean REY, p. 96

ILLNESS is a crowded time destined to fill the emptiness of the time already spent and to inspire us to strive towards a meaningful *end*. Consider your illness as an opportunity offered for a *good retreat*. [Sister Jeanne BELLEVILLE, June-July 1856, Duval, p. 267]

May God be blessed. In spite of your poor health, you are doing well and I think you are really doing fine; "when I am weak then I am strong" (2Cor.12,10). What perfection! What a great blessing to be able to say: I die each day. In this state of humiliation, nothing please the soul as God's will united to its divine model: all happiness consists in becoming like him: to adhere to God is a good thing for me. The world, with its joys, its praises, its goods mean nothing. The world is crucified in me and me for the world.

"My dear François, have courage... if suffering fills us with terror, the reward is there waiting for us...for we belong to Him, because in the Lord is mercy and abundant redemption. "You are doing much; if you think that you are doing less, don't be sad about it. The servant who received only two talents, is not rewarded less by the Master than the one who has received five, for both have been faithful. Because you have been faithful in little things, I shall give you a responsibility over many. p. 61 [let to Fr. François DECOMPOIX, 17-04-1855]

"A few days back I was thinking of paying you a visit, the day after tomorrow; but seeing that my infirmities are still afflicting me, I felt that it is better to give up the idea. "Don't think badly of me that in spite of my afflictions I find myself happy and contented to make myself useful to our good scholastics and Brothers. I find happiness in being able, without too much difficulty, to celebrate the holy Mass, to hear the confessions of the Sisters and to follow the little exercises of our small community.

"I also have a little more time to pray for you. Oh, yes, my sisters, I am happy that I am no longer able to do much, so that I can do better in doing less. **True wisdom does not consist in doing many things, it consists in doing them well**". p. 64-65 [let to Sister Marie PECCLET, 30-11-1858]

"We should never doubt that sickness is a blessing coming from God's goodness to all those who accept it in a spirit of sacrifice and love. Saint Francis de Sales tells us that the suffering through which he passed did him a lot of good. This of course should not prevent us from taking a reasonable care of our health. And so, take care of yourself; what is important is that in all things we do the will of God. **"We do much in doing little, if we do it for God, when and as he wills it.**

"On the contrary, in doing much, we do little and even nothing, as we run the risk of doing it without upright and pure intentions. They have already received their reward and nothing...what does it profit a man...How comforting this doctrine is to humble souls, how catastrophic to vain and ambitious people. Poor Pharisees, they have laboured in vain.

"Nothing can bring the soul to embrace these sentiments except sickness. ... God knows well, Saint Francis de Sales used to say, what is good and necessary for us." p. 65 [let to Fr. DELALEX, 17-04--1855]

"You are seeing great days, days which have practically no nights, no rest, no recreation, days which St.Paul calls days of salvation, brimful days, destined to fill the emptiness of other days, to make great profits which prepare the consummation [*Death*].

"Come on, this talk is too serious for a sick person. What do you say? I say no, for if the fever is high, the head is fine." .'" p. 67 [let to Sister Jeanne BELLEVILLE, 30-06--1856]

"I don't know about the exact state of my health, I think it is more or less the same. I still have the same difficulties to read and write. People think that I am improving, some of them say that to me, perhaps to please me; I thank them for it, what is better for me, is suffering." p. 73 [Personal Notes, 16-08--1859]

"I hope that it (sickness, trials, suffering) will be thus for the greater glory of God, for my improvement for the past and future and if it please Jesus, Mary and Saint Francis de Sales." p. 73 [Personal Notes, 18-08--1859]

**PAIN (SUFFERING / CROSS) :** Interior sufferings are an excellent cross which you must carry with resignation and even with joy. ... When St. Paul tells us that we must rejoice, he adds – in the Lord. *Real joy is not found without thorns and sacrifices.* FAMILY ANNALS, I, Re. SUFFERING AND THE CROSS : [p. 171, Annecy, to his niece, Sr. Louise, 1851]

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## **SUFFERING :**

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Fr Mermier never believed that we should suffer blindly without any specific and noble purpose. For him suffering is necessary and meaningful when it is recognized as the Will of God. "It is necessary that we suffer in one way or other without which we never reach." [From the "Letter to Fr Brifford on April 7, 1857," p. 59]

"It is not enough for you to have left everything...to have laboured much.... Other trials are necessary for the disciple of Christ, the missionary: he has still to be refined...through his infirmities....Accept, then, with confidence the chalice which the paternal hand of God offers you; rejoice at being found worthy to suffer.... [From the "Letter to Fr Lavorel on April 17, 1855," p. 54]

In Pougny, the aged and ailing Fr. Mermier "began his ascent to Calvary, victim of his zeal. ... Those who assisted or visited him in turns were moved with pity or enraptured with admiration, for if the illness was serious, the resignation and courage of the patient were greater still and when at short intervals understanding and speech came back to extricate Fr. Mermier from the grip of illness, the sentiments that he expressed revealed a soul lovingly submissive to the good pleasure of God." Jean REY, p. 91-92

"I am telling you all this, dear François, only to tell myself to do better and to join you in thanking the Lord for the grace he has bestowed upon you in calling you so early in life to share his chalice of bitterness: Can you drink of the cup that I shall drink? It is there that we find the principle and the fullness of virtue; he who follows me does not walk in the darkness. "Our strength lies in God alone: I can do everything in him who strengthens me, and this strength lies in infirmity. **In all works, the less there is of us, the more there is of God.**' The missionary, even though he be infirm, is a powerful force, if he is really dead to himself and resigned to God's Will". p. 62 [let to Fr. François DECOMPOIX, 17-04-1855]

"I find you today just like on the day when I was separated from you in the hard but salutary company of the beatitudes: let us console ourselves, the roots are bitter, but the fruit delicious, its maturity difficult, painful, but the harvest is abundant; it is necessary that it be so: It was necessary for Christ to suffer and thus enter into his glory We too must pass through the one and the other, otherwise we shall never arrive at our destination. ... p. 67-68 [let to Fr. BRIFFORD, 07-06-1856]

"I don't know about the exact state of my health, I think it is more or less the same. I still have the same difficulties to read and write. People think that I am improving, some of them say that to me, perhaps to please me; I thank them for it, what is better for me, is suffering." p 73 [Personal Notes, 16-08-1859]

"After a holy life, death is a necessary trial. But what happiness, what consolation to die in the joy of the Lord! May the Lord Jesus and his Blessed Mother obtain that grace for all of us." p 74 [let to Mother Claudine ECHERNIER, 10-02-1860]

## **MINISTRY of EDUCATION**

From the beginning of his priestly life, Fr. Mermier was concerned about education. Initially as curate-teacher at Magland and later as professor at Melan. As Parish priest in Chatelard he became involved in the serious lack of literacy in the rural areas : in poor parishes, children (especially girls) scarcely knew how to read. Besides to fight against the inroads of religious indifference, instruction was vital. And for this trained teachers were needed. This prompted him to found the

Congregation of the Daughters of the Cross, since he was pastoral to the core, for Mermier no education was complete without *religious* formation. “Education of the heart is the heart of Education.”

His instruction : “Love your pupils : be a mother to them by your tenderness and a father, by your prudence.” Indeed, if he loved children, the children worshipped him.” [Duval, p. 191]

Fr. Mermier was initially hesitant to assume the management of the college of **Evian** (State College) that were offered to the MSFS. Although there were no serious financial liabilities; yet experience had shown that the care lavished on the youth in such colleges did not serve to make them better Christians – his main concern. However, involvement here would mean less confreres would be available for parish mission in Savoy and for the Indian Missions; and yet the financial conditions were favourable, and, the required academic training of confreres would equip them for educational ministry in India, when required.

As for the college of **Melan** (in fact, the Minor Seminary, where Mermier himself was a student, professor and prefect of seminary) there were some tricky conditions implied; yet, the consideration that Melan could turn out to be a *seed-ground* for vocations prevailed. Accordingly, consistent with the *unfolding charism* of the Congregation the *providential offer* was taken up.

“The Missionaries consent to take charge of the College of Melan, hoping from the divine Bounty, the power to discharge it well, though for the moment they find it far above their strength. Your Lordship will say a word in this connection to the clergy gathered together for their retreat so that these latter will not accuse us of having allowed the work of the missions to suffer in order to occupy ourselves with things that they judge less conformable to our vocation.” Jean REY, p. 83-88

### **Process of DISCERNMENT :**

(-ve) question of competence of confreres @ to serve as professors; compulsion of serving the Mission of Vizagapatam and Parish Missions of the Diocese; Possible negative Public opinion @ Missioners = intruders

(+ve) Institutional infrastructure freely offered; possibility of young confreres to acquire necessary skills – their services, initially in the college of Evian, could subsequently be an asset for the Overseas Mission; Evian could become a seedground for local vocations. [Duval, Mermier, p. 177]

**College of EVIAN :** While Fr. Mermier was engaged in discussion with the Diocese who wanted to entrust him the College of Melan (and which he proposed to the Propaganda could serve as a ‘Seminary for the Foreign Missions’), the Bishop opined : “The idea of an institution entrusted to the Congregation of the Missionaries of the Diocese appeals to me very much; I have long thought of it. In spite of the advantages which Melan could offer, you may take steps to acquire Evian.” It was the autumn of 1856. [Duval, Mermier, p. 178]

**College of MELAN :** While the Fr. Mermier informed the Bishop that his councilors were of the opinion that there was no good reason for taken up the college of Melan, the Bishop replied : “It must be known that in my eyes the concerns of the Missionaries in no way differ from the concerns of my diocesan priests. I certainly don’t wish to get in the way of the Missions nor to hamper the Missionaries in any way (promising to supply the personnel needed for teaching, for the missions, and for the other activities. He promised to defray all the Missionaries’ expenses), ...” The Superior considered such benevolent words as these to be an order he could not disobey. (Personal Notes of Fr. Mermier, 30 Aug. and 01 Oct. 1855) The Congregation was to supply one or two Missionaries and three brothers who were to be accompanied by six Daughters of the Cross. All the professors at present in the college were to stay there. Fr. Clavel was to take on the responsibilities for the Home. [Duval, Mermier, p. 185]

**However, in the face of the most adverse conditions** – the college buildings were in a pitiable state, ... general dilapidation was going to prove extremely costly – **Fr. Mermier made the following observation** : “The distress of a country as poor as Savoy, in an institution as poor as Melan, seems to me a sufficient (even an urgent) reason for making use of all the most economical means when it comes to maintenance, to repairs to the buildings, to developing the land and even to the everyday life of the pupils, the professors, the brothers, etc. “ On 4<sup>th</sup>. September 1857, Melan was officially entrusted to the Missionaries. [Duval, Mermier, p. 185–187 *passim*]

**Missionary at the service of the Educational Apostolate** (Jean REY, p. 83-88)

Fr. Mermier, zealous missionary that he was, looked forward, in spite of not having the luxury of personnel, to taking up the Ministry of education of youth. In this he expected to train missionaries for Pastoral ministry in Savoy and for Overseas pioneering evangelization. An opportunity presented itself in 1845, when the MSFS were offered the management of the College of Evian. However, given the obstacles coming from the Sardinian government, the municipal officials, and even adverse reaction from the diocesan clergy Fr. Mermier sought time before taking the final call.

When these obstacles were removed by the pressure exerted on the government and the Municipality, and at the request of the Bishop, Fr. Mermier consented to the MSFS assuming the management of the College of Evian, and accepted the role of Superior – the sole person responsible for it before the Government. The compelling motive was to make the college a nursery for aspirants for the Missions. But before this could materialize another more favourable opportunity for his apostolic designs presented itself. The offer to take charge of the College of Melan, (after the expulsion of the Jesuits in 1848, and the steady decline of the college thereafter.

In 1856, after repeated requests of Bishop Rendu, and after initially declining the offer (citing lack of personnel), Fr. Mermier to take up the management of the College of Melan, foreseeing the future and weighing the matter well. He addressed a letter to the Bishop that was dictated by prudence : “The Missionaries consent to take charge of the College of Melan, hoping from the divine Bounty, the power to discharge it well, though for the moment they find it far above their strength. Your Lordship will say a word in this connection to the clergy gathered together for their retreat so that these latter will not accuse us of having allowed the work of the missions to suffer in order to occupy ourselves with things that they judge less conformable to our vocation.”

Indeed far from being an invader (as he initially thought he would be), by accepting the management of educational establishments, Fr. Mermier, in fact would be instrumental in reforming the institution. He had very strong views on the type of education required to respond to the needs of his time.

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**Fr. Mermier’s view on education** : From his early priestly Ministry (as curate-teacher at Magland, professor at Melan, Vicar at Chatelard), Fr. Mermier was required to deal with matters of education (particularly among the poor girls in the parishes) and formation of youth. To combat remedy indifference, trained teachers for quality education was essential.

“Desiring very much to instruct his parishioners,” writes Fr. Gaiddon, “he did not refuse any sacrifice. He himself paid a schools master whom he lodged in the presbytery and fed at his table, and who responded very well to the task.” So much so that ten of his students could gain admission to the college. [Jean REY, 1960, p. 22]

For him, Education – a work of love – can be imparted only based on *respect* for children. There no human formation was complete without religious education. Finally, there can be no serious Christian formation without sound Christian parents and teachers. As Warden and Prefect of Discipline, he knew how to combine *kindness* with *firmness* – was loved as much as he was *feared*. [Duval, Mermier, p. 191-192)]

Herewith, Fr. Gaiddon’s illustration of Fr. Mermier – Educator : “He combined kindness with firmness. He was loved and feared. He had at his disposal many means to sop roguish pranks and thwart the schemes of ringleaders, an almost impossible race to be ever subdued in colleges. For the little ones, he had the tenderness of a mother. Sometimes he made their beds, he helped them to get rid of many unwelcome and very numerous insects – bed companions, which in summer attempted very cruelly to curtail the sleep of the students; he even combed the hair of the youngest ones. [Jean REY, 1960, p. 16-17]

“Love the pupils; be a mother to them by your tenderness and a father by your prudence.” [Advice about their duties to the Missionaries who were teaching, 05 to 08 October, 1856, Noteboks, pp. 33-35. (Duval, Mermier, p. 177)]

On lack of genuine success of religious educational institutions, he observes : “One universal result is to be seen in children who have gone to universities, colleges and boarding schools – far from being pious, they are usually without religion, and even enemies of religion. ... They go to church and to Mass rather like soldiers to their drill ! ... Who is responsible – parents or society. Which is rotten to the extent of corrupting the Mind ? ... an education in which the passions are stirred and stimulated under the pretext of encouraging competition.” ...

Fr. Mermier preferred domestic education given within the family – the most natural kind of education. Isn’t that preferable, he exclaimed, to public education ? Can the latter, without the former, normally produce a good result ? ...

Does the kind of life commonly lived in most educational establishments (*Boardings / Minor Seminaries*) suit a child's temperament, or the temperament of youth, or the habits and needs of their age? The pupils find themselves enclosed like cloistered religious, obliged to a regular life like monks, condemned to go to bed and get up at the same time, to rise early in the morning, to work all day long, except for the few hours of recreation allowed for in religious houses, to go to common prayer, to Mass, to confession, etc. *willy-nilly*. Once again, my intention is not to cast blame. ...

It seems to me that the kind of life one is obliged to follow in many groups (boardings / minor seminaries) must even harm the children's health. Look at them shut up in halls, in classes, in dormitories for such a long time, etc. Etc. I leave it to men of knowledge and experience to make a point of examining these problems ... [Duval, Mermier, p. 193-196 *passim*)]

"If it were a question [a Catholic country like Savoy], I should like the method of education to be completely religious. Everything else is secondary and should serve as the proper way to open the mind and develop the pupils' faculties so that they may be capable of following the career to which God is calling them.

All such things are taught – above all – by example. True education is opening the heart rather than the mind. Masters should practise themselves what they teach to others.

The temptation to be satisfied with a superficial education is very great indeed: For a religious education, less brilliance and ostentation are needed, and more level-headedness – but that's where parents and even other institutions, will – as they say – cut the ground from under your feet. ...

The catechism was taught, of course, but so much importance was given to the rest that ... the study of religion is only secondary importance." [let of MERMIER to Fr. Jean-Marie Tissot, Missionary in India, 18-04-1852, Duval, Mermier, p. 196]

As for the second name you have taken, in order to avoid confusion of names, it is good, better two patrons than one. Have the piety, the fervor, the innocence of St. Louis de Gonzaga and the faith, the humility, the courage, the zeal and love for Jesus Christ of St. Peter.

In your new vocation, you must not only think of yourself, of your salvation, of your perfection, you owe your companion submission, respect, love of a child towards its mother.

Towards the little girls of your school, you must *render them the help of your prayers, the good example of a life which is very regular; you must be rather a little serious with them*, but without bitterness or severity, *they must love you*. When it is necessary to punish them, have recourse to your companion and if needed to the parish priest; *rarely should you take upon yourself the odium of punishing.*" ...

"... *Refuse no office, no type of work, however base or tiresome it may appear: obedience, love of God changes everything into gold.*" FAMILY ANNALS, I, re. DEVOTION TO SAINTS, sense of duty: [p. 159,160, Annecy, To Sr. Louise, Teacher at Marcellaz 7 July 1850]

Fr. Mermier had always insisted on supervision. But for him, this did not mean a picky observation, accompanied by sanctions aimed at getting boys to respond to a rule. It was more a question of constant, affectionate and kindly vigilance which followed the children all through the day. ... Supervision thus understood was the common responsibility of all the professors, even if it was not their 'work'. It called for a great *discernment*, ...

Such knowledge is acquired ... noiselessly, without fretting by way of pastime, in an attitude of affectionate kindness.

Such a method calls for total commitment on the part of the masters - ... they are never to let the children out of their sight; they are to be constantly with them. Frequent absences for outings, meals, preaching, confessions, were things to be wary of. Such absences, were more prejudicial than it is possible to say. To correct their failings, youth needed to be helped – and not by threats or punishments. Above all, the child's confidence was to be won ... by inspiring him with deference, respect and love for his masters – deference to their knowledge, devotedness and kindness; respect for their upright conduct, their self-control, their sense of justice; love in return for their love. ...

And Fr. Mermier, who is sometimes thought to have been so austere, added – even by affection and kindness.

Very often, he noticed that old boys of religious institutions evinced a certain distaste for traditional expressions of the Christian life. So he recommended professors to avoid carefully: ... anything that could arouse distaste for spiritual exercises, for prayers, for instructions, for the Office, for the sacraments, for retreats.

Each one was to make his teaching interesting so as not to give rise to dislike, aversion, boredom with work or study. The yoke of the rule should not weigh too heavily.

As former professor of Melan, he knew that children quickly judge their masters and that they are quick to sense disagreements and rivalries between professors; so he adds, 'nothing is more disastrous and opposed to the spirit of peace and unity.' [Fr. Mermier's personal notebooks (pp. 26-30), 05-10-1856, when MSFS took charge of the College of Evian, Duval, Mermier, p. 197-198]

[From 'CAYERS' personal notes, AM - pp.172-173 - "Salesian Education : Notes on Melan, 23 Sept. 1857"]

**Teachers :** Need to ensure : Agreement and good understanding between teachers; There must be continuous and individual but [paternal supervision of students. Avoid with the greatest care the drawback [harm] of making children timid, hypocritical, serving the eyes - *ad oculum servientes*; Edifying and consistent behavior full of charity and gentleness inspiring more confidence in the student than fear; The teachers should never lose sight of their double mission which consists in forming at the same time a man of God and a man of the world. [word used in a positive sense], man of devotion and a citizen [lit. a civilian]. They will do their best to form men of devotion, God-fearing men at the same time honest and charitable. They will unceasingly inculcate in them the great precept of charity. To love God above everything and the neighbor as oneself. In these two commandments – *in his duobus mandatis* ...

#### **Meeting with the students** [Melan, 22-10-1857]

(Testimony) I had to go to the study hall to make a sudden meeting with the students who had just come. There, without any formality, in a familiar manner, (perhaps, I lacked dignity), I wished them three things : knowledge, wisdom, discipline.

**Knowledge :** because it is the most natural and most common; because it is the desire of the parents and the government; because knowledge is the instrument and way to wisdom. Knowledge is the beginning of wisdom

**Wisdom :** Its nature, its effects, its necessity and importance; The esteem that is necessary to acquire it; the earnestness with which we should seek it; the manner in which we should grow in wisdom following the example of Jesus Christ.

**Discipline :** Earnestness in work, attention to study, faithfulness to the rules of the college, submission and respect towards superiors, professors and priests in the house; Justice, honesty, good example, charity towards all.

### **MINISTRY of FORMATION**

Focus on **Devotion** (Evangelical ministry is the work of God; He descends to us through humble prayer. ... through annual retreats, the daily practice of meditation, of reviews, of spiritual reading, of habitual recollection and through a great purity of intention. ... For, what can we offer others, if not from one's own abundance. It is in vain that a famished child sucks the milk-less breasts of a languishing mother),

Focus on **Study** (on this depends the success/failure of Mission. Study of languages, knowledge of the world, of men, of the human heart, the training in preaching, all these play a great role in the life of a Missionary. Of capital importance are the study of Holy Scripture and Sacred Theology : studied, meditated on, analysed and applied with practical sciences (to present-day realities) – are the means offered to form oneself for Christ's Mission)

Focus on **Service** (requires training in preaching, worthy administration of sacraments, meaningful celebration of the Eucharist, regular recitation of the Breviary and the duties enjoined by the Church – attentively, entirely and devotedly.) [let. to Fr. Francois Decampoix, 03-06-1850, p. 39-40]

FORMATION @ Antecedants to seminary in GOPALPORE, Cf. Moget, in MSFS, pp. 164-165, 188 : cf. photocopies of txt

We must pray God to send us more vocations; for our part we must cooperate, help Divine Providence. ... The majority of those who present themselves do not know themselves, how are they going to make themselves known ? All their great efforts are towards showing themselves to be other than they are. They hide their poor health, character, etc. They do not consult their superior about their vocation.

Yet the knowledge of self is so necessary, that without this first quality, there will neither be fear of God, nor humility, nor obedience, nor chastity, nor vocation; on the contrary, there will be only self-love, human respect, obedience a real slavishness, mortification a kind of hell. The Rule with its numerous prescriptions, so reasonable, so lovable, so meritorious, so easy, is for those ignorant ones an unbearable burden, they observe it only by force, with regret, murmuringly, because they are supervised, because they are afraid of being censured.

All these disorders come from ignorance of self, from losing control of self, from not knowing that one has need of a bridle to tame oneself, subdue oneself, to control one's passions, to break oneself from bad habits and to take on good ones, to do penance, etc." ...

*The multiplicity of books only serve to distract, etc. The spiritual science is a gift of God. We must ask it from God, merit it by great fidelity to his graces; yes, but it is also a science, an art, an exercise.* FAMILY ANNALS, I, Re-Formation and Instruction of members [p. 222-223, 224, 225 to his niece, 27 May 1857]

The Brothers are in great need, they are not sufficiently instructed, they do not know the rules; they are far from being faithful to the practice of those which they already possess a little. How do they do their daily spiritual and manual exercises? What progress do they make in the frequentation of the sacraments? They scarcely learn to know themselves. What idea do they form themselves about the manner of conversing among them? Of conversing with strangers? Do they appreciate community life, the happiness of being like brothers and better than brothers together, to live cordially with one another, considering themselves happy to avoid ego suffer with one another etc. You can, then, be of great assistance to them.

After the Gospels, the Catechism, the Imitation of Jesus Christ, the Introduction to the Devout Life, the life of the Saints, let them read Rodrigues. Add to all these that which your long experience has taught you in the direction.

