

INSTRUMENTS OF MERCY

**THE SPIRIT AND SPIRITUALITY OF
CANON C CONSTANT WILLIAM VAN CROMBRUGGHE
FOUNDER OF THE DAUGHTERS OF MARY AND JOSEPH**

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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 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 fulfillment 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.

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To my mother and in remembrance of my father, who so generously shared with me their gift of faith and their love, I dedicate this study.

Note: Sr. Emma Portael, DMJ, Belgian Region, found a copy of Teresa Clements' first study, SPIRIT AND SPIRITUALITY OF CVC, in Belgium. Emma offered to type it for CA. I accepted her offer since we did not have a copy of Teresa' 1978 study. *A. Nugent*

ABBREVIATIONS USED

ARCH.HIST.: Historical Archives of the Daughters of Mary and Joseph, kept in Rome. Original Documents and typescripts.

INST. SPIRIT: 'Instructions Spirituelles de notre Fondateur'. Spiritual Instructions addressed to the Sisters. Handwritten copies of original texts.

CONST.: Constitutions.
 - CONST. 1844: From the handwritten originals text of 1844, with page reference.
 - CONST. 1891: The Authorized Constitutions of 1891, e.g. CONST: 1891 Art. 90 (175) p. 73.
 Constitutions, 1891, Article 90. The Article in brackets refers to the enumeration of the revised text of May 1932.
 The page numbers refers to the 1891 French text.

LETT: Letters of the Founder addressed to members of the Congregation.
 The system used is rather complex, indicating two references.
 e.g. LETT: 17-12 / 1837 (L19 – 10)
 The first number (17) refers to the Sister to whom the letter is addressed (in this case Sr. Clothilde Minne).
 See Appendix I for the appropriate reference.
 The second number is the particular letter. 1837, the year it was written.
 Brackets, the first number (19) refers to the topic index for the letters, (in this case, simplicity).
 See Appendix II for this index.
 The second number (10) gives the particular quotation.

SCRIPTURE QUOTATIONS:

All scripture quotations, unless otherwise noted, are from the R.S.V. translation. New Testament quotations are taken from the R.S.V. Interlinear Greek-English New testament, Nestle-Marshal, (Simon Bagstar, London, 2nd Ed., 1975).

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**THE SPIRIT AND SPIRITUALITY OF
CANON CONSTANT WILLIAM VAN CROMBRUGGHE.**

INTRODUCTION

This study of the spirit and spirituality of the Founder of the Daughters of Mary and Joseph, Canon Constant van Crombrugghe, is an attempt to help me and my Sisters to a fuller understanding of the original impetus which he gave our Congregation. Through this deeper understanding we may respond more fully, both as individuals and as a community, to the spirit which impelled van Crombrugghe in his life.

From his documents and letters we are made more aware that van Crombrugghe was very conscious of the atmosphere of the time and place in which he lived. Through this experience of living he gradually grew in a unique relationship with God. This in turn inspired him with a particular view of life rooted in faith. It was in sharing his faith vision with others who became the first members of a small community, that he responded to the special needs of the time. In this way the foundations of a new Congregation in the Church were realized.

Today, we, as the members of that Congregation, are invited to participate in a similar faith-vision, to be moved by a similar spirit, to be filled with the gifts essential to our time and to respond to present-day needs with the same love and generosity of the Founder.

While the times in which we live are different from those of van Crombrugghe, our coming together as communities and as a Congregation can be totally identified with the foundation community of the early nineteenth century. We, too, desire to respond to the needs of Christ, of His Church and of all our brothers in this particular era in which we live.

Therefore, for this study to be of value to us today, it is necessary for us to come to terms in greater depth with the spirit and spirituality of van Crombrugghe and with the charism which he shared with us, so that the Spirit who moved may also move us to an ever greater response of love and service.

Before moving into this study it is important to define the terms ‘spirit’, ‘spirituality’ and ‘charism’.

The ‘spirit’ of man may be defined as ‘that which is his essential element’¹. It is the reality ‘difficult to describe which gives that person a particular sensitivity and capacity to perceive reality

¹ PUNTEL, Lourencio B., ‘Spirit’, Concise Sacramentum Mundi Ed. Karl Rahner, S.J. . (Seabury Press, New York, 1975). p. 1620.

and to act in accord with his perception’² The concrete reality of the ‘spirit’ is in the body, the way the whole person lives their being and is present to the world. Following from this definition of the ‘spirit’ of a person, it seems clear that a similar definition may be given of the ‘spirit’ of a body of persons, of a Congregation. The ‘spirit’ of a Congregation is the essential element, the principle of life. It is that which gives particular sensitivity towards reality and the capacity to act. It is embodied in the members of the Congregation and through each member is present to the world.

The Founder, through both his writings and his way of life, through his person, communicated his interior attitudes, his ‘spirit’ to the members of the Congregation. The ‘spirit’ of the Congregation, therefore, ‘has a direct relationship to the spirit of the Founder and in some way is identified with it.’³

‘Spirituality’ refers to the ‘personal assimilation of the salvific mission of Christ by each Christian’⁴ While there is one basic spirituality it may be said that there are as many spiritualities as there are Christians, because it is concerned with the basic relationship of man to God. The ‘spirituality’ of an individual is concerned with the sum total of one’s convictions and motivations, one’s reactions, the principles of life and the way in which they are lived out. The ‘spirituality’ of any individual is grounded in the social as well as in the personal aspects of life.

The ‘spirituality’ of a Congregation draws from that of the Founder. Different aspects of the basic Christian mystery were accented by the Founder and a form of life reflecting these aspects was established. The members of the Congregation are drawn to respond to the Christian mystery in a similar way.

‘Certain persons understand the spiritual itinerary in the same way and so create a certain style of life which reflects and encourages this understanding.’⁵

An essential element of all ‘spiritualities’ is that they are expressed through service of others and of the Church, the Body of Christ.

‘Charism’ may be described as the particular gift of the Holy Spirit given to an individual for the up building of the whole Body of Christ, of the Church, and recognized as such by the Church.

² MILLIGAN, Mary, RSHM., That They May Have Live, (Gregarian University Press, Rome, 1975). p. 33

³ Ibid., p. 33

⁴ SUBRACK, Joseph, ‘Spirituality’, *Concise Sacramentum Mundi*, op. cit., p. 1625.

⁵ Milligan, M. op. cit., p. 34

The charismatic dimension of the Church is a necessary and permanent element in its life. It is of the nature of charism that they are constantly given by the Holy Spirit in new forms. The charism of foundation, given so generously during the nineteenth century, is primarily for the service of the Church and for the growth in holiness of its members.

‘By these gifts He, (the Holy Spirit) makes them (the faithful) fit and ready to undertake the various tasks or offices advantageous for the renewal and upbuilding of the Church.’⁶

There are three elements in the charism of foundation, ‘1) the theological vision, or faith-vision of the founder, 2) perception of and sensitivity to real human need, 3) charity, that is, the supernatural dynamism which impels to action’⁷

It is the gift, the charism, of the Holy Spirit which moves the faith vision of the founder in a particular way, which in turn, leads to a deep awareness of the needs of others and a practical way of responding to those needs.

The charism of the Congregation is intimately linked to the charism of the founder. While not trying to harness the Holy Spirit, or limit His movements in any way in individuals, each is given the gift of the Holy Spirit to share in the basic charism of foundation.

Therefore, they share in the faith-vision, the sensitivity to need and the charity of the founder.

For this reason we wish to understand at greater depth the spirit and the spirituality of our Founder, Canon van Crombrughe, in order to share more and more fully and actively in the charism of the Daughters of Mary and Joseph, so that we might be of greater service to the Church, the Body of Christ.

At this point it would perhaps be helpful to see how we, the members of the Congregation, see ourselves today. In other words, what is the particular charism of the Holy Spirit we see alive in ourselves? What is our faith-vision? An attempt to express this was made in 1975 by about 150 Sisters of the Congregation⁸. It reads as follows.

‘We, the Daughters of Mary and Joseph,
are called, in community,

⁶ LUMEN GENTIUM, Para. 12. ‘Dogmatic Constitution on the Church’, The Documents of Vatican II, Ed. Walter M. Abbott, S.J., (Geoffrey Chapman, London, 1966). p. 30.

⁷ MILLIGAN, M., op. cit., p. 27.

⁸ This was prepared by the participants of an open session of the 1975 General Chapter during approximately five weeks of working with John Futrell, S.J.. There were several versions before it was written in this form. Of first importance was the fact that there was nothing stated that could not be affirmed by each person present. There were many more aspects and attitudes spoken about but they did not meet the criteria of being affirmed by each individual and therefore were excluded from the statement.

to a life of union with Christ,
to share the Gospel message
in a spirit of love, simplicity and joy
in response to the needs of today
and to be a sign of hope to all people.’⁹

There are questions that could be asked regarding this statement, for example, what are the elements in this that make it specific to the Daughters of Mary and Joseph? Such a statement could indeed be made by any group of committed Christians, therefore, we might ask what makes this specific? Does this express the same spirit and spirituality as that which moved Canon van Crombrughe? Are there new elements contained in this that were not expressed by the Founder?

This statement was not ‘definitive’, nor was it intended to be. In the same way the present study is simply intended to be a further reflection on the spirit and the spirituality of the Founder so that we might be led to respond more fully to the invitation given to the Daughters of Mary and Joseph today.

* * *

The sources of this study are two. First, the Founder’s writings and letters and the biographical and reflective material available. These are to be found in the Archives of the Daughters of Mary and Joseph in Rome and the Archives of the Josephite Fathers in Melle, Belgium¹⁰. These together form the primary source material.

The second source is the oral tradition within the Congregation regarding the Founder and also the lived faith-vision of the Congregation during its 160 years of life. This research into the oral tradition of the Congregation was made primarily among the more elderly sisters in Belgium.

In this study I propose, first, to present a brief biography of the Founder and the history of the foundation of the Daughters of Mary and Joseph. This is in order to see the origins of the charism of Canon van Crombrughe, the spirit that was his, and then to trace its development and its expression within the social dimension.

The second section will be concerned with the spirituality of the Founder, his unique response to the totality of the Christian mystery.

The third section will be taken up with reflections on the consequences of living out today the charism that was Canon van Crombrughe’s gift to the Daughters of Mary and Joseph.

⁹ ARCH. HIST.: Privately circulated document, 1975.

¹⁰ Unfortunately I was unable to have access to the Archives of the Sisters of St. Joseph, Bruges and the Sisters of Mary and Joseph, Grammont.

CONSTANT WILLIAM VAN CROMBRUGGHEPRIEST * EDUCATOR * FOUNDER;

Constant William van Crombrugghe was born in Grammont, Belgium, in 1789. His father was a merchant and his family was well respected in the town¹¹ The end of the 18th century and the beginning of the 19th century were troubled times for the people of Belgium. They were under the authority of France during the Napoleonic regime and therefore felt very strongly the effects of the French Revolution.

However, life within the van Crombrugghe household was happy. Ghislain van Crombrugghe as well as being a man of business was deputy mayor of the town of Grammont. He lived until 1842. Cecile Spitaels – van Crombrugghe was well known in the town for her kindness and the help she gave the poor¹². She was, in later years, to help in the Foundation of the Sisters in Grammont. She died in 1826. All his life the Founder spoke of his mother and would remark, ‘My mother did this, my mother said that’¹³.

The beginning of the devotion that van Crombrugghe practiced in a special way throughout his life, to Mary, the Mother of Jesus, may be traced back to this time. Devotion to Our Lady was strong in his family. Near their home, just outside Grammont, on the Oudenberg, there was an ancient sanctuary in honor of Our Lady of Good Succour, dating back to the 13th century. It had been a place of pilgrimage for centuries. After the French revolution this sanctuary was confiscated and sold to a merchant of Ghent who intended pulling it down. Ghislain and Cecilia van Crombrugghe, when they heard about this, decided to buy and restore the sanctuary and this they did.

Van Crombrugghe’s devotion to Mary was particularly towards Mary as the Mother of God, the Mother of Jesus. It is the title that in his letters and other writings he most frequently uses. In the constitutions of the Daughter of Mary and Joseph the articles that are concerned with devotion to Mary are ended ‘Mary, your Blessed Mother’¹⁴. The title that van Crombrugghe was to give the

¹¹ The genealogical history of the Founder may be found in the following: SCHOBBENS, V., and VAN HILLE, W., Descendance de J.B. Spitaels, (1719 – 1799). Tablettes des Flandres Document I, Bruges, (1958) p 139-140. (Constant van Crombrugghe, fils de Ghislain François van Crombrugghe et Cecile-Joseph Spitael – van Crombrugghe.)

¹² ARCH. HIST.: Historique de l’Institut, p. 9.

¹³ DE KORT, Leonard, C.J., Constant William van Crombrugghe (The Josephites, Weybridge, 1968) p. 15.

¹⁴ CONST. : 1844. p. 52.

Congregation, the Daughters of Mary and Joseph, also indicates this devotion. Van Crombrugghe understood that as Mary was the Mother of Jesus, so she is given to us by her Son to be our Mother. Towards the end of his life the Founder writes to one of the Sisters about this devotion to Mary. He first reminds her that Jesus has the first place in her love, he then continues:

‘Mary, His Mother follows: the generous Son of God has given us to Mary and allowed us to look on her as our Mother. Our confidence and our affection for Mary in no way diminish that which we have for our Savior, but rather help this affection (for Christ) to grow in our hearts.’¹⁵

The Founder also saw Mary as the model for life, of relationship of the person with God, so that all that may be found in her, all her attitudes, may be found in those who are devoted to her.

‘Together with your Mother on whom you model yourself, be unrestricted in giving yourself to God and you will be free in God, rich in God an always happy in Him.’¹⁶

* * * *

In 1805 van Crombrugghe went to the College of St. Acheul, in Amiens, France, to receive his education from the Fathers of the Faith.¹⁷ He went there with the intention of receiving sufficient education to become a merchant as his father. His director of studies, Father Sellier, who was also his personal director, encouraged him to follow classical studies rather than those directed towards a future in commerce. Father Sellier also encourage him to consider the priesthood as his possible vocation.

In 1806 Constant van Crombrugghe made a novena in honor of St. Joseph and at the end of the novena made a very clear decision to become a priest. Fifty years later Father Sellier still remembered this and wrote to van Crombrugghe:

‘You can be quite sure I have never forgotten what was for me a clear proof of St. Joseph’s power in helping a person to decide his vocation. The astounding change of mind you announced to me on the feast of the glorious patron you have chosen for all your holy Institutions was, one might say, miraculous.’¹⁸

¹⁵ LETT: 7-52 / 1859 (L14 – 5)

¹⁶ INST. SPIRIT: 7^e ‘Sur la Présentation de Marie, 1835’

¹⁷ The Fathers of the Faith were a community of priests who had either been Jesuits before the suppression of the Society of Jesus, or were to become so after the re-establishment of the Society in 1814.

¹⁸ DE KORT, Leonard, C.J., Constan William van Crombrugghe. (The Josephites. Weybridge, 1968) p. 22.’

Certainly from this time van Crombrugghe had a very special devotion to St. Joseph that was to continue right through his life. It was also to be given to each of the religious congregations that he founded. This devotion was one of turning to St. Joseph in both his material and spiritual needs. The Founder used to quote St. Teresa that she had never asked St. Joseph for anything that she had not received. He would ask for his own needs and the needs of others, for example in a letter written just a year before he died we read:

‘For Mlle Flore I pray to St. Joseph to obtain a high degree of faith, hope and charity, with humility and gentleness.’¹⁹

In his letters he associates humility and gentleness with St Joseph both as characteristic of the saint and as graces that could be requested through his intercession. To the Josephites he writes:

‘Remember his admirable chastity, his gentleness, his humility, remember the respect and love with which he worked for the Child Jesus Who was entrusted to his care?’²⁰

He again wrote to them:

‘I beg you to ask St. Joseph to intercede for you, so that you may obtain the grace to be humble and gentle.’²¹

In writing to the Daughters of Mary and Joseph, he usually refers to St. Joseph as the Spouse of Mary, and often as the step-father of Jesus. He sees him as a man filled with zeal, a true servant of God. There is a clear drawing together of van Crombrugghe’s thoughts about St. Joseph in the constitutions of the Daughters of Mary and Joseph, where the saint is shown as the model of love of Jesus and Mary, a model of tender care of Jesus and also a model of zeal and charity²².

* * * *

After the decision was made by van Crombrugghe to study for the priesthood, he remained in Amiens for three more years, always under the direction of Father Sellier. It is during this period that both his spiritual and educational values were developed. From letters and references to these years, it can be seen that Father Sellier has a great influence on him, particularly in that he was led

¹⁹ LETT: 7-93 / 1864 (L20 – 3)

²⁰ Josephite Fathers, The Founder Speaks, Extracts from the writings of Canon van Crombrugghe, (Salesius, Melle, 1956) p. 29.

²¹ Ibid., p. 29.

²² CONST: 1891, Art. 102 (192) p. 111-112.

to base his life on love, rather than fear of God²³. Working through love rather than fear was also so to be one of his basic educational principles. He was to write years later 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 everything, she has already gained the chief thing in education, possessing the key to their hearts?’²⁴

The years that Constant van Crombrugghe spent in Amiens were very happy, although we know comparatively little about them. Certainly he admired the men who taught him and remembered them throughout his life. He made his own the educational values he had experienced in his teachers at St. Acheul. From the record about students that he later kept in the College at Alost²⁵ it can be seen how interested he was personally in each boy and this he can only have learned at Amiens. He held the Fathers of the Faith, later re-established as the Jesuits, in very high esteem and was influential in their taking over the College in Alost after freedom of education was established in Belgium. In 1831 he wrote:

‘In my capacity as counselor to the Bishop of Ghent and that of President of the Diocesan Commission for instruction in the two Flanders, I have boldly put myself in opposition to the attempts to introduce into the College of Alost, men of the school of Lammenais. May it please heaven that I shall have the happiness to establish there the sons of St. Ignatius.’²⁶

* * * *

After four years of studies in Amiens, van Crombrugghe was admitted to the seminary in Ghent, Belgium, in 1809. The methods of the Flemish seminary were rather different to those used in France, rather more restrictive and there are indications that he found it difficult²⁷.

