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RE-READING POUILLART DES PLACES (continued)

3 - Materials for forming the resolutions in a Personal Rule.

In October 1701 Claude Poullart des Places entered the College of Louis-le-Grand to study for the priesthood. He followed the classes of theology given there by the Jesuits. M. Thomas, his biographer, gives many details about the life of prayer and mortification he imposed upon himself apparently from the time when he resolved to change his way of life.¹ But I shall limit myself to what Claude wrote himself.

We find four pages, fragments of a personal rule which probably was much more detailed. What we have left of it has to do with the daily exercises of piety which our young student followed. When we read these pages, we get the impression of an abundance of vocal prayers and pious exercises: long morning prayers, at least an hour of prayer in the evening, a half-hour of it before the Blessed Sacrament; prayers every time he enters or leaves his room; many visits to the Blessed Sacrament between classes and after meals. The notes are too fragmentary to give a complete picture of our theologian's life. The rule he will draw up later for the Holy Ghost Seminary will help us to understand better the life he lived himself during his student days at Louis-le-Grand. What is more important than questions of rule, however, is the spirit which breathes through these texts and especially the intentions he expresses in his prayers.

These prayers are not all original with him. We find some formulae which are familiar to many of us: in addition to the *Pater*, the *Ave Maria* and the *Credo*, he mentions the *Veni Sancte Spiritus*, the *De Profundis* for the dead, the litan-

¹ Koren, *Spiritual Writings of Claude François Poullart des Places* (hereinafter referred to simply as *Writings*), pp. 251 ff.

ies of the Blessed Virgin and the Holy Name of Jesus. Others are prayers which Claude would simply have borrowed from the prayer-books used in Jesuit colleges. This is the case with a prayer to the Virgin which he recited morning and evening.

*"I shall recite the Sancta Maria, etc. . . . to place myself in a special way under the protection of the Blessed Virgin. For I formerly was her special child, since my parents consecrated me to her and they had me wear white in her honor for a period of seven years."*²

J. Michel says that the reference is to a formula "which the members of Our Lady's Congregation in Jesuit colleges had to recite every day."³ Other formulas are more difficult to identify, especially three latin prayers which Claude recited during his frequent visits to the Blessed Sacrament and of which he gives the opening words.⁴ On the whole, we find in these pious exercises all the ordinary devotions of a fervent seminarian: invocations of the Holy Spirit to obtain His light, prayers to ask the protection of the Virgin Mary and his Guardian Angel, as well as prayers for the dead. We have to stress the importance of his devotion to the Eucharist as witnessed to by his frequent visits to the Blessed Sacrament.

We should spend more time over two texts composed by des Places himself. He presents them, not as formulas to be recited exactly, but as outlines which he wished to follow "expressing them somewhat in this fashion".⁵ This remark is

² Koren, *Writings*, p. 118. With reference to Claude's wearing white for the first seven years of his life, cf. the *Mémoire* of M. Thomas, *ibid.*, p. 119.

³ Michel, p. 88, note⁸, which reproduces the Latin text of this prayer. However, there must be a word omitted three lines before the end. Surely the reading ought to be: ". . . neque permissurum ut a meis subditis aliquid unquam *contra* vestrum honorem agatur."

⁴ Cf. Koren, *Writings*, p. 123, last paragraph. The first, which begins with the words: *Ave salus mundi verbum*, is perhaps the one U. Chevalier refers to as a prayer for the Elevation of the Body of Christ, from the *Heures d'Angers* the manuscript of which dates from the XVth century: cf. U. Chevalier, *Repertorium Hymnologicum*, no. 35720.