There is besides a complaint about the lack of courtesy of the Brothers: A lacks discretion, B scarcely keeps neatness, C seeks to isolate himself. ... Let them form themselves to the Interior life, to recollection, to habitual vigilance on themselves, to common life, to good manners which makes community life pleasant and which edify strangers so much. 89, 90 let to Fr. Neyret, at Allinges, 30-06-1846, 28-07-1846,

We need some Brothers for India, for Evian, for the different stations, for Notre Dame de la Gorge, trustworthy persons. To have them such, it is necessary to form them. Two years of Novitiate are not too long. After these trials, it is still necessary to choose. Well! This is the actual position. 92 let to Fr. Clavel, 17-10-1856

"What happiness and what boon to send forth Missionaries in the flower of youth provided they are true Missionaries, men worthy of their sublime vocation, new Apostles, other Christ's full grace and truth. Men who are totally detached from this world and from all its false goods. Such men are an immense blessing from the Divine Mercy, an infinitely precious resource for our little Mission. Do not fail in any manner whatsoever to come up to these expectations". p. 99 [let to Fr. SERMET, 06-07-1849]

Formation to Interior Life: "In order to succeed in this, here is a summary of the counsels I love to give you: "Work seriously and constantly at your own sanctification. "Beware of easy illusions: many forget their own sanctification, their salvation, their own perfection under the pretext of working for the salvation of others, for performing works of zeal. What folly! as if man were so necessary, as if the Almighty could not bring his designs to fruition without us... we are but unprofitable servants. The security against this great evil is found in the strict, careful and constant observance of our holy Rules. They immolate the whole man; through them you do not belong to yourself any longer, you belong entirely to God." p. 99-100 [let to Fr. SERMET, 06-07-1849]

"Apply yourself to study before everything else, the things essential to your ministry. Moral and dogmatic Theology, well grasped and analysed contains all these essential factors, holy Scriptures and Tradition, the Councils, the Fathers of the Church ... have a thorough grasp over the matter that you teach everyday in your catechism lessons. Study of languages, the knowledge of the world, of men, of the human heart, the training in preaching, all these things play a great role in the life of a Missionary.

You have to train yourself to the exercise of this saintly ministry. p. 100 [let to Fr. SERMET, 06-07-1849]

"But then, possessing a zeal that is truly apostolic, a great purity of intention, love for work and a spirit of observation, **even men** with mediocre talents, succeed. "Take careful notes, everyday, if possible. p. 100 [let to Fr. SERMET, 06-07-1849]

"Here, then, dear confrere, are some counsels to help you to form yourself without any further delay, to piety, to knowledge, to the exercise of your saintly ministry so that you may work ceaselessly to become, after the example of the divine Model holy, blameless, unstained, separated from sinners, exalted above the heavens(Heb.7,26). This will be the work of the Holy Spirit who will work in you in the measure that you are more faithful or less faithful." p. 101 [let to Fr. SERMET, 06-07-1849]

"To form oneself in the knowledge that is essential and useful to the exercise of such an important ministry whose success entails grave consequences. What then are means to succeed? "You ought to seek them in God's Spirit. "They are to be found in the holy Scriptures. "They are found in theology that is studied, meditated, analysed, compared with practical



sciences. The great means is to profit from your experiences, even to take notes so as to cover them at leisure, to consult them in times of doubt." ... "I say nothing about the other means offered by other branches of science all of which are useful to apostolic men, considering the almost infinite connections they can have with all sorts of people and in all sorts of circumstances". p. 101 [let to Fr. Francois DECOMPOIX, 03-06-1850]

"Take as much trouble as you can to reduce the work-load of your young Missionaries, so that they can have enough time to make progress in and to improve their knowledge. Help them as much as you can. "It is a tremendous boon to have around you robust young men in the flower of their youth, men on whom the Congregation relies for the future advancement of this beautiful Mission. But then, what misfortune if these young men given a mediocre training were to turn out to be mediocre subjects! Consequently, I have to tell you that you are in duty bound to exercise a strict supervision on them. «Studies, thorough studies are absolutely necessary for our Missionaries." p. 102 [let to Fr. DUPONT, June, 1849]

"The key to ecclesiastical science is theology. I can talk about it as St. Paul talks about the holy Scriptures, as least in so far as theology interprets them and teaches us how to make practical applications. "All Scripture is inspired by God and is useful for teaching, for refuting, for restoring, for educating in justice, so that the man of God is brought to perfection and equipped for every good work"(2,Tim.3,16). " p. 102 [let to Fr. DUPONT, June, 1849]

Continue to form yourself with a great purity of intention and diligence for the exercise of holy ministry which is a vast field. Remember, even men of moderate talent can succeed since the Grace of God is always at hand. [Let. to Fr. Francois-Marie SERMET, 06-07-1849, pp. 45-46]

You should take notes, often if not daily, notes on what you see, on what you hear, on what you do. [let to his niece, Sr. Louise MERMIER, 07-07-1850, AM p. 4]

## STUDY :

Moreover, he lost no opportunity of improving his knowledge : "On 8 January, a literary and pious in-service training took place in the lecture halls at the Propaganda. Six or seven cardinals were there, and a large number of bishops, ecclesiastics, religious and laity." The hall was cram-full. There appeared on the scene "forty-eight students from Propaganda who preached successively in the various languages." Conclusion : "See how ignorance and I know not what else ... have divided men and almost isolated them – these creatures who are so alike and have a similar origin, who experience similar needs, who are destined to love one another and form a single family in the bosom of the Catholic Church, etc. ... See how knowledge and charity bring them together." [Duval, Mermier, p. 108]

"The great misfortune, in visiting these eloquent monuments (notes made after coming out of the Vatican Museums) , is to be insufficiently educated in the knowledge of world history – sacred history, especially, and also profane history, the history of Christian religions and the history of paganism." [Duval, Mermier, p. 109]

"You should take notes, often if not daily, notes on what you see, on what you hear, on what you do." 12 [let to his niece, Sr. Louise Mermier, 07-07-1850]

"Take notes carefully, every day, if possible" 13 [let to Fr. Jean-Marie Sermet, 06-06-1849]

"In discourses on *political matters* : to listen to everything and to allow the laity to think that the missionary is at least a little stranger to all that, not to say totally unaware of it, because of the times in which we live. ...

The fruit to be drawn from the journeys : 1. After the spiritual exercises, the study of languages, the theological study, the study of rubrics, you must make use of your free time for the different studies which you may make. 2. The study of geography. 3. The knowledge of men. 4. Knowledge of customs and rites, etc. 5. About architecture."80 [Counsels given on 19-06-1848]

To acquire the knowledge required for ministry: what are the means ? "You have look for them in God's spirit. The Spirit of the Lord: the Apostles received it in abundance and were immediately filled with knowledge: they were all filled with the Holy Spirit. "Evangelical ministry is God's work and not man's. God is jealous of his glory. I will not give my glory to somebody else. But, to obtain it, this gift of knowledge, you have to ask God for it, you have to draw it down upon yourself through a prayer which is humble and full of confidence. p. 87 [let. to Fr. DECOMPOIX, 03-06-1850]

"He who follows me, will not walk in darkness, but will have the light of life. From there emerges the fundamental obligation of a *priest* (more than that of a simple layman) and especially of an apostolic man, to know Jesus Christ perfectly, **to study** his life, to meditate on his divine teachings, to copy his virtues, to imitate his example".

"Study the Scriptures: they render witness to my name" Saint Ambrose : The Scriptures are a sacerdotal book. All of us have it in our hands, we find it in our office, in the ordinary of the Mass, in all our prayers: we are kind of submerged in them and yet we do not know them at all or know them very little. It is really a prodigy, not to say monstrosity. A small time teacher knows his grammar ! Take note of the use the Fathers of the Church, the Apostles, Jesus Christ himself made of them: <it is written> he used to say, <examine the Scriptures> I consider this study so necessary that I want all of you have a copy of the Bible." p. 88 [let. to Fr. DECOMPOIX, 03-06-1850]

"The spiritual exercises and especially the examen of conscience and meditation, are really our two eyes, two arms, two feet. They are like the compass of our external operations; they are the family sanctuary where God speaks to the heart the secret language which is not heard elsewhere. "It is there that the heart feels the effects of the promise which Our Lord makes in these words of the Prophet : "I will lead the soul to the secret place and there speak to her heart". p. 88

## HOLINESS

*Dangers of Lukewarmness* : After the exercises of a well-made retreat are brought to a close, the subjects resume their ordinary course. We neglect the daily exercises, we fall into routine and dissipation. Oh, what a misery, what an abuse of grace ! Living in this manner, how can one gain the apostolic spirit which is the spirit of zeal, of fervour ? How to create this total renewal, a New man who is created in justice and holiness of truth. How to deepen (the knowledge and love of Jesus Christ) with life almost sensual where the body weighs down the soul ? ... The knowledge of Jesus Christ is essentially practical, imitation not in words but in the power of God. (I Cor. 4/20) 67 [Document : dispatched on 25-06-1848]

The most virtuous avoid sin and great faults, but they are careless in the practice of virtue. It is not enough to avoid evil but it is necessary to do good. ... The love of God is efficacious. It is a tree that we can recognize from the fruit it produces. It cannot live and be barren. There is nothing as strong and as active as love. It is a devouring fire. *Charity covers a multitude of sins.* (I Pet. 4/8) ) 67 [Document : dispatched on 25-06-1848]

"Without doubt, we are far from this perfection. Our duty is to aim at it and work for it." 111 [Let. to Fr. Jean THEVENET, 14-06-1848]

"Not in speech but in the power of God. He is the expert in the love of God, who loves really, efficaciously, strongly. To what purpose does it serve a farmer to speak much of agriculture, if he himself leaves his fields, his vineyards and his farm uncultivated ? Such is my distress." 24 [Personal Notes, 10-05-1853]

## SPIRITUALITY / DEVOTION

*The Purgative Way is the way of the converted penitents, who have acknowledged their sins, who continue to meditate on them, to examine them, who have them always before their eyes in order to bewail them, so as not to commit them again, in order to make a sincere and continuous penance for them.* It is what St. Thomas calls the *life of the Beginners*. Without this purgative way, there can be no conversion, there can be no spiritual life. It is the a,b, c, it is the first part of the religious grammar.

What does a gardener do before sowing seeds in the garden ? He removes, he pulls out the bad weeds.

What is the *illuminative Way* about ? It is a question of the truths we must learn, believe in and practice; the duties to be known and observed; the virtues to be chosen, studied and imitated, etc. There Jesus Christ, Redeemer, Master, Model, presents Himself, etc.

St. Thomas calls this way, the *life of persons who have progressed*. Once the sick person has been purged, he must recover his health, he must regain his strength. What a disorder ! Many keep to purifying themselves from their sins, to receiving absolution, without being much disturbed by their bad habits. The penances which must be done to complete the purification. They no longer busy themselves or hardly at all with the illuminative way, with the choice of virtues, works, duties of their vocation. It is a mad man who wishing to build a house, digs the foundations and does not take the trouble to complete it.

What is the *Unitive way* ? Once the soul has understood its misery, its numerous sins, its great sins, it is ashamed of itself, it annihilates itself before God; asks pardon. God enlightens it, Jesus Christ reveals himself to it, full of graces and mercy. The souls with the two kinds of knowledge : the knowledge of itself, the knowledge of God, as with two hands

embraces its God, its Redeemer, its Saviour, etc. It unites itself in spirit by thought, in heart by the will, in action by the works. Whether it eats or drinks, whether it acts or speaks, it is always only and above all in God and for God. This is the Unitive Way, the way of the perfect according to St. Thomas. ...

The means for these ways are prayer, meditation, spiritual reading, contemplation and mortification. FAMILY ANNALS, I, Re. Formation and Instruction of members : [p. 222-223, 224, 225 to his niece, 27 May 1857]

*The spiritual exercises and chiefly the examen and meditation, are in truth our two eyes, our two hands, our two feet. They are like the compass directing our exterior activities. Without having recourse to them, there will be neither prudence, nor modesty, etc. in us. They are like the crucible where the heart and soul purify and enlighten themselves. They are the domestic sanctuary where God speaks to the soul this secret language which we cannot hear otherwise or elsewhere. It is there that the heart experiences, feels the effects of the promises made by the Lord in these words of the prophet : "I will lead the soul into the wilderness and there I will speak to her heart." All the efforts of the devil are useless against a soul that prays. He only prays who endeavours to know his misery in a serious examen, and who enlightens his faith and stirs up his trust in meditation.*

But the flesh, the love of ourselves with its thousand pretexts, illusions and excuses make us miss, curtail or cut short the examen, meditation ! Above all the world, the customs, the examples of others : for these, a religious who is faithful to her examen, her meditation etc. is considered to be less intelligent, meticulous, scrupulous, ... This leads us to justify laxity stating that others do not inconvenience themselves as much, etc.

Bad temper, sadness, a certain bitterness of heart when the will consents to it, could be called the eighth capital sin – so hurtful is it for ourselves and for those with whom we live. ... There is, undoubtedly, a sadness which comes from zeal. Jesus Christ felt it in the garden of Olives, when he said : I am consumed with sadness (zeal), seeing the peace of sinners. ... On the contrary, we are sad to be saddened, to be contradicted, to be humiliated. These are our interests, the things we desire, we search for. We confound easily our interests with God's interests. Let us keep our souls in peace. Above all, let us have a right and pure intention and as to the result, let us be indifferent, saying with the Sovereign Wisdom : Not my will, but yours, my God." FAMILY ANNALS, I, Re. Spiritual exercises / Prayer / Sin : [p. 235-236, Pougny, to Sr. Jeanne Belleville, 29 December 1857]

It is not enough to receive abundant graces, to hear the Word of God, to make spiritual reading, to frequent the Sacraments, to follow spiritual exercises, to participate in Jubilees, to be in a state of perfection; we must profit by all these valuable favours. We must make the best use of these talents. It is not enough to avoid sin. We must work for our spiritual advancement. The Holy Gospel, in speaking of the condemnation of the wicked servant does not say that he had lost his talent, but stresses that he did not make good use of it. That is the cause of his deplorable misfortune.

I acknowledge that our Sisters *are obliged to lead, as Daughters of the Cross, a hard life, a laborious life, a trying and even mortified life !* I will add, nevertheless, that there is nothing extra-ordinary in that. Let them not compare their existence in the congregation with that which they had with their parents. ...

How to remedy this ? Is it enough to give the habit of the Daughters of the Cross and add on to it the post of the Directress, Teacher, in order to have a *goddess of pride* ? These are marks, the solemn exterior distinguishing marks of the religious profession, of humility, obedience, charity, mortification, religious perfection. But no ! Behind these apparent exterior signs, behind the beautiful veil of modesty, are hidden the greater defects, because they are more refined. Why ?

A long explanation is necessary here. These poor girls are not educated. Many have not even the capacity to be educated. They have received had education, they have acquired so many bad habits ! They are too old, they are too young, they have no models, etc.

Finally, how is this going to be remedied ? Most of the directresses are unbearable : no order, no rule, no charity sometimes, no mortification, no prudence, no spiritual advancement, and that is what I see, what Fr. Clavel wrote to me, what I think I have already told you.

How must I conclude ? Will you tell me ? *Must we be discouraged or make an uproar ? No. We must always pray and be warned that the greatest evil in communities and individuals is not to have defects; no, the greatest evil is not to know them !!!* ...

The New year has begun ! Let us enter into it earnestly. And how ? By means of the Rule before everything : religious exercises, spirit of order and good management in the smallest details; concord, charity, cordiality for one another, unbounded devotion to the practice of obedience and all the virtues, etc. I wish you all a very happy New Year. God gives it to us. FAMILY ANNALS, I, Re. Means to remedy notable failures : [p. 240, 241-242 , Pougny, to Mother Foundress, 11 January 1858]

Spiritual well-being comes from the good use of God's creation : the ladder by which we go up to God and down to His creatures. [let. to Bro. Charles GAILLARD, Yanam, 03-06-1850]

As for the second name you have taken, in order to avoid confusion of names, it is good, better two patrons than one. Have the piety, the fervor, the innocence of St. Louis de Gonzaga and the faith, the humility, the courage, the zeal and love for Jesus Christ of St. Peter. FAMILY ANNALS, I, re. DEVOTION TO SAINTS, sense of duty : [p. 159,160, Anney, To Sr. Louise, Teacher at Marcellaz 7 July 1850]

## **SALESIAN Spirituality**

God wishes to give to us this good will, and Jesus Christ has bestowed it on us. How St. Francis de Sales put it into practice in his youth, in his writings and in his actions ! May he obtain for us this grace which he possessed in such a high degree of perfection.” 72 let to Fr. Cheminal, 05-06-1843

On the 24th February 1849, Fr. Mermier while residing at Allinges, writes to Fr. Gaiddon and shares a few ideas with him on the missionary apostolate. Fr. Gaiddon is struck by the richness of the text, he encircles it with a pencil and notes: <<To read.>> He was no doubt planning to read the text to the community of La Feuillette. Here is the text :

"It seems to me that now is the time, as never before, to be holy, spotless, apart from sinners, raised up higher than the heavens. Our ministry demands that we show the people, the society, that we are other Saint Francis de Sales, perfectly disinterested, burning with zeal for the salvation of souls, full of compassion at the sight of the evils that afflict the people, without wasting our time in making useless speeches, but imbued with a genuine missionary spirit, an irreproachable doctrine and above everything else a pure life..." 75

“You will be perfectly united by doing everything in the most cordial manner as brothers who love one another and have the true zeal of Jesus Christ and of St. Francis de Sales, our glorious and illustrious patron, who desired only the greatest glory of God and the salvation of people and his own salvation.” 76 [To the Missionaries at La Feuillette, 20-09-1842]

“Ah ! How I would like to have something of the patience and gentleness of St. Francis de Sales. I wish them for you and implore the Holy Protector to inspire you with them, to obtain them for you so that we may become similar to him, worthy ministers of Jesus Christ.” 77 [Let Fr. Cheminal, 29-01-1843]

## **SPIRITUAL DIRECTION**

“*Speak about your vocation and your experiences on this topic. Solid vocations are like trees exposed to strong wind, their roots must g dee3p down, otherwise they will not be able to resist the violence of the storms, the same with your vocation, etc. Although for your direction you are in good hands, four eyes are better than two.*” FAMILY ANNALS, I, Re. SPIRITUAL DIRECTION : [p. 162, Allinges, to his niece, Sr. Louise, 1851]

## **PRAYER**

Life-giving *missionary ministry* without *personal prayer* may turn out to be not merely barren but even death-provoking ! Let us pray always ... more useful to our people and more effective for our own sanctification [Circular to confrères in India, 17-04-1852]

Prayer is a need, a duty, a means of obtaining grace and all the graces proper to our vocation. [Circular to confrères in India, 17-04-1852, AM 145]

It is difficult for me to tell you the pleasure and consolation you give me when you tell me that you always feel more the need and the advantages of prayer : To pray to make others pray, to pray always, it is a great grace which Jesus has given you. Yes, without this help, we can do nothing. With this help we can do everything. [let. to Fr. GAIDDON, 08-11-1845]

Let us pray always, in a more worthy manner, more pleasing to God, more useful to our people, more effective for our own sanctification. [Circular 17-04-1852, to MSFS in India]

We shall do nothing, obtain nothing without prayer. [Let. Mother Echernier, [10-09-1847](#)]

Meditation and Examination of Conscience are the *compass* of external activity; without their help no virtue is possible. [Novena Notes let p. 10, 17]

Repetitions strengthen our meditations [Let. Fr. J-M. DUPONT, 15-06-1848]

We priests rarely receive the gift of contemplation. We must use the hand-pump to get a few drops of this living water. [Let. Fr. J-M. DUPONT, 15-06-1848]

Pray for me and obtain for me that God may open my ears and loosen my tongue so that I may make Him known and loved; if I am not too unworthy of this grace and honour beyond all honours. [Let. Mother Echernier, 10-09-1847]

The fruit and success of Missionary ministry depend almost entirely on prayer and good example. [Advice to teachers, Personal Notes, 07-08-1856, AM,142]

“Almost all my occupations should be devoted to prayer and meditation. Everything else is hardly worth anything for me and still less for others. If I were to know myself a little better, I would say with gratitude : ‘Mary has chosen the best part for herself’. It seems to me that I have a glimpse of it (at La Salette)” May God give me this grace (to see it better !). 38 [Personal Notes, 31-12-1859]

### **ACTION (Contemplation) :**

The love of God is a practical science which one acquires and one does not preach efficaciously except through works.” 24 Personal Notes, 10-05-1853

“Don’t refuse any office, any kind of work, however lowly it may be in itself, however off-putting it may appear : obedience and love of God change everything in to gold.” [let. to his niece, Sr. Louise Mermier, 1850]

“We do a lot by doing a little, if we do it for God, when and as He wills.” [to Fr. Delalex, 1855, (Duval, Mermier, p. 113)]

“Remember this sentence : *Non Quam Multum, sed Quam Bene* – Not Quantity, but Quality. We don’t have to do a lot, but to do well whatever we do. Our days must be full - how ? By doing everything for God, seeking only his glory and our neighbour’s salvation ” [to Fr. Francis Decompoix, India, 1855, (Duval, Mermier, p. 113-114)]

“A courteous demeanour, considerate and modest for all that, gladly putting up with the defects of those among whom one finds oneself. ... At customs, at prefectures, whenever you have to deal with public officials, with everyone, be extremely honest, do not cause anyone trouble, be kind to everyone.” [Duval, Mermier, p. 111]

(There is much to do : repairs, building, ...) “You are on the spot to see. In spite of the urgency, and all that I have said, I cannot undertake things above my strength, and thus expose myself to be considered imprudent. *God does not exact from us more than we can do; cut off then, or correct even the propositions as you think best.*” FAMILY ANNALS, I, Re. Mermier’s Solicitude for every detail in [p. 157, To Mother Claudine prior to setting up community in the Parish Chaumont, 1848] :

### **DEATH :**

“May the Will of God be done : May it be one well this good dying. Sister will be happy to be well prepared if her time has come. For everything is there; after a holy life, death is a necessary homage. What happiness, what consolation to die in the joy of the Lord. May the Lord Jesus and his Holy Mother give us all the same grace.” 44 Let to Mother Claudine, 10-02-1860

“It is not necessary to live long time – not so long, but to live well; but so well – in a short time, etc. It is not necessary to live long years, not even many days provided they are full. So many young missionaries who won the palm of victory at the very beginning of their apostolic career. How did they succeed in it ? They knew how to sanctify their days and all their actions.” 66bis [Let. to Fr. Jean-Francois Balmand, 17-04-1855]

## **HUMILITY**

This is the spirit in which Fr. Mermier sought the approbation of the Holy See for the Congregation : “I acknowledge that I possess a mediocre intelligence and knowledge. I am without virtue and merit, yet it has pleased divine Wisdom and my superiors, to assign me to the Missions; although fully unworthy, I have thought of the Rules and Constitutions without which there can neither be order nor sanctification of the Missionaries, or a fruitful work”. Jean REY, 1960, p. 70

... firstly, all of you without exception, lament over the evils of your pride, self-love and self-esteem; it is very good, sisters. God be praised, may Jesus Christ so humble, who annihilated himself to the death of the Cross, be glorified; may Mary Our Lady of Compassion be our Mistress and our Mother. But what am I to say ? *You are already fairly well instructed, the mind is enlightened : that is little, that is very little, often it is a poison. Are you humble at heart ?* Learn of me, we are told by our Sovereign Master, for I am meek and humble of heart, without that, all the rest will fail; God resists the proud. *What folly ! we have nothing that can make us appear great in the eyes of the world, neither honours, nor riches, nor grandeur ... and in our distress, to wish to be somebody, is pettiness, is folly !* Oh how apt the words of St. Paul : “what have you that you have not received ?” FAMILY ANNALS, I, (pp. 141-142, Annecy, 18 February 1860)

Happy are those who die in the Lord. We are born to die so that we can live forever the life eternal. We are here only as pilgrims. Undoubtedly, our ignorance makes us go away from the right path. Our weakness is even greater than our ignorance, but God is so good, so merciful, so kind that he deigns to light up our blindness and raises our feebleness and he is patient.