We know nothing of the course of studies that he followed and we may only deduce something of their content from the general practice of the times, having particular reference to France. (It is important to keep in mind that although Belgium was under the authority of

²³ DE KORT op. cit. p. 25.

²⁴ VAN CROMBRUGGHE, Maxims for Good Education, The exact title and date of the original have not been found.

²⁵ Record kept in the Archives of the Josephites, Melle, Belgium.

²⁶ PIERAERTS, C., Vie et Oeuvre de Chanoine van Crombrugghe, (Peeters, Louvain, 1878), p. 62-63.

²⁷ DE KORT, op. cit., p. 28.

France and strongly influenced by French thought, it did have an independent growth and identity.) After the Concordat of 1801 seminaries were re-opened in Belgium and slowly organized. Concerning theological thought and practice at that time, Hocedez writes:

‘All the controversies which raged in France had their echo in Belgium, with the exception of those relating to Gallicanism.’²⁸

The early nineteenth century is not a period noted for its theologians. There is a weakness of speculative theology. In the seminaries, in general, the students were principally taught Moral Theology. Scholastic methods of approach to theology were also abandoned during this period. Seminarians were usually taught how to teach and to use the catechism. They were not usually taught anything concerned with Church History, nor anything related to Canon Law. They were taught a considerable amount of Sacred Scripture²⁹. In general, it might be said that those responsible in the seminaries were more concerned with initiating the future priests into a life of piety, and with their practice of the supernatural virtues.

The whole seminary life was geared to this. From the private books of the Founder still extant it seems that these general observations could be true of his formation at Ghent. Among them are to be found several books of priestly devotion and means of growth in the spiritual life, but none concerned with theology³⁰. In the later writings of Canon van Crombrughe we notice a strong reliance on Scripture for inspiration. He seems to have drawn from the Gospels and St. Paul and he also quoted from the Old Testament³¹.

We note, too, that in Belgium during this time, many of the Bishops, being threatened with imprisonment and exile under Napoleon, ordained their seminarians after a minimum of preparation. This was true in the case of the seminarians at Ghent. In 1811 van Crombrughe received all the minor and was ordained sub-deacon. Shortly after this the Bishop of Ghent, Msgr. de Broglie, was imprisoned and was to remain so until 1814. Van Crombrughe had therefore to make his own arrangements concerning his ordination to the priesthood, in Brussels, in 1812.

* * * *

²⁸ HOCEDEZ, E., S.J., *Histoire de la Théologie au XIX^e Siècle*.

²⁹ DEGERT, A., *Histoire des Séminaires Français*. (Beauchesne, Paris 1912) and HOCEDEZ, E., S.J., *op. cit.*

³⁰ There is a section of his personal library in the Josephite Archives, Melle. There are a few of the books of the Founder with the DMJs, Alost, Belgium.

³¹ See Appendix III for details.

He first went to work, after his ordination, in the town of Mouscron, where he is remembered particularly for two things, his work among the poor and destitute, and the establishment of the Confraternity of the Sacred Heart.

In 1814, after the fall of Napoleon (Belgium now coming under the authority of William of Nassau, King of the Netherlands) van Crombrugghe was asked by Msgr. de Broglie to take over as Principal and to re-establish the College for boys at Alost. The years he spent in Alost are important, as it is during this period that he sets the pattern of his life. He established his educational principles that eventually he was to hand on to the various Congregations. He continued to work with poor. He established devotions in his own life and in the lives of those he taught and directed, particularly to the Sacred Heart, the Blessed Virgin and St. Joseph. The only published writings of the Founder were also prepared while he was in Alost³². This, then, was a particularly rich period in Fr. van Crombrugghe's life. It was also a very disturbed period in the history of the country. Belgium was still feeling strongly the effects of the French Revolution.

The height of misery was reached in 1817 when there was a famine. The crops were poor and there were many people starving, wandering the roads looking for food. It was in this context that van Crombrugghe, while still Principal of the College in Alost, felt moved to bring together a group of pious ladies, with the help of Mademoiselle Colette de Brandt (1780-1856), to care for poor girls and give them a means of living. They opened a small centre for lace-making, a 'dentellière', on March 6th, 1817.

The centre made it possible for the ladies, while at work with the girls, to teach them some reading and writing, and more especially religion. This was the beginning of the congregation of the Daughters of Mary and Joseph. Fr. van Crombrugghe drew up for them a very simple rule of life, which contained just eight short points and was concerned mostly with daily schedule.

In this first small rule there is no mention of the aim or the reason for the group coming together. Nevertheless we can already see the seed of later Constitutions.

The first short paragraph reads thus:

'Each, day at 4.45 a.m. in winter and at 4.15 a.m. in summer,
they will be woken up. They listen for the words,
'My daughter, give me your heart!'
and rise immediately as if the Lord himself calls

³² VAN CROMBRUGGHE, C.W., Manuel de la Jeunesse Chrétienne, (Alost, Sacre, 1821); Art Epistolaire à l'usage de la Jeunesse, (Spitael, van Ryskjegein, Alost, 1825); Réfutation et Observations sur les libertos de l'Eglise Belgique, (Spitael, Alost, 1827).

them with these words.’³³

There must also have been other texts presented to the new community during these early years, because in the ‘Historique’ of the Congregation we read the following as being part of the first rule:

‘Here, my daughters, is the way that you must follow and by it you will not only reach heaven, but also a high degree of perfection.’³⁴

Eventually the aim of the Congregation would be stated by the Founder in the following way:

‘The personal perfection of each member of this pious family, and the good education of girls is the end of the Institute of the Ladies of Mary’.³⁵

Within the first year, 1817, the group of young ladies, under the direction of Colette de Brandt, grew, although there are no records kept of the exact numbers until after 1830. We know that in 1818 a house was opened in Grammond with the help of Mme van Crombrughe, the mother of the Founder. During these years, the Sisters were known, among other titles, as the Sisters of Mary. The Founder continued to use this title for them after they received their official title.

Colette de Brandt herself never became a religious, but certainly worked with the Sisters, at times taking responsibility for the community, and speaking for the Founder. She very clearly had a strong sense of mission to the poor and needy that had been with her all her life. We know very little about her, but it would seem it was she who would often remind the Sisters of their call to work with the poor.

At the time of her death in 1856, she left the Sisters a house for their use, on the condition that continued the ‘dentellière’ for the poor girls of Alost³⁶. By 1856 the Sisters were already very involved in middle-class education. (The original centre for lace-making

³³ ARCH. HIST.: Opening of the 1817 text:
‘Traduction du texte original des Constitution des Filles de Marie et de Joseph. (Cette 1^e règle se trouve chez les Soeurs de St. Joseph – Texte Flamande).

³⁴ ARCH. HIST.: Histoire de l’Institut, p. 12.

³⁵ CONST.: 1844, p. 1. ‘But de l’Institut’.

³⁶ Found in an ‘Historique’ attributed to Mme Flore Delhay, in the records kept at 139, rue Edith Cavell, Bruxelles.
‘Par arrangement pris avec Mlle. de Brandt, elle nous a cede une maison avec jardin, rue de Derrière, a la condition que nous contunuerons l’école dentellière’.

still stands today behind the large school in Alost, but has not been used for this purpose since the turn of the century.)

The call to work with the poor has continued in the Congregation, at times more clearly than others. In the Decree of Praise granted in July 1864 by the Sacred Congregation for Bishops and Regulars we find the following:

‘The Sisters of this pious Congregation, after having pronounced the simple vows of obedience, poverty and chastity, apply themselves to their own sanctification and that of others and for the greater good of the Christian community endeavor to give young girls, especially those who are poor, a pious and religious education.’³⁷

* * * *

Returning to the life of Constant van Crombrughe we see that he was also concerned about the boys wandering the roads, as he had been for the girls of poor families. On May 1st, 1817, he founded a second congregation, for men, the Brothers of St. Joseph. (These were later to be called the Josephites, a Congregation of Brothers which eventually became a Congregation of priests and brothers devoted to education.)

While there is only one brief rule extant, written for the Sisters at this period, for the Brothers, by the end of 1817, the Founder had already presented them with two rules. It is helpful to examine these briefly as they give an indication of the motivation and thought of van Crombrughe at that time. There are, also, many points that may be found in the later Constitutions of the Sisters. It is well possible that these same ideas may have been presented to the Sisters at this period of their foundation.

The first constitution³⁸ for the Josephites is written in Flemish and states as the aim of the Congregation, the education of male children who are in need. The Brothers were to educate without receiving remuneration and were to try to teach these boys to believe in God, to have a spirit of work, to be submissive to authority. They were also to be taught to read and to write and some of the important rules of counting. The first rule contains eight short points.

In a later fuller version of their constitutions, written also in 1817, the whole format is altered. The Founder begins with the beautiful quotation from Isaiah 30. 21:

‘(And your ears shall hear a word behind you saying) “This is the way”, Brothers of St. Joseph, “walk in it”, when you turn to the right

³⁷ CONST. 1891, p. 189-190, ‘Decret, 1864’.

³⁸ This is numbered (2) in the Josephite Archives, numeration (1) being given to a letter of the Founder to Mr. Van den Bossche, the first Josephite Superior.

or when you turn to the left.³⁹

In 1818 the first full constitution was given where the Brothers are called, ‘religieux de Joseph et de Marie’. It is of value to briefly quote from these constitutions concerning the boys in their care, as this indicates the attitude of van Crombrugghe towards young people, his educational attitudes and values.

‘Brothers, the children whom the Lord has entrusted to your care are His very own children bought with the price of the precious Blood of Christ (I Pet. I. 19). They have been washed and sanctified in Baptism (I Cor. 6. 19). They are the temples of the Holy Spirit (I Cor. 6. 19). the living tabernacles of the Holy Trinity (Jn. 14. 23). They are in a word, creatures chosen to serve God not only in this life, but in heaven for all eternity.’⁴⁰

By this period van Crombrugghe saw himself clearly as a priest-educator and took as his model in this Fenelon. In several of his letters he refers to Fenelon and shows his admiration for him.

Van Crombrugghe showed by his example and the inspiration he gave the Congregations he founded, that he had a great respect for human dignity. It is this respect that is at the base of his life and work, of all his initiatives as priest, founder of religious congregations, educator and later, politician.

* * * *

Constant van Crombrugghe continued to be Principal of the College of Alost until 1825, when he was forced by the government to close the school. William I of the Netherlands, himself a Protestant, had been persecuting the Catholics in Belgium and in 1825 ordered the suppression of the Catholic Schools and Colleges. This for van Crombrugghe meant that he had time to take up the fight for the freedom for religious education and freedom of religion that he had begun while Principal of the College.

In 1830 Belgium at last gained its independence from the domination of both France and Holland. A National Congress was formed, by election, for the Government of the country. (In 1831, Leopold of Saxe-Coburg became the King, but the country continued to be governed by a National Congress.) In the elections of 1830 van Crombrugghe was voted

³⁹ All these notes from the early constitutions of the Josephites are taken from the unpublished documents in the Archives of the Josephites, Melle.

⁴⁰ Introduction to the Constitution, Alost, May 1818. From the original French document and the translation presented in ‘The Spiritual Guide –Institute of the Josephite Fathers, (Salesius Press, Melle, 1956), Intro.

into Congress by the people of Alost⁴¹ and the Bishop of Ghent, Msgr. Vande velde asked him to accept the seat, so that he might take up the Catholic cause. In this same year van Crombrughe was made a Canon of St. Bavon.

The decisive work in Congress concerning the liberty of religion and of religious, was towards the end of December, 1830. Canon van Crombrughe made two very important speeches which had an influence on the final formulation of the 17th Article of the Belgian Constitution which reads:

‘There is to be freedom of education,
any restrictive measure is forbidden.’⁴²

The arguments he used were that the majority of Belgian people professed the Roman Catholic and Apostolic faith, that had been practiced for generations. Therefore the government should not tie down the Church in the profession of its doctrine, in its worship, its hierarchical authority or the means of perpetuating its ministry. Any law that would go contrary to this would be completely unacceptable to Catholics and would be void as far as they were concerned. There were seventeen priests in the Congress and their fight was for freedom for all in all things. Van Crombrughe understood this meant that “freedom must be wise and sincere; wise, in as much as it will ally itself with the respect due to authority, to the maintenance of order and the recognition of the rights of others; sincere in as much as it will be loyally practiced”...⁴³.

He concludes his congressional speech about liberty by saying:

‘We should give (to other nations) once more the example... of mutual confidence, of reciprocal esteem,...of love one for the other...’⁴⁴

These concepts of liberty are to be found in the Belgian constitution. The Congress closed on the 21st July, 1831 and this saw the end of the short political career of van Crombrughe. He said at the end of it:

‘The Congress is over. I have withdrawn from public life.’⁴⁵

⁴¹ ‘VAN CROMBRUGGHE) 1830, La Liberté d’Enseignement Article de journaux et discours par CVC, Ed. Robert Pieraert, (Grammont, undated), p.4.

⁴² DE KORT, op. cit., p. 66.

⁴³ Mother M. IGNATIUS, DMJ., As the Stars They Shine, (Vantage Press, New York, 1952), p. 106.

⁴⁴ 1830, La Liberté d’Enseignement, op. cit., p.26

⁴⁵ DE KORT, op. cit., p. 66

* * * *

In 1830, as Belgium reached its independence and was able to establish freedom of religion and of education. Catholic education was seen to be a priority. For many years the sons and daughters of the middle-class of society, the merchants and the professional people, had not been able to receive a Catholic education. The aristocracy had been educated in other countries. The condition of the poor we have already seen. But the future of religion in the country was seen to depend very much on the so-called ‘middle class’. Canon van Crombrughe saw this need very clearly and in response to this led two Congregations he had already founded, the Josephites and the Daughters of Mary and Joseph, into this area of education, while at the same time he encouraged them to continue their work with the poor.

He himself lived in Ghent while helping the Congregations respond to these new needs. He increasingly also became involved in Diocesan affairs. The help he gave the Congregations was not only towards their professional growth, but also, and primarily, their spiritual growth. From 1830 he wrote a large number of letters to both superiors and individual religious. There are still kept in the Josephite archives more than 1.000 such letters, many are concerned with material and professional problems, but also a good proportion are letters of personal direction. In the Archives of the Daughters of Mary and Joseph, there are more than 750 of the Founder’s letters and while some are concerned with material and professional questions, mostly they are letters of spiritual direction ⁴⁶.

* * * *

1830 was an important year for the Daughters of Mary and Joseph, not only because they began to move their new apostolic activity, but also because it was the year in which they first received approval of their Institute and of their Constitutions from Msgr. Van de Velde, Bishop of Ghent. For the first time the Sisters wore a habit, a black dress and veil and blue scapular. Until that time the Sisters had worn ‘modest, secular dress’.

From 1830 the Congregation grew rapidly⁴⁷. As well as the Sisters who joined the Congregation as novices, different small communities requested incorporation. The first of these was in 1830 when a small community of ladies at Mouscron required this. They had a long history as a community behind them. In 1633, by ecclesiastical authority, there had been erected a ‘pious

⁴⁶ The letters, with the Founder’s sermons and his explanation of the Constitutions form the basis of the second half of this study.

⁴⁷ A clear record is kept only of those Sisters who entered after 1830.

establishment of instruction'. This was primarily a Sunday School. These Sunday Schools had been and were to continue to be, important centers for teaching. Hundred of people would attend, both women and girls. (The one at Alost that was opened with the lace-making school in 1817, numbered about 500 by about 1830.) in 1830 formed this small community with its two hundred years of history. They wished to live a life of greater perfection,

‘... so that they might more effectively witness to God for all the good he had done for them and that they might be more effective instruments of the merciful plans of the Lord.’⁴⁸

It would be an interesting study to try to trace through the influence of these pious ladies in the Congregation, especially as one of them was later responsible for the formation of the novices (Marie-Anne de Ponthieux). Mouscron was a house of the Congregation with a very strong tradition. This tradition, of being open to needs of people and very closely linked with the life of this small town, has continued until the present day.

As the Congregation grew, the works undertaken by the Sisters varied. The Sisters in different towns responded to the needs where they lived. Those in Grammont were concerned with Sunday School work, the original ‘dentelliere’ and nursing the poor, those in Alost with the ‘dentelliere’ and regular education. After 1830, the Founder sent to Alost the Sisters who were capable of teaching and led the Sisters of Grammont to respond to the more pressing needs in that town, the nursing of the sick and the poor in their homes⁴⁹. They were known as the ‘Sisters of Mary and Joseph’ and eventually became a separate Congregation.

As a Congregation, they trace their origin to Grammont in 1818 rather than to Alost in 1817.

There had been other Sisters sent to Bruges, and houses opened in Waeken and Belleghem. (Both of these last two by incorporation of small communities as happened at Mouscron.) The apostolate of the Sisters was concerned with education of the poor and nursing as well. The Sisters, in practice, had become separate from the original Alost community, for reasons of geographical distance and work. Finally, in 1838, the Founder officially divided the Congregation into two separate Congregations. The first superior of the Daughters of Mary and Joseph, Sister Julia, was asked to become the Superior of the Bruges Congregation the ‘Sisters of St. Joseph’. The Alost community, with those of Mouscron, Brussels

⁴⁸ Terwecoren, S.J., ‘Institut des Dames de Marie’, Collection de Précis Historique – mélange Littéraires et Scientifique. June 1865, 324^c XIV annee, No. 12, p. 299.

⁴⁹ DE KORT, op. cit., p. 78-80.

and Malines, retained the title 'Fille de Marie et de Joseph', but were known as the 'Dames de Marie'. The reasons for the divisions were basically the different apostolic works undertaken.

'The distinctive aims of some of our convents and different members of our Institute, obliged our Reverend Founder to search out the means for each to attain their respective ends.'⁵⁰

Both the Sisters of Mary and Joseph and the Sisters of St. Joseph are Diocesan Congregations and are still active.

