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The Clergy in the France of St. Vincent

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For a serious look at the state of the clergy at the beginning of the seventeenth century, at the time that St. Vincent began his pastoral ministry, we must consider two things: the juridical situation and the situation as it actually existed.

The clergy, as the Assembly of the Estates General of 1615 recognized it, was the “first order” of the kingdom of France. It thereby enjoyed prestige and privileges. It was autonomous in the juridical and fiscal spheres, it could act freely in the spiritual ambit, and the laws of the Church were protected by the state.

The situation in fact was different. To get an idea we must put aside the indignation of the moralists, (“all” priests were ignorant, drunkards, undisciplined). We ignore, too, the lashes of the preachers, the criticisms of the religious, the interesting judgements of Protestants, the amusing stories of novelists.

The time frame that we will deal in is from the end of the Middle Ages to the first years of St. Vincent. In our examination we will ignore the facile reliance on anecdotes and generalizations, and will look rather for objective causes and judgments on which we can base some conclusions.¹

1. The Bishops

At the beginning of the 17th century there were in France 14 archdioceses and 105 dioceses. There were very small dioceses (Grasse had 23 parishes) and very large ones (Rouen has 1380 parishes). The standards used to determine the selection of bishops² in the order of their importance were the following: political, intellectual, moral.

¹ M. Aubrun, *La paroisse en France des origines au XV^e siècle*, Paris 1986; J. Chelini, *Histoire religieuse de l'Occident médiéval*, Paris 1991; AA.VV., *Le clerc séculier au Moyen Âge*, Paris 1993; F. Rapp, “Réformes et inerties,” in AA.VV., *Histoire du christianisme*, VII: *De la réforme à la Réformation (1450-1530)*, Paris 1994, 143-207.

² For what concerns the role of St. Vincent in the reform of the episcopate: P. Blet, “Vincent de Paul et l'épiscopat de France,” in *Vincent de Paul. Actes du colloque international d'études vincentiennes*, Paris 25-26 September 1981, Rome 1983, 81-114.

Very many dioceses were awarded as prizes by the King as a recompense for services rendered to the family or to the person. The *customary approval* came before the “sweet and well-disposed prayers” for the election of the candidate. So the son of the King’s attorney was chosen for Rouen, evidently as a reward for all that he did for the monarchy.

For this reason the dioceses often became the prerogatives of important families. As the Amboises had control of Rouen, Langres, Albi and Clermont from the 1400’s to the beginning of the 1500’s, so from the end of the century to the start of the new, the Gondi’s had Paris as their heritage. Other dynasties established in various dioceses were those of La Rochefoucauld, Béthune, Poitiers, Estrées, and Fouquières. The majority of the bishops were therefore, of the nobility, given that the “virtuous nobility” was considered by Richelieu the requisite for a good bishop.³

Many of them accumulated benefices. Cardinal d’Estouteville was from 1440-1450 Bishop of Couserans, Mirepoix, Nîmes, Béziers, Lodève, from which he could reap substantial returns in order to maintain a luxurious way of life and to pay for the expenses connected with acquiring the cardinal’s hat. There were others, but none like the ten dioceses of Cardinal Alessandro Farnese. The wealth of Mazarin was legendary, the obvious fruits of his hoarding of benefices.

The second standard was the *intellectual*. University studies were an important map for the road to a career. Étienne Poncher, Bishop of Paris, was connected to the intellectuals of his time. Aleandro was his secretary and had a close rapport with Budé, Lefèvre d’Étaples, Erasmus. Guillaume Briçonnet transformed Saint-Germain-des-Près, where he had been abbot, into a cultural center, before founding the “Cenacle of Meaux.” Of the French episcopate one observes that two-thirds had been advisers to the King, and so had a very sound juridical foundation.

The third standard was the *moral*. It would demean this discussion to reduce the episcopacy of that period just to colorful figures of immoral prelates living in luxury. A high profile figure at the end of the 1400’s was that of Claude de Seyssel (1450-1520). He had a good education in both juridical and humanistic studies in Pavia and Turin.

He entered the service of Louis XII, King of France, and near the age of 50, he entered the clerical state. He served his sovereign and Church faithfully and well. In 1507 the King informed the chapter of Marseille that he wished “his

³ Richelieu, *Testament politique*, Amsterdam 1688, 54.

friend and devoted counselor” to be named Master of Appeals at the Council of State, and bishop of that city.

