

INSTRUMENT IN THE HAND OF GOD

CANON CONSTANT GUILLAUME VAN CROMBRUGGHE

1789 - 1865

FOUNDER OF THE DAUGHTERS OF MARY AND JOSEPH

TERESA A. CLEMENTS D. M. J.

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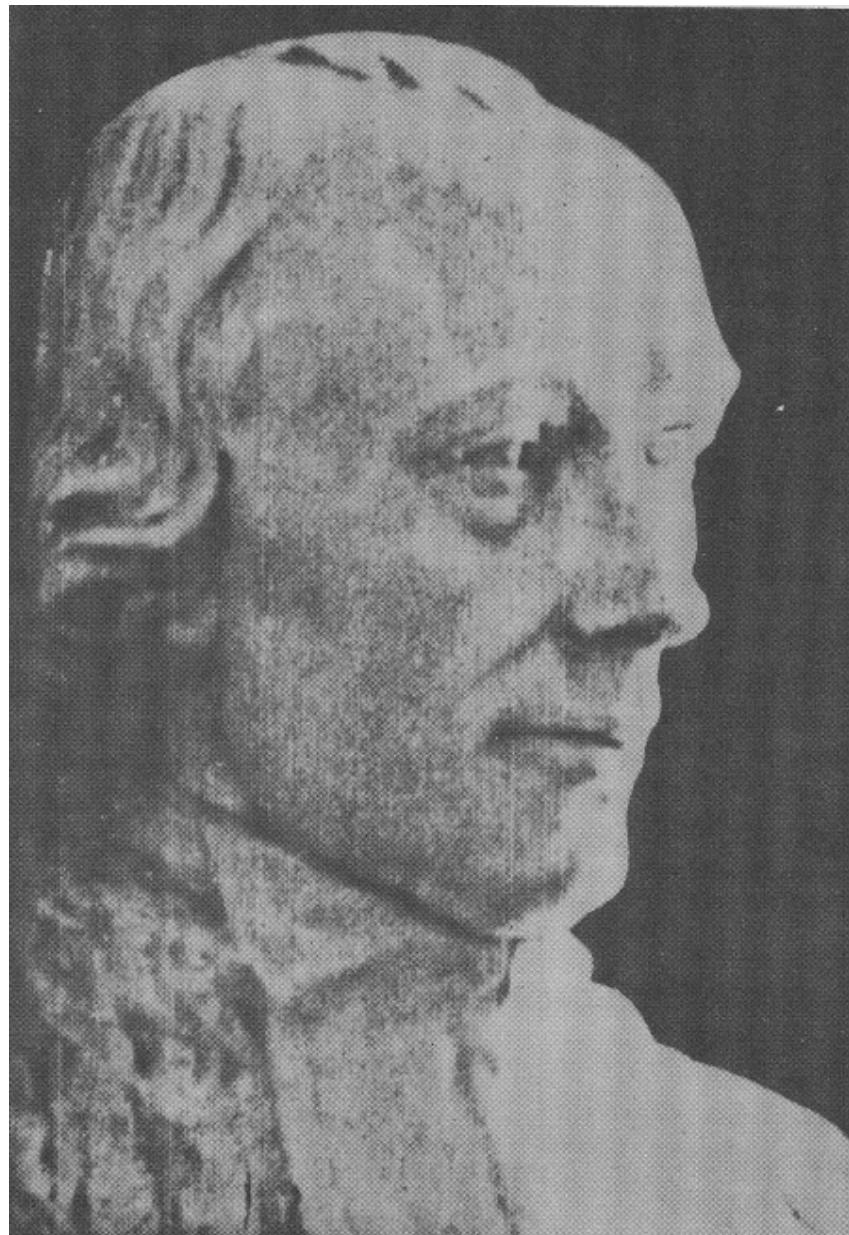
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The spirit by which I wish to see you animated
resides essentially in unlimited devotion
to Jesus Christ, His Church and all your brothers

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When writing acknowledgements for the presentation of a doctoral dissertation there are inevitably many people who do not appear by name. With the publication of this volume I wish to thank in a particular way the recent archivists of the Institute. Each has made her unique contribution that made it possible for this type of research to be undertaken. So I thank Sisters Jeanne Devedec, who first brought order out of a certain confusion; Barbara Batten (R.I.P.), who compiled the material with a new understanding of today's world; Simone Vandensteene, who undertook the monumental task of transcription of the letters of the Founder; Alice Nugent, who brought the ordering of the archives up to date and unearthed new material and Cathleen McCarthy who continues the good work today.

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Feast of the Martyrs of England and Wales,
Rome, 1983.

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GENERAL INDEX

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INTRODUCTION:

Constant Guillaume van Crombrugghe (1789 - 1865), canon of Saint Bavon of the Cathedral of Gent, Founder of the Daughters of Mary and Joseph, the Sisters of Saint Joseph, the Sisters of Mary and Joseph and the Josephites, was a man who was deeply involved in the society in which he lived. His was an age of great political upheaval and van Crombrugghe took an active part in the development of his country, Belgium, particularly during the years leading up to its independence (1830). Priest, educator, politician and founder, he was recognised in his day as being a man of wisdom and of spiritual maturity.

The present volume is substantially the first part of the doctoral dissertation entitled "Instruments of Mercy. A study of the spirituality of Canon Constant Guillaume van Crombrugghe, Founder of the Daughters of Mary and Joseph". The second half of the thesis was published in 1982 entitled "Instruments of Mercy", and it studies the question of what it means to be such an instrument. It deals with the spirituality of Canon van Crombrugghe as proposed to the Daughters of Mary and Joseph through his personal letters, the various Constitutions of the Congregation and the Spiritual Instructions that the Founder addressed to the Sisters.¹

The present volume presents a biographical outline of the Founder and a short history of the first fifty years of the Congregation. This follows a chronological order. A brief historical presentation sets the scene to introduce the van Crombrugghe family. Then follows a study of the Fathers of the Faith, the educators of Constant while he was at school in Amiens, France. Possible sources of influence on his spiritual development are underlined here.

The study continues by examining the influence on the young van Crombrugghe of his uncle, Canon Huleu, who was his spiritual director. There follows an examination of the seminary in Gent where van Crombrugghe spent three years during a time of persecution in the Church.

Chapters three and four consider the life of the Founder under the headings priest, educator, founder, Diocesan spokesman and politician as well as studying the early years of the Institute. The various Rules and Constitutions where we find the main themes of the spirituality of van Crombrugghe emphasized are also examined in these chapters.

The spirituality of any person is grounded in the social and political climate in which their life is lived. Both the request of Vatican Council II inviting religious congregations to return to the sources of their spirituality, and the popularity during the last few years of people returning to their roots in order to understand themselves better point this out. For these reasons the present volume is

¹ There are 954 letters of the Founder kept in the archives of the Daughters of Mary and Joseph, Rome. (ADMJR A / 1 - 20. The Rule and Constitutions written during the life-time of the Founder are dated 1918, 1830, 1844, 1864. There are 23 Spiritual Instructions on various subjects (ADMJR A / 21). See also - Appendix V, s. v.

being presented, that is, to help us in our understanding of the spirituality of Canon van Crombrugge, so that we may respond more fully in our present day to his invitation that we become instruments of mercy in the hand of God.

CHAPTER ONE: FAMILY AND EDUCATION

A. IN THE MIDST OF REVOLUTION AND WAR

1. Austrian Rule and the United Belgian Estates (1780 - 90)

It is difficult to imagine a more complex political situation than that of Flanders in the latter half of the 18th century. It was into this complexity and consequent turmoil that Constant Guillaume van Crombrugghe was born in Geraardsbergen (Grammont)¹ in 1789. Flanders, generally known as the Netherlands or Lowlands, was then under the rule of the Austrian Empire.

In 1780, Joseph II succeeded the Empress Maria Theresa as Emperor of Austria. During her despotic reign, Maria Theresa had brought about many reforms in the entire Empire, including that of the educational system, which she separated from the Church so that she could bring it entirely under her control². She attempted to create a national Church, in communion with Rome, but under her direct authority³.

Joseph II followed similar policies. He has been called "the most ardent of the enlightened despots"⁴. For him, the State together with the state machinery was an agent for reform. His reforms, while being progressive, were marred by his inflexibility. He introduced changes in taxation that helped the poor, as well as compulsory secular education. In 1781 he pronounced the "Patent of Toleration" which allowed much greater freedom of worship to all; Lutherans, Calvinists and other Protestant sects. Previously this had never been known and the public was ill-prepared for such freedom⁵.

Along with these reforms, good in themselves, came others that caused problems for the Church. Joseph wished to have full control over all his subjects and so the clergy were forbidden to have direct correspondence with Rome. He even went as far as to claim the right to cancel papal

¹ Throughout, place names will be given in their original Flemish or French forms. Where necessary, the translation will be given. See Introduction, p. v.

² CRAGG, G. R., The Church and the Age of Reason (1648-1789), in the series, The Pelican History of the Church, Book 4; General Editor: O. CHADWICK, (London, Penguin Books, 1970) p. 220.

³ ROGIER, L.-J., "Le Siècle des Lumières et la Révolution (1715 - 1800)", in, Siècle des Lumières, Révolutions, Restaurations, in the Series, Nouvelle histoire de l'Eglise, Book 4, (Paris, Ed. du Seuil, 1966) p. 151.

⁴ CRAGG, G.R., op. cit., p.219.

⁵ Ibid., p. 222.

pronouncements and to insist that before promulgation, any Papal Bulls must be approved by himself. He demanded an oath of allegiance from the Bishops and he took upon himself the re-organisation of the dioceses of the Empire⁶. In an attempt to improve the level of education of the clergy he took over and closed the diocesan seminaries and established five new general seminaries for the Empire, establishing two in the Lowlands, at Leuven (Louvain) and Luxembourg. These were to give a more liberal education to the new generation of clerics; they were also to be directly subject to the Emperor and were therefore a sort of State department⁷.

In 1783, the same year in which he began the centralisation of seminary education, Joseph II suppressed the contemplative monasteries. They were considered "useless" to the new Empire that he was trying to build⁸. The Emperor also wished to reform Church worship, objecting to various "superstitious practices", including visiting places of special devotion on pilgrimage⁹.

Until this period, the Lowlands had enjoyed reasonable autonomy as part of the Austrian Empire. On New Year's Day, 1787, this came to an end when Joseph II issued an edict abolishing the previous administrative and judicial framework. The Estates of the Lowlands thus lost their autonomy. There had already been increasing dissatisfaction with the Emperor's reforms and this edict clearly added to the problem. In defiance of the reforms, the Estates refused to pay their annual subsidies. A conservative lawyer, Henri van der Noot, in April 1787, called on the people to refuse loyalty to the Emperor, on the grounds that he had not honoured his oath towards them¹⁰.

Eventually a volunteer army was formed under a retired colonel, Van der Mersch and a lawyer, Jean-Francois Vonck and it was this army that overcame the Austrians in Brussels, in December 1789¹¹.

Under an uneasy coalition between Van der Noot and the Conservatives ("Statistes") and

⁶ Ibid., pp. 222 - 223. ROGIER, L.-J., op. cit., p. 157. Parishes were reorganised as well as dioceses. In the period 1783 - 1790 more than 800 were newly erected and parish boundaries re-defined.

⁷ CRAGG, G.R., op. cit., p. 223; GARCIA, G. C., Constant Guillaume van Crombrughe, 1789-1865 -- the response of a Christian and an Educator to and within the historical context of the 19th century, Doctoral Dissertation, Louvain, 1980, p. 3. ROGIER, L.-J., op. cit., p. 157.

Rogier states that there were four general seminaries includes, Charismatic Renewal, Rome, C.I.S., 1977.

UND Luxembourg.

⁸ CRAGG, G. R., op. cit., p. 223; GARCIA, G. C., op. cit., p. 3.

⁹ CRAGG, G. R., op. cit., p. 224.

¹⁰ HAAG, H., Les Origines du Catholicisme Libéral en Belgique (1789 - 1839), (Bibliothèque de l'Université, Louvain, 1950), pp. 1 - 77. See also Appendix II, p. v. "Van der Noot".

¹¹ ROGIER, L.-J., op. cit., p. 160; GARCIA, G. C., op. Cit., p. 4. See also Appendix II, p. v. "Van der Mersch" and "Vonck".

Vonck's Republican ("Démocrates") followers, the Constitution of "Les Etats Belges Unis" (The United Belgian States)¹², was proclaimed in January 1790¹³.

This coalition was doomed to failure. The Congress did not have sufficient power to maintain authority and each group was fighting for its own rights¹⁴. The Church sided with the conservatives and in so doing pushed the republicans to revolutionary and Gallican positions¹⁵.

The previous June (1789) in neighbouring France, the first National Assembly had been convened, in which the lower clergy, drawn mainly from the middle-class made up essentially of businessmen and lawyers, took an active part, while the higher clergy, usually of aristocratic origin, aligned themselves with the monarchy¹⁶. In Flanders we see somewhat similar tendencies. The lower clergy found their places rather on the side of the Republicans, who wanted Government control to be in the hands of the middle-class, while the hierarchy were one with the Conservatives.

Clearly, with so much internal discord, the country was again open to invasion and in December, 1790, the United Belgian Estates came to an end when Austrian troops once more took over Brussels¹⁷.

2. Between Austria and France (1790 - 1814)

By 1790, Leopold II, the brother of Joseph II, had succeeded to the Austrian Empire. He revoked the offending edicts returned to the type of rule of Maria Theresa¹⁸. However, this did not see the end of strife and once again, in 1792, the Estates of the Lowlands refused to pay their subsidies to Austria¹⁹.

Meanwhile, neighbouring France had been undergoing its own political upheavals. Lafayette had come into power during 1789 and 1790, when after having been appointed by the King Louis XVI as commander of the National Guard in 1789, he became the King's warden during his and his family's imprisonment. Lafayette had tried to defend the King, promote liberal principles and

¹² GARCIA, G. C., op. cit., Vol. II, p. 1, footnote 2.

¹³ ROGIER, L.-J., op. cit., p. 160; GARCIA, G. C., op. cit., pp. 4 - 5.

¹⁴ ROGIER, L.-J., op. cit., p. 160.

¹⁵ HAAG, H., op. cit., pp. 77 ff.

¹⁶ DANSETTE, A., Histoire Religieuse de la France Contemporaine, Paris, 1948, Vol. I, pp. 19 - 33.

¹⁷ GARCIA, G. C., op. cit., p. 5

¹⁸ Ibid., p. 5, referring to TAYLOR, A. J. P., "Austria, the Empire of" in Encyclopaedia Britannica, Vol. 2, (1955) pp. 754 - 774, pp. 762 - 763.

¹⁹ Ibid., pp. 4 - 5.

maintain military power. In 1790 he was still very popular with the people. The following year, the King, Louis XVI, had attempted to flee from France. He failed in his attempt and in September, 1791, reluctantly accepted a new Constitution²⁰.

The following year there was a further uprising which finally overthrew both the monarchy and the 1791 Constitution. Lafayette emigrated and in September, 1792, a new National Assembly was convened. It was therefore the revolutionary government of France that finally went to war with Austria over the situation in the Lowlands and in November, Austria was defeated and France occupied the Lowlands.

France formally annexed the Lowlands early in March, 1793, but by the end of that same month the Austrians were once more in control²¹. The occupying French found themselves with problems of their own. The trial of Louis XVI had begun in December, 1792 and he was executed a month later. That same month the French National Assembly had adopted a policy of annexation of all French occupied territory. At the beginning of 1793, the Lowlands were forced to vote for the type of government they wanted, but as they wanted their independence and the vote was obligatory, there was further internal turmoil. Meanwhile France had declared war first on England and then on Spain and so was in a weaker position regarding her hold on the Lowlands. In March 1793, Austrian troops again successfully entered Brussels²².

Events were moving with increasing rapidity and the international scene was one of confusion. In Vienna, Francis II, the new Austrian Emperor, opened a special chancellery office to deal with the problems of the Lowlands and he also appointed leaders in Brussels. But there was increasing distrust between Vienna and Brussels, a fact that is hardly surprising. So once more France intervened and after the decisive battle of Fleurus, in June, 1794, the Lowlands were again occupied by France²³. The people of Flanders came under French rule and remained there for twenty years.

During the first year, Flanders was an occupied country, which meant that it was administered by France, that its wealth was drained through taxes and other means, that there was suppression of political liberty and consequently those who did not fall into line with the occupiers were executed. One almost inevitable consequence, among others, was economic chaos. This was neither the first, nor would it be the last time that ordinary citizens of Flanders would suffer

²⁰ BEATTY, J.L., "Lafayette, marquis de", in Encyclopaedia Americana, N.Y. Americana Corporation, 1977, Vol. 16, p. 633; SOUBEL, A.M., "The French Revolution and Napoleon, 1789 - 1815", in New Encyclopaedia Britannica, Macropaedia, Vol. 7, London, Benton, 1977, p. 652. See also Appendix II, p. v. "Lafayette"

²¹ SOUBEL, A. M., art. cit., p. 634.

²² GARCIA, G. C., op. cit., p. 7.

²³ GARCIA G. C., op. cit., pp. 7 – 8; ROGIER, L-J., op. Cit., pp. 182 - 185.

enormous hardship because of political upheaval.

As trouble continued, there was an increasing desire among the nobles and the middle-class for the Lowlands to be united with France rather than occupied, so that there might be an end to the oppression. This came about in October, 1795, when the "Decree of Union" was issued. The decree meant a change of status for the Lowlands and they became part of the Northern Departments of France, therefore subject to French rule and law.

In all that concerned law, religion, education and government, the people of Flanders experienced change. Administrative areas were once again re-organised, education was centralised and brought under the control of the State, the power of the Church was reduced²⁴. In September, 1796, Religious orders and congregations which did not serve a useful purpose, such as the care of the sick, or education, were suppressed. Those that continued were kept under very close surveillance. Priests were not permitted to wear clerical dress. After the Jacobin "Coup d'Etat" of the 18th Fructidor, Year V, (September, 1797), the persecution of the Church and therefore of the clergy was intensified²⁵.

In the previous March, elections had been held throughout France. The results in the Northern Departments had been antigovernment and anti-French. But the "Coup d'Etat" overruled all election results. Priests were required to make a declaration of obedience to the law of the French Republic and on the 19th Fructidor, this became an oath of hatred of royalty and of tyranny²⁶. It was only after Napoleon came to power in the "Coup d'Etat" of the 18th Brumaire, (November, 1799), that the oath of hatred was changed to one of loyalty to the Constitution²⁷. Meanwhile in Flanders, the clergy, including Jean-Francois Ghislain Huleu, the grand-uncle and future spiritual director of Constant van Crombrugghe, were forced to make a decision over the question of the clerical oath²⁸. Having to make a decision as to whether or not to take the oath, created division among the clergy, causing the painful consequences which followed²⁹.

With the coming to power of Napoleon in 1799, relative peace at last came to the Lowlands. However this peace was indeed only relative. A certain political and economic stability was established, but central to the period of Napoleon's rule were the enormous difficulties in the relationship between Church and State, which caused such suffering to the whole Church, as well as

²⁴ GARCIA, G. C., op. cit., p. 9

²⁵ ROGIER, L.-J., op. cit., pp. 191 - 192.

²⁶ Ibid., p. 185; GARCIA, G. C., op. cit., p. 10

²⁷ GARCIA, G. C., op. cit., p. 11; ROGIER, L.-J., op. cit., p. 192.

²⁸ REUSEN, E.H.J., "Huleu", B. N., Tome IX, pp. 681 - 688;

²⁹ See below, chapter 2, A, "Jean-François-Ghislain Huleu", pp. 47 - 51.

to France and hence to the Northern Departments.

It was during this troubled period of time that Constant van Crombrugghe was born and received his early formation and education.

B. FAMILY AND SCHOOL

I. The Van Crombrugghes and the Spitaels

Constant Guillaume van Crombrugghe was born into a middle-class, "bourgeois" family, in 1789, in the town of Geraardsbergen. His family of merchants and businessmen, was one of those who helped to maintain stability, in so far as it was possible, during the political and economic upheavals experienced in Flanders. On both sides of the family there were relatives involved in municipal and business affairs.

The van Crombrugghe family can be traced back to Gent in 1600. Constant's grandfather, Bernard, was a small landowner who, in 1745, had received the fiefs³⁰ of Waregem and Desselgem. Ghislain-François, Constant's father, received the same fiefs in 1789. Ghislain's mother, Anne-Marie Huleu-van Crombrugghe, was a granddaughter of Jean Casteur, who had been a first alderman in Geraardsbergen in the eighteenth century. The elder brother of Anne-Marie was Jean-François-Ghislain Huleu, Canon of the Archdiocese of Mechelen, Rector of the seminary, and sometime Vicar General of the Archdiocese. He was godfather to both Ghislain François and his son Constant Guillaume and later served as spiritual director to Constant during the very important years of his education and seminary formation³¹.

Ghislain-François himself was a brewer, although later he handed his brewery over to his youngest son, François, and joined his wife in her work of lace-making, becoming known eventually as a "négociant en dentelles"³². After the Dutch government came to power in 1814, he served the town of Geraardsbergen as a municipal administrator. He was also a member of the commission for civil hospitals, which meant that he was concerned with the welfare of orphans as

³⁰ GARCIA, G. C., op. cit., Chapter 1, p. 7, footnote 79: "A fief was a landed estate held under feudal tenure. The van Crombrugghes were not of the aristocracy because they held these fiefs indirectly through inheritance."

³¹ The genealogical history of Constant van Crombrugghe is given in SCHOBBENS, V., and Van HILLE, W., Descendance de J. B. Spitaels 1719 - 1799, Tablette des Flandres, Document I, Bruges, 1958, pp. 139 - 140. See also: PIERAERTS, C., et DESMET, A., Vie et oeuvres du Chanoine Constant van Crombrugghe, Bruxelles, L'Edition Universelle, 1937, Ch.1; JORISSEN, C.J., Constant van Crombrugghe d'après sa Correspondance, unpublished manuscript, Louvain, 1945 - 52, Ch. I; GARCIA, G. C., op. cit., Ch. 1. B.

³² GARCIA, G. C., op. cit., p. 16; JORISSEN, J., op. cit., Footnotes to chapter 1, No.2.

well as of the sick³³. One of Constant's favourite aunts was Ghislain's sister, Bernardine, called in the family Aunt de Schepper³⁴.

Cécile-Joseph Spitaels (1756 - 1826), mother of Constant, belonged to another strong, middle-class family. The Spitaels family is found in Geraardsbergen from 1586 and was one of the most influential in the town. They were involved in both municipal and business affairs. Jean-François Spitaels, older brother of Cécile, was the first of a long line of bankers that in later years was involved in the development of heavy industry. He was alderman of Geraardsbergen in 1792. Cécile's younger half-brother, François Emmanuel Ghislain Spitaels became president of the municipal administration³⁵.

The van Crombrugghe-Spitaels were essentially business people, therefore, of necessity, flexible in all the changes of government and political upheaval that overtook the Lowlands in the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. Diplomacy was essential to their survival and Constant Guillaume, in belonging to such a family, inherited this business acumen, both in the orderliness which was characteristic of him during his life, and in the diplomacy which helped him to be both flexible and tactful.

This family was deeply religious, as well as being good business people. We know, for example, that Ghislain van Crombrugghe, Constant's father, bought the chapel of Onze Lieve Vrouw op de Oudenberg (Our Lady on the Old Mountain), near Geraardsbergen, to save it from destruction. With the permission of the Bishop of Gent, he restored the chapel, so that it would be once more a place of pilgrimage as it had been since the thirteenth century³⁶.

Ghislain was also a member of the Geraardsbergen Parish Council, appointed by Bishop Maurice de Broglie, in 1809³⁷.

We come to know people through their attitude towards life and towards others, as well as through the work they do. But no less revealing of a person's individuality are his letters. From the letters of Constant to his parents, especially when he was deciding his vocation, we can see that he took for granted that they were people of faith who would understand him.

Constant loved his mother dearly and even after her death would still write of her in his

³³ JORISSEN, J., op. cit., Footnote 1 (2).

³⁴ See ADMJR / 7 - 35, letter of van Crombrugghe to Flore Delhaye, 11 August, 1846.

³⁵ SCHOBBIENS, V., et Van HILLE, W., op. cit. See also Appendix I.

³⁶ There has been a chapel and hermitage dedicated to Our Lady, on the Oudenberg, since the 13th century. It was first sold in 1799 and eventually bought from the State by Ghislain van Crombrugghe in 1807. It is now the property of the Josephite Fathers who re-built it entirely in 1905. It is still a place of pilgrimage. See GARCIA, G. C., op. cit., p. 18.

³⁷ GARCIA, G. C., op. cit., p. 18, referring to the letter of appointment, (AJM / 1 / D, Maurice de Broglie, Bishop of Gent, to Ghislain van Crombrugghe, 11 May, 1809.)

personal letters³⁸. It was quite natural for him to ask his mother for help when after founding his new community of Sisters in Aalst, he wished to send two Sisters to Geraardsbergen to work among the poor. Cécile van Crombrugghe was to be responsible for the sisters as their "Mère Séculière", for the foundation of the lace-making factory and later for the Sunday School, all of which were expressions of her deep faith and of her love for the poor³⁹. Her work for the poor was well known and it is recorded that when she died in 1826, crowds came to her funeral and spoke of all that she had done for them⁴⁰.

Thus Constant inherited from his family his attitude towards society and the stance he would take before poverty. The middle-class of Flanders in the early nineteenth century accepted their social position as being a gift from God, as well as the just reward of their own labours. In their view, because of their social position, they carried a responsibility to help the poor. This responsibility would be expressed at times in almost condescending terms. The year after his ordination, 1813, Constant wrote to his parents:

"I believe that God will have particular regard and care for those who, for His love, help the suffering poor. It seems to me that it is in the plan of His paternal Providence to give more to those who make better use of the goods of this world; for why are there such goods? For what end did God create them? So that man may live and glorify (Him) in using these goods."⁴¹

Near the end of his life, in 1859, van Crombrugghe would write to Flore Delhaye, the second Superior General of the "Filles de Marie et de Joseph":

"In principle I wish, that there would be attached to all our establishments (fee-paying, boarding schools) a school for the poor."

He then stated his reasons for this:

"The children of this class will draw down on us and on the other children, the blessings of the Lord."⁴²

³⁸ For example, ADMJR / 18 - 66, 9 August, 1856, and ADMJR / 18 - 91, 10 August, 1857. Both are letters of van Crombrugghe addressed to his niece, Clothilde van Wymelbeke.

³⁹ JORISSEN, J., op. cit., p. 46: "*Mme. van Crombrugghe prend la location à leur usage une partie du couvent de Minimes. Me devient "la directrice de l'école et la mère ; séculière des religieuses."*" See below, Chapter 3, C, "Founder", p. 103.

⁴⁰ GARCIA, G. C., op. cit., p. 18.

⁴¹ JORISSEN, J., op. cit. p. 25:

"Dieu aura, je crois, des égards et des secours particuliers pour ceux qui secourent, pour son amour, les pauvres souffrants. Il me semble qu'il entre dans l'économie de la Providence paternelle de donner plus à ceux qui font meilleur usage des biens de la terre; car pourquoi sont les biens? Pour quelle fin Dieu les a-t-il créés? Pour que les hommes vivent et glorifient en usant de ces biens. " (29 December, 1813).

⁴² ADMJR / 7 - 54, letter of van Crombrugghe to Flore Delhaye, 28 March, 1859: "*En principe, je désire que tous nos établissements soient appuyés par une école de pauvres. Les enfants de cette classe attirent sur nous et sur les autres élèves, les bénédictions du Seigneur.*"

In other words, care for the poor, was not only an obligation inherited as part of the social class to which one belonged, but also a means of drawing down God's blessings on oneself. This reflects the normal attitude of the times. One of the Bishops of Gent wrote:

“... certain people live in poverty, others in luxury; that is the way Providence wished it to be. It is one of the most tangible proofs of the divine goodness and wisdom. It is the most powerful possession of society.”⁴³

This attitude did not detract from the intention of helping to improve the standard of living of the poor. In 1817, Constant van Crombrugge, while holding the position of principal of the College of Aalst, would petition the local administration to allow him to open a public workshop for young boys who belonged to needy families in the town. His hope was that by giving them work, as well as looking after their physical and moral welfare, he would attack the problem of the poor at its source⁴⁴.

2. Early formal education

In August, 1802, Constant had made his first Holy Communion, In Geraardsbergen⁴⁵. Shortly afterwards, at the age of thirteen, he left home for the first time to begin his formal education. The first year was spent at a school known as "L'Ermitage ou le Pensionnat de Wilhous"⁴⁶.

The following year, Constant had to transfer to another school; the school at Wilhous only received students up to the age of fourteen years, so Constant became a student in the small "Pensionnat de

⁴³ Quoted in GARCIA, G. C., op. cit., p. 17, from VERBIST, H., Les Grandes Controverses de l'Eglise contemporaine, 1789 - 1965, Lausanne, 1969, p. 361.

⁴⁴ PIERAERTS et DESMET, op. cit., p. 211, quoting a letter written in 1817, by van Crombrugge to M. de Waepenaere, bourgmestre d'Aalst:
“Pour concourir de tout mon pouvoir à l'exécution des vues bienfaisantes, de la Régence de notre ville, et encouragé par les sentiments de bienveillance dont veut bien m'honorer spécialement le noble Membre faisant, un ce moment, fonction de Bourgmestre, j'ai l'honneur d'exposer ici le plan d'un arrangement qui pourrait être conclu pour l'érection d'un atelier public qui, en fournissant le travail et en procurant les soins de l'éducation physique et morale aux enfants du sexe masculin appartenant à la classe indigente de cette ville, tarirait infailliblement la source la plus féconde des malheurs des pauvres.”

⁴⁵ Ibid., p. 24.

⁴⁶ PIERAERTS et DESMET, op. cit., pp. 26 - 27, footnote 2; GARCIA, G. C., op. cit., p. 20. "L'Ermitage de Wilhous" dated back to the 8th century, although it was at its best as an educational establishment in the latter half of the eighteenth century, teaching a broad curriculum. In November, 1796, it was suppressed, the teachers "accused of teaching monkish morals contrary to the catechism of the rights of man and of the citizen". It was allowed to re-open in 1802.

M. de Woulf", situated in Gent. There is no record at all of the education Constant received in either of these schools. They seem to have made no striking impression on him and he makes no reference to either place in any of his letters. He did write to his parents that his eyes were troubling him, but that after staying for a few days with his Aunt de Schepper they were much better⁴⁷. The observations are those of a young boy, seemingly missing home and family.

In October, 1805, having spent two years in Gent, Constant once more changed schools, and on the recommendation of friends of the family⁴⁸, went to Amiens, to the school run by the members of the Congregation known as "Les Pères de la Foi" (The Fathers of the Faith). The four years he spent in Amiens were, for Constant, among the most important years of his life. He was to be profoundly influenced by these men.

C. AMIENS

1. Fathers of the Sacred Heart of Jesus and the Fathers of the Faith of Jesus.

In the Duchy of Luxembourg, in July 1792, a new society of priests was started that was later to be called "Les Pères du Sacré Coeur de Jésus" (The Fathers of the Sacred Heart of Jesus). Their Founder was Eléonor de Tournely, assisted by a fellow priest, Charles de Broglie (brother of the future Bishop of Gent, Prince Maurice de Broglie). They were diocesan priests, who had been seminarians together at St. Sulpice, in Paris, and although neither of them had been Jesuits before the suppression of the Society of Jesus in 1773, they were inspired by the ideals presented by St. Ignatius Loyola to his followers. They decided to form themselves according to the spirit of St. Ignatius and to that end they made a retreat with the Capuchins at Antwerpen (Anvers). It is recorded that one day, as Eléonor de Tournely was in prayer before the crucifix, in contemplation of the wound in the side of Christ, He was drawn to the Heart of Jesus, filled with love for man. As a result of this prayer, de Tournely felt himself urged to name the new Congregation, the "Société du Coeur de Jésus"⁴⁹. He envisaged a Society that would "take on the sentiments, thoughts and interior dispositions of the Heart of Jesus"⁵⁰, where each one would be permeated by the love of Christ. He

⁴⁷ JORISSEN, J., op. cit., p. 11, quoted from van Crombrugghe's first extant letter to his parents, from Gent, 12 May, 1804. It is kept in the Archives of the Josephites, Melle, AJM / I / J; also: GARCIA, G. C., op. cit., pp. 19 - 20.

⁴⁸ GARCIA, G. C., op. cit., Vol. II, p. 11, footnote 107, with reference to AMJ / I / D, letter of Sabine Langevin to Mme. G. F. van Crombrugghe, négociante de Dentellerie, Amiens, 18 February, 1805.

⁴⁹ GUIDE, A., Vie du R. P. Joseph Varin, Paris, Poussielgue-Rusand), 1854. Other writers of later date usually base themselves on Guidée. They are listed in the Bibliography.

⁵⁰ HAMON, A, Histoire de la Dévotion au Sacré-Cœur, Paris, Beauchesne, 1939, Vol. 4, p. 333: "*Prendre les sentiments, les pensées, les dispositions intimes du Coeur de Jésus.*"

placed the accent on studying the interior attitudes of Christ so that the individual would become one with such attitudes, one with the obedient Christ, gentle and humble of heart⁵¹. It is clear that this demanded a profound life of contemplation on the part of the individual.

In 1794, others came to join the new Society, including three priests, all friends from the St. Sulpice days, Xavier de Tournely, Eléonor's brother, Pierre Leblanc and in July 1794, Joseph Varin⁵². Because of the difficult times in which they lived, the small community had to be constantly on the move, first going from Luxembourg to Antwerpen, and then, in July 1794, on to Bavaria, a real pilgrimage, as they made the entire journey on foot. It is said that while they walked, their conversation was centred around the Sacred Heart of Jesus. The journey to Bavaria was also an experience of the very real material poverty, which was to mark the members of the Society in the future.

The true beginning of the Society was in October 1794, when the priests made their vows of religion and included a fourth vow of obedience to the Sovereign Pontiff (as the Ignatian Constitutions propose to its members). It is recorded that one wished to make a special vow to the Sacred Heart of Jesus, another to the Heart of Mary⁵³. These two additional vows were not made, but they do indicate the strength of these devotions in the Society.

From the time of the foundation of the Society, they intended to become Jesuits as soon as the Society of Jesus would be restored and indeed their aim was to effect the restoration of the Society as soon as possible⁵⁴. In 1795, they made the thirty-day long Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius, which helped to establish deep bonds.

Eléonor de Tournely envisaged this form of life for others as well as for the community of priests. He shared this vision with Joseph Varin, who would become the superior of the group after de Tournely's death in 1797⁵⁵. Indeed, although the Society of the Sacred Heart of Jesus would be short-lived, the lasting and profound influence it had on the Church and on religious life is truly remarkable⁵⁶.

⁵¹ GUIDEE, A., op. cit., p. 22.

⁵² Ibid., chapters 1 - 4; BRODERICK, J. F., "Society of the Sacred Heart of Jesus" in N.C.E., Vol. 12, p. 826.

⁵³ GUIDEE, A., op. cit., p. 26. They had made a pilgrimage to the ancient shrine of Our Lady of Hal, in Belgium, in the early days of the Society, to ask for her protection.

⁵⁴ BRODERICK, J. F., art. cit., p. 826.

⁵⁵ The Society of the Sacred Heart recognises Eléonor de Tournely as the original inspiration of the Congregation. Madeleine Sophie Barat was later to be guided by Joseph Varin, when she began the Society in Paris and when she brought her community to Amiens in 1800. For an excellent study of this question see DE CHARRY, J., Histoire des Constitutions de la Société du Sacré-Coeur, Première Partie "La Formation de L'Institut.", 2 vols., Rome, 1981, revised edition; - Seconde Partie "Les Constitutions définitives et leur approbation par le Saint-Siège", 3 vols., Rome, P.U.G., 1977.

⁵⁶ Julie Billiart, was another Foundress helped by Joseph Varin and others, in Amiens, in 1804. See below, p. 42.

The members of the Society were marked by their interior life of contemplation and by their attitudes of obedience, gentleness and humility. Their style of life was poor and through circumstances, one of pilgrimage. The centre and force of their life was devotion to the Heart of Christ and His love for men.

Eléanor de Tournely died in 1797 and Joseph Varin was elected Superior of the small society. In the same year in Rome, another society was founded by Nicholas Paccanari, called the "Société de la Foi de Jésus" (Society of the Faith of Jesus). Nicholas was a layman of great natural talent, but who had received little by way of formal higher education. He was also an ambitious man, and eventually history would label him an eccentric and a person lacking in humility and prudence⁵⁷. He had spent a long period of time in personal prayer, maybe as long as fifteen months, in Loreto and Assisi, eventually feeling himself called to found this new society. As was the case with the Fathers of the Sacred Heart of Jesus, the intention of foundation was to work towards the restoration of the Society of Jesus. Paccanari tried to follow the ideal of St. Ignatius and the first members made the three traditional vows of religion, that is poverty, chastity and obedience, and a fourth vow of obedience to the Supreme Pontiff. They received provisional approval and encouragement from Pope Pius VI⁵⁸. The Society counted some former Jesuits among its members. In 1798, Paccanari, having heard of the Fathers of the Sacred Heart of Jesus, wrote to Varin, proposing the amalgamation of the two societies. However he went about making this proposal in a strange way, because he enclosed forms for the Fathers to fill in requesting their transfer to the Society of the Faith of Jesus and he appointed Varin superior in Germany! It was certainly an odd way of proposing such a union. The Fathers of the Sacred Heart were further put off when they heard, in 1799, that Paccanari had been imprisoned⁵⁹. On his release he tried to put right the poor impression he had made. He also had an audience with the Pope, Pius VI, who encouraged the union. The Fathers of the Sacred Heart, mainly because of Papal encouragement, agreed to the union in April 1799, just eight years after their quiet beginnings in Luxembourg. We are told that the decision was reached after mature deliberation⁶⁰. At the time of the union, the Society of the Faith of Jesus numbered three priests and twenty members, while the Fathers of the Sacred Heart numbered fifty, about half of whom were priests. Paccanari needed the union. Varin felt himself

⁵⁷ BRODERICK, J. F., "Paccanarists", N.C.E., Vol. 10, pp. 849 - 850.

