

"L'IMMENSE SIMPLICITE"

A Textual Analysis of Christian Simplicity as Revealed in the Early
Documents of the Sisters of the Presentation of Mary

by

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for Sister Saint Claudia, P. M.

Blessed are the singlehearted,
for they shall see God.

PREFACE

This paper has been written after a course in Religious Life Celibacy given by Keith J. Egan, O. Carm., whose suggestion that the principle of simplicity underlies the desire for commitment in religious life triggered personal interest, particularly in view of the assertion that a distinctive witness to Christian simplicity is inherent in the spiritual tradition of the Sisters of the Presentation of Mary of Bourg St. Andéol, Ardèche, France--a congregation to which I belong. This tradition has consistently alleged the extraordinary quality of Christian simplicity that characterized both the Foundress, Anne-Marie Rivier and the nascent community, established during the French Revolution in southern France. An indication of the scope of this claim can be seen in the commentary quoted in the Appendix, H: The Simplicity of Rivier.

The purpose of this essay, therefore, is to discover and to reflect upon the meaning of this simplicity through an investigation of hitherto unstudied primary sources, relevant to the foundation of the Sisters of the Presentation of Mary. However, my ultimate goal in undertaking such an inquiry is hardly intended to leave the reader "looking back" into history.

In the final analysis, what is hopefully evoked, especially for the present members of the Presentation of Mary, is a desire to move freely into the future. It is no longer enough for us to do as the men and women of the past did. And it is hardly sufficient to thrust oneself into the inadequate contemporary movements to simplify the secular. The

call to Christian simplicity today is perhaps more than ever a call to bless the plenitude of life through the unifying power of the Resurrection. We need to become whole not by eliminating the multiple but by transcending the limitations of the finite.

The present study is not a complete investigation into this question of Christian simplicity. Purposefully limited in its scope, I believe this essay only begins the kind of theological reflection on simplicity that is necessary for our time. I am, however, grateful to have begun the task and indebted to all who have assisted me.

I first wish to acknowledge Rev. Keith J. Egan, O. Carm., who directed the writing of this paper. His guidance and encouragement, particularly in view of the textual problems uncovered in handling the primary sources was most helpful. Moreover, I sincerely appreciate his unfailing availability and interest when both time and distance were a handicap in directing this study.

I am also indebted to Drs. Dennis Doherty and Tad Guzie, S. J., the second and third readers of this paper. I specifically thank Dr. Doherty whose evaluation and concern for precision enabled me to clarify and strengthen my hypothesis.

Acknowledgements are also due to those major superiors of the Sisters of the Presentation of Mary, both at Castelgandolfo in Rome and at Bourg St. Andéol in France, who made the requested sources available to me despite the difficulties of recovering lost texts and unidentified manuscripts. I also wish to thank Sister Margaret Aubin, P. M., who so graciously assisted in preparing and sending the manuscripts to me from Rome.

It is a pleasure for me to acknowledge the provincial superiors of the Presentation of Mary, Province of Manchester, who have encouraged me in this endeavor and who have lightened the task in so many ways. In this respect, I am particularly grateful to Sister Doris Benoit, P. M., not only for the opportunity to further my education but especially for the care and interest given to me during the course of my studies.

To all the members of the Rivier College Community who have facilitated this task in any way, I sincerely express my gratitude. In a special manner, I thank Sister Lucille Thibodeau, P. M., who typed this thesis at a time when such an enterprise was no slight inconvenience.

It seems especially fitting that the final word of appreciation be addressed to Sister Marie-de-la-Trinité, P. M. During the years when I studied under her tutelage in the community novitiate, her insight into the spirit of Anne-Marie Rivier was excelled only by her love for the authentic tradition of the Presentation. Her constant concern to transmit this spirit to the young members of the community impressed a lasting ideal on my own life: "Soyez toutes les Fondatrices en miniatures." Without the vision and hope for the future of the Presentation of Mary which she so spontaneously shared, I am convinced that this paper would never have been written.