Then he moved to Turin where he died a saintly death. He wrote many historical works – he was Louis XII’s historian – the most important being the *Treatise on the Threefold State of the Pilgrim* which is one of the first works on the pastoral character of a bishop.⁴

In the century of St. Vincent, we call to mind St. Francis de Sales, François de La Rochefoucauld, Bishop of Clermont, Blessed Alain de Solminihac, the saintly Bishop of Marseille, Jean-Baptiste Gault. By now the number of bishops who were alien to religious life, profligate and men of pleasure were in inexorable decline. Naturally they were not all models. What changed was the fact that most of the bishops resumed the role of rulers. There were then in the 1600’s a generation of authoritative bishops, strict in their demands for reform, men who were feared. The pastoral role was not only symbolic, but also a threat. In unsettled times even this is useful.

2. The Lower Clergy

a) *Recruitment*

We cannot speak of “vocations” at least up to the time of the *Spiritual Exercises* of St. Ignatius. One entered the clerical state by way of the “tonsure” (from age seven upwards), which was generally conferred at confirmation. The decision to enter the clerical state came from the family. There were three models by which parents arrived at that decision⁵:

- *the sacrificial model*: the family selected one of its sons in order to “offer” him to God;
- *the cultural model*: one would enter the clerical state in order to devote oneself to studies;
- *the social model*: one or more sons were sent into the clerical state because of the social prestige it afforded.

This last model was chosen by young Vincent’s family for his priestly vocation.

Many of the tonsured in fact remained so, a state that afforded several privileges. Such a one was recognized by the style of the hair, by the sober and

⁴ Analysis in P. Broutin-H. Jedin, *L’Evêque dans la tradition pastorale du XVI^e siècle*, Paris 1953.

⁵ V. Tabbagh, “Effectifs et recrutement du Clergé séculier français,” in AA.VV., *Le clerc séculier au Moyen Âge*, Paris 1993, 181-202.

long cut of his clothing, by his marriage to “one virginal woman.” The number of tonsured was imposing. From September 1506 to April of the following year there were 1028 in tonsure in Agen; on April 10, 1520, 411 were tonsured in Mende. In Paris 400 seminarians a year were tonsured in the middle of the 15th century, a figure falling to 360 ten years later. In Rouen the number of the tonsured dropped from 3000 in 1410 to 1300 a century later. These represented one-third of the total population.⁶

How many of these reached priesthood? In Paris in the 1660’s we are told that there were from one to fifteen. Nonetheless it was a strange phenomenon that the tonsured diminished in absolute numbers, while priestly ordinations increased. In Rouen ordinations tripled until they reached 200 per year at the end of the century. In Paris in the mid-1400’s 20 priests a year were ordained, and the number grew to 27 in 1465. In Toulouse annual priestly ordinations reached the notable number of 50.

Of course, many priests came from outside to be ordained. In 1506-7, some 690 were ordained in Agen, but only half of them were originally from that diocese. It is as if each parish supplied one priest each year. If we consider the other half of those ordained in Agen, we know that 96 came from Cahors, 66 from Sarlat, 31 from Bazas, and 22 from Rodez. In 1521-22, 417 were ordained priests at Angers. At Poitiers around 1480, 1600 clerics a year were ordained priests. Therefore, secular priests alone made up 5% of the population.

All this resulted in an enormous concentration of priests and tonsured clerics. It is calculated that 10,000 priests lived in the Limousin region, some villages having 30 or 40 of them. One reform set out to control the number of ordinations. Avignon, which had a multitude of ordinands, applied the brakes. But in 1600 the Bishop of Béziers wrote to Rome that he could not offer the competitive exam for the placement to parishes “because of the ignorance of the priests.”

b) Formation

How were those being prepared for orders formed? The greater number of those tonsured received orders after a kind of apprenticeship with a pastor. Those who went no further served Mass, worked as sacristans, chanted the office of the dead, or even worked as schoolteachers. For these there can be no talk of formation.

One who aspired to the presbytery had to show above all that he had a minimum annual income of about 15 to 20 lire from a benefice, from family real estate, or from a generous donor.

⁶ Ibid., 183.