⁵⁸ GUIDEES, A., op. cit., Ch. VIII, p. 48.

⁵⁹ It is not known why Paccanari was imprisoned this first time, but in 1807 (see p. 22) he was brought before the Holy Office charged with scandalous living and sentenced to ten years imprisonment (of which he did only two). See BANGERT, W. V., A History of the Society of Jesus, St. Louis Institute of Jesuit Sources, 1972, p. 421.

⁶⁰ GUIDEES, A., op. cit., Ch. VIII, p. 48.

unsuitable to be the overall superior of the new Society, so Paccanari, seemingly quite happily, took on the responsibility. The new society formed was called "Les Pères de la Foi" (Fathers of the Faith), or "Société de la Foi" (Society of the Faith), the first being the title more commonly used.

Paccanari immediately began to work on drawing the original Fathers of the Sacred Heart into a more active life. He insisted on much apostolic work and also, rather strangely, two or three hours a day of community recreation together! This clearly meant a great reduction of the amount of time they spent in prayer, an aspect of their life that had previously been vital to the Fathers.

Eventually life settled down to some extent, (although never very satisfactorily for the former members of the Fathers of the Sacred Heart), and a period of great apostolic zeal began. We can see that the Fathers of the Faith did in fact inherit characteristics from both Societies⁶¹.

Of Paccanari it is sufficient here to note that he eventually was put back into prison and from then there is no exact record of him. We have no details of his death. One historian says of him that he never lived under obedience (he was always a superior, even the superior) and was not solidly established in humility and abnegation⁶². He does, though, seem to have had an influence on the apostolic dimension of the lives of the Fathers. Maybe in his own way he did challenge those around him, although we may say, at the same time, that this was felt in a negative way.

2. The Fathers of the Faith - Amiens

Thus there came into being the society called "Les Pères de la Foi" (Fathers of the Faith). They were an amazing group of men whose influence on the Church was vast. Both directly and indirectly, through their parish missions and through their work of education, they touched the lives of countless people. Their direct influence on Founders and Foundresses of religious congregations is in itself a complete study. Joseph Varin, their superior in France, was responsible for helping Madeleine Sophie Barat (her brother, Louis, was a Father of the Faith) and her foundation of the

⁶¹ Sometimes the Fathers of the Faith have been referred to as "hidden Jesuits". Although they wished and worked for the re-establishment of the Society of Jesus, their spirit was not precisely that of the Jesuits. That is to say, they had studied the writings and spirit of St. Ignatius as well as they were able, they had returned in a particular way to the sources. The Jesuits had, over the years, as happens in any group of people, changed and modified the original inspiration of St. Ignatius. "Les Pères du Sacré-Coeur de Jésus" did not count any former Jesuits among their number and they were joined by only three priests of the second congregation after their union. It is not even known if these were Jesuits and certainly none of them later travelled to France; that was left to Pères Varin and Roger, who had been Fathers of the Sacred Heart. While they tried to live the constitutions of St. Ignatius they were not Jesuits. The accents stressed in their life as a congregation were rather different; for example, the place given to community, the sense of family (later, we will see it present at Amiens), the new stress on devotion to the Sacred Heart. It would be a while before Père Varin met Père de la Clorivière, who was responsible for the re-establishment of the Jesuits in France after the suppression was lifted in 1814. Indeed at that time all the former "Pères de la Foi" had to make a new novitiate on entering the Jesuits. See GUIDEÉE, A., op. cit., Chaps. VIII - X.

⁶² GUIDEÉE, A., op. cit., p. 60.

Society of the Sacred Heart; Julie Billiart and the Sisters of Notre-Dame de Namur; the founding group of Les Soeurs de la Sainte Famille from Besançon. Among Founders of congregations of both men and women we find many who were educated by the Fathers of the Faith, as was Constant van Crombrughe.

The individual lives of the Fathers show us men of great courage and prayer. Each one seems to have been a man of strong character, who attracted others to the Lord. In 1800, Varin, with a companion travelled to France and began working with the poor of Paris at the Salpêtrière. There had been no priest there for ten years and the work was hard, but the priests were loved. They lived in poverty, in very real dependence on God. Père Varin wrote to his confrère, Père Roger, when the latter was once without funds:

"Have confidence, the good Providence (of God) has never left us in want; it will come again to our help."⁶³

The Fathers were loved by the people for their kindness towards the sick, and they were very much appreciated for their gentleness as confessors. There is an account of one woman who was dying after a life-time of sinful living; it ends:

"... and she died in peace, filled ... with gentle confidence in divine mercy."⁶⁴

In reading about the early days of the Fathers of the Faith in France, one is left with the impression that both the confidence that the priests had in the providence and mercy of God, and the gentleness with which they treated others, were the fruits of the prayer and seclusion they had lived as Fathers of the Sacred Heart of Jesus as well as of the suffering they had experienced during the time of union.

The original group of Fathers of the Faith were soon joined by others. Nearly all the men who came had themselves suffered greatly as a result of the persecution of priests in France⁶⁵. They had endured great hardship and suffering and therefore knew in a very practical way what it meant to live trusting in God and in his goodness. Abandonment to the will of God is a frequent theme in the writings of the different members of the Society. Père Joseph Varin gives us many examples. In pausing to listen to his words, we catch some small idea of the characteristics of the Fathers as he was not only the Superior in France, but also responsible for the formation of the priests and young men who presented themselves to the Society.

⁶³ GUIDE, A., op. cit., p. 64: "Ayez confiance, la bonne Providence ne nous a jamais manqué; elle viendra encore à notre secours."

⁶⁴ Ibid., p. 66: "... elle expira en paix, pénétrée ... de la plus tendre confiance en la divine miséricorde."

⁶⁵ GUIDE, A., op. cit., p. 81.

Varin constantly recommended simplicity, joy and confidence⁶⁶, courage, too, and thanksgiving for the goodness of God. And so he would write:

"Be full of thanksgiving and confidence."⁶⁷ (67)
and further:

"(God) is a Father who would purify the heart of his child, so that it would become more worthy of his love. Therefore courage and confidence."⁶⁸

"How good God is: The more you advance and the more keenly you feel this goodness, all is merciful."⁶⁹

Towards others, Varin says that we should have "the gentleness and humility of the Heart of Jesus"⁷⁰.

A companion of Julie Billiart, who knew the superior of the Fathers of the Faith so well during the years that he helped in the foundation of the congregation, writes:

"A man is characterised by the words he habitually uses which are the echo of his thoughts. With Père Varin it was: 'Courage and confidence' and 'How good God is'."⁷¹

In a very short time after their arrival in France, the Fathers of the Faith had enough members to open schools for men. The first was in Lyon in 1801, and later in the year, Amiens. It was to Amiens that Constant van Crombrugge went to study in 1805.

⁶⁶ Ibid., p. 112

⁶⁷ Ibid., p. 112 : "Soyez plein de reconnaissance et de confiance."

⁶⁸ Ibid., p. 122: "Dieu est un père qui veut purifier le cœur de son enfant, pour le rendre plus digne de son amour. Donc, courage et confiance."

⁶⁹ Ibid., p. 131 : "Que Dieu est bon! Plus vous irez en avant et plus vous sentirez vivement cette bonté toute miséricordieuse."

⁷⁰ GUIDE, A., op. cit., p. 133: "Envers le prochain, douceur et humilité du Coeur de Jésus."

⁷¹ BLIN DE BOURBON, F., Vie de Julie Billiart ou Les Mémoires de Mère Saint-Joseph, Rome, P.U.G., 1978, pp. 382 - 385. Françoise Blin de Bourbon was one of the first companions of Julie Billiart. This is a recent publication of her writings. "Un homme se caractérise par son mot habituel, qui est l'écho de sa pensée. C'était chez le Père Varin. 'Courage et confiance', et 'Que Dieu est bon'."

D. PERE LOUIS SELLIER

The story of the College in Amiens is very closely linked with one of the teachers there, Père Louis Sellier (1772 - 1854), the man who most influenced van Crombrugghe⁷². Until the time of their suppression, the Jesuits had been responsible for the College in Amiens. Afterwards the running of the school had been entrusted to a group of Diocesan priests. For a few years it continued to be a large centre of education where Sellier himself was educated. It was run on the lines of a Jesuit establishment and later we see that Sellier used similar principles of education.

Louis Sellier had wished to become a priest, but in 1793 he was conscripted into the army because of the Revolution. After his army service was ended he bore a burden of guilt because of the acts of the Army of the Revolution (although he himself had held an administrative position and was not an active soldier). He was eventually helped by the parish priest of a nearby village, Antoine-Joseph Bicheron. Years later, Sellier still referred to this time as that of his conversion, and he wrote of the special place that Père Bicheron held in this.

"Who allowed me to meet this loving priest, the instrument of your loving mercy? Only you my Saviour."⁷³

Bicheron ran a small school (pensionnat) in Amiens and Sellier went there to teach both Humanities and Mathematics. Three years later he decided to begin his own school, with the help of another layman, M. Corbie. It was sometime during these years that Sellier first heard of the Fathers of the Faith and through a series of events, in 1801, he offered the small school⁷⁴ for which he was responsible, to Père Varin. By October, the transaction had been completed and Louis was admitted to the Society.

After making the Spiritual Exercises in Paris, and making a short novitiate, Louis returned to teach in Amiens, although he was not yet ordained a priest. In 1802 the school already had two hundred students and two years later it moved to Noyon, a suburb of Amiens. This marked the beginning of a period of great difficulty and the authorities were watching the Fathers of the Faith very carefully⁷⁵.

By 1804, the school was already widely known for the quality of education offered and also

⁷² GUIDEE, A., Vie du R. P. Louis Sellier de la Compagnie de Jésus, Paris Poussielgue-Rusand, 1858.

⁷³ GUIDEE, A., op. cit., p. 29 (Retreat notes, 1842).

⁷⁴ This was in a house that had previously been owned by the Fathers of the Oratory and later would be used by "La Société du Sacré-Coeur". See below, page 42.

⁷⁵ In the eyes of Napoleon, the Fathers of the Faith were Jesuits, if not in fact, because of the situation, they were so in spirit: "*Ils sont les Jésuites par l'âme.*"
cf. DERIES, L., Les Congrégations Religieuses au Temps du Napoleon, Paris, Félix Alcan, 1929, Ch. VI - IX.

for the spirit that prevailed. Most striking in all the accounts written by men who were educated in Amiens between the foundation in 1801 and its being handed over to the Jesuits in 1814⁷⁶ is the way they write of the family spirit they found in the College, the deep bonds they found between the teachers and the students, the kindness shown by the teachers and encouraged among the students and above all the atmosphere of prayer. Lamartine⁷⁷, a student there from 1803 to 1807 was later to write in his "Confidences":

"I felt as though I had entered another family ... All day (the first day away from his home and mother) I was sad, but my comrades did not mock me because of my sadness ... they gently initiated me into the rules of the house."⁷⁸

At that period of time it was indeed worthy of note for a young boy, lonely at leaving home for the first time, to be kindly received by his fellow students. As in any educational establishment, the tone was set by the teachers. In his same Confidences, Lamartine writes about them:

"(The teachers), my friends rather than my professors, will remain in my memory as models of holiness, of vigilance, of fatherliness, of gentleness and of graciousness towards their students."⁷⁹

Another student, Achille Guidée, who was enrolled in October 1802, says his of his teachers that they were "wise and modest, zealous priests and for the most part, confessors of the faith"⁸⁰. He further writes that:

"... in reality, this was the beautiful ideal of a Christian boarding school: sincere piety, cordial affection towards the teachers, constant regularity, charity and union among all."⁸¹

Van Crombrugge also found himself very much at home at Amiens. In 1806 he wrote to his parents:

"Allow me, my very dear parents, to tell you that I will never be

⁷⁶ For the history of the school at Amiens, the educational methods used, the problems the Fathers of the Faith encountered with the government of Napoleon, see GARCIA, G. C., op. cit., pp. 21 - 27.

⁷⁷ See Appendix II, Biographical Notes, p. v. "Lamartine".

⁷⁸ DULAC, P., Jésuites, Paris, Plou-Nourrit et Cie, 1901, pp. 126 - 7, quoting Lamartine, Confidences: "*Il me semble que j'entrais dans une autre famille ... tout le jour je fus triste, mais mes camarades ne se moquèrent pas de ma tristesse ... ils m'initierent doucement aux règles de la maison.*"

⁷⁹ DERIES, L., op. cit., quoting Lamartine, Confidences, Livre VI, notes 2, 3 and 4: "(Les professeurs) mes amis plutôt que mes professeurs, resteront dans ma mémoire comme des modèles de sainteté, de vigilance, de paternité, de tendresse et de grâce pour leurs élèves."

⁸⁰ GRANDIDIER, P. F., Vie du Révérend Père Achille Guidée, Amiens, Lambert-Cavon, 1867, p. 4: *savants et modestes, prêtre zélés et pour la plupart confesseurs de la foi.*"

⁸¹ Ibid., p. 7: "C'était en réalité le beau idéal d'un pensionnat chrétien: charité et union entre tous."

able to convince you enough of the happiness which you have obtained for me by placing me in this school."⁸²

In October, 1805, he had already written glowingly of the school, even though his very first reaction had been one of indifference. He tells his parents that:

"I like the arrangement of this boarding school very much because of the gentleness and affability with which we are led."⁸³ (83)

Père Louis Sellier was ordained a priest in 1804⁸⁴. When van Crombrugghe went to Amiens in 1805, Sellier was both teacher and spiritual director to the students. He was clearly a very remarkable man, who had great influence over those he met. In the case of van Crombrugghe, Sellier led him to consider his vocation and under his direction Constant reached the decision to become a priest.

Upon arriving in Amiens⁸⁵, Constant had been determined to follow the course of studies suitable for a business man. But Père Sellier recognised the new student's potential and contrary to the usual custom of the school, decided to allow Constant to receive private tuition. The following March, Sellier encouraged the young van Crombrugghe to make a novena in honour of St. Joseph, with the intention of discovering his vocation. He reached a decision that seems to have surprised himself as much as anyone. On the 19 March, 1806, he wrote home:

"After mature reflection, I wish to embrace the clerical state."⁸⁶

It was such a change that more than forty years later Père Sellier could still remember it well; he says that it was a "miraculous" change. He wrote, too, that he used it as a theme in his instructions "to confirm the witness of St. Teresa (of Avila) when she stated that she had never asked St. Joseph for anything on his feast, without receiving it"⁸⁷.

⁸² JORISSEN, J., op. cit., p. 13, letter of van Crombrugghe to his parents, 1806: "*Permettez-moi, mes très chers Parents, que je vous dise encore que jamais je ne pourrais assez vous convaincre du bonheur que vous m'avez procuré en me mettant dans cette pension.*"

⁸³ AJM / I / J, letter of van Crombrugghe to his parents, 28 October, 1805, cited in GARCIA, G. C., op. cit., p. 21: "*L'arrangement de ce Pensionnat me plaît beaucoup à cause de la douceur et ,affabilité avec lesquelles on nous conduit.*"

⁸⁴ GUIDEE, A., (Sellier) op. cit., p. 50.

⁸⁵ Concerning the name of the College ("Saint Acheul"), from the accounts I-ive•n by Guidée in his lives of both Père Varin and Père Sellier, it would appear that this name was only given after the re-establishment of the Jesuits in 1814, when they took charge of the College. However, all the biographers of van Crombrugghe, inclERHI the most recent, Guillermo Garcia, refer to the College as "St. Acheul", while the Founder was a student at the school. It rather seems as though until 1814, it was usually called by the place where it was situated, so Amiens, Noyon, Montdidier. cf. GRANDIDIER, op. cit., p. 18; GUIDEE, A., both the works cited.

⁸⁶ JORISSEN, J., op. cit., p. 14: "*J'ai mûrement réfléchi, je veux embrasser l'état ecclésiastique.*"

⁸⁷ Ibid., p. 14: "... pour confirmer le témoignage de Sainte-Thérèse, déclarant qu'elle n'avait jamais rien demandé le

For the remainder of his life, van Crombrugghe always had a very great devotion to St. Joseph and named him as Patron of each of the four Congregations⁸⁸ that he founded.

Constant never forgot, nor did he want his "daughters" to forget, the man who influenced him so greatly. Over thirty years after van Crombrugghe left school, Père Sellier visited Belgium and met the sisters. Van Crombrugghe was delighted and wrote to one of the superiors:

"What joy I have felt at the news that the holy man whom God used from my childhood to lead me in the ways of religion and also to help me to know my vocation, went to see you. You have seen a saint, towards whom you have obligations and who perhaps, in the ways of God, is the principal cause of the existence of your religious family."⁸⁹

What sort of man was Louis Sellier? Van Crombrugghe calls him a "holy man", a "saint". Clearly he had many human qualities that made him attractive to young men and therefore increased the influence he had on their lives. We know from another young man, a contemporary of Constant, Achille Guidée, that he too received his vocation to the priesthood and to the Society of Jesus, while he was under the guidance of Sellier. After Père Sellier's death, Guidée wrote of him:

"He was a tender father for me, a sincere friend ... Always simple and good, his heart forgot itself in order not to forget anyone."⁹⁰

He was a great teacher and priest, a charismatic figure. Guidée tells us that

"... in his retreats he electrified the young men, he shook them, he overwhelmed them and never failed to triumph over even the most rebellious wills and to bring about a general renewal."⁹¹

He was a man of enormous energy, combining the work of education with that of a missionary in the surrounding villages that lacked priests. After his death his Provincial Superior wrote

jour de la fête de S. Joseph sans l'avoir obtenu."

⁸⁸ Filles de Marie et de Joseph, dites "Dames de Marie", (Daughters of Mary and Joseph, called "Ladies of Mary"); Les Joséphites (Josephites); De Zusters van Maria en Joseph (The Sisters of Mary and Joseph); De Zusters van den Heiligen Joseph (The Sisters of St. Joseph).

⁸⁹ ADMJR / 4 - 12, letter of van Crombrugghe to Unknown Superior, 24 January, 1842: *"Quelle joie j'ai ressenti à la nouvelle que le Saint homme dont Dieu s'est servi pour me conduire dans les voies de la religion, dès mon enfance, et même pour me faire connaître ma vocation, vous est allé voir! Vous avez vu un saint à qui vous avez des obligations, et que peut-être, dans les vues de Dieu est la principale cause de l'existence de votre religieuse famille."*

⁹⁰ GUIDEE, A., (Sellier) op. cit, p. 235:

"... a été pour moi un père tendre, un ami sincère. Toujours simple et bon, son coeur s'oubliait pour n'oublier personne."

⁹¹ Ibid., p. 120:

"Dans ses retraites il électrifiait les jeunes âmes, il les remuait, il les bouleversait et ne manquait jamais de triompher des volontés les plus rebelles et d'opérer un renouvellement général."

"After having heard the confessions of the young men of Saint-Acheul, he set out on Sunday evening for some village in the neighbourhood, where, by himself, he established a three week mission, preaching two or three times a day, passing the rest of the time in the confessional."⁹²

That was not all, because in the evenings priests would also come to him, men whom he had formed and directed and who wanted his advice. As van Crombrugge said, Père Sellier was a "holy man".

All accounts of him show his deep attachment to the Person and the Holy Name of Jesus.

Already, in 1800, during a retreat he wrote:

"Name of Jesus, name of love, name of peace, name of goodness,
... All in Jesus, all for Jesus, all with Jesus, my adorable and loving
Master. There, my desire."⁹³

He kept very careful retreat notes all his life. At the end of the long thirty-day retreat he made during his Jesuit tertianship in 1825, he was filled with thanksgiving and wrote of the love of God, of his need for humility and compunction. He continued:

"If it is pleasing to the divine mercy to make use of this vessel of iniquity and to make of it an instrument of His glory, may His holy will be done."⁹⁴

The central devotion of his life was to the Sacred Heart of Jesus, which was for him the seat of the mercy of God. He seems to have been overwhelmed by the realisation of God's mercy towards himself and his favourite title for God was the God of all mercy⁹⁵. Throughout his life he tried to show this mercy to others. It is said that Sellier was gentle even in his manner and his way of speaking⁹⁶. Those who knew him well tell us that he especially showed this gentleness and compassion in the confessional. The Sacrament of Penance held a particular place in his priestly ministry, for it was the place where he could best speak of God's mercy and tenderness⁹⁷. His

⁹² Letter of Père Richardot, S.J., (Provincial) to Père Rozaven at Rome, 7 August, 1821, cited in BURNICHON, J., S. J., La Compagnie de Jésus en France, Histoire d'un Siècle 1814 - 1914, Vol. I, 1814 - 1830, Paris, Beauchesne, 1914, pp. 92 - 93: "*Après avoir confessé la jeunesse de Saint - Acheul, il part le dimanche soir pour quelque village des environs, y établit à lui seul une mission de trois semaines, prêche deux ou trois fois le jour, passe le reste du temps au confessionnal.*"

⁹³ GUIDEE, A., (Sellier) op. cit., pp. 36 - 37: "*Nom de Jésus, nom d'amour nom de paix, nom de bonté. Tout à Jésus, tout pour Jésus, tout avec Jésus mon adorable, mon aimable Maître. Voilà mon désir.*"

⁹⁴ Ibid., p. 168: "*S'il plaît à la divine miséricorde de se servir de ce vase d'iniquité et d'en faire un instrument pour sa gloire, que sa sainte volonté soit faite.*"

⁹⁵ GUIDEE, A., (Sellier) op. cit., p. 352.

⁹⁶ Ibid., p. 397.

⁹⁷ Ibid., p. 365.

personal life was very ascetic but to others he showed only kindness.

When counselling others he advised them to pray for the gifts they needed to live their vocation, especially for the gift of prayer and the "gift of discernment"⁹⁸. He called St. Joseph, to whom he had special devotion, the great master of prayer. He himself was always a man of prayer, even during long periods of his life when he experienced great spiritual dryness and temptations⁹⁹. On the last day of his life, he was still concerned with prayer. He told the brother who was caring for him that he should wake him at 2. 30 a.m., because during the previous days he had not prayed sufficiently as he had lost a lot of time (he had been in and out of consciousness)¹⁰⁰.

Our Lady held a privileged place in his life and it is said that he relied on Mary to give him confidence in all that he did¹⁰¹. Towards the end of his life he wrote:

"Conformity to the most adorable will of God, firm confidence in Jesus and Mary."¹⁰²

After his death his Provincial Superior said of him:

"It seemed that the spirit of St. Francis Xavier had passed into his body. We will learn without surprise that wonders are taking place at his tomb."¹⁰³

This remarkable man, both educator and priest, holy in the true sense of the word, made a lasting impression on Constant van Crombrugghe. It is always difficult to understand what influences any person; it would seem to be an amalgam of people, events, books we read and so forth, all absorbed into the mind and heart of the individual. However, the time when we are most impressionable is during the period of adolescence and early adulthood. That was the period when Constant van Crombrugghe knew Père Sellier. How did Père Sellier influence him? Was it simply a question of helping him to decide his vocation, or was it much deeper than that? It would appear to be very much deeper. While reading about Louis Sellier and reading the extracts from his letters and retreat notes, one has the impression of being with the "grandfather", the venerable man, the one who inspired and opened the way for the Holy Spirit to move in Constant. There is a distinct "family" likeness between the two men. It would seem that above all else Sellier communicated his

⁹⁸ Ibid., p. 401. Writing about the gifts needed, Sellier insisted: "*Demandez surtout les dons de discernement et de force dans les occasions difficiles.*"

⁹⁹ Ibid., Chap. XXXVII.

¹⁰⁰ GUIDE, A., (Sellier) op. cit., Chap. XXXII.

¹⁰¹ Ibid., p. 376.

¹⁰² Ibid., p. 401: "*Conformité à la sur adorable volonté de Dieu, confiance inébranlable en Jésus et Marie.*"

¹⁰³ BURNICHON, J., op. cit., p. 461: "Il semblait que l'âme de Saint François Xavier eut passé dans son corps. Nous apprendrons sans surprise que des merveilles s'opèrent à son tombeau."

understanding of the mercy of God. The gentleness which marked both Sellier and van Crombrughe, was based in the mercy of God, received and handed on to others. We have seen Sellier writing of another as an instrument of mercy towards himself, helping him to enter into the process of conversion. In his turn, he was himself an instrument in the hands of God, for God to use for His glory.

The idea of being an instrument in the hands of God is found in the writings of Saint Ignatius Loyola. It is an idea he expresses especially when writing personal letters to the members of the Society of Jesus, and he also uses it in the Constitutions. It has been said that it may serve as a résumé of Ignatian spirituality. It symbolises total abandonment into the hands of God, so that He may use us as He wills¹⁰⁴. It means to be totally at the disposal of the Father.

"To be an instrument in the hand of God is to be another Christ, whose humanity is an instrument so perfectly joined to the Father as to be the very hand of God."¹⁰⁵

The Fathers of the Faith, in their study and living of the Ignatian Constitutions, had discovered this for their own lives. It would appear, too, that through their particular devotion to the Sacred Heart¹⁰⁶, they had developed a spirituality of Mercy. Each of the biographies we read of these men, Varin, Sellier, Leblanc and others, is marked by their devotion to the Sacred Heart, their reliance on God and His mercy, their gentleness towards others as they are aware of being an instrument in the hand of God, a profound acceptance of the will of God. They had sat in the "school" of Christ, gentle and humble of heart¹⁰⁷.

Those who were guided by the Fathers of the Faith were also attracted by this devotion¹⁰⁸. It is said, for example, of Mère Barat, that there were four themes particularly dear to her that she saw as special marks of the members of her "Society of the Sacred Heart". These themes were "'Spouse', 'victim', 'apostle' and 'instrument of the work of God'"¹⁰⁹. In later years we will find two themes emerging clearly in the letters of Constant van Crombrughe to the Daughters of Mary and Joseph.

¹⁰⁴ MARUCA, D., S. J., Instruments in the Hand of God, Extract from the Doctoral Thesis, Pontifical Gregorian University, Rome, 1963.

¹⁰⁵ MARUCA, D., op. cit., p.72.

¹⁰⁶ See above, "Society of the Sacred Heart", p. 17.

¹⁰⁷ See above, concerning the spirituality of de Tournely, p. 18.

¹⁰⁸ In guiding the members of the Society of the Sacred Heart, Père Varin had insisted on the necessity of apostles being instruments of the work of God, which seems that the instrument must be handed over totally to the one who works, God. See de CHARRY, J., Les Constitutions définitives et leur approbation par le Saint-Siège, Seconde Partie, Vol. I, Exposé Historique, Rome, P.U.G., 1979, p. 246.

¹⁰⁹ de CHARRY, J., op. cit., p.513. "*'Epouse', 'victime', 'apôtre', 'instrument de l'oeuvre de Dieu'*, ainsi elle a vu sa société, ainsi elle voit chacune des membres."

Both themes are concerned with a way of being, that is, with the spiritual dispositions of the person. The themes are "Spouse" and "Instruments of mercy". Underpinning these themes is van Crombrugghe's insistence on the total abandonment of the person to the will of God, to the Providence of God¹¹⁰. All else is concerned with how this will be lived out in the individual life.

There were to be many other good men who influenced van Crombrugghe, in particular his grand-uncle, Huleu, and his professors at the Gent seminary, but the influence of the Fathers of the Faith appears to have been the strongest in his life, the one which affected him most profoundly. Through the writings and biographies of his teachers, we hear some of the words that were spoken to van Crombrugghe. We will hear these same words repeated later in his life and given a new richness once he had made them his own and integrated them into himself. We will see how, through his uncle, Constant was influenced by the writing of Saint Francis de Sales, but this only served to strengthen the foundations already laid in him by Père Sellier and the other Fathers of the Faith.

Before leaving Amiens, we should pause and meet some of the other people that Constant encountered there. It seems to have been a town of saints who helped and supported each other as instruments in the hand of God, instruments of His work and of his mercy.

E. PERE LEBLANC AND OTHER FATHERS OF THE FAITH

When van Crombrugghe went to Amiens the superior of the house and school was Pierre Charles-Marie Leblanc¹¹¹. Born in Normandy, he had joined de Tournely and the Fathers of the Sacred Heart and in 1784 had gone with them to Bavaria. He was ordained priest in 1799 and was the secretary during the negotiations for union. Returning to France in 1801, he was for a time superior at Amiens. He guided the school and the community through the difficulties with Napoleon's government and in 1806 facilitated the moving of the school, this time to Montdidier, where it enjoyed relative calm. At the end of 1807, the Fathers of the Faith were no longer allowed to teach and both Fathers Leblanc and Sellier were obliged to leave the school. Sellier, at the request of the local authorities, was able to return to the school as a teacher and spiritual director, in 1809, but Leblanc by then had gone to Paris to work. In 1814 he was made responsible for re-establishing the Society of Jesus in Belgium.

Leblanc's whole life seems to have been one of having to take great responsibility for

¹¹⁰ See s. v., Chapter 7, A: "Abandonment to the will of God – Obedience".

¹¹¹ GUIDEE, A., (Varin) op. cit., pp. 155 ff.

decision-making in times of political upheaval. He was able to sustain his calm and interior peace throughout, by his reliance on the will of God. However, this did not make life any easier for him. When he had to leave Montdidier, he was so upset that, instead of saying goodbye to the students he wrote to them telling them of his sadness, but at the same time recognising the will of God for him in the events¹¹².

Leblanc also wrote a personal letter to Constant in which he told him that absolute confidence in Christ is what gives us the necessary strength to face life, no matter what may be happening around us. Constant was very touched by this letter and a few days later wrote to his parents:

"At first, nature suffers, but the soul is in the greatest calm. Even more, I would say in great joy at seeing the hand of God, who strikes as a Father here below in order to pardon in the next world."¹¹³

Constant slowly but steadily learned trust and confidence in God from his "wise and modest" teachers¹¹⁴.

Another friend of van Crombrugghe was Louis de Sambucy de Saint-Estève¹¹⁵. He had been at St. Sulpice with Eléonor de Tournely, Charles de Broglie and Joseph Varin and others who eventually became Fathers of the Faith. He seems to have been a brilliant man, but he was also considered an absolutist.

Through this trait in his character, he was to be the cause of many difficulties and great suffering for Madeleine Sophie Barat, Julie Billiart and their communities¹¹⁶. When Constant knew him, he was confessor to the Sisters of Mère Barat, at that time known as "Les Dames de l'Instruction Chrétienne", who were living in the house where Père Sellier had begun the College, known as "L'Oratoire"¹¹⁷. Père Varin had asked de Sambucy to take an interest in the community as well as being their confessor, as he, Père Varin, was rarely in Amiens.

During this same time de Sambucy was also confessor to the group of Sisters who had

¹¹² PIERAERTS et DESMET, op. cit., p. 36

¹¹³ AJM / I / J, letter of van Crombrugghe to his parents, Montdidier, 17 November, 1807, quoted in GARCIA, G. C., op. cit., p. 25:
"La nature d'abord souffre, mais l'âme est dans le plus grand calme, je dirais plus même, dans une grande joie, voyant, la main de Dieu qui frappe en Père ici bas pour pardonner dans l'autre monde. »

¹¹⁴ GRANDIDIER, P. F., op. cit., p. 4.

¹¹⁵ Louis de Sambucy de Saint Estève, honorary canon of Amiens, councillor of the Embassy in Rome, secretary to the Sacred College of Cardinals for France, Titular Canon of Notre-Dame de Paris.

¹¹⁶ de CHARRY, op. cit., references throughout : BLIN DE BOURDON, op. cit., pp. 42 ff.

¹¹⁷ See above, p. 27, footnote 74.

gathered around Julie Billiart and lived just a few kilometres outside Amiens, known as the "Religieuses de la Congrégation de Notre-Dame"¹¹⁸. By 1806 this new congregation numbered thirty Sisters and in 1807 they opened a new house, in Montdidier¹¹⁹. From a letter that Constant van Crombrugghe wrote to his parents in 1807, we know that he visited the establishment in the company of M. Cottu, a friend of de Sambucy and Vicar General of the Diocese of Amiens¹²⁰. When van Crombrugghe made this visit and saw the work that Julie Billiart and her sisters were doing for the poor, he thought how it would be good to have a similar establishment in Geraardsbergen. There was a short correspondence between Constant and his father on this matter, but the project did not come to anything¹²¹.

During the final year of his stay in Amiens, Constant was asked to take on the responsibility of supervising the choir boys of the Cathedral. It was one of the normal duties undertaken by the senior students. He seems to have taken this responsibility seriously and done it well, living with the boys in their choir-school house in Amiens, organising a time-table for them and re-organising their rules¹²². At the same time because he took his own work seriously, he prepared a personal time-table that included both prayer and study¹²³. When Constant left, the boys missed him and still did two years later, when de Sambucy wrote to Constant:

"We are happy here, my good friend; only we miss you. The children miss you a lot. (...) I do not despair of seeing you again one day. God has His plans. Be always in total dependence on His divine Spirit and He will lead you as though by the hand, through

¹¹⁸ GUIDE, A., (Varin) op. cit., Chap. XV.

¹¹⁹ BLIN DE BOURDON, op. cit., p. 43.

¹²⁰ GARCIA, G. C., op. cit., p. 27, referring to AJM / I / M7, letter of van Crombrugghe to his parents, 6 January, 1808. Note: the letter only refers to Mlle. Julie, but comparison with BLIN de BOURDON leaves no doubt that this was Julie Billiart.

¹²¹ Ibid., p. 27.

¹²² JORISSEN, J., op. cit., p. 19: "Le Règlement Général des Enfants de la Maîtrise de la Cathédrale d'Amiens".

¹²³ The following is the time-table Constant prepared for himself, from JORISSEN, J., op. cit., Ch. I, footnote 12:
 4h. lever, visite spirituelle au Saint Sacrement, mes actions de la journée à offrir à Dieu;
 4½ h. étude, faire mon amplification jusqu'à 5h. pour les leçons;
 6h. oraison ;
 6½ h. faire mon lit et me préparer pour la sainte Messe;
 6.45h. départ pour la Sainte Messe;
 8h. étude, lecture ou mettre mes cahiers au net;
 10½ h. leçons;
 11½ h. chapelet, lecture d'Imitation, examen particulier;
 1½ h. lecture; 2½ h. étude;
 4h. transcrire les notes sur les cahiers de la maison;
 4½ h. préparation à la classe; 5h. café; 7h. lecture de piété ;
 7.45h. souper et récréation; 8.45h. prière du soir;
 9h. coucher des enfants, examen général de conscience;
 9¼ h. visite des dortoirs et coucher.

all the difficulties."¹²⁴

De Sambucy remained a friend of Constant and kept in contact with him throughout his life.

F. CONCLUSIONS

During his final year at Amiens, we begin to see the young man that Constant had become, beginning to respond not only to the promptings of the Spirit within him, but also to the conditions he encountered in society. Constant had gone to Amiens a boy, fresh from home and family. He had wished when he went there, to follow a course of studies suitable for a business man and had no other plan for his future but to follow the family trade¹²⁵.

In fact, Constant had surely taken on to some degree the characteristics and attitudes of his family, first among which was that deep faith which would not be shaken, regardless of difficult political situations and disturbances. He had also received from them the ability to be flexible in the face of political uncertainty and change, as well as the diplomacy that was to remain with him throughout his life. He was influenced, too, by the fact that his family was made up of good, hard-working people who were careful with their possessions while at the same time generous in caring for the poor¹²⁶.

During his years at Amiens, through the guidance of his teachers, particularly Père Sellier his spiritual director, he grew in faith and changed his whole direction in life. While making a novena to Saint Joseph, during his first year there, he made the decision to become a priest¹²⁷. The Fathers of the Faith became his models both through their personal lives and through their way of educating boys. He learned from them, especially from Sellier, reliance on the mercy and goodness of God, as well as trust and confidence in His care as a Father¹²⁸. He grew in discernment, in the discovering of the will of God in his own life. It is possible that he learned from them, too, a certain gentleness of manner¹²⁹. His ability to organise had also come strongly to the fore, in his dealings with the younger boys in the choir school. The boys liked him, and even two years after he had left,

¹²⁴ AJM / I / L, letter of de Sambucy to van Crombrugge, Amiens, 29 January, 1810, quoted in GARCIA, G. C. *op. cit.*, Vol. 2, p. 15, footnote 151:

"Que nous sommes heureux ici, mon bon ami; il n'y manque que vous. Les enfants vous regrettent bien ... Je ne désespère pas de vous revoir un jour. Dieu a ses desseins. Soyez toujours dans une entière dépendance de son divin Esprit et il vous conduira comme par la main à travers toutes les difficultés."

¹²⁵ See above, page 31.

¹²⁶ See above, B: "Family and School (1789 - 1809)".

¹²⁷ See above, D: "Père Louis Sellier", p. 31.

¹²⁸ See above, D : "Père Louis Sellier", pp. 32 – 34.

¹²⁹ See above, D : "Père Louis Sellier", p. 33.

(a long time for an adolescent), still missed him¹³⁰.

Having made his choice in life, Constant was trying to live accordingly and make the appropriate decisions for the future. At the beginning of 1808, he officially entered the list of ecclesiastics. Conscription had become obligatory in France and so the Bishop of Amiens applied for exemption for the students and seminarians concerned. He was told that this could be given if the young men had expressed a desire to become ecclesiastics; if they were actually following a course of studies; if their names had been sent by the Minister for Religion; and if their hair was cut in the suitable ecclesiastic fashion¹³¹. So van Crombrugghe was not conscripted and he was included in the list of ecclesiastics. At this point, we turn to the second man to have had a profound influence on the person of Constant van Crombrugghe, his uncle and spiritual director, Jean-François-Ghislain Huleu.