The Daughters of Mary and Joseph elected their first Superior General in 1840 Madame Olympiade Derville. In February 1844 the Sisters received the Approbation of the Archbishop of Malines, Cardinal Sterckx, for their Institute and Constitutions. They continued to expand as a Congregation both in the work of educating the daughters of professional and business people and also in teaching the girls who could not afford the education offered in the boarding schools.

In 1846 the Congregation received a Decree of Praise granted by the Sacred Congregation for Bishops and Regulars, in Rome⁵¹.

The subsequent Constitutions of the Daughters of Mary and Joseph retained a clear similarity to those approved in 1844, keeping the same order as that first given by Canon van Crombrugge. They were expanded and clarified over the years but always retaining the basic ideas of the Founder. He himself made suggestions for and approved further alterations before they were presented to Rome in 1864. (This work of alteration was basically that of Madame Flore Delhaye, the second Superior General). It seems, in reading the texts, that some of the original simplicity and clarity of the Founder was lost. It is not at all clear in texts later than 1844 which additions were made directly by the Founder and which by Madame Flore.

* * * *

From the late 1840's Canon van Crombrugge was increasingly unwell and suffered considerably from rheumatism and neuralgia. From 1858 until the time of his death, he was frequently seriously ill. He suffered from paralysis of the face which meant he could only speak or eat with considerable difficulty. His letters were, of necessity, dictated. Despite this he took a very active interest in all his religious, following the development of each of them, right up until the time of his death. In fact his interest seems to have increased as he became physically weaker. He died at Ghent, peacefully, after a long illness, on the 1st December 1865.

⁵⁰ ARCH. HIST.: 'Historique de L'Institut' p. 30.

⁵¹ Decree of Approval of the Congregation, 1878.
Decree of Approval of the Constitution, 1891.

His own style of life, during all his years, was very simple. He was a man of great moderation, who did not like any exaggeration, either in himself or others. All his letters and also the oral tradition within his Congregations point to him as being a very balanced man. He loved the ordinary things of life, he delighted in natural beauty.

He seems to have been a very gentle person and certainly from his letters, his concern for individuals is evident. He says himself that he tried to base his way of life and his spirituality on that of St. Francis de Sales. He had a great love of people and the encouragement that he gave to his religious was that they should be people filled with love and with joy. The central theme of his life is love, his whole gentleness in relation to people comes of this: love of God and love of all men, coming together in his life as one love. Throughout his life he was strongly influenced by the education he received from the Fathers of the Faith and hence by Ignatian spirituality as it was understood at that period. He suggested to the Sisters that their Spiritual Director, when possible, should be a Jesuit and that each year they would make a retreat under the direction of a Jesuit. The influence in his own spirituality can be most clearly seen in his sense of working with Christ in the world in which he lived, the world with so many needs. This influence is seen in many other aspects as well. If we examine briefly the main spiritual themes of some of the writers of the Fathers of the Faith⁵², we may possibly trace the source of some of the attitudes that remained with Canon van Crombrughe throughout his life.

Jean Nicolas Grou, one of the best known of these writers, placed a lot of emphasis in his writings on purity of love. He also wrote that 'Jesus is the unique and perfect model proposed to all Christians'.⁵³ The indwelling of Christ, through grace, was an understanding expressed by Barthelemy Bardrand who drew from the writings of earlier Jesuits, Francois de Sales and John Eudes. He also wrote extensively about devotion to the Sacred Heart. Another, Guillaum Berthier was concerned in his writings with conformity to the will of God.

Then too, there was the strong tradition of the ex-Jesuits who were martyred during the French Revolution, their solidity and their supernatural seriousness about their priestly life. Their concern, too, was to serve the Church.

⁵² DE GUIBERT, J., The Jesuits, Their Spiritual Doctrine and Practice (Inst. of Jesuit Sources, Chicago, 1964), p. 444-467.

⁵³ Ibid., p. 457.

Both the written tradition and the tradition of the martyred Jesuits would have formed a strong part of the teaching tradition at St. Acheul when van Crombrugghe was there and we will see many of these themes in his own life and teaching.

Christ was totally central in his life. He was particularly drawn to Christ present in others and especially in the person of the poor. His relationship with the Father was one of obedience and response in love to the Father's will. The key, though, to his spirituality seems to be his confidence and trust in God who loves us so totally. This confidence explains why, within the Congregations of both, the Josephites and the Daughters of Mary and Joseph, he encouraged them to move the accent of their work from the education of the materially poor, to people who were from a more comfortable situation. Historically it can be seen that the needs of the Church in Belgium in 1830 were great and that the Catholic education of young men and women was necessary for the development of the Church. This change of apostolate was a response to a need, situated in a particular time and place, rather than a moving away from the needs of the poor. It was recognition of a different poverty. His confidence in God may also be discerned in the way that van Crombrugghe encouraged the Sisters in their response to the needs of the Church in the place in which they found themselves. So, in those times, the needs in Grammont were not the same as those in Alost. The response was accordingly different.

A year after the death of Canon van Crombrugghe a biographer wrote of him:

‘He was a man occupied in important things and delicate tasks, constantly holding high positions... Yet what was seen and admired in him was the fervent and zealous priest, the friend of the poor, the wise educator, the citizen devoted to the free institutions of his country.’⁵⁴

The same biographer continued:

‘Faith had taught him to act only for the glory of God. It was to God that related all his thought and undertakings He never began an affair of any importance without withdrawing into himself to consult the Lord in prayer and solitude.’⁵⁵

His own life may be seen as living out his recommendation to the Daughters of Mary and Joseph:

⁵⁴ Quoted in: BATTEN, Barbara, DMJ, Live in the Joy of the Lord. Extracts from the writings of Constant van Crombrugghe, (Private Circulation) p. 5.

⁵⁵ Op. cit., p. 5.

‘The spirit by which I wish to see you animated resides essentially in an unlimited devotion to Jesus Christ, His Church and to all your brothers.’⁵⁶

THE SPIRITUALITY OF CANON VAN CROMBRUGGHE;

In the first section of this study we have looked at the birth and the development of the charism of Constant van Crombrugghe, the particular gift given to him by the Holy Spirit for the service of his brothers in the Church. We have seen this charism communicated to others through the Congregations that he founded. The birth of the charism, rooted in his family life and in his education and preparation for the priesthood, was complex. It came out of van Crombrugghe’s increasing consciousness of the needs of others and especially the poor. As this gift of the Lord grew and progressed he learnt to recognize the poor in many different situations. Through this experience both material and spiritual poverty began to have a much wider meaning for him. We have seen how Constant van Crombrugghe was led to have a deep respect for the dignity and freedom of every person which is theirs in Christ.

It seems evident that all the work he accomplished was based on his confidence and trust in God. Indeed it would be true to say that from this basic spiritual attitude flowed all his responses and reactions to life in general.

In this second section we will attempt to examine the spirituality of the Founder, his convictions and motivations as he expressed them to the members of the Congregations he founded and with special reference to the Daughters of Mary and Joseph.

CONFIDENCE AND TRUST IN GOD;

In the letters that Canon van Crombrugghe addressed to the Sisters, he uses the word ‘confidence’ 184 times. His whole relationship with the Father, with Christ, is built upon confidence and trust and he wishes that others should be filled with the same confidence.

‘Have courage, confidence; God is good and is powerful.’⁵⁷

On another occasion he writes:

‘It is God who preserves us, who upholds us who prevents us falling back into the nothingness whence he has taken us.’⁵⁸

⁵⁶ OP. cit. , p. 7. (ARCH. HIST. , A65).

⁵⁷ LETT: 3 - / 1839 (L18 – 7).

⁵⁸ CONST.: 1891 Art. 80 (160) ‘De la Présence de Dieu’ p. 55

This confidence is the source of all our joy:

‘Have confidence, pray, keep watch and
let your heart expand in a great interior joy.’⁵⁹

Therefore, in this confidence it is possible to move through life, trusting totally in God from whom we receive everything.

‘Go forward with confidence and simplicity.’⁶⁰

There are few places where the Founder writes about the Trinity, but each time it is in the context of trust and confidence. He reminds us that we will be given courage, confidence and love, ‘in the name of the Father, who created you... in the name of the Son who redeemed you... in the name of the Holy Spirit, who sanctified you.’⁶¹

Another time he writes:

‘Live with Jesus Christ. Be a child of the Father.
Listen to the Holy Spirit.’⁶²

Confidence in God, along with courage joy an generosity, are the main attitudes that the Founder would like to see in a person consecrated to God as a daughter of Mary and Joseph.⁶³ So we should ‘persevere’ with courage and trust God’s love will smooth the difficulties of the way to perfection’.⁶⁴

To understand this further and to see the consequences of this trust, it is necessary to look at the way van Crombrughe expressed his relationship to God.

GOD THE FATHER

We have seen indications already that van Crombrughe’s relationship with the Father was one of child-like trust. In the writings of the Founder we see that he already uses the word ‘Father’, but when he does it is in one of two ways, either when he writes that ‘we are children of the

⁵⁹ ARCH. HIST.: M. List E p.3.

⁶⁰ LETT: 17-12 / 1837 (L19 – 10)

⁶¹ CONST.: 1891 Art 98 (189) ‘De la Dévotion à la Sainte Trinité’ p.104.

⁶² ARCH. HIST.: File J. List C-16.

⁶³ LETT: 3 – 3 / 1837 (L18 – 3).

⁶⁴ LETT: BATTEN. B. Live in the Joy of the Lord, op. cit. , p. 18.

Father'⁶⁵, or in relation to our obedience to the will of the Father. This obedience is to be modeled on the obedience of Christ to the Father.

‘Jesus Christ was obedient unto death, even death on a cross?’ (Phil. 2:8)
 ‘My food’, says this generous Saviour ‘is to do the will of Him who sent me.’ (Jn. 4:34). Therefore he listens with respect to the voice of His Father: He makes it the rule of his judgments and His affections. He conforms all his desires to it. He performs all it prescribes to Him. Such should be the obedience of His Spouses.’⁶⁶

These words opened the article concerning obedience in the 1844 Constitution and were retained in this same form throughout all the alterations of the Constitutions in subsequent years. An important sentence in this passage is:

‘He listens with respect to the voice of the Father’.

It is this listening that is so important in the experience of the Founder and he encourages it in the Daughters of Mary and Joseph. ‘It is only when we have been listening to God Himself speaking and have been filled with His Spirit, that we may speak well and usefully of Him.’⁶⁷

When Canon van Crombrugge founded the Congregation, it was so that they might teach and work with the poor and those in need. He knew that their personal lives would be very occupied. He also realized the necessity for returning to God in prayer and silence, just because the Sisters lived such very active lives. In 1836 he gave a sermon concerning silence and recollection. This sermon is addressed to all of us involved in a full, active apostolate, whether in education or in other forms of service. He reminds us that our work is without value unless we first listen to God and take time to listen.

‘May silence be loved and respected. There must be a void within oneself and place, during outside distractions, for God to fill, in each one of us. In this silence of solitude God speaks to the heart.’⁶⁸

He tells us, ‘your life must be hidden with God in Christ’⁶⁹; In this hiddenness contemplation and activity are made fruitful.

⁶⁵ ARCH. HIST. : File M, List D-1.

⁶⁶ CONST.: 1844 p. 66 (From English Translation, p. 130).

⁶⁷ CONST./ 1891 Art; 90 (175) Commentary on ‘Dissipation’ p. 78-80.

⁶⁸ BATTEN, B., Live in the Joy of the Lord, op. cit., p. 16.

⁶⁹ INST. SPIRIT: 18^e ‘La Solitude et le Recueillement’, 1836.

‘Active life is useful to our neighbor, but only as it is helped by the contemplative life which is essential for us.’⁷⁰

We need to take time to speak to God in the silence of our hearts, so that ‘we may be of real service to our neighbor’⁷¹.

The overwhelming response of Canon van Crombrughe to God, to the Father, was one of gratitude, of thanksgiving.

‘I am so consoled, so filled with thanksgiving towards the author of every good, that these sentiments will remain carved deeply in my heart.’⁷²

‘I cannot contain my joy and the feeling of gratitude which inspire me and lead me to offer to the Lord unceasing thanksgiving for so much goodness.’⁷³

More than 160 times in his letters of direction to the Sisters, he invites the Daughters of Mary and Joseph to give thanks to God. He frequently joins with the person to whom he is writing to give thanks, for example in this letter written near the end of his life:

‘I unite with you in thanking God for all his blessings and in asking that he continue them.’⁷⁴

In a letter he wrote to one of his nieces in the community, he explains the reason for his giving thanks to God:

‘I like to see you recall the times in your life that were marked by the particular kindness of the Lord. This recognition fans the fire of love in the soul, it inspires generous feeling and helps us to overcome the obstacles which may be met as we go about our tasks. Therefore nourish these attitudes and in remembering what the Lord has done, recognize how little you deserve these signs of his goodness – I will help you in thanking the Lord and will pray that he continues to give you his grace so that you will respond to his tender care and that, helped by St. Joseph, you will be formed in humility, in generosity and in the intellectual gifts of which you have need to be of service to the Institute. Pray also, my dear niece, for your devoted uncle,

CGVC⁷⁵

⁷⁰ CONST.: 1891 Art. 90 (175) Commentary o, ‘Dissipation’ p. 78.

⁷¹ CONST.: 1891 Art. 90 (175) p. 79.

⁷² LETT: 6-4 / 1834 (L25).

⁷³ LETT: 0-1 / 1834 (L25).

⁷⁴ LETT: 13-13 / 1862 (L25).

⁷⁵ LETT: 18-2 / 1844 (L25)

This letter of the Founder is given here in full because more clearly than in other places,⁷⁶ he shows what gratitude means to him. First of all he encourages his niece, and through her all the Congregation, to remember the special acts of the Lord, an exercise that in our times is sometimes called ‘dynamic memory’. This means trying to bring into the present consciousness the events of the past that were marked by the presence of the Lord in a particular way.

The exercise, first of all, brings a response of love, because the Lord is so good and has been so good to me. The memory of goodness strengthens faith, so that one can go beyond the problems of today. Thus the Founder implies that this is a good exercise, because we see what the Lord has done, we see how gratuitously this help is given. Therefore, together with each other, we should give thanks to God, and through giving thanks, we will grow in humility, in knowing that all is a gift from God. We will grow in generosity, as the generosity of God draws out a like response from within us. We will be able to respond more freely through service to others, with the gifts God gives to each of us.

Therefore, we should ‘nourish this feeling of gratitude, and come to realize more and more that even eternity will not be too long to thank God for all his mercies and to praise and glorify Him who is the author of our happiness’⁷⁷.

* * * *

GOD THE SON

Central to the spirituality of Constant van Crombrugghe is his relationship to Jesus Christ. The centrality of his relationship in his life meant that he constantly returned in his letters and other writings to examine the various facets of union with Christ. In the First of his ‘Spiritual Instructions’⁷⁸, he writes of Christ in different ways. Here we will therefore follow the same order as van Crombrugghe.

First he writes of Jesus Christ as King, as Lord, as Lawgiver. In the ‘Instruction’ he writes:

‘Let us recognize these qualities in him and put ourselves under His law.’⁷⁹

⁷⁶ There is short sermon of the Founder, to the DMJ’s, undated, that details this exercise. INST. SPIRIT:, 3^e ‘Ce que vous devez au Sauveur Jésus: Reconnaissance, amour.’ However, this letter is more concise.

⁷⁷ LETT: 18-3 / 1845.

⁷⁸ INT. SPIRIT: 1^e ‘Quelques réflexions sur l’Avent’. Undated, earlier than 1836.

⁷⁹ INST. SPIRIT: 1^e .

In a letter written in 1837 to one of the Sisters the Founder explains his understanding of Jesus as King.

‘May we say with truth that we would see Jesus reign in us, without any resistance, and that we would permit him to exercise his reign over our heart and over our spirit, and over our words, over our actions, and over the interior man and the exterior man.’⁸⁰

On other words, that we allow Christ to be Lord over the totality of our being, is what van Crombrughe understands by Jesus as King.

Christ is also to be Lord in our relationships with others, in our love for others. The Founder wrote to one of the Sisters in 1836:

‘Yes, Jesus Christ possesses your soul and it is in him that you will love. May Divine Love rule all the love that you give to others.’⁸¹

Van Crombrughe’s understanding of Christ as lawgiver was through the rule given to the religious. He understood the Rule to be the means of the religious growing in her relationship with Christ and that it is given to her by Christ. There are many passages from which we might choose to illustrate this. The following is from the Constitutions.

‘Our Lord Jesus Christ would have all in you submissive to the rule and desires that you should walk with simplicity in the path that he had traced out for you yourself.’⁸²

No matter how strongly the Founder may speak about the rule, even to the extent of writing that ‘for the Daughters of Mary and Joseph there is no salvation outside the Rule’⁸³, the reason behind his stressing the importance of the Rule, is so that we may be fully caught up in the love of Christ.

‘Live in my love.’ Jesus Christ wishes that our love may respond to his and that it be solid, active, and persevering. The way to give these characteristics to our love is to carefully keep his commandments. He Himself says, ‘If you keep my commandments you will remain in my love.’ These commandments for you are your Rule.’⁸⁴

⁸⁰ LETT: 6-? / 1837 (L10 – 1).

⁸¹ LETT: 20-3 / 1836 (L12 – 1)

⁸² CONST.: 1891 Art. 107 (199-203) ‘Du Sacrement de Pénitence’
Commentary, p. 126.

⁸³ INST. SPIRIT: 5^e ‘Sur l’amour de Jesus Christ pour nous’.

⁸⁴ INST. SPIRIT: 5^e.

The Rule, then, is a means to attain the end, which is to remain in and be filled with the love of Christ.

Van Crombrughe continues in the first ‘Instruction’, to speak of Jesus Christ as our Mediator. He writes:

‘Jesus Christ began his work as Mediator at the first moment of His Incarnation and He has never stopped. St. Paul says, ‘He always lives to make intercession for us, without interruption before the Father.’⁸⁵

In the Constitutions the Founder writes more fully about this work of Christ.

