

Duquesne University

Duquesne Scholarship Collection

A Spiritan Anthology

Anthologie Spiritaine

1-1-2011

04. Choice of a state of life

Christian de Mare CSSp

Follow this and additional works at: <https://dsc.duq.edu/anthologie-spiritaine-english>



Part of the [Catholic Studies Commons](#)

Repository Citation

de Mare, C. (2011). 04. Choice of a state of life. Retrieved from <https://dsc.duq.edu/anthologie-spiritaine-english/11>

This PART ONE is brought to you for free and open access by the Anthologie Spiritaine at Duquesne Scholarship Collection. It has been accepted for inclusion in A Spiritan Anthology by an authorized administrator of Duquesne Scholarship Collection.

CHOICE OF A STATE OF LIFE¹

(These are the notes from the second part of the retreat. Claude-François wants to build on his conversion by leaving his indecision behind and choosing a state of life which will help him to be faithful to his resolutions.)

O my God, you are the guide to the heavenly Jerusalem for those who really trust in you, so I am turning to your divine providence. I abandon myself entirely to you. I give up my own inclinations, appetites and will in order blindly to follow yours. Please show me what you want me to do so that I may follow the way of life you have planned for me on this earth. Help me to serve you during my pilgrimage in a way which is agreeable to you and give me all the graces I need to give glory to your divine majesty.

During this retreat, I hope that you will speak to me and in your mercy deliver me from the anxieties caused by my lack of determination. I realise full well that you do not approve of my

¹ A note of Joseph Lécuyer: *Reading the second writing of Poullart des Places, is it possible to indicate any conclusions? Here are some that have struck me:*

1) *We have here a young Christian who, above all, wants to serve God, as and where he wants it. To discover his will, he first of all turns to prayer, but also to a rigorous examination of the natural tendencies which are in him, adopting an attitude of total indifference to everything that is not God.*

2) *Amongst those things that attract him, a special place is given to the service of the poor.*

3) *As regards dangers to be avoided, first place is given to ambition. Therefore, he must follow "the example of Jesus Christ who is always humble". I believe that these are part of our most authentic Spiritan heritage.*

present way of life and have chosen something better for me. I must take a firm, rational decision to think seriously about my salvation. Since I have been here, I have been meditating on this truth as though it were the most important and most necessary in the Christian religion. I have been asked a thousand times whether I understand what is my final end and each time, without thinking, I have answered in the same way as I do today after mature consideration: God only created me so that I can love him, serve him and enjoy forever the happiness promised to the just. That is my whole vocation, the unique goal of all my actions. I would be a fool if I acted in any other way since I should have no other purpose in life. No matter what happens in the future, I must always remember that any moments that do not help me to lead a good life are moments lost and I will have to give an account of them to God.

Deeply convinced of my duty, I promise never to perform a single act without first thinking it over and asking myself whether I am acting solely for your glory. (...) I will rid myself of all those human considerations which, until now, have always influenced me when considering the possible choices for a state of life. I am convinced that I must put aside all indecision, choose only one and never change, but I do not know which one will suit me and I am frightened of making a mistake. (...) I renounce all the advantages which could flatter me but which you could not approve. I have learnt to be indifferent to all the possible states of life. Speak to me, Lord, in the depth of my heart, for I am ready to obey.

I shall begin by examining my temperament to understand what I am capable of and I shall recall all my emotions, both good and bad, for fear that I might forget the first and allow myself to be deceived by the second. I enjoy excellent health, though I appear very delicate. I have a good stomach and am able to digest any kind of food with ease. Nothing makes me ill. I am as strong and energetic as anyone else, hardened to fatigue and