Tell our dear sick sister that she must hope, that the merits of Jesus Christ are infinite, that the tenderness of the divine heart is unutterable, that Mary is the Mother of Compassion, the advocate of tried souls.

Tell her that *humility which discourages does not come from God* who is all powerful, neither from the Gospel which assures the pardon of even the great sinner who humbles herself in hoping and hopes in humbling herself. Re. Death / HUMILITY : [p. 164, Annecy, to Mother Foundress, 4 February 1851]

God always shows you your miseries; you see only faults in yourself, your ignorance, your incapacity overwhelms you. I bless the Divine Mercy for it; those are some very precious graces, and they are excellent, provided these base sentiments of yourself do not produce discouragement. They will make you have recourse to prayer, to the Sacraments with greater fervor and assiduity, they will make you always more prudent and more humble; it is the esteem of ourselves, presumption which will ruin us.” FAMILY ANNALS, I, Re. HUMILITY : [p. 167, Allinges, to Mother Foundress, 13 April 1851]

“We have just finished the exercises of our Missionaries’ Annual Retreat on Monday 26 (June 1854). I hope all of them will have come to a better understanding of the happiness of the religious life, and the excellence and value of the many means which our Rules give them to work for their salvation and the sanctification of souls. I hope the retreat will be of benefit to us. I gave it as usual with a great deal of trouble and always with some hesitation at preaching to my betters. One thought alone sustained me : my **duty**. I have said practically everything, thank God, and they have not seemed displeased.” [let to Gaidon, 28-06-1854, (Duval, Mermier, p. 171)]

[*On the death of Fr. Cheminal, at the age of forty-eight.*] But what bitter and frightening soul-searching I’m doing. Apart from the help and assistance I used to get from our deceased, I used seriously to think of being replaced and having him elected in my stead as Superior of the Congregation. My conduct seems so little in conformity with our Rules – that accounts for the many defects in the members, in the subjects.” [From Fr. Martin to Bishop Neyret, 27/28-04 and 30-04-1852, (Duval, Mermier, p. 206)]

... firstly, all of you without exception, lament over the evils of your pride, self-love and self-esteem; it is very good, sisters. God be praised, may Jesus Christ so humble, who annihilated himself to the death of the Cross, be glorified; may Mary Our Lady of Compassion be our Mistress and our Mother. But what am I to say ? *You are already fairly well instructed, the mind is enlightened : that is little, that is very little, often it is a poison. Are you humble at heart ?* Learn of me, we are told by our Sovereign Master, for I am meek and humble of heart, without that, all the rest will fail; God resists the proud. *What folly ! we have nothing that can make us appear great in the eyes of the world, neither honours, nor riches, nor grandeur ... and in our distress, to wish to be somebody, is pettiness, is folly !* Oh how apt the words of St. Paul : “what have you that you have not received ?” FAMILY ANNALS, I, HUMILITY : (pp. 141-142, Annecy, 18 February 1860)

Tell her that *humility which discourages does not come from God* who is all powerful, neither from the Gospel which assures the pardon of even the great sinner who humbles herself in hoping and hopes in humbling herself. Re. Death / HUMILITY : [p. 164, Annecy, to Mother Foundress, 4 February 1851]

God always shows you your miseries; you see only faults in yourself, your ignorance, your incapacity overwhelms you. I bless the Divine Mercy for it; those are some very precious graces, and they are excellent, provided these base sentiments of yourself do not produce discouragement. They will make you have recourse to prayer, to the Sacraments with greater fervor and assiduity, they will make you always more prudent and more humble; it is the esteem of ourselves, presumption which will ruin us." FAMILY ANNALS, I, Re. HUMILITY [p. 167, Allinges, to Mother Foundress, 13 April 1851]

HUMILITY is when our weaknesses and sins lead us to *humble repentance*, as St. Peter and Mary Magdalene, they become a source of salvation. [Let. to Sr. Jeanne Belleville, 27-08-1857, p. 165]

I ask myself whether it is not due to our fault that our beginnings are small, that we obtain so little success, that we are exposed to die almost before we are born. The thought I suggest to you is a thought of *humility*, a thought of life and not a discouragement. I pray God in the little sanctuary of St. Francis de Sales to bless it [life] and fructify it in each one of you. [Circular to the MSFS in India, sent from Les Allinges, 28-03-1855, AM 19]

My main occupation, I would say almost my torture, has been within myself. What a struggle...I was thinking over the steps already taken, I was afraid of having lacked prudence. Everything was opposed to me. The persons who at first seemed to be interested in me soon regarded me with indifference. They appeared to look at my affairs and my embarrassment as things which did not deserve their attention. I was trying to offer my sacrifice and to be resigned, thinking that it was the will of God and the obstacles were not a bad sign. But soon, other thoughts occurred to me reproaching me for my faults, my lack of mortifications, my negligence, my ignorance, my rudeness etc. It appeared to me that God should treat me in this manner due to my pride...For me: '*It is good that you have humiliated me.*'<sup>1</sup> From the "Letter to Fr Brifford on April 7, 1857,"

"On the one hand, it seems to me that the affairs (Approval of the Congregation) could hardly succeed better in the hand of a poor being (like me) ... On the other hand, I was a little afraid for the Congregation." 15 [let Personal Notes, Rome, 02-06-1843]

"When I urge you to perfection, to love, to the esteem of your Holy Rules, to faithfulness in observing them, I am urging myself to do the same. I reproach myself for my unfaithfulness, my courage revives, my confidence increases. I always count on the purity and the fervor of your prayers and sacrifices." 17 [let Sr. Jeanne Belleville, 16-06-1847]

"As I reach this advanced age almost spent up, I share with you a profound regret not to have loved my God and even spoken only a little of divine love. Besides what could I have said of this divine science? ... No, the love that I had for God has not been a real love, a love of affection, efficacious and effective, a practical love. But it was a love of temperament tossed between presumption and mistrust." 24 [Personal Notes, 10-05-1853]

"It will be as it will please God, but at last from this great time and always, *I remain small and miserable* repeating with my spirit and heart, 'It is good that you have humiliated me.'" 26 [Personal Notes, 23-07-1859]

"If I am not able to acquit myself of my functions, I should give them up. 'Love to be Unknown and to be thought of as nothing' are for me the most important things." 51 [Personal Notes, 13-07-1859]

"The apprehensions arising from your humility and the knowledge of your nothingness are very legitimate and they are essential to a missionary. But they ought to be moderated through confidence in God – *I can do all things* ... and directed by obedience without which they degenerate into defects and could become a stumbling block." 109 [To Fr. Tissot, 12-09-1855]

"The spirit that I want you to have is a spirit of humility, a spirit of life and not of discouragement. I pray to God in the little sanctuary of Saint Francis de Sales (Les Allinges) to bless this spirit and to make it fruitful in each one of you". p 30 Circular to Missionaries in India, Allinges, dated, 28-03-1855]

"I really have some desire to be what you would want me to be. Doesn't matter, I accept heartily the honest and respectful procedures you follow towards your Superior. "I am convinced that he ought to be more capable, more holy, more loving and more perfect. However, his subordinates owe him respect, submission and love even when he is only what he is." p 77 [let Fr. NEYRET, 11-09-1847]

"As for Reignier, and for the smiles lavished upon me by these ladies and gentlemen, I was quite touched at the moment, but God granted me the grace to make in some way or the other my little sacrifice. Let us purify our intentions. The judgements of the Divine Master against the pomp and glory of this world are like thunderbolts."

"God knows the degree of reputation that I need, would I merit a higher degree than the one shown to me? I don't know, I should think not. It is God, the Supreme Good, who is my judge". p 78 [let to Fr. GAIDDON, 04-02-1847]

"Everywhere and in all things and especially in great undertakings, **God is jealous**. He has chosen the weak to confound the strong. Not to us but to you may glory be given forever and ever. Humility and gentleness are all that are required in an apostolic man. "Learn of me, for I am meek and humble of heart. "This foundation is so necessary and so essential in the performance of God's work that Jesus Christ himself, the Sovereign Missionary, his Apostles and all apostolic men never deviated from it. If the Lord does not build... on the other hand, God rejects the proud... trust and distrust." p 78 [let to, Fr. DUPONT, 17-04-1855]

(Without this knowledge of self) what does an apostolic man become, what is the zeal that animates him and sustains him in the exercise of his formidable ministry? It is a reed shaken by the wind, a tower built on shifting sand... "That is what a man is, especially a missionary, who does not know himself, who has not gained a profound knowledge of his weakness. of his nothingness, of his misery, his numberless defects, his daily faults, in a word, a missionary who does not take pains to know himself better each day and all the days of his life and so to understand the words of the Lord: "Without me you can do nothing" and the magnificent words of St. Paul: "I can do everything in him who strengthens me ". ... "On the contrary, the one who possesses this practical knowledge, who knows himself, who is conscious that he knows nothing, that he is worth nothing in himself, 'what have you that you have not received?' this one **places all his confidence in God**. "I can do everything". What power! what courage! He knows that all success in his apostolic ministry comes from God's infinite mercy, from the efficacy of God's grace, from the power of his divine Word. "At your word I will cast out the net"; he keeps calm and tranquil in the midst of adversity as in the midst of prosperity." ... "Where then does the idea that in all things we have to depend on ourselves alone, come from? That is because we are continually blinded by our self-love, it is because that we do not know ourselves in depth, we have not yet attained the practical knowledge which persuades us and which produces the conviction in the apostolic man that he can achieve nothing on his own, that the success of his mission depends on the action that comes from above. "Without me, you can do nothing." p. 78-79 [To Fr. Dupont, 17-04-1855]

"The fears founded on your humility and the consciousness of your nothingness are but legitimate, they are essential to an apostolic man. But they have to be tempered by confidence in God and guided by obedience, without which, they degenerate into failure and could well become a stumbling block" p. 80 [To Fr. J-M. Tissot, 17-04-1855]

"To you, my dear confreres, I would say that continually making efforts to renounce yourself, 'let him deny himself', so as to hate yourself, 'he who does not hate himself, you have all the same to dilate your heart and say with the prophet-king: "he who puts his trust in the Lord is like the Mount Sion", you have to base yourself firmly in this confidence which made the same King say "he who resides in Jerusalem will be invincible." ... "Trust in God and distrust of self, Saint Francis de Sales used to say, are like the two basins of a weighing-scale: as soon as one mounts the other descends. "As soon as the distrust of ourselves is complete and absolute, our trust in God will be perfect and we will be in a position to say with St. Paul: I can do everything in him who strengthens me, without fear of deluding ourselves. "In you, Oh Lord, have I hoped, I shall never be disappointed." p. 80 [To Fr. J-M. Tissot, 28-07-1852]

"The Vicar of Chaumont has given me your news, it is quite a consoling news to me, it is a compliment to your zeal and the confidence you know that you deserve. "God is constantly making you aware of your misery, you see only your defects, you are oppressed by the consciousness of your ignorance and your incapability's, I thank the Lord for his divine Mercy; it is a precious grace provided that these feelings don't lead you to discouragement; in this case these feelings are excellent and they will lead you to a more fervent and assiduous prayer and reception of the sacraments, they will make you more prudent and humble; what leads us to our perdition is excessive self esteem and presumption." p. 82 [To Sr. Marie PECKET, 13-04-1851]

**Instruction on Incarnation : HUMILITY** : Cahiers, Mission and Retreats 1848-1855, AM, pp. 173-174

The great and principal teaching which Jesus Christ gives in his incarnation is humility. St. Paul teaches us : *Who taking the form of a servant emptied himself. Why ?*

1. ...



2. To teach us that *humility* with its degrees is the basis of the spiritual edifice. Without this first disposition there is neither beginning nor progress, nor perfection. Salvation is like a building cast in the air.

First, without this light which teaches us to know ourselves, which discloses our source, our dependence, our nothingness, our miseries, our ignorance, our weakness, our corruption, our malice, our crimes, there is no justice, no prudence, no fortitude, no fear, no moral virtues.

Second, without humility and the feeling which this virtue inspires, there is no faith, no hope, no solid charity.

What is faith, if not humility and obedience of the spirit and heart ? What is hope, if not humility, the confidence which acknowledges that it knows nothing, that it can do nothing, that it has nothing, that it does nothing without the help of Him through whom we know, wish, and do everything. *What have you that you have not received ? If you have received why do you boast ...? Without me you can do nothing.*

What is charity, if not humility which knows that God alone is supremely lovable, that he is the source of all that is good, that God alone deserves to be loved that all that is lovable in creatures comes from God and should not be loved except for love of him.

Without the virtue of humility, the theological virtues lack foundation.

## M A R Y

“A long, costly, painful, dangerous ... pilgrimage undertaken through the inspiration of Our Lady of La Salette after my healing, and after the innumerable favours which I have received, and which I receive everyday, from this good Mother. Among the innumerable favours I received daily from this good Mother, I count as the most notable the grace of being granted the time to see how I stand before God and men, after so hollow and dissipated a life. The grace continues with the same effects, so that even were I to wish to go faster, I could not do so”. 35 [Personal Notes, 23-07-1859]

“Mary taught me to be a different man, a man more humble, more gentle, more mortified. ... My new condition of health forces me to it. This Mother, since my return to the new condition, has obtained for me enough strength, enough light to recognize myself, to act in spite of my new state (of health).” 36 [Personal Notes, 23-07-1859]

“The principal thought in speaking about Our Lady of La Salette : La Salette preaches to us retirement and in retirement, the solitude. *I shall lead her into solitude and speak to her heart.*” 39 [Personal Notes, 23-07-1859]

“The thought that St. Francis de Sales came to this shrine (Loreto) has been a consolation to me. While I was saying Mass I commended myself to this powerful Protector AND Model, so that he would let me offer our Lady of Loreto now those great feelings of devotion and fervor with which he visited her in bygone days. [Travel Diary, Duval, Mermier, p. 101]

The beautiful month of **Mary** which begins tomorrow and for which we prepare already this evening will teach you the rest. Do it well, *offer to Mary flowers, for you and for me, so that she will give us the delicious fruits of her virtues.* FAMILY ANNALS, I. : [p. 171, Annecy, to his neice, Sr. Louise, 1851]

May Jesus Christ and His Holy Mother make this star to rise over us in order to lead us also to His holy crib, so that there we may learn to proclaim Him as our God by the incense of our prayer, as our King with the gold of our almsgiving and our zeal for our neighbor, as our Saviour and our model by the myrrh of our mortifications and by the faithful observance of our Rules FAMILY ANNALS, I. Re. New Year : [p. 178, Annecy, to the Sisters of Chaumont, 6 January, Epiphany 1852]

MARY is a Mother of Compassion, and a powerful advocate of persons who suffer. [Let. to Mother Claudine 04-02-1851, p. 160]

Today, the feast of the Presentation, I have received an authorization for canonically erecting the Confraternity of our Lady of Seven Dolours in our chapel : it was a devotion of St. Francis de Sales. [Le. to Fr. MARTIN, 21-11-1842, AM 82]

"I only want to say that I was recommended to Our Lady of La Salette and that I have thanked her as soon as they spoke about my vow. I have just fulfilled it, though it was risky, as I am not fully cured. ... but on the other hand, my actual state is infinitely consoling, because I feel that it is good for me to be humiliated. This state of humiliation which lasted over a year is the greatest honour that the Holy Virgin could have obtained for me." Jean REY, p. 94

After a pilgrimage to La Salette, Fr. Mermier notes in his diary :

"How does **Mary** make her appearance ? "I cannot answer: nothing extraordinary, if you wish, for I need to live in humility and modesty; I don't deserve any favours, I wouldn't know how to keep them. No, I hardly think of them, All I wish is to please God alone, is that not all I need ? "Already a year has passed after my cure, what blessing ! "I should thank my **benefactress** and hope that I become gentle before everything else and all other good things will be granted to me." p 71-72 [Personal Notes, 23-07-1859]

"My present condition is infinitely consoling because in this condition I feel that it is good for me to be humiliated: 'It is good that you have humiliated me'. This state of humiliation lasting one full year is the greatest favour which the Holy Virgin has obtained for me." p 72 [Personal Notes, 23-07-1859]

"Speaking of Our Lady of La Salette, the principal idea : La Salette preaches a retreat to us and in the retreat, solitude: *I will lead her to a secret place and there I will speak to her heart:*" I am still half-blind and infirm in so many ways that it's much better for me to go into solitude". p. 92 [to Sr. Marie PECLET, 08-02-1860]

"What does the sanctuary of Notre-Dame de la Gorge say to you when you are at the feet of the august Lady who deigns to dwell there, when you confide to her your needs and ours, when you pray to her, when you make the vaults resound with your song while chanting her praises. "While speaking to you about your desirable solitude, I feel surging in me a longing to go and visit you". p. 93 [to Fr. CLAVEL, 08-08-1842]

"22nd October, Saturday, I said Mass at Saint Mary Major, in the chapel housing her statue. I profited from this lovely occasion to recommend, in a very special manner, to this loving Mother all my Missionaries and other persons... How beautiful are the litanies to the Holy Virgin. What a detailed and pious explanation of the qualities, greatness and glorious titles of Mary! Oh, Virgin Mary, seat of wisdom, obtain for me the grace of reciting your litany in spirit and in heart". p. 93 [Personal notes, 22-10-1842]

"May God, with all the celestial court, be blessed. Thanks to Mary, to the Holy Apostles Peter and Paul, to Saint Francis de Sales. After nearly two months of waiting and labours, it is only today, after the second novena made especially to Our Lady that I can at last begin to breathe. "It is then today, Feast of the Presentation of the Blessed Virgin that I have learnt that His Eminence the Cardinal Prefect, has consented to examine the Constitutions and Rules of the Congregation of the Missionaries of Saint Francis de Sales and that he has ordered that they be transmitted to a Consultor of his Congregation. We have to thank Jesus Christ for it and also his Mother." p. 94 [to Fr. MARTIN, 21-11-1842]

"Today, Feast of the Presentation, I received an authorisation for the canonical erection in our chapel, of a confraternity of Our Lady of Seven Sorrows: it was the devotion of Saint Francis de Sales." p. 94 [to Fr. MARTIN, 21-11-1842]

"How great are the goodness and mercy of God. It was not enough for Jesus Christ to show how much he loved us to give us his own Mother to be our very own; look and contemplate what he has done at Loretto to make us know her and love her. If only I had more time, more leisure, more piety to meditate at my ease on the ineffable love of Jesus and his Holy Mother. It was such a great consolation to think that Saint Francis de Sales had come to this same sanctuary. It was during the celebration of the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass I recommended myself to this powerful protector and model that deigned to allow me to offer to our August Lady of Loretto the great sentiments of piety, fervour with he visited her in the past. "How beautiful the countryside of Loretto - so pleasing and so rich. I took delight in meditating on the beautiful canticle of Our Lady of Loretto : Magnificat." p. 95-96 [Personal notes]

"A long, costly, painful, dangerous pilgrimage...undertaken under the inspiration of OUR LADY OF LA SALETTE after my cure and after the innumerable favours which I received and which I receive each day from this loving Mother, graces among which I consider to be the most remarkable the one that she deigned to uphold me before God and before men after a life of dissipation and vanity, grace which continues to bring forth the same effects with which she started: in such a way that when I wanted to go faster, it would be impossible for me."

"Mary, by teaching me to be another man, a more humble, more gentle, more mortified man...my new state forces me to be so: this loving Mother, ever since my return to this new state, obtained for me enough strength, enough light to uphold me and to act in spite of my new state.

I can say in summing up, that the most holy Virgin has practically forced me and continues to force me to belong entirely to her and to continue doing so; I have utter trust now and I will continue always with still more trust. p. 96-97 [Personal notes, 23-07-1859]

## MISSION

The Episcopal decree conferring a canonical status to the Congregation was signed by the Bishop on 24 October 1838. On this day, Fathers Mermier, Martin, Cheminal, Petijean and Lavorel pronounced the vow of stability. Thereafter, Fr. Mermier stated : "I feel urged to make a second vow which will bind me irrevocably to the work of the Missions." [Jean REY, 1960, p. 49]

Fr. Mermier returned to La Feuillette from Rome on 27<sup>th</sup>. July 1843, to a hearty welcome by the community. Fr. Gaidon greeted him with the words "Father and Friend", "Founder and Master", "Leader and Model", and punning on his name Peter, he added "you are the rock of our Community." Indeed, Fr. Mermier was more than the founder of a community, he was its soul. Like the yeast, his spirit of zeal penetrated it and sustained it in fervor and in action. Was not the success of the Missions and the retreats preached in Savoy the principal alleged motive for obtaining the "great Commendation" from Rome for the Congregation ? Jean REY, 1960, p. 70

Before everything else, may the name of God be sanctified and not yours; May His kingdom come, not yours; May His will be done on earth as in heaven, and not yours. Oh ! My sister, what a language ! What a lesson ! Everybody knows it and hardly anyone understands it. Whose fault ? Ours. We are without intelligence because we do not wish to understand, we do not wish to do ...

Let us begin, then, with ourselves. Let us not be satisfied with knowing. Let us do : saying and doing do not go hand in hand. To be ignorant without one's fault is neither good nor bad. But to know and not to do is evil. Here is disorder; here is sin. How do we stand ? Being so proud, thinking ourselves learned, having so little humility, so few virtues ! Let us be abashed. Let us say with more humility than ever : Forgive us our sins, etc. ...

You will have to be the mistress of novices. What does this mean ? You will begin and continue to sanctify yourself more and more, each day. That is not enough. Let us say : it is nothing. It is not enough to save oneself, it is not enough to know, to love and serve God. WE must also love and serve the neighbor – not in a general and common manner – as it is said. You must love your novices – all and each one of your novices; that is to say, pray for them. Without the grace of God, of Jesus and of Mary what will you do ? The Master has said : 'without Me you can do nothing. To your capacity as the Mistress of Novices, it will not be enough to know to write, to calculate, etc. You must learn everything, correct everything, admonish, even punish. An whom ? The children of Adam and Eve; teach them to pray, to meditate, to work, to suffer, to please God and not men, to avoid all that is evil even its shadow; to practice goodness and all the virtues. Above all that, they must avoid giving scandal and occasions of sin. You will find them even amidst your students, your novices. My God ! what vigilance, what wisdom, what prudence ? You must see that everything goes on in perfect order. The least fault is a disorder. The Mistress, from afar or close by, will be obliged to supervise, to reprove, to correct.

But you tell me : I am only a child, how could I fulfil such a task ? No other answer then ... you are the mistress and the Mistress of Novices, God wills it. What is impossible for man is not impossible for God. ... You will have enough to do before God and men. But since it is God's will and nothing is impossible for men of good will, we must have confidence. As for you, particularly as Mistress of Novices, let your work be to form and reform those young girls ... according to God's grace and your natural forces. FAMILY ANNALS, I, Advice on her employment / Organisation of the Administrative Council of the Congregation [p. 259-262, to The Mistress of Novices, 20 September 1859]

For the Directresses and all those who are in charge of convents and of teaching : (1) Concerning interior life above all - No one is good for another if he is not good for himself; (2) About their instruction and their science – How can they instruct others if they do not themselves know what they teach ? Apart from the four parts of the Catechism, they must know thoroughly everything regarding teaching in the school, from the alphabet, etc. (3) About the way in which each one manages, administers, preserves, economises her little possessions – like the poor.... God asks for nothing impossible. His graces are abundant, but that is to make us humble. FAMILY ANNALS, I, Request for special account of each Sister - Instructions and Exhortation for the Mother Superior, Novices, Sister teachers; Sister Workers : [p. 263-266, Our Revered Mother Foundress, Annecy, 10 November 1859]

The experiences and the findings of his missionaries in Savoy: "Our European societies have reached the extreme limits of errors, of follies, of perversities of all kinds, they have made a full circle in their wanderings, there is no salvation for them except in a prompt and sincere return to the truth: "I will rise up and go back to my father." Poor prodigal son!