‘Jesus Christ, as God, loved us before we were formed, even before the world was created. His love for us knew no beginning. Then, as God-man, he truly lived here on earth, knowing work, shame, suffering. he kept us in mind and He never stopped thinking of us and loving us. He was our model, our security. Now, sitting at the right hand of the Father, he watches over us, he directs us, he defends us, he constantly gives us proofs of his love.’⁸⁶

Christ, then, as mediator, constantly stands before the Father interceding for us and watching over us.

Christ is also our brother. This appears to be the only place where van Crombrughe directly refers to Christ as our brother, but he implies it frequently in speaking of us as children of the Father even though, these terms in themselves are not necessarily the same. In this ‘Instruction’ he writes very simply:

‘Jesus Christ is our brother. He gave us this glorious title himself. We have become co-heirs with him. See, said the well-beloved Apostle, what love the Father has for us; he wishes that we carry the name ‘child of God’, and that we should be so in fact.’⁸⁷

The Founder then continues to write of Jesus as our model. This is a favorite understanding of his. Jesus is our model in everything, especially in love of the Father and of our neighbor. ‘Following Christ’s example, we must have, one for another, a positive, real and lasting love.’⁸⁸

⁸⁵ INST. PSIRIT: 1^e Quoting Hebrews 7:25. Note That the exact Scripture quotations are rarely recorded by the Founder. He seems to write the passages from memory and frequently there are variations. This seems to indicate that scripture has become an integral part of his own prayer life. It is only on very formal occasions that he will note his text.

⁸⁶ CONST.: 1891 Art. 100 (181), Commentary ‘Du Sauveur votre Divin Epoux Jésus Christ’, p. 106.

⁸⁷ INST. SPIRIT: 1^e .

⁸⁸ BATTEN, B., Live in the Joy of the Lord, op. cit., p.10 Quoting,

And then again to one of the Sisters he writes: ‘May the Lord Jesus be your model, your consolation and your reward.’⁸⁹ Towards the end of his life, the Founder writes even more clearly: ‘Have faith, have confidence in Jesus Christ, everything is there: truth, way, life.’⁹⁰

Finally, in this ‘Instruction’, van Crombrughe writes of Jesus as Spouse, spouse by particular choice.

‘In virtue of a sacred bond, Jesus Christ had contracted a very close covenant with you. he is one with you through ties of love and he gives you His most precious gifts.’⁹¹

The Founder explains something of his understanding of this relationship in the Constitutions.

‘I no longer call you servants, I call you my friends, you will be my Spouses.’ These are the words of Jesus!... The religious are the spouses of God: they have no other care than to respond to the love of God. They have no other concern than God, they have no other interests than that of the glory of God.’⁹²

In another place he writes:

‘Go very often to your spouse. He is so near you: he gazes at you, he encourages you, he is pleased with your efforts. He gives you life and his hands are always raised to bless you and to give you new gifts.’⁹³

The conclusion of the ‘Instruction’ draws together all these thoughts. We are invited to give to Christ ‘love for Love’⁹⁴. The Founder prays with us that all of us may be filled with the love of Christ, an effective love. He prays that we may be fully united with Christ, that ‘we may be one with him, so that we may say with St. Paul, ‘It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me’.

⁹⁵

Inst. Spirit: 11^e ‘Affection Réciproque’.

⁸⁹ LETT: 6-5 / 1837 (L10 – 5)

⁹⁰ LETT: 18-144 / 1862 (L10 – 4). This is one of the rare letters of the later years of the Founder written entirely in his own hand. This particular sentence stands out for its clarity.

⁹¹ INST. SPIRIT: 1^e.

⁹² CONST.: 1844, p.47.

⁹³ CONST.: 1891 Art. 90 (175), Commentary ‘De la Dissipation’, p. 80.

⁹⁴ INST. SPIRIT: 1^e.

⁹⁵ INST. SPIRIT: 1^e referring to Gal. 2:20.

In the vision the Founder had of our relationship with Christ, as expressed in these passages, he was truly a man of his time. There is nothing unusual about his understanding of Christ and many of his phrases are to be found in the spiritual writers of the 19th century, in the writings of Founders and Foundresses of other Religious congregations.

‘To imitate Christ, to follow, to conform oneself to Christ, to adhere to Christ, to live as he and with Him, are aspirations which constantly recur in the spiritual writing of the century.’⁹⁶

This centrality of Christ as inspiration for the spiritual life came right into the 20th century and may be seen refined in the doctrine of the Mystical Body⁹⁷, and lived out in such people as Charles de Foucauld and many others in our century.

In one sense we may rightfully say that there is nothing original or unusual in van Crombrugghe’s understanding of Christ. But, in another sense, the particular combination of ideas and sentiments we find in him are original and particular to him. It is this that forms the centre of his spirituality, his personal response to the gifts that God gave him. Although we may break down the components of his spirituality, of his understanding of Christ and find each part common to the period in which he lived, put those parts together in the particular unity that was in him and the whole is original to him.

There were two particular devotions that were van Crombrugghe’s response to his understanding of Christ, devotion to the Sacred Heart of Jesus and devotion to the Holy Name of Jesus.

In the 19th century, devotion to the Sacred Heart of Jesus meant an understanding that the love of Jesus is centered in His heart. To have a devotion to the Sacred Heart meant to enter into that love, to love as Jesus loved. It meant to conform oneself to the life, intentions and sentiments of Jesus Christ.

This was also the clear understanding of van Crombrugghe:

‘Yes, keep yourself in the Heart of Jesus Christ, take your powers of action, your direction from it; plunge yourself entirely into the furnace of this sacred fire; you will come out purified, recreated.’⁹⁸

⁹⁶ RAYEZ, A., ‘France – de la Révolution au début du XX siècle’, Dictionnaire de Spiritualité, (Beauchesne, Paris, 1964) Tome V, 953-997.

⁹⁷ *Mystici Corporis Christi*, P. Pius XII, 1947.

⁹⁸ LETT: 6-20 / 1835 (L5 – 1).

The Sacred Heart of Jesus speaks to us of the mercy and compassion of God and of his love.

‘It is infinite mercy, incomprehensible love which brought the Second Person of the Trinity to earth to take on our humanity, to be sacrificed on the altar of the cross, to reconcile us with God, to establish the Sacrament of the Eucharist and so to remain with us always.’⁹⁹

We remember how in the first parish in which van Crombrughe worked after his ordination to the priesthood, (Mouscron), he established devotion to the Sacred Heart. He also encouraged the devotion in each of the Congregations which he founded. He consecrated the Daughters of Mary and Joseph to the Sacred Heart of Jesus and offered all the Sisters to Christ in a particular way.

‘I have vowed and consecrated to Him your Institute and myself with all that I may possess... Lord, receive them with kindness, strengthen them, hold them in the fire of your love.’¹⁰⁰

The second devotion that was important to the Founder was that to the Holy Name of Jesus. This is related to devotion to the Sacred Heart. The devotion is a call, an invitation to respond to the love of Christ, the mercy, compassion and love of God. Everything that we have in ourselves is a gift from God; everything that we do is in the name of Jesus, the source of our life.

‘It is in the name of Jesus that we work and that our work is made pleasing to the Father.’¹⁰¹

It is also in the name of Jesus that we receive strength and healing.

‘May the name of Jesus enlighten us, heal us and strengthen us.’¹⁰²

‘I pray with all my heart for you...may the name of Jesus enlighten us, correct us, strengthen us and sanctify us.’¹⁰³

‘May His holy name be adored by the whole universe.’¹⁰⁴

Christ is the source, the inspiration of our entire lives, all comes from him and is found in him. He dwells in us and in others and so he is the source and the inspiration of our love.

⁹⁹ CONST. 1891 Art. 103 (194), Commentary ‘Du Sacré Coeur de Jésus’, p. 113.

¹⁰⁰ CONST.: 1891, *ibid.*, p. 114.

¹⁰¹ LETT: 18-152 / 1863 (L5 – 3).

¹⁰² LETT: 4-15 / 1846 (L18A – 1).

¹⁰³ LETT: 6-30 / 1836 (L16A – 3)

¹⁰⁴ LETT: 6-52 / 1837 (L10 – 5)

‘Jesus Christ truly remains and is constantly with his Church, until the end of time, not only as God, but also as man’,¹⁰⁵ therefore it is in our fellow men that we will meet Christ.

‘All that you do to your neighbor is done to Jesus Christ himself.’¹⁰⁶ Through allowing Christ to be in us we allow others to recognize him in us, he is able to witness through us to his love.

‘Yes, Jesus Christ remains in your heart, it is the way he has chosen for you to witness to his tender love.’¹⁰⁷

For this to be possible each person has to allow Christ to enter in fully so that we become one with Christ.

‘Union with Christ for me is so real, so intimate, as to make with him one body.’¹⁰⁸

Finally, as we are transformed into Christ, become more one with him, like we are made instruments of mercy, people who may be used by Christ, to be ‘instruments of mercy’¹⁰⁹ for others.

‘Our good Lord grants us so many graces... that it is up to us to make use of them and make ourselves more and more to be fitting instruments of his mercy.’¹¹⁰

* * * *

THE HOLY SPIRIT

It is to the third person of the Trinity, the Holy Spirit, that van Crombrugghe invites us to turn in all our needs. We have already heard his recommendation to ‘listen to the Holy Spirit’¹¹¹. In the 1844 Constitutions he writes:

‘Study continuously the impulses of your soul so as to be always prepared to follow those inspired by the Holy Spirit.’¹¹²

¹⁰⁵ INST. SPIRIT: 4^e ‘Sur l’union de Jésus-Christ avec nous.’

¹⁰⁶ CONST.: 1891 Art. 80 (180), Commentary ‘Des moyens de parvenir à l’amour du prochain’, p. 49.

¹⁰⁷ INST. SPIRIT: 4^e ‘Sur l’union de Jésus-Christ avec nous’.

¹⁰⁸ INST. SPIRIT: 4^e ‘Sur l’union de Jésus-Christ avec nous’.

¹⁰⁹ INST. SPIRIT: 1^e also LETT: 18-116 / 1859 and in several other letters.

¹¹⁰ LETT: 5-27 / 1840 (L8 – 8).

¹¹¹ ARCH. HIST.: File J List C-16.

¹¹² CONST.: 1844, p. 46.

And in the same passage he continues:

‘Always have recourse to the Holy Spirit in your moments of doubt, in your moments of weakness or of fear.’¹¹³

In different places in his letters, the Founder prays to the Holy Spirit and suggests that the person prays for all her spiritual needs, for an abundance of grace. He prays particularly for zeal, courage, gentleness and humility; He prays that the Sisters may be true children of Mary and Joseph, that they may be filled with true love of Jesus Christ¹¹⁴.

The Founder prepared himself especially for the feast of Pentecost, his letters around this feast each year indicate this and that it was a time when he particularly prayed for the Congregation¹¹⁵. It is also traditional within the Congregation to prepare for the feasts of Pentecost in a particular way.

All may be asked of the Holy spirit to help us to respond to the invitation the Father has given to us. The Founder asks for all the graces that we might need:

‘I have asked particularly for you, that Jesus would send His Holy spirit to enlighten, to purify, to sanctify and that he would make of you instruments of his mercy.’¹¹⁶

* * * *

When in the first section of this study we tried to trace the origins of the charism of the Founder, we noted two devotions that were important in his own life and which he gave to the Congregations that he founded, these are devotion to Mary, the Mother of Jesus and devotion to St. Joseph, the husband of Mary and foster-father of Jesus. So that we may understand more clearly the charism that has been given to us, we will try to examine these devotions in more detail and also the attitudes, the response, that they inspired in the Founder.

MARY, MOTHER OF GOD

¹¹³ CONST.: 1844, p. 46.

¹¹⁴ LETT: 7-34 / 1836 (L6 – 3).

¹¹⁵ For example LETT: 3-7 / 1851 (L6 – 4)

‘During these days which precede the solemnity of Pentecost, I am particularly occupied with the spiritual needs of my children.’

¹¹⁶ LETT: 7-19 / 1842 (L8 – 4)

We have seen in the first section that van Crombrughe's devotion to Mary was centered on her Motherhood, she is the Mother of Jesus and He has given her to us to be our Mother. We can therefore go to her in complete trust.

'Put yourself into the arms of Mary and remain at peace.'¹¹⁷

And again the Founder writes:

'Be joyful, be generous and put all your concerns into the hands of your good and powerful Mother.'¹¹⁸

Another time he writes to a Sister:

'It seems to me that our good and blessed Mother, as well as her holy spouse, take delight in supporting our requests and the desires we have, before the Holy Child.'¹¹⁹

Mary is not only Mother, but also our model and in following her we will be drawn closer to God.

'With your Mother and your model, try to live for self and then you will live in God and be happy with him always.'¹²⁰

In 1835, on the feast of the Presentation of Mary, the day chosen for the Sisters to renew their vows, the Founder gave an 'Instruction' to the Sisters about Mary. He saw this as an opportunity for the Sisters to reflect on the attitudes of Mary and their own attitudes, and if necessary to change what they found wanting in themselves. The first aspects that he looks at are 'complete confidence, absolute devotedness and true zeal'. He also states, that perhaps there may be 'too much of self' to the detriment of Christ. Maybe obedience has not been like that of Mary. In a letter which the Founder wrote three years after this 'Instruction', he says:

'May the will of God be done. You should repeat this very often in your heart, in imitation of the 'fiat' which your Mother Mary said.'¹²¹

In the 'Instruction' he advised that we should have courage, that there be no limit to our generosity, no doubts and that we should be filled with peace and joy.¹²² This 'Instruction' gives us an idea of

¹¹⁷ ARCH. HIST.: File I, List A-89.

¹¹⁸ LETT: 11-13 / 1836 (L14 – 7)

¹¹⁹ LETT: 4-3 / 1836 (L14 – 6)

¹²⁰ ARCH. HIST.: File M. List E, p. 10. Ghent Nov. 21, 1835.

¹²¹ LETT: 19-12 / 1838 (123 – 5-

the attitudes that van Crombrughe particularly associated with Mary. They are confidence in God, devotedness, zeal, emptying of self, obedience, courage, peace and joy. In the letters that he wrote to the Sisters he frequently associates these same attitudes, and others, particularly simplicity, with Mary. He presents her to us as both Mother and model and proposes that we make her attitudes our own. So he writes:

‘Have courage, be joyful, be generous, have a loving confidence in God... these are the principal attitudes to be found... in the family of Mary and her Spouse.’¹²³

The Founder especially recommends joyfulness to the Sisters. Many times in his letters he writes, ‘be joyful’, more than 135 times he uses this word. Another favorite word is ‘cheerful’. In a letter in 1831 he wrote:

‘Be courageous, be joyful, never be dejected.’¹²⁴

So often in his writings we find phrases similar to this. For example:

‘We may be tired, even really sick, bur never sad.’¹²⁵

It is this joyfulness that opens the heart to Christ, that allows his presence to show through us to others.

‘Always be joyful and generous and the tenderness of your Spouse will be seen in your heart, in all that you do.’¹²⁶

Therefore, to hold onto sad thoughts, to remain dejected, is to close ourselves to Christ working in us. To a novice he wrote:

‘The only enemy is sadness.’¹²⁷

In one of his letters, the Founder explains the understanding that he has of this attitudes of joy.

‘May your cheerfulness be a quiet joy in the presence of God. A simple joy

¹²² INST. SPIRIT: 7^e ‘Sur la Présentation de Marie’, 1835.

¹²³ LETT: 3-3 / 1837 (L18 – 3).

¹²⁴ LETT: 15-2 / 1831 (L11 – 1).

¹²⁵ LETT: 11-8 / 1834 (L11 – 4).

¹²⁶ LETT: 18-4 / 1846 (L11 – 10).

¹²⁷ LETT: 3-8 / 183? (L11 – 18)

which enlarges the heart, recreates the spirit... and is like a balm; a joy that sweetens the cross and which increases the value of your work.’¹²⁸

And so the Founder invites us to ‘continue to be joyous in the Lord’¹²⁹.

Simplicity is another attitude of Mary that the Founder presented in a special way. By this he means a simplicity and straightforwardness in religious practices and in our behavior and speech. He also means a simplicity in the way the Sisters were to live.

Towards God, van Crombrughe insists on a simplicity that is of the child of God.

‘I pray that the Savior may give you the light and strength but above all the simplicity of spiritual Childhood.’¹³⁰

On another occasion he wrote:

‘Become a child to honor the childhood of Jesus.
Be simple and joyful and we shall be what God asks of us.’¹³¹

To another he wrote:

‘Serve your divine Spouse with a great and genuine simplicity.’¹³²

These ideas are drawn together when he says:

‘Be simple and straightforward and uncomplicated before God.’¹³³

Concerning the work and talents of each Sister the Founder advises:

‘Be simple in everything and the talents you have may grow to the glory of God.’¹³⁴

At one time the Founder was concerned about some furniture the Sisters had bought. He considered it too extravagant and he wrote to the Superior of the community:

‘The Ladies of Mary must love religious simplicity. So, here are the reflections I offer you. I could not take it on myself to allow the introduction of luxury into your Institute.’¹³⁵

¹²⁸ LETT: 6-6 / 1834 (L11 – 2).

¹²⁹ LETT: 18-8 / 1847 (L11 – 11).

¹³⁰ LETT: 5-6 / 1838 (L19 – 2).

¹³¹ LETT: 5-6 / 1836 (L11 – 6-).

¹³² LETT: 15-25 / 1841 (L19 – 8).

¹³³ ARCH. HIST.: File M, List E-6.

¹³⁴ LETT: 7-3 / 1838 (L19 – 1).

¹³⁵ LETT: 4-16 / 1847 (L19 – 3).