¹³⁰ See above, E: "Père Leblanc and other Fathers of the Faith", p. 43.

¹³¹ AMJDR / A - 26, letter of Père Sellier to van Crombrugghe, from St. Just, 28 July, 1808.

CHAPTER TWO : FORMATION TO THE PRIESTHOOD

A. JEAN-FRANCOIS-GHISLAIN HULEU (1746 - 1815)

1. Diocesan Priest

Perhaps one of the most interesting people to have influenced Constant van Crombrugghe was his uncle, Huleu. A man with a deep attraction for the contemplative life, he was an influential person in his diocese of Mechelen, with strong Ultramontanist tendencies, but who fell into total disagreement with his Ordinary, Cardinal Franckenberg, over the Oath of the 19th Fructidor¹.

a) Biographical sketch

Huleu, the uncle of Ghislain-Francois van Crombrugghe, was born in Geraardsbergen in December 1746². We know practically nothing of his early life and education. He studied philosophy and theology at Louvain at the "Collège du Saint Esprit"; where later he was to be a professor. He was ordained to the priesthood in 1771 and in 1773 attained his Licence in Theology, teaching in his College during the same year³.

In June 1773, he was asked by Cardinal-Archbishop de Franckenberg to be his secretary. In 1775, while still only 29 years of age, he was named as successor to Pierre Dens as Canon, synodal examiner and President of the Seminary. In 1779 he was made Archpriest of the Diocese of Mechelen and lived there in a type of clerical community.

Increasingly Huleu felt himself attracted to the contemplative life, and in 1784 he joined the Trappists for a brief period⁴. The following year he decided to enter the Discalced Carmelites, near Paris (the exact convent to which he went is unknown). Once again this was for a short period of a few months, after which he returned to Mechelen, this time living with the Calced Carmelites. While he felt drawn to the contemplative life, it would seem clear that this was not his vocation.

¹ See above, page 8 – 9.

² REUSENS, E.H.J., "Huleu", B. N. Tome IX, (Bruxelles, Bruxelles, Bruylant-Christophe, 1886 – 1887) pp. 681 – 688.

³ LECLERQ, L., "Le Memorale Vitae Sacerdotalis de Claude Arvisenet à Malines". Collectanea Mechliniensis, T. XXIII, 1834, pp. 321 – 326. (Novae Seriei, T. VIII).

⁴ GARCIA, G. C., op. cit., p. 28.

During this period he was in active opposition to the reforms of Joseph II, the Austrian Emperor⁵, and the government was suspicious of him, thinking that his devotion was a cover up for political activity. He was required to leave Mechelen and to live in another area of the Lowlands in a monastery of his choice. Thus in the beginning of 1787 we find him in Gent, but not entering, the Friars Minor⁶. This also was only for a few months, because already in June he was back in Mechelen. He returned as a Canon of the Diocese, President of the Seminary and would later be made Vicar General. Throughout this period Huleu was considered a pious and wise man, very highly thought of by both his fellow clergy and by his Bishop, Franckenberg.

b) Huleu and the Oath of Hatred of the 19th Fructidor

During the entire period of political unrest in the Lowlands⁷, with each successive regime, it would seem that Huleu “changed sides”. His main concern and preoccupation was that the Church might be allowed to continue serving the faithful⁸, and to this end he tried to be on good terms with those currently in authority. It was this that led to the problem between himself and his Ordinary over the question of the Oath.

By the decree of the 19th Fructidor (September, 1797), the clergy were required to take an oath of obedience to the French Republic, an oath of hatred of Royalty and of Tyranny⁹. In line with his principles, Huleu said that the Oath should be taken and in so doing found himself in complete opposition to Cardinal Franckenberg. Apart from all the religious issues involved, it is clear that politics also played a part in this argument. Franckenberg had been an appointee of the Empress Maria Theresa¹⁰ and so would most certainly not have welcomed the occupation of the Lowlands by the French.

In an attempt to defend his position, Huleu began publishing, the first of his pamphlets appearing in 1797, entitled “Wearschoewinge aan het volk” (Notice to the People)¹¹. This pamphlet

⁵ See above, page 2.

⁶ LECLERCQ, L., op. cit., p. 322; REUSENS, E.H.J., op. cit., p. 682.

⁷ See Chapter I. A: "In the midst of revolution and war", pp. 1 - 9.

⁸ GARCIA, G. C., op. cit., p. 28

⁹ See above, page 8.

¹⁰ ROGIER, L.-J., op. cit., p. 158

¹¹ For details of this argument see GARCIA G. C., op. cit., pp. 28 - 30. HULEU, J.F.G., Wearschoewinge aan het volk ... over syn geroelen ten opzichte van de Declaratie die door de Republiek van Geistelyke voord geëyscht, (Mechelen, 1797).

sums up his basic attitude. He argued that the French were the legitimate authority and that the oath required only the promise not to incite to insurrection. He also relied on the statement of Pope Pius VI, made in July 1796, that recommended the clergy to submit to the laws of the Republic¹². Huleu was an Ultramontanist and for him any decision, or even silence, on the part of the Pope was of greater importance than any decision reached by the Local Ordinary. Over the whole issue of the Oath this remained an essential aspect of his argument. Eventually he went as far as open, public opposition and disobedience to his Ordinary.

In 1798 he published two more pamphlets consequent on the required oath, one concerned with the duties of the Catholic citizen and the other, an attempt to clarify the meaning of the Oath¹³. He used the same arguments as before, in addition explaining that "hatred of royalty" did not mean effective hatred, but rather the promise not to work for the return of the monarchy.

Cardinal Franckenberg did not agree at all with Huleu's arguments¹⁴, especially those concerning Rome, and he wrote in April 1798, that Huleu was really using a Jansenistic distinction¹⁵. A few days afterwards, in a letter to Huleu, he warned him that despite the example of piety and zeal he had given the Diocese over the years, he was now moving towards schism¹⁶.

Huleu was removed from his position as President of the Seminary and Vicar General of the Diocese of Mechelen. He must have felt himself very isolated during this period, because although some others in the Diocese did follow his arguments, the majority did not. The whole position was very bad, especially as Huleu was trying to protect the pastoral ministry of the Church.

"In his mind, taking the oath and making the declaration that replaced it after the 18th Brumaire (November 1799) were the only ways to ensure that the faithful continued to receive the sacraments. Unfortunately his decision caused scandal and had the opposite effect than the one hoped for."¹⁷

It was only after the Concordat between Napoleon and the Holy See that Huleu was re-instated as Vicar General of Mechelen, under Archbishop de Roquelaire, and was named titular Canon and

¹² GARCIA, G. C., op. cit., p. 29.

¹³ HULEU, J.F.G., Pligten van allen Katholyken borger, (Mechelen, 1798); Veritatis aurora sive duplicitis status quaestionis circa sensum formulae juramenti 19 Fructidor, examen serum, (Mechelen, 1798).

¹⁴ "Lettres inédites du Cardinal Franckenberg", J.H.L., Tome II, 1835 - 36, 18^e Livraison, 1 October, 1837, pp. 287 - 293.

¹⁵ Ibid., Franckenberg to Van de Velde, April 1798; also quoted in REUSENS, E.H.J., op. cit., p. 685: "A cela s'est jointe encore la triste conduits de mon archiprêtre de Malines, qui s'embourbe toujours de plus en plus, et court à grands pas vers le schisme;... Vous y verrez qu'il se ferme, pour ainsi dire, tout moyen de se soumettre à la doctrine de Rome par une, distinction vraiment jansénistique sur le sens général et particulier du serment."

¹⁶ REUSENS, E.H.J., ibid., Franckenberg to Huleu, 17 April, 1798.

¹⁷ GARCIA, G. C., op. cit., p. 30, Franckenberg to Huleu, 17 April, 1798.

synodal examiner. After his retirement in 1818, he was again President of the Seminary and was also one of the two Vicar Capitulars of the Diocese. In 1806 he had founded a congregation of Sisters in "Les Soeurs de la Charité Chrétienne" and it would be in their community chapel that his grand-nephew, Constant, would celebrate his first Mass. The Sisters worked with the poor, both in the area of education and nursing, thus fulfilling a personal, life-long desire of Huleu's to help the poor. Jean-François Huleu died in Mechelen in 1815.

2. Spiritual Director

a) Publications

It is relatively easy from our vantage point, to look back in history and to sit in judgement on people and events without understanding the religious and political complexities of the times. Therefore, before jumping to conclusions over the question of Huleu and the Oath it may be of help to examine his writings and his work as a spiritual director. As was common at the time, as President of the Seminary, he edited or changed previous works to suit the needs of the seminarians with whom he was concerned. Among these are a clerical manual to which he contributed, a prayer book and an edition of Arvisenet's Memoriale Vitae Sacerdotalis.

In 1780 the first edition of the Manuale Clericorum was published for the Diocese of Mechelen. This was said to be entirely by Huleu, but in fact he used a previous work and contributed a new section entitled "Catechismus de Tonsura". This would appear to have been his first published work¹⁸.

When Huleu had replaced Pierre Dens as President of the Seminary (because of advancing years Dens had allowed things to slip regarding internal discipline), he had the unenviable task of restoring the type of discipline considered suitable in a seminary. He produced a Prayer Book for the use of the seminarians as a part of his reforms¹⁹. He relied on a previous work of Dens, retaining some of the original prayers and cutting others down in length.

Huleu prescribed prayers for the whole day and, following the example of St. Francis de Sales, whom he proposed as Patron of the seminarians, suggested that all the events of the day, conversation and work were to be offered to the greater glory of God²⁰. For the seminarian the day began

¹⁸ LECLERCQ, L., "Le Manuale Clericorum de l'Archidiocèse de Malines", Collect. Mech., T. XXV, Aug - Sept., 1936, pp. 501 - 521.

¹⁹ Ibid., p. 503. The Prayer Book was a success and continued to be reprinted well into the twentieth century.

²⁰ Ibid., p. 518.

by making the sign of the cross, symbolising the entire giving of himself to God²¹. He would then place himself under the protection of Our Lady and the Guardian Angels. There were detailed prayers proposed for use throughout the day until, finally, the day ended with the prayer, "Into your hands, O Lord, I commend my spirit". There is even advice for those who could not sleep: that they should repeat continuously the Holy Name of Jesus²².

The Prayer Book reflected the type of spirituality that relies to a great extent on oral prayer and is very organised. With various modifications, it was to remain in use in the Diocese of Mechelen for over a hundred years.

In 1796 the Memoriale Vitae Sacerdotalis of Arvisenet²³ was published for the first time in Belgium. This small book had a great influence on Huleu. The previous year, 1795, he had gone to Rome at the request of Cardinal Franckenberg and had come across this book. He was fascinated by it and on his return to Belgium set about having it printed in Mechelen, with a preface written by himself²⁴. As President of the Seminary, Huleu recommended it as the official spiritual reading of the seminarians.

The author of the Memoriale was a French Priest exiled from France who wrote this and other works in order spiritually to support his fellow priests in exile. As was customary, he left the authorship anonymous. The Memoriale went into many editions in various countries and the author himself seems to have completely revised the work and included additional chapters²⁵.

While the Memoriale is rather similar in style to the Imitation of Christ, it also relies on the writings of Saint Francis de Sales, particularly regarding the encouragement it offers. It takes the form of an imaginary conversation between God and the priest. In many of the chapters the conversation opens with words of the Father, followed, in a more gentle tone, by Christ, who invites and draws the priest to himself. While not using direct quotations from Scripture, the passages are usually in the form of a scriptural paraphrase. In responding to Christ the priest expresses his sentiments and difficulties, to which Christ again replies. The whole tone is of gentleness and

²¹ Ibid., p. 513.

²² Ibid., p. 520.

²³ LECLERCQ, L., "Bibliographie Ascétique à l'Usage du Clergé de l'archdiocèse de Malines" (1738 - 1906), Collect. Mech., 1938, pp. 469 - 490.

For the purposes of this study the following were used:

ARVISENET, Memoriale Vitae Sacerdotalis, (Brixiae, Pasini, 1824);
Oeuvres Complètes d'Arvisenet, (Ed. Publisher, M.l'Abbé Migne, Paris, 1856).

²⁴ LECLERCQ, L., (Memoriale) op. cit., p. 322. Because Huleu placed his initials at the end of the Preface, for a long time this book was considered to be his work. Even REUSEN, in his article in the Biographie Nationale makes this mistake.

²⁵ Ibid., p. 324. In the edition published in Belgium in 1801, there were 82 chapters and it was considered that some were the work of Huleu.

encouragement²⁶.

"Come my son. Come confidently: know who I am who calls you
... Do not despair ... but trust, not in yourself, but in Me, who
works in you."²⁷

Throughout there is a double stress on prayer and priestly ministry. Perfection for the priest consists in prayer, word and example²⁸. In writing of the priestly ministry, especially the Sacrament of Penance, Arvisenet insists that the priest show the mercy of God toward the penitent²⁹. This theme recurs many times. The priest himself is advised to receive the Sacrament frequently, so that he may offer the same mercy and gentleness to those he serves. In one of the chapters concerned with Penance, the priest is reminded of the words of Jesus that we be merciful as our heavenly Father is merciful³⁰. He is advised to follow the example of the father of the prodigal son, to encourage rather than to discourage, with gentleness and affection rather than authority³¹.

Finally the priest is advised in his ministry to be always merciful in truth, maintaining the balance between justice and peace³², receiving people with love, tact and mercy³³.

Arvisenet writes about every imaginable aspect of the priestly life; virtues, vices, housing, clothing, church adornment and so on. Among the authors he recommends are A Kempis, Francis de Sales and Rodriguez³⁴.

The impression received from this book is one of peace. There is a gentle atmosphere about it, every page holding words of encouragement for the priest, that is encouragement for himself and for the people he serves. This is all the more remarkable when we recall the conditions of exile and hardship under which the book was written.

In the preface which Huleu wrote to the Memoriale, he advises the reader to ponder and

²⁶ ARVISENET, op. cit., p. 9.

²⁷ Ibid., Introduction: "*Accede, fili, accede confidenter: sciens quia ego qui te vocavi ... Ne desperes ... et, presume non de te, sed de me, qui operabor in te.*"

²⁸ Ibid., p. 30: "Fili, ecce quanta potest verus et sanctus sacerdos, orationi, verbo et exemplo intentus."

²⁹ Ibid., p. 60.

³⁰ Ibid., Chapter LV: "De misericordia in sacro poenitentiae tribunali tenenda"

³¹ BROUTIN, P., "La piété sacerdotale au début du XIXe siècle", R.A.M. Avril – Juin, (XXe année, - 78), pp. 158 - 180.

³² ARVISENET, op. cit., p. 196.

³³ Ibid., p. 164.

³⁴ In 1804 Huleu published a translation of Rodriguez, De oeffenings van de Volmaek theyd door Alphonsus de Rodriguez.

meditate on the contents and to read it repeatedly³⁵. We may perhaps presume that he followed his own advice and allowed this work to influence his own thought, and therefore the thought of those to whom he offered spiritual direction.

b) Huleu and van Crombrugghe

It is not known when Chanoine Huleu became his nephew's spiritual director, but in 1806 it was to him that Constant had written about his decision to become a priest, and asking his uncle to obtain the necessary permission from his father to follow a suitable course of Study at Amiens³⁶. When van Crombrugghe experienced spiritual dryness and doubts during his final years at Amiens, it was the correspondence he held with his uncle that helped him³⁷. At the beginning of the year 1809, Constant had written to his uncle of his resolution to become "a saint and a scholar", and to consecrate himself "to the service of God and of souls"³⁸. However, having made this decision he found the next month wrought with difficulties and his uncle wrote to him regularly explaining the spiritual life and offering encouragement.

Huleu taught Constant to rely on the goodness and the mercy of the Lord and to be gentle with himself rather than angry and distressed. He reminded his nephew that St. Francis de Sales had encouraged us to live in this way.

As Constant increasingly experienced spiritual dryness, Huleu helped him to understand that this was a normal state for beginners in the spiritual life as that was a time of purification. He warned Constant that he should not be sad about it and when he was with others to make an effort to be cheerful³⁹.

Constant had almost stopped receiving Holy Communion because he thought he was unworthy and unsuitable⁴⁰. Canon Huleu guided him well, over this problem. There was a certain briskness about his response in which he told Constant that of course he was not worthy, but that was all the more reason to trust in God and to continue with thanksgiving, in peace and joy of soul.

³⁵ LECLERCQ, L., (Memorale), op. cit., p. 322:

"In tantum quidem, ut ea quae legit, iterum legere, ruminare, meditare cupiat et numquam satiatus a lectione recedat."

³⁶ JORISSEN, J., op. cit. p. 14.

³⁷ During this final year Père Sellier was not at the school. See above, p. 40.

³⁸ JORISSEN, J., op. cit., p. 21:

"Il avait déclaré à son grand-oncle 'sa ferme résolution de devenir un saint et un savant, et par là d'avoir le bonheur de se consacrer, toujours plus et mieux au service de Dieu et des âmes' ."

³⁹ PIERAERTS et DESMET, op. cit., p. 52.

Canon Huleu's guidance of Constant was mainly directed towards freeing him from fear and scrupulosity, in order that he might accept the Lord's mercy and follow the will of God with confidence and courage. There was nothing soft about his spiritual direction. Six months after Constant had entered the seminary, in February 1810, when the Church in Belgium was once again facing severe problems, Huleu wrote to him:

"Would it (the Church) be saved by our alarm, by our discussion on the matters, by our grief? Undoubtedly no: rather (it will be saved) by our prayers, by our submissiveness (to God) and by a masculine confidence in Divine Providence without whom nothing happens."⁴¹ (41)

The correspondence between van Crombrugge and his uncle continued until Huleu's death in 1815. He guided Constant through the seminary years and because of the circumstances of the time, arranged for his ordination to the priesthood⁴².

In this correspondence the impression given of Huleu is that he was a direct person who did not mince his words. It makes it a little easier to understand his attitude over the question of the oath. It is possible to suspect a passive submissiveness in the character of Huleu that led him to change very easily with each successive government, but this is not upheld in his correspondence with van Crombrugge, at least in the few letters still in existence. The impression is rather given that if he decided to do anything it would always be because he saw in it the will of God. In reflecting on the question of the Oath, it would have indeed required a manly confidence in God to follow through on his decision. Whether he was right in going against his Ordinary as he did, or whether he was right in taking the Oath, are other questions.

His nephew, while following his direction concerning things spiritual, never in any way followed his example concerning obedience to his Bishop. While, as will be seen, Constant van Crombrugge was also an Ultramontanist, reverence for his Bishop and obedience to him were characteristic of his entire life. By his direction, Huleu brought Constant to submissiveness to the will of God, but in a "masculine" way, an "active" submissiveness rather than a "passive" resignation⁴³. He led Constant out of his scruples and gave him clear principles on which to base decisions regarding himself. There is a health and balance about this direction.

Constant was immensely proud of his great uncle. If Huleu had lost his good name in his

⁴⁰ JORISSEN, J., op. cit., p. 21.

⁴¹ GARCIA, G. C., op. cit., p. 31; (AJM / I / L, letter of Huleu to van Crombrugge, Mechelen, 27 February, 1810). "*Serait-elle sauvée par nos alarmes, par nos entretiens sur ces matière par nos chagrins? Non sans doute; mais bien par nos prières, par notre résignation et une confiance mâle dans la Divine Providence sans laquelle, rien n'arrive.*"

⁴² See below, page 75.

⁴³ GARCIA, G. C., op. cit., p. 31.

own country, according to Constant this was not so in France, for he wrote home to his parents from Amiens, that Huleu was a man "whose praises ring even in this area where there are few priests who do not know him; perhaps more justice is rendered to his merit here than in certain places in Flanders"⁴⁴.

When van Crombrugge came to the end of his final year at Amiens, he had to decide on the seminary he would attend. He was attracted to Amiens, because there he could continue working with the choir boys; his uncle agreed with him⁴⁵. Père Sellier did not, writing to Constant in May 1809,

"The other motives which make you inclined to stay in Amiens, do not seem to me of the kind to hold you there."⁴⁶

In trying to discover, to discern the will of God for him, Père Sellier tells Constant to look for two things: what would be of greater benefit for himself and what would therefore be also for the greater glory of God.

Huleu had also suggested to him the possibility of his going to the seminary in Mechelen, where he was still the President. Following on this suggestion, Constant's father requested the Bishop of Gent, Maurice de Broglie, to grant the necessary permission. The Bishop replied to M. van Crombrugge that while he would like to reply favourably to the request, he lacked priests; therefore he did not wish to let go of a promising seminarian. He promised that he would put Constant's talents to the best possible use⁴⁷. And so it was decided that Constant would enter the seminary in Gent.

⁴⁴ GARCIA, G. C., op. cit., p. 32; AJM / I / J, van Crombrugge to Parents, Amiens, 22 July, 1809.
"Ce digne ecclésiastique dont les éloges retentissent jusqu'en ces pays-ci où peu de prêtres ne le connaissent. Peut-être son mérite reçoit plus de justice ici que dans certains endroits en Flandres."

⁴⁵ PIERAERTS et DESMET, op. cit., p. 71; GARCIA, G. C., op. cit., p. 33 with reference to AJM / I / L letter of Huleu to van Crombrugge, Mechelin, 25 May, 1809.

⁴⁶ ADMJR / A - 26, letter of Sellier to van Crombrugge, 18 May, 1809, (copy, possibly made by the Founder.) *"Les autres motifs qui font pencher pour rester à Amiens ... ne me paraissent pas de nature de vous retenir.»*

⁴⁷ PIERAERTS et DESMET, op. cit., p. 71, lettre de Maurice de Broglie, évêque de Gand à M. van Crombrugge, 18 September, 1809, (AJM / I / D): *"Je voudrais pouvoir accéder à votre demande mais ce moment je manque de prêtres. Vous comprendrez sans peine que je ne dois pas me dessaisir d'un sujet qui promet beaucoup, et dont j'ai droit d'espérer de bons services dans l'état ecclésiastique. D'ailleurs vous pouvez être assuré que j'aurai pour M. votre fils tous les égards que ses talents et ses mœurs méritent."*

B. SEMINARY EDUCATION

1. The Gent Seminary

Constant van Crombrugge entered the Gent seminary in September in 1809. Among his professors were the brothers Joseph and François de Volder and Augustin Joseph Ryckewaert. Ryckewaert and the de Volder brothers were to become important figures in the Diocese during the difficulties in the years to come⁴⁸. When Constant entered the seminary the problems were only beginning and he could live and study in comparative peace.

There is no record of the course of studies Constant followed and because of the later dispersion of the seminarians of Gent, in 1813, we know nothing either of the programme or of the methodology of theology or scripture taught there. We can arrive at some ideas indirectly by examining these courses as they were generally taught elsewhere during the same period.

a) Seminary education in general

Because of the circumstances prevailing in France, including the Northern Departments, the whole course of philosophy and theology was brief⁴⁹ lasting only two or three years.

In the 17th century there had been a reform of the clergy in France effected through men such as Bérulle, St. Vincent de Paul, Jean-Jacques Olier, St. Jean-Marie Eudes. They had all, in one way or another, worked for the perfection of the priestly state. For example, during this century the practice had begun of seminarians preparing for their ordination and future ministry by making a retreat. This had become accepted practice for all ordinands by the end of the 17th century.

Throughout the 18th century, priestly formation continued to be primarily concerned with the spiritual formation of the seminarian. This did not exclude academic studies, but spiritual development was generally considered to be of greater importance. The devotional book of Arvisenet, the Memoriale Vitae Sacerdotalis, is typical in showing the kind of priestly perfection envisaged⁵⁰. Usually the personal libraries of priests contained such devotional works⁵¹. This system of seminary education produced generations of holy men, who, when confronted by revolution and war, as well as by great secular philosophers such as Rousseau and Voltaire, were able to withstand the assault. In many instances it produced martyrs and certainly men who

⁴⁸ See below, page. 68; see also Appendix II, Biographical Notes, p. v. Ryckewaert, and Volder, de.

⁴⁹ BAUNARD, Un siècle de l'Eglise en France, 1800 - 1900, Paris, Ch.Poussielgue, 1901, chap. XVII.

⁵⁰ See above, pp. 53 - 56.

⁵¹ In the Archives at Melle, the Generalate of the Josephite Fathers, a few personal books of the Founder are kept, among them some of this category, for example: Par l'ordre de Monseigneur l'Evêque d'Amiens, Discours Ecclésiastique, Charles Caron-Hubault, Amiens, 1750, (Retreat conferences for diocesan priests and ordinands). Par ordre de l'Archevêque de Sens, Recueil des Conférences Ecclésiastiques du Diocèse de Sens, Sens, Prussinot, 1682.

accepted suffering as part of their vocation and priestly ministry⁵². This accent on the spiritual dimension of their life led priests to become primarily pastors and apostles among the people they served⁵³. Duties of state were considered of great importance and were grouped under two categories, service of God and service of others. They were men of great apostolic zeal⁵⁴. These priests were educators in the fullest sense of the word, instructing their people in every aspect of life and supporting them in their trials. The hallmark of these priests of the 18th century, was their spiritual strength and their generosity as pastors of the people⁵⁵. The Gent seminary where Constant spent three years would not have been an exception in offering this type of priestly training.

b) Scripture

Regarding the course of Scripture taught by Joseph de Volder we know nothing, so once again we have to look elsewhere to get some idea of what was usually taught in the seminaries at the turn of the century.

In general, at this time, Scripture was used as an aid to devotion. Authors would quite freely paraphrase passages of Scripture to suit their purposes and to fit their themes. The Bible was read in excerpts, if at all. Certainly the laity had to have permission to read it, and particularly in their own language⁵⁶. In the seminaries Scripture was normally taught, but as an extra subject and not part of a scientific discipline.

In the text books and "Dictionnaires" in use at the time, we find certain recommendations for the theologian⁵⁷. A typical selection of these recommendations is as follows. First, when reading Scripture, only the meaning offered by the Church was acceptable; otherwise one could fall into heresy. Second, it was considered that the authors of the books of the Bible wrote the literal truth; therefore a literal interpretation was recommended. Third, it was the work of the theologian to examine various texts so that if something were not clear in one place, it would be in another, when a text comparison was made. Fourth, it was important that the theologian could read Hebrew if a serious study of any passage were to be made.

⁵² BENOIT, P., La vie des Clercs dans les Siècles Passés, Paris, Maison de Bonne Presse, 1914, Chap. XLI - XLII, pp. 541 - 577.

⁵³ Auteurs Divers, "Prêtres de Belgique, 1830 - 1930", N. R. T., Vol. 57, N° 8, Sept - Oct., 1930, Avant Propos.

⁵⁴ BROUTIN, P., op. cit., p. 162.

⁵⁵ "Prêtres de Belgique, 1830 - 1930", N. R. T. op. cit., avant propos.

⁵⁶ BOUSSEN, F-R., Evêque de Bruges, "Circulaire de Msgr. l'Evêque de Bruges, sur les sociétés Bibliques", J.H.L., Tome III, pp. 1836 - 1837, 29^e Livraison, September 1836, pp. 237 - 239. In this letter, the Bishop while writing against the Protestant Bible Societies reminds the Clergy that the laity are not permitted to read or to possess the Bible translated into their mother tongue, unless they have received express permission from the Bishop. His reason was that commonly given, that they could be led into misundstanE., and harm. (p.239).

⁵⁷ The Josephite Archives, Melle, contain among the books of van Crombrugge, Dictionnaire, historique, critique, chronologique, géographique et littéral de la Bible, Toulouse, Sens, 1783.

A study of the teachings of the Fathers of the Church, particularly concerning Scripture, was considered essential, in order to be conversant with their interpretations of various passages. A very comprehensive reading list was given for aspiring theologians⁵⁸.

These "Dictionnaires" were a curious mixture of factual and devotional material. They draw not only from Scriptural texts but also from the writings of the Fathers, as well as the visions of contemplatives and mystics⁵⁹.

Most Scripture courses, possibly including those taught at Gent, probably followed a method similar to these guidelines, encouraging the use of Scripture for devotion and drawing from many other sources, especially from the Fathers of the Church⁶⁰.

c) Theology

We may recall that Joseph II, Emperor of Austria, had promoted educational reform in all the provinces of the Empire. All the seminaries had been closed and in the Lowlands two state universities had been opened, Leuven and Luxembourg, and all seminarians were obliged to attend one of these⁶¹. This had been done in an attempt to raise the educational standards. Leopold II on becoming Emperor had rescinded this order and diocesan seminaries were re-established⁶².

In 1802, Msgr Fallot de Beaumont⁶³ had been appointed by Napoleon as Bishop of Gent and among other reforms effected during his episcopacy was that of the organisation of the diocesan seminary. He was equally concerned with the academic education of the clergy as well as their spiritual welfare, and so, for example, he established the Chair of Philosophy at Gent. The seminary was re-opened in 1804 and by 1806 there were already 70 students.

De Beaumont insisted, too, on the virtue of the priests and the seminarians, and wrote several pastoral instructions concerning this⁶⁴. Priests were to encourage the people not only by what they

⁵⁸ SIMON, R., Le Grand Dictionnaire de la Bible, Lyon, Bruyset, 1768.

⁵⁹ For example, the article "Marie", Ibid, Vol. 2, pp. 95 - 107.

⁶⁰ Van Crombrughe made use of Scripture in a devotional way in the Constitutions and Spiritual Instructions he would later offer the religious Congregations he founded (See Appendix V). He also used the writings of the Fathers to a limited extent. He quoted from St. John Chrysostom and St. Augustine, and referred to St. Jerome and St. Cyprian.

⁶¹ See above, page 2.

⁶² ELLIS, J.T., "Short history of seminary education from Trent to today", Seminary Education in a time of change, ed. J. M. LEE and L. J. PUTZ, Indiana, Fides Publications, 1965, pp. 30 - 81.

⁶³ See Appendix II, Biographical Notes, p. v. Fallot de Beaumont.

⁶⁴ DE BROGLIE, M., Evêque de Gand (1807 - 1829), Recueil des Mandements, lettres pastorales, Instructions et autres Documents, Gand, Poelman - de Pape, 1843. See the introduction referring to his predecessor, Msgr. Fallot de

said but primarily through the manner in which they lived. The Bishop encouraged retreats for priests and we know that in 1806 there were four such retreats available in the diocese; during these retreats time was given for meditation and silence was encouraged. De Beaumont also introduced into the diocese the practice of examination of confessors, in order to ensure their suitability⁶⁵.

The theology taught in Gent would have been the minimum needed for the young priest. The practice in other seminaries and perhaps also in Gent, was to begin the course by studying the tract on the Church. A contemporary of van Crombrugghe, Rohrbacher in the seminary at Nancy, wrote about the impression this tract made on him. He says that there was a special interest in this treatise for two reasons: first, because of the condition in which the Church found itself and second, because "one could expect to give one's life for the truths which it (the Church) taught and which one was studying"⁶⁶.

The Gent Seminary had on its faculty one of the best theologians in the Lowlands at the time; Augustin-Joseph Ryckewaert had been ordained in Mechelen in 1797, having studied philosophy at Leuven and theology in the seminary of Ypres⁶⁷. After having gained pastoral experience by working in a parish, he was appointed as professor of theology in Gent in 1806 by Msgr. Fallot de Beaumont, and also taught the courses of Logic and Metaphysics.⁶⁸. He was popular among the seminarians both as a confessor and spiritual director. It is said of him that he was a man full of confidence in the Lord and that he tried to encourage this in others, helping the person grow in a true sense of humility that trusts in the Lord rather than in self. He is said to have had a personal devotion to the Guardian Angels whom he invoked frequently, a devotion he encouraged in those he directed⁶⁹.

Throughout his life Ryckewaert continued to be outspoken. As a theologian he worked against any form of Jansenism. In later years he would be one of the first to speak out against the teaching of Lamennais⁷⁰, and warn of the dangers inherent in his writings. He died in Gent in 1839, having contributed greatly to the Church in Belgium through his services to the Diocese as a

Beaumont.

⁶⁵ ANON., "Notice sur Msgr. Fallot de Beaumont, J. H. L., Tome II, 20^e Livraison, 1^{er} Dec. 1835, pp. 427 - 432.

⁶⁶ COSTIGAN, R. F., S. J., Rohrbacher and the Ecclesiology of Ultramontanism, P. U. G. Rome, 1980. Quoted on p. 5. Rohrbacher was ordained for the Diocese of Nancy in 1812 having completed his seminary studies in two years, 1810 - 1812.

⁶⁷ DE SCHREVEL, A. C., "Ryckewaert, Augustin-Joseph", B.N. (Bruxelles, Emile Bruylant), 1880 -1910, pp. 640 - 650, (Vol. 20).

⁶⁸ BRACQ, H., "Notice sur M. le Chanoine Ryckewaert, Président du Séminaire de Gand", J. H. L., Tome 3, 27^e Livraison, Juillet 1836, pp. 116 - 124.

⁶⁹ BRACQ, H., op. cit., p. 117.

⁷⁰ See below, chapter 3, page 112.

theologian and through those he helped prepare for the priesthood⁷¹.

It was to Ryckewaert that Maurice de Broglie turned in 1811 when, as Bishop of Gent, he was preparing to go to the Council of Bishops called by Napoleon, in Paris. He appointed Ryckewaert as his personal theologian and requested him to study the relationship between Church and State⁷². He made the study with particular reference to the teachings of the general Councils of the Church⁷³.

2. Ultramontanism in Belgium and the 1811 Council of Bishops

Ryckewaert was an Ultramontanist⁷⁴. He held that the Church must always remain free regarding its discipline, organisation and especially doctrine, while recognising the authority of the State in all that concerned civil affairs⁷⁵.

Ultramontanists maintained that the Supreme Pontiff had sovereign authority over all the Church, including the assemblies of Bishops and that the Pope's "actual, regular exercise of sovereign authority in teaching and ruling" should be accepted and welcomed throughout the Church⁷⁶. In the early 19th century this placed them in opposition to the Gallicans who considered that authority should arise from among the faithful. Gallicans held that the authority of the Pope was limited and to some extent subordinate to the authority of Episcopal Councils. While recognising universal religious unity, they stressed the unique traditions and near independence of the national Church. During this period in history, Gallicanism was closely associated with revolution⁷⁷.

The particular brand of Belgian Ultramontanism prevalent in the early 19th century, was staunchly faithful to the Pope in all that concerned matters spiritual and moral, while at the same time maintaining that the Church should recognise appropriate State authority and avoid all extremes. Belgian theologians, among them Ryckewaert, always rejected any form of absolutism in

⁷¹ BRACQ, H., op. cit., pp. 123 ff; DE SCHREVEL, A. C., op. cit., p. 649.

⁷² DE SCHREVEL, A.C., op. cit., pp. 640 - 642.

⁷³ DE BROGLIE, M., op. cit., Introduction.

⁷⁴ "Ultramontane" literally means "over the mountains". In the 19th century it meant those who favoured papal authority. They were called Ultramontane because they supported the Pope who lived "over the mountains", the Alps.

⁷⁵ GARCIA, G. C., op. cit., p. 34.

⁷⁶ COSTIGAN, R. F., op. cit., p. XXX. This attitude would reach its peak in the Dogmatic Constitution, "Pastor Aeternus", Vatican I, 1870.

⁷⁷ HAAG, H., op. cit., Chap. 2, "Ultramontanism".

the exercise of authority⁷⁸. For them, the power of authority must always be limited on the one hand by privileges freely allowed and on the other by morality and justice⁷⁹. The main thrust of Ultramontanism as it developed in Belgium, was to protect the liberty of individuals and their freedom of conscience.

In following these principles, the Belgian Hierarchy, especially de Broglie of Gent, came out strongly in favour of the papacy and the rights of the Church in opposition to Napoleon. In 1811, when the Council of Bishops was called and met in Paris, the differences reached their peak.

At that point the Pope, Pius VII, had already been held prisoner in Savona by Napoleon since 1809, when the Papal States had been annexed. Napoleon insisted that he had the right to appoint the Bishops in France, but the Pope refused to ordain the nominees. A council had already been held that same year but it had failed to resolve the question. Hence Napoleon called the Council of 1811.

During the meeting of the Council, de Broglie, Hirst of Tournai and Boulogne of Troyes were the only three Bishops who spoke out clearly against Napoleon⁸⁰. The crucial question was whether the Council was competent to make pronouncements if the pope did not accept the nominated Bishops. De Broglie, Hirst and Boulogne, in no uncertain terms, responded negatively, and as a result, on the night of 11 July, 1811, they were imprisoned. They were forced to resign from their dioceses, a clearly invalid action, and suffered an exceptionally harsh imprisonment⁸¹.

The diocese of Gent, as well as those of Tournai and Troyes, was told to elect a new diocesan administration. Under the guidance of Ryckewaert and the de Volders, many of the priests refused to do this. Finally, with the consent of de Broglie, two Vicar Capitulars were elected, Goethals and de Meulenaere⁸². This situation held until the Spring of 1813.

So far as the seminarians of Gent were concerned, these events brought about two main effects. First, the fact that their professor of Theology was also theologian to the Bishop, who took a clear stand regarding the Church-State relationships, must have developed and strengthened their own Ultramontanist attitudes⁸³. Eventually, when Belgium would arrive at Independence almost

⁷⁸ HAAG, H., Les Origines du Catholicisme libéral en Belgique, 1789 - 1839, Louvain, Université, Recueil de Travaux d'Histoire et de Philologie, 3^{me} Série, Fascicule 36, 1950.