But what does God do in his infinite goodness? It is in the very midst of this extreme misery that he proposes to Europe the one and only remedy: What then is this remedy? This remedy is Jesus Christ himself, it is his grace; it is his divine Word which he has confided to his Church when he told his disciples: "Go out and teach" and it is his message that we are called to proclaim to the whole world, to all men, to be apostles, missionaries, to bring Christ's teaching to the people who have never heard about it, never known it, or forgotten all about it, even to people who seem to be fed up with it.

"This then is our mission: it is sublime, it has to be spread abroad and it is difficult. You are the light of the world, you are the salt of the earth. This mission should be our main preoccupation, every moment of our lives, just as it should take a complete possession of ourselves." p. 7-8 [03-07-1852 Circular addressed to MSFS of Vizagapatam on the Theme : 1<sup>st</sup>. Part – Jubilee and Meaning of Mission; 2<sup>nd</sup>. Part – Love and Loyalty to the Congregation – note : There are three versions of this doc : *undated*; 02-07-1852, 03-07-1852 – *all three manuscripts handwritten by Fr. Mermier* ]

"We know well that our undertaking is holy, our duties are sacred and we are obliged to observe them with our whole heart for the sake of a happy eternity for us all. Amen." Personal Notes, 21-11-1859

## MISSIONARY :

The ensemble of qualities which make a missionary is rarely found blended together in a single individual. A vocation that is faithful, a complete disinterestedness in everything, a total abandonment to the designs of divine Providence, a total and absolute renunciation of one's self-will, only to seek and will what Jesus Christ wishes from us by way of obedience – *I do always what is pleasing to Him* – a pure, ardent and well ordered zeal for one's own sanctification and the salvation of souls; a constant and well sustained zeal accompanied by all its effects. All these disposition are necessary for a missionary whom God calls to work for the conversion of peoples, above all in the foreign missions." 68 Doc. 25-06-1848 On the dangers of Lukewarmness

*"This cluster of qualities which renders a man apostolic is rarely found in one piece. A vocation in the midst of all kinds of trials, a total dispossession in all things, a complete abandonment to the plans of divine Providence, an entire and absolute renouncement of one's own will, so as to seek and to will only what Christ wants of us and from us, through the way of obedience "I do what pleases him and I do it always with a zeal that is pure, ardent and well ordained for my own sanctification as much as for the sanctification of others; a zeal that is constant and determined, accompanied by all its fruits; all the necessary dispositions of a missionary whom God calls to work for the conversion of the peoples, especially in the overseas missions". p. 18 [Circumstances remarquables dans le dernier envoi des missionaries dans l'Inde effectué dans le courant du mois de juin 1848, MSFS central Archives]*

Usually the *missionaries* are looked upon as extraordinary people destined to combat the greatest disorders, to correct the greatest abuses and to remedy the greatest evils. This opinion of the people should be fostered and even increased if possible; and for this, it is necessary to have well-prepared men, men well-exercised for a long time and men well-tested from all angles. *To have such men, thus chosen and well-prepared a Congregation is necessary.* [Memoir, 1839, p. 18]

Without self knowledge (of one's defects and weaknesses) a *Missionary* is like a reed shaken by the wind, a tower built on shifting sand. The totality of qualities which make a Missionary, though necessary, is rarely founded blended together in a candidate. (They need to be nurtured through prayer and self-discipline)

I am convinced more than ever of the need to have missionaries who are filled with the spirit of God, who pray, who study, who mortify themselves, who love their brethren. [personal diary while in Rome, 1842-1843, cf. Moget, MSFS, p. 43]

"What joy, what consolation to set out together as a family ! Go, Missionaries of St. Francis de Sales in the peace of the Lord, in the hands of Mary, under the protection of the Guardian Angels ! Go. May your voyage be happy. Perform daily your spiritual exercises, obey, meditate on your Holy Rules. Do not forget me. The bonds which unite us are not loosened by distances. . Once more, blessed are you. ... Your vocation is really great; you cannot imagine the repercussions it had on the whole diocese." [Farewell let. To MSFS leaving for India, 23-05-1845, letter they received at Bordeaux prior to their departure on 8<sup>th</sup>. June 1845] cf. also, Jean REY, p. 76

We have the same mission to be fulfilled (as the apostles), the same means to be employed, the same goal to be achieved. Like them, we ought to work to render ourselves worthy of our sublime vocation. For it, the first condition is to have a lofty idea of this vocation, to value it above everything, considering all the rest, all other occupations as nothing, as

mud, as dung, meditating and contemplating Jesus Christ, the sovereign missionary of the apostles. According to this view, the faith of the priest grows, his confidence is without limit, his charity immense. The obstacles encourage, the difficulties disappear, the sacrifices, death itself becomes a gain. If such dispositions are so rare among us, it is because we occupy ourselves only a little with Jesus Christ, his Gospel, the salvation of souls. May these matters become our daily meditation, may these be also the rule of our conduct, of all our actions and we will also be apostles. [let. to Fr.LAVOREL, 28-07-1852, AM 21]

"This is the first time that I write to you, dear Decompoix, and I would remind you that the life and work of a priest can be resumed in three words : *piety, single-minded devotion, ministry*. To train yourself in piety through the faithful observance of the spiritual exercises, first of all in the annual retreats, then through the daily practice of meditation, exámenes of conscience, spiritual reading, habitual recollection and a greater purity of conscience." p. 86-87 [let. to Fr. DECOMPOIX, 03-06-1850]

To acquire the knowledge required for ministry: what are the means ? "You have look for them in God's spirit. The Spirit of the Lord: the Apostles received it in abundance and were immediately filled with knowledge: they were all filled with the Holy Spirit. "Evangelical ministry is God's work and not man's. God is jealous of his glory. I will not give my glory to somebody else. But, to obtain it, this gift of knowledge, you have to ask God for it, you have to draw it down upon yourself through a prayer which is humble and full of confidence. p. 87 [let. to Fr. DECOMPOIX, 03-06-1850]

What do we offer to others ? Very little or nothing because the apostle ought to give from his abundance. It is in vain that a famished child sucks the milkless breast of a languishing mother. [let. Fr. Francis Decompoix, 03-06-1850, AM 39]

A missionary is one who has time only for others [let Canon Chalamel, 21-01-1843, AM 90]

Already as professor at Melan, Fr. Mermier felt strongly attracted to the faraway mission lands. It was, then, not surprising that he devoted his leisure moments while in Rome to the study of the famous book on geography author by Malta BRUN. Mermier himself notes in his Diary : "Although this sort of work seems a little irrelevant to my ministry, apart from the knowledge it give me, I make use of it to inflame my *zeal* towards so many unfortunate countries buried in darkness and ignorance, in misery and sin. It has convinced me more than ever of the need tgo have *missionaries* who are filled with the spirit of God, who pray, who study, who mortify themselves, who love their brethren and also the women religious who love our Lord and his holy Cross." Jean REY, 1960, p. 73

"Never send to India a missionary who has not acquired and who does not try to acquire this basic virtue of Renunciation" [Fr. Girard to Fr. Mermier, Moget, MSFS of Annecy, p.107]

"(Do) not insist too much on discipline or qualifications ... Send the candidates to India where we need so many priests ... Life will teach them." [Fr. Girard to Fr. Mermier, Moget, MSFS of Annecy, p.107]

It will be difficult to choose *four* of the *thirteen* missionaries to be sent to India, since extraordinary vocations are rare. I need the spirit of discernment to make the right choice. We are praying. Pray with us and for us. [Let. To Fr. J-M. TISSOT, 12-09-1847]

Your reports on the Brothers are well motivated. If they should be more learned, better in their manners, more perfect or else remain where they are. At least, it appears that they are not essential to the new Mission. We have, then, the time to envisage what we would have to do with regard to them. 91 let to Fr. Neyret, at Allinges, 11-09-1847

Jean-Marie Tissot, Bishop of Vizagapatam, writes, on 09 December 1885, to Fr. Joseph Tissot, MSFS Superior General : "This is confidential. After examining before God the requirements of our mission and of the Congregation, it seems to me that the only means to procure the progress of the Missions and maintain religious spirit is to get Fr. Philippe appointed as Coadjutor. We need a sure guide for spiritual life, to keep the observance of the Rule. We need also an experienced administrator. You know on both these points the qualities and experience of Fr. Philippe. He will be Coadjutor in name only. In fact, he will be bishop and administrator. Nobody knows what I am writing to you. I wished to speak to you alone, because you alone can bring this project to a successful end. I know that it will be a loss for La Feuillette, but you will get your reward in having at the head of the Mission a man on whom you can depend for the spiritual and material. I don't say more. Consider it". Cf. MOGET, in MSFS, p. 135

**MISSION PREACHING** : cf. Duval, Mermier, Part III, ch. 2–5 : The Ministry of the Word, pp. 138–175; The majority of these notes are supplied by the “*Mission Notebooks*” of Fathers Petitjean, cheminal, Gaiddon and especially Fr. MERMIER] *These notes, and others made from day to day allow us to see the human condition in which the first Missionaries carried out their apostolate – an environment of poor people, workers, living a hard life, often quite ignorant, but (more often still) with sturdy faith.* [s(Duval, Mermier, p. 158)]

The Mission at CHATELARD-en-Bauges : He zealously strove to promote the spiritual renewal of the parish. The results, however, at the end of the year, were much below his expectations. He called for helpers and asked for and obtained the approval of the Parishioners for a Mission to be preached along with Fr. Joseph Marie FAVRE, who already enjoyed the fame of an apostle in the diocese. “The mission began on 18<sup>th</sup> November 1821. Eight days had passed in praying, preaching and in inviting the people to come for the exercises; the expected change did not take place. Humiliated and grieved, the parish priest and the missionary wondered whether they should continue or give up their preaching. ‘Neither one nor the other,’ said Fr. Favre, whose infallible resources in great difficulties was to do heaven violence by his austerities and prayers; ‘let us set out, let us ask God for the conversion of your people.’ And the two of them went on foot to the desert of Grande Chartreuse. Surprised at this sudden interruption, the inhabitants of Chatelard asked what had become of the parish priest and the missionary. ‘They have gone to pray and fast for your conversion’, replied those who were confidants of the secret. The point hit home. The entire parish much moved, clamoured for the return of these ‘two saints’ and a few days later, the mission began again. It bore the most abundant fruits”. [Jean REY, 1960, p. 25]

Indeed, were acclaimed as a formidable duo of mission-preachers “One was the eagle the other the ox (of the vision of Ezeckiel) ‘The furrow that they traced was deep’ (Fr. Gaiddon). ... “According to Fr. Granjux Fr. Favre was more brilliant and ardent even to immoderation; while Fr. Mermier was more calm, more discreet, more moderate.” [Jean REY, 1960, p. 25]

From the time he joined the missionaries in 1832, Fr. Gaiddon was accustomed to jot down the things he noticed. In that year, 1832, he was at *Chamonix* with the Fr. Mermier. “This mission comes just after great scandals. Some of the people have left, after breaking up and setting fire to the benches which the sisters occupied in the church. During the mission, men, women and the old folk asked the parish priest for forgiveness on bended knee. In these deep valleys superstition reigns. In the Valais they go looking for blessed herbs. They dress in black. There are suicides from time to time, even among religious people. ... (At *Quintal*) The men came *en masse* to the five-thirty morning service. But few turned up for the two principal services of the day (since they were workers and not accustomed to mission services) ... The women too, seemed to feel the tiredness brought on by work. ... Some of them were already asleep at the beginning of the sermon. The surprising thing was, however, that they had a great facility in understanding and were able to say exactly what had been said”. [Fr. Gaiddon, Mission Notebook 1843-1845, (Duval, Mermier, p. 154-155)]

Fr. Gaiddon seemed to have particularly appreciated the *Massongy* mission (which began on 26 December 1844). “From the first day, there was a good crowd at the five o’clock service. They arrived pretty well on time.” There was one problem, however, for the confessions : “... the men didn’t dare approach the confessionals. They all went to the gallery, where Fr. Tissot was hearing. That caused a bottleneck” [Fr. Gaiddon, Mission Notebook 1843-1845, (Duval, Mermier, p. 155-156)]

On 27 October, the Fathers began a mission near the Swiss frontier. A sufficient number took part, however, Fr. Gaiddon noted one characteristic : “The custom of not getting married causes a lot of trouble. A large number do not possess the grace of virginity. The custom of marrying late means that a lot of quite young children lose their parents – and how are they brought up ? Parents are old, even very old, when their children are twenty. That being so, how are they to keep them in check ? Parents have scarcely any charm left when their children are ten, how can they win those children’s affection ? This old habit of late marriages results in the parish being filled with solitary individuals who have practically no family spirit. Hence selfishness, hard-heartedness, etc. etc. ... Those bachelors, those sinsters, who live by themselves need housekeepers and servants, and so ... there are no brakes upon all-night parties, dances and licentiousness. Many don’t marry because they are afraid of obstacles, etc.

“This is the second mission we have given in *Argentière*. It is a very educated parish, the faith is strong and most of the people – it can be said – are devout. In this parish, the mission has been attended in the most perfect way possible. – the people arrive in time and listen to the Word of God eagerly. ... WE noticed at *Argentière*, the fear of God in the men, most of whom are shepherds in Tarentaise in the summertime and very well behaved. They scarcely ever go to Paris. They make many sacrifices for their church. .. Everyone went to confession. Three smugglers never seemed to finish (allusion to the custom of going to confession several times before receiving absolution). A widow who had left the country a long time ago and abandoned her children, turned up in the parish. She hesitated for a long time; finally she went to confession. ... It is wonderful to see the inhabitants of Vallorcine coming to this mission in such great numbers. ... The inhabitants of *Jonzier*,

have come in strength. ... We have been plagued by penitents – we had to have an extra confessor. We have a good number from Chavannaz, etc., but practically no one from Contamines.” [Fr. Cheminal Notebooks, (Duval, Mermier, p. 152-153)]

At *Cuvat*, (Mission from 20-12-1843 – 12-01-1944) ... the mission had a good following. Many visitors came from La Caille, from Saint-Martin and from Pringy. At Alex, the big number came each morning at five-thirty.” ... In a neighbouring parish the judgment was severe : “Rather a coarse people, given to grudges, with rather a bad name round about, plunging too easily into lawsuits.” [Fr. Cheminal Notebooks, (Duval, Mermier, p. 153, 154)]

In a parish of the Geneva region was to be seen a failure for Fr. Mermier : “Regular attendance at the morning and evening instructions – practically nil. ... Conversions – a few men and women who had apostasied seemed to float to the surface. ... Edification – nil; instead, solemn and almost universal scandal from the parishioners, from children to old folk. The indifference of these people in religious matters is absolute. There is no religious feeling in them at all. They are still outwardly ritualistic, but they take only what they want without making it a matter of conscience either way.” [Fr. Mermier 1858 Notebook, (Duval, Mermier, p. 154)]

“The preachers (of the Mission at Arbusigny) in the main pulpit were Frs. Mermier and Tissot. The talks were given by Fr. Petitjean, a skilled controversialist, and, Frs. Pissard and Mabboux did the main examination of conscience, before the community Mass at eight o'clock. After the Gospel came the sermon. At two thirty, the conference. ... Scarcely had the mission opened than visitors – our neighbours – were to be seen hastening. ... Those who had seemed to show little concern for the missions, those who had more or less set aside their duties or had even given them up altogether, were the first at the priests' feet. How many prejudices were dispelled ! What happiness those disillusioned found ! ... The members of the civil authorities, beginning with the Mayor, gave continued edification by their regular attendance and by their piety) ”[[FROM a little book : “An Account of the Mission at Arbusigny, in May and June 1840”, written by P. VACHOUX, Seminarian], (Duval, Mermier, p. 161, *passim*)]

If God's Word remains ineffective "it is not because of its efficacy; it is because the people who most need it do not feel the need of it". How, then, bring them to listen to God's Word ? The paper says: "Not only through the voice of the ordinary pastors, but by the strong voice of the missions which are the extraordinary means destined to heal, or at least, to bring to light the evils afflicting the parishes, and, in particular, and the danger of indifference". p. 9-10 [MEMORANDUM, p. 10]

Father Mermier is convinced about the limits of the ordinary methods of pastoral ministry: what makes the ordinary ministry almost useless, at least in some parishes and for some people, is that these parishes these people don't frequent the instructions; and if they do, they do so very rarely and usually badly and without any purpose... "During the big exercises of the mission, in all the parishes of Savoy, from the very beginning, without any notable exception, everybody comes in haste, listens, learns, etc". p. 11 [MEMORANDUM, p. 12]

Based on the conviction that (the Sacrament of Penance) Confession, on the one hand liberates the conscience and on the other allows the parishioners to form their conscience and solve their difficulties, Fr. Mermier exhorts his audience to present themselves to the "Tribunal" as it was then called. "The choice of the confessors is easy; they are not men from the place; people can come again and again several times to the tribunal of penitence. This ensures that the confession is well prepared by a thorough examination of conscience, carried out in several sessions with the Confessor, until the end of the mission, ..." p. 11 [MEMORANDUM, p. 13]

## PIONEERING EVANGELIZATION

The Holy See requests the diocese of Annecy to send missionaries to Africa. To Fr. Mermier this is a call from divine Providence. Without delay, he offers the services of his missionaries and proposes that he himself lead them to Africa. He writes to the Vicar General : "Convinced as I am that God's Spirit is now speaking to me through the mouth of the Common Father of the faithful, I hasten to tell you that I would like to take this occasion to place the services of the Congregation of the Missionaries of St. Francis de Sales under the direct guidance and authority of His Holiness by accepting the **mission of Liberia**... and by offering my own person...for this glorious enterprise." [MERMIERmsfsMISrelLife, p.15] [Letter to the Vicar-General of Annecy, 09-09-1842]

To the letter inviting the clergy of Annecy to participate in the Mission of Africa, Fr. Mermier replied to Cardinal Franzoni, Prefect of the Propaganda : “Your eminence, in answer to your honourable invitation made to the clergy of Annecy

and convinced that it is the spirit of God who speaks to me by the mouth of the common Father of the faithful, I hasten to tell him that I profit by this happy occasion to place the Congregation of the Missionaries of St. Francis de Sales under the immediate authority of the Holy See, in accepting the mission of Guinea, which will be dependent on the Congregation, if we are judged worthy and capable of it." And he offered himself with one of his Missionaries for this enterprise, giving certain conditions which would cause a delay of one year, for consolidating the two religious families : Missionaries of Annecy and the Daughters of the Cross of Chavanod. Jean REY, 1960, p. 73

In reply to this letter, Cardinal Franzoni announced to Fr. Mermier that the destination of his Missionaries would no longer be Africa by Asia, as Rome was presently re-organizing the Missions of East Indies. He concluded : "While awaiting the decision of the Sacred Congregation, apply yourself to fostering the zeal and vocation of the priests that you intend to set apart for this work." Jean REY, 1960, p. 75

It was only on 2<sup>nd</sup>. May 1845, that the Propaganda confided to the MSFS the Mission of Vizagapatam in India and asked the Superior to send Missionaries there without delay.

## MSFS CONGREGATION

The needs of the missionaries make it a duty for them to seek to join together and to bind themselves by vows. Each body demands the bonds which attach the members together. Usually the *missionaries* are looked upon as extraordinary people destined to combat the greatest disorders, to correct the greatest abuses and to remedy the greatest evils. This opinion of the people should be fostered and even increased if possible; and for this, it is necessary to have well-prepared men, men well-exercised for a long time and men well-tested from all angles. *To have such men, thus chosen and well-prepared a Congregation is necessary.*

Who can understand the *excellence of the vocation of a missionary* ? What wisdom, what seriousness, what reserve and at the same time what easy manners combined with discretion and trust towards diocesan priests. Finally, what attention, what modesty, what patience, what zeal for the people of the world, in the relations with them, in the conversations, during the journey and at meals; in the midst of social gatherings and parties where everyone has his eyes on the missionaries.

(May God grant the necessary gifts) to those who ask for them with their whole heart through persevering prayer, to those who prepare themselves for this formidable ministry through the test of a long and laborious novitiate and by the regularity of a life separated from the world, peaceful, totally dedicated to study and to the service of the neighbor.

**Therefore, a religious Congregation is necessary to form the missionaries.** p. 59 [Memoir, 1839, p. 18]

"In 1822, while there was not a single religious existing in Savoy, I started the ministry of the Missions with the approbation from the Archbishop of Chambéry. I continued exercising this apostolate till today in the company of a few priests of this region. . **My desire has always been to form a new congregation of Missionaries.** God has blessed this desire: my companions and myself have evangelised a large part of the diocese of Savoy". p. 25 [Petition to His Holiness, Pope Gregory XVI, between 20 -25 October, 1842]

" Here is what we believe that we should ask His Highness : "that you bring together a group of priests in a congregation established under a Rule given and approved by you, placed under your authority in conformity with and under the authority of your successors by means of an Episcopal ordinance sealed by your Chancellery, in which you declare that this **Congregation has in fact been existing since a certain number of years** and that it has devoted itself to the work of the Missions and to apostolic ministry under your authority.

*Fr. Mermier explains the motives which he puts forth, in his "MEMORANDUM" : wish of the clergy and bishops, success of the Missions, proximity to Geneva, possibility to recruit vocations in Savoy, the feeling that for them, religious life is a necessity ... and he concludes : "It is then their clear wish; they have had twenty years to think over it, the successes and the obstacles they have met with have forced them to think about it; it is now and immediately that they want to receive from God's infinite goodness, through the merits of Jesus Christ and the intercession of the Virgin Mary and of Saint Francis de Sales, their special patron...(this approbation)". p. 25-26 [To Bishop REY, let dated 10-09-1838]*

"I am writing to you to confirm my desire to consecrate myself entirely to the service of God and the salvation of souls and consequently to join your Society. The reason for my intention and my desire is that I believe that the religious life is the best and the surest means of working at one's sanctification and through it for the sanctification of others. I may tell you that I came out of the Mission of Viuz with more fervour than from the priests' retreat in spite of the fact that I was in the midst of dissipation: and so, if I felt so uplifted in my heart in so short a time, what would I not feel if I were to live continually in your Congregation !" p. 45 [Fr. MABBOUX to Fr. MERMIER, let dated 07-01-1839]



... The name of the amiable St. Francis de Sales is most renowned ... and universally held in honour that all (humanists and perhaps also, many among the Protestants) will be happy to learn that a Congregation under the title, "the Congregation of the Missionaries of St. Francis de Sales," is coming into existence in Savoy. because this undertaking, offers tribute and pays homage to the virtue of a man who was the greatest friend of his people and most responsive to their distress. [quote p. 27 Memoir of 1939, title VIII]

Go. May your voyage be happy. Perform daily your spiritual exercises, obey, meditate on your Holy Rules. Do not forget me. The bonds which unite us are not loosened by distances. [Farewell let. To MSFS leaving for India, 23-05-1845]

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Superiors have to supervise. For this, they must be able to see, to know. It is not enough for them to know the name of each of those entrusted to them. They must have an ideas of their conduct, of their doings, of their dispositions. The confreres, on their side, must know their superior. They must be in relation with him, make him acquainted with their views,

for the good of their apostolate. ... Yes, the relations, the external dialogue are a part of life. We belong not only to God but to our brothers. We are members of one another. [Let. to Fr. Fr. Pierre BOSSON, Kamptee, April 1855; cf. A. NAZARETH, Novena Notes]

May the members of our Congregation obtain from the perfect model, the Holy Apostle of the Chablais, a little of that zeal and gentleness which will make us die to ourselves in order to live only for God and for the welfare of the people, like other St. Francis de Sales. [Circular to confrères in India, 17-04-1852]

We entered the Congregation only because we love it and we prefer it above all others. We take shelter under its protection like little chicks under the wings of their mother. [Circular to confrères in India, 03-07-1852, AM, 135]

Statistics : Little by little the Congregation grew : in 1840, there were ten fathers and five brothers; in 1846, following the first departures for India, there remained in Savoy, ten fathers, two novice, and eight brothers; in 1847, there were six priests in the novitiate, and five scholastics, in addition to the ten professed priests and ten brothers.