⁵ Koren, *Writings*, pp. 119 and 123.

important because it invites us to look less at the form than at the substance, less at the style than at the sentiments it expresses.

a) *The great prayer to the Trinity*

Claude introduces this first prayer with these words:

*“As to the intention which I shall have in view in my prayers, I shall make the following requests, expressing them somewhat in this fashion; I shall do this twice a day, in the morning and in the evening”*⁶

Perhaps precisely because he did not set out to write an exactly composed text, since he merely wanted to determine “more or less” the end he had in view in his prayers, this text is not easy to analyze. It is very difficult to find one thread running through it, a logical tie between the different paragraphs. Neither Father H. Le Floch nor J. Michel have attempted it. Even though I lack their competence and their knowledge of Poullart des Places, I am going to attempt such an analysis, or, more simply, I shall try to say what these pages seem to mean to the Spiritan I would like to be today.

1. Let us stress, first of all, the opening invocation of the Blessed Trinity: “Most Holy and most adorable Trinity, Father, Son and Holy Ghost, whom I adore by Your holy grace with all my heart, with all my soul and all my strength . . .” We shall find these same words at the beginning of the shorter prayer which Claude said several times a day. This recalling of the central mystery of Christianity and our duty of adoration is not without importance.

2. Claude then lists the people he wants to pray for, but what he asks for above all for himself, his relatives, his friends, enemies, benefactors, and in general all those for whom he has a duty to pray, are the graces of sanctification, of forgiveness of sin and of conversion.

⁶ Koren, *Writings*, p. 119. For the text of the prayer, we follow the one given by J. Michel, pp. 85-87. J. Koren reproduces, in addition to the manuscript hand-written by des Places (pp. 119-121), the text re-copied by M. Thomas, which differs from the former only in details of style which are usually improvements (pp. 258-262).

3. For this same intention he offers the Sacrifice of the Mass, but he adds a long list of graces he seeks for himself: "... faith, humility, chastity, purity of intention, rectitude in my judgments, great trust in You, a great distrust of myself, constancy in doing good, final perseverance, sorrow for my sins, love of sufferings and of the Cross, contempt for the world's opinion, regularity in the observance of my little rules, Your strength and power against lukewarmness, against human respect and generally against all your enemies." What a program of moral perfection! From this list, J. Michel rightly stresses the words: "... love of suffering and of the Cross, contempt for the world's opinion." We can see here a reminder of what Claude revealed in earlier writings about his dominant fault: vanity, or, more exactly, ambition and a desire for men's esteem. We must also bear in mind an indication given by M. Besnard, the biographer of Grignon de Montfort, in reference to Poullart des Places' life at Louis-le-Grand College (also called Clermont College): "After Claude's arrival in Paris, he entered Clermont College... By reading the life of Father Le Nobletz, a priest-missionary who died in the odor of sanctity in Brittany, he was greatly aided in despising the world and surmounting human respect".⁷

As well as the influence of Father Le Nobletz, we cannot forget the Jesuit spiritual writers whom Claude would certainly have read, especially Father Louis Lallemant, whose *Doctrine Spirituelle* Father Champion had published a few years earlier (in 1694).⁸

⁷ Koren, *Writings*, p. 281. The reference is to the biography of Michel Le Nobletz published in 1666 by Father Verjus, "one of the most irritating biographers of the XVIIIth century" says H. Bremond, *Histoire Littéraire du sentiment religieux*, Vol. 5, 1920, p. 82, note 2. In this volume of Bremond, we find many very precious details about the mystical renewal in Brittany in the XVIIth century. Claude des Places certainly was influenced in many ways by this current of spirituality which had transformed his native province. Cf. also the remarks of H. Le Floch, pp. 219 ff.

⁸ A simple glance at the work of Father Lallemant reveals an astonishing correspondence between the virtues enumerated by des Places and those which Father Lallemant considered the most necessary for perfection: cf. 2nd Principe, Sect. Chap. 2; 3^e Principe, Chap. 3-4.

4. At this point in his prayers, we can pick out an important passage: over and above the virtues, what Claude desired above all was to know God Himself, to Love Him always more and more, and to serve Him perfectly,—God as He has manifested Himself to us in the incarnation, in the life and death of Jesus Christ.