The candidate then had to learn the rites well and to read the missal. Nothing more. In the end the goal of these priests was not pastoral ministry, but the celebration of Mass and the office of the dead. There were then two grades of priests: “Mass priests” and “parish priests.”⁷ The former lived with their families, helped with farm work, or at most a less rewarding material activity. To reach orders it was enough to be of legitimate birth (this being the era of the “bastards”), to be able to read and to sing.

According to the statutes of Tournai in 1366, an exam had to be taken given by the archdeacon two days before ordinations. The candidate had to know the formulas for the sacraments, the fourth book of the *Summa* of Peter the Lombard, books two and four of the *Decretali*, besides naturally, the rights and duties of the ecclesiastical state.⁸

A particular model of formation involved the boy singers.⁹ Small schools were set up in many cathedrals for those boys who guaranteed the music ministry of the cathedral. At the beginning they were supported by the canons, but later many of the schools became self-supporting, thanks to the rents received from some chapels or vacant benefices. But these were in no way able to resolve the problem of the formation of the secular clergy.

In the mid-1400’s several conscientious bishops confronted the problem of priestly formation. The Bishop of Utrecht, having submitted his clergy to testing, found that of 300 candidates, only three were suitable. For “ongoing formation” there was a series of books, such as anthologies of sermons, manuals for confession and pastoral duties, of modest level, but useful nonetheless.¹⁰

Before the establishment of seminaries, there were a number of colleges. Paris had the famous college of Montaigu. It was a university college founded in 1344, a place of drudgery, the direction of which was entrusted to John Standonck (1450-1504).¹¹ He first of all restored discipline. He then founded near the college the *domus pauperum* (house for the poor), a kind of seminary *ad erigendum gentem novam* (to build up a new people), which received 80 young men who aspired to the priesthood and to the consecrated life. They were maintained by board paid by the more affluent students. They were given a room,

⁷ Later they would be called: *Mass priests* and *confessional priests*.

⁸ M. Aubrun, *La paroisse en France des origines au XV^e siècle*, Paris 1986, 162.

⁹ P. Demouy, “Les Pueri chori de Notre-Dame de Reims. Contribution à l’histoire des clergeons au Moyen Âge,” in AA.VV. , *Le clerc séculier au Moyen Âge*, Paris 1993, 135-149.

¹⁰ A. Prosperi, “Di alcuni testi per il clero nell’Italia del primo Cinquecento”, in *Critica storica* 7 (1968) 137-168.

¹¹ R.G. Villoslada, *La Universidad de Paris durante los estudios de Francisco de Vitoria*, Roma 1938.

a candle and some white bread each day. The studies were intense, but the planning was defective insofar as it gave space to nominalism, with no opening either to St. Thomas or to the humanities.

The realization, of a monastic and conservative system, was successful. Standonck founded four other colleges along the same model, at Cambrai and Valenciennes (1499) and at Malines and Louvain (1500), foreshadowing a possible congregation. Every house had at its head a “minister of the poor.” New candidates did not take vows, but only a promise of obedience. They were garbed in outfits of course cloth of various colors, black for the theologians, and gray for those who studied in the school of the arts. There was no meat at meals, nor wine, except for a small amount for the theologians, which was diluted with water. It was a poor life, the fasts were very rigorous, the discipline severe. They rose at night by turns for matins. Daily Mass was obligatory, plus a half-hour of meditation; in his free moments each one had to note in a small book the spiritual phrases that struck him most.

If we examine this initiative over the short term, we can observe that it was successful. Some 300 of these students became religious in a great variety of communities, such as the Carthusians, Carmelites and Franciscans. Nevertheless this type of operation had no future. It was medieval and monastic. It was adequate for one who sought certitude, not for those undertaking the risky road of the new century.

The Council of Trent wanted a seminary established in every diocese.¹² A seminary had been established at Reims in 1567. Other dioceses founded their seminaries a few years after, for example Pont-à-Mousson (1579); Carpentras (1581), Aix (1582), Bordeaux, Embrun and Valence (1583), Sarlat (1584), Avignon and Cavaillon (1586), Toulouse (1590) Vaison (1594), Agen (1597), Auch (1609), Mâcon (1613), Rouen (1615), Luçon (1617). In fact, in 1644 only Bordeaux, Reims and Rouen existed. All the other seminaries had disappeared and their work came to naught.