### **MSFS COMPROMISED :**

“In our small congregation, when the spheres of influence of the Bishop and the Provincial are not exactly delimited, sooner or later frictions arise among them, unless the Provincial remains completely inactive. This is what my predecessors, who were intelligent, did; Fr. Crochet, Fr. Bonaventurye, Fr. Coppel did this. We could wonder at what was their function as Provincials. Bishop Coppel, in spite of his right intentions and his self-sacrificing spirit, will not be able to avoid feeling a certain resentment at the new way of functioning of the Provincial, which seems to encroach on his territory. ... I completed my annual visit of the stations. For the first time, I inspected all the account-books and the *mass books*, without any opposition. All the Fathers obeyed with humility and good will. I am happy to remark that most of our Fathers are filled with true religious spirit. However, most of them do not give much importance to regularity regarding the time of rising and going to bed. ... Some shape for themselves ‘broad’ consciences and do not ask for permissions. Even in spiritual matters, the Bishop’s decision prevails. It is evident that this state of things cannot last. I shall willingly resign. Please allow me to do so. ... “Fr. Visitor Delegate (Alphonse Favrat) preached [the Fathers’ Retreat at Nagpur] with so much zeal and unction that all our Fathers were very pleased with it. We never had in India a retreat of that kind. I am convinced that its fruits will last and that our Fathers will not lose so soon the salesian spirit which he taught us, and the conviction of the need of the integral observation of the rules. As for me, one of the fruits I drew from this retreat has been to reconcile me to my position, and to submit myself to the holy will of the good God.” [Fr. Thevenet (Reg. Sup.) to Fr. C. Bouvard (Sup. Gen), 10-09-1910 and 23-12-1911 and 23-11-1911, in MOGET, Shepherds, p. 23-24, 25]

*From Sept 1910 to January 1911, Nagpur, Amravati and the whole of Berar (Vidharba were struck by plague. “The plague is a terrible scourge. People feel completely helpless and turn to God. (ask for baptism) If the Mahars accept our medicines, the cast people do not approach us, and they have spread a rumour that the Europeans are the cause of the plague. Some say that we spend the nights in the villages and that when everyone is asleep, we go and throw germs of the disease into the wells. ”* [Fr. Forel, from Kapustalni, November 1910, in MOGET, Shepherds, p. 15, 16]”

“I shall have to face great difficulties. The devil is not pleased with my coming here. Out of the 400 Mahars of Borsar village, 140 are Christians, but they are bitter, filled with prejudices, ill-disposed towards us, because of caste difficulties and the moral demands of the Catholic religion which annoy them. The instruction of the children is defective, most of the marriages are contracted before the legal age. But, with God’s grace, we hope for progress in the Christian way of life.” [Fr. Jacquier, 1910, in MOGET, Shepherds, p. 33]”

**PROVIDENCE @ Expansion / Consolidation :** “Fr. Tissot and his Council considered the situation of the Nagpur Mission (*after the demise of Bishop Riccaz, 1892*). There were only 14 priests and 13 brothers, and the Congregation was not able to provide enough personnel and financial help. Would it not be better to give up the Nagpur Diocese and send the fathers; and brothers to strengthen the Vizag Mission ? Several fathers were consulted and all were against this move. So much work and sacrifice had shaped the Nagpur Mission. To give it up now would not be desirable. It was better to trust in Providence. // Besides, there was a plan to create a New vicariate by cutting off the North-Eastern part of Nagpur diocese and the adjacent part of Visakh diocese, to be entrusted to the Salesians of Don Bosco. If that plan was realized, it would ease the burden of the MSFS. Cf. MOGET, in MSFS, p. 167-168

**Vizag JUBILEE @! Statistics** cf. Moget, in MSFS, p. 174-175 :

**Diocese of Vizagapatam (1890)** : 12 Mission centres spreading on 600 km; 19 Fathers, 08 Brothers; 50 Sisters of St. Joseph of Annecy; 10,000 Christians; Schools: 1,000 students; Orphanages : 67 boys and 150 girls

**Diocese of Nagpur (1890)** : 07 Mission centres ; 14 Fathers, 13 Brothers; 31 Sisters of St. Joseph of Maurienne; 13 Holy Cross Sisters; 04 catechist Sisters; 6,465 Christians; Schools: 1,200 students; Orphanages : 300 boys and girls

## PRAYER

Life-giving *missionary ministry* without *personal prayer* may turn out to be not merely barren but even death-provoking ! Let us pray always ... more useful to our people and more effective for our own sanctification [Circular to confrères in India, 17-04-1852]

Prayer is a need, a duty, a means of obtaining grace and all the graces proper to our vocation. [Circular to confrères in India, 17-04-1852, AM 145]

It is difficult for me to tell you the pleasure and consolation you give me when you tell me that you always feel more the need and the advantages of prayer : To pray to make others pray, to pray always, it is a great grace which Jesus has given you. Yes, without this help, we can do nothing. With this help we can do everything. [Let. to Fr. GAIDDON, 08-11-1845]

Let us pray always, in a more worthy manner, more pleasing to God, more useful to our people, more effective for our own sanctification. [Circular 17-04-1852, to MSFS in India]

We shall do nothing, obtain nothing without prayer. [Let. Mother Echernier, 10-09-1847]

Meditation and Examination of Conscience are the *compass* of external activity; without their help no virtue is possible. [Novena Notes let p. 10, 17]

Repetitions strengthen our meditations [Let. Fr. J-M. DUPONT, 15-06-1848]

We priests rarely receive the gift of contemplation. We must use the hand-pump to get a few drops of this living water. [Let. Fr. J-M. DUPONT, 15-06-1848]

Pray for me and obtain for me that God may open my ears and loosen my tongue so that I may make Him known and loved; if I am not too unworthy of this grace and honour beyond all honours. [Let. Mother Echernier, 10-09-1847]

The fruit and success of Missionary ministry depend almost entirely on prayer and good example. [Advice to teachers, Personal Notes, 07-08-1856, AM,142]

“Almost all my occupations should be devoted to prayer and meditation. Everything else is hardly worth anything for me and still less for others. If I were to know myself a little better, I would say with gratitude : ‘Mary has chosen the best part for herself’. It seems to me that I have a glimpse of it (at La Salette)” May God give me this grace (to see it better !). 38 [Personal Notes, 31-12-1859]

The parish missions the community undertook (in Pougny) were not very successful. He bemoans this fact in a letter to his niece. Sr. Louise Mermier : “The consciences are frozen; everywhere there is the sleep of indifference. Oh ! How great is the need to pray for my intentions.” Jean REY, p. 89

"As for us (Missionaries in Europe) and for me especially, I should be afraid of being the cause of my own problems (we deserve what we merit). We work, but with what success ? Like so many others, we don't seem to be bothered by anything, we share the common lethargy which is in itself the greatest chastisement, for the one who is afraid of them, seeks the remedies. There is but one and that is to approach God in prayer. The remedy is entirely in God's hands who wants us turn to him in prayer - a prayer coming from a heart that is sincere and pure. p 29-30 Circular to Missionaries in India, Allinges, dated, 28-03-1855]

"Before everything else, you have to train yourself to prayer. It is by prayer that you have to begin and end everything. Train yourself to piety. Mere physical training of the body doesn't mean much, but piety is useful for everything"

"To do so fruitfully, I add a few words on the dispositions: before prayer, prepare your soul; do not tempt God (Ec1.18,23) " Put yourself in an atmosphere of **recollection**

"Bring yourself to have a sincere sorrow for your sins "Humiliate yourself before God... The **supreme disposition** lies in this short prayer: Domine in unione... Lord, in union with the divine intention in which you proclaimed, on earth, the praises of God. It is to unite oneself to Jesus Christ, to pray with him, by him and through him, for, as St Paul says, all subsists in him, by him, through him. It is to **pray in union with his mystical Body**, the Communion of Saints, it is finally to unite, ourselves, members of our little Congregation through the perfect observance of our Rules and to render ourselves more and more worthy to offer ceaselessly this divine incense which comes forth only from that heart that is pure and burning with love.

"To pray, then, my dear Confreres, to pray all the time, to pray in a worthy manner is a duty and a need for everyone, but especially for a priest. This duty, this need are all the more imperative on us today in our age of trial and desolation; everything points out to it: the malice of the wicked, the cowardice of the good, the voice of our common Father of the faithful crying out in various Jubilees(1851 and 1852), the blindness of your pagans in India, the scandal of our bad Catholics, the persecution of the reformed, finally, my long and sad experience which has convinced me that I cannot recommend sufficiently enough the need of the holy exercise of prayer. p 40-41 Circular to Missionaries in India, 17-04-1852]

"I can do everything in him who strengthens me. Without this strength, we can do nothing without me you can do nothing. Jesus, God Himself prayed. '... he passed the whole night in prayer'. Mary's heart prayed during her sleep, and the creature, the sinner will live without prayer? We shall pray, then, in a more worthy manner, in a manner more pleasing to God, more useful to our souls and more effective in our own sanctification. "My dear Confreres, accept this sign of my care and solicitude for you and since you understand better and better the importance of prayer, don't forget me in this holy exercise so that I may become more worthy of my vocation". p 41 Circular to Missionaries in India, 17-04-1852]

Prayer, to each one of us, is a need, a duty, the means of obtaining the unique grace and all other graces proper to our vocation: "Ask, and you shall receive"(Jn.16,24);"All that you ask for in prayer, believe that you will receive it and it will granted to you"(Mc.11,24). God, in his mercy and his infinite bounty begins the work of our sanctification without us: he calls us; it is up to us to cooperate with his loving designs for us: not me, but God's grace in me"(I Cor.15,10) - 'if you did not operate', says St. Augustine, 'God would not cooperate' "The great means, is prayer, continual prayer, the spirit of prayer. Thus had understood the Apostles, brought up in the school of Jesus Christ:<As for us, we will devote ourselves to prayer and the ministry of the Word."(Acts, 6,4) That is how the first Christians had understood it and all of them together had formed one body and one soul. " p. 84-85 [Circular to the MSFS in India, 17-04-1852]

"Our soul is like a barren and sterile land : "in terra deserta" which cannot produce fruit unless it is irrigated; more than our body, it is subject to all sorts of illnesses and infirmities. It is ceaselessly under attack from a thousand enemies. This condition of weakness is the consequence of our corrupt nature. God assures us that his grace is sufficient for us: my grace is sufficient for you.(2.Cor.12,9). The means of obtaining it, is prayer: Ask and you shall be given".(Mt.7,7). "This means, that what is necessary to all the faithful is much more necessary to the priest, to the apostolic man. The priest, by his ordination, has become a man of prayer. "Between the entrance and the altar, the priests will weep"(Joel,2,17). The Church binds him to recite the canonical office. 'What happens to the apostolic ministry of a priest who is not a man of prayer? As weak as he is in his nature as other men, it is a sterile ministry, fruitless, even harmful, it's a dead ministry, which instead of enlightening, blinds, instead of healing, kills.

But in a man of prayer, it is a life-giving ministry, it is virtue, it is God's omnipotence, it is a living ministry, it is Jesus Christ himself alive among men. "As the Father has sent me, I also send you", because prayer is all powerful: <There's no man who is more powerful than a man who prays> (St.Chrysostom).<Prayer is efficacious, it pierces the heavens> (St. Augustine). " p. 85 [Circular to the MSFS in India, 17-04-1852]

Obstacles to Prayer – "We pray, you will tell me. "Yes, undoubtedly, but do not all those numberless obstacles render this exercise difficult ? The preoccupations of a difficult ministry, a more or less imperfect preparation of lessons, ignorance and study of different and difficult languages, all these are certainly obstacles to the spirit of prayer, and one cannot surmount them except by a deep interior life, working seriously at the death of self and to unite oneself closely to Jesus Christ. "It is the fruit of a well performed meditation, it is the kingdom of God active in man, it is the interior self, it is a man of prayer, the priest, apostolic man.

Thence I conclude that before everything and always you must train yourself to a life of prayer; it is by prayer that you have to begin and end. "Train yourself to piety. Physical exercise is useful for very few things, whereas the exercise of piety is useful for everything." p. 86 [Circular to the MSFS in India, 17-04-1852]

"**The supreme disposition** lies in this short prayer: "Domine in unione.."..Lord, in union with the divine intention in which, Jesus proclaimed, on earth, the praises of God..." It is to unite oneself to Jesus Christ, to pray with him, in him and through him, for, as St. Paul says, all subsists in him, by him, through him. It is to pray in union with his mystical Body, the Communion of Saints, it is finally to unite ourselves, members of our little Congregation through the perfect observance of our Rules and to render ourselves more and more worthy to offer ceaselessly this divine incense which comes forth only from a heart that is pure and burning with love. p. 87 [Circular to the MSFS in India, 17-04-1852]

You ask for some days of saintly rest which Our Lord frequently proposed to his disciples: Come to a lonely place. Rest a while. This request is quite in line with your piety. "When Our Lord himself had to spend 40 days in solitude and suffer trials, what then should we ourselves think ? "It was in obedience to God's command that the Apostles went to the Cenacle: it was under the guidance of the Holy Spirit that they spent those holy days which rendered them worthy of so sublime a vocation. The ways of divine Wisdom don't change, they are the same always: like the Apostles, we have to retire to the Cenacle.

Come, then, with the desire to imitate these great models; they gather together and remain in the Retreat and they disperse, not on their own, but on the command of the Lord." p. 90-91 [let to FR. Arvin-Berod, desirous of joining the Congregation, and seeking to join in the retreat,26-10-1857]

"If our daily exercises are so useful to a priestly soul, not to say necessary, how important should an annual Retreat be? I recommend it to you with all my force. Take as your guide the little book of the Exercises. It is ever new and I would say, ever difficult; But we are well rewarded for our pains, after making a good retreat by following it. p. 91 [to Fr. LAVOREL, 14-06-1848]

"My occupation ought to be entirely at prayer and at meditation. All the rest is almost nothing to me and still less to others." p. 92 [personal notes, 31-12-1859]

**PREACHING :** Between 1832 and 1862, Parish Mission Preaching were undertaken in 27 parishes ((Duval, Mermier, p. 150))

"... in serious matters such as penance, scandal ... words leading to laughter are out of place." (Duval, Mermier, p. 148)]

"Don't adopt mannerisms like the frequent repetition of 'well now – dear brethren' ... There's a great risk, when speaking frequently, of using the same old phrases like an everending chorus. Be happy to be warned of this." ... "Take care not to speak *ab irato* ("in an angry tone of voice"), avoid trivial matters, keep simple, use a language that everyone can understand." [cf. *Directoire des Missions*, promulgated by Very Rev. Fr. Clavel, 3<sup>rd</sup>. Superior General of the Congregation, (Duval, Mermier, p. 148, 149)]

In *preaching* teach what is necessary, to whom it is needed, when needed and in the proper manner. For this you need knowledge, study, practical application, union with God. [AM, LETTERS, pg. 9]

The personal notes of Fr. Mermier, his analysis of the sermons, his criticisms and his judgements help us to discover the principles which he applied to himself in his preaching. They revealed less eloquence and more zeal. Jean REY, 1960, p. 71

His commonsense rules out flowery language, great outbursts, sublime flights of oratory, the common place excuses of their length, in a word, all that goes to make the preacher popular and admirable. Jean REY, 1960, p. 71

His sermons were in the form of a dialogue between him and his audience and they contained three stages : enlightening the minds, touching the hearts and leading the will to practical resolutions. Jean REY, 1960, p. 71

Once after erecting the Cross, he wrote : "The sermon had for its object, to make people understand that it is not enough to bear the cross; in order to honour it worthily, it must be borne with honour and pride and one must esteem oneself happy to follow the divine Master under His banner." Jean REY, 1960, p. 71

If the appearance of Fr. Mermier at the pulpit seemed to be severe, a warm heart, nevertheless, beat within him. ... three loves made his words efficacious and appealing : the love of the truth he preached, the love of the form which clothed

it, the love for the audience who listened to him. These three loves inflamed his gaze, modulated his voice, regulated his gestures and stressed his convictions, so much so that there was permanently a crowd around the confessionals. The rigid preacher became on this occasion, the good and indulgent confessor for the contrite and humble sinners. Jean REY, 1960, p. 72

Undoubtedly Fr. Mermier enjoyed the fame of a powerful preacher. Some said : "What prodigious talent to put the greatest truths within the reach of the most simple minds !" Others thought : "What excessive zeal fit to sow trouble and fear in the consciences of all." Jean REY, 1960, p. 72

Fr. Mermier never bothered about eloquence but focused only on the spirit of God. He wrote : "Our duty is to draw it upon us and on others, to take all possible precautions so as not to thwart its action." Jean REY, 1960, p. 72

"This man of God who had no other eloquence than that of simplicity, lucidity and conviction has attracted a greater number of listeners to his instructions." Testimony of Fr. Mettral, Parish Priest of Magland. Jean REY, 1960, p. 72

"My uncle was not a man of eloquence, but of conviction, a man of faith, an organizer; he was very practical, and all that he did was marked with the stamp of good administration." Testimony of Marie Chautemps, Fr. Mermier's nephew. Jean REY, 1960, p. 72

## RELIGIOUS LIFE

A consecrated person is a *lamp* always burning in the presence of the divine spouse; a *tree* planted on the banks of refreshing streams, ever green and always covered with flowers and fruit. [Bro. Charles GAILLARD, Yanam, 03-06-1850]

"The love of God is a practical science which one acquires and one does not preach efficaciously except through works." 24 [let Personal Notes, 10-05-1853]

"I have often said to my dear community : we have only just begun. Our duty is to do better, to work in order to become conformable to our obligations. WE know well that our undertaking is holy, our duties are sacred and we are obliged to observe them with our whole heart for the sake of a happy eternity for us all." 57 [Personal Notes, 21-11-1859]

"He repeats to us to do good, that religious must be like water, having neither colour nor form, nor taste; that nothing is more harmful in the work for souls than an attachment to a way of seeing and doing." [Mother Louise BLANC, Superior General, Sisters of St. Joseph of Annecy, writing, after a visit to Mermier at La Feuillette, to Fr. Larive, missionary in India] Jean REY, p. 97

"After the vows the essential thing for apostolic men, is the exercise of abnegation, as it is indicated in (this section of) the RULES" p. 91 [let to Mgr. NEYRET, 30-06-1849]

### SUPERIORS :

The Superior must keep herself informed about everything. She must see everything; she must know, act in everything and everywhere. That is her office, her duty. It is really so essential to know that the smallest failure is a disorder. You will tell me : how can a Superior know everything, busy herself with everything, etc. I will reply : It is impossible. Let us say it : it is impossible. We do not want to understand. This is ignorance, pride. We do not reflect. The Superiors do not see the full gravity, the obligation of their charge; it is certain that they will have to submit to a terrible judgement. *Judicium durissimum*.

I know well, that a Superior cannot do everything all alone. What must she do then? She must have the help of the Directresses, the Mistresses, the novices, etc. She must make them her helpers, she must supervise them, make them act, instruct them, etc.; but always in perfect harmony, and in accordance with the Rules and the established customs. Without that all of you together will ruin the community and you will ruin yourselves. It will not be, as Our Lord tells us, because you will have called : Lord, etc.

... In speaking to the Mother Superior, it may seem to you that the Mother is going to do everything; that she is going to handle everything. Far from that. I want her to understand, if she is wise, that alone she can do very little. If it is the question of the convent, all must be done harmoniously by the Superior in agreement with the Directress. And with

regard to the Novitiate, in agreement first with the Mother, and the Mother with the Directress, the Directress with the Mistress of novices.

The father Superior will be there to know how you relate yourselves between the three of you. Do not be too surprised with my embarrassment. The future difficulties will prove to us that I have hardly begun. Pay attention to it. We learn to live happily with one another if we know how to benefit by it. I always experience my ordinary difficulties in writing to you. May God be blessed in everything and may He deign to bless us always. FAMILY ANNALS, I, (COMMUNITY) Re. Unity between the Superior and Directress : [p. 268-270, Reverend Mother Foundress, 30 November 1858]

“In reading these reflections, I foresee that your humility will not prevent you from saying or at least thinking : “The poor Superior is a priest preaching to a convent. It is like big John teaching a lesson to his parish or better still – *Physician, heal yourself!* All these thoughts are quite justified. However, they cease to be justified when they concern a Superior or a friend who is bound to speak.” 18 [Let. to Fr. Lavorel, April, 1855]

“The Bishop continues to treat me (in spite of the complaint he has received) to treat me with some of his ‘good compliments’. I really find them a little bitter. However, the indignation caused by them does not last too long. Sometimes, I think it may be advantageous for the Congregation to have another Superior.” 21 [Let. to Fr. Gaidon, 04-02-1841]

“As for me, I have to leave you (who are also a Superior) in difficulties, whilst telling you that I have had my fair share of them all this time. God willed it, may He forgive my defects. I am going on, sustained by His all-powerful hand, full of confidence to undertake other more difficult tasks.” 22 [let Mother Claudine, 28-10-1851]

“I really have some desire to be what you would want me to be. Doesn't matter, I accept heartily the honest and respectful procedures you follow towards your Superior. “I am convinced that he ought to be more capable, more holy, more loving and more perfect. However, his subordinates owe him respect, submission and love even when he is only what he is.” p. 77 [Let. to Fr. Neyret, 11-09-1847]

## VOCATION

### THE PERSONAL VOCATION OF FR. MERMIER

“I owe my vocation to the holiness of my mother. ... I repent for not having written anything about my mother. My God, how much I owe her. No, no, she was not an ordinary woman.” [Jean REY, p,6]

The zeal of Fr. Mermier, as a young curate, led him to aspire to a more committed and demanding vocation as a religious. He sought counsel from his Parish Priest, Fr. Desjacques, of Magland, who advised : “God can call us not only to one state, but to various functions within that state. I think that without having indications of God’s will we cannot go away from one path and throw ourselves into another perilous and unknown one. For your project, a simple desire is not a sufficient manifestation of the will of God”. And he counseled him to remain at his post while awaiting a “clear and more positive” manifestation of the will of God. ... “your students could go to India, and you could become the father of martyrs”. [Jean REY, 1960, p. 19]

After the demise of his mother (23<sup>rd</sup>. February 1819) Fr. Mermier felt more strongly attracted towards community living as a religious under a “Rule”; thought of becoming a Jesuit. Fr. Desjaques very sympathetically counseled him : “I commend the good resolution that you have taken, but if Providence does not show you clearly that you should go elsewhere, I think that you are where you ought to be.” [Jean REY, 1960, p. 21]

The response of Fr. Godinot to whom he addressed repeated requests, as to whether he should quit Melan and join the Jesuits, was as follows : “I am obliged to tell you, that the advice you have asked me is one that I cannot give. To accept or refuse the candidates who present themselves is my obligations, but to decide for them when they themselves have not resolved what I am not able to do.” [Jean REY, 1960, p. 20]

Fr. Desjacques persisted: “ I commend the good resolution that you have taken; but if Providence does not show you clearly that you should go elsewhere, I think you are where you ought to be”. And later : “You will not go to the Jesuits before your soul more at peace hears the voice of God. Embrace the Crucifix and listen to it”. Fr. Mermier obeyed with fervor, but his Crucifix remained silent.” The voice was heard by the Director of the College of Melan, Fr. Marin DUCREY, when Mgr. De Solle, Bishop of Chambery, informed him of the transfer of Fr. Mermier from the college and his

appointment as Archpriest of the Parish of Chatelard-en-Bauges. He communicated to Fr. Mermier the sentiments of the Bishop : "I am not opposed to vocations. Nevertheless, I consider it my duty to think of the needs of the Diocese before everything else." [Jean REY, 1960, p. 20]

In loyal obedience, he accepted his appointment, but not the canonical installation. He would later record in his *personal notes* that Chatelard was a "terrible spot". Faced with this very discouraging situation, he felt an intense need of having recourse to those "holy and true friendships", which usually help priests. He had the idea of a group, of a team and thought of establishing an Association of priests - "by means of it, friends animate themselves, help and uphold the well-being of each other". [Jean REY, 1960, p. 22-23]

: "Although you see me so miserable and although Frs. Favre and Allard are much more talented and virtuous than I, I have been told that they will not succeed in forming a missionary body; this work is reserved for me." [Jean REY, 1960, p. 36]

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## FR. MERMIER'S VIEWS ON VOCATION

In your new vocation, you must not only think of yourself, of your salvation, of your perfection, you owe your companion submission, respect, love of a child towards its mother.