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CHAPTER I

A CRITICAL INTRODUCTION

Statement of the Problem, Evaluation of Bibliographic Material, and Validation of Primary Sources

What can we gain by sailing to the moon
if we are not able to cross the abyss
that separates us from ourselves?

Thomas Merton¹

In every age characterized by increasing complexity, man's spirit, when threatened by a sense of meaninglessness and chaotic diversity, has struggled either to intensify or to rediscover the experience of wholeness. Such seems to be one of the deepest concerns for contemporary man who endeavors to maintain some interior harmony amidst the cultural havoc of a pluralistic world in the process of creating adequate conceptual systems.² Overwhelmed by the many, man hungers for the one.

¹ Thomas Merton, The Wisdom of the Desert (New York: New Directions Corporation, 1960), p. 11.

² No cures are in the offing. Opportunity, once an ideal, has become a kind of madness as overstimulation and overchoice corrupt the human psyche. Alvin Toffler labels the contemporary experience "future shock." Toffler's grim appraisal is without counter-attack: modern man is undeniably fraught with anguish and unable to control the "death of permanence," the increasing awareness of relativity or the final crisis of inalienable solitude. Cf. Alvin Toffler, Future Shock (New York: Random House, Inc., 1970). Indirectly, contemporary literature, film and art persistently proclaim this negative experience of man, his preoccupation with finiteness, his awareness of meaninglessness and his feeling of utter alienation. What authors and critics tell us is that now, when man seems to have come of age, when he has truly taken life

This constant struggle for unity amidst and from the richness of diversity perhaps best explains the dynamic movement toward interior wholeness that lies at the very core of what it means to be human.

Francis Florand, in his text, Stages of Simplicity, further suggests that

We can even ask if this deep-rooted tendency to unity is not what is most human in man. He grows stronger as it progresses; he lessens when it declines. Recent studies in psychopathology have proved this fact, thus confirming an idea dear to mystics, namely, a man is perfect to the extent that he is one, and proves himself capable of creating or reconstituting unity in himself.³

Inherent in the human experience then is the tendency to become one from within, to become simple. Indeed, only when such integration prevails does man tranquilly cherish the multiple.

To be simple, then, in the finest sense of the word, necessitates the tremendous energy inherent in the process of synthesizing. What could lead to dissipation and depersonalization is wholly transformed through this vital power and discipline of interior unification.

It has always been so. The first lines of Genesis, one of man's oldest stories, celebrate the remembering of the moment when God created order out of chaos, light out of darkness and peace in the

into his own hands, his actual experience of freedom leads him, not to the expected exaltation, but rather into an abyss of isolation. Tragically, man has lost his interior peace, his fundamental integrity, his faith in the pursuit of an ultimate goal, and his hope in the possibility of absolute unity. The diary of Dag Hammarskjold reveals precisely this anguish, cf. Markings (London: Faber and Faber, 1964). Langdon Gilkey examines this problem at length in his text, Naming the Whirlwind: The Renewal of God-Language (New York: The Bobbs-Merrill Company, 1969), where he pinpoints the contemporary experience in relation to the loss or the absence of God through a thoroughly documented analysis of the major Death of God theologians.

³Francis Florand, Stages of Simplicity (St. Louis: Herder Book Company, 1967), pp. 25-26.

heart of man.⁴ The significance of simplicity is inherent in the biblical world-view, and in Ecclesiastes, the faith assertion is clearly and concisely formulated: "This, however, you must know: I find that God made man simple; man's complex problems are of his own devising" (7:30). In referring to the nature of simplicity as understood by the Hebrew, Ceslas Spicq, the biblical scholar, believes that simplicity is the precise attitude necessary for man to receive the word of God.⁵

Although the search for simplicity surpasses the limits of any one religious tradition, utter simplicity finally requires the vision of man and the experience of God rooted in the Christian affirmation. In Christ and through Christ all things are, in fact, restored to the Father, the light truly overcomes the darkness, and peace, shalom, transforms the reality of human existence.