Even so, the Founder was concerned with a much deeper simplicity and poverty:

‘To renounce what you have is easy, but to renounce what you are and to continue to renounce it at every moment - that is the sacrifice that you must offer.’¹³⁶

All these thoughts are drawn together when we read:

‘Because Jesus Christ wants you to be poor, take care to be really poor, poor in spirit and poor in body.’¹³⁷

When we studied in a previous section the devotions that van Crombrugghe practiced towards the Sacred Heart of Jesus and the Holy Name of Jesus, we found nothing unusual, nothing that was not part of the normal devotions in the times in which he lived. The same is true when we look at his devotion to Mary. There is nothing unusual. His devotion is part of the age in which he lived. If we try to define the particular aspect of Marian devotion that marked the congregation, it would probably be that of simplicity and joyful service, the ‘humble devotion’ of Mary that was given as a model in 19th century spirituality. In the writings of van Crombrugghe there is also the strong sense of the Motherhood of Mary, she is the Mother of Jesus and therefore our Mother, and this is a source of inspiration. Mary is our Mother and model, and like her, we offer ourselves in simplicity to serve others.

We could say that this is the unique gift of van Crombrugghe which he shares with us, to draw these particular aspects together and to highlight these ideas. We may, there for, accept his invitation to ‘go to Mary’.

‘You have a special right to her tenderness...and she will offer you to Jesus Christ.’¹³⁸

‘Continue with courage, with joy, with humility to work at your sanctification and you will become a worthy child of Mary, a true Spouse of God, and an instrument of mercy for the salvation of many.’¹³⁹

* * * *

¹³⁶ INST. SPIRIT: 24^e ‘Rénovations de Saints Voeux’, 1844.

¹³⁷ ARCH. HIST.: File M, List E-8.

¹³⁸ LETT: 7-28 / 1844 (L14 – 3)

¹³⁹ LETT: 18-6 / 1844 (L8 – 6)

ST. JOSEPH

The other important devotion in the life of van Crombrugghe is to St. Joseph. Because this was so important in his own life and marked his devotion to become a priest, we examined this devotion in more detail in the first section of this study. Therefore, here, while looking briefly at the devotion practiced by the Founder, we will look in more detail at the attitudes inspired by the devotion.

For van Crombrugghe, St. Joseph is a man filled with love. He writes of him as the husband, the spouse of Mary and as the foster-father of Jesus. He shows St. Joseph as a model of love of Jesus and Mary. The Founder saw him as a true servant of God, a very gentle person, while being filled with zeal. He is also an example of humility.

It is these same attitudes that the Founder associated with St. Joseph humility, gentleness, zeal, service and above all love, that he encouraged in the Daughters of Mary and Joseph.

Humility in the letters and writings of the Founder is frequently associated with gentleness and also with courage and with confidence. It is important to understand the meaning this word had for the Founder, as it is a word that has altered in popular use since the first half of the 19th century. Perhaps the clearest understanding we may arrive at is when he links the word humility in accepting who we are, with all our faults and limitations.

‘Never be discouraged when you are before your faults and whatever is lacking in you, look at all this humbly and turn to your Divine Spouse with complete confidence.’¹⁴⁰

On another occasion very near the end of his life, the Founder writes:

‘Go forward calmly and with confidence, in the trials of life and do not get angry with yourself. Humiliate yourself and count on the assistance of grace.’¹⁴¹

So humility is not a question of trying to lessen ourselves in the eyes of others, but of accepting who we are and not trying to be in anything more than we are. Humility thus becomes a reason for confidence and trust in God, a reason for turning to Christ and relying on Him.

‘Therefore, have confidence in Divine goodness, be patient in all humility before your own weakness and renew your courage everyday.’¹⁴²

¹⁴⁰ LETT: 7-2 / 1834 (L3 – 1)

¹⁴¹ LETT: 4-3 / 1863 (L18 – 9)

¹⁴² LETT: 1-5 / 1862 (L3 – 9)

Perhaps the attitudes of gentleness and humility are best summed up in one of the ‘Instructions’ of the Founder. ‘Peace towards God – to submit all to his will.

Peace towards one’s neighbor – a life of gentleness
and patience
Peace with oneself – a life of humility
and trust in God. ¹⁴³

Finally, ‘remember that the work of God grows in humility and is sustained by humility’. ¹⁴⁴

* * * *

All the attitudes that van Crombrughe lived in his le.....?????.....
animated by love and shown in the service that he.....?????.....

[Note: It seems Emma Portael, DMJ, Belgian Region unable to translate the above]

Christ showed us his love by giving his life; we in response are called to serve Christ in all his people. In this love and service, that is, love of God and love of our brothers and sisters, are contained all the attitudes our Founder encourages us to foster and to express in service.

Indeed this is the focal point of the charism of Constant van Crombrughe.

‘The spirit by which I wish to see you animated resides essentially in unlimited devotion to Jesus Christ, his Church and all your brothers.’ ¹⁴⁵

The love of Christ moves us to service because it is Christ who is served, ‘all that you do to your neighbor is done to Jesus Christ Himself... and in serving your neighbor you are serving Jesus Christ’. ¹⁴⁶

‘What a wonderful way this is of returning the love which the Lord continually shows you.’ ¹⁴⁷

The service that we offer others should always be kind and show the love that moves us.

‘Always keep in mind the kindly manner in which Christ dealt with people.
Do not make profound considerations on Christ, but make Christ live by

¹⁴³ INST. SPIRIT: 10^e ‘Amour de al Paix’.

¹⁴⁴ LETT: 4-1 / 1835 (L7 – 2).

¹⁴⁵ ARCH. HIST.: File I, List A, p. 65, April 19th, 1831. ‘See also List E-8).

¹⁴⁶ CONST.: 1891 Art. 80 (160), Commentary ‘Des Moyens de Parvenir à l’amour du prochain’, p. 50.

¹⁴⁷ Ibid., p.50.

the way you act in daily life.’¹⁴⁸

The understanding the Founder had towards service is clear in following short passage. It may be applied to all forms of service that we might be called to offer.

“‘Everything you do to the children in your care you do to me,” said the Lord... Be zealous, but let your zeal be enlightened and prudent, let it be pure, let it be generous and persevering.’¹⁴⁹

There is a wealth of writing by the Founder concerning education, the main form of service offered by the first Daughters of Mary and Joseph. It was a concern of the Founder that this service should be good and to the best of the capabilities of the Sisters. But, as we saw above, his idea of service is much wider, it is offered to the Church, to all our brothers, and to be offered in humility.

‘Be at the service of the whole Church.
Be there as a pardoned sinner who has
found peace and rejoices in the merciful
love of God.’¹⁵⁰

* * * *

At this point we might attempt to draw together the various aspects of the spirituality of van Crombrughe that we have seen in this study.

He was a man primarily moved by love, love of Christ and love of his fellow man, recognizing Christ present in each person. This love led him to the service of others and also led him to invite other men and women to share in this service. For him, in the times and place in which he lived, the service he offered was mostly concerned with the education of young people and this same means of service was taken up by the Daughters of Mary and Joseph. But the vision of van Crombrughe was much broader than that. He wished to be at the service of the whole Church. In other words, to offer service to others, wherever the need was discerned to be the greatest. Because of his vision, he was able to change the form that his own service took and that of the Congregations that he founded.

He was animated in this generosity and expression of love, by a very deep relationship with God, particularly with the second Person of the Trinity. He recognized that without this

¹⁴⁸ BATTEN, B., Live in the Joy of the Lord, referring to Arch. Hist.: File L, List B. 70.

¹⁴⁹ CONST.: 1844, p. 36.

¹⁵⁰ ARCH. HIST.: File J, List C-18.

relationship, this drawing near to God in silence and prayer, that all he might do would be ineffective.

He was also moved, through special moments of grace in his life, to model himself on Mary and Joseph. Mary, as the Mother of Christ; he accepted as his mother. As Mary was filled with rejoicing before the wonders that had been done to her by God, so the Founder was filled with the same joy and thanksgiving. His life was marked, too, with simplicity, both in his personal style of life and in his attitude towards life.

St. Joseph had a particular influence on the Founder; he was a model of love, service, and humility.

Finally, all that van Crombrughe said and did was marked by joy, simplicity, humility, thanksgiving and above all love. In other words, he had that complete confidence and trust in God that expressed itself in service to others. It is this same spirit which moved van Crombrughe that now moves each Daughter of Mary and Joseph. The particular gift that was given to the Founder is given to each of us, is offered to us to live today.

‘I will never stop praying to the Lord to pour out on all the Institute which belongs to him alone, His Spirit and His love to give all my children the spirit of their state in life, their hearts like His heart, full of self-denial and above all, love.’¹⁵¹

There is one prayer that recurs many times in the letters of Canon van Crombrughe to individual Sisters and to the Congregation. He prays that we may be ‘instruments of mercy’. This sums up in one short phrase the spirituality of the Founder. Because each has received so much from the Lord, and above all experienced the mercy of God, we, in our turn, become ‘docile instruments in the hands of God.’¹⁵² We read at the end of the section where we studied van Crombrughe’s relationship with Christ:

‘Our good Lord grants us so many graces...that it is up to us to make use of them and more and more make ourselves instruments of his mercy.’¹⁵³

And then again, in praying for the gift of the Holy Spirit on the community:

‘I have asked particularly for you, that Jesus would send his Holy Spirit who enlightens, who purifies, who sanctifies that he would make of you instruments of his mercy.’¹⁵⁴

¹⁵¹ INST. SPIRIT: 18^e ‘La Solitude et le recueillement’, 5th April, 1836.

¹⁵² LETT: 4-3 / 1837 (L3 – 3)

¹⁵³ LETT: 5-27 / 1840 (L8 – 8) - Reference, footnote 53.

When later we studied the attitudes of Mary, who is given to us as a model, we read:

‘Continue with courage, with joy, with humility, to work at your sanctification, and you will become a worthy child of Mary, a true Spouse of God and an instrument of mercy for the salvation of many.’¹⁵⁵

In the Constitutions, the Founder goes even further. Because we follow the example of Christ and are consecrated to the service of others, the Founder writes that:

‘You are the instruments of the mercy of the Lord.’¹⁵⁶

And then he continues:

‘Let no difficulty stop you in this ministry.’¹⁵⁷

The service that we are invited to give to others is ‘to be instruments of mercy’, instruments of God’s mercy to our fellow men. When we are called to be of service to our brothers and sisters it is in the full awareness that we have been shown, each one of us, the mercy of God and in this mercy we rejoice and are at peace.

‘BE AT THE SERVICE OF THE WHOLE CHURCH
BE THERE AS A PARDONED SINNER
WHO HAS FOUND PEACE
AND REJOICES
IN THE MERCIFUL LOVE OF GOD.’¹⁵⁸

¹⁵⁴ LETT: 7-19 / 1842 (L8 – 4) - Reference, footnote 59.

¹⁵⁵ LETT: 18-6 / 1844 (L8 – 6) - Reference, footnote 82.

¹⁵⁶ CONST.: 1844, p. 36. (See CONST. 1891 Art. 81 (161), p. 59.)

¹⁵⁷ Ibid.

¹⁵⁸ ARCH. HIST.: File J, List C-18 - Reference, footnote 93.

REFLECTIONS ON THE SPIRIT AND SPIRITUALITY OF CANON VAN CROMBRUGGHE;

In the introduction to this study we noted that as members of the Congregation founded by Canon van Crombrugghe we are called to share in his faith-vision, to respond to the charism of foundation which moved him. The first two sections of this study were an attempt to examine the spirit and the spirituality of van Crombrugghe which he shared with the Daughters of Mary and Joseph. This section is concerned with reflections on that spirit.

There are many ways of approaching this, but because the writings of van Crombrugghe are scripturally based, especially on the Gospels and St. Paul, these reflections will be based on the scriptural meaning of the attitudes recommended to us by the Founder.

Each attitude suggested by Constant van Crombrugghe will be examined briefly in the light of today's scriptural exegesis. One is very much aware that these reflections could form the basis for a more profound study, by developing the relationship between the biblical themes and the various virtues suggested by the Founder to the Daughters of Mary and Joseph. This study, however, will only give brief indications referring to the first two sections, namely the biography of the Founder, and the spirit and spirituality of Constant van Crombrugghe.

The Daughters of Mary and Joseph are called to share in the same charism as that given by the Holy Spirit to Canon van Crombrugghe. As we have seen, this means that, like our Founder, we too are primarily moved by a deep personal love for Christ and through this, love for all our brothers and sisters. We try to recognize both individually and as a community, Christ present in all people and so moved by this recognition to be of service to Christ, to the Church and to all our brothers. The expression of our love is service.

There are many pictures that come to mind when we use this word, service. In Scripture it has a very broad meaning. The original Greek meaning of the word to 'serve', *hupeereteo*, was that the person was a member of a rowing crew. He was not a single rower, but a member of a team. He could not take up this work if he were a slave; he had to be a free person. So it was work taken up voluntarily and meant submitting oneself to the leader of the team, the head of the crew. In this way he would carry out orders in a proper way.¹⁵⁹ The meaning of the word has been

¹⁵⁹ RENGSTORF, K.H., Theological Dictionary of the New Testament, (Wm. B. Eerdmans Publ. Co., Michigan, 1966), Vol. 8, p. 530-544.

developed over the centuries, but there were two basic elements that always remained: first, that service was something undertaken voluntarily, and second, for it to be effective it was undertaken in obedience to another.

There are several words in Greek which are also used with reference to service and which help us to get a broader understanding of our service. One of the most important words, 'leitourgia' originally meant work undertaken voluntarily for the state. This work was also undertaken without expectation of reimbursement. The word later came to mean service offered by those qualified to undertake a particular office. There was also a second meaning of the word, that is, service of a religious nature. This could mean to perform a religious service or also to minister to another. The word developed to mean any kind of service or work undertaken ¹⁶⁰.

When the word 'leitourgia' was used in the New Testament it was usually in the second sense, that of service of a religious nature. However, Paul occasionally used it in the more general understanding of service undertaken voluntarily. For example he writes to the Romans:

'If the Gentiles have come to share in their spiritual blessings, they ought also to be of service (leitourgeezai) to them in material blessings.' ¹⁶¹

All work is a 'liturgy' laid on man by God, a service, a ministry to each other ¹⁶².

There are other words which mean to be a servant, or to be of service, with each time a difference of understanding, for example, 'diaconos', which means to serve and to minister to another; 'therapon', a servant who helps in the healing of another; 'pais' which means child as well as servant; 'doulos', a servant who is bonded to another, a slave.

Christ tells us that there is only one obstacle to service and that is dependence on material goods which is in direct opposition to the love of God. Therefore we are invited to 'sell what we have' and follow Christ in service of others.

The example of service which Christ gave, was voluntarily undertaken by himself and in obedience to the Father. His was a ministry and service to his brothers, healing them and re-creating them. The service he gave demanded a self-emptying on his part, a complete setting aside

¹⁶⁰ LIDDELL AND SCOTT, Greek English Lexicon, (Clarendon Press, Oxford, 9th Ed., 1961).

¹⁶¹ Rms. 15: 27.

¹⁶² BARCLAY, W., New testament Words, (SCM, London, 1964), p. 176-178.

of self. In him we find our model of service. The Founder cited part of the following text of St. Paul at the opening of the article on obedience ¹⁶³ and because it is about obedience, it is also about service.

‘Have this mind among yourselves, which you have in Christ Jesus, who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied himself taking the form of a servant (doulon) being born in the likeness of men. And being found in human form he humbled himself and became obedient unto death, even death on a cross. Therefore God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name which is above every name.’ ¹⁶⁴

There is another passage in St. Paul which inspired the Founder when writing one of the commentaries concerning study in the Constitutions ¹⁶⁵, that is the passage found in Romans 12. We might make it ours once more. ‘Never flag in zeal, be aglow in the Spirit, serve the Lord.’ ¹⁶⁶ Some translators end this verse as ‘serve the hour’, which would mean being able to meet the demands and needs of the time ¹⁶⁷. However this may be the message to us is clear.

Service, as St. Paul teaches, is a charismatic gift, a charism given for the whole body, the Church ¹⁶⁸. It is a charism given to us in a particular way, through the charism of foundation. In our Congregation it has its own aspects and attitudes that makes us uniquely who we are and makes particular the celebration of the service of our brothers and sisters.

‘The spirit by which I wish to see you animated resides essentially in an unlimited devotion to Jesus Christ, his Church and to all your brothers.’ ¹⁶⁹

* * * *

All Christians are called to be servants of Christ and are primarily called to be servants of the Word, that is, people who bring the Good News of Christ to others, a service that is offered in

¹⁶³ CONST.: 1844, p.66 ‘Jésus Christ fut obéissant jusqu’à la mort et même jusqu’à la mort de la croix’.

¹⁶⁴ Phil. 2: 5-9

¹⁶⁵ CONST.: 1891 Art. 105 (196), Commhentary. He refers to the whole passage, Romans 12: 3-13.

¹⁶⁶ Rms. 12: 11

¹⁶⁷ RENGSTORF, op. cit. p. 540.

¹⁶⁸ Rms. 12:7.

¹⁶⁹ Qouted in BATTEN, B., Live in the Joy of the Lord, op. cit. , p. 7. See supra p. 37.

humility. This is because through the service of Christ towards us, we have been taken from the service of sin to the service of justice, the service of Christ. We therefore serve not as slaves but as sons and daughters of the Father ¹⁷⁰.

The greatest service we might offer our fellow-man is confidence and trust in God, faith in him and above all, hope in him. Our world is torn by wars and evil in many forms. Without belief in God and the confidence that comes from this, man becomes paralyzed by fear. Our confidence is rooted in the Creator of the world. We recall at this point the words of the Founder when he writes:

‘It is God who preserves us, who upholds us, who prevents us falling back into the nothingness whence he has taken us.’ ¹⁷¹

Confidence is rooted in faith, which is only as deep as our humility. We are not led, through trusting in God, to underrate the evil powers at work in the world, or to forget our own personal sinful condition. It is rather in the reality of being, in the awareness of personal sinfulness, that confidence grows ¹⁷². Our song is that of the Psalmist:

‘I have trusted in your steadfast love...
I will sing to the Lord because he has
dealt bountifully with me.’ ¹⁷³

The first Christians, as is recorded in the New Testament, were people who were filled with trust and confidence in God, and therefore were joyful. They had a certainty in all that they did. Their trust was totally without fear and centered in Christ, despite the persecutions that they experienced.

