

PRINCIPAL SOURCES

I The Writings of Poullart des Places

The Archives of the Congregation of the Holy Spirit at Chevilly-la-Rue, Paris, contain several documents written by Claude Poullart des Places:

1) Reflections on the truths of religion, written by a soul who is thinking of conversion.

A manuscript of 34 pages in quarto, written at Rennes in 1701, probably in the summer. At that time, Claude Poullart was still “a man of the world”.

2) The Choice of a state of life.

A manuscript of 19 pages, following on from the “Reflections” and written during the same retreat.

3) Fragments of resolutions made for a personal rule.

Four pages from a rule drawn up at Louis-le-Grand in 1702. The original manuscript was much longer but only no. 12 and nos. 13-16 have survived.

4) Reflections on the past.

Four pages in-folio set in two columns. A note by an unknown hand, inserted after the title, says that these Reflections were written “in 1705, perhaps in the month of August”. Fr. Le Floch reckons they were written “during the retreat leading up to the reception of minor orders” which he received on June 6th, 1705.

5) General and particular rules

A manuscript of 64 pages, written in quarto. The cardboard cover has a title, written in an unknown hand, which reads; “*Rules for the Community of the Holy Spirit*”. It also bears the monogram of Poullart des Places.

The first chapters were written at the very start of the Community, the later ones after the transfer to rue Neuve-Saint-Etienne. A few marginal notes have been added, in all but two cases, written in the hand of M. Bouïc. On the last page, there is a note written by Fr. Thomas which says: “*All these Rules were drawn up by the late Fr. Desplaces, written in his hand and practised by himself and his students*”.

All these writings of Poullart des Places are written in his own hand. In general, the handwriting is cursive throughout. Quotations in this present work are taken from the manuscripts but the references given are to Fr. Henry Koren’s 1959 edition of the writings.

II Biographies

1) The Manuscript of Pierre Thomas

Pierre Thomas, who was received into the Community of the Holy Spirit in March, 1704, wrote a biography of Claude Poullart des Places. It is in the form of a manuscript of 24 pages in quarto. The version that has come down to us and is kept in the Spiritan General Archives is very incomplete; it finishes, effectively, in the year 1702. It says very little about the work for ‘poor scholars’ and solely in the passages where he talks of the virtues of his founder. The only exact date that it gives is that of the birth of Claude Poullart. But despite its

lacunae, this is a document of great value to us. It was published by Fr. Henry Koren after Claude Poullart's "*Spiritual Writings*".

2) Charles Besnard: "*La vie de Messire Louis-Marie Grignon de Montfort, Prêtre Missionnaire Apostolique*."

In the fifth volume of this manuscript, which is kept in the Archives of the Daughters of Wisdom in Rome, Fr. Charles Besnard, the third successor of Saint Louis-Marie Grignon de Montfort, gives a summary of the life of Poullart des Places (pp. 101-107) which fills in some of the gaps in the work of Thomas - the affair of the robe, his relations with Louis Grignon, the preparations for his foundation, his sickness and death. A comparison of the two texts shows that Charles Besnard had access to a more complete version of the work of Pierre Thomas than the one that is in the Spiritan General Archives.

3) Joseph Picot de Clorivière: "*Le Vie de M. Louis-Marie Grignon de Montfort, Missionnaire Apostolique, Instituteur des Missionnaires du Saint-Esprit et des Filles de la Sagesse* ». Paris, Rennes and Saint-Malo, 1785.

Overall, this work depends greatly on the manuscript of Charles Besnard. This is particularly true of the pages (312-319) where he gives a résumé of the life of Claude Poullart des Places. But these same pages prove that the author knew the text of Thomas from another source other than that of Besnard. Hence the interest of the precisions that he gives which are not found either in Besnard's work or in the text of Thomas as it has come down to us: "*He consecrated himself ... by a vow to the practice of poverty ...*"

Fr. de Clorivière saw the letter of Jean-Baptiste Blain concerning Grignon de Montfort. The author of this letter, who was older than Poullart des Places, says that he did not really know Louis Grignon apart from in the class of rhetoric because "*he was very reserved and had almost no relations with the other students*". Fr. de Clorivière concludes that Claude Poullart was in philosophy when he knew the young Grignon.

4) Henri Le Floch C.S.Sp. : « *Claude-François Poullart des Places, fondateur du Séminaire et de la Congrégation du Saint-Esprit* ». Paris, 1906. XXIII – 570 pages.

This book, which was praised by the French Academy, played a great part in reviving an appreciation of the importance and role of Poullart des Places which had become largely forgotten. The author was well aware of the difficulty of writing an historical study where there was such a paucity of surviving documents from the period under consideration. He warned his readers in the preface: "*This attempted restoration will be faced with the lack of direct sources of information and, quite often, will fall back on conjecture and probabilities by looking at the effect Claude Poullart had on other people and events*". The author was sometimes led into mistakes by the incorrect deductions of Fr. de Clorivière: for example, Fr. Le Floch has Claude Poullart beginning his 6th year of school at the age of seven and rhetoric at the age of 11.

The work devotes much space to the background history of the period and contains some interesting documents on the Congregation of the Holy Spirit.