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Fragments of a Personal Regulation

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3.

**FRAGMENTS OF A PERSONAL
REGULATION**

INTRODUCTION

The second of Poullart des Places's writings ends with the resolution to follow the decision of a spiritual director. This director, whose name we do not know, must have given Claude Francis a clearcut decision, since in October 1701 we find him at the College Louis le Grand in Paris following the courses in theology given by the Jesuits and preparing for the priesthood. His choice of Louis le Grand is very significant. By deciding to study under the Jesuits rather than at the Sorbonne he gave up any idea of a university degree and with it all hope of a distinguished ecclesiastical career. Claude Poullart des Places had already begun his decisive fight against vanity, ambition and the desire for human glory. His biographer, who was also one of his first disciples, gives us many details concerning the life of prayer, the penances and the acts of charity that he forced himself to undertake (cf *Koren*, pp. 252 ff).

As regards his prayer we have a document written by the hand of Claude himself. Unfortunately it is far from complete; it consists of four pages obviously written at the flow of the pen with erasures and corrections all in his own hand. In fact it amounts to a personal regulation, numbered point by point, of which only a part of number 12 as well as numbers 13 to 16 remain. In the margin of the document someone has added a summary of the contents; these notes will not be included in the text. They may have been written by Father Thomas, who in his memoir on Claude Poullart des Places gives a slightly different version of the two prayers to the Blessed Trinity from that contained in Claude's document. Here the original manuscript will be followed faithfully.

FRAGMENTS OF A PERSONAL REGULATION¹

... and the *Sancta Maria* etc.² to ask for the guidance of the Holy Spirit and the protection of the Blessed Virgin. However for all these prayers I will not take more time than a quarter of an hour.

13. My morning prayer will consist of: a *Veni Sancte* etc., my short prayer of 'My God, I take the liberty etc.', three Our Father's and three Hail Mary's, the first in honour of the most holy Trinity, the second in honour of the Blessed Virgin prescribed by the 'little habit',³ the third in honour of my guardian angel asking him to assist me continually with his advice and to obtain for me a happy death. . . . I will add a *De Profundis* for the repose of the souls in purgatory, and the *Sancta Maria* etc. so as to put myself in a very special way under the protection of the Blessed Virgin, whose privileged child I used to be, having been dedicated to her by my parents. In her honour they dressed me in white for the first seven years of

¹ This title does not appear in the manuscript. As we have it the manuscript begins with the last words of what should be no. 12. The page is numbered III. Moreover two notes have been added: (i) in the left hand margin, 'All this is written in the hand of M. des Places'; (ii) at the top in front of the figure III, 'while he was still in college'.

² Here the reference is to a prayer used in the Marian sodalities which existed in all Jesuit colleges. The following is the full text as published in the *Manual* of the sodality used at La Flèche in 1610, p. 627: 'Holy Mary, Virgin and Mother of God, I choose you today as my mistress, my patroness and my advocate. I have decided and I now promise never to forsake you, never to do or say anything to your detriment, never to let anyone dependent on me do anything which dishonours you. I ask you therefore to accept me as your servant for evermore. Help me in all my actions and do not abandon me at the hour of my death. Amen'.

³ This expression would seem to refer to the scapular of our Lady of Mount Carmel in its shorter form, very much in vogue in Poullart des Places's time. The formula of imposition begins, 'Receive this *habit*. . .'.

my life.⁴ As to the intentions I want to pray for, I shall express them in the following requests which I shall make in much the same way each morning and evening:

'Most holy and adorable Trinity, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, whom I adore through your holy grace with all my heart, with all my soul, with all my strength, allow me to offer you most humbly my poor prayers, for your greater honour and glory, my sanctification, the remission of my sins, the conversion of my father, my mother, my cousin,⁵ all my relatives, friends, enemies, benefactors, and in general for all, alive or dead, for whom I am bound to pray. Allow me, O my God, to offer you the holy sacrifice of the Mass for this same intention and in order that it may please you to grant me faith, humility, chastity, purity of intention, rectitude in my judgements, great trust in you, great distrust of myself, constancy in doing good, final perseverance, pardon for my sins, love of suffering and of the cross, contempt of the world's opinion, regularity in the observance of my little rules, your strength and power against all your enemies. Grant me also, O my God, the favour of imprinting in my heart through the indelible mark of your grace the death and passion of my Jesus, his sacred life and holy Incarnation, so that I always bear them in mind and remain responsive to them. Fill my mind and heart with the importance of your judgements, of your gifts and of the promises I have made to you through your holy grace. May I never forget them but ask to die a thousand deaths rather than be allowed to be unfaithful to you. May the moments I have squandered in my past life be always present to my mind, together with a horror of my past sins (even though I ought to die of sorrow because of them, provided this is not contrary to your holy will). May I henceforth, aided by your holy grace, make better use of the time still left to me. It only remains for me to ask you, my God, to deprive me of all things earthly and

⁴ This particular detail is also mentioned by Father Thomas (cf *Koren*, p. 228).