“Grant me the favor, O my God, to imprint in my heart by the indelible darts of Your grace, the death and passion of my Jesus, His holy life and holy incarnation. May I thereby always remember them and be affected by them as I should. Fill my heart and my mind with the greatness of Your judgments, and your gifts and of the promises I have made to You through Your holy grace . . .”

The experience of his past sins leads him to ask that he be stripped of all things which could turn his heart away from God. He writes:

“Grant me this other grace of being absolutely detached from all creatures and from myself, so that I am irrevocably attached to You alone. And with my heart and my mind filled only with You, may I live always in Your presence, as I should.”

It would be easy to draw a comparison here with the sometimes hard sayings of Father Libermann about absolute renouncement. For both of them, renouncement was not an end in itself,—not even when Claude dares ask to be laden “with opprobrium and sufferings.” He writes that this is

so that, “My divine Master,” I may “render myself worthy to obtain from Your infinite goodness, Your holy love, the love of the Blessed Virgin, and the grace of knowing and fulfilling Your holy will with perfect resignation! These are the three graces I implore more than all others. May I be ready to suffer death . . . rather than deliberately commit even one small venial sin . . .”

Thus, what Claude asks for above all else is the love of God, the love of the Virgin, and the perfect fulfillment of God’s will. Let us remember these few words. For us also, they are a whole life-project.

5. The last two paragraphs of the prayer center upon the Sacrifice of the Mass: by the Precious Blood which Jesus Christ “has deigned to shed” and which continues to be

offered, by all the holy communions and the prayers of the past and of the future, Claude asks to be heard. Here we find an aspect of the spirituality of Poullart des Places which his biographer, M. Thomas, treats at length.⁹ We shall come back to it again.

The prayer ends with a final recourse to the Virgin Mary: Claude asks her to offer his heart and the hearts of all other believers, along with the Blood of Jesus, to Him whom he begs to be for all “a God of mercy now and forever.”

b) «*Prayer upon entering or leaving my room*»

We find the same sentiments in the shorter prayer which des Places recited on his knees every time he entered or left his room. Here again he makes it clear that he wishes in this way to bring down “God’s blessing using expressions like these.” So it is not a question of a stereotyped formula. Still, it is worth reproducing here in its entirety:

“*Most holy Trinity, Father, Son and Holy Ghost, Whom I adore through Your holy grace with all my heart, all my soul and all my strength. I beg You to grant me faith, humility, chastity, the grace of not doing, saying thinking seeing hearing or desiring anything except what You want me to do and say. Grant me those graces, my God, together with Your most holy blessing. May my heart and my mind be filled with You alone. May I always walk in Your presence and pray ceaselessly to You, as I should.—My Jesus, be for us eternally a Jesus. My Jesus, may You be Jesus eternally for me und may You be forever in me, and I in You! I place my mind and my heart in Your hands through the most holy Virgin. In the name of My Jesus and Mary.*”¹⁰

Is there any need to point out the beauty of this prayer and the program of spiritual perfection it contains? The will to enter entirely and without reserve into God’s plan, to do

⁹ Koren, *Writings*, pp. 265-267.

¹⁰ Koren, *Writings*, p. 123. The final words, omitted in M. Thomas copy (*Ibid.*, p. 254), must be separated from the previous phrase as Father Le Floch (p. 239) and the English translation (Koren, p. 123) do. That is why we have put a period before the words: “In the name of my Jesus and Mary.”

only what pleases God: this is the attitude which the Gospel shows to be in Jesus Christ Himself, He Who wishes to do only the will of His Father, Who lives always in the presence of His Father. As for the invocations: "My Jesus, be for us eternally Jesus . . . Jesus for me", Father H. Koren suggests that we must refer to the etymology of the name Jesus which means: "God is my saviour."¹¹ This does not seem to me to be necessary. Love does not bother itself about etymology. A lover likes to repeat interminably his plea to the beloved to be what he is for him and to be so forever.