⁷⁹ Ibid., pp. 77 ff.

⁸⁰ ROGIER, L-J., op. cit., pp. 292 ff.

⁸¹ DE BROGLIE, M., op. cit., Introduction.

⁸² VANDERMOERE, J., Récit de la Persécution endurée par les Séminaristes du Diocèse de Gand en 1813 et 1814 - précédé d'un coup d'œil sur l'histoire de l'Eglise dans ses rapports avec ce diocèse de 1800 à 1814, Gand, Vander Schleden, 1863.

⁸³ DE SMET, J. J., "Coup d'œil sur l'Histoire ecclésiastique dans les premières années du 19^e siècle et en particulier sur l'assemblée des évêques à Paris en 1811", J. H. L., Tome III, 33^e Livraison, 1837, pp. 454 - 457. Quoting Pius VII:

twenty years later, this will be seen to have been the case for van Crombrugghe and others of his generation⁸⁴.

The second effect was the very practical one that in the absence of the Bishop, no ordinations would be held from December 1811 until July 1813⁸⁵.

3. Constant van Crombrugghe – Seminarian

During the years 1809 to 1812 that Constant van Crombrugghe spent in the Gent seminary, he was taught by priests who were willing to risk imprisonment and worse, to defend what they considered to be right. We know that this influence was so strong that in 1813 the seminarians, along with their professors and other priests of the Diocese, refused to accept as Bishop, de la Brue de Saint-Bauzille⁸⁶, whom Napoleon appointed while Maurice de Broglie was still in prison. In consequence they were imprisoned or went into hiding and exile⁸⁷. Some seminarians died as a result of poor living conditions. Among these was a cousin of Constant's, Bernadine van den Hende⁸⁸. It is said that the seminarians had the courage to do this because of the help and encouragement they received through good, solid spiritual direction given in the seminary by Ryckewaert and others. Order was restored only at the end of the year 1813, when Broglie was reinstated as Bishop of Gent⁸⁹.

During these years, through his teachers and spiritual directors, Constant developed the strength of character that was evident throughout his life. He also learned tolerance and openness towards others. Early on in his seminary years, he felt that his friend Père Sellier, still in Amiens, had accepted the regime too easily. Père Sellier, in order to return to teaching, had applied for government recognition of his qualifications. Constant wrote and told him that he had been wrong

"Heureusement les Belges n'ont pas besoin de voir le Souverain Pontife pour, demeurer fermes dans leur soumission filiale à l'Eglise » (p. 455).

⁸⁴ In 1827 van Crombrugghe published a pamphlet entitled, Réfutation des Observations sur les libertés de l'Eglise en Belgique, par un Catholique Belge. In this he takes a stance that is clearly Ultramontanist and equally clearly writes against Gallican theories. He defends the Roman, universal character of the Church and its freedom. See also GARCIA, G. C., op. cit., p. 34.

⁸⁵ DE BROGLIE, M., op. cit., p. 189: "Anno 1812 et sequenti non prodiit Ordinatio quadragesimalis..."

⁸⁶ See Appendix II, Biographical Notes, p. v. Saint-Bauzille.

⁸⁷ DE BROGLIE, M., op. cit., Introduction.

⁸⁸ GARCIA, G. C., op. cit., pp. 33 - 35. During the years he spent in Gent, van Crombrugghe had also to assume responsibility for family problems. Due to the mental ill-health of the business head of the family, his uncle, Jean-François Spitaels, Constant became the family representative in Gent. He also assumed the responsibility for supervising the education of his younger sisters, especially Charlotte.

⁸⁹ VANDERMOERE, J., op. cit., pp. 232 ff.

to do this. In his reply, Sellier pointed out that as Constant lived in Flanders he should follow the opinions generally held there, but that did not give him the liberty to pass judgement on those living in other circumstances. He ends by saying:

"Thus, in spite of all you hear, do not condemn easily."⁹⁰

A difficult lesson to learn, to hold one's own ideas and at the same time give others the freedom to hold theirs, especially when there are important issues involved.

He received another such lesson from his uncle, Huleu. We have already seen how his uncle wrote to him that the Church is not going to be saved by our fears and discussion, but through our prayer⁹¹. In the same letter he wrote that Constant should limit himself to his duties as a seminarian, leaving Church affairs to his superiors, as this was the Lord's will for him at that time⁹². It is never easy to learn this type of lesson in detachment, especially when surrounded by trouble. That Constant did, however, begin to make this kind of detachment a part of his life was already evident at the time of his cousin's death in 1813. He wrote to his parents that Bernadine Van den Hende's death

"... is a loss neither for him nor for ourselves; his generous constancy in defending the sacred laws of the Church at the price of his life has merited for him unspeakable happiness and has acquired for all the family a powerful protector near God. He had fought unto death for the law of God and "supported by the solid Rock, he had not dreaded the word of the impious."⁹³

His years in the seminary thus helped Constant to develop his own principles of action while respecting those of others; they helped him to become detached from what should not concern him and to learn how to see beyond the immediate events in faith and to recognise that neither prison, nor exile, nor even death itself discourages those who are true disciples of Christ⁹⁴.

In 1812 Constant completed the required course of studies in the seminary. The previous year, in May 1811, Bishop de Broglie, before leaving for the Council in Paris, had conferred minor orders and the order of subdiaconate on van Crombrugghe. In the following December he received

⁹⁰ ADMJR / A - 26, Louis Sellier to van Crombrugghe, Montdidier, 12 September, 1809: "... ainsi, malgré tout ce que vous entendrez dire, ne condamnez pas aisément."

⁹¹ See above, page 58; (AJM / I / L, letter of Huleu to van Crombrugghe, Mechelen, 27 February, 1810.

⁹² Ibid., (also PIERAERTS et DESMET, op. cit., p. 73.)

⁹³ Cited in GARCIA, G. C., op. cit., p. 36 (AMJ / I / J), letter to parents, Mouscron, 29 December, 1813: "Ce n'est pas une perte ni pour lui ni pour nous. Sa généreuse constance à défendre au prix de la vie les Lois Sacrées de l'Eglise, lui a mérité un bonheur ineffable et nous a procuré un puissant protecteur pour toute la famille auprès de notre Dieu ... Il a combattu jusqu'à la mort pour la loi de Dieu et appuyé sur la pierre ferme, il n'a point redouté la parole des impies."

⁹⁴ PIERAERTS et DESMET, op. cit., p. 73, letter of Huleu to van Crombrugghe, 27 February, 1810.

the order of deacon, with the Bishop of Namur, de la Gaude, replacing the imprisoned de Broglie. In 1812, with de Broglie still in prison in Vincennes, private arrangements had to be made for the ordination of Constant to the priesthood. He had asked and received dispensation for ordination as he was still only 22 years of age. And so on 19 September, 1812, Constant van Crombrugghe was ordained priest, in Brussels, in the private chapel of Msgr. Van de Velde de Melroy⁹⁵, the officiating Bishop and retired Bishop of Ruremonde. Two days later he celebrated his first mass in the chapel of "Les Soeurs de la Charité Chrétienne", in Mechelen. Thus Constant's years of formation came to an end.

C. CONCLUSIONS

Constant took with him to Gent the attitudes he had learned during his early years, from his family and, during his adolescence, from the Fathers of the Faith. His political attitudes, business acumen as well as his sense of responsibility towards the poor, and flexibility were a part of the formation he received from his family⁹⁶. While in Gent he had the opportunity to develop his political knowledge and to integrate his attitudes towards the State with his understanding of the Church. He had the help of his professors in this, particularly as they were actively involved in such questions. He left the seminary an Ultramontanist, recognising the place of the State while at the same time ready to defend the rights of the Church and the authority of the Pope.

When he left his family he had had the opportunity to clarify his attitude towards poverty and towards the type of responsibility he would have as a priest towards the poor. Having to take over the business dealings of the family when his uncle was ill made him a capable business man, and led him to be very practical as far as any material help for the poor was concerned.

Before arriving at Gent, Constant's spiritual life was well formed, especially after the years he had spent under the guidance of Père Sellier. He had discovered his priestly vocation while at Amiens, under the patronage of St. Joseph, who from then on held a special place in Constant's life. He came to Gent firmly rooted in devotion to the Heart of Christ and with a realisation of the Lord's mercy toward him⁹⁷.

The guidance given him by his uncle, Canon Huleu, strengthened his understanding of the mercy of God. Huleu also taught him to keep a balance in his own spiritual life, not allowing himself to be overcome by scruples, but free to trust the Lord. Constant probably learned from his

⁹⁵ See Appendix II, Biographical Notes. p. v. Velde de Melroy.

⁹⁶ See above, chapter I, B: "Family and School (1789 - 1809)", pp. 9 - 15.

⁹⁷ See above, chapter I, C,1: "The Fathers of the Faith - Amiens", pp. 17 – 23. and D: "Père Louis Sellier", pp. 26 - 39.

uncle, as he surely did from Père Sellier, how to keep a balance between his life of prayer and his active priestly ministry, that same balance so obvious in Huleu himself. Although a man deeply attracted to the contemplative life who tried several times to respond to the vocation he thought he had to such a life, he also had the courage to stand out against his Ordinary, when, in conscience, he thought that this was necessary for the good of the people he served. He surely communicated both these traits to Constant, as part of the active submissiveness to the will of God and a strong confidence in the providence of God.

Another aspect of Huleu's influence was caused by his discovery of Arvisenet's Memoriale, which moved him deeply. This book is marked by a sense of the presence of God: the Lord who holds conversation with the priest; and by a whole sense of gentleness and mercy, confidence and trust in God and a sense of peace. Huleu surely passed on these characteristics to Constant through his spiritual direction. Christ would be very real to the young man, a Person with whom he could communicate in prayer; One, whom he would recognise in his neighbour and through events.

At this time in van Crombrugghe's life, one has the impression of a very virile young man, ready, even, to accept persecution if asked of him, in order to defend the rights of the Church. A young man who has learned to overcome his timidity and scrupulosity and to rely on the Lord.

Someone who could discern the will of God, through prayer and through other people and respond to that will in a manly, active way. A man, too, who had learned to receive the mercy of the Lord with confidence and who could offer that mercy to others in a gentle peaceful way as an instrument in the hand of the Lord⁹⁸. He was ready to begin his priestly ministry.

⁹⁸ See above, chapter I, D: "Père Louis Sellier", pp. 26 - 39.

CHAPTER THREE: INSTRUMENT IN THE HAND OF GOD (1812 – 1830)

A. PRIEST

Two months after his ordination, Constant van Crombrugghe was appointed to Mouscron. This was a middle size parish in the Diocese of Gent, with about 5,500 inhabitants¹. His work there was normal for any newly-ordained curate, teaching catechism, helping the poor, visiting the sick, preaching and so on².

In a letter to his uncle in which he described his work, Constant wrote that he especially enjoyed working with the youth of the parish and as was a common practice at the time, he held a Latin class for those he thought were possible future seminarians³. It was hard work and for relaxation he sometimes took the opportunity to go home and visit his family in Geraardsbergen⁴.

Sometimes his friend, Ambroise Goethals, later Vicar General of the Diocese, would accompany him on these visits⁵.

While he was in Mouscron van Crombrugghe met a group of women under the leadership of Marie Dal, who were responsible for the catechesis of the girls of the parish. This was an important meeting for both, as later these women were to become part of his first religious foundation, "Les Filles de Marie et de Joseph". The group in Mouscron formed a small secular community. They had come into existence in 1633 and had episcopal authorisation⁶. It was known as a pious establishment of instruction, or an "école dominicale". These Sunday schools were very important for the Church in Flanders, as they catered for the educational needs of the poorer women and girls⁷.

¹ PIERAERTS et DESMET, op. cit., p. 81.

² ADMJR / uncatalogued, handwritten notes of van Crombrugghe, "Pour une première Communion", Mouscron, April 1813. There are in these sermon notes two themes that will be found throughout the life of the Founder, that is the glory of God and therefore the need to give thanks to God, and secondly the mercy that God constantly offers us.

³ JORISSEN, J., op. cit., p. 24.

⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 25, letter of van Crombrugghe to family, 29 December, 1813.

"*Je me porte beaucoup mieux encore qu'avant mon voyage, tant il est vrai que le voyage en renouvelant les idées, tranquillise l'esprit et influe ainsi considérablement sur tout notre être.*"

⁵ GARCIA, G. C., op. cit., p. 36.

There are 7 letters of Ambroise Goethals addressed to van Crombrugghe and dated between 1817 – and 1865 in the DMJ Archives, ADMJR / A - 26.

⁶ TERWECOREN, S.J., "Institut des Dames de Marie", Collection de Précis Historiques, Mélanges Littéraires et Scientifiques, June 1865, 324^e, XIV année, No. 12.

⁷ With 350 years behind the Mouscron community, the constant element throughout the centuries and indeed to the present day, has been a profound involvement in the life of the parish. During the past 150 years this has made the community distinctive within the life of the Congregation.

During his first years in the parish van Crombrugge began preaching devotion to the Sacred Heart. There is some indication that he was one of the first priests to promote this devotion in Belgium, and as he would later do in other parishes, he began in Mouscron the Association of the Sacred Heart. In whatever work he would undertake throughout his life, this was always the first devotion that he would establish among the people he served; it is essential to an understanding of his spirituality⁸.

Within his first year in Mouscron, van Crombrugge and three other priests received a request from the Chaplain General to the French army which was then stationed in Flanders, to minister to the soldiers, many of whom were dying because of an epidemic⁹. He responded to this invitation and went to help "in the name of the Lord and with a firm confidence in God"¹⁰.

There are various indications that van Crombrugge while being an energetic person, did not have good health and it would seem that taking on this additional activity was too much for him. In April 1814 he was transferred to the parish of Kortrijk and in July of the same year to the village of Heusden, a small place near Gent. We know nothing of his stay in Kortrijk and little more about Heusden, except that he seems to have followed the same pattern of parochial work and also established devotion to the Sacred Heart of Jesus there. In Heusden he met a young man, Guillaume Vanden Bosche, who just three years later would help van Crombrugge with the Foundation of the Congregation for men, the "Brouders van den H. Joseph", later to be known as the Josephites. Guillaume would eventually become the first Superior General. It seems that he lived in the parish house with Constant and helped him in his parish activities¹¹.

During these first two years of his priestly ministry, there are three interests of van Crombrugge's which attract our attention. First there is his interest in education; he liked working with and helping the young men of his parish. Secondly, he showed another of his basic concerns, by helping the poor, especially through giving them an education they would otherwise not have been able to afford. Thirdly, through his service of the soldiers caught in an epidemic, he shows a certain ability to adapt, to respond to pressing needs. He could, quite easily, have turned down the invitation of the Chaplain General, on the grounds of already having sufficient pastoral work in the parish itself.

⁸ JORISSEN, J., op. cit., p. 24. The question of van Crombrugge's understanding of this devotion will be taken up later in this thesis. It is important to note at this point, that it is the only devotional aspect of his first years of priestly ministry that is recorded.

⁹ PIERAERTS et DESMET, op. cit., p. 88. letters of Corselis to van Crombrughe 19 December, 30 December, 1813, and 15 January, 1814.

¹⁰ Ibid., p. 89. "... au nom du Seigneur, avec une ferme confiance en Dieu".

¹¹ JORISSEN, J., op. cit., p. 26.

On the spiritual level, as we have seen, among the people with whom he worked, he established the Association of the Sacred Heart within the parishes.

B. EDUCATOR

1 Principal of Aalst College

Once more political events were to change the course of van Crombrugge's life. As we have seen, in 1812 the year of his ordination, the deterioration of Napoleon's reign had begun. By 1813, the French had lost the Russian campaign. In 1814 the Allies defeated Napoleon and by April he had abdicated. In June 1814 there was an amalgamation proposed between the people of the former Austrian Netherlands, the United Provinces, and Luxembourg, under the reign of William I, Prince of Orange-Nassau.

The Netherlands were now known as the Southern Provinces¹². In March 1814, under the terms of a newly issued Fundamental Law throughout the Provinces, all education had been placed in the hands of the King and the protection and toleration of all cults was assured. Preference was however given to the Reformed Church that to which William gave his allegiance. In August 1814, when William took possession of the Southern Provinces, where the majority of the population was Catholic he promised to honour and protect their religion¹³.

Because of the preference given to the Reformed Church, the Catholic Bishops of Belgium were concerned about the future, both in the areas of freedom of worship and freedom of education. Bishop de Broglie of Gent had just been freed from his imprisonment in Vincennes in May 1814, a month after Napoleon's abdication and because of the prevailing situation, he decided immediately to set about reorganising and stabilising Catholic education. He was especially concerned with Colleges for boys as they were the normal source of priestly vocations¹⁴. So it happened that in September 1814 he sent for van Crombrugge and asked him to take on the responsibility of becoming Principal of the boys' College in Aalst (Alost). This College had been staffed by the Jesuits until their suppression and in the intervening time had practically fallen into disuse¹⁵. The

¹² GARCIA, G. C., op. cit., p. 43.

¹³ Ibid., p. 43 ff. This summary of events necessarily omits much important material but the topic of this thesis limits any attempt to delve into the political dimension of the age. It is considered sufficient here to pass briefly over these events in order to show the problems that immediately affected the life of van Crombrugge. For a full treatment see the work of G. C. GARCIA, chapter 2, "Growth of Principles for Action, Section A., An 'amalgam' that did not succeed: the Kingdom of the Netherlands", pp. 43 - 59.

¹⁴ JORISSEN, J., op. cit., p. 27; GARCIA, G. C., op. cit., p. 60.

¹⁵ PONCELET, A., *La Compagnie de Jésus en Belgique - Aperçu Historique*, (Bulens, Belgique, 1907), p. 13.

work would then chiefly be of reorganisation and getting the College well established once more. Van Crombrugghe hesitated feeling himself unsuited for the work. Finally the Bishop's arguments prevailed and he accepted. The College reopened in October 1814. One off his biographers says that he accepted first out of obedience to his Bishop, but also in a sense of submission to the needs of the time as he came to see these more clearly¹⁶. Whatever his reasons, and those given would seem likely, it was an important decision, as his future apostolate, indeed his whole perception of life, would always evolve around these two factors, obedience to legitimate authority and the actual needs of society and of the Church as these became evident. There is no doubt that he was at ease in the work of education. Even so it was an act of obedience to his Ordinary that brought him definitively into this apostolate.

Van Crombrugghe was to stay in Aalst from 1814 until 1825 when, because of a change in Government policies, the College was closed. For various reasons these were possibly the most important years in the young priest's life. He was able to put into practice what he had learned and to establish patterns for the future. During this period he formulated his principles of education, eventually to be expressed in various 'Rules' for teachers¹⁷. For the students and parents he wrote his two volume '*Manuel de la Jeunesse Chrétienne*' (Manual for Christian Youth), which is concerned with the prayer life of the individual within the context of development towards Christian maturity¹⁸.

Within a few months, van Crombrugghe was, able to raise the College to a high standard from both the Christian and academic viewpoint. Primarily the College was for the education of middle-class boys and in later life many of them became prominent leaders of both Church and State in Belgium¹⁹.

The Diocese of Gent was very short of priests and so Bishop de Broglie appointed senior seminarians to assist van Crombrugghe on the staff. The only other priest with him was Charles Valnetijne²⁰, newly ordained and appointed as the spiritual director to the College. He was to

¹⁶ JORISSEN, J., *op. cit.*, p. 27

¹⁷ Along with various writings of the Founder kept in the Archives in Rome the "Règlements des Maitresses" is most important. In this thesis they will be examined only in as much as they reveal something of the spirituality of the Founder. For a detailed study see the work of G. C. GARCIA.

¹⁸ VAN CROMBRUGGHE, C., *Manuel de la Jeunesse Chrétienne* (Alost H. Sacre, 1821). Vol. I : Ouvrage qui pourra être utile aux Parents et aux Instituteurs Vo1. II: Centenant des instructions des prières et des pratiques à tous les âges et à toutes les conditions.

¹⁹ Among the alumni of Aalst College during this period, were Henri Bracq future Bishop of Gent; Adolphe Deschamps, future leader of the Belgian Catholic Party; Theodore de Montpellier, future Bishop of Liège; the future Msgr. V. Scheppers founder of "Les Frères de la Miséricorde", Malines.

²⁰ See Appendix II, Biographical Notes. p. v. Valnetijne.

remain a life-long friend of van Crombrugghe. Bishop de Broglie insisted that the seminarians on the faculty continue their preparation for the priesthood, as it was only because of urgent necessity that he had sent them to Aalst. Therefore van Crombrugghe was asked to supervise them very carefully regarding both their spiritual and academic development, their free time being given to prayer and the further study of theology. A daily programme of prayer was also proposed by the Bishop and every morning a period of time was given for communal and personal prayer. He also wished the Principal to ensure that the seminarians received the sacraments regularly and that any slackness in fulfilling the spiritual exercises was to be made known to him. In view of these recommendations, van Crombrugghe wrote a small rule for the community²¹. The arrangement must have been difficult both for the Principal and for the seminarians²².

2 Educational Principles

Van Crombrugghe's first concern in Aalst was to organise the students programme and to propose methods of study for them to follow. He himself did not teach regularly, only in case of necessity, although he seems to have been an excellent teacher because he was concerned with the education of the whole person. He begins his Rule for the College as follows:

"The goal which one proposes in this house is to cultivate both the mind and heart of young people."²³

He understood the task of education as forming "an upright man and perfect Christian"²⁴.

This all required a balanced programme of studies and a wise practice of authority on the part of the teachers. The relationship between teacher and student is based on love, a very real love that cares for the other, and that helps the young person to gain confidence. In later years van Crombrugghe would write to the Sisters:

"Once a teacher is known to her pupils as being a person who loves them and wishes for nothing more than their happiness in

²¹ JORISSEN, J., op. cit., p. 29; Maurice de Broglie to van Crombrugghe, 17 September, 1815; GARCIA, G. C., op. cit., AJM / I / F, de Broglie to van Crombrugghe, 17 December 1816.

²² Joseph-Olivier, Andries found it so, and in 1825 wrote bitterly about it to van Crombrugghe, saying that as a seminarian he had had a right to be given the time to study theology and this had not been granted him. He asked van Crombrugghe to put in a word on his behalf with the Bishop, so that he might be freed for further study. cf. GARCIA, G. C., op. cit. p. 63.

²³ AJM / I / F, Règlement du Collège d'Alost (II) or 5°, p. 1. "*La fin qu'on se propose dans cette maison est de cultiver tout à la fois l'esprit et le coeur des jeunes gens.*" GARCIA, G. C., op. cit., p. 67.

²⁴ VAN CROMBRUGGHE, C. G., Manuel de la Jeunesse Chrétienne, Vol. I, p. 1. "*Il est peu de sciences, ce me semble, plus universelles ou du moins qui soient plus importantes, puisqu'elle a également pour objet tout ce qui contribue à former un honnête homme et un parfait chrétien.*"

everything, she has already gained the chief thing in education, possessing the key to their hearts."²⁵

For him the school was like a family, and this too was reflected in his advice given in later years.

"It is necessary that the students find a mother in their teacher."²⁶

L'Abbé van Crombrugghe insisted that both the students and the teachers be polite. This was not for the sake of 'being polite', a social courtesy, but rather as part of true Christian love and out of respect for the person of the other. In later years, when writing on the subject of authority in the classroom to the Daughters of Mary and Joseph, the Founder situates politeness among the necessary attitudes of a teacher.

"To do good to her students the teacher must necessarily have authority. To obtain this authority she must have their esteem ... A way that is gentle and modest, a frank and smiling expression, manners, simple and polite without being pedantic, a firm character of which she is always in control ... these will ensure ... authority over your students."²⁷

A teacher who is moody and changeable will soon break down the relationship that she may have built up with her pupils and will also lose authority.

It is natural that the student will in some way imitate the teacher, therefore the teacher, and more especially the religious has to watch her own behaviour. Van Crombrugghe insists that her actions be centred in Christ.

"Study constantly the sentiments of your divine model; the way in which He conversed with people and particularly the way He attracted children to Him. Remind yourself that He had nothing gloomy about Him, that He was not hot-headed, that He did not argue, that He did not break the bruised reed....

He was so gentle and unassuming that children went to Him with confidence ... There is your rule."²⁸

²⁵ BATTEN, B., DMJ, Live in the Joy of the Lord, (private publication, 1971) p. 26, referring to ADMJR / B - 44.

²⁶ ADMJR / 18 - 14, letter of van Crombrugghe to Clothilde van Wymelbeke, 7 February, 1852: "Vous tâchez donc d'être, ou de moins de paraître, toujours gaie avec vos consoeurs et avec vos élèves. Gagnez l'affection de celles-ci, en vous prêtant généreusement à leurs besoins, et ne vous montrez sévère que lorsque vos devoirs et le bien de ces mêmes enfants l'exigera ... Il faut aussi que les élèves aient une mère dans leur maîtresse."

²⁷ ADMJR / B - 37, Règlements des Maîtresses, Seconde partie, chapitre I, article II, pp. 15 - 16: "Pour faire du bien à ses élèves, la maîtresse doit nécessairement avoir de l'autorité sur elles. Pour obtenir cette autorité, elle doit avoir leur estime, si elle aime véritablement ses élèves, si elle leur donne souvent les preuves de son affection et si elle leur inspire une idée avantageuse de sa piété, de son savoir, de son caractère. Un air doux et modeste, un visage ouvert et riant, des manières polies et faciles mais sans pédantisme, une fermeté de caractère qui se possède toujours, une grande exactitude pour faire tout au temps marqué etc. ... Voilà, ce qui infailliblement vous assurera la considération générale et par un suite nécessaire, l'autorité sur vos élèves."

²⁸ Ibid., Seconde partie, chapitre II, article II, p. 23: "Etudiez sans cesse les sentiments de votre divin modèle, la manière dont il a conversé avec les hommes et comment en particulier il a traité les enfants. Rappelez-vous toujours qu'il n'avait

While we find van Crombrugghe insisting on politeness throughout his life, and others wrote of him as being a man who was always polite and courteous²⁹, this should not be exaggerated or misplaced. The aim of Christian education is to help others become true Christians and to form them as disciples of Christ:

"Knowledge, politeness of manners, even qualities of heart only constitute one part of the good which our students have the right to expect of us."³⁰

The educator tries to bring Christ to others, as she herself grows in conformity to Him. Thus nothing in her behaviour should be objectionable to the other person. The main thrust of her life should be to help others to grow closer to God, to grow in love.

"You will love God through the hearts of those you have taught to love Him."³¹

Regarding methods of education, that most favoured by van Crombrugghe was what is called "l'émulation". This involves a whole, system of competition and reward that is an attempt to draw the best out of each student. It is concerned with encouraging each to arrive at a personal best both academically and in behaviour. Van Crombrugghe used a whole system of medals and ribbons that were offered as awards in the areas of academic work, diligence and politeness. By using this method it was possible for any student to achieve success, if not academically then in other areas. The teacher was expected to be impartial and to recognise not only apparent academic success but also the student that had tried his best. Writing in 1815, while in his second year as principal of the College of Aalst, van Crombrugghe insisted that reward be given for evidence of talent or wisdom both in efforts shown and results achieved³².

Van Crombrugghe also encouraged the system whereby older students supervised and took responsibility for the younger ones³³.

rien de sombre dans le regard, qu'il n'était pas emporté, qu'il ne contestait pas, qu'il ne brisa pas le roseau déjà froissé ... Il était si doux et si modeste que les enfants s'approchaient de lui avec confiance ... Voilà, votre règle."

²⁹ ADMJR / A - 27, Portraits de Notre Très Rév. Fondateur. For example, Dame Ursula wrote of him 11 February, 1866, (p. 6): "*Modèle d'ordre et de bon ton, jamais on ne remarquait en notre vénéré Fondateur rien de négligé, ni dans sa mise, ni dans sa contenance, ni dans ses mouvements.*"

³⁰ Règlement, p. 37: "*La science, la politesse des manières, les qualités même du cœur ne constituent qu'une partie du bien que les enfants ont droit d'attendre.*"

³¹ BATTEN, B., op. cit., p. 25, (reference ADMJR / B - 1).

³² GARCIA, G. C., op. cit., p. 72, (AJM / I / F) : "... car dans ces encouragements on ne préfère que le talent et la sagesse, on ne couronne que le succès ou même le seul effort." There was also a system of negative marking; three failures also led to recognition! This whole system is still basically in use, although modified, among the religious teachers who follow van Crombrugghe's inspiration.

³³ JORRISEN, J., op. cit., Footnotes, I, 2 (7); these were chosen for academic ability, exemplary behaviour, generosity

There is a wholesomeness about the Founder's methods of education. There is nothing new as such in his methods; basically he had brought the ideas with him from Amiens, but his way of putting his ideas into practice and of encouraging other teachers, is where we find his particular gifts in use. He continually encouraged change and keeping up with current methods if these were thought to be good. In later years he would write to one of the sisters:

"We have the greatest interest concerning methods, in not remaining behind; everything is moving, we must also move forward."³⁴

In an instruction concerning education that he gave years later to the Daughters of Mary and Joseph, he is more precise:

"As far as methods in general are concerned, not being enslaved to any one (method), we will not reject any type of improvement merely because it is a novelty. Nevertheless we will distrust the mania for changes, for experiments, especially those wonderful schemes for which even the advertisements are not always free from charlatanism... Finally, in order always to be useful, our Institute, making itself all things to all men, will modify its means of action according to the new needs of society. Such will in all ages be our great rule concerning methods."³⁵

For van Crombrugghe, all education should be religious, this was essential. Already in 1815, when he gave the awards speech in the College, he said:

"if I have some experience in this respect I will dare to say with deepest conviction that the way to make education all that it must be is to make education of youth essentially religious."³⁶

It would be through the whole atmosphere of the school, the relationships of ease between the teachers and students, that he would encourage religious development and this in a time when

and wisdom.

³⁴ ADMJR / 02 - 93, letter of van Crombrugghe to Marine Coulon, 26 December, 1849: "Nous avons le plus grand intérêt à ne pas rester en arrière en fait de méthodes; tout marche, nous devons aussi marcher en avant."

³⁵ ADMJR / A - 21, De l'instruction et de l'éducation chez les Filles de Marie et de Joseph (1833):
"Quant aux méthodes en général, ne tenant servilement à aucune, nous ne repousserons nulle espèce de perfectionnement par la seule raison que c'est une nouveauté. Cependant nous nous défierons de la manie des changements, des essais, surtout de ces systèmes merveilleux dont l'annonce même n'est pas toujours exempte de charlatanisme.... Enfin pour être toujours utile, notre Institut se faisant tout à tous modifiera ses moyens d'action d'après les nouveaux besoins de la société. Telle sera en tout temps notre grande règle relativement aux méthodes." We should note that the last two sentences were added to the original copy by the Founder himself and conclude this instruction.

³⁶ GARCIA, G. C., op. cit., p. 74 (Sur l'éducation 14 - 15):
"Si j'ai quelque expérience à cet égard, j'oserai dire dans la conviction la plus intime que le moyen de rendre à l'éducation tout ce qu'elle doit être est de rendre l'éducation de la jeunesse essentiellement religieuse."

education was rapidly being secularised, and brought under the control of the State.

The college had been re-opened in order to counteract this secularist tendency and to provide opportunity for the encouragement of priestly vocations. Van Crombrugghe proposed as special patron of the College, St. Joseph, the patron of his own vocation. That he was successful in the task given him by his Bishop cannot be doubted.

C. FOUNDER

1 Brothers and Sisters of St. Joseph

As the College became established, the Principal began other work in the town of Aalst, particularly with the poor. By 1815, the Southern Provinces were once again in economic chaos. Among other problems, the merchants and manufacturers were unable to compete with their Dutch neighbours and there was a gradual increase in unemployment³⁷. To make matters worse due to heavy rainfall in the winter months of 1816 - 1817, there was widespread famine and misery among the people. In order to obtain food, people took to the roads and stealing was their only means of survival. Consequently there was a widespread fall in moral standards.

Living quite close to the College in Aalst was an unmarried lady, Colette de Brandt, who gave all her time and energy working for the poor in the district. As her spiritual director, van Crombrugghe knew her well and together they decided to help girls from poor families who were suffering the effects of the famine³⁸. At the College, there was a group of young women employed as domestic staff and it was these who on March 6, 1817, went to live together as a small community, in a house purchased for them by van Crombrugghe. They opened a small "dentellièr" (lace-making school) where they taught the girls who came to them the art of lace-making and at the same time to read and write. By selling the lace they made these girls were able to provide a small income for their parents. At the same time the "sisters" prepared the girls for their first holy communion.

Colette de Brandt did not live with the small community, but she helped and guided them in

³⁷ For details of the situation, see GARCIA, G. C., op. cit., p. 53.

³⁸ At this time Colette de Brandt (1780 - 1856) was 36 years old. She is an important but rather elusive figure in the first years of the Congregation. Twice it is recorded that she responded to dreams in a way that affected the Congregation. First, at the time of foundation, it is recorded that one night M. van Crombrugghe had a dream in which he saw a crowd of abandoned children and seemed to hear a voice that told him to instruct them and bring them to the Lord. The next morning after Mass he went to speak with Colette and she had had the same dream. The second dream of Mlle de Brandt concerned the establishment of a community of the Congregation in the Archdiocese of Mechelen, a very important decision. (See JORISSEN, J., op. cit., pp. 40 ff.; Historique, pp. 32 - 33; and TERWECOREN, S.J., op. cit., p. 313.)

practical affairs³⁹. Born in October 1780, and educated by the Benedictines and the Ursulines, she was known as a woman of solid virtue and piety. It is said that from childhood she was attracted to helping the poor and this became her life's work. As we follow the letters of the Founder to the sisters, we have a small portrait of this lady who never became a member of the Congregation, but was intimately linked to it for the first 40 years of its existence. During the first years van Crombrugge lived near the sisters and could tell them himself what he wanted of them, although there is a tradition which says that he often asked Mlle. de Brandt to speak to the sisters for him. From 1830 onwards, when he had moved away from Aalst, he began a long correspondence with various sisters. Quite often, especially in business matters, we find him suggesting to the superiors that they consult Colette⁴⁰.

There were times though when relations between the sisters and Mlle. de Brandt became strained, and the Founder had to mediate but even he, who knew her so well, could not always understand her⁴¹. Most of the difficulties seem to have arisen over property. Despite the problems that emerged over the years, the Founder kept a high regard for her. Years later, her niece, Victorine de Brandt asked to enter the Congregation, and it would seem that this pleased her aunt. At the time, van Crombrugge wrote to Flore Delhaye:

"You will have a new right to the prayers of Mlle Colette. You are aware that her prayers are powerful with the heart of God. You know the great charity of this special soul."⁴²

The year before Colette's death, the Founder wrote about her to the superior of Aalst:

"Will you have the goodness to let Mlle. Colette know that, with pleasure, I have fulfilled the promise that I have made her, to pray for her every day. We would be ungrateful, I and all of you, my children of St. Joseph, if we neglected our duty towards a person who aided me so courageously during the first years of existence of your religious family and who keeps us in sincere affection."⁴³

³⁹ JORISSEN, J., *op. cit.*, p. 45. It is possible that van Crombrugge, remembering Julie Billiart and the work she and her Sisters were doing in Amiens, envisaged something similar for Colette and the small band of Sisters. However, her vocation was not to be a religious but a dedicated lay woman. Rather similarly, van Crombrugge himself never became a Josephite, but remained a diocesan priest.

⁴⁰ For example, ADMJR / 17 - 40, letter of van Crombrugge to Clothilde Minne, 2 March, 1836, and ADMJR / 6 - 47, letter of van Crombrugge to Olympiade Derville, 26 November, 1837, concerning the buying of property.

⁴¹ ADMJR / 6 - 101, letter of van Crombrugge to Olympiade Derville, 19 May, 1838, over a problem concerning property; he ends by saying:

"La conduite de cette excellente personne est inexplicable à notre égard."

⁴² ADMJR / 7 - 41, letter of van Crombrugge to Flore Delhaye, 27 November, 1848:

"Vous aurez de nouveaux droits aux prières de Mlle Colette. Vous savez que ses prières sont puissantes sur le cœur de Dieu. Vous connaissez la grande charité de cette 'élite'."

⁴³ ADMJR / 02 - 144, letter of van Crombrugge to Marine Coulon, 12 January, 1855:

In Colette de Brandt, the Founder recognised a woman of spiritual strength and worth, and especially in the early years of the Congregation, used her gifts to the best advantage.

Two months after the foundation of the small community, whom he called the Sisters of St. Joseph (Zusters van den H. Joseph), van Crombrugghe enlisted the aid of Guillaume Vanden Bosche, whom he had known at Heusden, to begin a similar community for men. During the previous two years, Guillaume had been at Aalst, trying to study Latin and French, but without success. Meanwhile as the country was engulfed in famine and poverty was on the increase, van Crombrugghe decided to begin for boys something similar to the "Dentellièr" for girls. So on 1 May, 1817, Vanden Bosche became the first member of the "Brouders van den H. Joseph" (Brothers of St. Joseph) and with another, Joseph Vanderkinderen, opened a weaving school in Geraardsbergen⁴⁴.

2 Daughters of St. Joseph - Aalst, 1818

In the midst of intense activity, while still Principal of the College, van Crombrugghe set about giving direction to the two small Congregations that he had founded for the service of the poor⁴⁵. The Founder was a man who was continually in a process of revisiting, modifying, changing and adapting his ideas, his methods and the rules of life that he gave to others. The titles given to his, Congregations did not escape his attention! So the community of women, having begun life as the "Sisters of St. Joseph" became eventually the "Daughters of Mary and Joseph". But right up until the time of his death in 1865, van Crombrugghe would, in his letters, refer to them by a variety of names⁴⁶. The first, the "Sisters of St. Joseph", within the first year became the "Daughters of St.