⁵ From 1690 Anne Marie Lamisse de Hingueul, a cousin of Claude's on his father's side, lived in Rennes with his parents; from then on she was accepted as one of the family (cf *Michel*, pp 19, 144, 184).

perishable. Grant me, therefore, just this one grace by detaching me entirely from all creatures and from myself so as to attach me forever to yourself alone. My heart and my mind filled only with you, may I live always in your presence, as I should. O my God, force me to ask you, from the very bottom of my heart, to give me this grace and also to overwhelm me with shame and suffering. In this way, divine Master, I want to make 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 which I implore more than all others. May I be ready to suffer death on the gallows or the wheel⁶ rather than commit even the smallest deliberate venial sin. I beg you, my God, to humble me in every other way you wish since, as long as I do not offend you, I desire nothing more and I ask you that I may never desire anything more. I ask you, my God and my all, for all these graces not only through the holy sacrifice of the Mass, which I hope to hear by your grace, and through the poor prayers I address to you, but also through the precious blood which my loving Saviour Jesus Christ deigned to shed for me on the tree of the cross. I ask them through all the holy sacrifices that have been offered, are now being offered or will be offered, especially those during which the body of my Jesus is immolated. I ask these graces of you by all the holy Communion that have been received in the past, are being received today or will be received until the end of the world, and by all the holy prayers which have been addressed to you, are being addressed to you today or will be addressed to you. I beg you therefore, my God, to allow me to join my intention to that of all those holy persons to whom I ask you to be, as you are to me, a God of mercy now and for all eternity, through the precious blood which my Lord Jesus Christ, my dear and only love by your holy grace, has deigned to pour out for us. I ask the Blessed Virgin to offer it to you together with our hearts, so that it become efficacious for us. Amen'.

⁶ This refers to the medieval instrument of torture which revolved while the victim was tied to it; hence the expression, 'to be broken on the wheel'.

14. As regards evening prayer, after a quarter of an hour's examination of conscience in my room I will recite the litany of the Blessed Virgin, three Our Father's, three Hail Mary's and the Creed. For those prayers I will allot half an hour. Then in front of the Blessed Sacrament I will recite the litany of the most holy name of Jesus, the *De Profundis*, the *Sancta Maria* etc. and the prayer written above. For these prayers I will allow another half-hour.

15. I will never enter or leave my room (unless I have urgent matters to see to) without going down on my knees and begging God's blessing in some such words as the following: ' Most holy Trinity, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, 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 saying, thinking, seeing, hearing or desiring anything except what you want me to do and say. Grant me all these graces, my God, together with your most holy blessing. May my mind and heart 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, be for me eternally a Jesus; be eternally in me and I in you! I place my mind and heart in your hands through the most holy Virgin. In the name of my Jesus and of Mary'.⁷

16. In the morning before going to the cases of conscience⁸ I shall pay my respects to the Blessed Sacrament as I go by. I shall do the same between the cases and the theology class, as well as after dinner and supper. My prayer will

⁷ We have retained two traits proper to the manuscript: five dots before the beginning of the prayer and three small crosses before the words, My Jesus etc. The invocation, 'My Jesus be for us . . . and I in you' is not unknown in spiritual writings anterior to Claude's time. To give just one example, St Philip Neri was fond of repeating *Jesu sis mihi Jesus* (Jesus be for me a Jesus) (cf L. Bonnelle and L. Bordet, *Saint Philippe Neri et la société romaine de son temps*, Paris 1928, p. 545).

⁸ Here the reference is to moral theology classes which took the form of solving cases of conscience. In the margin we read: 'He visited the Blessed Sacrament at least four times a day, using the break between the cases and dogmatic theology for one of these'.

consist of one *Ave salus mundi Verbum* etc., one *Adoremus*, one *Corpus et Sanguis* etc., and a prayer similar to the one given above to ask for Jesus' blessing.⁹

⁹ These four prayers chosen for his visits to the Blessed Sacrament between classes and after meals must have been short. It is not easy to identify them:

(i) the first may possibly be the one that U. Chevalier lists as a prayer for the elevation of the Host contained in the *Hours of Angers*, which opens with the words, *Ave, Salus mundi, Verbum* (Hail, thou Word, Salvation of the world) (*Repertorium Hymnologicum*, no. 35720).

(ii) no doubt the second is the one contained in the Manual of the Marian Congregations (p. 274) already quoted: *Adoramus te, Domine Jesu Christe, et benedicimus tibi, quia per crucem tuam redemisti mundum* (We adore you, Lord Jesus Christ, and we praise you because by your holy cross you have redeemed the world) – a prayer still used in many places during the Stations of the Cross.

(iii) the third must surely be the formula used by the priest at holy Communion, *Corpus et sanguis Domini nostri Jesu Christi custodiant me in vitam aeternam* (May the body and blood of our Lord Jesus Christ preserve me for eternal life).

(iv) the fourth is the last part of the prayer to the Trinity given above under no. 15, beginning with the three crosses.