‘The Lord is my helper, I will not be afraid; what can man do?’ ¹⁷⁴

This is the kind of confidence and trust in God that marked the Founder and should mark us too. His was a trust that was like that of a child. His choice of Scripture highlights this:

¹⁷⁰ AUGRAIN, C., AND LACAN, M.F., ‘service’, Dictionary of Biblical Theology, Ed. X. Leon-Dufour, (Seabury Press, New York, 2nd Edit., 1973), p. 533-535.

¹⁷¹ CONST.: 1891 Art. 80 (160) ‘De la présence de Dieu’ p. 55.
See Supra p. 39.

¹⁷² LACAN, M.C.M., ‘Confidence’, *Ibid.*, p. 88-90.

¹⁷³ Ps. 13: 5.

¹⁷⁴ Heb. 13: 6.

‘Can a woman forget her sucking child?...
even these may forget, yet I will not forget you.’¹⁷⁵

It is because of this trust that we may bring hope to the world. The usual word used in Greek for confidence and trust is ‘pepoittheesis’, but there is another, ‘elpizo’, which means to hope as well as to have confidence.

We can be a sign of hope to others in our service of them because we trust God and are confident in him. Our lives, rooted in faith must be hope-filled and it is the same hope that we can share with our brothers and sisters.

‘Have courage, confidence; God is good and is powerful.’¹⁷⁶

* * * *

To have confidence in God, therefore is to be a sign of hope and at the service of others needs. This confidence is measured by our humility. In the writings of the Founder, humility means an honest acceptance of who we are. In the passage to the Philippians which is quoted above we find the use of the word ‘tapeinos’, which means humility, lowliness of mind. First Christ ‘emptied’ (ekenosen) himself taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men’ and then ‘being found in human form he humbled (etapeinosen) himself and became obedient unto death.’¹⁷⁷

The original meaning of the word ‘tapeinos’ was insignificant, lowly, weak, poor¹⁷⁸. It could also mean the difficult situation of man in society, a ‘lowly status’. However, as it is used in the Old Testament it referred to an action rather than to a state, so something of the sense ‘to stoop down’ is implied. When humiliation is enforced it means oppression. God became the subject of the action and thus Mary rejoiced, He ‘put down the mighty from their thrones’¹⁷⁹. It is also God who exalts the oppressed and the lowly (tapeinos)¹⁸⁰.

¹⁷⁵ CONST.: 1891 Art. 80 (160), Commentary ‘De la Présence de Dieu’, quoting, Is. 49: 15.

¹⁷⁶ LET/ 3-5 / 1839 5118-7° See supra p. 39.

¹⁷⁷ Phil. 2: 6-7.

¹⁷⁸ GRUNDMANN, Theological Dictionary of the New Testament, op. Cit., Vol. 8, p. 1-26.

¹⁷⁹ Lk. 1: 51.

¹⁸⁰ Lk. 1:52.

Humility is understood on different levels. The first level may be said to be that of modesty as opposed to vanity. This is the type of humility that we find in the writings of Proverbs.

‘Be not wise in your own eyes.’¹⁸¹

On the second level, we find the kind of humility that is opposed to pride. This is the attitude of the sinner before the Almighty. It is the realization of the reality of the human condition and of the personal sin. The person comes to recognize that all he has and is is a gift from God. Paul asked some questions that point to this kind of humility.

‘For who sees anything different in you?
What have you that you did not receive?
If then you received it, why do you boast as if it were not a gift?’¹⁸²

A deeper humility is that shown to us by Christ and because he saves us by his self-abasement, he is our model of humility. We may see in Christ that the height of humility is serving God in men¹⁸³. Humility, the is opposed to any kind of vanity or pride, it means realizing that all we have is ‘gift’ from God and that in recognizing our gifts, we use them for the service of our brothers. In its fullness, humility means an emptying of self, as Christ did, for others. It means being moved to this self-emptying as He was, by love.

‘The kings of the Gentiles exercises lordship over them; and those in authority over them are called benefactors. But not so with you: rather let the greatest among you become as the youngest, and the leader as one who serves.’¹⁸⁴

* * * *

There were two other qualities of service which marked Canon van Crombrugghe and which he shared with the Daughters of Mary and Joseph, namely simplicity and joy.

In its original use in Greek, simplicity, ‘haplotees’, meant, ‘simple’, but in time it came to have a wider meaning, that of being open, without ulterior motive, unambiguous, whole-hearted. It did, however still retain the meaning, ‘simple’, in a negative sense. When it is used u-in the New Testament it is either with a neutral understanding, or in expressing a

¹⁸¹ Pr. 3: 7.

¹⁸² I Cor. 4: 7.

¹⁸³ LACAN, M.F., ‘Humility’, Dictionary of Biblical Theology, op. cit., p. 247-249.

¹⁸⁴ Lk. 22: 25-26. Quoted in Practical Applications of Government, Chapter Document, 1975. Appendix, ‘Jesus – the servant of God.’ Para. 1 and ‘Authority in the New testament’, Para. 1.

positive value¹⁸⁵. So therefore we find:

‘If your eye is sound (haplous), your whole body will be full of light.’¹⁸⁶

In this context sound ‘haplous’, has the meaning of being healthy. In fact this text is the inspiration for the Founder when he comments on the offering we make each morning of the day ahead of us¹⁸⁷.

Simplicity is also linked with purity, singleness of heart. St. Paul writes to the Corinthians:

‘I am afraid that as the serpent deceived Eve by his cunning, your thoughts will be led astray from a sincere (haplotees) and pure devotion to Christ.’¹⁸⁸

Finally, simplicity may have a sense of generosity and liberality. In Paul’s letter to the Romans he reminds us that all are members of the Body of Christ, each with different gifts to be used for the whole Body¹⁸⁹.

He writes:

‘having gifts that differ according to the grace given us, let us use them: if service (diakonian) in our serving, he who teaches in his teaching, he who exhorts in his exhortation, he who contributes in his liberality (haploteeti), he who gives aid with zeal, he who does acts of mercy with cheerfulness.’¹⁹⁰

The word used here for ‘liberality’, ‘haploteeti’ may equally read ‘simplicity’¹⁹¹. So whatever we have is contributed and shared in liberality and in all simplicity. We may remember the words of Canon van Crombrughe when he writes to a Sister:

‘Serve your Divine Spouse with a great and genuine simplicity.’¹⁹²

¹⁸⁵ BAUERNFEIND, Theological Dictionary of the New Testament, Vol 1, p. 386.

¹⁸⁶ Mt. 6: 22.

¹⁸⁷ CONST./ 1891 Art. 73 (153), Commentary ‘Direction de l’Intention’, p. 20.

¹⁸⁸ II Cor. 11: 3. The last line may be read literally, ‘from simplicity in Christ’.

¹⁸⁹ The Founder refers indirectly to this passage in his commentary on charity, CONST.: 1891 Art. 80 (160) . De la Charité et de la concorde’; p. 35-42.

¹⁹⁰ Rms. 12: 6-8.

¹⁹¹ R.S.V. Interlinear Greek-English New testament, op. cit., p. 641.

¹⁹² LETT: 15-25 / 1841 (L19 – 8). See supra p. 62.

In this spirit we might grow in an understanding of the manner in which we offer our service to our brothers: Service which has no ulterior motive and is unambiguous, whole-hearted, marked by purity and simplicity in Christ.

* * * *

When we try examine what is meant by joy in scripture we are confronted by many words with a wide variety of meaning. It would be easy to lose touch with the basic simplicity of the emotion. First of all it is an emotion, something that is basic to man, in the same way as sorrow is also a basic human emotion. Joy can possess the whole man and is shown to the world by the person experiencing joy.

It is an emotion that is basic to the Christian. We could say that the characteristic attitude of the Christian is joy. As in English there are many words linked with joy, so there are in Greek, each a little different. One word which is frequently used in the New Testament is 'agalliasis'. This means to 'be joyful', to 'exult'. The word is concerned with personal joy as well as with a cultic act, that is when the community together rejoices for a feast or a festival. In Luke's Gospel we find it used in a personal sense. The best example is found in Mary's song of praise.

'My spirit rejoices (egalliasen) in God my Saviour.' ¹⁹³

John the Baptist leapt for joy (agalliasen) in Elizabeth's womb when Mary visited her cousin¹⁹⁴.

When Jesus teaches his followers the Beatitudes, he ends by saying:

'Rejoice and be glad (agalliasen) for your reward is great in heaven.' ¹⁹⁵

It is the emotion that the early Christians experienced, 'day by day attending the temple together and breaking bread in their homes, they partook of food with glad (agalliasen) and generous hearts, praising God and having favour with all people' ¹⁹⁶.

Paul does not use the word 'agalliasis' in his letters. He prefers to use the word 'boast' (kaukaomai). This also means to glory, so that we can boast in the Lord rather than in ourselves ¹⁹⁷.

¹⁹³ Lk. 1: 47.

¹⁹⁴ Lk. 1: 44.

¹⁹⁵ Mt. 5: 12.

¹⁹⁶ Acts 2: 46-47.

¹⁹⁷ BAYREUTHER. Dictionary of New Testament Theology, Ed. C. BROWN, (Paternoster Press, Exeter, 1976-, Vol. 2, p. 352-354.

Another word that is frequently used in the new Testament is ‘euphraino’, which means to gladden, to cheer and the word ‘euphrosunee’, related to it means joy. So we have the mood of joy and gladness. This also refers to the personal joy as well as a general well-being and rejoicing at feasts and festivals ¹⁹⁸. In the spiritual life this word can express joy at God’s protection. We have a clear idea of the use of this word when Peter stands up at Pentecost, after the experience of receiving the Holy Spirit in the upper room, and addresses the people. he teaches clearly the reason why we can rejoice and exult. He explains how Jesus became man and worked many signs and wonders among the people. he was then delivered up to death and crucified,

‘but God raised him up... “therefore my heart was glad (euphranthee) and my tongue rejoiced (egalliasato) moreover my flesh will dwell in hope”.’ ¹⁹⁹

There is also another word meaning joy or gladness, ‘chara’. This is closely linked with the word ‘charis’ meaning grace and from which we have the word ‘charism’. ‘Chara’ is concerned with both the feeling and the cause of our joy. It is also used at times in the Septuagint translation of the Old testament for the Hebrew word ‘salom’, peace ²⁰⁰.

In the New Testament, the Gospel and St. Paul, ‘chara’ and ‘chairo’, meaning to rejoice, are most frequently used to express the joy of being in Christ, of hoping in him and of our hope of eschatological fulfillment.

The joy of Jesus is full communion with the Father and it is this same joy that he wishes to share with us.

‘These things I have spoken to you that my joy (chara) might remain in you, and that your joy (chara) might be full.’ ²⁰¹

At this point it might be helpful to try to draw together all these ideas so that we might understand a little more clearly what it means to be joyful. Joy is concerned with both the personal emotion of joy as well as joy expressed in the community. The joy of the community may be expressed in a cultic act, an act of worship.

Joy is a basic human emotion, experienced deeply within the person. It comes out of the past, remembering what has gone before. It is situated in the present; it is a state that is experienced

¹⁹⁸ BULTMANN *Theological Dictionary of the New testament*, op. cit. Vol. 2, p. 772-774.

¹⁹⁹ Acts 2: 24-26, quoting Ps. 16:9.

²⁰⁰ For example, Is. 48: 22. ‘There is no peace (chairo) for the wicked’.

²⁰¹ Jn. 15: 11.

now. And it projects into the future. Because of the past and present experiences it is possible to hope in what is to come.

For the Christian, joy is a characteristic attitude. There is every reason to rejoice, as Peter taught on the day of Pentecost, because Jesus died and has risen. Already people had rejoiced when they saw the miracles that Jesus performed.

‘All the people rejoiced at all the glorious things that were done by him.’²⁰²

We too are filled with joy, the joy of being in Christ, of hoping in him, of being fulfilled in him.

We might recall the words of Canon van Crombrughe when he wrote to a Sister:

‘May your cheerfulness be a quiet joy in the presence of God. A simple joy that enlarges the heart, recreates the spirit... and is like a balm. A Joy that sweetens the cross and which increases the value of work.’²⁰³

The joy that Jesus experienced was full communion with the Father and it is this same joy that Jesus prays may be our experience.

‘that they may have my joy fulfilled in themselves.’²⁰⁴

Finally, as the Founder reminds us when writing in the Constitutions about joy²⁰⁵, it is a gift of the Holy Spirit²⁰⁶ for which we should ask.

* * * *

We have seen how we are called to the service of our brothers, to celebrate the ‘service’ of our brothers. This celebration is rooted in our faith in God, our confidence and trust in him. Trust in God is what makes it possible for us to share our hope with others, that is, hope in Christ who lived among us, died and rose from the dead. It is the resurrected Christ that we celebrate with our brothers. The marks of our service are humility, the realization that all we have is a gift from God and therefore we share that gift with others; simplicity, a whole-hearted, unambiguous sharing of

²⁰² Lk. 13: 17.

²⁰³ LETT: 6-6 / 1834 (L11 – 2). See supra p. 61.

²⁰⁴ Jn. 17: 13.

²⁰⁵ CONST.: 1891 Art. 90 (175). De la Gaieté, de la Douceur, et de la Politesse’, p. 74.

²⁰⁶ Gal. 5: 22.

ourselves and our gifts; joyfully, remembering the goodness of God to us, experiencing this joyful remembrance today and looking towards our fulfillment in Christ, the fullness of all men in Christ.

It is therefore because we have individually experienced the goodness of God that we wish to serve others, to help our brothers to experience the love of the Father. Our service to others is our thanksgiving to the Father.

When we look at the Greek word for Thanksgiving, ‘eucharistia’, we realize that there are many aspects of our thanksgiving. We can see very Quickly that all we have said about service is contained in that word. First of all, it is striking that it contains the word ‘charis’, grace, and that it is clearly related to ‘chara’, joy.

‘Eucharistia’ brings to our minds the whole eucharistic celebration of the Church. Of itself the word means both thanksgiving and blessing. It means gratitude which is the source, the root, of thanksgiving. Gratitude for something leads us to give thanks. When this gratitude is addressed to God in prayer, it is frequently united with blessing God. From this it is seen that thanksgiving is in memory of an action or an event. To be moved to gratitude means that we have remembered that which has gone before ²⁰⁷.

‘Eucharistia’ is the word that is used in the Jewish meals celebrated in the family when the father blesses the bread and gives thanks to God before eating. It was used by Jesus and by the early Christians.

When Jesus fed the crowds who had come to see him and listen to him, we read:

‘Jesus then took the loaves and when he ha given thanks (eucharisteesas) he distributed them to those who were seated.’ ²⁰⁸

St. Luke records the same word at the last supper of Jesus with the apostles:

‘And he took a cup, and when he had given thanks (eucharisteesas) he said: “Take this and divide it among yourselves, for I tell you that from now on I shall not drink of the fruit of the vine until the kingdom of God comes.” And he took bread and when he had given thanks (eucharisteesas), he broke it and gave it to them saying:

²⁰⁷ BENOIT, Pierre, ‘Eucharist’, Dictionary of Biblical Theology, op. cit. p. 145-149.

²⁰⁸ Jn. 6: 11 (See also Mk. 8: 6, a different occasion).

“This is my body which is given for you. Do this in remembrance (anamnaisin) of me.” And likewise the cup after saying: “This cup which is poured out for you is the new covenant in my blood”.²⁰⁹

This, as we know so well, is the central act of the Christian community, the memorial (anamnesis) of Christ. It is the perfect act of thanksgiving to the Father, for the Son, through the Holy Spirit.

It is this same remembrance that we are called to celebrate in the service of our brothers.

Central to the word ‘eucharistia’ is the word ‘charis’, meaning grace and also thanksgiving. In the Old Testament ‘charis’ is used to translate the Hebrew word ‘hen’, which means the favour of God, especially mercy and compassion²¹⁰. We have been shown the mercy, the compassion of God and therefore are called to celebrate our thanksgiving in and through the service of others.

* * * *

Our service of others becomes a song of joy, of celebration of the mercy of God. In this we may join in a particular way with Mary, the Mother of God in her great song of the liberating Word of God, the Magnificat²¹¹. Canon van Crombrughe shared with us his devotion to Mary and invited us to follow her as both our Mother and model²¹². In recent years, the Church has presented us with clear teaching concerning Mary²¹³. Mary is seen to stand among the poor²¹⁴, she is one of the ‘anawim’ of the Old Testament. She herself in the Magnificat, calls herself the handmaid of the Lord. The word used in Greek is ‘doulees’, one who is bonded to another. She is bonded to the Lord. Mary gives herself totally, therefore, to the service of God and this means to the person and

²⁰⁹ Lk. 22: 17-20. Some authorities omit 19b-20.

²¹⁰ BERGER, K., ‘Grace – Biblical’ ‘Concise Sacramentum Mundi’, Ed. Karl Rahner, (Seabury Press, New York, 1975), p. 584-587.

²¹¹ See GUTIERREZ G., A Theology of liberation, (Orbis Books, Maryknoll, New York, 1973), p. 207-208, for a consideration of this aspects of the Magnificat.

²¹² See supra p. 49-55.

²¹³ -Documents of Vatican II, Ed. Walter M. Abbott, S.J., (G. Chapman, London, 1966). LUMEN GENTIUM, Ch. 8, Para. 52-68.

²¹⁴ Lumen Gentium, 55.

work of her Son²¹⁵. She listens to her Son and keeps his word and stays close to him until his death²¹⁶.

‘In the course of her Son’s preaching she received his praise, when, in extolling a kingdom beyond the calculation and bonds of flesh and blood, he declared blessed (cf. Mk. 3: 35; Lk. 11: 27-28) those who heard and kept the word of God, as she was faithfully doing (cf. Lk. 2: 19, 51). Thus the Blessed Virgin Mary advanced in her pilgrimage of faith and loyally persevered in her union with her Son unto the cross.’²¹⁷

Mary was overshadowed by the Holy Spirit as the cloud in the Old Testament overshadowed the Ark of the Covenant.