work, but I am inclined to be lazy and easy-going, applying myself only when spurred on by ambition. By nature I am mild and docile, indulgent almost to excess, practically incapable of saying "no" to anyone, but this is the only place where I am consistent. By temperament I am slightly sanguine and very melancholic. Although rather indifferent to wealth, I am passionately fond of praise and of anything else that can raise me above others by my own efforts. The success of others makes me jealous and fills me with despair, though I never allow this ugly vice to show itself nor do I do anything to satisfy it. I am discreet where secrets are concerned, rather diplomatic in all my conduct, enterprising in my plans but secretive in the way they are carried out. I look for independence yet I am the slave to splendour. I am afraid of death and this makes me a coward, although I cannot tolerate insults. Too fond of flattering others, I am ruthless with myself in private when I have committed a public 'faux pas'. I am sober regarding the pleasures of food and drink and rather reserved when it comes to those of the flesh. I sincerely admire really good people and I love virtue, but I rarely practise it myself because of human respect and a lack of perseverance. Sometimes, I am as devout as a hermit, pushing austerity beyond the limits of what is normal; at others, I am soft, cowardly and lax in my Christian practice. I am always frightened when I forget God and fall into sin. I am scrupulous to a fault, almost as much in times of laxity as in periods of fervour. I recognise well enough what is good and what is evil. God's graces are always there to help me discover my blindness. I like to give alms and, by nature, I am sympathetic to the sufferings of others. I hate slanderers. I am respectful in church without being a hypocrite.

I believe this is what I am like and in this description I see a true portrait of my self. (...)

(Claude-François now begins his process of discernment):

A choice now has to be made between monastic life, the ecclesiastical state of secular priests, and the third state which people refer to as 'the world'. In all three a man can save his soul or lose it. The hair shirt and the cassock can cover a wicked and sinful heart just as easily as the lawyer's gown or the cavalryman's braided tunic. Likewise, a judge or a swordsman can preserve a pure and virtuous heart just as well as the most austere hermit and the most devoted priest. Both can be rogues or honest men. God is with these people everywhere and he gives them the graces they deserve. These can be merited in any state of life, provided it is the one willed by God. The secret, then, consists in making the right choice. The surest way of doing this is to keep sight of the glory of God and the desire to save one's own soul. My soul, let you and me now ask ourselves if this is the only motive that rules our actions. (...)

(He asks himself if he is attracted to religious life¹ and decides that he is not)

My soul, you tell me that you are undecided as to the different states of life, but I will answer for you and say you are not as undecided as you think - religious life is not at all to your liking. (...)

(He feels attracted to the life of a priest, but even after a long self-examination, he remains undecided. Does he have sufficient strength of soul to live such a life with humility, sanctity and justice?)

You come up with a thousand reasons why you should enter the ecclesiastical state, yet, if I were ready to enter immediately, you would still want time to think about it. You still love the world a little and you do not quite know which of the two you should love the more. Both suit you and both please you. (...)

(The possible positions in the world - the army, the court, politics, finance ... would encourage his dominant faults. And he is hardly attracted by marriage. Is he making any progress with his discernment?)

¹ Monasticism is the only form of religious life that Poullart considers.

It is a sad thing to be unable to make up my mind. I must turn to you, my God, if I am to make a decision in accordance with your will. I am here to consult your wisdom. Destroy within me all those earthly attachments which follow me wherever I go. Grant that in whatever state of life I choose, I may not have any opinions apart from those which please you. And since it seems to be impossible for me to come to a conclusion, even though I have a strong feeling that this is what you want of me, I have decided to be perfectly open with your ministers and share the problem with them.

(With the help of his spiritual director, Poullart eventually decided on what had always attracted him and which the retreat seemed to confirm: he would be a priest in the ministry. But to guard against any ambition and vanity, he would not be a "career" priest and therefore, he would not go to the Sorbonne. This decision shows how the two parts of this retreat complemented each other.)

- 5 -

CHARLES BESNARD (continued)

When he arrived in Paris, Claude entered the College of Clermont. (...) In reading the life of Father Le Nobletz,¹ a missionary priest who died in Brittany and was regarded as a saint, he found it a great help in despising the world and surmounting human respect.²

¹ Michel Le Nobletz (1652) undertook the re-evangelisation of Brittany in the first half of the 17th century, with a combination of unlimited pastoral fervour and the practice of rigorous discipline. The Life of M. Le Nobletz, priest and missionary, was written by Fr. Verjus in Paris in 1666, and made a profound impression on the young Claude Poullart.

² Fr. Joseph Michel places great emphasis on the role of the *Assembly of Friends* (AA) in the strengthening of the Christian life of Poullart when he was a young theology student at Louis-le-Grand. Fr. Michel discovered in the Jesuit archives at Toulouse a note that probably refers to Poullart: "Another confrere is supporting a