Towards the little girls of your school, you must *render them the help of your prayers, the good example of a life which is very regular; you must be rather a little serious with them, but without bitterness or severity, they must love you.* When it is necessary to punish them, have recourse to your companion and if needed to the parish priest; *rarely should you take upon yourself the odium of punishing.*" ...

"... *Refuse no office, no type of work, however base or tiresome it may appear : obedience, love of God changes everything into gold.*" FAMILY ANNALS, I, re. DEVOTION TO SAINTS, sense of duty : [p. 159,160, Annecy, To Sr. Louise, Teacher at Marcellaz 7 July 1850]

... *Be a stranger to your own country. - Relations and acquaintances have a certain right to our attention but our duty comes first. Remain at home. ... Take notes often, if not every day on what you see, what you hear, what you do. Above all, love, love your crosses.* Let us pray for one another. FAMILY ANNALS, I, Re. Nine Practical Rules of behaviour : [p. 213, to his niece Sr. Louise, ? 1856]

"I have often said to my dear Community : We have only just begun. Our duty is to do better, to work in order to become conformable to our obligations." Personal Notes, 21-11-1859

Vocation leads us to *be* where God wants to *do* what He demands, to *suffer* the pains He sends, to *obey* the Superiors He places over us. To know and follow our vocation is true happiness in this world and the sure way to eternal happiness in heaven. [Bro. Charles GAILLARD, Yanam, 03-06-1850]

What is vocation if not the choice of sending of [persons] according to the [plan] of God for the salvation of creatures. God calls. Soe turn a deaf ear. What is it that holds them back ? Their attachment to creatures, their inordinate affections. Creatures themselves are indifferent things. We must make use of them according to the will of God. That is vocation. Whether we are in Savoy, whether we are in India, in itself, it is something indifferent. But to be in Savoy when God calls us to India is probably something to be condemned. To be where God wants us, to be employed as He wants, to accept the sufferings He allows, and to obey the Superiors placed over us : this is true wisdom. To know and follow your vocation is the true and only happiness in this world and the sure way of finding happiness in eternal life. [Bro. Charles GAILLARD, 30-06-1850, AM, p. 129]

On the one hand, priests have to understand above all the vocation, the holiness, and the dignity of the priest, the greatness, the tremendous elevation of the priesthood. On the other, they are to be aware of the dangers to which they are exposed. ... For the peace of one's own conscience as well as for the success of one's ministry, ... the secure harbor is *consecrated life, the community life of the religious congregation.* There surely, we are less in the world, less in contact with the world, less given over to the world. [Circular, 03-07=1852, to the Missionaries in India]



We are bound by our vocation to Christianity and still more by our Priesthood and the duties which it imposes on us; but in a quite different manner by our religious vows, to work for our spiritual progress. [let. of 25-06-1848 *Dangers of Lukewarmness*]

We are born only to die and live forever in eternal life. We are only travelers on this earth. Our ignorance is often the cause why we stray out of the right way. Our weakness is even greater than our ignorance. But God is so kind, so merciful, so clement that he deigns to give light to the blind and raise the weak, that he is so patient. [Let. Mother Echernier, 05-02-1851]

The love and esteem of your holy *vocation* must be the compass of your human pilgrimage. [LETTERS, pg. 9, no. 14]

He who says 'that's enough' is on the way to perdition. [LETTERS, pg. 18, no. 32]

We do much when we do little, if we do it for God, when and as He wants. Not how much, but how well. The Sovereign Judge considers not the volume but the value of or actions. [LETTERS, pg. 13, no. 22]

Prayer to each one of us, is a need, a duty, the means of obtaining the unique grace and all other graces proper to our vocation.

'The harvest is great'. But the Master of the harvest knows better than we do what is needed for the interest of His glory; what is best for His work and for our happiness. [LETTERS, pg. 13, no. 23]

"The more we are raised in honour before God and before man, the more the duties which this sublime dignity imposes on us are serious and important ." 65 Let. To Fr. Avrillon in India, 17-04-1855

"The ensemble of qualities which make a missionary is rarely found blended together. A vocation that is faithful, a complete disinterestedness in everything, a total abandonment to the designs of divine Providence, a total and absolute renunciation of one's self-will, only to seek and will what Jesus Christ wishes from us by way of obedience ... a pure, ardent and well-ordered zeal for one's own sanctification and the salvation of souls; a constant and well-sustained zeal accompanied by all its effects. All these dispositions are necessary for the missionary whom God calls to work for the conversion of peoples, above all in the foreign missions." 68 [let. of 25-06-1848 *Dangers of Lukewarmness*]

... the soul who sees the world as little in the light of the Gospel and who does not ceaselessly bless the Divine Mercy which has withdrawn it from it, is an ungrateful soul or at least a thoughtless one; *when I say withdrawn, I do not mean that it be taken out of the world, but that it no longer follows its way of life.* Oh how happy it would be even with a poor hut for lodging and with black bread for nourishment !" FAMILY ANNALS, I, Re. the grace of RELIGIOUS VOCATION : [p. 147, Annecy, to Sr. Jeanne Belleville, 15 December 1845]

If I had complaints to make, I would turn them above all on myself. Are we wrong in sending away these subjects ? No. It is necessary to sacrifice one member for the sake of preserving the body. *The community before everything else, and a regular and exemplary life which is its soul; it is this that we must secure.*

Nevertheless, it remains very true that these dismissals are very painful, as much for the superior as for the members of the community; and then, the consequences for these poor girls who are thus dismissed. ... FAMILY ANNALS, I, Re. a Dismissal / Rules of Prudence VOCATION : [p. 172, Allinges, to Mother Foundress, 12 September 1851]

Yes, my Sister, I am happy when I see many subjects arriving, who leave the Babylon of the world in search of a shelter in solitude. But you know, that in spite of the pain which the dismissal of a subject causes me, I am content. I bless God for the happiness he has given to the Congregation to purify itself by getting rid of the subjects who have no vocation."

...

You do well to resign yourself (to my erratic ? dispositions), it is your duty. You must preserve peace of soul and *pray with greater fervour for one who is at least the occasion of your pain.*" FAMILY ANNALS, I, Re. VOCATIONS serenity [p. 180, Annecy, to Mother Foundress, 1 July 1852]

Be a stranger to your own country. - Relations and acquaintances have a certain right to our attention but our duty comes first. Remain at home. ... Take notes often, if not every day on what you see, what you hear, what you do. ... Above all, love, love your crosses. Let us pray for one another. FAMILY ANNALS, I, Re. Nine Practical Rules of behavior [p. 213, to his niece Sr. Louise, ? 1856]

You know where you stand. In proportion as you can free yourself from exterior affairs, busy yourself more seriously with your religious exercises. You must know enough, except to love and serve God. All the rest is nothing. FAMILY ANNALS, I, Re. Accounts [p. 258, Sr. Marie Pecelet, 12 November 1859]

It is not enough to receive abundant graces, to hear the Word of God, to make spiritual reading, to frequent the Sacraments, to follow spiritual exercises, to participate in Jubilees, to be in a state of perfection; we must profit by all these valuable favours. We must make the best use of these talents. It is not enough to avoid sin. We must work for our spiritual advancement. The Holy Gospel, in speaking of the condemnation of the wicked servant does not say that he had lost his talent, but stresses that he did not make good use of it. That is the cause of his deplorable misfortune. *of the Cross, a hard life, a laborious life, a trying and even mortified life !* I will add, nevertheless, that there is nothing extra-ordinary in that. Let them not compare their existence in the congregation with that which they had with their parents. ... How to remedy this ? Is it enough to give the habit of the Daughters of the Cross and add on to it the post of the Directress, Teacher, in order to have a *goddess of pride* ? These are marks, the solemn exterior distinguishing marks of the religious profession, of humility, obedience, charity, mortification, religious perfection. But no ! Behind these apparent exterior signs, behind the beautiful veil of modesty, are hidden the greater defects, because they are more refined. Why ? A long explanation is necessary here. These poor girls are not educated. Many have not even the capacity to be educated. They have received had education, they have acquired so many bad habits ! They are too old, they are too young, they have no models, etc.

Finally, how is this going to be remedied ? Most of the directresses are unbearable : no order, no rule, no charity sometimes, no mortification, no prudence, no spiritual advancement, and that is what I see, what Fr. Clavel wrote to me, what I think I have already told you.

How must I conclude ? Will you tell me ? *Must we be discouraged or make an uproar ? No. We must always pray and be warned that the greatest evil in communities and individuals is not to have defects; no, the greatest evil is not to know them !!!* ... The New year has begun ! Let us enter into it earnestly. And how ? By means of the Rule before everything : religious exercises, spirit of order and good management in the smallest details; concord, charity, cordiality for one another, unbounded devotion to the practice of obedience and all the virtues, etc. I wish you all a very happy New Year. God gives it to us. FAMILY ANNALS, I, Re. Means to remedy notable failures [p. 240, 241-242, Pougny, to Mother Foundress, 11 Jan 1858]

You know where you stand. In proportion as you can free yourself from exterior affairs, busy yourself more seriously with your religious exercises. You must know enough, except to love and serve God. All the rest is nothing. FAMILY ANNALS, I, Re. Accounts [p. 258, Sr. Marie Pecelet, 12 November 1859]

"(Like the Apostles) we have to strive to **render ourselves worthy of our sublime vocation**. The first condition to do this is to have a true idea of this vocation, to esteem it above everything else, considering all the rest, all other occupations as nothing, as dirt, as dung. Meditating constantly on the lessons and examples of Jesus Christ, supreme missionary, on the Apostles etc.

Doing this, the priest's faith grows stronger, his confidence becomes clear-sighted, his charity overwhelming. Obstacles become sources of courage, problems disappear, sacrifices, death itself become beneficial. "If then we become conscious that these beautiful dispositions are so rarely found in us, it is because we are not sufficiently interested in Jesus Christ, in his Gospel, in the salvation of souls. All these should be made a part of our daily meditation, the gauge of our behaviour, of all our activity and we shall also become Apostles..." p 20-21 [let to Fr. Joseph LAVOREL, 28-07-1852]

"We are called to live our vocation as Christians and still more as priests and the responsibilities that go with it; but we are also called to live by the observance of our religious vows and thus work for the advancement in our spiritual life." p 58 [Exceptional circumstances leading to Missionaries being sent to India in June, 1848, 24-06-1848]

From October 1882, Fr. Tissot started his method of Probation for the Sisters. He told them, as reported in the Family Annals : "During the holy exercises of the Retreat, is sown the seed of the Word and inspirations. It has to be watered by grace and helped to grow and fructify by personal work. ... perfection cannot be acquired in a single moment, nor put on as a dress, but defects have to be conquered and virtues acquired one by one ... That's why it seemed to me according to God's good pleasure, my dear Sisters, to invite you all, with fatherly entreaties, to take advantage of the fervor kindled by a retreat to work under the protection of our gentle Queen, to acquire one after the other the virtues more in conformity with your holy vocation. You will spend three months in working towards the acquisition of each of these virtues, and you will call them three months of probation". Cf. MOGET, in MSFS, p. 146

Vocation to a State of Life leads us to *be* where God wants to *do* what He demands, to *suffer* the pains He sends, to *obey* the Superiors He places over us. To know and follow our vocation is true happiness in this world and the sure way to eternal happiness in heaven. [Bro. Charles GAILLARD, Yanam, 03-06-1850]

What is vocation if not the choice of sending of [persons] according to the [plan] of God for the salvation of creatures. God calls. Some turn a deaf ear. What is it that holds them back ? Their attachment to creatures, their inordinate affections. Creatures themselves are indifferent things. We must make use of them according to the will of God. That is vocation. Whether we are in Savoy, whether we are in India, in itself, it is something indifferent. But to be in Savoy when God calls us to India is probably something to be condemned. To be where God wants us, to be employed as He wants, to accept the sufferings He allows, and to obey the Superiors placed over us : this is true wisdom. To know and follow your vocation is the true and only happiness in this world and the sure way of finding happiness in eternal life. [Bro. Charles GAILLARD, 30-06-1850, AM, p. 129]

On the one hand, priests have to understand above all the vocation, the holiness, and the dignity of the priest, the greatness, the tremendous elevation of the priesthood. On the other, they are to be aware of the dangers to which they are exposed. ... For the peace of one's own conscience as well as for the success of one's ministry, ... the secure harbor is *consecrated life, the community life of the religious congregation*. There surely, we are less in the world, less in contact with the world, less given over to the world. [Circular, 03-07=1852, to the Missionaries in India]

We are bound by our vocation to Christianity and still more by our Priesthood and the duties which it imposes on us; but in a quite different manner by our religious vows, to work for our spiritual progress. [let. of 25-06-1848 *Dangers of Lukewarmness*]

We are born only to die and live forever in eternal life. We are only travelers on this earth. Our ignorance is often the cause why we stray out of the right way. Our weakness is even greater than our ignorance. But God is so kind, so merciful, so clement that he deigns to give light to the blind and raise the weak, that he is so patient. [Let. Mother Echernier, 05-02-1851]

The love and esteem of your holy *vocation* must be the compass of your human pilgrimage. [LETTERS, pg. 9, no. 14]

He who says 'that's enough' is on the way to perdition. [LETTERS, pg. 18, no. 32]

We do much when we do little, if we do it for God, when and as He wants. Not how much, but how well. The Sovereign Judge considers not the volume but the value of our actions. [LETTERS, pg. 13, no. 22]

Prayer to each one of us, is a need, a duty, the means of obtaining the unique grace and all other graces proper to our vocation. 'The harvest is great'. But the Master of the harvest knows better than we do what is needed for the interest of His glory; what is best for His work and for our happiness. [LETTERS, pg. 13, no. 23]

"I have often said to my dear Community : We have only just begun. Our duty is to do better, to work in order to become conformable to our obligations." Personal Notes, 21-11-1859

"The more we are raised in honour before God and before man, the more the duties which this sublime dignity imposes on us are serious and important ." 65 Let. To Fr. Avrillon in India, 17-04-1855

"Which of us can ever fully grasp the excellence and the eminence of a missionary vocation ? And what a perfection it is to belong to the Congregation, to be the perfume of a religious house and build up a community ! What wisdom, what solemnity, what reserve and at the same time what sentiment of feeling at ease, mingled with tact and confidence in our relationships with secular priests, called as we are to work with them and to share our life with them; and then, what consideration, what modesty, what patience, what zeal in our relationships with the people of the world, in our conversations, our journeys, our meals; in social gatherings and social contacts where everyone has his eyes fixed on the missionary!

Who cannot see how difficult it is for a man who is deemed to possess all the virtues and to lead an irreproachable life, without any defects, to come up to the sublime heights of his vocation and not to falter some time or the other" p 23 [MEMOIRE]

Every missionary must be filled with apostolic virtues. It is God who gives them; but to whom? To those who ask for them with all their hearts in an assiduous, constant and persevering prayer, to those who endeavour with all their might to

acquire them, to those who are assiduous to learn from all the experiences they come across in their missionary enterprise, to those finally who prepare themselves to this formidable ministry through the test of a long and laborious noviciate and through the regularity of a life separated from the world, of a life that is serene, devoted to study, totally consecrated to God and to the service of the neighbour. p 23 [MEMOIRE]

" The love, the esteem of your vocation should be like the compass of your earthly pilgrimage, the spring of your soul and all your actions, it is the support, the anchor to sustain you in all your trials. "God wants it, it's my vocation. ...How beautiful is a Rule to an inspiration such as this! How loving it becomes! The least of the practices merit our attention, demand daily sacrifices to make us reproach ourselves for the least negligence. "The religious soul becomes like an ever burning lamp in the presence of the divine spouse. It is a tree planted on the banks of the streams, always green, always covered with flowers and fruit. It is the fullness of God's love and we cannot pay too great a price to possess a treasure such as this, which is the source of all good things. p 30 [let to Bro. Charles GAILLARD, 30-06-1855]

### **VOCATION OF BROTHERS :**

The brothers are destined by their well-trying vocation to serve the Congregation as part of its members by the holiness of their life, by their fervent prayers, by their manual work, and by the exercise of profession.

Through this kind of education and through the instruction they receive, they can be useful in poor parishes to conduct the school for youth, to give them the example of piety, and the love of work as they all are formed in one or several trades and most useful for the people of our countryside. In the foreign missions, they are destined to be the support of the missionaries, to serve the Congregation as catechists or also as teachers in lower classes. 87 Petition to His Majesty, King of Sardinia, 14-09-146

The number of Brothers is going up to ten of whom two or even three could start for the Mission of Vizagpatam where they would be needed (sic) They know to read well, to write, French grammar, some notions of Latin grammar, the ordinary rules of arithmetic. 88 [let to Fr. Martin at Yanam, 16-06-1846]

### **VOCATION PROMOTION :**

We must pray God to send us more vocations; for our part we must cooperate, help Divine Providence. ... The majority of those who present themselves do not know themselves, how are they going to make themselves known? All their great efforts are towards showing themselves to be other than they are. They hide their poor health, character, etc. They do not consult their superior about their vocation.

Yet the knowledge of self is so necessary, that without this first quality, there will neither be fear of God, nor humility, nor obedience, nor chastity, nor vocation; on the contrary, there will be only self-love, human respect, obedience a real slavishness, mortification a kind of hell. The Rule with its numerous prescriptions, so reasonable, so lovable, so meritorious, so easy, is for those ignorant ones an unbearable burden, they observe it only by force, with regret, murmuringly, because they are supervised, because they are afraid of being censured.

All these disorders come from ignorance of self, from losing control of self, from not knowing that one has need of a bridle to tame oneself, subdue oneself, to control one's passions, to break oneself from bad habits and to take on good ones, to do penance, etc." ... FAMILY ANNALS, I. Re. Formation and Instruction of members : [p. 222-223, 224, 225 to his niece, 27 May 1857]

[MERMIER] CANDIDATES : "Never send to India a missionary who has not acquired and who does not try to acquire this basic virtue of Renunciation" [Fr. Girard to Fr. Mermier, Moget, MSFS of Annecy, p.107]

"(Do) not insist too much on discipline or qualifications ... Send the candidates to India where we need so many priests ... Life will teach them." [Fr. Girard to Fr. Mermier, Moget, MSFS of Annecy, p.107]

It will be difficult to choose *four* of the *thirteen* missionaries to be sent to India, since extraordinary vocations are rare. I need the spirit of discernment to make the right choice. We are praying. Pray with us and for us. [Let. To Fr. J-M. TISSOT, 12-09-1847]

“Let it be known : in spite of the pain I feel when someone leaves us, I am happy. I bless the Lord for this grace given to a congregation of becoming stronger by getting rid of subjects who have no true vocation to religious life.” [let. To Mother Claudine, Moget, MSFS of Annecy, p.107]

## **SUPERIORS :**

“In reading these reflections, I foresee that your humility will not prevent you from saying or at least thinking : “The poor Superior is a priest preaching to a convent. It is like big John teachikng a lesson to his parish ort better still – *Physician, heal yourself!* All these thoughts are quite justified. However, they cease to be justified when they concern a Superior or a friend who is bound to speak.” 18 [Let. to Fr. Lavorel, April, 1855]

“The Bishop continues to treat me (in spite of the complaint he has received) to treat me with some of his ‘good compliments’. I really find them a little bitter. However, the indigestion caused by them does not last too long. Sometimes, I think it may be advantageous for the Congregation to have another Superior.” 21 [Let. to Fr. Gaiddon, 04-02-1841]

“As for me, I have to leave you (who are also a Superior) in difficulties, whilst telling you that I have had my fair share of them all this time. God willed it, may He forgive my defects. I am going on, sustained by His all-powerful hand, full of confidence to undertake other more difficult tasks.” 22 [let Mother Claudine, 28-10-1851]

The Superior must keep herself informed about everything. She must see everything; she must know, act in everything and everywhere. That is her office, her duty. It is really so essential to know that the smallest failure is a disorder. You will tell me : how can a Superior know everything, busy herself with everything, etc. I will reply : It is impossible. Let us say it : it is impossible. We do not want to understand. This is ignorance, pride. We do not reflect. The Superiors do not see the full gravity, the obligation of their charge; it is certain that they will have to submit to a terrible judgement. *Judicium durissimum*.

I know well, that a Superior cannot do everything all alone. What must she do then? She must have tehe help of the Directresses, the Mistresses, the novices, etc. She must make them her helpers, she must supervise them, make them act, instruct them, etc.; but always in perfectg harmony, and in accordance with the Rules and the established customs. Without that all of you together will ruin the community and you will ruin yourselves. It will not be, as Our Lord tells us, because you willhave called : Lord, etc.

... In speaking to the Mother Superior, it may seem to you that the Mother is going to do everything; that she is going to handle everything. Far from that. I want her to understand, if she is wise, that alone she can do very little. If it is the question of the convent, all must be done harmoniously by the Superior in agreement with the Directress. And with regard to the Novitiate, in agreement first with the Mother, and the Mother with the Directress, the Directress with the Mistress of novices.