c) Defects

Lacking seminaries, the quality of the clergy was diminished. Bourdoise recalled what was said to him in 1607: “You must learn well how to read so that

¹² A. Degert, *Histoire des séminaires en France jusqu'à la Révolution*, 2 vol., Paris 1912; M. Venard, “Les séminaires en France avant Saint Vincent de Paul,” in AA.VV., *Vincent Depaul*. Actes du colloque international d'études vincentiennes. Paris 25-26 September 1981, Rome 1983, 1-7; E. Préclin-E. Jarry, *Le lotte politiche e dottrinali nei secoli XVII e XVIII (1648-1789)*, edited by L. Mezzadri (Storia della Chiesa di Fliche-Martin XIX/1), Torino 1974; *La Chiesa nell'età dell'assolutismo e dell'illuminismo* (Storia della Chiesa di H. Jedin VII), Milano 1978; R. Taveneaux, *Le Catholicisme dans la France classique 1610-1715*, 2 vol., Paris 1980; “Histoire de la France religieuse,” edited by J. Le Goff and R. Rémond, II: *Du christianisme flamboyant à l'aube des Lumières*, Paris 1988.

you sing well in church, because it is good when a priest knows how to read and write.”¹³

If there is something that can be documented it is the ignorance of the clergy, since the pastoral visits offer us abundant documentation. Many made themselves popular thanks to their weaknesses. A priest who knew how to give a hand to the work and participate in the drinking of his parishioners, in some places like La Rochelle or Auvergne, was looked on with favor. Such a priest, however, did not preach or hear confessions, or if he did, he did not know the formula for absolution. The catechism was neglected. At Tréguier, for instance, in 1624, the priests simply did not bother with it.

One of the reasons for founding the Congregation of the Mission was the abandonment of the country areas. The explanation is simple. In the Toulouse Region, half of the clergy before 1631 did not reside there. In 1624 the Bishop of Tréguier found that the priests did a poor job of maintaining their churches. Based on the pastoral visitations in the diocese of Chartres between 1628-30, it was found that tabernacles either did not exist, or if they did, they were dirty. Often the pastors did not know if the hosts in the ciborium were consecrated. Worse, the canonical visitors in many cases saw the ciboria full of worms.

d) Pastoral Life

Parish personnel was very numerous. It consisted of the pastor, some chaplains, also chaplains of chaplaincies, priests who were in possession of benefices, and those who performed funeral rites.

The pastor had care of the parish. He often had other parishes or benefices and therefore did not reside in a specific parish. In his place another priest lived, exercising the service and being compensated in a very small way in comparison to the actual revenue. Then there were parochial chaplains, who in some way helped out in pastoral ministry. These are not to be confused with the chaplains of chaplaincies, who were not involved with the care of souls, insofar as their duties were exclusively liturgical. Not included in the last named are the “funeral rite priests,” whose duty it was to celebrate Masses for the deceased, for which they were remunerated.

In some places there were communities of priests who had benefices.¹⁴ These were formed within the parishes, grouped priests who were born there, and

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Cited by E. Labrousse-R. Sauzet, “La lente mise en place de la réforme tridentine (1598-1661),” in *Histoire de la France religieuse*, 390.

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who received a pension from the sum total of the revenues. In the diocese of Clermont such communities existed from the end of the 12th century. In 1535 there were in that diocese some 104 such communities, the greater part of which were founded in the 15th century. They gathered together a varying number of priests. A third of them were made up of no more than two priests. But there also existed communities much more numerous. Aurillac, for example, had 30 priests in 1344, 48 in 1439, and 100 in 1508, who received an income of about 45 lire per year. They themselves were administrators of the revenues. The pastor could choose his collaborators from among them. The city councillors entrusted to them the school and works of charity.

To examine pastoral life concretely, we rely on a specific case, which has the advantage of having been studied very carefully. It concerns the Diocese of Clermont, in France, and allows us to look at parochial life in microcosm, using the issue of income as the starting point.¹⁵ Parishes were supported by two types of income. The first came from real estate, which was very little, because it varied between two and four lire in mountain parishes, to 35-40 lire in lowland parishes. Then there were also the uncertainties, which included the altar and church fees.

The administration of the sacraments (altar fees) assured a definite income. The administration of baptism was three *denarii* in Villeneuve. In one parish there is mention of a fee for Easter confessions, which was two *denarii* for the head of the family, and one for the other members.