Better than any other commentary, the work of Poullart des Places which we are going to study next will enlighten us as to the attitude of mind which these lines reveal.

4 - Reflections upon the past

According to J. Michel, Claude Poullart des Places' fourth work dates from the year 1704.¹² More than a year had passed since the young theologian had established what would become the "Holy Ghost Seminary." The little group of "poor students" whom Claude had begun to help both materially and spiritually had become, on Pentecost, May 27, 1703, a real community consecrated "to the Holy Ghost, under the invocation of the Blessed Virgin conceived without sin." Claude-François, who was still only an aspirant to ecclesiastical status, was the founder and director, while continuing his own theological studies for the priesthood.¹³ It was an astonishing situation, one that would be almost unthinkable nowadays: the superior of what had all the appearances of a seminary had not yet received minor orders and was only twenty-four years old! J. Michel is fully justified in giving Chapter X of his biography of Claude Poullard des Places the title: "*The astounding daring of a tonsured cleric . . .*"

¹¹ Koren, *Writings*, p. 123, note.

¹² Michel, p. 161 and pp. 339-340. Father Le Floch (p. 300) places the date as "during the preparatory retreat for minor orders" which Claude received on June 6, 1705.

¹³ Michel, p. 139.

It was, therefore, about a year and a half after that decisive period of his life that Claude-François wrote the 4 pages *in folio* that the Congregation of the Holy Ghost has in its archives and which bear the title "Reflections on the Past."¹⁴ These pages are very moving and well worth an attentive reading, even if it is again true that they clearly were not meant for publication and are merely personal notes made during a retreat, perhaps with the intention of having them read by the retreat master.

The work falls naturally into two parts: the first recalls graces received in the past; the second describes the spiritual trials Poullart des Places was going through.

a) *Recalling graces received.*

The manuscript has at the top the letters: AMDGVqM, which are to be translated: *Ad Majorem Dei Gloriam Virginitatis Mariae*, For the greater glory of God and of the Virgin Mary.

At the very beginning, Claude-François accuses himself of negligence: "If I loved God and my salvation a little, I should feel sad because I have spent this past year as I have done..." There follows an accusation, a real indictment, which our young theologian—perhaps remembering his law studies—is ready to present against himself. However, before entering into detail about the crimes of which he accuses himself, and in order to emphasize their gravity, he wishes to recall to mind all the benefits he has received from God: "Is that what our Lord should have expected of my gratitude?"

Claude-François recalls the grace of conversion of which we have been able to find traces in his first writings. To hear him tell it, God has drawn him out of "criminal chains," "the clutches of Satan," He "did miracles" in his favor:

"To attract me, He closed his eyes to an enormous crime which brought my iniquities to a climax and which I had committed at the very moment when He pressed

¹⁴ The text is published by Koren in *Writings*, pp. 137-149. Michel also studied the manuscript and he reproduces it almost completely along with a commentary (*cf.* pp. 47, 49; 89-94). It is this latter text which ought to be followed, because it is more accurate.

me more than ever towards conversion. He not only did not seem to resent it, but on the contrary He made use of it to touch me. His excessive patience began to pierce my heart.”¹⁵

What was this “enormous crime?” J. Michel thinks he has identified it: “At the beginning of October 1697, Claude was eighteen and a half years old. He left home and started for Nantes, travelling, like the students of his rank, on horseback with his sword at his side. During a stop, perhaps at the gates of the city, he met Le Huédez who was transporting travellers and merchandize from Croisic to Rennes. A fight broke out. The carriage-driver was wounded by a sword-thrust . . .”¹⁶

For many, the incident would not have seemed important; for Claude, it was an “enormous crime,” and seven years later he still talks of it with real horror. But, if he still recalls it, it is above all so that he may wonder at the goodness of God who made use even of this fault to bring him entirely to Him: “God alone and my heart must never forget the most wonderful effect of His mercy toward me.”