"Aurez-vous la complaisance de faire comprendre à Mlle Colette, que je me suis acquitté avec plaisir des promesses que je lui ai faites, de prier tous les jours pour elle? Nous serions des ingrats, moi et vous toutes, mes enfants de St. Joseph, si nous négligions nos devoirs envers une personne qui m'a aidé si courageusement, durant les premières années de l'existence de votre famille religieuse et qui nous conserve une affection sincère."

⁴⁴ ADMJR / A - 25, Handwritten notes in Flemish of the foundations, possibly by Vanden Bosche. The history of the foundation of the Josephites is found in detail in both GARCIA and JORISSEN.

⁴⁵ The scope of this thesis being the spirituality of van Crombrugghe as shown in his letters to the Daughters of Mary and Joseph, the history of the Josephite foundation and development will not be repeated here. We should also note at this point that there is no precise record of the early Sisters. Jorissen (op. cit., Footnote, I, 3 (6),) maintains that the first members did not persevere and that the Founder withdrew their names from the list of Sisters. The first recorded is Sister Antonia, who entered in 1820. However, this lack of records may be for other reasons. First, keeping in mind how rapidly sisters died in the early years (see the existing records), one wonders if that were not the case of those who entered in 1817, especially as there was a cholera outbreak in 1818 – 1819 (Jorissen, Fnote I, 3 (7).) Secondly there was hardly need of records, the sisters, the Founder and Mlle. de Brandt lived within minutes walk of each other and by the time they began to keep them, details and names had possibly been forgotten.

⁴⁶ The question of titles is most confusing, and to add to the difficulty the Sisters were divided into three Congregations in the 1830's. (see below, pp. 130 - 6). In 1830 the Congregation was established as "Filles de Marie et de Joseph". By 1833 the title "Dames de Marie" is used in the Founder's letters, but at the same time he frequently refers to them as the "Soeurs de Marie". Over the years he also uses "Enfants de Marie et de Joseph" and "Famille de Marie et de Joseph".

Joseph", (Dogters van den H. Joseph) and it is under this title that the Founder gave the first Rule. In fact it can hardly be called a "Rule" it is so brief, really nothing more than an horarium. There is no mention of the reason for the small group coming together, or of the quality of community life⁴⁷.

On 6 March, 1818, van Crombrugghe wrote a formal letter to the sisters, on the first anniversary of their foundation, and it is in this letter that for the first time we find an expression of the spirit of the Congregation. Most of the elements of the Founder's spirituality, which he was to spell out over the years, are contained in this letter. Because of its simplicity and directness, there is a clarity about the ideas expressed.

The Founder begins by calling the sisters, "Beloved of the Lord", an expression that is not found again in his letters. In the opening paragraph he outlines the type of vocation to which the sisters are called. He begins:

"To fulfil with a holy zeal the duties of the vocation to which you have been called -- the education of children --- and to arrive at religious perfection, you must consider and imprint deeply in your heart, the greatness of the work for which God has chosen you,"⁴⁸

Van Crombrugghe then goes on to speak of the children they educate in terms that will appear in all the subsequent constitutions of the Congregation: each child is a child of the Father, bought at the price of Christ's blood, "they are purified and sanctified by their baptism, temples of the Holy Spirit and living dwelling places of the Holy Trinity"⁴⁹.

"Daughters of Mary and Joseph, you are chosen by God as foster-mothers to nourish and to lead these little ones and slowly and gently form them to holiness."⁵⁰

Eventually, the official title was "Filles de Marie et de Joseph dites 'Dames de Marie'". In 1886 the Sacred Congregation for Religious requested that "Filles de Marie et de Joseph" be the official title and the only one used in written Constitutions. This request was respected, although popularly the Congregation continued to be known as the "Dames de Marie". It was only in the Chapter of 1981 that the title "Filles de Marie et de Joseph" (Daughters of Mary and Joseph) was accepted for the whole Congregation as its sole title.

⁴⁷ ADMJR / Constitutions, I: opening of the 1817 text, "Traduction du texte, original des Constitutions des Filles de Marie et de Joseph" (Cette 1^{ere} règle se trouve chez les Soeurs de St. Joseph - Texte Flamand). The text of this first rule only contains the horarium and tells us nothing of the spirit of the new Congregation.

⁴⁸ ADMJR / Regel-Boek der Dogters van Maria en Joseph, 1830. Aenspraak:

6 Maerte, 1818, Aalst. "Om de pligten van uwen roep tot het onderwys der kinders, met eenen heyligen iver te volbrengen, en tot de kloosterlyke volmaekheyd te geraeken, moet gylieden wel overleggen, en diep in uw herte printen, de grootheyd van het ampt tot het welk God u verkozen heeft." (page iii). For the meaning of the word 'beloved', see s. v. Chap. 6, C: p. 65.

⁴⁹ Ibid., "... die gezuyverd zyn en heylig gemaekt door het doopsel ... de tempels van den H. Geest, de levende woonplaetzen van de allerheyligste Dryvuldigheyd." (p. iv).

⁵⁰ Ibid., p. iv. "Gylieden, Dogters van Maria en Joseph, zyt dan als voestermoeders van God verkozen, om die jonge aenkomelingen in de deugd op te voeden, te bestieren, en allengskens tot de christene volmaektheyd te brengen."

The Sisters are called "co-workers" with Christ⁵¹, delegated by Christ to lead and form others and to be servants of the Trinity. Van Crombrugge makes clear the responsibility each sister has to work with and for Christ. This is no easy task:

"You are called to be prepared for battle as members of the Holy Church in the fight against evil, the world and the flesh."⁵²

In their turn the sisters should prepare those they teach to enter into this same battle, so that they may keep and guard their love for Christ. Then follows the heart of the letter:

"However, beloved Daughters, you will never arrive at these important ends, you will never be able to fulfil your holy vocation, if before all else you do not try to make yourselves worthy, by a godly and perfect life, to become true instruments of divine mercy."⁵³

There is no use practising self-denial, living poorly, leading others to heaven unless convinced of the fundamental truth that all are created for the service of God. In practice the Founder writes, this means doing what is pleasing to God, and more importantly, doing this in such a way that does in fact please Him. There should be no half-measures. Even so, the very reason for the sisters coming together is to please God, so by practising obedience they will be doing what God wants of them. It is for this reason that they have a Rule.

Van Crombrughe continues by referring to the Book of Maccabees⁵⁴ where Judas Maccabeus, in moving the people to battle does not give them implements of war to use against the enemy, but good words and exhortations. Judas recounts his vision of Jeremiah giving him a gift of the Lord in the form of a sword. Van Crombrughe notes that the Israelites in this passage were more concerned with the defence of the Lord's temple, than for themselves, their families and friends, and that they defended the temple with courage. Judas, in front of the enemy and apparently in a hopeless situation, prayed that the Lord would help him. They went into battle, praying all the while and trusting in God, and they were victorious. The Founder then tells his Daughters:

"... accept these spiritual arms which I offer you for the glory of God and for your sanctification. Think that the Blessed Virgin and St. Joseph give you this spiritual sword."⁵⁵

⁵¹ Ibid., p. iv. "Gy zyt medewerksters van den Zaligmaeker."

⁵² Ibid., p. iv. "Eyndelinge gylieden zyt geroopen, om de lidmaeten der heylige Kerk, in den stryd tegen de helle, de wereld en het vleesch, to oeffenken."

⁵³ Ibid., p. v. "Nogtans, beminde, Dogters, gy zult tot deeze groote eynden nooyt geracken, nooyt zult gy uwen heyligen roep volbrengen, is het zaake gy niet eerst voor al en tragt u weérdig te maeken, door uw godvrugtig en volmaekt leéven, de waere instrumenten te worden bermhertigheyd Gods."

⁵⁴ The actual text is not cited and could refer to any number of passages, for example, I Mac. 3:16-26.

⁵⁵ Ibid., p. vii. "Aenveerd ook, beminde Dogters, met zulke gesteltenisse, deeze geestlyke wapens, die ik u, tot Gods glorie en uwe zaligheyd, aenbiede. Peyst dat de H. Maegd, dat den H. Joseph u dit geestelyk zweerd schenkt."

Finally van Crombrugghe prays for his sisters:

"I lift my hands to heaven and beg your powerful and gentle Patron to protect you and obtain for you that God send his angel to defend you at all times, to overcome your enemies and help you to triumph."⁵⁶

Having put the rule under the protection of Mary our Mother, he concludes with the quotation from the Book of Proverbs:

"... keep my words and treasure up my commandments with you."⁵⁷

The vigour of this letter is never found again in later Rules or letters. In 1818 Constant van Crombrugghe was still only 28 years old. We have already seen his enthusiasm when he worked in his first parishes. When we take time to reflect on his work in education it is easy to lose sight of his energy, as he is writing formally and in the fashion of the time. But in this first letter to the first sisters, which was still being used as an introduction to the Rule of 1830, we see a young priest ready for anything in his battle for the Lord calling others to be just as enthusiastic. So the women whom he has invited to share his vision, are encouraged to have the same enthusiasm and vigour. As members of the Church he calls them to be at the heart of the battle for the Lord and to help form others especially young people, for Christ. We are reminded of St. Ignatius Loyola's vision on the road to La Storta when he received the invitation from the Father to walk with Jesus, to serve at His side⁵⁸. We are also reminded of Ignatius' meditation on the Two Standards⁵⁹, where the individual is invited to choose between the Lord and Satan, to decide to which camp they belong, and having decided, to enter into combat on behalf of the Lord against the Enemy. It would appear that it is this meditation that van Crombrugghe had in mind and that he offers to the Sisters. They, in their turn having made their choice, enter into the consequent battle for the Lord.

We may remember that the Founder began this letter by writing about "zeal". The whole letter has been concerned with just that, zeal for the work of God; for His glory. For van Crombrugghe, the only way that this form of life will be possible is if each tries to make herself worthy of becoming a "true instrument of divine mercy" by doing what is pleasing to God, in a way

⁵⁶ Ibid., p. viii. "Ik heffe ook, myne handen nae den hemel, en smeke uwe magtige en goedertiere Patroonense, dat zy u bescherme en verkryge dat God u zynen engel, afzende, die u in alle tyden verdedige, uwe uyanden verschrikke, en u over hun doe zegepraelen."

⁵⁷ Ibid., Prov. VII, I. (R.S.V. Trans.)

⁵⁸ CONWELL, J. F., S.J., Prayer Proper to the Society of Jesus accortici to Jerome Nadal, (Doctoral Dissertation, Pontifical Gregorian University, 1957), p. 33: on the vision of St. Ignatius at "La Storta".

⁵⁹ PUHL, L. J., S.J., The Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius, (Loyola University Chicago, 1951), The Second Week. Fourth Day. "A Meditation on the Two Standards", particularly the second part of this meditation, "The Standard of Christ", pp. 60 - 63.

that in fact does please Him; by taking as her sword in this battle, the word of God. All this under the patronage of Mary and Joseph; Joseph the protector and Mary the example, model and Mother.

During the remainder of his life, van Crombrugghe will spell out more and more clearly for the Sisters, both to individuals and to the community as a whole, the particular call that he had written about for the first time in March 1818. From the point of view of clarity it will never be surpassed.

3 A second foundation - Geraardsbergen - and a new Rule (1818)

In November, 1815, the Founder decided to send two Sisters to his own town of Geraardsbergen, to open a lace-making school similar to the one in Aalst, that is, eventually combining lace-making with general and religious instruction. His mother, Mme Cecil van Crombrugghe had acquired a property that had belonged to the Minimes and this is where they lived. She took over the same role towards the young sisters that Mlle. Colette de Brandt fulfilled in Aalst, that of "la Mère Séculière" (the secular Mother)⁶⁰.

It would seem likely that this first move was the occasion for the Founder to attempt to write down more clearly the Rule of life he wished his sisters to follow⁶¹. Through this Rule there emerges a more detailed picture of van Crombrugghe's vision for the Congregation, now called "Dogters van den H. Joseph" (Daughters of St. Joseph)⁶².

The Rule opens with a paraphrased quotation from Isaiah:

"Look, Daughters of Joseph, this is your way; walk in it, and do not digress, neither to the right nor to the left" ⁶³

The reason for this new community coming together was to serve God perfectly and to offer, especially through the education of poor children, whatever service was possible, to His Church⁶⁴. The Sisters are invited to reflect on their vocation as a precious gift of the Lord and to thank Him for it.

The Rule spells out the daily, weekly and monthly living of the Sisters, their prayer, work,

⁶⁰ TERWERCOREN, op. cit., p. 297.

⁶¹ ADMJR / Constitutions, 1818 – 1820: a summary of this Rule. "Kort begryp Van de Regels der Dogters Van den H. Joseph."

⁶² See above, page 97.

⁶³ Rule, 1818: Introduction. "Ziet hier, Dogters van Joseph, uwen Weg; Wandelt 'er in, en Wykt 'er niet of, nog naer den rechten, nog naer den linken kant. Isaías 30 C. 21 V"

⁶⁴ Ibid., Introduction.

devotions and so on. Everyday, before attending Mass the Sisters were to make a half hour's meditation. Together they prayed the Little Office of Our Lady. They were also to take time everyday to make an examination of Conscience. Practices of penance were regulated, with fasting only on Saturday, unless the Superior gave permission otherwise⁶⁵.

Devotion to the Sacred Heart was given a particular place, and that of the First Friday was written into the Rule⁶⁶. An annual retreat of eight days was recommended during which the Sister was to have the opportunity to speak with her Superior. It was also the time to review the way that she lived the vows⁶⁷.

The Superior has an important role to play in the spiritual development of her "Daughter". It was recommended that the Sister recognise in her Superior a person given her by God, a "tender-hearted Mother"⁶⁸. This idea of the superior as mother recurred throughout van Crombrugghe's guidance of the Congregation. It was not just a name given to the superior but reflected a much deeper attitude and was part of the family spirit that the Founder wished to find in all his Congregations⁶⁹.

In preparation for living this life, it was proposed that there be a novitiate of one year and then the sister would make her vows for life. The Rule concerning this reads:

"The Sisters of St. Joseph bind themselves by the vows of obedience, chastity and voluntary poverty and to teaching, poor children, especially in what concerns the salvation of souls."⁷⁰

It was proposed that to help the Sisters, especially with the practice of the fourth vow, a weekly community meeting would be held in order to study the catechism in use in the Diocese⁷¹. A very practical method to take and rather typical of the type of formation that van Crombrugghe gave his

⁶⁵ Ibid., Tweede Kapittel, 2^{en} - 2 Regel.

⁶⁶ Ibid., Derde Kapittel, 2^{en} Regel.

⁶⁷ Ibid., Derde Kapittel, 3^{en} Regel.

⁶⁸ Ibid., 6^{en} Regel, 2 C. 6: "*De Dogters moeten hunnen overste aenzien als eene teerhertige Moeder, die Godt ever hun heeft gesteld.*"

⁶⁹ The question of "family spirit" involves the whole way or life of the community, the way the sisters relate to each other as well as the individual relationship between each sister and the superior. It will be taken up again in Chapter 4 and in greater depth in Chapter 7, where its relationship with devotion to Mary and Joseph will be shown.

⁷⁰ Ibid., Vyfde Kapittel, 1^{en} Regel: "*De Dogters van den H. Joseph verbinden zig met die beloften van gehoorzaemheyd, zuuyverheyd, vrywillige aermoerde, en van d'aerme kinderen te onderwyzen, in de zaeken bezoenderlyk die de ziele zaligheyd aengaen.*"

⁷¹ Ibid., Tweede Kapittel, 1^{en} Regel: "*Vermits het bezoenderste oogwit van de vergaderinge der Dogters vanden H. Joseph de Christelyke Leeringe der kinderen is, zoo moeten de Dogters den Catechismus van Bisdom wel we'eten; vervolgens zullen sy eene uere weeklyks besteeden om zig zelven in deeze wetens chap te oeffenen.*" (Since the special object of the coming together of the Daughters St. Joseph is the Christian teaching of children, they must know well the diocesan catechism; they will take an hour a week to practise this science.)

religious.

Concerning the fourth vow, it was fairly common practice during this period for religious to bind themselves in such a way. There is a long history of this custom in the Church and in some way the fourth vow expresses the character, the spirit of a Congregation⁷². It underlines the particular form of living the Gospel to which the members of the Congregation are called. In some sense it is a form of the vow of stability, maintaining, strengthening and uniting the apostolic activity of the group. Van Crombrugghe in the later Rule of 1830 writes concerning this vow:

"This fourth vow consists in our binding ourselves, according to what authority requires of us, to help children, namely the poor in what concerns Catholic religious instruction and piety."⁷³

He goes on to explain that the fulfilment of this vow is found in working together to this end which is common to all. It serves to bind the members of the community together in their service of the Lord and of His Church⁷⁴.

The 1818 Rule concludes with reference to the letter of Paul to the Galatians, that is the invitation to do good to all "especially those of the household of the faith"⁷⁵. The sisters are promised that those who live the Rule will be in peace.

"Therefore be faithful Daughters, even in the smallest duties, because God, by whom you have been called in the Company of Jesus Christ Our Lord is faithful to His promises."⁷⁶

Having established the Daughters of St. Joseph in Aalst and Geraardsbergen, and the Brothers of St. Joseph in Geraardsbergen, and given both groups a Rule of life⁷⁷, M. l'Abbé van Crombrugghe, still Principal in Aalst, undertook another project for the poor. This time, in 1819, he

⁷² The history of the fourth vow goes back to the Middle Ages some would maintain to the Knights Templar. The Council of Trent (Session 25, De Reg. C 1) says that these vows pertain to the essence of the Order. See also, with many references to this fourth vow Jeanne De CHARRY, RSCJ, Histoire des Constitutions de la Société du Sacré-Cœur, Première Partie, La Formation de l'institut, Vo1. I, Exposé Historique (Rome 1981) p. 448 etc.

⁷³ Regel-Boek, 1830, Vierde Capittel, 14° Van de Beloften, 4° *"Deze vierde belofte zal bestaan in ons te verbinden van de kinderen, volgens dat van de overheyd word opgeleyd, behulpzaem te zyn, naementlyk de armen, in het geene hunne onderwyzing in de catholyke Religie en godvrugtigheyd aengaet."*

⁷⁴ Ibid., p. 70. As we examine the writings of the Founder and the Rules and Constitutions given to the Congregation, we will need to pay particular attention to both the spirit and the material of this fourth vow, as it offers us the clearest indication of its spirituality. For example, in examining the 1818 Introductory Letter, we have already seen how "zeal" and to become "instruments of mercy" are intimately linked with the material of this fourth vow, and therefore with apostolic activity.

⁷⁵ Gal. 6:10.

⁷⁶ Rule, 1818: *"zyt dan, Dogters, getrouw zelfs aan de klenste uwen plichten want God door, wie Gyt; geroopen zyt in Gezelschez van J. C. Onzen heer, it getrouw in zyne beloften."*

⁷⁷ A. J. M., Constitutions, 1 – 5, II A.

opened a second school for boys, attached to the College, for those who could not afford to pay the full amount of fees. They paid a nominal sum, but followed all the classes at the College and received the benefits of such an education. He sent one of the Brothers of St. Joseph to supervise the School and placed one of the seminarians, Andries, as director⁷⁸. Throughout his life, van Crombrughe knew how to stretch people to the maximum to better serve the Church, while at the same time he usually was able to give them the personal support that such an extension requires.

During this period of intense activity the Bishop of Gent, Maurice de Broglie was once more in exile, this time in France where he had fled in 1817. This had come about through his outspokenness against the King, William I of Orange-Nassau and his government. There had been increasing control exercised regarding both religious worship and education; the Bishop objected. In June 1817, he was condemned to deportation. The notice was posted in the public market place in Gent between two criminals condemned to the stocks⁷⁹. So once again, Gent was without a Bishop and remained like that until the appointment of Msgr. Van de Velde, in 1829.

D. DIOCESAN SPOKESMAN AND POLITICIAN

Aalst was not the only place to suffer the effects of government policy. William I, in his despotic rule of the country, placed severe restriction on all private education and either brought it under state control or closed the establishment, this being the fate of Aalst, as of other Colleges, in June 1825⁸⁰. During the period 1825 - 1830, there was increasing opposition to the government on the part of the Catholics⁸¹. They began especially to work for freedom of religion, freedom of education, and for personal freedoms. It was therefore a logical step for them to join with the political Liberals, whose position was based on the rights and freedoms of the individual. In particular the Liberals in Belgium were concerned with freedom of the press⁸². The Liberal Catholics in Belgium wanted reciprocal independence, that is, while the State should recognise the rights of the Individual, the rights of the State would also be made clear⁸³.

⁷⁸ GARCIA, G. C., op. cit. p. 85.

⁷⁹ PIERAETS et DESMET, op. cit., p. 99. Bishop Maurice de Broglie died in exile in Paris, in July 1821.

⁸⁰ DIERICKX, M., 'Belgium', N.C.E., Vol. 2, p. 247.

⁸¹ DIERICKX, M., op. cit., p. 247; HAAG, H., 'The political ideas of Belgian Catholics 1789 - 1914', in Church and Society, Ed. J. Moody, (Art Inc., New York, 1953) pp. 281 - 285.

⁸² HAAG, H., op. cit., p. 286. Quotes Baron de Gerlache Catholic leader addressing the Liberals: "You ask for freedom of industry and the press. You seek a jury system and an efficient parliamentary control. Very well. But do not forget the freedoms demanded by the Catholics, especially that of education. This is the price of our support. If you recognise our title to liberty we will unite our forces with yours and the government will be forced to listen."

⁸³ There was no question of revolution, but rather discussing with the existing Government, "the peaceful battle of ideas

The Catholics of the old regime, whose tendencies were Febronianist⁸⁴, did not agree with this stance and worked rather for the alliance of Church and State⁸⁵. Rome, too, was against the alliance of the Catholics and Liberals, being opposed to Liberal principles, considering them a product of the French Revolution and against Catholic doctrine⁸⁶.

In 1827, negotiations were in hand for a Concordat between the State and the Holy See, which was arrived at in June of that year, but which failed to resolve anything⁸⁷. Subsequently, the Catholics and Liberals strengthened their alliance to work for freedom of education, freedom of the press and freedom of worship. In 1826 a newspaper had appeared for the first time, "Le Catholique des Pays-Bas", which took up this campaign. Van Crombrugghe was on the board of directors of this paper from its beginnings⁸⁸. "Le Catholique" had the support of both the diocese of Gent and the aristocracy. The diocese, still without a Bishop, was at this time under the administration of Prof. Ryckewaert, Ambroise Goethals and Boussen⁸⁹. The views of this administration were those mainly expressed in the newspaper.

In any struggle of this nature there is a tight-rope to be walked and such was the case for the Catholic Liberals in Belgium. It has been held that they were strongly influenced by Félicité Lamennais, already writing his controversial opinions in France, but it would seem rather that Lamennais himself was influenced by events in Belgium⁹⁰. This is not the place to enter into the argument. We do know that two people who exercised a strong influence over van Crombrugghe

and parties". HAAG, H., op. cit., p. 288. The famous quotation from the future Cardinal Sterckx sums up the situation: "*Nous ne voulons pas que l'Etat domine l'Eglise mais nous ne voulons pas non plus que l'Eglise domine l'Etat.*" Quoted in SIMON, A., "Le Cardinal Sterckx et son temps, 1792 - 1867", Vol. I, L'Eglise et l'Etat", (Ed. Scaldis Wetteren, 1950), p. 207.

⁸⁴ Febronianism built on the principles of the Enlightenment, to build up the local Church as independent from Rome. It was developed by Johann Nikolaus von Hontheim (1701 - 1790), auxiliary Bishop of Trier, whose pseudonym was "Febronius". He published a bitter treatise attacking Papal claims to power. He held that infallibility resides in the whole Church and not just in the Pope, and that papal pronouncements are only bis in sancto matrimonio, with the consent of all the Bishops. The effect was towards decentralisation and the development of the concept of the State Church. (For a summary see: O'CALLAGHAN, M., "Febronianism", N.C.E., Vol. 5, pp. 868 - 869).

⁸⁵ HAAG, H., op. cit., p. 284; also HAAG, Les origines du Catholicisme Libéral en Belgique (1789 - 1839), Bibliothèque de l'Université, Louvain, Recueil de Travaux d'Histoire et de Philologie, 3^{me} série, Fascicule 36, 1950, p. 112.

⁸⁶ GARCIA, G. C. op. cit., p. 55.

⁸⁷ DIERICKX, M., op. cit., p. 247, and SIMON, A., op. cit., (Sterckx) pp. 87 - 94.

⁸⁸ GARCIA, G. C., op. cit., pp. 101 - 102.

⁸⁹ GARCIA, G. C., op. cit., p. 102

⁹⁰ HAAG, H., op. cit. (The Political Ideas) p. 288. "*The Abbé de Lamennais, whom some people see as its (catholic liberal union) promoter, actually had no part in it. His book "Des Progrès de la Révolution" appeared long after the conclusion of the Liberal-Catholic alliance.*" Also BOUDENS, R., "Lamennais, Hughes Félicité Robert de", N.C.E. (Vol. 8, 1967), pp. 347 - 349)

were already warning against the teachings of Lamennais. Ryckewaert in 1825⁹¹, had begun to point out the dangers and as a diocesan administrator and theologian would have kept a close watch on the Catholic Liberal development. More distantly, Père Sellier, in earlier years van Crombrugghe's spiritual director, with whom he still kept in contact, had also spoken against Lamennais⁹².

Although the views of Liberals and Ultramontanists are generally held to be in opposition, "Le Catholique des Pays-Bas" reflected Ultramontanist attitudes. It would seem that van Crombrugghe was a type of link between the diocesan administrators and the young priests and laity involved in the newspaper. In Gent, as in Belgium as a whole, there were these main tendencies: first those who went with the government in power and followed the principles of the Enlightenment and Febronianism, for example, de Meulenaere, one of the Vicars General. Secondly, those who were ultramontanists, people such as Ryckewaert and van Crombrugghe and thirdly, those who were Liberal and who in some degree followed the theories of Lamennais⁹³. Among these last were the younger clergy, some of whom were van Crombrugghe's old students from Aalst.

Throughout 1828 and 1829, great pressure was put on the government to grant freedom in the different areas, and so the tension mounted. In August 1830, things came to a head and riots broke out in Brussels. The provincial government took power and in November convoked the first National Congress of Independent Belgium.

Many of the lower clergy, like van Crombrugghe, had taken a leading part in the struggle for freedom and so, not unnaturally, when the national elections for Congress took place, they were once more involved.

The previous year, 1829, Msgr. Van de Velde had been named the new Bishop of Gent⁹⁴. Van Crombrugghe was close to him, as his secretary and also as a member of the Diocesan Council. Van de Velde had named him as spokesman for the diocese with the Archdiocese of Mechelen and it was at this time that van Crombrugghe began a life-long friendship with the future Archbishop, Cardinal Sterckx. Throughout this period, in the year leading up to Independence, van Crombrugghe had lived near Aalst in his private house "Pausipone"⁹⁵. So it was that when the

⁹¹ DE SCHREVEL, A. C., op. cit., p. 650.

⁹² GUIDEES, A., op. cit., (Vie du Père Sellier), p. 344.

⁹³ GARCIA, G. C., op. cit., p. 59.

⁹⁴ See Appendix II, Biographical notes, p.v. Velde, van de.

⁹⁵ He had bought the house while still Principal of the College, and he had named it "Pausipone" from the Greek, παυσι-πούσις, "pause from hard work". During the period 1825 - 1830 he lived there and it was occasionally used as a meeting place for the Diocesan representatives.
(See SIMON, A., op. cit., (Le Cardinal Sterckx), p. 110).

elections for Congress were underway he was proposed by the people of Aalst as their representative to Congress. Van Crombrugghe had not been active in the election campaign and did not wish to be involved, so when he knew in which direction the elections in Aalst were moving, he asked the advice of his friends. He wrote in his notes:

"I had neither the taste, nor the leisure, nor the required knowledge for such a work."⁹⁶

He was advised to accept the nomination, both by his friends by the diocesan council and by the Bishop, Van de Velde. The Abbé van Crombrugghe submitted to their decision, finding in it the will of God for him⁹⁷.

There was division among the hierarchy about the priest-deputies, but the Bishop of Gent was to write:

"Whatever their judgement may be, I rejoice and will continue to rejoice in the fact that you have been deputies."⁹⁸

In all there were thirteen priests elected to seats of whom nine were from the Diocese of Gent.⁹⁹.

The priests went to Congress determined to fight for freedom of worship, education and press, the "freedoms" that had been their main concern during the previous few years. Van Crombrugghe, having accepted his place in Congress as "the will of God", worked throughout, as he would always do, with zeal for his Lord, but always in a very practical way. In Congress he was especially concerned about and took an active part in formulating the draft articles of the Constitution on freedom of worship (ultimately Article 14 of the Belgian Constitution) and freedom of education (Article 17).¹⁰⁰

⁹⁶ AJM / I / G / FCN, 3 Remarques sur le Congrès National.

« Je n'avais ni le goût, ni le loisir, ni les connaissances requises pour un tel emploi. »

At the end of the same notes he writes that when the election was finalised,

"Il semblait impossible de refuser le mandat sans indisposer beaucoup de personnes, zélées pour le bien de la Religion et de la Patrie."

⁹⁷ AJM / I / G / FCN, 3: "Je soumis l'affaire au Conseil de l'Evêque, présidé par Sa Grandeur: l'opinion de M. Goethals fut celle du Conseil épiscopal. Monseigneur me fit envisager la mission au Congrès comme devant être avantageuse à la religion et prit sur lui de m'engager à l'accepter. Je me soumis donc, car j'aurais cru résister à la volonté de Dieu en m'y refusant. »

⁹⁸ AJM / F / FCN, 5: Epistola manuscripta episcopi Gand^s ad R.D.V. Crombrugghe, 31 December, 1830:
"... sed quidquid de eorum iudicio sit, gaudeo et gaudebo vos finisse deputatos." (Trans. GARCIA, G. C., op. cit., p. 112).

⁹⁹ It is outside the scope of this thesis to enter into a study of the Founder's political activity, brief as it was. This only offers an outline. For full studies, see GARCIA, G. C., op. cit.; SIMON, A., op. cit., (Le Cardinal Sterckx); LAMBAERTS, E., Kerk en Liberalisme in het Bisdom Gent: 1821 - 1857, Bijdrage tot de studie in het Liberaal-Katholicisme en het Ultramontanisme. (Universiteit ti Leuven; werken op het gebeid van de geschiedenis en de filologie, 5^e reeks, deel 8) Leuven, 1972. Garcia draws considerably on this study.

¹⁰⁰ For the importance of the role played by van Crombrugghe concerning education, see both GARCIA, G. C., op. cit., pp. 116 - 118, and SIMON, A., op. cit., (Le Cardinal Sterckx), p. 145.

In a way that is typical of the man he had become, he is quoted as saying:

"Let not the more or less fanciful fear of abuse deprive us of that freedom in all and for all without which in our opinion, there is neither harmony nor rest possible,"¹⁰¹

His most important speech to Congress concerning education was delivered on 24 December, 1830 and this swayed the voting for the final draft. Not all the work in Congress went as he and others would have wished, as for example, when it was voted that the civil ceremony of marriage should precede the religious, he felt that he and others had failed¹⁰². But in general he was pleased with their interventions, and especially happy with the outcome concerning freedom of education and his own contribution to that.

"The joy I felt at this triumph made me forget all the annoyance of my position."¹⁰³

The 1831 Constitution, among other decisions taken, accorded to the people of Belgium freedom of religion, worship and cult, freedom of the press and of speech, freedom of education, and freedom of association and reunion.

Van Crombrugghe while happy to have served both his Church and his Country, was also happy to move out of the public limelight

At the end of it all he wrote:

"The work of the Congress having ended, I have withdrawn from politics."¹⁰⁴ (104)

During the first National Congress the relationships among the Catholic-Liberals themselves underwent change.

The final articles in the Belgian Constitution read:

Article 14: La liberté des cultes, celle de leur exercice public ainsi que la liberté de manifester ses opinions en toute matière sont garanties, sauf la répression des délits commis à l'occasion de l'usage de ces libertés.

Article 17: L'enseignement est libre; toute mesure préventative est interdite; la répression des délits n'est réglée que par la loi. L'instruction publique donnée aux frais du l'Etat est aussi réglée par la loi.

¹⁰¹ GARCIA, G. C., op. cit., p. 115; "*Que la crainte à peu près chimérique de l'abus ne nous prive de cette liberté en tout et pour tous, sans laquelle à notre avis, il n'y a plus ni harmonie ni repos possible.*" For the texts of van Crombrugghe's interventions see 1830, La Liberté d'Enseignement, Articles de journaux et discours par Constant van Crombrugghe. Ed. Robert Pieraert (Grammont, undated).

¹⁰² GARCIA, G. C., op. cit., p. 116.

¹⁰³ AJM / I / G / FCN, 3. "*La joie que j'ai conçue de ce triomphe me fit oublier tous les désagréments de ma position ...*" (Trans. GARCIA, p. 116).

¹⁰⁴ JORISSEN, J., op. cit., p. 70:
"*L'œuvre du Congrès terminée, je me suis retiré de la vie politique.*"

Some of the younger clergy and laymen were becoming increasingly influenced by the writings of Lamennais. Van Crombrugge, himself an Ultramontanist, very soon found himself actively opposing the Liberals. After Congress some of the extreme Ultramontanist Catholics were very suspicious of this new Liberal Constitution and when the encyclical of Pope Gregory XVI, "Mirari Vos" was promulgated in 1832, some took this to be an indirect criticism of the new Belgian Constitution¹⁰⁵. In fact this argument between Liberals and Ultramontanists was to continue for another half a century¹⁰⁶. As far as van Crombrugge was concerned, while he was not an extremist, this tension did have an immediate effect on his personal life. In 1830 he had been made a titular Canon of the Gent Cathedral. During the period 1831 - 1833 he was still influential in the diocese : a diocesan counsellor, director for religious, president of the diocesan commission for education in the two Flanders. However, increasingly during this period, his Bishop, Van de Velde, was more and more influenced by the younger liberal clergy and in 1834 the ultramontanist van Crombrughe retired from the Diocesan Council.

Finding himself no longer on the Council, and with more free time, he gave considerable attention to helping and guiding the congregations that he had founded, the Daughters of Mary and Joseph, and the Brothers of St. Joseph.

With the new constitutional type of government in Belgium gradually finding its feet, a period of development took place throughout the country, especially in the area of education. Canon van Crombrughe, while recognising the continuing need education of the poor, also saw the need for educating the sons and daughters of the new leaders of society those involved in commerce and industry. Especially in the case of the Josephites (as the Brothers would be called), he directly guided the Institute to respond to these needs both spiritually and professionally¹⁰⁷. With the Daughters of Mary and Joseph, while also leading them into middle-class education, he worked with them in a different way, through visits, but also and it would appear mainly, through his personal correspondence with individual sisters as well as with the communities in general¹⁰⁸.

¹⁰⁵ HAAG, H., op. cit., (The Political Ideas), p. 290.

¹⁰⁶ Leo XIII brought it finally to a close in 1879, when he wrote:

"It would be against the views of the Holy See to attack and censure your Constitution.
Catholics must obey it without mental reservation."

Quoted in HAAG, op. cit., p. 294.

¹⁰⁷ It is outside the scope of this thesis to deal with the relationship between van Crombrughe and the Josephites as they developed their educational methods and also as it eventually became a clerical Institute. This subject is treated fully in the study of G. C. Garcia (op. cit.) where there is also a comprehensive examination of education in Belgium after 1830.

¹⁰⁸ The second part of this present thesis is based almost entirely on this correspondence, which covers the years 1830 - 1865. There are 954 letters still extant in the DMJ Archives, Rome.

E. CONCLUSIONS

Before moving on to see van Crombrugghe's direction of the Congregation in the years following the Independence of Belgium, let us first pause to recapture some of the important elements of his first years in active priestly ministry and as Founder. Right from the beginning we see that he was concerned with youth and with the poor. He wanted to help them improve their standard of living and their education and this desire would eventually lead him to found the two Congregations.

When he was invited by his Bishop to become the principal of the College in Aalst he responded by putting to the best possible use, the principles of education he had learned in his own school days. The aim of all that he undertook in this field was to form "an upright man and a perfect Christian"¹⁰⁹. The spirit of family that he had found at Amiens became his own, and in Aalst was developed through his real love for his students and his encouragement of the teachers. It was also helped through the mutual politeness and good manners that he expected from both teachers and students.

His ability to organise and to adapt also came to the fore and within a period of a few months he had got the College on to its feet. Perhaps the most important of all his principles of education was that of being able to modify the approach to education (in the context of which this is written we may also understand "evangelisation") according to the needs of society, what he himself called the "great rule" of the Daughters of Mary and Joseph. We remember what he advised them:

"In order always to be useful, our Institute, making itself all things to all men, will modify its means of action according to the new needs of society. Such will in all ages be our great rule concerning methods."¹¹⁰

The importance of this is evident in the original manuscript, where the Founder himself wrote these two sentences at the end of the text.

We have already noticed that after the independence of Belgium in 1830, he was to lead the Congregations he had founded into a new field of education, among the sons and daughters of the new industrial and commercial middle-class. This is an excellent example of what he meant by adaptation, because this change of apostolate was not an attempt to abandon or ignore the poor, on the contrary he was insistent that such work should be continued by the Sisters, but rather it was a response to the pressing needs of Belgium in the mid-19th century. It would be difficult to say that

¹⁰⁹ See above, page 62.

¹¹⁰ See above, page 65.

van Crombrugghe wished to serve, through education, the rich, poor or middle-class, but we can say with certitude that he wished to serve his Lord in whatever way seemed appropriate and for the greater glory of God. This Ignatian motto of doing all for the greater glory of God is one he used frequently during this period of his life.