For weddings the spouses had to pay five *soldi* at the door of the church, a fourth of the wedding bread, a quarter-liter of wine, a leg of pork, a piece of beef and a hen. In Bourgogne the rule was that at the occasion of a marriage they had to provide the celebrant's meal for the day of the wedding and for the next day. If the groom wished to be married elsewhere, if he was a property owner he had to pay ten *soldi* and a hen; if he was not, he had to pay five *soldi* and also bring a hen as a gift.

The stipend for a funeral was very carefully calculated. At the beginning of the 1500's, a rooming house proprietor could pay up to 16 *soldi*, while for the other adults one would be content with five *soldi*, and for children two *soldi* and six *denarii*. Church fees included various types of taxes, generally in kind. For Sunday pastoral services, i.e., for celebrating a "low" and a sung Mass, a measure of oats was due the pastor. At Longpré, at the end of the 14th century, each parishioner owed the pastor a measure of rye for annual services, plus a large pork sausage for the Passion gospel. In some cases the taxation consisted of Christmas

R. Germain, "Revenus et actions pastorales des prêtres paroissiaux dans le diocèse de Clermont," in AA.VV., *Le clerc séculier au Moyen Âge*, Paris 1993, 109-111.

¹⁵ Ibid. 101-119.

dinner for the pastor, his chaplain, his cleric and the church sexton. In addition, for the same occasion, they had to feed the parish priest's three dogs and horse.

In short, what did a parish yield? For Pierrefitte-sur-Loire, a parish of 109 households, we know that it had an annual income of 25 lire from the administration of the sacraments and 30 from Church fees. The greater the income, the higher the taxes. Among these there was the "free gift," a tax imposed on the church by the monarchy, but which was considered not "owed," but "a gift... free," even though it was obligatory.¹⁶ The bishops naturally divided this figure among the various parishes. For the "gift" of 1535, the sum requested varied from seven *soldi* and six *denarii* to 50 lire for the better off parishes. Then there were the fees of charitable institutions which varied from five *soldi* at Vilplaix to ten lire for Theil.

At the time of a synod the bishop requested a tax ("parée synodale"), as he did for a pastoral visitation ("droit de procuracy"). The first fluctuated between six *denarii* and five *soldi*, while for the second, documents note a variation between four and 48 *soldi*.

In return for his income, a pastor was held to carry out the "officium" of caring for souls. At Monétay-sur-Allier, an agreement in force was initialed between the parishioners and the pastor by which the pastor had to say a low Mass and a solemn Mass every Sunday and feast day. In addition, the pastor was held to officiate at weddings and funerals, and to administer baptisms. He further had to deliver a sermon on the gospel of the Feast of the Holy Cross in May, as well as the similar one in September.¹⁷ In bad weather for agriculture (on the occasion of storms, freezing...) he had to announce processions and prayers. Finally the pastor was held to provide a "good and sufficient" paschal candle, incense for the feasts and blessed bread for the feast of the Circumcision.

At Molinet the pastor had to chant a *Libera me* before and after the Mass every Sunday, sprinkling the graves with holy water.¹⁸ In another parish, there was absolution for the deceased before and after Mass. As can be seen, ministry on behalf of the deceased was very intense, so much so that on the occasion of a

¹⁶The French clergy expected to be exempt by divine right from all monetary contributions to the kingdom. If it gave something, it was not out of obligation but by a spontaneous decision, through a spirit of reconciliation and courtesy toward the sovereign. It was a theoretical liberty. Every so often, the clergy or a part refused and was called to order. The "free gift" varied depending on whether there was war or peace.

¹⁷ The Feast of the Holy Cross in May was the feast of the Invention of the Cross (3 May); that in September was the feast of the Exaltation (14 September). On this subject see the "Glossario di date" in A. Cappelli, *Cronologia, cronografia e calendario perpetuo*, Milan 1930, 109-124.

¹⁸ The practice of burying the dead in the church is known. This explains the abundance and richness of numerous chapels in the churches, especially those of the mendicant orders.

synod, the priests of one parish asked the bishop that four of them be excused from taking part in the synod because so much of their time was taken up by services for the dead.