The manuscript goes on in this tone of gratitude for the innumerable benefits received from God. Soon, however, Claude comes to a description of the interior state in which he lived happily for eighteen months: a period of sensible consolation, when he felt he was almost continually in the presence of God and drawn towards a life of poverty and sacrifice in response to God’s love. Take these few lines:

“I desired to love Him alone, and out of love of Him I would have renounced the most legitimate attachments of this life. I wanted to be despoiled some day of everything, living only on alms after giving everything away. Of all temporal things I wanted to keep health alone, and I wanted to offer the latter in a complete sacrifice to God in the work of the missions. I would have felt most happy if, after enkindling the fire of God’s love in the hearts of all men, I could have shed the very last drop of my blood for Him

¹⁵ Michel, pp. 47 and 49; Koren, *Writings*, p. 131.

¹⁶ Michel, p. 48.

whose mercies were almost always present before my mind."¹⁷

Drawn to a life of poverty, to missionary work, to total sacrifice in the service of preaching the love of God,—these are some points we have already discovered in Poullart des Places and which he will instill as the spirit of the work he founded and which comes down to us today.

Then we find an abundance of details about the theologian's spiritual life during those privileged eighteen months: strong desire to converse with God, intense devotion to the Blessed Sacrament, continual prayer, love of recollection and solitude, lively awareness of past faults, feelings of humility, devotion and contrition leading even to the gift of tears, etc. . . . Biographers of Poullart des Places have recognized in these pages a remarkable description of that stage in spiritual life about which Father Libermann will speak at length in a treatise entitled "Affective Prayer";¹⁸ the comparison between the two works is made much easier by J. Michel's presentation in two parallel columns.¹⁹ Still, there is a big difference between the two descriptions: Claude-François speaks of this period in his past life not only as a time of intense spiritual fervor but also as an ideal state from which he had fallen through his own fault; Father Libermann, more experienced in direction of souls, knows that this is only a stage which is still quite imperfect and not without danger: "It is the childhood of the interior life; it needs to be guided."²⁰

Nevertheless, as I read the burning words of Poullart des Places and compare them with the description which his biographer, M. Thomas, gives of this period of his life, it seems to me that certain fundamental traits of Spiritan spirituality are already clearly to be found there. I shall simply list them:

1. Very lively awareness of the love and goodness of God, of his mercy which our sins could never exhaust.

¹⁷ Michel, pp. 89-90; Koren, *Writings*, pp. 133-135.

¹⁸ *Ecrits Spirituels du Vénérable Libermann*, Paris, 1891, pp. 149-209. The comparison with the work of Poullart des Places was already done by Koren, *Writings*, p. 128.

¹⁹ Michel, pp. 89-94.

²⁰ *Ecrits Spirituels*, p. 202.

2. A concept of sin which allows no indulgence of its malice and ingratitude, the only obstacle in the way of God's love being victorious. A propos of this, let me quote a short prayer of Poullart des Places which M. Thomas has preserved for us:

“But, alas my God, a hundred million years hence, in the midst of your glory, it will be true to say, ‘that man, whom You love and on whom You have poured out Your graces and blessings, formerly when he lived on earth, that man sinned against You’.”²¹

3. Desire to correspond with God's love by a total giving which would bind him to a whole lifetime of service especially “in the works of the missions” and even in martyrdom which, according to M. Thomas, Claude-François wished to find among the people “to whose salvation he hoped to consecrate himself.”²² Even then, he says that he feels real affection for those who suffer, . . . ardent zeal to bring sinners back to God. “Nothing . . . would have seemed beneath him if it could serve as a means of winning them.” His biographer adds that “At that time already he had a special love for the *most obscure* and *most neglected* works.”²³ Thus he worked to help Savoyard children who had come from their far-away home to work as chimney-sweeps. Thus too he had begun to give his money, his time and his spiritual support to “poor students,”—this was what led him to become the founder of the Seminary and the Congregation.