‘The Holy Spirit will come upon you and the power of the Most High will overshadow you.’²¹⁸

This is so that she might bring Christ to the world and present him to all men. Accepting this challenge demanded a total giving of herself. ‘Behold I am the handmaid of the Lord, let it be to me according to your Word.’²¹⁹

And this is the invitation that is given to us through the charism of foundation.

We, too, are called to be in the service of the Lord, as those who are poor, who are even bonded, as Mary was. We are called to be among the ‘anawim’ of today.

We are also called to a total giving of self, a self-emptying in order that we might be overshadowed by the Holy Spirit, that the Holy Spirit might come upon us. This is so that the Word might dwell in us, might fill us, so that we might be servants of the Word today.

With Mary and as her, we are invited to listen to the Word, to contemplate the Word, to remain at the foot of the cross. We are called in humility, recognizing that all we have is a gift from God, to give ourselves totally to the person and work of Christ in our brothers today.

In her song of praise Mary sings that God looked upon the ‘humiliation’ (tapeinosin) of his handmaid ‘doulees’²²⁰. It was also the humble ones ‘tapeinous’, that were exalted by the Lord²²¹.

²¹⁵ Lumen Gentium, 56.

²¹⁶ Lumen Gentium, 58.

²¹⁷ D.M.J., Chapter of Renewal, Rome, 1970, ‘To know Christ Jesus’, Document I, p. 7. Quoting, Lumen Gentium, Ch. 8, 58.

²¹⁸ Lk. 1: 35.

²¹⁹ Lk. 1: 38.

²²⁰ Lk. 1: 48.

We are called to serve in simplicity and singleness of heart. We are called to serve in joy and thanksgiving and with Mary to 'exult' (agalliasen) in the Lord ²²². To proclaim the Lord to others, because we have ourselves been shown the mercy and compassion of God.

'He has helped (succoured) his servant (his child) Israel, in remembrance of his mercy.'²²³

'My soul proclaims the greatness of the Lord. My spirit rejoice in God my Saviour. For he has looked with favour on his only servant. The Almighty has done great things for me, Holy is his name. He has come to the help of his servant Israel, for he has remembered his promise of mercy.'²²⁴

CONCLUSION - INSTRUMENTS OF MERCY

In the introduction to this study we were confronted with certain questions concerning the statement of charism made by some of the Sisters three years ago, in 1975. We asked ourselves concerning this statement: 'What are the elements in this statement that make it specific to the Daughters of Mary and Joseph, because such a statement could be made by any group of committed Christians? Does this express the same spirit and spirituality as that moved Canon van Crombrughe? Does it express the fullness of vision that he shared with the Congregation? Are there new elements contained in this that were not expressed by the Founder?' ²²⁵ We noted that the statement had not intended to be definitive and that this study also is simply a further reflection on the spirit and spirituality of the Founder which he shared with us.

Taking each of these questions in the light of this study, I would respond as follow:

²²¹ Lk. 1: 52.

²²² Lk. 1: 47

²²³ Lk. 1: 54.

²²⁴ Lk. 1: 46-49 ICET text for the Gospel Canticles.
(1970, 1971 International Consultation on English Texts.)

²²⁵ Introduction, p. 6

It is true to say this statement could be made by any group of committed Christians. It is the call to all Christians to be united with Christ, to share the Good news of the Gospel with others by means of all the gifts and graces given to them by the Holy Spirit ²²⁶. What might be said to be specific to the Daughters of Mary and Joseph is the particular combination of gifts that they receive by sharing in the charism of Foundation of Constant van Crombrughe. Before we can affirm this, it is necessary to attempt to answer the other three questions.

Does this statement express the same spirit and spirituality as that of Constant van Crombrughe? It seems to me that we may say that it does. It expresses the same sense of being moved by love to respond to the needs of people today, whatever those needs may be. Inherent in the statement is also the sense of respecting deeply the individual, although it does not appear to be consciously expressed. Certainly the spirit of service and the manner of that service are expressed and clearly stated.

Does this statement introduce any new elements that were not present in the Charism of the Founder? It would appear that it does not. It is true that the term ‘to be a sign of hope’ does not apparently come in the writings of the Founder. But in the third section of this study we have seen that hope is an essential understanding when we speak of having confidence and trust in God. Because of the previous experience of God’s goodness we are at present filled with hope in the future. To be a ‘sign of hope’ is a little more than this. It implies a willingness to share with others one’s personal experience of God’s goodness which is the basis for confidence and trust in him. Although the Founder does not use the phrase ‘to be a sign of hope to all people’ he certainly speaks about what it means to be such a sign.

Finally, does this statement express the fullness of the vision that Constant van Crombrughe shared with us? It seems to me to imply the fullness of that vision, although it is not expressed. It would be possible at this point to play with words. But it is not words as such that we are trying to evaluate here, words have a habit of moving in and out of fashion. For example, we might say that in this statement of charism there is no mention of humility. Others would answer that all the ideas we see contained in humility are in the word simplicity. No, here we are concerned with the concepts that Canon van Crombrughe used to communicate his spirituality.

It seems to me that there is one such concept, which is not expressed in the statement but which draws together in a remarkable way the spirit and the spirituality of Constant van Crombrughe, which is, that we be ‘instruments of mercy’.

²²⁶ Reference to Lumen Gentium Ch. 5.
‘The Call of the Whole Church to Holiness.’

We may and indeed did, affirm the Statement of Charism of 1975 as being within the charismatic experience of each of the Sisters present. We may also affirm that what makes it specific to the Daughters of Mary and Joseph is the manner in which we experience the call individually and as a community to union with Christ. We may affirm that this union with Christ, union of love, flows out to the whole Church to all our brothers and sisters in the form of service which is marked by love, simplicity and joy. By making this affirmation though, we also realize that the charism of Foundation in which we share is much wider and that gradually, through the force of different circumstances and the times in which we live, this Charism will unfold and take on much deeper and more profound meanings. Today, in the troubled world in which we live we are called, it seems to me, to penetrate more deeply into an understanding of what it means to be an ‘instrument of mercy’.

The final section of this study will be an attempt to look a little more closely at this particular invitation given to us by the Holy Spirit through Canon van Crombrughe.

INSTRUMENTS OF MERCY

While we may look in Scripture to discover a little more about what it means to be merciful, we do not find the metaphor ‘to be an instrument of mercy’ used in Scripture. It would be helpful, to try to understand the inspiration of this concept. We cannot ask more of a concept than it can convey, it can only be a means of helping us to get in touch with the thought and the reality of the person using it. Therefore, to understand the inspiration of a metaphor it may help us to get closer to the thought of the person using it.

There is another phrase that is used less frequently by the Founder in his letters namely to be an ‘instrument in the hands of God’. For example he writes:

‘Be a docile instrument in the hands of God.’²²⁷

And on another occasion:

‘The Daughters of Mary and Joseph should clearly be good instruments in the hands of God our Saviour.’²²⁸

²²⁷ LETT: 4-3 / 1837 (L3 – 3).

²²⁸ LETT: 5-29 / 1840 (L3 – 5).

This concept of being an instrument in the hands of God is one used by St. Ignatius Loyola. He uses it especially in his letters to the members of the Society of Jesus and also in the Constitutions of the Society. It has been said that it may serve as a resumé of Ignatian spirituality, because contained in this concept are all the elements essential to the spirituality of St. Ignatius ²²⁹.

To be an instrument in the hands of God is an expression of a very deep and personal association with God. It recognizes that God is the source of all life and goodness, but that he uses man and works through him for all men. It means that to the extent to which the person is attuned to God, to that extent God has a more perfect instrument at his disposal. It is important though, to understand that Ignatius was not thinking in terms of our being passively present in God's hands. central to his spirituality is that man is called to work with God, to walk with Christ. This clearly calls for a response on the part of the person. In fact, man is called to union with Christ, to a dialogue of love and this union is expressed in working with Christ for all men. Ignatius leads those who follow him, through the 'Exercises' which he gives, to discover God present in all things, in all men. God is discovered more fully in others as the union of man with God deepens. And so he becomes more able to co-operate in the work of God for his fellow-men. In other words, he becomes a more fitting instrument in God's hands.

We can see from this that to become an instrument to be used by God for others it is essential to draw closer to God. it means having an intimate association with God so that we may be used by Him to minister to the needs of others.

'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.'²³⁰

It would seem possible and even probable, in view of the influence in his early life of the Fathers of the Faith, that Constant van Crombrugghe was inspired by this concept of St. Ignatius. It seems that he made it his own and that there was a development according to his personal response to the working of the Holy Spirit. And so we find him using the phrase 'to be instruments of mercy' and even, in the Constitutions, 'you are instruments of mercy'²³¹.

²²⁹ MARUCA, Dominic S.J., Instruments in the Hand of God, Extract from the Doctoral Thesis (unpublished), (Pontifical Gregarian University, Rome, 1963).

²³⁰ Ibid., p. 72.

²³¹ CONST.: 1844, p. 36.

Mercy is an attribute of God as we see in both the Old and the New Testaments. In the Old Testament it is associated with compassion ²³². The only place in the New Testament where the words are linked as attributes of God is in the Letter of James.

‘You have seen the purpose of the Lord, how the Lord is compassionate and merciful.’ ²³³

It will be helpful to examine both words in order to get a better understanding of what is meant by the mercy of God. First of all we find that it is God’s definition of Himself. We read in the book of Exodus:

‘The Lord passed before him (Moses) and proclaimed: “The Lord, the Lord, a God merciful and gracious slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness”.’ ²³⁴

In Hebrew, the word used in the Old Testament is ‘*hen*’ and is translated into Greek in the Septuagint, as ‘*eleos*’, meaning mercy. Mercy is an emotion that comes from being in contact with the affliction of another. It can also be used in the context of justice in that the administrator may show mercy to another. In its use in the Old testament it meant more than this. The idea of mercy came out of the whole concept of covenant. God and man had committed themselves to each other and therefore in their faithfulness there was an obligation to be merciful. Because of the special covenant relationship, if man broke the covenant God would show mercy. ‘*Eleos*’ also meant love and grace. God showed mercy out of love for man, rather than as an obligation. Man was in turn called to show mercy to his fellow-men.

For God, then, his mercy rests on the covenant, therefore man can appeal to his mercy. When man is faithful to the covenant he can expect the mercy of God. When he is unfaithful he can call on the mercy of God which takes on the meaning of pardoning grace.

The second meaning and that which came to have a fuller meaning in the new Testament is mercy as love, pity, sympathy invoked by one in another. And in this, mercy has the meaning of an act rather than an emotion. A person is moved to pity, to love, to sympathy and moved to demonstrate this emotion.

There is another word used in the Old Testament which means both mercy and compassion and that is ‘*oiktirmos*’. It is this word that is used in Luke when Jesus says to his followers:

²³² DUPONT, Jacques, ‘L’Appel à imiter Dieu en Matthieu 5: 48 et Luc 6: 36.’
Revista Biblica, 14, 146-149.

²³³ James 5: 11.

²³⁴ Ex. 34: 6.

‘Be merciful (oiktirmones) even as you
Father is merciful (oiktirmon).’²³⁵

This may read:

Be compassionate even as your Father
is compassionate.’²³⁶

In the Old testament mercy and compassion are attributes of God to which man may appeal because of the covenant made between him and God. The two words used in Greek are ‘eleos’ and ‘oiktirmos’. When Jesus invites us to be as the Father it is in terms of being merciful, being compassionate as the Father is compassionate.

In the New Testament the writer used another word, which means compassion (‘splanknizomai’), to feel or to be moved by compassion. It is a stronger word than ‘eleos’. In the Gospels ‘splanchna’ is only used twelve times and only of Jesus, or Jesus himself uses the word in a parable.²³⁷ Originally this word meant the innermost parts. So the noble parts of the animal used in sacrifice, the heart, liver, lungs, kidneys were the ‘splanchna’. In a particularly forceful way it meant the womb²³⁸. In a person it meant the seat of feelings, the centre of the person. It is used occasionally in the Old Testament. For example in Sirach where the writer says that at the slightest cry of the child the father’s ‘splanchna’ are moved²³⁹.

In the New Testament with the exclusive use in the Gospels of this word in relation to Jesus²⁴⁰ it takes on a fullness of meaning. In Jesus it reveals the compassion and the mercy of God.

‘When again a crowd had gathered and they had nothing to eat, he called his disciples to him and said to them: “I have compassion (splanchnizomai) on the crowd because they have been with me now three days and have nothing to eat...”’²⁴¹

²³⁵ Lk. 6: 36.

²³⁶ R.S.V. Interlinear Greek English New Testament op. cit., Lk. 6: 36.

²³⁷ For this section on the word ‘splanchna’ I am indebted to both the private notes and the course of Fr. Henri Nouwen, ‘Ministry and Spirituality – Compassion’.

²³⁸ KOSTER, Theological Dictionary of the New Testament op. cit., Vol. 7; p. 548-559.

²³⁹ Sirach 30: 7.

²⁴⁰ St. Paul also uses the word in the Epistles and also St. John.

²⁴¹ Mk. 8: 1-2.

There was the widow at Naim whose son died:

‘And seeing her the Lord felt compassion over her and said to her: “Do not weep”.’²⁴²

On another occasion a leper came to Jesus and said to him: ‘If you will, you can make me clean’ and Jesus

‘being filled with tenderness stretched out his hand and touched him.’²⁴³

Another time there were two blind men sitting by the road crying out for mercy and for help. Jesus asked what they wanted and they requested to be cured of their blindness.

‘And being filled with tenderness Jesus touched their eyes.’²⁴⁴

On another occasion it was the people who appealed to the compassion of Jesus. A boy was brought to him who was possessed by an evil spirit that had tried to destroy the young man and the people said to Jesus: ‘help us, having compassion on us.’²⁴⁵

The parables that Jesus taught where people were moved by compassion were those of the Prodigal Son, the Good Samaritan and the servant who did not in turn show compassion²⁴⁶.

Jesus was moved to the depths of his being, where the most intimate and intense emotions are located, by the human condition. He was moved in love to do something about what he saw. This is an emotion that is much deeper than sympathy. Through compassion he was eventually led to the cross. The whole mystery of the mercy and compassion of God are revealed in Jesus.

It is to this compassion that Christ invites his followers:

‘be compassionate as your Father is compassionate.’²⁴⁷

²⁴² R.S.V. Interlinear op. cit., Lk. 7: 13. (Jesus was also moved by the needs of the crowd).

²⁴³ R.S.V. Interlinear op. cit., Mk. 1: 41.

²⁴⁴ R.S.V. Interlinear op. cit., Mt. 20: 34.

²⁴⁵ Ibid., Mk. 9: 22.

²⁴⁶ Ibid., Lk. 15: 20, Lk. 10: 33, Mt. 18: 27.

²⁴⁷ Lk. 6: 36.

Thus we are to be moved to the depth of our being, to the most intimate part of our emotions by the condition of our fellow men.

This does not happen easily. Compassion in its fullness is not a natural response in man. First it is necessary that each of us has experienced, not just in our minds, but in our hearts and whole person, the tender compassion of God, that we experience ourselves as poor, as weak, as sinners who have received and do receive the mercy and compassion of the Lord. It is necessary that we have had to cry with the blind men or the leper or the widow and that the Lord has been moved to the depths of his being by our condition and reached out and touched us. This is our moment of conversion. We are called by this invitation to go to the roots, the ‘splanchna’, the innermost parts of ourselves and be recreated by Christ. In having received the tender compassion and healing of Christ we are filled with love and with mercy. This is not an emotion, but an invitation to act for and with our brothers and to be their servant. This invitation of Jesus ‘to be as our heavenly Father’ is a call to imitate God in his way of being and of doing. It is a call for us to give out of our own poverty and out of our having experienced God’s mercy and love.

‘If anyone has the means of life, the necessities of life and sees his brother in need and closes his heart against him, how does God’s love abide in him?’²⁴⁸

This same text of the first letter of John is quoted in the exhortation of the Founder concerning the assistance we give one another for our spiritual progress²⁴⁹. This exhortation is found in the Constitutions in the whole section which deals with charity, that is the many aspects of charity towards both God and man. It may be said to be the core of the Constitutions. The Founder draws together his teachings about charity and love.

In this particular use of the quotations of St. John, van Crombrughe points out that if a man who refuses to assist another in his corporal necessities lacks charity and love, this is even more true if we do not help those in spiritual need. There are several places in these exhortations that show clearly the kind of love we should have towards another.

In the first exhortation on ‘Charity an Union’, the Founder quotes a passage from St. John Chrysostom:

²⁴⁸ R.S.V. Interlinear op. cit., I Jn 3: 17.

²⁴⁹ CONST.: 1891 Art. 80 (160). ‘Du devoir réciproque de concourir à l’avancement spirituel’. p. 46-47.

‘Charity does not consist in words only, nor in an empty interchange of external civilities, but in acts of real kindness. You will manifest your charity to all your brothers by sharing in their sorrows and in their joys, in all that happens to them. It is by this last characteristic that charity is more especially distinguished. For in the depths of every heart there lurks a secret feeling of jealousy that is opposed to charity.’²⁵⁰

In the exhortations it is the sense of what is done rather than what is said that is important. Charity is shown especially ‘by sharing in their sorrows and in their joys’²⁵¹.

While rejoicing with the joys of others and sharing in their sorrows we are also confronted by the reality of people’s situations. Van Crombrugghe writes:

‘Charity does not exact that you should be blind to what is wrong... Let nothing shock or offend you: on the contrary, have compassion on the weaknesses and the frailty of others: adapt yourself to their needs, humble yourself, reform yourself: whatever you do comfort your neighbour.’²⁵²

This compassion shown to another is healing for them:

‘Kindness heals the hidden wounds of others and draws to God even the most unlikely people.’²⁵³

We are invited to be ‘the instruments of God’s mercy’ to all:

‘Never abandon the weakest ones. Feel for them and neglect no means that your love can suggest to give them courage.’²⁵⁴

This kind of love towards the other is based on the compassion and love that has been shown us by God. We can go to the Father with complete confidence and trust and bring before him the needs of the world.

‘Your needs, those of your sisters, of those you teach, the needs of the whole Church will come before you in the moments of most intimate union with God who consoles

²⁵⁰ CONST.: 1891 Art. 80 (160). ‘De la charité et de la concorde’. p. 40.