The celebration of the Eucharist was at the center of the parish life. Those who arrived at the church had to wait before the start of the celebration, which began only at the arrival of the lord of the place and his family. If he was very late, it could happen that the pastor was impeded from saying the Mass.¹⁹

For parishioners at a distance there were chapels. When these did not have their own chaplains, the celebration was provided for at least once a year. Then there were processions. These took place nearly every Sunday, and sometimes were useful for reaching distant parishioners.

Conclusion

When St. Vincent was converted,²⁰ that is, around 1608-1612, the situation of the clergy and the Church of France was still uncertain. The Nuncio Ubaldini wrote in 1611 that the clergy was asleep and no one knew how to awaken it. The difference between the times of Calvin and Francis I was that now there were laws (those of Trent²¹), but the men to implement them were lacking. Resistance was still huge. The canons claimed their “legitimate rights” and “good customs.” Many bishops were absent from their dioceses. Those few who did reside in their dioceses were unable to act, hindered by jurists and magistrates who opposed every episcopal decision “appel comme d’abus.” The Estates General of 1615 did not recognize the Tridentine reform which was “accepted” unilaterally by the clergy. It is said that reform is the work of saints. In reality it was brought about by many factors.

The first factor was the end of the religious wars, which making cease the reasons for weapons opened up the age of the weapons of reason. The Edict of Nantes (1598) was a useful compromise because it allowed the Church to resume her pastoral activities. The monarchy arrayed itself openly on the side of the Church, and then with Richelieu in power, it began to erode the power and the autonomy of the Huguenots. If up to Henry IV the passage to Calvinism was a hemorrhage, after Nantes a reverse movement began. The ecclesial body began to take on vigor again, to be respected, to reacquire credibility.

¹⁹ M. Aubrun, *La paroisse*, 173.

²⁰ L. Mezzadri, “La conversione di S. Vincenzo de Paoli. Realtà storica e proiezione attuale,” in *Annali della Missione* 84 (1977) 176-182.

²¹ On this subject, see the excellent work of A. Tallon, *La France et le concile de Trente (1518-1563)*, Rome 1997.

Contributing to this were actions by the Holy See through its nuncios, by the government which selected austere and serious bishops, the renewal of religious orders, the establishment of new religious communities (Jesuits, Capuchins, Theatines), and the “mystical invasion.” A decisive factor was the declaration of priestly doctrine by the so-called “French School.”²²

Priestly spirituality ranged between two different theologies, which give rise to different ways of understanding the same image and ministry of a priest. On one hand there is the theology of the Pseudo-Dionysius by which the priest, taken from among men, is set above them, being inserted into that celestial-terrestrial hierarchical complex, from which comes the sanctification of men and the glorification of God. On the other hand is the Augustinian vision, in which the emphasis is not placed on being the head, but on service. The priest, taken from among men, is not above them, but is for them in fraternal service. More than the head, he is a brother. Rather than commanding, he helps from within.

In the Augustinian understanding, the priest is a man for the mission, while in the opposing view he is rather a man for the cult. They are clearly two very schematic polarizations, more able to define a tendency, than to lock up an author’s thinking. In any case, these are helpful in grasping the various facets of the so-called French School of Spirituality.²³

The great reformers of the French clergy in the 1600’s (Bérulle, Condren, Vincent de Paul, Olier, Eudes), put into the empty lamps the oil of prayer, and then these lamps were carried to illuminate the footsteps of man. The consequences for spirituality were exciting. It highlighted firstly the need for holiness.

St. Vincent de Paul said: “There is nothing greater than a priest, to whom God gives all power over his natural and mystical body, the power to forgive sins, etc. Oh God, what power! Oh, what dignity!”²⁴ And he added “One doubts if all the disorders that we see in the world must not be attributed to priests. This may scandalize some, but the subject requires that I show, by the greatness of the

22 On the *French School*: Y. Krumenacher, *L'école française de spiritualité. Des mystiques, des fondateurs, des courants et leurs interprètes*. Paris 1998; “École française de spiritualité,” in *Théophilyon* 4 (1999) 1-225.

23 L. Mezzadri, “La spiritualità dell’ecclesiastico seicentesco in alcune fonti letterarie,” in AA.VV., *Problemi di storia della Chiesa nei secoli XVII-XVIII*, Napoli 1982, 45-89; id., “Jésus Christ, figure du Prêtre-Missionnaire, dans l’œuvre de Monsieur Vincent,” in *Vincentiana* 30 (1986) 323-356; id., *A lode della gloria. Il sacerdozio nell’école française XVII-XX secolo*, Milan 1989; id., “Adorazione, sacrificio e missione. Le dimensioni del presbiterato nella Scuola francese del ‘600,” in *Communio* n. 150 (1996) 32-46.