4. Importance of mortification, or rather what Father Libermann would call self-denial, renouncement; i.e. the deliberate refusal to follow “the world and its ways . . . its esteem . . . its customs” and the will to follow only “Jesus Christ crucified.”²⁴

²¹ Koren, *Writings*, p. 255, sect. 2.

²² Koren, *Writings*, p. 255, sect. 2. The whole context shows that Poullart des Places is thinking here of far-off missions where he hopes to find martyrdom at the hands of those whom M. Thomas calls “the savages.”

²³ *Mémoire de M. Thomas*, in Koren, *Writings*, p. 267, sect. 4. The underlining is ours.

²⁴ Michel, p. 92, sects. 1-2; Koren, *Writings*, p. 137, sect. 1.

5. Vital importance of prayer, of the Eucharist, of thinking of God as often as possible. We have already seen how, in the "Fragments", Claude-François set himself precise rules for living as continually as possible in God's presence, to the point of never wanting to enter or leave his room without an explicit act of recourse to the thought of God. The work which we are examining here only confirms us in this impression: for him, it is not possible to love God truly without frequently living in awareness of His presence and His love.

b) *Time of Spiritual Testing.*

In the second part of his writing, Claude Poullart compares his past fervor with what he calls "the pitiful states of lukewarmness I am in."²⁵ In very severe terms he lists all the ways in which this "lukewarmness" manifests itself: no more spontaneous attention to God's presence, no more attraction to prayer or Eucharistic communion, no more courage for mortification nor for custody of the senses, no more zeal for the spiritual good or the conversion of others, etc. . . . Instead of seeking only God's esteem, Claude finds he is "eager to be considered a virtuous man";²⁶ he notices that he is subject to moodiness, to vanity, that he is irregular in keeping his rule: "To sum up, I must confess before God that at the present moment I am merely a man who is reputed to be still alive, but who is certainly dead, at least when I compare the present with the past. Alas! I am now only a mask of devotion, as it were, and the shadow of what I once was."²⁷

A "mask of devotion!" That expression, severe as he intends it to be, is an admission: Poullart des Places is aware that he has not changed in the sight of those who observe his life; and, in fact, neither M. Thomas nor M. Besnard, his first biographers, makes mention of any diminution of fervor in his life. M. Thomas recognizes that he dropped a certain number of mortifications; but "this was not due to any dimin-

²⁵ Koren, *Writings*, p. 139, sect. 3.

²⁶ Koren, *Writings*, p. 141. To be corrected in terms of Michel, p. 165.

²⁷ Koren, *Writings*, p. 142; Michel, p. 167.

ution of fervor, but because his director explicitly commanded it and those in whom he confided advised it.”²⁸

Therefore, it is a case of an interior trial, similar to those God reserves for all those whom He wants to lead to a higher sanctity: privation of sensible devotion and awareness of God’s presence, the painful experience of the “old man” continuing to be active. I have no intention of repeating here what all the great spiritual authors have taught about the necessity and the characteristics of these trials. J. Michel has quoted to good effect several texts of St. Bernard, Father Libermann, St. John of the Cross and St. Teresa.²⁹

However, in the writing of Poullart des Places, short though it be, we seem to be able to discern signs of the spiritual progress he made during that period of dryness. First of all, we must note a deepening humility, a greater distrust of self: “The sad experience I have of my past conduct gives me powerful reasons for distrusting my own strength,” he wrote.³⁰ He recognizes as a great gift from God the fact that, during this period of trial: 1) he has not been satisfied with himself even for a moment; 2) he has always seen interiorly that he was well below what others thought or said of him; 3) his scruples were an occasion for him to go to confession more often and to become more afraid of sin.³¹

Precisely because he is aware of having had, ever since the time of his first writings, a tendency towards ambition and vanity, he wonders whether his present state is not the consequence of having lacked humility and having yielded to presumption in undertaking the work taking “responsibility for those poor students whom Providence is kindly taking care of.”³² Let us listen to him:

“... the source of my laxness, or to speak more honestly as I should, of my falling off and disorder, is the fact that I left solitude too soon. I have poured myself out, as it were, on external things, undertaking this work for poor students and striving to keep it going. I did not have a sufficiently

²⁸ *Mémoire de M. Thomas*, in Koren, *Writings*, p. 271, sect. 3.