In his personal life, van Crombrugghe was not afraid to adapt and so was able to accept his election to the National Congress. We should notice here the importance he placed on freedom. Throughout his life, when writing of education, he underlines four important elements, which we have already met in his 1818 letter to the Congregation. First he reminds the sisters that every one is a child of the Father; second, each has been bought at the price of Christ's blood on the cross; third, that the Holy Spirit chooses to live in each person; and fourth, that everyone is a dwelling place of the Holy Trinity and so worthy of respect and love. It is for the freedom to make this type of education possible, to be able to hand on to future generations the teaching of the Church, that he became involved in politics.

There is a sense of vigour and enthusiasm about Constant van Crombrugghe during these years, of using all the means possible to serve Christ and the Church. It is interesting too, to see that he was not afraid to use unusual means to help the Congregation in its early days. The exact position of Mlle. de Brandt is not clear, but she was more than a helper, she was in some sense the superior, the "Mère Séculière".

Through the early Rule we see already the outline of the spirituality that Canon van Crombrugghe offered his daughters. He invited them to make a choice for the Lord, to enter into battle with zeal, to take as their sword in this battle the word of God. To be an instrument of mercy is the expression that the Founder uses to draw together all the elements of the specific vocation of the Daughters of Mary and Joseph.

CHAPTER FOUR: ABANDONMENT TO THE WILL OF GOD (1830 - 1865)

A. THE CONGREGATIONS

1. Episcopal approval (1830)

Canon van Crombrughe, at the conclusion of the National Congress, found himself in a new pattern of life. He was still only 42 years old, in his full vigour and yet with no clear work to do. It must have been a time of personal difficulty, perhaps, of spiritual re-assessment and eventually of renewal. He had, after all, been an extremely active man up to this time, both within the Church and in the area of politics.

In 1830, at the end of his work in Congress, he was made a titular Canon of Saint Bavon, the Cathedral Church, so he went to live in Gent in order to fulfil this office. It involved being present at the singing of the Divine Office every day, a responsibility he took seriously throughout the remainder of his life¹. He was to remain from this time on, a resident of Gent.

As we have seen, between 1831 and 1833 the Canon was still a diocesan councillor and active within the Diocese, but his work in that area was diminishing temporarily and so he increasingly gave more time to both the Congregations he had founded. For the Daughters of Mary and Joseph, as indeed for the Brothers of St. Joseph, this was a very important period, for this was when the future pattern of the Congregation would be established. From 1817 to 1830 the Sisters in both Aalst and Geraardsbergen had been basically concerned in the lace-making schools and in teaching catechism. Their work had increased and they were well established. During this period they had followed the Rule already given them in 1817 and 1818. It would seem that most of these first sisters were ordinary working-class women, with a minimal education. We know little about them except that they established a way of life that was not easy and was primarily devoted to giving a basic education to the girls who came to the lace-making schools. The Sunday schools were also well attended, with about 500 students receiving instruction in Aalst².

In 1830 the Founder sought and obtained episcopal approval for both his Congregations. In order to get this approval he had rewritten the Rule. Basically the same as that of 1818, the Rule of 1830 expands, develops and clarifies. It is considerably longer and more clearly organised. It is still quite straightforward and demanding on the individual. In 1837 the Founder wrote to one of the sisters:

¹ JORISSEN, J., op. cit., p. 75

² ADMJR / Historique, p.10.

"The spirit of your holy Rule is a spirit of gentleness and simplicity in imitation of Jesus."³

Certainly the simplicity is very striking.

It is important for us to understand what van Crombrugghe meant by the "Rule". Quite near the end of his life he wrote to the Superior General, Flore Delhaye, when she herself was working on a revision of the Rule:

"I still persist in the fear that you have not removed from the text of your Constitutions and Rules expressions which might give to the term Rules a meaning different from that which we have attributed to it.

In our spirit, our Rules signify: our exercises, our usages, our practices, and the way of carrying them out, fulfilling them, observing them. We make no allusion at all to the term Rule of St. Benedict, for example, of St. Francis, of St. Augustine."⁴

There is no reason to believe that he had any other idea in mind from the beginning. The Rule is the written expression of the lived reality.

In the Rule of 1830, the sisters are placed under the guidance and authority of the Bishop. Bishop Van de Velde, in recognising the Rule, gave the first canonical approval to the small Congregation. He gave his approval, both to the Sisters and the Brothers, on the feast of St. Teresa, 15 October 1830, that is during the first weeks of Independence in Belgium. Van Crombrugghe had lost no time at all in getting his Congregations approved.

In his letter of approval of the Sisters, the Bishop wrote:

"It is not unknown to us that these pious Sisters have served God faithfully; that notwithstanding the difficulties of the times, they have served Holy Church zealously ever since they were founded at Aalst in the year of grace, 1817."⁵

He approves the Institute

³ ADMJR / 02 - 10, letter of van Crombrugghe to Marine Coulon, 22 January, 1837: "L'esprit de votre Ste. Règle est un esprit de douceur et, de simplicité à l'imitation de Jésus."

⁴ ADMJR / 7 - 83, letter of Van Crombrugghe to Flore Delhaye, 29 January, 1863:

"Je persiste toujours dans la crainte que vous n'avez pas fait disparaître du texte de vos Constitutions et Règles, les expressions capables de donner au terme Règles, une signification différente de celle que nous lui attribuons.

Dans notre esprit, nos Règles signifient: nos exercices, nos usages, nos pratiques et mode de les exécuter, de les remplir, de les observer. Nous ne faisons aucune allusion au terme Règle de St. Benoit, par exemple, de St. François, de St. Augustin."

⁵ ADMJR / Constitutions, 1891, Official English Translation. The original text in Flemish reads: "Het is ons niet onbekend dat deze Godminnende Zusters getrouwiglyk voor den Heer hebben geleefd, en dat zy, niet tegenstaende de moeyelkheden van onze ongelukkige tyden, de H. Kerk met iver hebben blyven dienen, sedart dat gezegden heer, alsdan Oversten van het Gymnasium van Aalst, hun aldaer en ook te Geeraardsberge, heeft ingesteld in't jaer MDCCCVII." Regel-Boek – 1830, p. 82

"... to these ends: to the greater glory of God and for the benefit of the young."⁶

The Rule of 1830, like that of 1818, offers guidelines for daily living. There are some aspects, though, which are found here for the first time, for example the instructions on charity and interpersonal relationships. Over the years the Founder would add to these instructions, polish them, but in this Rule we find in embryo all the ideas that will be found in his later instructions⁷. For example, in the article on "conversation" stress is placed on courtesy, politeness, kindness, patience, the care to be taken so as not to offend another⁸. In this same article particular friendships are forbidden because of the disruption they can bring in a community. Fraternal correction is encouraged as a means of building up love and unity and of bringing each other to the Lord.

In 1830 the Sisters did not wear a habit and the Founder gave simple guidelines concerning dress. First he writes that it should be suitable for a person who has committed herself to a life of chastity. At the same time, it should be poor; the reason given is not because they have made a vow of poverty, but so that offence would not be given to the poor with whom they work⁹. It should be remembered though that the Founder did not like people to be dowdy; when in 1831 he chose a habit for the Brothers and the Sisters he proposed a blue scapular:

"So determined was van Crombrugghe to make the religious life of his day a thing of joy that he gave his first sons and daughters an unusual habit. Both wore a scapular of a cheerful blue to relieve the monastic black of the traditional religious dress."¹⁰

Central to the Rule are the articles concerned with apostolate, that is education, particularly of the poor. It is of interest to note that there is an article concerned with penance given after that on education. The Founder writes that the whole purpose of penance in the life of the Sister is to sustain the apostolic work that she undertakes. There is no doubt at all that fasting held an important place in the early days of the Institute as well as other acts of physical penance such as taking the discipline. The law of the Church concerning fasting was more extensive than in the present day and all these fasts were kept as well as some additional days. Before undertaking any fast the Sister

⁶ Ibid., p. 83: "*Zoo dan, ter meerder eere on glorie Gods, tot nut der jongheyd.*" Statistics showing the development of the Congregations founded by van Crombrugghe are offered in Appendix III, s. v.

⁷ These exhortations are still kept in the Constitutions, incluLond the new draft of 1981.

⁸ Regel-Boek - 1830, Eerste Kapital, 22^o und 23^o; Recreatie, and Het gesprek of Conversatie.

⁹ Regel-Boek – 1830, Eerste Deel, Eerste Kapitel, 28^o "op de Zedigheyd", 5^o und 6^o, p. 31.

¹⁰ BATTEN, B., op. cit., p. 7.

had to have the permission of her superior and van Crombrugghe always insisted that the superior exercise moderation. Many times, in his letters, he gave advice about fasting; sometimes he would refuse to give permission for fasts; at other times he would offer guidelines.

"As a general rule, do not permit the class mistresses to fast. When in doubt, ask for a dispensation."¹¹

He consistently advised that those who were teaching should not fast; as in everything else, moderation and prudence were life-giving virtues for van Crombrugghe.

"Be prudent during Lent, you have neither the age, nor the strength to fast. The intention of the Church is not that we destroy ourselves, but that we be converted and that we live."¹²

The recommendations concerning fasting and penance are typical of the man; he expected of himself and of his religious men and women, the best. He was never satisfied with half-measures. However, this was always modified by a very practical exercise of prudence. There should never be anything at all excessive.

Concerning the annual practices of the Sisters, we find one new addition in this Rule concerning the retreat. It reads:

"Therefore, each year, the Sisters of our Congregation make a spiritual exercise for some days, following the book of exercises of St. Ignatius."¹³

Although there had been many previous indications of the influence of St. Ignatius on the spirituality of the Founder, this is the first direct statement¹⁴. As in the Rule of 1818, the retreat was also the occasion for speaking with the superior and it was advised that a manifestation of conscience be made to her. In 1838 van Crombrugghe gave an Instruction to the Sisters concerning this, where he explained what he meant by this openness. It is clear that he saw the Superior as the spiritual directress of the sister, an understanding that was not unusual in religious institutes at that time.

¹¹ ADMJR / 7 - 52, letter of van Crombrugghe to Flore Delhaye, 8 March, 1859. "*En règle générale, ne permettez pas le jeûne aux maîtresses de classe. Dans le doute, vous demanderez dispense.* »

¹² ADMJR / 9 - 7, letter of van Crombrugghe to Aloïse Brucher, 21 February, 1835: "*Soyez prudente pendant le carême, vous n'avez ni l'âge, ni la force de jeûnes. L'intention de l'Eglise n'est pas de nous détruire, mais que nous nous convertissions, et que nous vivions.*"

¹³ Regel-Boek - 1830, Vierde Kapitel, 19, van de Geestelke Exercitie, 1^o, p. 54: "*Jaerlyks dan, zullen alle de zusters van onze gemeyntens eene geestelke exercitie doen, van eenige dagen, volgens den boek der exercitien van den H. Ignatius.*"

¹⁴ This recommendation was removed from the next Rule (1844) but returns in the Rule and Constitutions, 1863, that was presented to Rome when the Congregation received its decree of Praise, 1864. It was finally dropped from the Constitutions in 1878.

"You must open yourself and make yourself known to your Superior in both the things that you find good in you and those which you find bad. This is indispensable so that your guide and counsellor may know your condition perfectly and that she may lead you to God by giving you the advice that your needs require."¹⁵

The Founder quotes St. Teresa of Avila in warning against false humility that would hide the good that we may find in ourselves. He goes into details about the good things that should be spoken of to the Superior, such things as the gifts given us by God, insights in prayer, ease in certain areas of virtue and so on.

According to van Crombrugghe, one of the main aims of spiritual direction (and it is for this that he makes openness towards the superior a matter of Rule), is to smooth out difficulties that stop God from working in us. Therefore weaknesses, faults and so on also need to be brought out into the open. Temptations are not sin, so, he writes, there is no need to hold anything back. The Founder concludes this instruction by writing of the times of darkness, experienced by many, when the Lord seems to withdraw. He says that it is at these times that we most need to go to the person the Lord has given us as guide.

Although eventually manifestation of conscience to the Superior would no longer be a matter of Rule, the principles expressed here concerning spiritual direction, both the need and the means used, remain valid.

The Rule of 1830 also recommended that there should be an annual visitation by the superior, so that each sister would be able to meet with her¹⁶.

Concerning the vows, the novitiate and so forth, basically this is the same as in the previous text. More clearly expressed is the invitation to centre the whole of one's life in Christ, and especially to be given to Him as Spouse¹⁷. From the 1830's onwards relationship with Christ would be developed in these terms. There is a helpful reminder about discernment. Whatever the Lord has given each person is very precious and should be guarded as a treasure, but there is always the possibility of attack from the enemy of the soul. Therefore one needs to take care to watch the senses and particularly to know the movements of one's own heart in order to remain totally given

¹⁵ ADMJR / Instructions Spirituelles, A21 - 19, "Sur l'ouverture de Coeur": "Vous devez vous découvrir et vous faire connaître à votre Supérieure sur ce qui se trouve de bien en vous, et sur ce qui s'y trouve de mal. Cela est indispensable pour que votre guide et, conseillère connaisse parfaitement votre état et quelle puisse vous conduire à Dieu, en vous donnant les avis que vos besoins réclament. »

¹⁶ Regel-Boek - 1830, Vyfde Capittel, 27° Van het betrrouwelen in d'Overste, p. 80 - 81.

¹⁷ Ibid., Vyfde Capittel, 14 °, Van de Beloften, p. 69. 2 ° Belofte van zuverheyd.

to Christ¹⁸. Relationship with Christ, intimacy with Him, is at the very heart of the life of each one and is the basis of all apostolic endeavour. While study was continually encouraged by the Founder, so that the Sisters would be better suited for the work they were asked to do, the first concern of van Crombrugge was to bring people closer to Christ, and so when he speaks to the Sisters about their talents he ends:

"Let us never forget that we will always need saints more than learned women."¹⁹

This word of advice spoken six years after the Rule had received approval, sums up very well the spirit of this Rule. The Sisters were just beginning to find their place in educational work -- and it could have become totally absorbing.

The Rule ends with a quotation from St. John:

"My food is to do the will of Him who sent me and to accomplish his work."²⁰

The canonical position of the Congregation at this time was that it was under the direct authority of the Bishop, who appointed a spiritual guide, or director, in this case the Founder himself. The rôle of the Spiritual Director was to facilitate the government of the Congregation, to help maintain the discipline of the Rule and to liaise between the Bishop and the Institute. The Superior was appointed by the Spiritual Director; there was no form of chapter or of election.

2. The Daughters and Sisters of Mary and Joseph

After 1830 the Daughters of Mary and Joseph developed rapidly and within the next ten years were to become established in the pattern of life that would mark the Congregation in the future. In October 1830 three women who had formed part of the lay community in Mouscron²¹ asked to be admitted to the Congregation. They went to Gent and stayed with the Founder, making the spiritual exercises under his direction, at the end of which they became novices. They returned to Mouscron with one of the sisters from Aalst who was to continue to teach them the Rule. The three were professional women who, for a number of years, had been responsible for both a middle-class boarding school, established in 1802, and a poor school. One of them, Marie-Anne de

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ ADMJR / Instructions Spirituelles, 21^{me} Diversité des talents. A 21 - 21: "*N'oublions jamais que nous aurons toujours plus besoin encore de saintes que de savantes.*" (Trans. BATTEN, B., op. cit. p. 22).

²⁰ Regel-Boek - 1830, Vvfde Capittel, 27^o p. 81:
"Myne spyze is den wil te volbrengen van den Geénen die my heéft gezonden om zyn werk te voltrekken (Joan. IV)."

²¹ See above, Chapter 3, pp. 80.

Ponthieux, then aged 42 years, would be the novice mistress during the following 23 years and included among her novices were two future superiors general, Olympiade Derville and Flore Delhaye.

In the same year, 1830, another similar group of lay women, that had been founded in the parish of Belleghem, in 1827, asked to become part of the Congregation. One of them, Julianne Herbau, followed the spiritual exercises with the group from Mouscron. Later Julianne was given the name in religion of Julie. It was Mère Julie whom the Founder appointed as the first Superior General of the Congregation²². Julie, from what we know of her, was an affectionate, motherly person; she was also a woman of simplicity and openness, willing to be formed. The Founder wrote of her when she was appointed Superior General,

"The way in which she received this function made me hope that she would become a powerful instrument of divine mercy for our Institute."²³

By 1832 there were already six communities of the Congregation, each involved in varying types of apostolic activity. This variety of work was to lead Canon van Crombrughe to make the first division of the Congregation. In Geraardsbergen the sisters, while continuing the work of education of the poor, began, during an epidemic of cholera, to nurse both the poor and the middle-class people in their own homes. They did not wear the blue scapular that had become part of the habit of the other sisters; neither, it would seem, did they take the fourth vow²⁴. In the town itself they were known as "Les Soeurs Noires". In December 1834, the Superior of Aalst, Sister Antoinette, who had been among the first members of the Congregation, having entered in 1820, was appointed as Superior in Geraardsbergen. In effect she became from that date, the first Superior General of this small Congregation known from then on as the "Zusters van Maria en Joseph" (Sisters of Mary and Joseph)²⁵. This first division came about mainly because as the communities responded to the needs of the apostolate, the style of life of the Sisters changed. The Founder could

²² ADMJR / Historique, p. 19 - 22. Among the Daughters of Mary and Joseph, Mère Olympiade has always been considered the first Superior General. It would be more correct to say, however, that she was the first elected. Mère Julie, appointed in 1833, was assisted by Olympiade as her Vicar.

²³ JORISSEN, J., op. cit. p. 111. Found in the notes of the Founder.

"La manière dont elle reçut cette fonction me donna l'espoir fondé qu'elle serait un instrument puissant de la miséricorde divine sur notre Institut."

²⁴ It would appear from the later division of the Congregation (see below, p. 24) that the fourth vow was reserved to the "Madames", that is, the Sisters who taught and who kept a type of enclosure within their convent.

²⁵ For details of this division see JORISSEN, J., op. cit., pp. 111 - 112 and GARCIA, G. C., op. cit., pp. 167 - 168. The Congregation still exists. They date their foundation from the opening of the community in Geraardsbergen in 1818 rather than Aalst 1817. It was one of these Sisters who nursed the Founder in his last months. It was also these Sisters who were heroic in their nursing of the sick during an epidemic of cholera from 1831 - 1833; one of them, Ursula, was the last victim of the epidemic having just before offered her life to the Lord for the epidemic to end.

not envisage these two types of Sisters in one Congregation. True to his principles of adaptation according to needs, he saw no other way than division. During the first years of Independence in Belgium, he saw very clearly the need for educating sons and daughters of middle-class families, the leaders in the new society. Mouscron and Aalst were already involved in their work while continuing to run a school for the poor. Geraardsbergen had continued rather to work in the earlier way of the Congregation, responding primarily to the needs of the poor²⁶ and not tied by an enclosure which was by this time, imposed in the other communities.

3. Daughters of Mary and Joseph and the Sisters of St. Joseph

A second division gradually took place in the following few years between the Sisters in the Diocese of Bruges (communities in Belleghem, Bruges and Waeken) and the other communities. This time it occurred not so much because of the needs of the apostolate but a complexity of geographical distance and diocesan politics as well as apostolic activity.

Bruges had been established as a separate diocese with Msgr. Boussen²⁷ appointed as Bishop. As early as 1834 he had written to the Founder that he had taken the Sisters into his special care.²⁸

Until this year, 1834, Julie was actively the Superior General of all the Sisters and there is no doubt that she was both loved and respected. In 1835, Olympiade as Vicar to Julie, and under the direction of the Founder, began to take almost entire responsibility for the Sisters in Aalst and Mouscron, that is those involved primarily in middle-class education. Olympiade herself was French speaking, the language used exclusively during that period for secondary classical education. Julie lived normally at Belleghem or Bruges; Olympiade was Superior in Aalst²⁹ where the community was now known as the "Dames de Marie" (Ladies of Mary).

In 1837 the "Dames de Marie" opened a new house in the Archdiocese of Mechelen and also in Brussels. A long friendship between Cardinal Sterckx and the Sisters dated from this time³⁰. Although Julie was still the Superior she lived in Bruges and it was Olympiade as Vicar who made all the arrangements for these new foundations and handled the placing of personnel. It is even

²⁶ There is no record of this first division in the Historique of the Daughters of Mary and Joseph.

²⁷ See Appendix II, Biographical Notes, p. v. Boussen.

²⁸ ADMJR / A - 26, letter of François Ev. de Bruges to CVC, 30 July, 1834:
"Je prends sous ma protection spéciale les Soeurs de Marie aux quelles je vous prie de continuer vos bons offices."

²⁹ JORISSEN, J., op. cit., pp.115 - 128.

³⁰ SIMON, A., Le Cardinal Sterckx et son temps, 1792. 1867, Vol. II, L'Eglise dans l'Etat. (Wetteren, Ed. Scaldis, 1950, p. 95.

difficult during this period, in the letters the Founder addressed to Olympiade, to see that she is not in fact the Superior General³¹.

This must have been a very painful time for Julie, having the authority and yet not really exercising it for half of the Congregation (which after all was still small in number). It is only someone of a very gentle character who could have handled the situation as she did, without becoming resentful.

Finally, in 1838, the division was made. The "Historique" of the Institute records it in simple terms.

"During a meeting of Superiors held in October 1838, and presided over by our very Reverend Founder, it was decided that the two branches of the Institute, already, in reality, separated, would have nothing between them except the link of kinship and spiritual affection that comes from a common origin, a rather similar objective and the same love of their common Master and Saviour, Jesus Christ.

An arrangement was made for separating the interests and the direction of the two Institutes: Soeur Julie remained Superior General of the Institute of Soeurs de St. Joseph and Madame Olympiade was charged with the provisional government of the Dames de Marie, as Vicar."³²

Soeur Julie was told to remove her blue scapular and to have nothing more to do with the government of the "Dames de Marie". It was done in a way that was hurtful; even the order was taken to her by an ordinary sister, one of her community. She herself showed no bitterness, but her Sisters felt it! She was, it seems just too great a person to allow this to embitter her and, it would seem, knew the Founder too well to be hurt, or at least to show her hurt. She wrote to van Crombrughe:

"Yes, very Reverend Father, these feelings of thanksgiving and of love increased in the measure that I see better all the trouble that you go to for my good and for that of all my dear children in Jesus Christ."³³

³¹ From 1835 the Founder discusses the placing of Sisters with Olympiade; see ADMJR / 6 - 9, 31 March, 1835; 6 - 30, 17 January, 1836, and many others. From 1837 onwards van Crombrughe's letters to Olympiade are very much concerned with business of various kinds.

³² ADMJR / Historique, pp. 40 - 41, Séparation des deux Branches de l'Institut, 1838: "Dans une réunion des Supérieures tenue en Octobre 1838, et présidée par notre très Révérend Fondateur, il fut arrêté que les deux branches de l'Institut déjà séparées en réalité, n'auraient plus entre elles que ce lien de parenté et d'affection spirituelle, que donne une origine commune, un but à peu près semblable et le même amour du commun Maître et Sauveur Jésus-Christ. Un arrangement fut convenu pour séparer les intérêts et la direction de nos deux Instituts: la Soeur Julie demeura : Supérieure Générale de l'Institut des Soeurs de St. Joseph et Madame Olympiade fut chargée de gouverner provisoirement celui des Dames de Marie comme vicaire."

³³ JORISSEN, J., op. cit., p. 152:
« Oui, très Révérend Père, ces sentiments de reconnaissance, d'amour s'accroissent à mesure que je vois de mieux en mieux tout le peine que vous vous donnez pour mon bien et pour celui de toutes mes chères enfants en Jésus-Christ. »

It is difficult to understand how a man as evidently gentle and sensitive as van Crombrugghe, could have treated one of the sisters whom he both admired and trusted, in such a way. Maybe his desire to see both groups of women move ahead in their apostolic work was more important than anything else. Or, it is also possible that knowing Soeur Julie as he did, he knew that in her simplicity and humility she would understand him, as indeed she seems to have done. Sadly others did not. The Sisters of St. Joseph were hurt. The "Dames de Marie" almost forgot that Julie had ever been their Superior General. In forgetting her, however, they would be in danger of forgetting the simplicity and gentleness that marked her character and were an essential part of the spirit of the Congregation.

Soeur Julie lived a long life, dying just one year before the Founder, in September, 1864. Van Crombrugghe wrote to Madame Flore, then Superior General³⁴:

"Last Saturday, in the morning, the good and always so edifying Soeur Julie, our first Mother General, died, piously and full of spiritual consolation, in the convent at Blanckenberghe."

B. SPIRITUAL JOURNEY

From 1838 the Congregation, now officially entitled "Filles de Marie et de Joseph, dites 'Dames de Marie'", moved ahead steadily in the work of education³⁵. Before tracing the developments of the following years, under the guidance of the Founder, it may be the moment to stop and look at the man himself.

We have seen that after all his apostolic and political activity of the late 1820's and during 1830 - 1831, he gradually found himself less and less involved in the Diocese. It gave him time, certainly, to work with the Congregations and during these years he gave a great deal of time, especially to the Josephites in helping them to get on their feet as professional educators. But what was happening in him, at the deeper level? He was in his middle years, having been in favour with authority all his life, and now he found himself in some way out of favour, no more on the Diocesan Council and his views no longer respected as they had been."

Constant van Crombrugghe rarely writes about himself. This is true throughout his life. But during the 1830's, just occasionally, he gives us brief glimpses of how he was thinking and feeling.

³⁴ ADMJR / 7 – 99, letter of van Crombrugghe to Flore Delhaye, 5 September, 1864. "Samedi dernier au matin, est pieusement et remplie de consolations spirituelles décédée au couvent de Blanckenberghe, la bonne et toujours si édifiante Sœur Julie, notre première Mère Générale. »

³⁵ This is not the place to develop the history of the other two Congregations of Sisters. An outline of their history is given in Appendix III, s. v.

During the last ten years of his life, from the mid 1850's the same thing would happen, but never with the same depth as in these earlier letters. From the letters he wrote to some of the Sisters, those he knew very well, it would seem that he underwent a period of darkness and uncertainty.

Traditionally, in the Congregation, it has always been considered that van Crombrugghe was closest to Flore Delhaye among the first Sisters, but from 1834 to 1840, we find it is almost exclusively to Olympiade that he reveals himself. The closest we are able to come to the man as he saw himself is through his letters to her, and one or two others.

In 1834, in a letter of direction to Clothilde Minne, professed just the previous year, he writes:

"In my turn I thank the good God for having allowed me to be the instrument of His goodness for you, for His vision of mercy towards you. Let us rejoice, we two and never lose the memory of these marks of love which the Lord brings to us."³⁶

As he would encourage the Sisters to be instruments of mercy in the Lord's hands, so he saw himself towards individual sisters. This is the side of him that strengthens and supports others, and there are examples scattered throughout his correspondence.

In a letter to Olympiade in 1836 we have another picture. He has been encouraging her to have confidence and trust in God; now he emphasises the need to trust without in any way being disturbed. He then continues:

"I say this again more to "me" than to you, in a thousand circumstances I feel how small and lacking in trust I am."³⁷

This comes as a real surprise from someone who consistently throughout his life has encouraged others to have great confidence in God. That he saw himself as small is rather different from the "external" impression of the man. Later in the same year, again to Olympiade, he writes to thank her for her prayers. He had been ill.

"I feel already the effects of your good prayers and our divine Spouse gave me more than you have asked of Him: another illness more dangerous than bodily weakness made me lament for a long time. Indeed it seems to me that I see something of my spiritual wretchedness: that at last the Lord has succeeded in opening the eyes of one blind, and that His generous hand pours out a saving balm on the wounds which pride has inflicted on my poor soul. May I be able to respond at last to the voice of our merciful Father."³⁸

³⁶ ADMJR / 17 - 5, letter of van Crombrugghe to Clothilde Minne, January, 1834: "*Je remercie à mon tour, le bon Dieu d'avoir permis que je fusse l'instrument de ses bontés pour vous, de ses vues de miséricorde sur vous. Réjouissons-nous tous deux et ne perdons jamais le souvenir des marques de l'amour que le Seigneur nous porte.*"

³⁷ ADMJR / 6 - 29, letter of van Crombrugghe to Olympiade Derville, 6 February, 1836: "*Je le dis encore plus à « moi » qu'à vous, je sens combien je suis petit et peu confiant, en mille circonstances. »*

³⁸ ADMJR / 6 - 39. letter of van Crombrugghe to Olympiade Derville, 29 June, 1836: "*Je sens déjà les effets de vos*

Discovering his blindness and his need of the Lord's healing would appear to have been a new experience for van Crombrugghe; or maybe not so much a new discovery, as a new depth of discovery. It is also an example of the humility that he will recommend to the sisters, that is a straightforward knowledge of self and a reliance on the mercy of the Lord based in hope and confidence.

Just a few weeks later van Crombrugghe seems to have plunged into a period of sadness and fatigue, that is really not characteristic of him.

"I regret not having more time to spend with you and to have been so unable to use well the little time which I have spent with you. I was very tired and incapable of applying my mind."³⁹

He was having health problems at this time, his eyes were not good and the neuralgia that was to cause him so much difficulty in his later years was already troubling him.

The following month, again in a letter addressed to Olympiade he asks her to pray with him in asking forgiveness for his sins. He recalls the day of his baptism, when he was made a child of God. He continues:

"Will you join with me in thanking the Lord for His goodness and in asking Him pardon for my sins and my frequent ingratitude. I mean what I say."⁴⁰

These may sound like stereotyped phrases, expressions used casually, but they are not normally found in van Crombrugghe's correspondence. Such remarks are rare and in that last remark that he is speaking sincerely, there is, it seems an insistence on his need for the help of their prayer. It is not difficult to imagine his need; he is already the "Très Révérend Père, notre Fondateur" and therefore set apart. Continually guiding and supporting others, he must at times have felt, in his turn, the need of support and help at least of prayer.

By 1837 there is a return of confidence in the way in which van Crombrugghe writes of himself, even when he writes of sinfulness. It continues to be only in his letters to Olympiade that

bonnes prières, et notre divin Epoux m'accorde plus que vous le lui avez demandé: une autre maladie plus dangereuse que la langueur corporelle me fait gémir depuis longtemps. Il me semble véritablement que je vois un peu ma misère spirituelle; que le Seigneur réussit enfin à ouvrir les yeux d'un aveugle, et que sa main libérale verse un baume salutaire dans les plaies que l'orgueil a occasionnées à ma pauvre âme. Puisse-je enfin répondre à la voix de notre miséricordieux Père."

³⁹ ADMJR / 6 - 42, letter of van Crombrugghe to Olympiade Derville, 22 July, 1836: "Je regrette de n'avoir pas eu plus de temps à passer avec vous et d'avoir été si peu capable de bien employer le peu de temps que j'ai passé chez vous. J'étais très fatigué et incapable d'application de l'esprit."

⁴⁰ ADMJR / 6 - 43, letter of van Crombrugghe to Olympiade Derville, 14 August, 1836: "... du jour heureux où je devins enfant de Dieu par le baptême. Veuillez vous joindre à moi pour remercier le Seigneur de ses bienfaits et pour lui demander pardon de mes péchés et de mes ingratitudes sans nombre. Je vous parle sincèrement."

we find these small glimpses of the soul-searching that has been going on.

"I said to you, on my last visit, that I do not count much on the effect of my prayers. There is there a very dubious sense; my prayer as coming from a sinner is not worth much; but, through the hands of Jesus Christ, my prayer as prayer may do so. My assertion was contrary to confidence in God. Woe to me if I jeopardise this confidence among my children by these kind of remarks, which are unworthy of us but which sometimes escape us."⁴¹

His search for what the Lord wants of him continues. He writes to Olympiade that he has always loved St. François de Sales and wished to follow his example. He has felt that God called him to that, but, he writes, he is ashamed to admit that he has not responded to the invitation. So he resolves to start once again even though, now that he is older it is not going to be all that easy. Van Crombrugge asks her to help him "through the gentleness and mercy of Jesus Christ"⁴².

A year later van Crombrugge wrote to another sister about this starting over again. It sounds as though it comes out of his own experience.

"Forget the past; oh: this past is no longer with us, and it must not be an obstacle to your happiness, nor to the good you will do with the help of the grace of the Saviour."⁴³

Was this the personal discovery he was making, to move on in confidence, with the help of the Lord's grace? In this same month, February 1838, van Crombrugge seems to have had a new experience of the Father's love for him, to have known the love and mercy of God at a deeper level than ever before. During these two or three years there had been many deaths among the sisters, but there is one that moved him specially, that of Aloïse Bruycker. He clearly liked her very much as well as considering her a very holy person⁴⁴. He was deeply moved by her death and had a sense of personal loss. But this was the way the Lord chose to show His own love to van Crombrugge.

"One day this week, on finding myself a bit too absorbed by sad and painful thoughts, I received a consolation which I have not

⁴¹ ADMJR / 6 - 53(?), letter of van Crombrugge to Olympiade Derville, 19 January, 1837: "*Je vous ai dit, à mon dernier voyage, que je ne comptais pas beaucoup sur l'effet de mes prières. Il y a là un sens très louche: ma prière comme venant d'un pécheur ne vaut pas grand chose; mais ma prière peut, comme prière, par les mains de Jésus-Christ. Mon assertion était contraire à la confiance en Dieu. Malheur à moi si je nuis à cette confiance chez mes enfants, par ces sortes d'expressions indignes de nous et qui nous échappent parfois.*"

⁴² ADMJR / 6 - 55, letter of van Crombrugge to Olympiade Derville, 26 January, 1837: "*Aidez-moi, je vous conjure, par la douceur et la miséricorde de J. C.*"

⁴³ ADMJR / 10 - 1, letter of van Crombrugge to S. Gonzague, 18 February, 1838: "*Oublions le passé; eh ! ce passé n'est plus à nous, et il ne doit pas être un obstacle à votre bonheur, ni au bien que vous ferez avec le secours de la grâce du Sauveur.*"

⁴⁴ ADMJR / E - 1, Vie de Madame Aloïse de Bruycker (unpublished). Aloïse de Bruycker (spelt variously 'Brucher') died at the age of 23, having been already Superior in Brussels. The Founder was to propose to others that they take her as a model, the ideal, of what he considered a Daughter of Mary and Joseph should be.

experienced for a long time; this was on reading these words of our divine Master: As my Father loves me, so I have loved you. God loves me, however unworthy I may be of this favour! God loves me and He loves me with a love so tender and so great that my past sins do not hold me back!! I was another man, and the idea of the gentle and innocent smile of our sister, Aloïse, came before my imagination. I am now more courageous and more alive in the service of God so infinitely merciful."⁴⁵

Constant had arrived at a great turning point in his life: "God loves me and He loves me with a love so tender and so great that my past sins do not hold me back!! I was another man." Probably one of the most important moments in anyone's journey through life with the Lord.

From these brief glimpses into Constant van Crombrugghe's personal journey, we see a man who has been given the possibility of reflecting on his life, of discovering himself as he is. When he writes of his blindness and sinfulness there is a certain striking simplicity especially when we realise that he is writing to a sister under his direction, who is more than twenty years younger than himself. The only personal sins of which he writes are pride and lack of trust, although when writing he is more concerned with the Lord's healing of the wounds caused by sin, than sin itself.

One is left with many questions. Was, for example, the tiredness and fatigue of body and spirit that he experienced, only a reaction after the years of very active life, of coming into his middle-years, or was it also because he was experiencing a time of self-emptying, normally a rather exhausting experience? Is it possible to recognise in his discovery of the love of God, for him a highly personal experience, a second conversion experience, or would this be taking his reflections too far and giving them a meaning that he did not intend? The conditions for such a conversion are there⁴⁶: he is a mature man in his mid-forties who has undergone a change in the rhythm of his life and activity; he has time for reflection on his spiritual life that evidently included a certain amount of soul-searching so important to him that he wrote about it to a much younger sister under his direction. He did experience a new awareness of the Lord's telling him "I love you" and this experience was so strong that he repeated the words three times in one sentence! As he wrote of

⁴⁵ ADMJR / 6 - 91, 96, letter of van Crombrugghe to Olympiade Derville, 28 February 1838: "*Un jour de cette semaine me trouvent un peu trop absorbé de tristes et pénibles, je reçus une consolation que je n'avais plus éprouvée depuis longtemps; ce fut à la lecture de ces paroles de notre divin Maître: Comme mon Père m'a aimé, je vous ai aimé de même. Dieu m'aime quelque indigne que je sois de cette faveur! Dieu m'aime et il m'aime d'un amour si tendre et si grand que mes pechés passés ne le retiennent point!! Je fus un autre homme, et l'idée du doux et innocent sourire de notre soeur Aloïse se présentant à mon imagination, je suis demeuré plus courageux et animé au service d'un Dieu si infiniment miséricordieux.*"

⁴⁶ For the whole question of second conversion see: POTTIER, A., S. J. Le Père Louis Lallement et les Grands Spirituels de Son Temps. Vol. I. (Paris, Pierre Tequi, 1927), particularly the second section, "Les deux poles de la vie spirituelle, première et seconde conversion, conduite du Saint Esprit". See also O'COLLINS, G., S. J., "Integrating the Second Journey into Spiritual Life", Sursum Corda, October 1979, pp. 505 – 515, and also O'COLLINS, G., S. J. The Second Journey, Dublin, Villa Books, 1978.

himself, "I was another man".

If this were true and really marked the high-point of a conversion experience, then he would be marked by it for the rest of his life, and he would be especially stamped by the central point of that experience, that is the personal love and mercy of God.