24 SV XII, 85.

evil, the importance of the remedy. Several conferences were held on this question, which was treated thoroughly, in order to discover the sources of all those disasters, with the result that it was decided that the Church had no worse enemies than priests. It is from them that heresies have originated; take, for instance, those two heresiarchs, Luther and Calvin, who were priests; and it is by priests that heretics have prevailed, that vice has reigned, and ignorance has set up its throne among the poor people. This is due to the disorders of priests and to the fact that they have failed to oppose with all their strength, according to their obligations, those three torrents which have deluged the world.”²⁵

There took place the “terrorizing of the souls” of those who aspired to the priesthood, holding open before them the greatness of what they were to receive. “One who is not a saint is an erring priest.” Pierre de Bérulle (1575-1629)²⁶ had recourse to the Pseudo-Dionysius to prove that necessity. In the Areopagitic pyramidal vision, the bishops and priests must purify, illuminate, and ignite the fire of their inferiors. But to achieve this goal, the priests must be “instruments joined” to the Son of God, and must act in the spirit of Jesus.²⁷ United sacramentally to Christ, the priest must find in the Word his spiritual “sustenance,” he must be “pure emptiness for him, which is filled with him and tends toward him.” Just as the humanity of Christ is the instrument personally joined to the divinity, so priests are organs of his grace, and God’s living instruments on earth. It is as if they assumed a humanity, which makes the priest the place to adore the Word. For him “the priestly state is at the origin of all sanctity, which must be present in the Church of God.”²⁸ Priests must make a “solemn profession of piety.”²⁹

Jean-Jacques Olier (1608-1657) confided in his *Mémoires* that he received this order from Christ “I want you to live in perennial contemplation... and... I want you to bring contemplation into the midst of the clergy.”³⁰ It was not only a

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ Works: *Œuvres complètes*, Paris 1644 (n. ed. Paris 1960); *Opuscules de piété*, edited by G. Rotureau, Paris 1944; *Correspondance*, edited by J. Dagens, 3 vol., Paris-Louvain 1937-39. Fundamental works: A. Molien, *Le Cardinal de Bérulle*, 2 vol., Paris 1947; J. Dagens, *Bérulle et les origines de la restauration catholique (1575-1610)*, Paris 1952; P. Cochois, *Bérulle et l’Ecole française*, Paris 1963; M. Dupuy, *Une spiritualité de l’adoration*, Paris 1964; G. Moïoli, *Teologia della devozione berulliana al Verbo incarnato*, Varese 1964; J. Orcibal, *Le Cardinal de Bérulle: évolution d’une spiritualité*, Paris 1965; M. Dupuy, *Bérulle et le sacerdoce. Etude historique et doctrinale. Textes inédits*, Paris 1969; F.G. Preckler, “Etat” chez le Cardinal de Bérulle, Roma 1974; id. *Bérulle aujourd’hui. 1575-1975. Pour une spiritualité de l’humanité du Christ*, Paris 1978.

²⁷ P. Cochois, *Bérulle et l’Ecole française*, Paris 1963, 31.

²⁸ M. Dupuy, *Bérulle et le sacerdoce*, 410ff.

²⁹ Ibid., 348ff. Piety is the same as perfection.

³⁰ R. Deville, “Jean-Jacques Olier maître d’oraison,” in *Jean-Jacques Olier (1608-1657): Bulletin de Saint Sulpice* 14 (1988) 98. On his *Mémoires* (8 handwritten volumes conserved in the archives of Saint Sulpice in Paris): M. Dupuy, *Se laisser à l’Esprit. Itinéraire spirituel de Jean-Jacques Olier*, Paris 1982.

matter of teaching how to pray, which would be almost enough for transforming priests into men of ritual, but to make them “experts in the mysteries of Christ.” The idea that is subject to is that the Word of God wanted to “deny himself as God,” to assume a human appearance wrapped in fragility, clothed in sorrows and human limitations in order to reignite in the world the groaning of prayer.

