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M. Pouget: *The Geniality of Humility*

by Jean Guitton *
of the French Academy

Paris, July 3, 1995 **

In my long life (I was born in 1901), I have met many admirable people, from all strata of life. But I have never known anyone like M. Pouget. Between the appearance and the reality, there was about him something that was entirely, even scandalously, different. Who was M. Pouget? He appeared to be an old man, close to the end of his life, who had been pushed to one side in those modernist times and who was about to disappear from the scene. That is what he seemed to be. And, in reality, what was there? From my point of view, there was almost everything.

In his research, his preoccupation was to show that Christian revelation is never in contradiction with good sense and reason. In this, the problem of faith is well posed; because, whatever the reasons might be, faith cannot be a deduction. In fact, he would say, reason can simply indicate the motives sufficient for believing. He knew that one had to acknowledge the place of grace, while fully appreciating human liberty and sincere human effort. His work had as its goal the setting aside of obstacles which are opposed to adherence to faith. Thus it is that Revelation is offered to intelligence with a transparency which attracts without constraining. In such a way, he outlined the exact dimensions of the religious problem: at the point where the human being is set before God who reveals self and engages the human response in liberty.

Theological reflection, according to Pouget, gains a mystical dimension. But it is a mystique which is concrete and simple, with

* French philosopher (1901-1999), author of many works dedicated to Catholic thought.

** This article corresponds to the Preface of the book by E. Antonello, C.M.: *Guillaume Pouget (1847-1933), testimone del rinnovamento teologico all'inizio del secolo XX*, Thesis, Edizioni Glossa Srl, Milan, 1995, 287 pages.

Christ as its centre. When, in my deepest soul, I think of M. Pouget, I find a geniality, the geniality of humility. In all that I have learned from him, he used the most ordinary and simple of words in order to reveal what was essential. In his words, he penetrated truth itself, the definitive sense of life: "I am 78," he told me, "moving at full sail towards my eternity. And, to my benefit, it is only Christ who matters. Everything leads me towards Him. If there were no Christ, what would we do?"

So then, from this point of view, criticism is a small thing. We have links with the invisible world, we belong to God, a great deal more than we sense or realise, to the very last fibres of our being. "Beyond the little sidetracks," he told me once "get into the habit — when you are young — of seeing always the immortal Christ, and round about him all the saints who are already reigning in heaven with Christ, and all those who, here below, follow, in humility and patience, and with all their might, the divine Crucified One."

"The great day of eternity is a horizon so vast that nothing is of worth before it. While waiting for it, I seek to work to make souls live in a reasonable manner. Life is simple. It is enough to have the intention of doing one's duty, and the good which you do will always count to you."

"I, who am no mystic, by means of studying, I will become a little like one. I am not trapped by the earth: beautiful countryside, all the views which I might ever see, this cannot fulfil me like the Three Persons: when I consider that the Father, Son and Spirit are concerned with me! In the life of Christ, we see how everything is oriented towards his Father. We Christians, we really are a *tertium genus*: for us the things of this earth count for little; what is above is all in all." The secret of M. Pouget consisted in this supernatural horizon of faith towards which was turned his enlightening blindness.

Among the testimonies about M. Pouget, his place in contemporary history, the most notable is the following. The author is a "critical spirit," a non-believer. He writes in 1942 on the subject of the *Portrait of M. Pouget*: "This is the most remarkable religious book that I know of in more than a century. The talent of the engraver (he does not paint) is almost worthy of the model. Had I not known M. Pouget: he alone would be the Counterreformation. Until yesterday, I did not know his name. He is all that a Catholic should be in terms of science and exegesis, all that a Catholic might be in putting reason at the service of the faith. And he may even do it to excess, as happens in a similar case. In this one man, together with his texts, M. Pouget is a Council, and notably the Council of Trent of the 20th century, which arms the Church of 1920 in its hand-to-hand combat with science, as that of 1550 armed it against the criticism of the Renaissance."

(EUGENE CURRAN, C.M., translator)