The father Superior will be there to know how you relate yourselves between the three of you. Do not be too surprised with my embarrassment. The future difficulties will prove to us that I have hardly begun. Pay attention to it. We learn to live happily with one another if we know how to benefit by it. I always experience my ordinary difficulties in writing to you. May God be blessed in everything and may He deign to bless us always. FAMILY ANNALS, I, (COMMUNITY) Re. Unity between the Superior and Directress : [p. 268-270, Reverend Mother Foundress, 30 November 1858]

## **“The RULE” – CONSTITUTIONS**

As curate at Magland, in 1813 he drew up for himself a “Rule of Life” in which he notes : “As much as it depends on me, I will have a room without tapestry without decoration. It will always be clean and very white. The Cross or Crucifix that I will have will not be gilt but of simple wood. However, I will seek to have one in which the face of Christ is expressive. I will have an earthenware holy water stoup, I will observe this same rule of simplicity and poverty with regard o some other necessary furniture : candle-stick, writing-desk, etc. In my room I will never have a mattress on my bed?. [Jean REY, 1960, p. 13]

This is the spirit in which Fr. Mermier sought the approbation of the Holy See for the Congregation : “I acknowledge that I possess a mediocre intelligence and knowledge. I am without virtue and merit, yet it has pleased divine Wisdom and my superiors, to assign me to the Missions; although fully unworthy, I have thought of the Rules and

Constitutions without which there can neither be order nor sanctification of the Missionaries, or a fruitful work". Jean REY, 1960, p. 70

"What counts more than exact obedience to the Rule, by the way, is the spirit of the Rule. Self-renunciation, forgoing one's creature comforts, making oneself all things to all men everywhere, always, in the slightest things, is to be like a grain of wheat sown in the earth. Charity and gentleness towards our neighbor are the offspring of our love for God." (let. Mermier to Fr. Petitjean, 05-12-1844, [Duval, Mermier, p. 111])

"Let us take up our resolutions and set to work. *Let us carry our Rules in our hands, in our hearts, on our tongue.*" FAMILY ANNALS, I. Re. the RULE : [p. 196, Annecy, to Sr. Mary Peclet at Chaumont, 9 January 1854]

The RULE is for us the cream of the Gospel; the key of Paradise. [let to Fr. Dupont, Yanam, June, 1849] My great regret will be to die without having learned the practice of my own vows in a more perfect manner. I say this and I confess it, so that you may pray for me, and, that you may do better than me. [Personal notes, 21-11-1859, pp. 16]

It is through our Rules that we are religious. The care you apply to the observance of your Rules, far from impeding your other occupations, will rather help you to fulfil them with faithfulness, zeal and merit. [LETTERS, pg. 8, 2]

We live well if you live in good order regarding your conduct : orderly as regards yourself, sociably with others, humbly before God. The Rule is for us the cream of the Gospel, the key of Paradise. Let us make an attempt and we shall understand. [Let. Fr. J-M. DUPONT, June, 1849]

After the vows, the essential for persons devoted to the apostolate is the exercise of abnegation, as it is mentioned in the Rules. [Let. Bishop Neyret, , 30-06-1849]

Undoubtedly, we are far from perfection. Our duty is to desire it and to work for it. [Let. Fr. J. THEVENET, 14-06-1848]

May it [our Rules] make us conformed to our glorious patron St. Francis de Sales who made himself so conformed to Jesus Christ by making himself all to all like Him. [Let. Fr. J. THEVENET, 14-06-1848, AM, 142]

How important are our Rules. It's your password, the key to heaven. Our rampart, citadel, arsenal. It is through our Rules that we are Religious : far from impeding your other occupations, your Rules will help you fulfill them more faithfully, with greater zeal and merit. [Let. Fr. Marie GAVARD, 01-07-1849]

"To be faithful to the Rule, even during the Mission is a great thing and a great reason for comfort. All the same [fidelity to] the letter [of the Constitutions] is not enough. Often, an exterior and literal obedience to it becomes impossible. It is above all the spirit of the Rule : Renunciation of self, the sacrifice of one's comforts and conveniences, to make oneself all things to all, everywhere, always even in the least things. To be like the grain of wheat thrown on the earth. Charity and gentleness towards neighbor are daughters of the love of God. Read frequently I Cor ch. 13 : *Charity is patient*. You know and you are afraid of your weakness. Thank the divine goodness for it. Listen attentively even to the smallest reproaches of the Holy Spirit who dwells in you. Be on your guard not to grieve him, he is so sensitive. Be on your guard especially at table, in your conversation with strangers, at the confessional, in the pulpit [while preaching]. With temperaments like ours, we stand in need of making continual efforts to keep the [maxim] : *Watch and pray that you do not enter into temptation.*" 79 [Let Fr. Petitjean, 05-12-1844]

"I am confident, in advance, my dear Confrere, that all that I tell you here about the importance of our obligation will be perfectly understood by you, that you are observing them since a long time and that you will conform yourself to them more than I hope for – *au-dela de mes esperances*. Besides, Mgr. Neyret has identified himself with the practice of the religious. His example would have told you everything since you have the honour of being with him." 104 Let to Fr. Tissot, 06-07-1849

"I pray Our Lord, his holy Mother, St. Francis de Sales and all our holy protectors to fill you more and more with the spirit of our Holy Rules and to render us conformable to our glorious patron, St. Francis de Sales, who rendered himself so conformable to Jesus Christ in making himself all things to all like Him." 112 [let to Fr Thevenet, 14-06-1848]

*The framework of the religious life is defined by the Rules which Fr. Mermier considers to be the expression of God's Will. Already from 1822 he has at heart the idea of preparing a Rule of life for his missionaries whom he wants to be Religious. During his sojourn at La Roche-sur-Foron (1834-1837), the whole community comes together to formulate this Rule. Finally, Fr. Mermier goes to Rome in order to present this document to the Holy See for its approbation. Furthermore, extremely solicitous to give a solid structure to the life of the missionaries, he consults a number of theologians, canonists and religious superiors.*

*At last, on the 10th December 1842 he has the joy of writing to Mgr Vibert, bishop of Maurienne :*

"The vote of the Reverend Consultor is the best thing I can expect." p 27 [let to Mgr. VIBERT, Bishop of Maurienne, 13-12-1842]

*Mermier is more explicit with his confreres at La Feuillette :* "What will the conclusion of this long work be ? I believe that unless something extraordinary happens, that it will be good. The Reverend Consultor has not pointed out any important defect in the Constitutions, he hasn't changed a single word. Tell all our dear missionaries and brothers, that since our rules are so wise, so pure, so perfect, **that they endeavour to observe them with an ever greater zeal, fervour and fidelity**". p 27 [let to Fr. Jacques MARTIN, 04-12-1842]

The Rule is for all of us the cream of the Gospel, key of heaven. Let us try our best and we shall understand the full impact of it upon our lives. *Intellectus bonus omnibus facientibus. ...* p 28 [let to Fr. DUPONT, at Yanam 10-06-1849]

I exhort you with all my strength, to have your Rules constantly in your hands, it has to be the book of the whole Congregation, at least till such time as we have them in all their perfection." p 28 [let to Fr. DUPONT, 30-06-1849]

"I shall end by speaking to you about our Holy Rules. I have been reading them in a very special manner all this year. The more I meditate on them and the more I explain them, the more do I esteem them and the more I understand their importance and necessity. ... We cannot arrive at the perfection demanded of us by our apostolic life without applying the means. It is difficult to find them outside religious Congregations, means that are more sure, more efficacious and more holy than in the holy Rules and Constitutions." p 28 [let to Fr. NEYRET, 05-06-1847]

"I can not tell you how important our Rules are! They are like the bull's eye (of perfection) - the final word (of order). Fr. Saint Jure calls them the book of the elect, the key to heaven... I would myself call them our **fortress, our citadel, our armoury. ...** In fact what will become of a missionary who strives everyday to understand better, to practice exactly and carefully the second Rule of common daily practices ? that is, Let each one in each of his works and especially preaching have the purest intention of pleasing God alone. ... To what purity of purpose, to what holiness of life, to what renunciation he will not attain soon : *if your eyes are simple, your whole body will be full of light.* p 29 [let to Fr. Marie GAVARD, 01-07-1849]

The Missionaries will be fervent, regular, it is absolutely necessary today. Perhaps more than ever before. Seeing the evils that surround us, we should not be satisfied with ordinary remedies: What then are we to conclude? God is there to help us, Saint Francis de Sales to protect us, Our Lady of Sorrows is there to look tenderly upon us: we shall continue making progress.

"A subject of such comfort to us! After giving you a glimpse that I intend giving you (beginning of the circular) of the society, our own diocese, you will see for yourselves that we need to have men who are really animated and filled with God's Spirit, men who are regular, exemplary and completely apostolic, men who are refashioned and recreated in the image of our holy Rules. God himself will give us these men if our Congregation and its ordinances are our rule of life, our centre of attraction, our bonds of unity..."

"By observing them faithfully, entirely, constantly and with great love, we shall possess the strength of God himself..." I can do everything in him who strengthens me..." p 30-31 Circular to Missionaries in India, Allinges, dated, 28-03-1855]

To be faithful to the Rule, even when occupied with the work of the Mission is a great matter and a great source of consolation; however, the letter of the law is not enough, often mere external and material obedience becomes difficult to observe; it is rather the spirit of the Rule, the renouncement of self, the sacrifice of one's comforts, one's conveniences, to be all to all everywhere and always, in the smallest things: to be like the grain of wheat thrown into the earth. Charity and gentleness towards our neighbour are the daughters of the love of God. Read often II Cor. XIII : Charity is patient..."

"You know and you fear your weakness, thank God for it, be attentive to the voice of the Spirit who dwells in you, and take care not to sadden him even when he makes the smallest reproach to you, he is so delicate; be mindful of

your behaviour, especially when you are at table and in your talk with outsiders in the tribunal (of confession) and in the pulpit". p 31-32 [let to Fr. Petitjean, 05-12-1844

In well made rules nothing should be considered as useless, everything in them is substantial. This is the fundamental characteristic of our Rules. Let us do everything that we can to observe them as perfectly as possible". p 32 [let to Fr. Jean-Marie TISSOT, Superior, Vizagapatam, 06-12-1849]

"I demand, from this very moment, in virtue of the holy obedience to which we have all vowed, that all the members of the Congregation should make it point to observe with all their heart the letter as well as the spirit of our holy Rules, in conformity with our Institute. I demand that in your quality of Superior of the House, you face up to the responsibilities in the task assigned to you in our house at Vizagapatam, for example concerning the practice of fraternal correction at least once a month, in conformity with the article "of the Commons" for each month, in public or in private". p 33 [let to Fr. Jean-Marie TISSOT, Superior, Vizagapatam, 06-07-1849

"When I exhort you to perfection, to love, to the esteem of your holy Rules, to fidelity in their observance, I exhort myself at the same time. I reproach myself for my infidelities and then my courage is rekindled, my confidence grows, I count on the purity and the fervour of your prayers and sacrifices." p. 77, [let to Sr Jeanne BELEVILLE, 16-06-1847]

### **TESTIMONY [Of /on PMM and on Mission- / Preaching Team] :**

"I owe my vocation to the holiness of my mother. ... I repent for not having written anything about my mother. My God, how much I owe her. No, no, she was not an ordinary woman." [Jean REY, p,6]

Fr. Guillet, Superior, and Fr. REY professor of the Major Seminar of Chambéry, ) were priests that Peter admired. Fr. Rey preached retreat in preparation for his ordination Peter Mermier was ordained priest on 21 March 1813. "Thirty years later he wrote in his diary : 'On 21<sup>st</sup>. September 1942 feast of St. Matthew, Apostle, I had the happiness and consolation of celebrating the Sacred Mysteries in the chapel of the major Seminary of Chambéry, at the spot where the precious remains of Fr. Guillet, my, former superior and director of the Seminary rests. It is there that God of all goodness had offered and granted me so many graces; it is there that he gave me such wise and good masters, and the most fervent and exemplary seminarists as friends". [Jean REY, 1960, p. 17]

Testimony of a reputed doctor who attended on him during his last illness : "The care I take of my respectable patient is for me an act of gratitude; I acquit one part of my debt which I had contracted when I began my studies at Melan". [Jean REY, 1960, p. 17]

Herewith, Fr. Gaiddon's illustration of Fr. Mermier – Educator : "He combined kindness with firmness. He was loved and feared. He had at his disposal many means to sop roguish pranks and thwart the schemes of ringleaders, an almost impossible race to be ever subdued in colleges. For the little ones, he had the tenderness of a mother. Sometimes he made their beds, he helped them to get rid of many unwelcome and very numerous insects – bed companions, which in summer attempted very cruelly to curtail the sleep of the students; he even combed the hair of the youngest ones. [Jean REY, 1960, p. 16-17]

He returned to La Feuillette on 27<sup>th</sup>. July 1843 to a hearty welcome. Fr. Gaiddon greeted him with the words "Father and Friend", "Founder and Master", "Leader and Model", and punning on his name Peter, he added "you are the rock of our Community." Indeed, Fr. Memier was more than the founder of a community, he was its soul. Like the yeast, his spirit of zeal penetrated it and sustained it in fervor and in action. Was not the success of the Missions and the retreats preached in Savoy the principal alleged motive for obtaining the "great Commendation" from Rome for the Congregation ? Jean REY, 1960, p. 70

"This man of God who had no other eloquence than that of simplicity, lucidity and conviction has attracted a greater number of listeners to his instructions." Testimony of Fr. Mettral, Parish Priest of Magland. Jean REY, 1960, p. 72

"My uncle was not a man of eloquence, but of conviction, a man of faith, an organizer; he was very practical, and all that he did was marked with the stamp of good administration." Testimony of Marie Chautemps, Fr. Mermier's nephew. Jean REY, 1960, p. 72



“It was Monsieur le Superieur (Fr. Mermier) who preached the opening of the Mission. His name is blessed a thousand times in Arbusigny. What memories it recalls, what reflections it brings to birth ! It is pronounced with respect, with delight ! ... What a prodigious talent he had for bringing the highest truths down to the level of the simplest minds ! On his lips especially God’s Word became that two edged sword of which St. Paul speaks.” ... *After narrating the touching sermons delivered on the concluding day (on the last things) and the blessing and erection of the Cross as a Memento of the Mission, the Seminarist concludes* : “Thanks be to this man of the Cross ! Thanks be to his venerable and worthy colleagues – ever so powerful in works and words.” [FROM a little book : “An Account of the Mission at Arbusigny, in May and June 1840”, written by P. VACHOUX, Seminarian], (Duval, Mermier, p. 161, 164)]

Letter to Fr. Gaiddon from the curate of Abondance, after the Mission of 1835 : “The mission worked wonders – everyone says so and, what’s more, everyone shows it.” (Duval, Mermier, p. 165)]

Letter to Fr. Mermier from the Parish Priest of La Borne, after the mission of July, 1836, preached under the leadership of Fr. Martin : “Thank you for your kindness in sending me four apostles. Their fruit is abundant – not only in my parish but also in all the surrounding areas – to the extent of attracting not merely the people, but also the clergy. ... I am overjoyed but also a little fearful, because I am aware of not knowing how to keep up what has been so well done. ... Many people feared that the Mission would clash with their work, but at present they are thanking me for what we are doing now. Each one admits that none of their affairs has been disrupted. ... In my opinion, the mission has been fully successful. ... Each parish priest wants to have you one day and they often pay us a visit. I haven’t time to tell you everything, but just this to ask you for a further favour – to preach an eight-day retreat next year”. (Duval, Mermier, p. 166)]

Letter (dated 16-02-1838) of Parish Priest of Designy : “As regards your way of conducting a mission, I believe it is always superior to that followed by others. You have done well in resorting to a novena after each mission to call for perseverance. It preserves and greatly strengthens conversions.” (Duval, Mermier, p. 167)]

Testimony of an eye-witness on Mermier, a teacher : “If *he* loved the children, *they* worshipped him. They pressed round him, climbing on his shoulders, while others clung to the skirt of his soutane. [Duval, Mermier, p. 192]

We greet you in the name of *father* and *friend*. We greet you with the name of *founer, master, leader* and *model*. To you it has been given to confirm your brethren ... to rally them and hold them together. [cf. Duval, p. 215]

He outlives himself to be for each of you a living model of all priestly virtues. [Bishop Claude MAGNIN of Annecy]

A quarter of an hour of conversation with this man of God does more to lead a soul to recollection than would days of preaching. [Mother Louise BLANC, Superior General, Sisters of St. Joseph of Annecy]

“Oh father, if you could see this blessed face, this blissful face ! If you could listen to his words ! There remains only the love of God in his heart, only the vision of faith in his mind; there remains no human contrivances. He repeats to us to do good, that religious must be like water, having neither colour nor form, nor taste; that nothing is more harmful in the work for souls than an attachment to a way of seeing and doing. And when we told him not to try to work, he replied : ‘And what will we do if we only talk, today conversations are just empty.’ A quarter of an hour of conversation with this man of God does more to lead a soul to recollection than would days of preaching. [Mother Louise BLANC, Superior General, Sisters of St. Joseph of Annecy, writing, after a visit to Mermier at La Feuillette, to Fr. Larive, missionary in India] Jean REY, p. 97

“Allow me to tell you how happy I am to see here your very worthy leader, your venerable and holy superior, this man of faith who had founded, directed and sustained your dear Congregation in such a flourishing state from its very start. He allowed the Spirit and Breath of God to have dominion over everything and everywhere; Who by him has done such great things. How happy am to see that Divine Providence has left him as it were to outlive himself in order to be for each one of you a living model of all priestly virtues; to survive like a brilliant torch to guide you in the exalted paths of evangelical perfection; to survive finally by miracle, in order to make him enjoy at the end of a full saintly life, the progress of his children in Jesus Christ and to find in his charitable works an anticipated recompense of his indefatigable endeavours which have prepared for him such a rich crown in heaven ! Thank the good God, my dear Fathers, for such a grace, just as I myself thank him for such a consolation”. [Eulogy of Fr. Mermier, pronounced by Bishop Magnin of Annecy at La Feuillette after the religious profession of 4 nuns, 08 Sept. 1862 ?] Jean REY, p. 101

"What is it that I hear? One of these ordinary observations: Yes, but don't I know to suffer as I ought to? What! you don't know, you cannot, if not with your heart, at least with the mouth to say: yes, yes, my excellent doctor, you know what is needed for the make-up of your spouse: wash her in cold water or in hot, as you wish, so long as she is beautiful." p. 68 [let to Sister Jeanne BELLEVILLE, 07-04-1856]

"Our religion is divine. ... it is the work of God, it is his blessing. "From man's side, what is great, worthy and consequently perfect, is adoration, this entire and absolute submission to the supreme Will of God, this universal conformity of our thoughts, our feelings and our actions to the commands, dispositions of the divine Providence, to his good pleasure.

"Benefit from this new and terrible trial which this divine Providence sends you. "Don't waste your time trying to scrutinise God's impenetrable designs. Adore and kiss several times a day God's fatherly hand which strikes you, it is infallibly for your greater good. "The great St. Paul assures us this when he says that everything works for the good of those who love God. And St. Augustine adds to this inspired message: everything – even evils, even sins like those of Magdalen, of St. Peter, when one profits from them, as they did, to become more humble and more penitent. p. 68-69 [let to Sister Jeanne BELLEVILLE, 27-08-1857]

"Man proposes but God disposes; our lives are in his hands; he is a good Father, we couldn't be better off anywhere else except in the arms of his divine Will. I say then: May the most high and the most loving will of God be done." p 71 [Let to the Community at La Feuillette, 29-01-1843]

"If I appear to ask for something better, it is mainly because of my work. "It will be as it pleases God" but finally, from this time and always I remain small and miserable, repeating in spirit and in the heart: it is good to have been humiliated." p 72 [Personal Notes, 23-07-1859]

"I hope that it will be thus for the greater glory of God, for my improvement for the past and future and if it please Jesus, Mary and Saint Francis de Sales." p 72 [Personal Notes, 18-08-1859]

"I desire to go and visit our Sisters in their different stations. "But I must hasten to add that man proposes and God disposes. My health has not improved yet, I feel a great need to make myself less fussy; this applies to things, to external works: God alone knows what is worthy of love or of hate. To God alone honour and glory, praise to Mary". p 74 [let to Mother Claudine ECHERNIER, 18-05-1860]

"I have just written you some lines, but not without pain. I couldn't do any better. God be blessed.

"I feel good today, I am writing freely to you. What would you say to me? God be blessed, you would say, and me too. But then, would you believe that I ought to, or least that I should have wanted to prefer these sufferings if I did not have my responsibility. I hasten to leave everything to the Will of God." p 74 [let to Mother Claudine ECHERNIER, 10-02-1860]

## VIRTUE

Virtue is found in externals animated with the spirit of faith and devotion. We must bear *fruit* not merely *flowers*. [Novena Notes let p. 10, 17]

If we do not have all the virtues manifested in our letters, we desire them and desire to inspire them to our dear confreres. We speak thus in our letters to give edification, to become better. Isn't it a duty on our part? Otherwise, we should keep mum, or speak like worldly people of business, of useless things, only giving compliments. [Let. Fr. J. THEVENET, April, 1855]

The love of God changes everything into gold. ... Charity and gentleness to our neighbor are the offspring of our love of God. [AM, Letters,

"It is quite certain that virtue is not found in external ceremonies if these are not accompanied by a spirit of faith and piety. Even confessions and frequent communions are not enough to render souls more perfect; one can make a wrong use of them. You have to consider good works; it is by the fruit and not by the flowers that one knows that a tree is good. "These are sure principles: the divine Master repeats them constantly in the Gospel: it is not the one who says: Lord, Lord, who will be saved, but the one who does the will of my Father.' p. 83 Let. To Mother Claudine, 09-04-1852

**CHASTITY :**

Thirdly, regarding CHASTITY\_\_\_: Several among us have received this *salutary and precious favour, almost naturally having been kept away from dangerous occasions, born of parents who were religious and feared God, always from the scandals of the world, having lived poorly*, obliged to work from early morning, at the sweat of our brow. The others are still young, rather inconstant; they have hardly reflected on what goes on within them. I will tell them that to become religious, this very natural chastity does not suffice, they must arrive at chastity of the heart : “Blessed,” said Jesus Christ, “are those who are pure in heart, for they shall see God.” FAMILY ANNALS, I, (pp. 141-142, Annecy, 18 February 1860)

## **DISCERNMENT**

We ought to treat with caution self-love, the susceptibilities of Parishes and inhabitants; we are to adapt the matter which we deal with to actual needs, to wait for the moment of grace and not to put out the wick which is still emitting smoke. We need a truly apostolic patience which knows to make oneself all things to all.