From here is born that priestly school of prayer which, soaked with grace, gave new life to the French Church. The priest must live in a “spirit of prayer,” do everything as if led by it. “Nothing can be gotten from God and from the neighbor if not by virtue of the Holy Spirit activated in prayer.” Further it “is in prayer that the priest draws life for himself and for the people . In it is his peace and his joy.... Finally, it is in prayer that the priest, filled with charity, finds himself clothed with all God’s magnificent riches. Through it one does not only enter into the knowledge of the mysteries of God the Father and of his Son, but in enjoying and participating in their ‘state.’ One enters into the power of the Father, into the splendor of the Son, and into the ardor of the Holy Spirit.”³¹

St. John Eudes (1601-1680), who in his numerous writings³² always had pastoral aims, starts with a grand vision of baptism, which he calls “covenant contract” in which God makes us sons in the Son, gives us his own life, and inaugurates a mystery of universal communion. He desires that “we continue and that we contemplate” his earthly life based on Mary’s example. The summit of communion is fulfilled in Jesus, God and man, unique and eternal priest, host and sacrificer.

With the strength of baptism, all the faithful “offer” and are “offered.” They are victims and priests. The ministerial priesthood, however, is not “something more,” but is an existence changed from “within,” in order to realize to the fullest the role of pastor. The priest is a being made into “Church,” who exists “for the Church.” One who signs himself “missionary priest” teaches that

On Olier: *Œuvres complètes*, ed. Migne, Paris 1856; the *Mémoires* up to the present in manuscript are accessible thanks to M. Dupuy, *Se laisser à l'Esprit. L'itinéraire spirituel de Jean-Jacques Olier*, Paris 1982; *Traité des saints ordres (1676) comparés aux écrits authentiques de Jean-Jacques Olier (+1657)*, edited by G. Chaillot, P. Cochois, I. Noye, Paris 1984; *Lettres*, edited by E. Levesque, 2 vol., Paris 1935. Among the biographies to recall are those of E. M. Faillon (3 vol., 1873), P. Pourrat (1932), A. Portaluppi (1947). Very dense synthesis in DS (Dictionary of Spirituality).

³¹ R. Deville, *Jean-Jacques Olier maître d'oraison*, 99ff.

³² Works: *Œuvres complètes*, 12 vol. , Vannes 1905-11; *Œuvres choisies*, 8 vol., Paris 1931-37; *Il Cuore di Gesù fornace d'amore*, Roma 1965. Among the works on priesthood: *Mémorial de la vie ecclésiastique* (1681), *Le prédicateur apostolique*, and that entitled *Du bon confesseur*. J. Arragain, *Le cœur du Seigneur. Etudes sur les écrits et l'influence de saint Jean Eudes*, Paris 1955; J. M. Alonso, *El Corazón de María en san Juan Eudes*, 2 vol., Madrid 1958; P. Milcent, *Saint Jean Eudes. Introduction et choix de textes*, Paris 1964; id., “Pasteur dans le Christ pasteur; le prêtre selon saint Jean Eudes,” in *Vocation* 240 (1967) 501-14; id., *Un artisan du renouveau chrétien au XVII^e siècle. Saint Jean Eudes*, Paris 1985; C. Berthelot Du Chesnay, *Les missions de saint Jean Eudes*, Paris 1967; DS 8 (1974), 488-501.

“the principal exercise is that of making known without fear, publicly and privately, in work and in word, the gospel of Jesus Christ.”³³ In another passage he writes: “You are in the priesthood of the living Jesus Christ, who walking on this earth, represent his person, act then in his place.”³⁴ The priest, after the Virgin, is the most precious thing in the hands of Christ. “You are the saviors of the world who the Savior has left in his place here below to continue and to complete the work of universal redemption.”³⁵

This role of “added” humanity and “extended” existence is translated into these very attractive images: “You are the most noble part of the mystical body of the Son of God. You are the eyes, the mouth, the tongue and the heart of the Church of Jesus; or to say it better, you are the eyes, the mouth, the tongue, and the heart of Jesus himself. You are his heart because it is through you that he gives true life, the life of grace on earth, and the life of glory in heaven to all the true members of his body.”³⁶

(STEPHEN J. INDIA, C.M., translator)

33 DS 8 (1974) 497.

34 Ibid, 30.

35 Ibid., 29.

36 Ibid., 26ff.