From the 1840's onwards van Crombrugge's letters, when they are concerned with spiritual matters, take on a new depth. However, many of his letters between 1840 and 1854 are more concerned with business. But, particularly when writing of the mercy of the Lord, he does express more clearly his reliance on the mercy and tenderness of God⁴⁷. This was not something about which he only reflected intellectually and wrote beautifully but it was expressed in a firm trust and confidence in the Lord and this the Founder wanted to share with his Daughters.

"I promise you also, to pray with confidence to the Master whom we serve, so that His grace may work in us, as it has worked in this multitude of saints whom we honour at this moment. We will be able to do what they have been able to do by this same grace; because the arm of the Lord is not foreshortened; his power and his mercy know no limits."⁴⁸

C. DAUGHTERS OF MARY AND JOSEPH – RULE AND CONSTITUTIONS (1844)

From 1840, the "Filles de Marie et de Joseph" now popularly called the "Dames de Marie" became increasingly established both in their community life and in their work of education. In March 1840, Canon van Crombrugghe wrote to Catherine Dal, superior in Mouscron, that a Chapter for the election of a Superior General would be held on the feast of St. Joseph⁴⁹. This election actually took place on the 25th March and Olympiade Derville became first elected Superior General of the Congregation.

Two months later she moved to Mechelen with Marie-Anne de Ponthieux and ten novices, to the house of "Reine des Anges" which became the Mother-House and the novitiate of the Congregation. This move marks the beginning of a new era. Up until this time there has been a sense of newness, of vitality. After 1840 the Congregation steadily develops within a clearly

⁴⁷ The letters from the last years of his life are once again very open, but because he had to have someone write the letters for him, they lost their spontaneity.

⁴⁸ ADMJR / 02 - 74, letter of van Crombrugghe to Marine Coulon, 30 October, 1843: *"Je vous promets aussi de prier avec confiance le Maître que nous servons afin que sa grâce opère en nous, comme elle a opéré dans cette multitude de saintes que nous honorons en ce moment. Nous pourrons ce qu'ils ont pu par cette même grâce; parce que le bras du Seigneur n'est pas raccourci; sa puissance et sa miséricorde ne connaissent pas de bornes."* (This may refer to the following texts of Scripture: Num. 11:23; Is. 50:2; Is. 59:1).

⁴⁹ ADMJR / 5 - 25, letter of van Crombrugghe to Catherine Dal, superior of Mouscron, 2 March, 1840. The official notification of Chapter.

established pattern. It is recognisable as the Institute it will remain for well over one hundred years.

In 1844 van Crombrugghe, having revised and rewritten Rule and Constitutions, presented them to Cardinal Sterckx, Archbishop of Mechelen, for Approbation. This was granted on the 2nd February, 1844. He had begun the work of revision as early as 1838. In April of that year he wrote to Olympiade that he was making quite good progress⁵⁰. The Founder did not work alone on the revision, he asked the help not only of Olympiade, but also, through her, of Flore Delhaye, Marie Charlotte and Clothilde van Wymelbeke⁵¹. Among these sisters, it was Flore Delhaye who, it would seem, followed most closely the work of the Founder. He also had the help of a Jesuit priest, who was not named but who was considered to be "modest and learned"⁵². This was for a month or so in 1840.

The title given to this new Rule is "Constitutions et Règles des Filles de Marie et de Joseph, dites Dames de Marie". A cumbersome name to say the least⁵³.

1 Introduction

As in the previous Constitutions there is a letter of Introduction, which sets the tone for what is to follow. This letter of 1844, while it is written in a beautiful style, lacks the vitality of the 1818 letter. It is much more formal and is addressed to the "Reverend Ladies and Sisters, my dear Children in Jesus Christ"⁵⁴.

The letter begins by reminding the Sisters that they have been invited to leave the world and follow the Spouse. There is no direct quotation from Scripture, but a mixture of unidentified texts.

"Come, you who are my friends, come; I have first chosen you ... I

⁵⁰ ADMJR / 6 - 99, letter of van Crombrugghe to Olympiade Derville, 10 April, 1838.

⁵¹ ADMJR / 6 - 5A, letter of van Crombrugghe to Olympiade Derville, 10 April, 1838; also 6 - 200, to the same, 14 February, 1840.

⁵² ADMJR / 2 - 200, letter of van Crombrugghe to Olympiade Derville, 14 February 1840: "*J'ai commence mes séances avec un Rév. Père Jésuite pour la révision des Constitutions ... etc.*" And, 6 - 205, letter of van Crombrugghe to Olympiade Derville, 11 March, 1840: "*Le modeste et savant Jésuite qui vient de terminer avec moi la révision de vos Constitutions, m'a été très utile. Vous en jugerez comme moi, j'en suis bien certain, et vous serez contente de notre ouvrage.*" There is a possibility that the Founder was helped by I. Van de Kerkhove, S. J. (1790 - 1871). He had studied at Roselare (Belgium) with the Fathers of the Faith, was in the Gent seminary in 1812 - 13 and entered the Jesuits in 1814 (see: GARCIA, *op. cit.*, vol. 2, p. 62, footnote 45). He helped many religious congregations with formulating their Rules. His similarity of background to that of van Crombrugghe would encourage this view.

⁵³ For the purposes of this thesis, henceforth Rule, 1844. This Rule, after an introduction, is divided into three parts; the first concerned with the structure of the Congregation; the second with the life of the religious, daily, weekly exercises and so on; the third with the duties of the various functionaries within the Congregation.

⁵⁴ Rule, 1844, opening letter addressed to:
"Révérendes Dames et Soeurs, mes chères Enfants en J.C. (sic)".

will give back to you a hundredfold for all that you have sacrificed
for me and finally your prize will be heaven ...⁵⁵

The Founder reminds the Sisters that this Rule has been lived for a number of years already and that it has been submitted to a higher Church authority in order to give it new force and strength and also that the Sisters may more clearly see in it an expression of the will of God for them. Each Sister, through her formation in living the Rule, has been given to understand "the secrets of the love of God"⁵⁶. This is not for everyone, "holy things are for the holy"⁵⁷, and so the Rule is only for the Sisters and not for others; van Crombrugghe insists on this, that the Sisters may not share this Rule with others. There is a strong sense that the "world" will contaminate and ridicule this way of life, so care must be taken to keep entirely away from any influence of the world.

The Founder prays for the members of the Congregation, that Mary and Joseph will obtain for them wisdom, love of humility, charity and courageous zeal, and the concluding paragraph reminds the sisters that they must work at their own spiritual development. For the first time in the formal writing of Canon van Crombrugghe one is struck by a strong voluntaristic flavour about his recommendations. Whether this is because he is writing in French rather than Flemish and therefore using the phrases and ideas that were current, or whether it is because his thinking has changed, it is difficult to decide. Possibly it is a mixture of both. There are in him two aspects always moving along together: first, a very free spirit which encourages others to move ahead with courage and zeal, no matter what; second, that of conformity to social norms and conventions. At various times one or the other is predominant in his writing and here it would appear to be the second.

Remarkable also about this introduction, is that there is no reference made at all to service; it is entirely concerned with the holiness of the individual sister and to some extent with their support of each other. Even though we might conclude that this is a question of style and conformity to contemporary thought, even so it is a remarkable change in accent compared with the previous Rules of 1818 and 1830.

Throughout both the Introduction and Rule, the language is more florid, maybe because of the use of French rather than the more practical Flemish, but in his private correspondence during this period van Crombrugghe did not usually permit himself to go into such flights of language. Whatever the reason, from having directed the Sisters out, to focus on the needs of the world and the Church in the earlier Rules, there is now, in 1844 a withdrawal and the main effort directed

⁵⁵ Ibid., "Venez, vous qui êtes mes Amies, venez; je vous ai choisies le premier ... je vous rendrai au centuple tout ce que vous avez sacrifié pour moi et enfin le Ciel sera le prix." The question of "Spouse of Christ" will be taken up in Chapter 6, s. v.

⁵⁶ Ibid., "Il vous a donc été donné entendre et de comprendre les secrets de l'amour divin."

⁵⁷ Ibid., "Les choses saintes les ne sont que pour les saints. Votre Règle n'est que pour vous."

toward the sanctity of the individual.

2 The Purpose of the Institute and its Government

The Rule opens with a statement of the aim of the Institute:

"The purpose of the Institute of the Ladies of Mary, is the perfection that is proper to each member of this pious family and the good education of girls."⁵⁸

This will be achieved under the protection of Mary the Mother of Christ and St. Joseph. The work of the Sisters is listed as education, that is maintaining Boarding Schools, classes for day pupils and free schools for girls from poor families. It continues by saying that the schools must be suitable for students from "bourgeois" families, meeting the expectations and requirements of the parents⁵⁹. The Sister had also, in her person, to meet these same expectations!

Throughout the Rule there is a careful distinction made between "Les Dames", responsible for the work of education, and "Les Soeurs" who took care of the domestic work and were known as "Soeurs Converses" (lay sisters).

There was a third type of membership of the Congregation, although maybe "member" is too strong a term to use. These were known as "coadjutors" and were unmarried lay women who helped the "Dames" in business outside the convent, in the supervision of the poor classes and in visiting the sick and so on. This type of associate membership would not be included in subsequent Constitutions⁶⁰.

As an Institute, the members practised the normal observances of religious life, were consecrated by vows and were under the authority now of the Archbishop of Mechelen⁶¹. There is no need here to enter into details of the practices of everyday life. They were the normal mixture of devotional practices, apostolic activity and penance.

Concerning the vows, details are given in the second part of this Constitution. The general presentation is that normally accepted by the Church and relies on the teaching of St. Jerome, St.

⁵⁸ Ibid., "La perfection propre de chaque membre de cette pieuse famille, et la bonne éducation des enfants du sexe, tel est le but de l'Institut des Dames de Marie". Première Partie, Chapitre Première.

⁵⁹ Ibid., 1^{er} Partie, Ch. I, Art. 2: "Leurs Couvents et leurs classes doivent être montés en toutes choses, de telle manière que les bourgeois et les Parents riches, les trouvent en harmonie avec les besoins de leurs enfants, et même avec les exigences raisonnables de leur condition dans la société. »

⁶⁰ Ibid., Part I, Ch. I, Art. 5: "Coadjutrices" or "Congréganistes".

⁶¹ Ibid., Part I, Ch. I, Art. 4

Cyprien and St. Bernard, that is, that religious profession is a second baptism⁶². Poor as Christ was poor, the religious is encouraged to live real poverty and is reminded of the Beatitude, "blessed are the poor in spirit"⁶³. Canon van Crombrugghe insists, that despite appearances to the contrary because of the work in which they are involved, poverty within the Institute must be second to no other religious Institute, even the most austere⁶⁴. When in Part One of this Rule the question of temporal goods is discussed we find that it was possible for the finally professed religious, more than seven years after her profession, to make a total renunciation of ownership. However the Founder, while retaining the principle, did not find the details of the recommendation practical. The text reads:

"After their second novitiate and before the renewal of their holy vows they renounce formally and really, that which they still civilly possess."⁶⁵

In the original text the words "formally and really" are crossed out and in the margin the Founder wrote "Impracticable, C. G. V. C.". So despite the many changes in this Rule, and the different styles van Crombrugghe remains as full of common sense as ever.

As regards obedience, the model for the Sister is Christ, who listened to the voice of the Father and was obedient to death, even to death on the cross⁶⁶. The vow of chastity expresses the desire of the religious to keep for Christ, her Spouse, her heart, body and mind. All is His⁶⁷.

Each vow is explained clearly in terms of the practical, daily living out of the commitment. In the Rule of 1844 there is still a fourth vow taken only by the "Dames", not the "Soeurs

⁶² Ibid., Part II, Ch. VI, "Des Saints voeux":

"Saint Jérôme, Saint Cyprien, Saint Bernard appellent la profession religieuse un second baptême, qui peut procurer à l'âme une telle pureté, que si l'on venait à mourir en ce moment, on irait droit au Ciel, comme ceux qui meurent immédiatement après le baptême."

⁶³ Ibid., Part II, Ch. VI, "Du voeu de Pauvreté": *"Notre divin Législateur, notre modèle, et notre Maître, le céleste Epoux des Filles de Marie et de Joseph, Jésus-Christ, préconise cette sainte et volontaire pauvreté, par sa doctrine et par son exemple. Bienheureux, dit il, les pauvres d'esprit."*

⁶⁴ Ibid., Part II, Ch. V, Pauvreté, 8^o: *"Enfin, malgré les apparences contraires auxquelles les soumet le décorum de leur état, elles ne peuvent le céder sur l'esprit de pauvreté, à aucun autre Institut religieux, sans excepter même les plus austères."*

⁶⁵ Ibid., Part I, Ch. V, 1, "Des Biens Temporels": *"Après leur second Noviciat et avant le renouvellement de leurs saints voeux; elles renoncent formellement et réellement à tout ce qu'elles possèdent encore civillement."* The second novitiate normally took place seven years after a sister had made final vows. See below, p. 156.

⁶⁶ Ibid., Part II, Ch.V, "Du voeu d'obéissance":

"Jésus-Christ fut obéissant, jusqu'à la mort et même la mort de la croix. Je ne cherche pas ce qui me plait, dit ce généreux Sauveur, mais ce qui plait à celui qui m'a envoyé."

⁶⁷ Ibid., Part II, Ch. V, "Du voeu de Chasteté":

"Par ce voeu, heureuses enfants d'une Mère vierge, d'un Père vierge, les filles de Marie et de Joseph, s'obligent à conserver purs et chastes, à leur Epoux vierge, leur coeur, leur corps et leur esprit."

Converses". The material for this vow is the instruction of youth. By this vow the religious is consecrated to work with zeal in forming disciples for Christ. For those who take this vow, there is an obligation to study. The type of work undertaken is naturally left to the superior⁶⁸.

The formula of vows is similar to subsequent formulas in use and reads:

"My God, my Creator, my Redeemer, though I am nothing but weakness and have offended you by my sins, relying on your infinite mercy, I dare to appear here in your presence and before your altar, before Mary and her Blessed Spouse, I, N vow and promise by perpetual vows, to your divine Majesty, under the authority of my Lord, the Archbishop of Malines, chastity, obedience, poverty and to employ myself in this holy society with the instruction of girls, in conformity with this Rule of the Ladies of Mary, which I accept and which I embrace in all its points. In the name of the Father, of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen."⁶⁹

The structure of this formula is similar to that in use in other institutes at the time. The opening is similar in content to that found in the Jesuit scholastic's formula, although the wording is not the same⁷⁰.

The government of the Congregation was under a Spiritual Director, "Le Révérend Directeur Spirituel". He would be named by the Archbishop, the immediate authority. The director's function was to facilitate the government of the Superior General, to help maintain the discipline of the Rule, to liaise between the Institute and the Archbishop and if necessary to dismiss, with reference to the Archbishop, any troublesome members of the Institute. So he was a man who held a great deal of authority and was respected as the Archbishop's representative⁷¹.

The normal responsibility for the Congregation was held by the Superior General, who was elected during a Chapter. The right of vote, though, was only given to the Superiors in the Institute. Other Sisters could be named but not elected to Chapter (only from among the "Dames"; not the "Soeurs Converses,"), but they could not vote for the Superior General⁷². She was elected for a

⁶⁸ Ibid., Part II, Ch. V, "Du voeu d'instruire la jeunesse".

⁶⁹ Ibid., Part II, Ch. V, "Formule des Voeux":

"Mon Dieu, mon Créateur, Mon Rédempteur, quoique je ne sois que faiblesse, et que je vous aie offense par mes péchés, appuyée sur votre miséricorde infinie, j'ose paraître ici en votre auguste présence et en face de vos autels, devant Marie, ainsi que devant son bienheureux Epoux, moi, N..... je vous et promets par vœux perpétuels, à votre divine Majesté, et sous l'agrément de Monseigneur l'Archevêque de Malines, Chasteté, Obéissance, Pauvreté et de m'employer dans cette sainte société, à instruire les personnes de mon sexe, conformément à cette Règle des Dames de Marie, que j'accepte et que j'embrasse dans tous ses points. Au nom du Père, du Fils et du Saint Esprit, Ainsi soit il."

⁷⁰ DE CHARRY, J., op. cit., Première Partie, Vol. I, p. 130.

⁷¹ Rule, 1844, Part I, Ch. II, Art. 1. Fortunately for the Sisters in the 1840's this office was held by the Founder himself. It seems a dangerous amount of power to be held by someone outside the Congregation other than the Bishop.

⁷² Ibid., Part I, Ch. III, Art. I.

period of nine years and she had to have made her second novitiate and also be academically capable. There was nothing written into the Rule which prevented re-election. She was helped by four council members⁷³.

The religious were invited to see their Superior General as a Mother, even that she took the place of Mary, Mother of God in the community. In her turn she was invited to take her difficulties to Mary⁷⁴. With her council she was to ensure that the spirit of the Institute and its service of the Lord should be handed on intact to future generations⁷⁵.

The local Superior should also be seen primarily as a Mother and she too was to represent Mary, Mother of God, to the Individual Sister. This was not an attempt to make Mary the "superior" of the community, but rather it is an example of the "family spirit" that van Crombrugge encouraged so much among his religious both men and women. Rather than equating "Mary" with "superior", the superior is equated with "Mother", as Mary is Mother to Jesus. Opening one's conscience to the Superior is therefore considered desirable and again, as in 1830, made a matter of Rule. There is a long extract given from the writing of St. François de Sales supporting this practice. The Superior was seen as the spiritual directress of each Sister and among other permissions, she gave that of receiving Holy Communion, or presumably she might also withhold this permission⁷⁶. We should remember though, that in practice at this time in the history of the Institute, the Founder was the director of many of the Sisters.

In the final part of this Rule, the Founder once again refers to the Superior as mother when he advises that when there are difficulties and problems with individual sisters, she the superior should try to be compassionate as a mother and treat the people concerned with love, gentleness, patience, delicacy. In fact, he writes, the people with whom she should be most concerned and show real love, are those with a difficult character⁷⁷. It is quite clear throughout these articles that van Crombrughe is trying to build up a sense of family, not encouraging childish behaviour⁷⁸.

Concerning formation, there is advice given both for those responsible and those in

⁷³ Ibid., Part I, Ch. II, Art. 2; and Ch. II, Art. 1. & 2.

⁷⁴ Ibid., Part I, Ch. II, Art. 2:

"*La Mère Générale remplace à l'égard des religieuses ici-bas, l'auguste Mère qu'elles ont dans le ciel.*" This question will be taken up further in Chapter 7, s. v.

⁷⁵ Ibid., Part I, Ch. II, Art. 3, (i).

⁷⁶ Ibid., Part II, Ch. V, "Des Supérieures", quoting from Constitution 21, De la Visitation. Also: "*Aux jours et aux heures indiquées on demande à la Révérende Mère la permission de faire les communions ordinaires et les avis de direction dont, on a besoin.*"

⁷⁷ Ibid., Part II, Ch. II, "Des Dames Supérieures", 5^o.

⁷⁸ It is during this period that in his letters the Founder quite often writes of the Institute as the Family of Mary and Joseph, for example: ADMJR / 19 – 16, letter of van Crombrughe to Seraphine de Trocht, 23 March, 1839.

formation. The postulancy lasted for three months, as in 1830, but the novitiate is now of two years duration, both for the "Dames" and the "Soeurs". The "Dames" made perpetual vows immediately after the novitiate, although they remained under the care of the novice-mistress for one more year and did not receive the full habit until the end of that year. The "Soeurs" made temporary vows for three years and then were admitted to final vows.

Seven years after their profession the sisters were encouraged to write to the Superior General and request a year of second novitiate, beginning and ending with a ten-day retreat and a devotional renewal of vows⁷⁹. The idea was that the individual would have a quiet year at Mechelen, by then the Mother-House, in order to have time for prayer, reflection and to absorb the spirit of the Congregation by living at the novitiate house. In practice, as will be seen later, this was very difficult to arrange⁸⁰.

The Sister responsible for formation, the novice-mistress, needed to be a solidly good, prayerful person, a woman of discernment, plus having a good sense of humour. There is a lot of common sense in the articles concerned with formation personnel, and a real recognition of the weaknesses and difficulties that emerge when a community of women live together⁸¹.

The novice, in her turn, is reminded that the novitiate is basically a time of solitude and silence, also of penance and mortification. She is invited to turn to her Lord at all times and in any difficulties; to stay close to Jesus, to listen to Him, because she is the object of His love and delight, chosen by Him⁸².

3 Charity, mercy and zeal

The central part of this Rule and Constitution is really the heart in every sense. It is described as concerning the daily life of the Sisters, and in fact is primarily concerned with love, with charity. In later Constitutions this group of articles, which includes a large number of topics, will be formed into what came to be called "allocutions" or "exhortations, of our Founder.

The article on Charity itself is the only one to begin with a quotation from Scripture, which is from St. Matthew, Chapter 23, the commandment to love. In the course of the article, there is

⁷⁹ Ibid., Part I, Ch. VI, "Des Postulantes, des Novices, et du second noviciat".

⁸⁰ See below, p.174.

⁸¹ Ibid., Part II, "Des Principales fonctionnaires", Ch. I, "Des qualités qu'on leur désire", and Ch. II, "Devoirs des fonctionnaires", pp. 72 – 87.

⁸² Ibid., Part II, Ch. V, "Des postulantes et des Novices", pp. 60 - 61.
"Venez, approchez, mes bien-aimées; venez vous que mon cœur à préférées; prêtez l'oreille aux inspirations de mon amour. Oubliez votre peuple et la maison de votre père; écoutez, je vous ornerez d'une, beauté céleste, qui vous fera des objets de ma complaisance; venez, car je vous choisis."

another citation from John 15, that is to love one another as Christ has loved us. Throughout, the insistence of Canon van Crombrugghe is on reciprocal love. However this article lacks the directness of the earlier Rules concerning charity and at the same time lacks the depth of the allocution written in the revised Constitutions of 1864. The series of articles of 1844 have not the same force though this does not detract from their importance⁸³.

Near the beginning of this section, the Founder sums up the attitude the Sisters should have towards each other:

"They will be gentle, prudent, cheerful, polite, and charitable."⁸⁴

In other words, all his favourite virtues. As we read on we find Canon van Crombrugghe writing in a way that is more normal to him. It is like a breath of fresh air. When writing on "Zeal for the salvation of youth", as he has done before and will do again, he reminds us that Christ has poured out His blood for each person. This remembrance should be the source of our zeal; as each one remembers the great love and mercy shown her by God, so she in her turn brings others to the same realisation. The means to this end proposed by the Founder is education. And so he writes:

"Following the example of our Divine Saviour and of His dearest friends, the Ladies of Mary vowed to this same work, are, like them, the instruments of the mercy of the Lord for forming servants of the heavenly Father, disciples of Jesus Christ, living temples of the Holy Spirit."⁸⁵

Is vowed really what van Crombrugghe means here, or simply devoted? It is very difficult to say, but the religious were still taking the fourth vow of education, as we have seen. It would seem then that the invitation to be an instrument of mercy, in being intimately linked with zeal and education (as it constantly is in the Founder's writings), describes the spirit of the Congregation in a unique way. As we have already seen, the fourth vow is a way of expressing the essential aspect of the Congregation, its way of living the Good News of Jesus Christ. For the Daughters of Mary and Joseph, the essential becomes clear:

"you are instruments of the mercy of the Lord."⁸⁶

⁸³ Ibid., Part II, "De la vie des Religieuses en commun", Ch. I, Exercises Journaliers", pp. 30 - 44.

⁸⁴ Ibid., Part II, Ch. I, "De la récréation", p. 35: "*Elles se souviendront qu'en récréation comme ailleurs, elles sont toujours en la présence de Dieu; elles y seront donc douces, prudentes, gaies, polies et charitables.*"

⁸⁵ Ibid., Part II, Ch. I, "De zèle pour le salut de la jeunesse", p. 35:
"A l'exemple de notre Divin Sauveur et de ses plus chers amis, les Dames de Marie vouées à cette même oeuvre, comme eux, elles sont les instruments de la miséricorde du Seigneur, pour former des servants au Père Céleste, des disciples à Jésus-Christ, des temples vivantes au Saint Esprit."

⁸⁶ Ibid., Part II, Ch. I, "De zèle pour le salut de la jeunesse", p. 35:

Zeal for the salvation of others, bringing them to recognise the love and mercy of God towards them as individuals, is what the Congregation is about. Zeal which is enlightened, discreet, pure, generous and persevering, giving light and life to others⁸⁷. This is a work of formation, of education; forming servants for the Father, disciples of Jesus, living temples of the Holy Spirit. Van Crombrughe encourages us to let no difficulty stop us in this particular ministry. We will be helped by the remembrance of what Jesus Christ has done for us and so will be taught what we must do for Him and for our brothers and sisters⁸⁸.

The strength for this work is found in mutual love and respect but basically in recognising God everywhere, in all whom we meet and within ourselves. The Founder recommends that we show our gratitude and thanksgiving to God especially through the attitudes of cheerfulness and gentleness towards each other. Most important though, in order to sustain this ministry, time must be given to the Lord. The apostolic life, urgent as it is, must not be allowed to swallow up the whole of life, leaving no time for prayer and contemplation⁸⁹. It is particularly in and before the Blessed Sacrament and in the Sacrament of Penance that the Sister, in receiving the mercy of God is strengthened to bring this to others. It is here too that she intercedes for others, telling the Father, her Father and friend, of her needs and those of the Church.

"Their needs, those of their sisters, of their students; the needs of the whole Church will be made the object of their prayers and of their desires."⁹⁰

It is the Holy Spirit who guides the person, therefore

"the religious will study the movements of their soul, so as to be always ready to follow the promptings of the Holy Spirit."⁹¹

All that the religious is and does is for the glory of God and is in response to the love shown us in Christ.

⁸⁷ Ibid., p. 36:

"Que leur zèle soit donc éclairé, qu'il soit discret, qu'il soit pur, qu'il soit généreux et persévérand."

⁸⁸ Ibid.: "Le souvenir de ce que Jésus-Christ a fait pour elles, leur, apprendra ce qu'elles doivent faire pour lui; c'est à moi-même dit ce bon Sauveur, que vous faites tout ce que vous faites à la moindre des enfants que je vous ai confiées."

⁸⁹ Ibid., particularly, "De la présence de Dieu", p. 47; "De la dissipation" etc., p. 41.

⁹⁰ Ibid., p. 43: "Des visites au Saint-Sacrement":

"Dans ces visites que n'auront elles point a communiquer à leur Père, leur seul ami, à leur céleste Epoux? Leurs besoins, ceux de leurs Soeurs, de leurs élèves; les besoins de toute l'Eglise feront l'objet de leurs prières et de leurs voeux. »

⁹¹ Ibid., Part II, Ch. II, "Du Saint Esprit et des âmes du Purgatoire":

« Les religieuses étudieront les mouvements de leur âme, afin d'être toujours disposées à suivre ce que l'Esprit Saint y excite. »

"I will not call you my servants anymore; I will call you my friends, you will be my Spouse."⁹²

Finally, Mary, who holds a special place of honour in the Institute, is offered to the religious as model and as Mother. She is taken into the family of the Congregation in a particular way⁹³. St. Joseph is proposed as patron and Father of the Institute and as a model of zeal. In his honour the sisters abstained from meat every Wednesday⁹⁴. Although the Congregation had become popularly the "Dames de Marie", their spirituality was still very clearly one of family of being true daughters of both Mary and Joseph.

The 1844 Rule and Constitutions ends with a reminder of the love and respect that each Sister should have for the Rule. As Daughters of Mary and Joseph they should follow this courageously, with humility, gentleness, patience; supporting each other in love, maintaining peace⁹⁵. Canon van Crombrugghe concludes by praying for them:

"May the peace of Jesus Christ, this gentle and powerful peace which surpasses all good, always enlighten their spirit and direct their love."⁹⁶

D. SPIRITUAL DIRECTOR

During the remaining years of his life, the Founder continued to help all four congregations, the three of women and that of men. He worked particularly with the Josephites in what concerned the development of their Congregation⁹⁷ and their specific work of education⁹⁸.

So far as the "Dames de Marie" were concerned, with the encouragement of the Founder, throughout the 1840's and 1850's, the Sisters expanded their work by developing the already established schools in Aalst, Mouscron, Mechelen and Brussels. They continued to educate the

⁹² Ibid., Part II, Ch. II, "Du Sauveur Jésus-Christ, leur Divin Epoux": "*Je ne vous appellerai plus mes servantes; je vous appellerait mes amies, vous serez mes Epouses.*"

⁹³ Ibid., Part II, Ch. II, "De Marie, leur Auguste Mère", p. 52.

⁹⁴ Ibid., Part II, Ch. II, "De, leur Patron Saint Joseph", pp. 48 – 49.

⁹⁵ Ibid., Part III, Ch. III, "De l'attachement à la Ste. Règle et aux usages qu'elle établit", pp. 87 - 89.

⁹⁶ Ibid.: "*Que la paix de Jésus-Christ, cette douce et puissante paix, qui surpasse tout bien, éclaire toujours leur esprit et qu'elle dirige leurs affections.*" p. 89.

⁹⁷ See below, p. 181, concerning the development of the Josephites as a clerical Institute rather than one of teaching Brothers, or a mixed Institute.

⁹⁸ See GARCIA, G. C., op. cit., Chapter 3: "Teaching Congregations: the 1830's to the 1860's", especially section 2c, "Messieurs les Joséphites", pp. 174 – 190.

daughters of the "bourgeoisie" and also girls from poor families. Although the call to work with the poor has never been totally lost in the Institute, it came very close to it at this time in its history.

While Canon van Crombrugghe saw the need of expanding middle-class education because of the political and economic situation in Belgium⁹⁹, nevertheless he did not want the Sisters to neglect the poor and he took care to remind the superiors of their responsibility in this line.

"It is certain that a free school is a source of blessing for religious establishments and above all for those which vow themselves to the education of the young. It is the wish of our Rule like a practical constant proof, to have a free school everywhere that we have an establishment."¹⁰⁰

In fact, while there were always free schools or classes attached to the fee-paying schools, the Sisters were known for their work with the middle-class. Their popular name, "Dames de Marie", is in itself an indicator of this.

1 Olympiade Derville

Of great importance during these years, for the "Dames de Marie" was Canon van Crombrugghe's direction of individual sisters, especially the superiors and those in other positions of influence and responsibility within the Congregation¹⁰¹. In 1845, Olympiade Derville was re-elected for a second term of office as Superior General and Flore Delhaye became her Vicar and at the same time was responsible for the educational standards within the Institute.

Olympiade and Flore were very different characters. Olympiade seems to have been a nervous type of person and very conscientious, and at the same time stubborn. Van Crombrugghe frequently tried to modify her behaviour both for her own sake and that of the sisters. He had begun directing her personally while she was still Vicar to Soeur Julie. His early letters to her insist on trust and confidence in the will of God. For example he writes in 1835:

"So do not look anymore to the future, nor look at the present according to our weak ideas; see everything in the loving will of the divine Spouse."¹⁰²

⁹⁹ See above, pp. 132.

¹⁰⁰ ADMJR / 18 - 51, letter of van Crombrugghe to Clothilde van Wymelbeke, 5 June, 1855: "*Il est certain qu'une école gratuite est un élément de prospérité, une source de bénédiction pour les établissements religieux et surtout pour ceux qui se vouent à l'éducation de la jeunesse. C'est le vœu de notre Règle, comme le preuve la pratique constante, d'avoir partout une école gratuite où nous avons un établissement.*"

¹⁰¹ As the material for the second half of this thesis is drawn almost entirely from van Crombrugghe's letters of direction, only a brief outline of his type of direction will be shown here.

¹⁰² ADMJR / 6 - 8, letter of van Crombrugghe to Olympiade Derville, 26 March, 1835: "Ne voyez donc plus l'avenir, ne voyez plus le présent selon nos faibles calculs; voyez tout en l'adorable volonté du Divin Epoux."

In another letter written later on in the same year, he tries to draw her out of herself. He tells her that she needs to think of things that console her and cheer her up, otherwise she becomes too serious and introspective.

"At the moment you have more need to read the tract on joy than to follow a retreat with exactitude."¹⁰³ (103)

There were a number of times during her life when for similar reasons he discouraged her and even forbade her making a retreat. As Olympiade's spiritual director, van Crombrugghe kept a watch on all the aspects of her life and frequently advised her to moderation. Although, as we have seen, the sisters were encouraged to practise penance and fasting, Olympiade seems to have been taking it too far. The Founder writes to her:

"As to this taste for bodily mortification, I am not at all sure if it is the Spirit of God or a natural fervour which is pushing you; I incline towards the second feeling and I urge you to moderate it; it could bring about a physical illness without spiritual benefit."¹⁰⁴

At one time, because he had found her very tense, he insisted that she should not pray, or study religious subjects, or hold a spiritual conversation with anyone for more than an hour! It would appear that previously she had not taken his advice too well because he continues:

"And so you may understand my thought in a precise and clear way, you will not make the annual retreat, nor another, until a new order (is given). I pray the good God to give you the necessary docility to obey with simplicity and better than you have done until now, the voice of your devoted father in Jesus Christ,
Constant van Crombrugghe."¹⁰⁵

Harsh as this sounds, van Crombrugghe seems to have understood her very well. He understood her inclination to look always on the miserable side of things and to turn in on herself; hence his continual battle with her, both for her own good and that of the sisters. Perhaps sometimes it was difficult for her to accept the guidance he offered, as when he wrote to her:

¹⁰³ ADMJR / 6 - 21, letter of van Crombrugghe to Olympiade Derville, 26 October, 1835: "Vous avez plus besoin, en ce moment, de lire le traité de la joie, que de suivre avec exactitude une retraite."

¹⁰⁴ ADMJR / 6 - 2 (A), undated letter of van Crombrugghe to Olympiade Derville:
"Quant à ce goût des mortifications corporelles, je ne suis pas aussi certain si c'est l'Esprit de Dieu ou une ardeur naturelle qui vous y pousse : je penche pour le second sentiment et je vous engage à le modérer: il pourrait occasionner un mal physique sans bénéfice spirituel ».

¹⁰⁵ ADMJR / 6 - 74, letter of van Crombrugghe to Olympiade Derville, 12 November, 1837: "Et pour vous faire comprendre ma pensée de manière nette et claire, vous ne ferez plus de retraite annuelle, ni autre, jusqu'à nouvel ordre. Je demande au bon Dieu de vous donner la docilité nécessaire pour obtempérer avec simplicité et mieux que vous ne l'avez fait, jusqu'ici à la voix de votre tout dévoué Père in J. C., Constant van Crombrugghe."

"You love the divine Spouse, and for Him, you love the guide that He has given you."¹⁰⁶

We should at the same time remember that it is mainly to Olympiade that he writes as he does of his own spiritual dryness and struggles.

2 Flore Delhaye

Canon Van Crombrugghe's direction of Flore was very different. In one way it is more difficult to follow through the lines of direction, than with Olympiade, because from their mutual correspondence it is clear that they met more frequently than they wrote. There are periods when Flore wrote to him even twice a day, or on successive days and we do not have his replies and the same is true the other way round¹⁰⁷. Another consideration is that though the Founder's letters to Olympiade contain plenty of business matters, they frequently have a more personal note added on, while the letters to Flore are often only business. Personal letters were usually written separately. She was Superior General towards the end of his life and therefore many of his letters to her are dictated, which means that he was not so free to write as he wished. He did tell her to write freely, because he still opened his own letters even when writing became impossible¹⁰⁸. But the important point is, that while we have plenty of letters or direction addressed to Flore, much is missing because they met often.

Van Crombrugghe had known Flore since she was a young girl in Mouscron when he was a curate there, so in a unique way he had been able to mould her into his understanding of the spiritual life. Towards the end of his life he writes to her of the great consolation this has been for him, and the happiness of knowing that she understood him as no other person did. He writes that only God can give this type of understanding between two persons and he continues to recall with joy the years he has known Flore:

"For your consolation, I would say, also, that you are known to me and that since your childhood I have been able to follow the ways of grace, the development of your faculties of mind and heart."¹⁰⁹

¹⁰⁶ ADMJR / 6 - 282, letter of van Crombrugghe to Olympiade Derville, 15 October, 1842: "Vous aimez le divin Epoux, et pour lui, vous affectionnez le guide qu'il vous a donné."

¹⁰⁷ ADMJR / A22, letters of Flore Delhaye to van Crombrugghe, dated from 1837 to 1865. There are 151 letters in this collection. Of those addressed to Flore by the Founder, there are 113 dating between 1834 - 1865, just a month before his death. When read together, there are comparatively few of these letters that have continuity.

¹⁰⁸ ADMJR / 7 - 89, letter of van Crombrugghe to Flore Delhaye, 2 December, 1863: "Ecrivez comme de coutume, moi seul j'ouvre ce qui m'est, adressé, et seul je prends lecture des lettres."

¹⁰⁹ ADMJR / 7 - 52, letter of van Crombrugghe to Flore Delhaye, 8 March, 1859: "Pour votre consolation, je vous dirai aussi que vous m'êtes connue et que depuis votre enfance, j'ai pu suivre les voies de la grâce, le développement, de vos

In Flore's letters to van Crombrugghe, she comes across as a very lively person, certainly, during her earlier years. Sometimes her "humility" does not ring true and it is noticeable that the Founder, in his answers to her, never makes reference to such remarks. For example, in 1842, when she was first made a superior she writes at length about how she feels being called "Madame la Supérieur", In his reply the Founder makes no reference to this at all, probably the best way of dealing with it. But, on the whole, right through the correspondence she appears as lively and energetic.

It is interesting to notice the revision of her letters in this connection, as it tends to make her both more pious and more determined than she apparently was. In September 1858, just after being elected Superior General, she wrote to the Founder that she had consulted with her council about some action and decided to go ahead. The consulting is edited out and the decision made solely hers¹¹⁰.