## **COMPASSION : (For sinners @ SFS)**

“See the penitents frequently (says the Directory of the Missionary] every two or three days as far as possible. Don’t receive those who have already started their confession with another confessor ... Have I done right [M. Mermier asked himself] in giving so much rope to these poor sinners, for fear of putting them off confession, of keeping them from the sacraments and of almost making them hostile to religion.” [let of Fr. Mermier to Fr. Gaidon, 24-02-1849]

## **FAITH**

A renewed zeal to form the minds and hearts of these children. Though all are happy with the work and progress of the students, and I myself was satisfied with the answers they gave, still I would have liked the older ones to answer more confidently without hesitation on the principal mysteries, you will not have failed to notice it. *Without faith, it is impossible to please God and without the clear knowledge of the principal mysteries, no one can have faith.* From this we can conclude *how necessary it is for the masters and mistresses of these children to instruct them.*

Yet this is only the first step; faith without good works is not enough. Jesus Christ asks us for our hearts; we must be His and entirely His. He asks us to love Him. He asks for the homage and sacrifices of our heart. It is therefore, to form the hearts that you must work, praying to God, Jesus Christ, Mary, the saints and guardian Angel, the patron saints, for the all the children giving them everywhere good example in the class, in the church, in the parish, in teaching them at every turn.” FAMILY ANNALS, I, Re. Sisters’ behavior among themselves : [p. 149-150, to Sr. Jeanne Belleville, 16 June 1847]

## **HOSPITALITY**

“ You tell me that we will be obliged to be impolite (in receiving poorly, the guests at Les Allinges). We do not deserve this reproach when we offer *gracefully the little* that we possess. The divine Providence does not allow the seed to remain a long time without producing the fruits : *he who gives receives.*” 81 [let. to Fr. CHEMINAL, at Allinges, 10-08-1846]

## **LOVE**

Love your neighbor more than yourself to the extent of giving your life in the image of Jesus Christ. Here is the one thing necessary, here is the *missionary*, here is the *apostle*, here is the true and unique *happiness* of the human person. [let. to Jean THEVENET, 28-07-1852]

## **OBEDIENCE**

OBEDIENCE sanctifies and increases the merits of every sacrifice made, even the smallest. How great a soul is when it wills only *what* God wills, *when* He wills it and in relation to *whomsoever* he wills it. ... We do a lot by doing even

little, if we do it do it when and as He wills. [let. to Fr. Cheminal, 05-01-1843 ... let. to Fr. Delalex, India, 1855] Obedience and love of God change everything into gold. [let to Sr. Louise MERMIER, 07-07-1850]

## **PATIENCE**

Fr Mermier confessed that he practiced patience when things went slowly. “As regards our affairs, they are going slow. I practice patience, I learn a little how to live. When I am preaching Missions, I give orders. Here in Rome, I obey.” [Letter from Rome to Canon Chalamel, Vicar Capitular on January 22, 1843]

I assure you that the beginnings are terrible, moreover, if I do anything, it will be by means of humiliations. All the same, I must praise God much, thank Jesus Christ, his Holy Mother, and the Holy Apostles Peter and Paul. I must take care against the least bitterness of heart. Continue to pray and to have prayers said for me. Since our Congregation has not established itself outside the diocese [of its origin], and it has only house and the members are not many, His Eminence, the Cardinal Prefect of the Bishops and Religious, is not at all of the opinion that we strive for an approbation. His answer came straight, without reading the petition, not even a part of it. Nonetheless, after listening to some explanations about the beginnings of the missions in Savoy, their good effect in the different dioceses of the Duchy, His Eminence declared that if the missionaries of the four dioceses joined together and the four bishops gave their attestations accordingly, the examination of the Constitutions will begin. [From the “Letter to Fr Cheminal on October 29, 1842,”]

All the same, let me say : for twenty years and more I have preached missions. I have often borne many unpleasant things during these exercises, but the most difficult and certainly the most serious with priests to form this society and to prepare the Constitutions and Rules. Often it seemed to me that the work begun was too hard and impossible due to my weakness. Then I took the advice of many wise persons. All were encouraging me to keep up such a useful work. My advisers were not only diocesan priests but religious among whom were many Fathers of the Society of Jesus. [From the “Petition to the Holy Father drafted on October 29, 1842,”] “We need a truly apostolic patience which knows to make oneself all things to all.” 70 [let to Fr. Clavel, from Chamonix, 29-10-1850]

“More regularity and devotion. The fruit and success of their ministry depend almost entirely on prayer and good example....More unity and cordiality, one would say integrity [lit. honesty] and patience....Never any harsh words, hurting words, abuses, sulking between one another.” [“Advice to Teachers (Personal Notes) on September 7, 1856,”]

## **POVERTY**

Secondly, regarding POVERTY : Our sisters have the honour and good fortune of being born poor, they have acquired the habit of living poorly from their childhood. It is not difficult for them to continue to live thus. But to be poor in spirit and heart, to love the religious poverty of the Son of God who had nowhere to lay his head – poorer than the birds of the air and the foxes of the dens behold, this is the life of the Daughters of the Cross, who ask for nothing and refuse nothing; what disinterestedness, what virtue ! *This is not learnt in a day, not even in two or three years. Perfect detachment is the work of qa whole life.* May the people who are born poor think of this seriously. FAMILY ANNALS, I, (pp. 141-142, Annecy, 18 February 1860)

## **PRUDENCE :**

(There is much to do : repairs, building, ...) “You are on the spot to see. In spite of the urgency, and all that I have said, I cannot undertake things above my strength, and thus expose myself to be considered imprudent. *God does not exact from us more than we can do; cut off then, or correct even the propositions as you think best.*” FAMILY ANNALS, I, Re. Mermier’s SOLICITUDE FOR EVERY DETAIL IN SERVICE : [p. 157, To Mother Claudine prior to setting up community in the Parish Chaumont, 1848]

“Tell Fr. Petitjean thagt first of all he has to be reasonable. It’s not enough for him to be prudent in the mission of Lovagny. If necessary, it’s better to call a helper than to expose himself to illness. ... We need it equally for our souls and bodies.” 08 [let to Fr. Clavel, 08-02-1852]

“ I wish to tell you something about *prudence* and simplicity. The Divine Master, in the instructions which he addressed to his apostles told them : *Behold, I am sending you as lambs among wolves.* And certainly, as long as we are

sheep, we conquer the enemy easily. When, indeed we pass into the nature of wolves, then we are conquered; then, we have no protection from the shepherd who feeds not the wolves but the sheep. ... This is the lesson of the Master, of the sovereign Missionary. He institutes the apostolate, he sends his apostles, he communicates to them His powers, his assistance is assured for them. But, on what conditions ? Among other virtues, He recommends to them : *prudence* and *simplicity*.” 65 [let to Fr. Avrillon, in India, 18-04-1855]

“Among other [virtues] He recommends to them *prudence* and *simplicity*. ‘Be prudent and simple’ What is prudence, if not foresight, counsel , vigilance, purpose ? What is simplicity, if not the sincerity of speech, frankness, a certain confidence, saying with the mouth only what one has in the heart, without vengeance ? These two virtues are necessary, one to the other. In an apostle, they are to walk together, they cannot go one without the other. Prudence, says St. Jerome, without simplicity is malice, and, simplicity without reason is called foolishness.” 65 [let to Fr. Avrillon, in India, 18-04-1855]

“I will not tell you anything about the consequences which the political movement produce on the populations. Although they are still religious, we stand in need of a very special assistance of the spirit of prudence, of discernment, of direction which God gives only to fervent prayer, to a holy and exemplary life of the ministers of the Gospel. We ought to treat with caution self-love, the susceptibilities of parishes and inhabitants; we are to adapt the matter which we deal with to actual needs, to wait for the moment of grace and not to put out the wick which is still emitting smoke.” 70 [let to Fr. Clavel, from Chamonix, 29-10-1850]

## **RENUNCIATION / MORTIFICATION :**

May Jesus Christ and His Holy Mother make this star to rise over us in order to lead us also to His holy crib, so that there we may learn to proclaim Him as our God by the incense of our prayer, as our King with the gold of our almsgiving and our zeal for our neighbor, as our Saviour and our model by the myrrh of our mortifications and by the faithful observance of our Rules. FAMILY ANNALS, I, Re. New Year : [p. 178, Annecy, to the Sisters of Chaumont, 6 January, Epiphany 1852]

## **SIMPLICITY**

“The first thing to observe in writing a letter is that what you write should be reasonable. You should write as you think and as you speak, as if you were to say by word of mouth what you are putting in paper. ” 14 Let. To his niece Sr. Louise 07-07-1850

“As I reach this advanced age almost spent up, I share with you a profound regret not to have loved my God and even have spoken only a little of divine love. Besides what could have I said of this divine science ? The love of God is a practical science which one acquires and one does not preach efficaciously except through works.” 24 Personal Notes, 10-05-1853

“If I appear to ask for an improvement in my health, it is mainly because of my work.” 26 [Personal Notes, 23-07-1859]

“Among other [virtues] He recommends to them *prudence* and *simplicity*. ‘Be prudent and simple’ What is prudence, if not foresight, counsel , vigilance, purpose ? What is simplicity, if not the sincerity of speech, frankness, a certain confidence, saying with the mouth only what one has in the heart, without vengeance ? These two virtues are necessary, one to the other. In an apostle, they are to walk together, they cannot go one without the other. Prudence, says St. Jerome, without simplicity is malice, and, simplicity without reason is called foolishness.” 65 [let to Fr. Avrillon, in India, 18-04-1855]

“It is a very dangerous temptation in ministry for all, but especially for the Youth, to consider as true zeal a certain ardour of temperament and taste, an ambition which prefers works of brilliance to ordinary works, to simplicity and to the modesty of Jesus Christ” 66bis [Let. to Fr. Jean-Francois Balmard, 17-04-1855]

“Here is a counsel which I give you with a grain of salt to be on your guard against the poison of vainglory. Continue in the same way without looking back. Always apply yourself to be more simple; *be simple as the doves*. Purify

your intentions more and more : *if your eyes were simple*. Yes, according to the manner of St. Francis de Sales. ” 108 [let to Fr. Tissot, 12-09-1847]

“Be on your guard against the poison of vain-glory; work at being ever more simple, purify your intentions ever more and more – yes, like St. Francis de Sales.” [to Fr. Tissot, 12-09-1847, (Duval, Mermier, p. 114)]

“Can’t you say to our Lord : ‘Yes, yes, you know what is wanting to your bride’s finery. Wash her with water that is cold or hot, as you wish, as long as she is fine to behold.’” [to Sr. Jeanne Belleville, 1856, (Duval, Mermier, p. 115)]

“One’s feelings at the sight of these Indian folk are inexpressible. Everything is surprising to a European coming for the first time. (In honour of the feast) there was a truly curious and extraordinary procession which didn’t finish until eleven-thirty and set before us all the boisterousness, solemnity and immensity of Indian gatherings. Everything took place so earnestly and reverently.” [to Fr. Mermier from Fr. Thevenet (Duval, Mermier, p. 123)]

“The inhabitants of *Le Chatelard* have shown me some consideration. I thank them for it. But rather than pay them compliments, which I scarcely know how to, I told them once or twice some things which were a little hurtful to the middle classes. No one passed any comment. I don’t think those few words did any harm”. [Notebooks, (Duval, Mermier, p. 114)]

## SURRENDER

“It was quite sad to see Sister Louise leaving Chgavanod. Though my mind was made up, I must confess that I was keenly affected, but the will of God before everything, in everything and always.” 06 Let. To Sr. Jeanne Belleville, 30-06-1856

“I embrace all of you, missionaries and brothers, and I pray the Sovereign King whom we, with the Magi, to accept us all with our little gifts.” 09 From Rome, 1843

“I would like to make a round of visits to our Sisters in the different stations. But I hasten to say that man proposes and God disposes. My health is not yet restored. I feel ever more the enormous need which I have of rendering myself less bad as regards things, external activities.” 27 Let to Mother Claudine, 18-05-1860

“Man proposes and God disposes, we are in the hands of God. He is a good Father. We can be better nowhere else than in the arms of his divine will. I say therefore : May this most holy and most lovable will be done.” 28 [Let to Fr. Cheminal, 29-01-1843]

“God who is all powerful, who has no need of anyone, does not demand miracles from us. They are not in our power. He expects some works or at least our good will. May He graciously give us this will which is the source of interior peace, which prepares the soul to receive the communications of its God and makes it ready for the greatest sacrifices.” 29 Let to Fr. Cheminal, 05-01-1843

“How great a person is when the person wills only what God wills, when he wills it and in relation to whomsoever he wills it.” 29 Let to Fr. Cheminal, 05-01-1843

“I resign myself perfectly and joyfully to the holy will of God who wishes me to be here [at Rome]. I am sincerely grateful to it.” 31 Let to Msgr. Rendu, 28-03-1843

“How did Mary show herself ? How are the marvels continued ? What did I myself experience on this occasion. I cannot answer ! Nothing extraordinary, if one may say so because I need to keep myself humble and modest. I do not deserve any favours, I would not know how to preserve them. No, I hardly think of it, I wish nothing but to please God : is it not everything for me ? ” 41 Personal Notes, 23-07-1859

“... because I have so much need of infinite mercy of my God and of the protection of the Most Holy Virgin, I hope with confidence.” 56 Personal Notes, 21-11-1859

“Let us wait for the hour of the harvest, let us draw profit from all our temptations, even the least. Holy be the name of God, may His Kingdom come, not ours, may His will be done, not ours. There is our daily bread. The rest is temptation, sin and pain.” 64 Let to Fr. Dupont, at Vizag, 28-07-1852

“In concluding, it occurs to me to ask myself why the divine Providence has reserdrved for us and sends us very difficult times. Is it in his mercy or in his justice ? When they alienate the strong ones of Israel, what will the weak do ? When they burn the foundations of the edifice, who will be strong enough to sustain the house ? Whilst awaiting further reflections which I cannot give now, here are some at least : It seems to me that perhaps it is the time, more than ever, to be holy, unstained, separated from sinners, made higher than the heavens. Our ministry demands that we offer ourselves to the people, to the society, like other St. Francis de Sales, totally disinterested, burning with zeal for the salvation of people, full of compassion at the sight of the evils which make the people desolate without amusing ourselves to lose our time in useless oratory, with a legitimate mission, an irreprouchable doctrine and above all, a good life.” 75 [Fr. Gaiddon, 24-02-1949]

“To be where God wants, with the job he asks of each one, suffering the evils which he sends us, obedient to what pleases him – there you have true wisdom” [to Bro. Charles Gaillard, India, 1850, (Duval, Mermier, p. 113)]

“Each one is to have the purest intention of pleasing God alone. Pray for your Superior [adds Monsieur Mermier humbly] so that he may try to begin at least, late though it is, to practise what he preaches to his masters [namely, conformity to God’s will].” [to Fr. Tissot, 12-09-1847, (Duval, Mermier, p. 114)]

“God knows gthe amount of reputation I need. Do I deserve anything better than the one I’m given. I don’t think so. God who is supremely good, is my Judge. I’m in his divine hands.” [to Fr. Gaiddon, 1841, (Duval, Mermier, p. 114)]

Fr. Mermier admired Bishop Neyret, whose judicious level-headedness, unfailling zeal and humility he valued. He thought him to be a model religious, a *veritable incarnation of the Rule*. “Your dilemmas over India and the state of its wretched inhabitants are alarming. You should, as you did in your letter to His Lordship, finish by something encouraging. All that Heaven has done for this Mission in so short a time, the sympathy – I should even say the zeal and the sacrifices of our religious priests as well as of the faithful of our Diocese for this good work – the devotedness of all the members of our Congregation and finally this peace, this courage which God pours into our souls, are they not sufficiently powerful motives for saying with perfect abandonment : *non secut egvo volo, sed sicut tu; jube et da quod jubes* (‘not my will but yours, command, and give the strength to fulfil your will’)” .” [From Fr. Mermier to Bishop Neyret, 13-06-1848, (Duval, Mermier, p. 209)]

“God is everywhere. We must seek him in every place and continuously. But it is in solitude that he wants us to seek him. La Salette is an amazing proof of that. But how does Mary show herself ? What did I experience myself on this occasion ? Nothing extraordinary, if you please, because I need to keep myself humble and modest. I don’t deserve favours; I wouldn’t know how to preserve them.

All I want is to please God. Isn’t that everything for me ? A year’s life is mine already after my cure; what a blessing !” [Duval, Mermier, p. 273]

Divine Providence never fails those who trust in Him entirely. If He seems to forget us at times in leaving us to fight the tempests and trials, it is the *father of a family, who threshes the grain, who winnows his grain, it is for the good of his chosen ones and for those who love Him.*” FAMILY ANNALS, I, Re. SURRENDER : [p. 192, Allinges, to Mother Foundress, 21 September 1853]

“It is for your own good that the Divine Master asks you for the greatest sacrifices. Even if it is a question of life itself, do not refuse Him anything; after the example of your Divine Model, tell Him : *Yes, my Jesus, as you wish and not as I wish; whatever you wish and not what I wish for.* ... Your whole life has been one of anxieties and trials ... Go on as you have begun. Be always more a Daughter of the Cross, unite all your sufferings with those of Jesus dying on Calvary and of Our Lady of Compassion, standing at his feet.” FAMILY ANNALS, I, Re. Resignation in Sickness : [p. 207-208, Allinges, to Sr. Jeanne Belleville, 17 June 1856]

Will you be able to travel by car soon and leave for Chavanod or Carouge ? Do not be worried with whichever you choose. Give all the possible instructions to Sister Louise, she is worthy of your confidence. It was really a very sad scene when she left Chavanod, although I showed myself firm, I must tell you I was very acutely affected. *But the will of God before all, in everything and always.* It was the refrain of the Divinie Jesus and His Holy Mother. *St. John, our glorious patron preferred the happiness of doing the divine will of God to the joy of going to see our Lord in person.* Make your abode in this impenetrable fort and you will be invincible and victorious. FAMILY ANNALS, I, Re. Consolations and encouragement : [p. 212, Chavanod, to Sr. Jeanne Belleville, ? 1856]

Do not waste your time in uselessly scrutinizing his unfathomable designs. Many times a day, adore and kiss the fatherly hand which strikes you. It is certainly for your greater good. *The great St. Paul confirms it by saying that everything works together for good for those who love God. St. Augustine adds these words to this inspired statement : after the example of Peter and Magdalene, even evil and sin can be made use of, to be more humble and penitent.* FAMILY ANNALS, I, Re. Surrender : [p. 232, Pougny, to Sr. Jeanne Belleville, 27 August 1857]

“It is not enough for you to have left everything...to have laboured much.... Other trials are necessary for the disciple of Christ, the missionary: he has still to be refined...through his infirmities....Accept, then, with confidence the chalice which the paternal hand of God offers you; rejoice at being found worthy to suffer.... [Letter to Fr Lavorel on April 17, 1855]

“What a motive for gratitude, for zeal! of a holy zeal, humble, disinterested, prudent, gentle and patient. It is not, then, a passionate zeal, ambitious, impetuous, angry, overbearing, blind, imprudent, selfish, totally human, carnal jealous, curious, full of vanity etc.” [Letter to Fr Lavorel on July 28, 1852]

“My God how weak we all are in virtue and how we need to be strengthened and renewed ! Oh ! May God give you an abundance of His grace, may He inspire you with an ever greater religious spirit to communicate it to others. You know : Rome was not built in a day !

Nothing is in working order here : everything is at a standstill except the railway. People’s consciences are frozen. There is death everywhere; death almost everywhere ! The sad death due to sin and religious indifference. Oh ! what a great need I have of someone to pray for my intentions. May God help you all – sisters and novices. ... Spend the Lenten season well to arrive at a new Resurrection. FAMILY ANNALS, I, Re. Regrets : [p. 244-245, Pougny, to his niece Sr. Louise, 24 February 1858]

## Z E A L

Already as professor at Melan, Fr. Mermier felt strongly attracted to the faraway mission lands. It was, then, not surprising that he devoted his leisure moments while in Rome to the study of the famous book on geography author by Malta BRUN. Mermier himself notes in his Diary : “Although this sort of work seems a little irrelevant to my ministry, apart from the knowledge it give me, I make use of it to inflame my *zeal* towards so many unfortunate countries buried in darkness and ignorance, in misery and sin. It has convinced me more than ever of the need tgo have *missionaries* who are filled with the spirit of God, who pray, who study, who mortify themselves, who love their brethren and also the women religious who love our Lord and his holy Cross.” Jean REY, 1960, p. 73

“ *‘I do not seek my glory’* (Jn. 8/30). You see that my intention is to speak with you about zeal for our common edification. **It is charity** in its splendor, in its most perfect brilliance.” 66 [Let. to Fr. Francis Larive, 17-04-1855]

“But what perfections (does zeal) exact from its ministers ? I reduce them all to one : *‘Behold we have left everything.’* It is absolute and total renunciation for the sake of following Jesus – *et secuti sumus te* – and we have followed you. Renunciation interior, spiritual and material, sacerdotal and apostolic – *as if possessing nothing* (I Cor. 7/30). Renunciation total and generous, capable of making us overcome every difficulty and the greatest obstacles; (renunciation) for which death is a gain and the summit to happiness. It is zeal which made St. Paul say : *Who is led into sin and I am not indignant ?* (II Cor. 11/29). ... Renunciation of every self-interest – does not seek what is one’s own – zeal disinterested and detached from all mingling of self-love so as to be happy that the work is done by another rather than oneself.” 66 [Let. to Fr. Francis Larive, 17-04-1855]

Zeal that motivated the pioneering MSFS missionaries was to go forward and onward – being born to a new culture, owning and being owned by the culture of the new land : “Our motherland is now the District of Visakhapatnam. India is our Europe.”

We must first exercise *zeal* for ourselves, for our own holiness. ... If we wish to kindle divine fire in the hearts of others, our own heart must be on fire first. [pg. 11, No. 18]

If we desire to ignite the fire of God’s love in the hearts of others, we need to be burning with divine ardour ourselves. It is only zeal for one’s own sanctification that can lead to zeal towards others. . [Fr. J. LAVOREL, Kamptee, 28-07-1852]



The character of true zeal – supernatural, apostolic, perfectly disinterested is *patience, resignation, serenity*. Fr. J-F. BALMAND, 17-04-1855]

It is a very dangerous temptation in ministry – especially for Youth – to consider as true zeal a certain ardour of temperament and taste, an ambition which prefer works of brilliance to ordinary works, to simplicity and to the modesty of Jesus Christ. [Fr. Dupont, Visakhapatnam, 28-07-1852]

Fr Mermier understands patience as one of the characteristics of a holy zeal. “What a motive for gratitude, for zeal! of a holy zeal, humble, disinterested, prudent, gentle and patient. It is not, then, a passionate zeal, ambitious, impetuous, angry, overbearing, blind, imprudent, selfish, totally human, carnal jealous, curious, full of vanity etc.”

**The true qualities of zeal** are to be understood. Jesus Christ himself was made its master. It is from this ineffable source that we ought to draw. *I have given you an example, that as I have done, thus you may also do.* To draw profit from this example of Our Lord Jesus Christ, and of the lessons of this divine Master, we should begin by having *some zeal for ourselves* for our own sanctification. If we wish that sinners weep over their sins, we ought to weep over ourselves and over the sins of others. [Fr. J. LAVOREL, 28-07-1852]

**Inaugural Message of Bishop Peter-Joseph REY :** "I shall speak to you about your duties in three words: Study Saint Francis de Sales, imitate his virtues, build-up your method of direction upon his, be full of kindness towards sinners. You will find this method in his letters. You will find the riches of his heart in his Treatise on The Love of God, sublime theology, admirable fabric of comparisons to throw a beam of light on truth and make it penetrate in the most hardened heart. Read these pages burning with the most ardent charity.

People generally speak of the gentleness of Saint Francis de Sales; and they are right. But according to me it does not bring out fully his characteristic trait. His gentleness appears to me to be but a means of exercising his zeal. **HIS CHARACTERISTIC TRAIT IS ZEAL.**

You are right to take as your motto : "To God alone be honour and glory" (Soli Deo honor et gloria) Along with gentleness have a strong zeal against vice.

I recommend to you as much knowledge as virtue. You can have zeal without knowledge, but this zeal is incapable of doing any good; it certainly is not what can do any lasting good". p. 6 [Register of La Feuillette, p. 26-27 (preserved in the MSFS Central Archives)]

**Disinterested ZEAL :** "I know perfectly well that in spite of all the good work that you are doing and want to do, you are unhappy because you feel that you can not do more; I think it's a good thing; I thank God for having blessed you with an ardent zeal. I must however tell you that true zeal, a zeal that is perfectly disinterested, is **patient, resigned, serene,**(charity is patient, hopes in all circumstances. It may be that God is using these trials to purify your zeal by burning away all alloys and the craving for self-satisfaction. (Christ did not take delight in himself...); You have to be convinced that conversion is the work of grace...(It is the Lord who illumines the blind, it is he who raises downtrodden). True disciples of Christ **should proclaim with the heart and the mouth** (we are but unprofitable servants); let's learn to wait for the time of harvesting. May God's name be made holy, may his kingdom come and not ours, may his will be done, and not ours. Everything else is temptation, sin and unhappiness". p 17-18 [let Fr. Dupont in Vizag, 24-02-1852]

**Supernatural ZEAL :** "Oh God, you have filled your friends with honour"(Ps.138) "What astonishing proof of God's friendship towards us! Disinterested friendship, generous, tender and attentive **friendship;** efficacious from the part of this divine benefactor.

Reason for thanksgiving for a zeal that is holy, humble, disinterested, prudent, gentle, patient, not a zeal that is passionate, ambitious, impetuous, choleric, quick-tempered, blind, imprudent, self-seeking, all human, carnal, jealous, curious, full of vanity and so on..." p 19 [let to Fr. Joseph LAVOREL, 28-07-1852]

**Jesus – Model of ZEAL :** "In order to learn from the example of Jesus Christ and from the lessons from this divine Master, we have to start from *a zeal towards our own selves*. If we want that sinners should repent of their sins, we should shed tears over our own sins. (Weep over yourselves!)

Example of St. Ambrose. If we want to ignite the fire of God's love in the hearts of men, we should be the first to burn with these divine ardours. It is the zeal we have towards our own selves that will urge us on to have zeal towards others". p 20 [let to Fr. Joseph LAVOREL, 28-07-1852]

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