²⁵¹ Ibid., p. 40.

²⁵² CONST.: 1891, Art. 80 (160). ‘Des obligations qu’impose la Charité’, p. 45.

²⁵³ Ibid., ‘De la charité et de la Concorde’, p. 37.

²⁵⁴ Quotes in BATTEN. B., Live in the joy of the Lord, op. cit., p. 24.

in all tribulations, who takes care of all
because to him belongs all power: but the
titles which are dearest to him and by
which he wishes we invoke him are
All-Merciful, All-Compassionate.’²⁵⁵

As we in the first section, Constant van Crombrughe showed this tenderness and love in his life. His respect for the dignity of each person was very marked and he showed his love for them by responding to their needs, especially through the foundation of four religious congregations. His whole life expressed the compassion and love that moved him most deeply. We can only see this through those who knew him and wrote about him and through his own writings. We attempted in the first section to see him through the eyes of others. In the second section we tried to discover his spirit and spirituality through his own writings, especially through the Constitutions of the Daughters of Mary and Joseph and letters addressed to the Sisters. We concluded the study of the spirituality of Constant van Crombrughe by becoming aware of his call to us, as Daughters of Mary and Joseph, to be ‘instruments of the mercy of the Lord’²⁵⁶, instruments of God’s love. We realized that, to be instruments of mercy we are called to intimate union with Christ.

‘yes, Jesus Christ possesses your soul
and it is in him that you will love.
May Divine Love rule all the love that
you give to others.’²⁵⁷

We share this love with our brothers with all the love that we receive from Christ.

‘Yes, Jesus Christ remains in your heart,
it is the way he has chosen for you to
witness to his tender love.’²⁵⁸

We are transformed into Christ, and van Crombrughe writes of his transformation:

‘Union with Christ for me is so real, so
intimate as to make him one body.’²⁵⁹

As we are transformed into Christ through the working of the Holy Spirit in us, we become the instruments of the mercy of God.

‘I have asked particularly for you, that Jesus would send his Holy Spirit who
enlightens, who purifies, who sanctifies, that he would make of you
instruments of mercy.’²⁶⁰

²⁵⁵ CONST.: 1891 Art. 80 (160). ‘Présence de Dieu’. p. 56.

²⁵⁶ CONST./ 1844; P. 36; See supra p. 72.

²⁵⁷ LETT: 20-3 / 1836 (L12 – 1). See supra p. 47.

²⁵⁸ LETT: 11-7 / 1834 (L12 – 2). See supra p. 55.

²⁵⁹ INST. SPIRIT: 4^e. See supra p. 55.

To be instruments of mercy is the ministry of the Daughters of Mary and Joseph, the service that we offer to our brothers and sisters, our celebration of thanksgiving towards God.

In this study we have only briefly looked at this invitation through the writings of Canon van Crombrugghe and through scripture. This is only a first step taken haltingly and there is much further to go. However, we may begin to respond to the question, what does it mean to be an instrument of mercy. To be an instrument of mercy means that we are called to empty ourselves of self and allow Christ to fill our person,

‘so that we make with him one body.’²⁶¹

It means that we are able to cry out to the Lord in recognition of our sinfulness and weakness and receive the mercy of God

‘as a pardoned sinner.’²⁶²

It means that we are at the service

‘of the Church and of all our brothers.’²⁶³

It means to be another Christ and to be so perfectly joined to the Father that we are moved with the same compassion and the same tenderness towards our brothers and sisters.

‘YOU ARE INSTRUMENTS OF MERCY’²⁶⁴

BE AT THE SERVICE OF THE WHOLE CHURCH
BE THERE AS A PARDONED SINNER

WHO HAS FOUND PEACE

AND REJOICES

IN THE MERCIFUL LOVE OF GOD’²⁶⁵

²⁶⁰ LETT: 7-19 / 1842 (L8 – 4). See supra p. 57.

²⁶¹ INST. SPIRIT: 4^e. See supra p. 112.

²⁶² ARCH. HIST.: File J. List C-18.

²⁶³ See BATTEN. B., Live in the Joy of the Lord, op. cit., p. 7. See supra p. 36.

²⁶⁴ CONST.: 1844? P. 36. See supra p. 72.

²⁶⁵ ARCH. HIST.: File J, List C-18. See supra p. 72.

APPENDIX I

Sisters to whom the Founder addressed letters:

The number corresponds to that used in the footnotes.

(See the note, 'Letters', under 'Abbreviations used'.)

| No. | Name | Letters | Profession | Death |
|-----|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------|--------------|--------------|
| 0 | <u>Julie</u> Superior General before the separation; remained Superior general of the Sisters of St. Joseph, Bruges. | 1834 | ? | 1864 |
| 1 | <u>Superiors at Malines, 1853-1865</u> -Eulalie Vandemaele -Helene de Bus (Vicaire de l'Institut -Raphael Becq | | 1838 1849 | 1871 1868 |
| 2 | <u>Superiors at Alost, 1859-1865</u> (not known by name) | | | |
| 3 | <u>Marie-Anne de Ponthioux</u> Mistress of Novices, 1830-1853. She was part of the original community at Mouscron who were incorporated into the DMJ's in 1830. | 1837 | 1830 | 1855 |
| 4. | <u>Various Superiors unknown</u> | 1835-1865 | | |
| 5 | <u>Catherine Dal</u> Superior at Moscron | 1835-1841 | 1831 | 1851 |
| 6 | <u>Olympiade Derville</u> First Superior General, 1840-1858 | 1833-1863 | 1834 | 1887 |
| 7 | <u>Flore Delhaye</u> Superior at Moscron Vicaire de l'Institut Second Superior General, 1858-1885 | 1834-1865 | 1834 | 1836 |
| 8 | <u>Raphaelle Becq</u> Superior of Malines Third Superior General, 1885-1900 | 1854-1865 | 1855 | 1900 |
| 9 | <u>Aloyse Brucher</u> Superior, Holy Angels, Brussels Considered to be a very saintly person | 1832-1833 | 1832 | 1838 |
| 10 | <u>Gonzague</u> Left the Institute | 1838-1839 | ? | |

| No. | Name | Letters | Profession | Death |
|-----|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------|------------|-------|
| 11 | <u>Bathilde Delhay</u> Sister of Flore Delhay | 1832-1836 | 1833 | 1839 |
| 12 | <u>Louise Decamps</u> | 1834-1858 | 1841 | 1876 |
| 13 | <u>Justine van Crombrugghe</u> Niece of the Founder | 1859-1864 | 1867 | 1914 |
| 14 | <u>Eleonore Laoulais</u> Maitresse Generale | 1854-1862 | 1855 | 1894 |
| 15 | <u>Colombe Verduyn</u> Local Superior God-daughter of Canon van Crombrugghe | 1831-1852 | 1832 | 1852 |
| 16 | <u>Pauline D'Halluin</u> | 1861-1864 | 1866 | 1942 |
| 17 | <u>Clothilde Minne</u> Assistant at Alost | 1833-1841 | 1833 | 1842 |
| 18 | Superior at Coloma Vicaire de l'Institute Superior at Brussels, Holy Angels | | | |
| 18 | <u>Clothilde van Wymelboke</u> Niece of the Founder Superior, Brussels, Holy Angels Mistress of Novices Superior, Coloma, Malines | 1843-1865 | 1845 | 1878 |
| 19 | Addressed to various people: <u>Emelie Lecroart</u> Letters <u>1-6</u> Member of the original Mouscron Community of 1830 | 1831-1839 | 1831 | 1852 |
| | <u>Raphael Hennion</u> Letters <u>7-12</u> | 1835-1839 | 1835 | 1839 |
| | <u>Clémentine</u> Letters <u>13</u> | 1837 | | |
| | <u>Colette Wouters</u> Letters <u>14-15</u> Died age 21 years. Considered to be a very saintly person. | 1838 | 1831 | 1839 |
| | <u>Séraphine de Trocht</u> Letter <u>16</u> | 1839 | 1838 | 1851 |
| | <u>Julie Loix</u> Letters <u>17-19</u> | 1840-1844 | 1842 | 1854 |
| | <u>Helene Dubus</u> Letter <u>20</u> Superior Malines 1859-1862; Vicaire of the Institute. This letter was written before she entered the community | 1847 | 1849 | 1868 |
| | <u>Félicité van Crombrugghe</u> Letters <u>21-23</u> Niece of the Founder | 1848-1850 | 1847 | 1853 |

| No. | Name | Letters | Profession | Death | |
|-----|------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------|------------|-------|------|
| | <u>Albertine Oden</u> Soeur Converse | Letter <u>24</u> | 1854 | 1841 | 1855 |
| | <u>Apollone Delbeque</u> | Letters <u>25-27</u> | 1857-1859 | 1859 | 1859 |
| | <u>Joséphine Beyser</u> | Letters <u>28-29</u> | 1858 | 1861 | 1865 |
| | <u>Adele Delcroix</u> Mistress General of the Institute | Letters <u>30-32</u> | 1858-1859 | 1859 | 1903 |
| | <u>Flore de Mytternaere</u> | Letter <u>33</u> | 1861 | | |

APPENDIX II

The number corresponds to that used in the footnotes. (See the note 'Letters', under 'Abbreviations used'.)

1. Blessed Sacrament
2. Church
3. Confidence and trust in God
4. Courage
5. Heart of Jesus
6. Holy Spirit
7. Humility
- 7b Instruments in the hand of God
8. Instruments of Mercy
9. Institute – Devotions etc.
10. Jesus Christ
11. Joy
12. Love
13. Love of God
14. Mary
15. Moderation
16. Peace
- 16b Name of Jesus
17. Prayer
18. Principles
19. Simplicity
- 19b Holy Angels
20. St. Joseph

21. Study
22. Voluntarism
23. Will of God
24. Service
25. Thanksgiving
26. Presence of God
27. Poverty
50. Colette de brandt
51. Fénelon
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80. General notes

APPENDIX III – SCRIPTURE REFERENCES

A. References to Scripture found in the Constitutions – the Commentaries of Canon van Crombrugghe.

The Article number refers to the 1932 revised enumeration.

The Page number to the English Translation made after 1932.

| <u>Article</u> | <u>Page</u> | <u>Citation</u> | <u>Reference</u> |
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| 160 | | <u>Charity and Union</u> | |
| | 20 | The two commandments | Mt. 22: 37-40 |
| | 21 | Love one another | Jn. 15: 10-15 Jn. 13: 35 |
| | 21 | God is Love | I Jn. 3:15 |
| | 21 | Speak with the tongues of men and of angels | I Cor. 13: 1-13 |
| | 23 | Son of Man came to save men's lives | Lk. 9: 55b-56 Jn. 12: 47 |
| | 24 | Love without dissimulation | Rm. 12: 3-13 |
| | | <u>Obligations imposed by charity</u> | |
| | 26 | As you would that men do to you | Mt. 7: 12 |
| | 26 | Passions are the root of all disputes | Jms. 4: 1 |
| | 27 | Bear one another's burdens | Gal. 6: 2 |
| | | <u>Rendering Mutual Assistance</u> | |
| | 28 | See another in need and close his heart | I Jn. 3: 17 |
| | | <u>Means for acquiring love of our neighbour</u> | |
| | 30 | This is my Body, this is my Blood | Mk. 14: 22-26 Mt. 26: 26-30 Lk. 22: 19-20 |
| 160 | 31 | ... to the least of these little ones, you did it to me | Mt. 25: 40, 45 |
| | | <u>The Presence of God</u> | |

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| | 35 | God is not far from us | Acts 17: 27-28 |
| | 35 | Can a mother forget her child? | Is. 49: 15 |
| 161 | | <u>Zeal for the Welfare of Youth</u> | |
| | 39 | Shine as stars for all eternity | Dan. 12: 3 |
| 163 | | <u>Meals</u> | |
| | 41 | Whether you eat or whether you drink | I Cor. 10: 31 |
| | | <u>Cheerfulness, Meekness, Politeness</u> | |
| 175 | 50 | Do your work in meekness... | Si. 3: 17 |
| | 50 | Rejoice in the Lord always | Phil. 4: 4 |
| | 50 | The fruits of the Spirit | Gal. 5: 22 |
| | | <u>Dissipation of Mind</u> | |
| 175 | 54 | Come apart and rest awhile | Mk. 6: 31 |
| | 54 | We have laboured all night... | Lk. 5: 6 |
| | 54 | I am the vine you are the branches | Jn. 15: 5 |
| 164 | | <u>The Blessed Sacrament</u> | |
| | 64 | Delight to be with the children of men | Prov. 8: 31 |
| | 64 | Come to me all who labour | Mt. 11: 28-30 |
| | 64 | Taste and see that the Lord is good | Ps. 34: 8 |
| 186 | | <u>The Angelus</u> | |
| | 68 | behold the handmaid of the Lord | Lk. 1: 38 |
| 191 | 76 | <u>The Holy Name of Jesus</u> | |
| | 77 | No longer servants bur friends | Jn. 15: 15 |
| 193 | | <u>St. Joseph</u> | |
| | 80 | Whatever you do to the least of these little ones... | Mt. 25: 40 |

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| 197 | | <u>The Chapter</u> | |
| | 88 | Learn of me for I am meek and humble of heart | Mt. 11: 29 |
| | 88 | Humble yourself before the Lord | Jn. 4: 10 |
| | 88 | Clothe yourself with humility before one another | I Pt. 5:5 |
| 209- 213 | | <u>Holy Communion</u> | |
| | 96 | Come to me all that labour | Mt. 11: 28 Mt. 4: 19 |
| | 96 | Bread that I will give is my flesh | Jn. 6: 51 |
| | 96 | I will remain in him | Jn. 6: 56 |
| | 97 | Ask and it will be given you | Mt. 7: 7 |
| 221 | | <u>Superiors</u> | |
| | 113 | My food is to do the will of him who sent me | Jn. 4: 34 |
| 223 | | <u>Novices and Postulants</u> | |
| | 115 | Forget your people... | Ps. 45: 10 |
| | 115 | I chose you | Jn. 15: 16 |
| 227- 241 | | <u>Poverty</u> | |
| | 124 | Blessed are the poor in spirit | Mt. 5: 3 |
| | 124 | No place to lay his head | Lk. 9: 57 |
| 242- 245 | | <u>Chastity</u> | |
| | 128 | Blessed are the pure of heart | Mt. 5: 8 |
| 246- 256 | | <u>Obedience</u> | |
| | 130 | To do the will of him who sent me | Jn. 4: 34 |

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| 130 | | Am I trying to please men? | Gal. 1: 10 |
| 321- 324 | | <u>Obligations to observe the Constitution</u> | |
| | 135 | I will sing of the steadfast love of the Lord | Ps. 89: 1 |
| | | <u>Attachment to the Constitutions</u> | |
| | 136 | Unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace | Eph. 4: 3 |

B. References to Scripture found in the 'Instructions Spirituelle' of Canon van Crombrugghe.

1^e Quelques réflexions sur l'Avent

| | |
|-----------------------------------------------------------------------|------------|
| Shower O heavens from above and let the skies rain down righteousness | Is. 45: 8 |
| He lives to make intercession for them | Hb. 7: 25 |
| Fellow heirs with Christ | Rm. 8: 17 |
| It is no longer I who live | Gal. 2: 20 |

2^e Sur la Circonsision

| | |
|----------------------------------------------|----------|
| Jesus the pioneer and perfecter of the faith | Hb. 12:2 |
|----------------------------------------------|----------|

3^e Ce que vous devez au Seigneur Jesus

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|------------------------------------|--------------|
| I am the vine you are the branches | Jn. 15: 1-11 |
|------------------------------------|--------------|

4^e Sur l'Union de Jesus Christ avec nous

| | |
|------------------------------------|--------------|
| Behold I am with you all days | Mt. 28: 20 |
| I am the vine you are the branches | Jn. 15: 1-11 |

5^e Sur l'amour de Jesus Christ

| | |
|-------------------------------------------------|---------------|
| As the Father has loved me so have I loved you | Jn. 15: 9 |
| If you love me you will keep my commandments | Jn. 14: 15 |
| I do not call you servants but friends | Jn. 15:15 |
| Appointed you that you should bring forth fruit | Jn. 15: 16 |
| Come to me all that labour | Mt. 11: 28-30 |
| Take my yoke upon you | Mt. 11: 29 |

6^e Sur la Resurrection

Once risen Christ dies no more I Cor. 15: 15-23

7^e Sur la Présentation de Marie

Everyone who has left house, or brothers and sisters... Mt. 19: 29

8^e Sur le mystère de l'Incarnation

Behold the handmaid of the Lord Lk. 1: 38

9^e Des Ste. Anges: I and II

Are they not all ministering spirits? Hb. 1: 14

He will give his angels charge over you Ps. 91: 11

My angel is with you; your lives will be in his care Bar. 6: 6

Angel to Lot 'Arise...' Gen. 19: 1

If you listen to the voice of your angel... Ex. 23: 22

10^e Amour de la Paix

Blessed are the peacemakers Mt. 5: 9

Passions are the root of all disputes Jms. 4: 1

11^e Affection Réciproque

Love one another as I have loved you Jn. 15: 12

13^e Pureté de Zele, jalousie

He must increase, I must decrease Jn. 3: 26-30

15^e Sur les conversations

The good man out of the good treasure of his heart produces good Lk. 6: 45

| | |
|----------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------|
| What is this conversation which you are holding? | Lk. 24: 17 |
| 16 ^e <u>La vérité doit régner en tout ce que l'on dit</u> | |
| Men will render an account for every careless word | Mt. 12: 36 |
| The cleaning of the temple | Lk. 19: 45-46 |
| We are the temple of the living God | II Cor. 6: 16 |
| 22 ^e <u>Du travail</u> | |
| Because you have eaten of the tree... | Gen. 3: 17 |
| 23 ^e <u>Diversité des Talents</u> | |
| There are varieties of gifts but the same Spirit | I Cor. 12: 3 |
| Having gifts that differ... let us use them | Rm. 12: 6 |

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