Many of her letters are business or news, but there are some very personal ones. For example, in February 1859, she writes to van Crombrugghe and gives an account of how she found herself spiritually. It is a very honest letter. She reviews her attitudes towards devotions, prayer, life with other people and so on. Towards the end of it she writes:

".. often, I find myself before His adorable Heart distracted and cold!

I often lack friendliness and gentleness in my manner and tone (towards others)."¹¹¹

It is in the letter of reply to this that the Founder reminds Flore that he has known her since she was young. He gives thanks for all that the Lord has done both for her and through her. This is all in Christ, who is the centre of her life.

"Certainly Jesus must have the first place in your love; He is the true way, your light, your life; He is your Saviour; He is the Spouse of your soul."¹¹²

A real consolation to the ageing Founder is the fact that she has understood so well the spirit of the way in which he has directed her over the years.

"I notice, with true consolation, that you understand the spirit, the

facultés de l'esprit et de cœur."

¹¹⁰ ADMJR / A - 22, letter of Flore Delhaye to van Crombrugghe, 1 September, 1858. Pencilled editing of an unknown date.

¹¹¹ ADMJR / A - 22, letter of Flore Delhaye to van Crombrugghe, 27 February, 1859: "... que souvent je me trouve devant son cœur adorable, distraite, froide! ... Je manque souvent d'amabilité, de douceur dans l'air, et le ton."

¹¹² ADMJR / 7 - 52, letter of van Crombrugghe to Flore Delhaye, 8 March, 1859: "Bien certainement, Jésus doit avoir la première place dans votre amour: il est vrai voie, votre lumière, votre vie: il votre Sauveur; il est l'Epoux de votre âme"

means, the purpose of your Institute."¹¹³

Flore had asked the Founder to go on directing her as he had done for years and he accepts.

It is certainly more through Flore's letters to the Founder, than his to her that we can see the development of his direction of her and indeed it must have been a great consolation to him to see the woman she eventually became.

3 Marine Coulon

There were many other sisters that he guided and some of them through really difficult times. Perhaps the letters that show best both his compassion and skill as a director are those to Marine Coulon. After having been superior for a number of years, she seems to have suffered some kind of nervous breakdown. His letters to her are tender as well as being practical. She was, it seems, by nature a fearful person and this fear had become crippling. She had to change her confessor and thought that she had to begin her story all over again. Van Crombrugghe writes to her that not only is this unnecessary but could be harmful to her. He continued:

"Avoid going into that which troubles your imagination, you might open anew badly healed wounds and go back into situations very harmful to your soul and very opposed to what the divine Spouse asks of you."¹¹⁴

Her problems are not over within a few months, and throughout van Crombrugghe is always most patient with her. Six or seven years later he is still writing in a similar way without any sign of impatience, but full of encouragement. He is also practical in his advice.

"I understand your state. You leave yourself open too much to dark ideas; you do not allow yourself the recreation your body needs as well as your mind."¹¹⁵

He also makes it clear that she should try to help herself while at the same time asking the Lord's help.

"Raise your heart, raise your mind; offer them to Jesus and you will see light entering your mind and peace re-established in your heart."¹¹⁶

¹¹³ ADMJR / ibid.: "Je remarque avec une vraie consolation, que vous comprenez l'esprit, les moyens, le but de votre Institut."

¹¹⁴ ADMJR / 02 - 52, letter of van Crombrugghe to Marine Coulon, 21 October, 1841: "Evitez de rentrer dans ce qui a troublé votre imagination, vous pourriez ouvrir de nouveau des plaies mal cicatrisées et retourner à des situations très nuisibles à votre âme et très opposées à ce que demande le divin Epoux."

¹¹⁵ ADMJR / 02 - 86, letter of van Crombrugghe to Marine Coulon, 2 June, 1847: "Je comprends votre état. Vous vous laissez trop aller à des idées noires; vous ne vous accordez pas les récréations dont votre corps comme votre esprit a un grand besoin."

¹¹⁶ Ibid.: "Levez votre cœur, levez votre esprit; offrez-les à Jésus et vous verrez la lumière rentrer dans l'esprit et le

A few months later, he is writing to her again to have confidence, to keep trusting in God, to recognise the love the Father has for her¹¹⁷.

"As I have said to you a thousand times, you are wrong to listen to your gloomy imagination; while simply recognising your poverty, you should wonder that God loves you and that He wants to be loved by you."¹¹⁸

By 1850, Marine seems to have come through her problems and she is back at work. One of the last pieces of spiritual advice that we find in the Founder's letters to her perhaps sums up best his type of spiritual direction:

"Never become discouraged; always start again with new courage and real humility, with confidence in God always more perfect, and with the help of grace, nature will be renewed."¹¹⁹

As we have seen in the Rules and Constitutions, van Crombrugghe, as founder, was demanding of the sisters, but as spiritual director he was a true father, caring for the sister in every detail of her life. Quite often in his letters, he would ask the sister to give him details about herself: health, work, rest and so forth. In a letter that Flore wrote to him in 1837 she answers one of his questions teasingly:

"As you have told me to write to you... I will tell you as exactly as possible the state of my physical strength. 1st I am very well, 2nd I am always well, 3rd I am as strong as ... I was going to say Samson."¹²⁰

As a director he was always encouraging. He did expect the best but that did not mean that he was insensitive to the person¹²¹. In general one might say that his direction was both sensitive

calme rétablir dans votre coeur."

¹¹⁷ ADMJR / 02 - 87, letter of van Crombrugghe to Marine Coulon, 25 October, 1847.

¹¹⁸ ADMJR / 02 - 88, letter of van Crombrugghe to Marine Coulon, 17 December 1847: "Vous avez tort, comme je vous l'ai dit mille fois, d'écouter votre imagination sombre; vous devez en reconnaissant naïvement, votre pauvreté, admirer que Dieu vous aime, et qu'il veut être aimé de vous."

¹¹⁹ ADMJR / 02 - 94, letter of van Crombrugghe to Marine Coulon, 23 July, 1850: "Ne vous découragez jamais; recommencez toujours avec un nouveau courage et une humilité toujours réelle, une confiance en Dieu toujours plus parfaite. A force d'essais et à l'aide de la grâce, la nature se réformerà. »

¹²⁰ ADMJR / A - 22, letter of Flore Delhaye to van Crombrugghe, 23 January, 1837:
"Comme vous m'avez dit de vous écrire je vais vous donner le plus exactement que possible l'état de ma force corporelle. 1^o Je me porte très bien: 2^o Je me porte constamment, bien: 3^o je suis forte comme ... j'allais dire Samson (sic)."

¹²¹ This will emerge more clearly in the second part of this thesis when we examine in greater detail the content of the letters.

and spiritual. Sensitive in that he showed his concern for the individual; spiritual in so far as he led the person to Christ and to receive His mercy and love. Without question the focus of his spiritual guidance is the person of Jesus Christ.

In reading the letters one is also aware how adaptable he is in his direction. Each sister is treated in a unique way. While he has his favourite sayings, as we all do, nevertheless he adapts his ideas according to the person. So, as we have seen very briefly above, he wrote to Olympiade, Flore and Marine each in a distinct way. With Olympiade he stresses the need for her to control her forceful and demanding character and tries to help her become more pliant and moderate. Flore he leads gently along in the ways of the Lord's love, while he encourages Marine through her difficult years and brings her a sense of peace. The same flexibility is evident in letters to other sisters.

That Canon van Crombrugge, both as a spiritual director and as Founder, saw himself as a father is beyond any doubt. He wrote as a father, thought as one and cared for the sisters as his "daughters". His favourite letter endings¹²² were of the type that mixed formality with affection, for example, "your always devoted father in Jesus Christ". Most of the time he uses one or another such ending. This was his favourite letter ending to Olympiade and Marine. He frequently used it at the end of letters to Flore as well, although he also used the simpler and less formal "Your Father in Jesus Christ". For some he would use the more distant "Your Spiritual Father", while in contrast at times he would write much more warmly, "Your very affectionate Father in Jesus Christ". Although he had several nieces in the Congregation it is rare that one would suspect such a relationship from the letters he wrote to them. Just occasionally he allows himself to include a letter, "Your devoted Uncle", but this really is unusual.

As he grew older his letter endings became simpler and most frequently he signed himself, "Your Father in Jesus Christ" and that is truly how he saw himself, father in Christ to all the religious.

E. TOTAL ABANDONMENT

In 1858 Flore Delhaye was elected Superior General of the "Dames de Marie". She began her period of office with two main objectives: to seek the approbation of the Holy See for the Institute and the Rule and Constitutions and secondly, to open a community in another country, preferably England¹²³. She succeeded in both of these aims in a fairly short time. She also worked intensely for

¹²² Of the 954 letters in the Archives of the Daughters of Mary and Joseph, over 880 have their enon, Methuen and Co., 1912.

¹²³ ADMJR / 7 - 65, letter of van Crombrugge to Flore Delhaye, 16 February, 1861: "*Dès ce moment, je recommande vos projets dans mes prières et au Sacrifice de la Messe. Une maison convenable à St. Joseph, une maison en pays étranger, l'approbation, par le St. Siège, de vos Constitutions et de vos règles, certes ! Ce sont trois choses dignes de*

the spiritual development of the Congregation, with the help of the Founder who was now in very poor health.

In the Rule of 1844 it had been stated that each sister, approximately seven years after her final vows, could ask to make a spiritual year, "a second novitiate" as it was called, at the Mother-House in Mechelen. In practice, with few exceptions, this had not been possible and when Flore became Superior General, there were about fifty sisters who wished to make such a year. So it was decided that all the members of the Congregation more than seven years professed would make a year together. Flore herself had great hopes for her own spiritual development and that of the sisters and this year, September 1859 to September 1860, does seem to have been a year of grace¹²⁴.

During this same period Flore began, in close collaboration with the Founder, to work on the revision of the Constitutions. In her correspondence with the Founder it is clear that it was the occasion to examine what could remain as it was, and what, from experience, needed to be adapted or rejected. Basically, the spirit is the same as the 1844 Rule and Constitutions¹²⁵, with some of the writings of the Founder considerably developed. There are two important additions as far as the spirituality of the Congregation is concerned, first concerning Ignatian spirituality and second, devotion to the Sacred Heart.

Throughout 1861, Flore worked intensely on the revision¹²⁶. Her correspondence with the Founder is full of notes about her thoughts and work; letters went back and forth between them several times a week affirming and verifying ideas. It was Flore, not the Founder, who made the actual alterations with the help of Cardinal Sterckx' lawyer¹²⁷.

votre foi, de votre confiance et de votre active charité."

¹²⁴ ADMJR / Historique, pp. 76 - 78. The decision to make this year generally and not at Mechelen disappointed some of the sisters especially because it did not allow the time for silence and reflection. Despite this, "*cette année de récollection, n'importe où on passait, était une grâce précieuse*". Van Crombrugge wished that the Josephites would follow the same idea, but it seems they were reluctant to get around to it.

J.JORISSEN writes that, "*Without doubt, more than the women religious, they were caught up by the demands of daily life*". (*mais, plus que les religieuses sans doute, ils sont tenaillés par les exigences de la tâche journalière*). One wonders why! The Founder insisted and it is possible, though not sure that 1863 - 64 was for them a spiritual year. (JORISSEN, J., op. cit., pp. 301 - 302).

¹²⁵ It is incredible to see in her letters that Flore, while undertaking the work of revision, plus the duties of being Superior General was still teaching classes in the school. It is exhausting just reliste about it. For example, a typical passage is the following:

"Wednesday, after my class, I will go to Mechelen. Saturday I will return to Coloma for the retreat. Thursday the 20th I hope to go to Brussels; from Brussels I will go to Aalst. When my journeys are finished, I will see to the ceremonial." ("Mercredi, après ma classe, je me rendrai à Malines. Samedi je reviendrai à Coloma pour la retraite. Le jeudi 20, je compte aller à Bruxelles ; de Bruxelles j'irai à Aalst. Mes courses terminées, je m'occuperai du cérémonial").

ADMJR / A - 22, letter of Flore Delhaye to van Crombrugge, 10 November, 1862.

¹²⁶ Because the spirituality of the 1864 Constitution is basically the same as the Rule, 1844, a detailed examination is not being made here.

¹²⁷ The lawyer, Monseigneur Lawvers, often went to Mechelen to help and seems to have been very much appreciated. ADMJR / A - 22, letter of Flore Delhaye to van Crombrugge, 11 October, 1862. References are contained in several

To help her in the spiritual guidance of the Congregation, Flore increasingly relied on the Jesuits, especially for the direction of retreats and as confessors. We have seen how Constant van Crombrugge himself, during his school days in Amiens had been strongly influenced by an Ignatian spirituality as understood by the Fathers of the Faith. He had handed this on to the Sisters as well as his love and respect for the re-instated Jesuits. While working on the revision, therefore, in September 1862, Flore wrote to the Founder proposing that it be written in the Constitutions, that whenever possible the extraordinary confessor should be a Jesuit. She wrote:

"It seems to me that if we are in some way supported and guided by the Company of Jesus, we will be strong and durable."¹²⁸

To this van Crombrugge replied that this was not possible because it would undermine the authority and freedom of the Bishop in appointing confessors¹²⁹. This was his prerogative.

What did happen though, was that in the revised Constitutions it was written that whenever possible, a Jesuit should direct the annual retreat. We may recall that the Founder had, as early as 1830, proposed and written into the Rule, that the Sisters should follow the spiritual exercises of St. Ignatius each year¹³⁰. This was explicit. In 1844 there was nothing clear beyond the fact that the Sisters would make a retreat each year of from five to eight days¹³¹. The manner of making the retreat is described by the Founder. Now, in 1864, the Sisters are, once more, recommended to follow the Exercises of St. Ignatius, under the direction, when possible, of a Jesuit. Article 131 reads

"During the holy time, they follow, whenever possible under the direction of a Father of the Company of Jesus, the exercises of St. Ignatius."¹³²

Subsequently this was altered by the Holy See¹³³. What is important here is the fact that throughout

letters.

¹²⁸ ADMJR / A - 22, letter of Flore Delhaye to van Crombrugge, 10 November, 1862: "J'ai oublié, mon très révérard Père, de vous proposer de mettre dans nos saintes Règles, que notre confesseur extraordinaire, autant que possible est un Père Jésuite. Auriez-vous la bonté de réfléchir à ma proposition et de me dire, quand vous le trouverez bon, ce que vous en pensez. Il me semble, mon très cher Père, que si nous sommes un peu soutenues et guidées par la Compagnie de Jésus, nous serons fortes et durables."

¹²⁹ ADMJR / 7 - 78, letter of van Crombrugge to Flore Delhaye, 12 November, 1862: "Il m'est impossible (sic) je pense, d'admettre que votre confesseur extraordinaire soit de tel ou tel ordre. C'est l'évêque qui choisit et donne ces confesseurs aux Religieuses. Il me paraît qu'on peut manifester un désir mais rien de plus." (See below, p. 178, footnote 133.)

¹³⁰ See above, p. 126.

¹³¹ Rule, 1844, Seconde Partie, Ch. IV, I. de la Retraite, pp. 54 – 56.

¹³² Constitutions, 1864, Art. 131: "Pendant ce saint temps elles suivent, autant que possible, sous la direction d'un Père de la Compagnie de Jésus, les exercices de S. Ignace."

¹³³ The text was part of the Constitutions that received approval from Rome in 1864. After the death of the Founder, in 1878, the remarks concerning the Constitutions addressed by the Holy See to the Congregation, asked that this be

his life the desire of the Founder that the Sisters follow, whenever possible, the Ignatian exercises was clearly expressed. More important than the question of who directed the exercises, was that they should be made.

The second addition to the 1864 Constitutions concerning the spirituality of the Congregation, is centred around devotion to the Heart of Christ. We recall the importance of this devotion in the early life of Constant van Crombrugghe and how he had established the devotion in the Institute right from the earliest days of the Foundation¹³⁴. Van Crombrugghe saw the Heart of Christ¹³⁵ as the centre, the seat of Mercy and had written about this in various ways to the Sisters, as for example:

"May faith be sufficient for you and the sight of your imperfections not stop you from returning without ceasing to the centre of all mercy, the adorable Heart of Jesus."¹³⁶

In the revised Constitutions the Founder establishes this devotion in a particular way, by consecrating the institute to the Heart of Christ.

"Filled as I am myself, dear Sisters, with gratitude , and thanksgiving for the infinite goodness of God to us, and with a just desire to testify to the adorable Heart of my Divine Master my gratitude and the love with which He inspires me, I have VOWED AND CONSECRATED TO HIM YOUR INSTITUTE AND MYSELF WITH ALL THAT I MAY POSSESS. Yes, O best of Masters, I have offered to you and I offer to you again the pious family that you have confided to my care. I consecrate to you these souls so dear to you; receive them all with kindness; strengthen them; enkindle in them the fire of your Divine Love."¹³⁷

In a way, this is Canon van Crombrugghe's last and most precious gift to the Congregation.

From 1857 Canon van Crombrugghe had been increasingly ill. In June of that year he had taken part in a local celebration in honour of the martyr, Saint Lievin, patron and apostle of Aalst. It

changed. Item 20 states that all indication in the Rule and Constitutions that required that confessors and the priest directing the annual retreat be Jesuits, had to be removed. The two reasons given were that this was injurious to other religious Orders of men and that it interfered with the appointments that rightly belonged to the Bishop, the Ordinary of the Diocese. In addition the Jesuits only accepted such a ministry on condition that it was not permanent.

¹³⁴ See above, p. 104.

¹³⁵ Van Crombrugghe most frequently uses the term "Heart of Jesus" (*Coeur de Jésus*) or "Heart of Christ" (*Coeur du Christ*), except when actually writing of the feast or the Church's official devotion to the Sacred Heart of Jesus.

¹³⁶ ADMJR / 02 - 57, letter of van Crombrugghe to Marine Coulon, 15 March, 1842: *"Que la foi vous suffise, et que la vue de vos imperfections ne vous empêche pas de retourner sans cesse vers ce centre de toute miséricorde, le cœur adorable de Jésus."*

¹³⁷ ADMJR / Constitutions 1864, translation taken from the Official English text "Constitutions of the Daughters of Mary and Joseph", text approved by His Holiness Pope Leo XIII, 24 January 1891, Art. 194, the Sacred Heart of Jesus, p. 44.

On presentation of the 1864 revision to Rome, the Congregation received the "Decree of Praise" from the Sacred Congregation of Bishops and Regulars, on 20 July, 1864.

was a jubilee celebration including a procession and was followed by a visit to Melle, the Josephite Mother-House and school, by five Bishops. Naturally the Founder was there. It was unusually hot weather and it seems that with both the procession and celebration in honour of the Saint and also the visit, van Crombrugghe became exhausted and also suffered sunstroke¹³⁸. He never got over this. He himself called it 'neuralgia' or a numbness of the facial nerves (atonie du nerf facial)¹³⁹.

Initially it caused a partial facial paralysis and therefore it was difficult for him to speak and to eat; also it seems eventually to have caused him a considerable amount of pain. During the next few years he often asked the Sisters to pray for healing for him. There was occasional improvement but not much¹⁴⁰. From this time on he was obliged to ask the help of a secretary. One of the Josephites accepted the work, he would write van Crombrugghe's letters, who would sign them and sometimes add a small personal note.

The last few years of the Founder's life were marked with difficulties concerning the Josephites, that is the type of Institute they were becoming, his vision of the Institute and non-acceptance by Rome¹⁴¹. He had wished since 1838 that they would be a "mixed" Institute, with Brothers and Priests who would have equal standing within the Congregation. But when they finally received their "Decree of Praise" from Rome, in September 1863, it was stated clearly that this was as a lay Congregation, not clerical, and that "mixed" was out of the question. They finally received clerical approbation from Rome in March 1897, more than thirty years after the death of the Founder. The main purpose of their Congregation remained the education of middle-class boys, especially preparing them for work in commerce and industry, a very new concept in education at that time. Not unnaturally there were problems among the members of the Congregation, some desiring that it be "mixed", others that it be clerical. Van Crombrugghe had once more and finally to leave everything in the hands of the Lord, to seek out God's will and do it in the way that God wished it to be done. His final gesture of 'active' submissiveness was to leave the Institute in the

¹³⁸ There is discrepancy about the year, whether this happened during the Aalst celebrations, or in 1858 during a Blessed Sacrament procession. From letters written in the winter of 1857 - 58 he is already suffering difficulty. ADMJR / 18 - 102, letter of van Crombrugghe to his niece Clothilde van Wymelbeke: "*Ma santé est excellente, quoique je souffre d'une neuralgie*". From this time on there is frequent reference to this neuralgia. In a later letter, 18 - 102, addressed to Clothilde (12 February, 1860), van Crombrugghe himself says it began at the Saint Lieven celebrations: "*On croit que c'est à la célébration solennelle du jubilé de St. Lieven que j'ai contracté mon infirmité*".

¹³⁹ Ibid.: "*L'indisposition de mon oeil et les autres misères causées par l'atonie du nerf facial, restent à peu près dans le même état.*"

¹⁴⁰ ADMJR / 12 - 11, letter of van Crombrugghe to Louise Dechamp, 23 February, 1858: "*Vous aurez appris quo ma santé est bonne, et que je nourris l'espoir que mes enfants spirituels m'obtiendront l'entièr guérison de la neuralgie qui me tourmente depuis assez longtemps.*"

¹⁴¹ This fails to do justice to an extremely complex and important question. For a full examination of the whole question see GARCIA, G.C., op. cit., chapter 4, "The Josephites, Papal Approval and Priesthood, 1863 and after", pp. 192 - 234.

hands of Divine Providence¹⁴².

He did not leave the Sisters with such great problems. He lived close to the Sisters of Mary and Joseph in Geraardsbergen and was nursed by them during the last few months of his life.

Presumably he had plenty of time to speak with them. Regarding the Sisters of St. Joseph, of Bruges, he also had close contact. Sister Julie had died the year before and they had a new Superior General. He wrote to them not long before he died:

"I wish you neither health nor illness, neither joy nor trials, I wish only one thing for you: that the holy will of God be accomplished in you."¹⁴³

In 1863 he had retired from all public activity including the work with prisoners that he had carried out in Gent over the years. The excuse given was that of old age¹⁴⁴. He was honoured in the Diocese by being made an Archdeacon and Doyen of the Chapter¹⁴⁵. It seems that he still daily, punctually took part in the recitation of the office whenever it was at all possible for him.

The following year, he began to give his books and pictures to the four Congregations choosing what would be most suitable for each. He also went through his correspondence and returned letters to their writers. So he prepared for death over a period of time, calmly and gently. There is a real sense of peace and of abandonment about him during the last two years. He continues to write about business matters, to give his advice when it is asked, but this does not take away from the sense of serenity. He also looked back with gratitude for the way that the Lord had led him. A few months before his death a Jesuit priest, Father Terwecoren, who knew the "Dames de Marie", had written two articles about their history¹⁴⁶. Flore sent these to the Founder, who confirmed that they were correct, except that he felt that some of the expressions used praised him too much! He took the occasion to recall God's goodness:

¹⁴² Ibid., p. 235.

¹⁴³ JORISSEN, J., op. cit., p. 325.

"Je ne vous souhaite ni santé, ni maladie, ni joie, ni épreuve, je désire pour vous une seule chose; que la sainte volonté de Dieu s'accomplisse en vous."

¹⁴⁴ For his work he was named "Officier de l'Ordre de Leopold" (J. JORISSEN, op. cit., p. 348). Jorissen states that he was forced to resign by a prison administration that was sectarian. They gave the excuse he was too old. He himself wrote: ADMJR / 4 - 29, letter of van Crombrugghe to an unknown Superior, 26 March, 1863: "Je vous remercie des félicitations que vous m'avez adressées en votre nom et en celui de vos chères consoeurs à l'occasion de la distinction dont S.M. notre Roi a voulu m'honorer."

¹⁴⁵ ADMJR / 4 - 32, letter of van Crombrugghe to an unknown Superior, 6 November, 1863: "Je vous remercie des voeux que vous m'avez adressées à l'occasion de la grande solennité que nous venons de célébrer, et des félicitations si cordiales que vous m'avez fait parvenir à la nouvelle de l'honneur que Monseigneur mon Evêque a bien voulu me faire an me conférant la dignité d'archiprêtre et doyen du Chapitre de sa cathédrale."

¹⁴⁶ TERWECOREN, S.J., "Institut des Dames de Marie", Collection de Précis Historique, Mélanges Littéraires et Scientifiques, June 1865, 324^o, XIV année.

"I have followed with real consolation, the hand of this good Providence, which in the middle of often difficult circumstances, led, towards the purpose assigned them, the works undertaken for God and for His Church."¹⁴⁷

In May 1865, Constant had the joy of being present for the episcopal ordination of one of his old students from the Aalst days, Bishop Henri Bracq of Gent. It was a very special occasion for van Crombrugghe and he took the opportunity during the ceremony to go forward and offer the Bishop the pectoral cross that had belonged to Bishop Prince Maurice de Broglie, his predecessor who had suffered so much for the Church in the early years of the century¹⁴⁸. The cross had been given to van Crombrugghe after the death of de Broglie in exile in France, and he now handed it on.

More than anything else during the last months of his life, one is struck by van Crombrugghe's abandonment to the will of God. In one letter to his niece he reveals a little of the life-long struggle he has been through to reach this point. He is writing about another young relative, Louise, who has just come to the Congregation:

"I hope that this dear child will be faithful to grace and that she will go forward with generosity in the way that the Lord Jesus Christ will open before her. This way has its rough places in the beginning, but slowly faith makes it practicable and charity ends by making it gentle."¹⁴⁹

Years before, when Constant was still a young priest in Aalst, he had written about walking and seeing nature as a temple of the Lord, everything, plants, animals, reminding one of the glory of God. At that time he prayed:

"Make it possible that I take this walk with the same serenity, the same attention to your Presence, that you had yourself, Jesus, when you walked alone on the mountains or with the apostles by the edge of the sea, or in the country. I offer you this simple pleasure and I unite it with everything that you have done on the earth for love of me."¹⁵⁰

¹⁴⁷ ADMJR / 7 - 106, letter of van Crombrugghe to Flore Delhaye, 25 July, 1865:

"J'ai lu avec un vif intérêt les deux articles que le bienveillant auteur de précis historiques a donnés, sur l'Institut des Dames de Marie. J'y ai suivi avec une vraie consolation, la main de cette bonne Providence, qui au milieu des circonstances souvent difficiles conduit les œuvres entreprises en vue de Dieu et de son Eglise, vers le but qui leur est assignés. Sauf quelques expressions un peu louangeuses à mon adresse, et que je sais bien ne pas mériter, je suis fort content de ces articles."

¹⁴⁸ JORISSEN, J., op. cit., pp. 314 - 315.

¹⁴⁹ ADMJR / 18 - 173, letter of van Crombrugghe to Clothilde van Wymelbeke, 27 June, 1865: "J'espère que cette chère enfant sera fidèle à la grâce et qu'elle marchera généreusement dans la voie que le Seigneur Jésus-Christ vient de lui ouvrir. Cette voie a ses aspérités dans la commencement, mais peu à peu, la foi rend praticable et la charité finit par la rendre douce."

¹⁵⁰ VAN CROMBRUGGHE, Manuel de la Jeunesse Chrétienne, p. 48: "Faites que je me promène avec la même sérénité, la même attention à votre présence, que vous l'aviez vous-même, O Jésus, lorsque vous vous promeniez soit seul sur les montagnes, soit avec vos apôtres sur les bords de la mer, ou dans les campagnes. Je vous offre ce plaisir innocent, et je l'unis à tout ce que vous avez fait sur la terre par amour pour moi."

One has the impression towards the end of his walk through life, that he has made it with the same serenity, the same sense of the Lord's presence. He had lived actively in the service of the Lord and of His Church, but we see at the end how charity, how love, has indeed made the way of the Lord gentle for him.

Just a few days before his death he remarked:

"I never knew that it would be so easy to die, when one has done something good in this world."¹⁵¹

During his life he had prayed to be freed from the fear of death, and he was¹⁵². He had also relied totally on the mercy of Jesus and on the love of the Father for him. And so he died, 1 December, 1865, relying on that mercy and full confidence in God; a little surprised at the great peace that filled him and trusting as always in the love of the Father.

F. CONCLUSION

The focus of his whole life was love; love of God and of all the men and women whom he met. After his death the sisters who had known him were asked to write short biographical sketches. It is remarkable that however an individual sister had known him, the one word that recurs over and over, again is that of charity, love, expressed through gentleness and kindness. He lived out in his own life the recommendation that he gave to the Sisters:

"Love God in all whom you love; and all that you love, love in God."¹⁵³

His first love was for God and all else was secondary. One old sister who had known him for many years said of him:

"Our very reverend Father had but one purpose in all that he did, in all that he undertook; he only wished and desired the greater glory of God."¹⁵⁴

¹⁵¹ JORISSEN, J., op. cit., p. 346: "Je ne savais pas, qu'il fut si doux de mourir, quand on a fait quelque bien en ce monde."

¹⁵² In the "Manuel" (pp. 279 - 281) there is a type of litany for a preparation for death. Each invocation ends, "*merciful Jesus have pity on me*". A few are concerned with fear, for example one which reads: "*When my spirit, troubled by the sight of my sin and by the fear of your justice, fights against the Angel of darkness, who would conceal from me the sight of your mercy, and throw me into despair, Merciful Jesus, have pity on me.*

"Quand mon esprit, troublé par la vue de mes iniquités et par la crainte de votre justice, luttera contre l'ange des ténèbres, qui voudrait me dérober la vue de vos miséricordes, et me jeter dans le désespoir ; miséricordieux Jésus, ayez pitié de moi."

¹⁵³ Constitutions, 1891, English text, p. 15.

¹⁵⁴ ADMJR / A - 27, p. 6, letter of Dame Ursula to Flore Delhaye, 11 February, 1866, quoting an unnamed elderly sister: "*Notre très révérend Père n'avait dans tout ce qu'il faisait, dans tout ce qu'il entreprenait qu'un but pieux; il ne voulait, il ne recherchait que la plus gloire de Dieu*".

If the earlier years of Constant van Crombrugghe's life are marked especially by zeal, the latter years are marked by love and also the mercy of God. He continually returns to this in his writings and consequently to accepting the other person as she is. Even when he writes of zeal for the salvation of others we notice a change, for it has become a means of bringing the other to recognise the love and mercy of the Lord for them. We find too, especially from the 1840's onward a new accent placed on the way that charity is shown, that is through gentleness, cheerfulness, politeness and so forth. In fact we have seen van Crombrugghe writing to a sister that the spirit of the Rule is one of gentleness and simplicity in imitation of Christ¹⁵⁵. As in his own life he had come to realise the Father's love for him, in a most personal way, so he wants others to know how very much they are loved by the Father.

Right at the beginning of the Founder's apostolic life we have seen how he promoted devotion to the Sacred Heart of Jesus; now it has become for him the "centre of mercy"¹⁵⁶. This is his great gift to the Congregation, that he has consecrated it and given it totally to the Heart of Christ.

Also clearly expressed, rather than implied in these later years, is the desire that the Congregation be Ignatian in its basic spirituality, through making a matter of rule the following of the Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius, and by stating that whenever possible this should be directed by a Jesuit. This, however, is not to the exclusion of other influences¹⁵⁷, but even so it is stated clearly in the various redactions of the Rule and Constitutions, and would remain there until after the death of the Founder.

There emerges, as well, particularly during the 1830's, an evident tension in van Crombrugghe, between the charismatic dimension and the juridical aspects of life. On the one hand he encourages people to move ahead with zeal, without fear, and on the other there is a strong tendency to conform to the norms of both Church and society. It may perhaps have been this tension in van Crombrugghe that caused his uncharacteristic insensitivity towards Julie. There is an impression, but nothing more conclusive than that, that later in his life, as in the earlier years, he is much freer. Whether this is true or not, in the Rule of 1844 we see a more legalistic approach which is not modified by his exhortations on charity and other subjects. He does make such modifications in the Constitutions of 1864.

More clearly in the later years of his life van Crombrugghe continues to stress the

¹⁵⁵ See above, page 87.

¹⁵⁶ See above, page 126.

¹⁵⁷ This question of possible influences on van Crombrugghe's spirituality will be taken up again in Chapters 5 and 8, when we try to examine the influence of the other masters of spirituality, particularly St François de Sales and Fénelon.

importance of the family spirit within the Congregation. This is shown not only through the relationship of the sister with her superior, but also the relationships among the sisters. Family spirit is to be the basis of charity. While as a Congregation the Sisters have become known as the "Dames de Marie", they are still basically the daughters of Mary and Joseph, part of the "family" of the Mother and foster-father of Jesus.

Central to the spirituality the Founder offers the Sisters during his later years is that each is called to be a spouse of Christ, intimately joined to Christ, one with Him. It is out of this relationship that all else grows. As he wrote: "Jesus must have the first place in your love"¹⁵⁸. From this relationship comes a willingness to abandon oneself in to the hands of God, to accept His will lovingly, to be used by Him as His "instrument" for bringing others to receive the mercy of the Father. It is this abandonment that leads to peace and to joy. Constant van Crombrugge expressed this most beautifully in a prayer that he wrote, a prayer of abandonment to the loving will of the Lord.

"Where shall I turn, O Lord, when I can no longer see you,
 who are the light and the Way, the Beginning and the End of my existence?
 If I keep my gaze steadfastly fixed on You I shall never stray far.
 In the overwhelming darkness of life's journey,
 I have but to put all my faith and trust in You, O my God.
 You alone do I seek, you alone do I see reflected in all creation.
 The fulfilment of Your holy will is my sole desire.
 Even when preoccupied with the innumerable cares of my daily life,
 I am still united with You. Did you but cease to look on me with love,
 I should be unable to concern myself with even these earthly matters
 and I should sink back into my very nothingness.
 O Lord, always assist me with Your saving grace."¹⁵⁹

Everything would indicate that van Crombrughe was a man who communicated more easily by the warmth of his presence than through his official writings, which often became stilted in their formality. In the letters that he wrote he is free, more simple and direct. At times a very real sense

¹⁵⁸ See above, page 119

¹⁵⁹ "Seigneur, où vais-je, lorsque je ne vous vois plus, vous qui êtes ma lumière,
 et le terme unique où doivent tendre tous mes pas.
 Vous regarder, dans toutes les démarches que l'on fait,
 c'est le moyen de ne s'égarter jamais!
 O Dieu, je ne vois que vous, c'est vous seul que je cherche
 et que je considère dans tout ce que mes yeux semblent regarder.
 L'ordre de Votre Providence est ce qui attire mon attention.
 Mon cœur ne veille que pour vous, dans la multitude des affaires,
 des devoirs et des pensées qui m'occupent,
 parce qu'elles ne m'occupent que pour obéir à Vos ordres.
 Ainsi je tâche de réunir toute mon attention en Vous,
 O souverain et unique objet de mon cœur."

of humour shines through and, as we have seen, he was open to being teased¹⁶⁰. It is to the letters, then, that we look to fill in the details, to give flesh to the outline given in the Rules and Constitutions. The personal letters help the Rules to become alive.

Constant van Crombrugghe summed up his vision of the Congregation when he wrote:

"The spirit by which I wish to see you animated, resides essentially in an unlimited devotion to Jesus Christ, His Church and all your brothers."¹⁶¹

This is the broad view of the invitation given to the Congregation, More precisely from the beginnings in Aalst in 1817, we have heard a more profound call.

"You are the instruments of the mercy of the Lord,
to train servants for the heavenly Father,
disciples for Jesus Christ,
to rear living temples of the Holy Spirit."

"Let no difficulty stop you in this sublime ministry."

"The remembrance of what Jesus has done for you
will teach you what you should do for Him."¹⁶² (162)

It is this call that we wish now to examine in greater detail in order that we make full use of the gift given by the Lord to the Church through Constant William van Crombrugghe.

"I will never cease praying to the Lord to scatter on all the Institute which belongs to Him alone, His Spirit and His love, to give all my children the spirit of their state of life, their hearts like His heart, full of self-denial and above all that charity which is the root of all virtue."¹⁶³

¹⁶⁰ See above, page 121 - 122.

¹⁶¹ BATTEN, B., Live in the joy of the Lord, p. 5; also ADMJR / A - 65.

¹⁶² Constitutions, 1891, Official English text, pp.181-19

¹⁶³ Instructions Spirituelles, 18, "La Solitude et le Recueillement".

"Pour moi, je ne cesserai jamais de prier le Seigneur, de répandre sur tout l'Institut, qui est à lui sans partage, son Esprit et son amour; de, donner à toutes mes enfants l'esprit de leur état, des coeurs selon son coeur, le renoncement à tout intérêt propre, et surtout cette charité qui est l'âme de toutes les vertus. "

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Letter of van Crombrugghe to Prince Maurice de Broglie, évêque de Gand (1820): A - 26.
2. Instructions Spirituelles: A - 21 (22 Instructions).
3. Rule and Constitutions:
 - i) Kort begryp, van de Regels der Dogters van den H. Joseph, 1818.
 - ii) Regel-Boek der Dogters van Maria en Joseph, 1830, (including the introductory letter of 6 March, 1818).
 - iii) Constitutions et Règles des Filles de Marie et de Joseph, dites "Dames de Marie", 1844.
 - iv) Constitutions des Filles de Marie et de Joseph, 1864 and 1891.
 - v) Constitutions of the Daughters of Mary and Joseph, official English text.
 - vi) Ceremonieel der Dogters van Maria en Joseph gezeyd Zusters van Maria (1831).
4. De L'instruction et de l'Education chez les Dames de Marie: E 10.
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Guide Pédagogique, Préceptes Règles de Conduite.
5. Sermon Notes (Mouscron, 1813)
 - i) Sur le soin des Maîtres envers leurs domestiques.
 - ii) Pour une première Communion.

6. Collections of extracts from the writings of van Crombrugghe:
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