²⁹ Michel, pp. 161-164.

³⁰ Koren, *Writings*, p. 145, sect. 1.

³¹ Koren, *Writings*, p. 145, sect. 3.

³² Koren, *Writings*, p. 145, sect. 2; Michel, p. 167.

*strong foundation in virtue for such an undertaking. I had not yet acquired enough humility to put myself safely at the head of such a work. Ten years of retreat to reflect only on myself, after a life such as I have led, would not have been too long for a man like me.”*³³

It is true, Claué recognizes, that in the first days of the work for poor students he had “not yet completely lost my fervor. But I undertook this task when the whole thing was more obscure and buried, as it were, under the most lowly dust.”³⁴ It was the unexpected success of the work that was at the origin of what he considered a culpable loss of fervor.

It is true also that he undertook nothing without his director’s permission, but could he be quite sure that he had not had secret and unavowed ambitions from the very beginning?³⁵ Claude-François concludes with this very moving cry:

*“These reflections fill me with sorrow. I left the world in order to seek God, renounce vanity and save my soul. Is it possible that I merely changed the object of my ambition and that I preserved that ambition all the while in my heart? If so, of what use was it to undertake that work?”*³⁶

In the midst of this apparent disarray, everything that Poullart des Places writes seems to me to manifest a fundamental attitude, the normal effect of spiritual trials borne with generosity. In spite of the seeming abandonment of God, in spite of the loss of awareness of His presence, in spite of doubts about his own sincerity and renewed experience of his own misery, the faith of Claude-François was never stronger: faith in God’s infinite mercy, in His tenderness and in His pardon always to be relied upon. This attitude shows itself in the very way he affirms his unworthiness. If he has made a retreat and been able to discover his misery, this is another grace coming from God and a proof of His faithfulness: “All this conduct on God’s part, I say, makes me hope

³³ Koren, *Writings*, p. 147; Michel, pp. 167-168.

³⁴ *Ibid.*

³⁵ Koren, *Writings*, pp. 147-149.

³⁶ Koren, *Writings*, p. 149.

that heaven will not always be like an iron vault above my head if I sincerely bewail my sins and seek again to enter into the Lord's grace."³⁷ Also, there is nothing in this work (in spite of what J. Michel may say),³⁸ which would permit us to think that he thought seriously of giving up the work he had undertaken. We know from the word of eye-witnesses of his life that he remained faithful to it to the end. Could there be a greater proof of his faith?

To tell the truth, the very vehemence with which Claude-François accuses himself, the sorrow he feels for his infidelity, are in reality irrefutable signs of his love for God, whom he refers to as: "... Him without whom, whatever I do, I cannot live in peace."³⁹ It makes one think of the Spouse of the Canticle who seeks her Well-beloved anxiously, and who is "sick with love" (Cant. 5: 8). But perhaps the best expression of the spiritual attitude of Poullart des Places at this time in his life is given to us by M. Besnard in his description of the last illness and final moments in the young founder's life:

"His very exhaustion seemed to give him new strength to repeat over and over again with the holy king David: Quam dilecta tabernacula tua, Domine virtutum, concupiscit et deficit anima mea in atria Domini. How lovely are thy tabernacles, O Lord of Hosts! My soul longeth and fainteth for the courts of the Lord." (Ps. 82: 2-3)⁴⁰

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(to be continued)

³⁷ Koren, *Writings*, p. 145; Michel, p. 167.

³⁸ p. 167.

³⁹ Koren, *Writings*, pp. 145-147; Michel, p. 167.

⁴⁰ *Mémoire de M. Besnard* in Koren, *Writings*, p. 287; cf. Michel, p. 241.