One of the most distinctive characteristics marking the Christian way of life, then, ought to be simplicity. Certainly, a concern for simplicity is evident in the primitive Christian communities striving to establish a new primacy of values in a world exposed to the brutal fact of short-lived pleasure and human finitude. The plight of the first solitary men exemplifies this struggle: they fled from the disrupting influences of their society to recover, in the desert, an

⁴Unless otherwise indicated, the biblical references used throughout this study are taken from the English translation of The Jerusalem Bible (Garden City, New York: Doubleday and Company, 1966).

⁵Ceslas Spicq, "La vertu de simplicité dans l'Ancien et le Nouveau Testament," Revue des Sciences Philosophiques et Théologiques, XXII (1933), 15-26.

awareness of personal integrity and peace.⁶

Contrary to the popular notion of the desert ascetic as a fanatical escapist, then, the hermit emerges as today's new hero. He can be singled out from the past as a person of uncompromising strength, a man who insisted upon essential wholeness, refusing to fit into pre-designed cultural molds. He stands apart, willing to take all the means necessary to achieve authentic self-discovery, even if it means the harrowing experience of desert solitude. This is what Thomas Merton affirms:

The simple men who lived their lives out to a good old age among the rocks and the sands only did so because they had come into the desert to be themselves, their ordinary selves, and to forget a world that divided them from themselves. There can be no other valid reason for seeking solitude or for leaving the world.⁷

This simplicity was also the concern of men such as Benedict, who built a city of monks when Rome and its pseudo-magnificence crumbled, leaving men to flounder in another broken world. And again, amidst a later cultural upheaval, the same pattern was followed by Bernard and the monks of Clairvaux who renewed the quest for simplicity and abandoned the sacral-secular struggle of feudal power for the austerity of the Cistercian life-style.

These historical patterns are evidence enough that the dynamic principle of synthesizing which gives direction, purpose and power is an ideal long loved by man and that periods of reform seem to be

⁶In view of the subsequent dichotomy established between these two world-views, Christian and pagan, it becomes easier for the twentieth-century observer, in retrospect, to sympathize with apparently exaggerated movements within the first few centuries of the church to "withdraw from the world," since the only world known was a deadly threat to the hope of self-transcendence.

⁷Merton, pp. 22-23.

characterized by the urge to rediscover essentials, thus, discovering anew, the meaning of existence through simplicity. Furthermore, when this experience is rooted in the ultimate unification of human energy in view of man's hope of self-transcendence, theological reflection upon the meaning and significance of such simplicity then becomes relevant.

The French Revolution marks a particularly traumatic period of such reform, an undeniable turning point in the history of France and of the western world. In fact, the resultant breakdown was not in the least limited to the existing social order but rather the inevitable outcome when value systems inadequately correspond to reality. Inherent in the violent overthrow of monarchical power and in the reforms enacted by several subsequent governments was a desire, however fumbling and intolerable its methods, to recreate and to sustain a sense of order and a primacy of values.⁸

This disruption and cultural breakdown provided the setting for the development of many new structures needed to effect reform. One result was the emergence of several new celibate religious communities which attempted to simplify both the human ideal and life-style by a radical commitment to one essential, life with God in Christ. It

⁸Perhaps the measure of chaos indicates to some extent the measure of violence to human integrity. Certainly, one outstanding result of this period of history is the rise of awareness of personal dignity in a culture previously geared toward evaluating humanness in terms of one's inherited title and royal lineage. The cry of the revolutionaries, "Liberty, Equality, Fraternity," epitomizes this new understanding. It seems an obvious conclusion that such a movement in France is related to the previous revolution in America and the subsequent development of philosophical systems that are best illustrated by men such as Henry David Thoreau, who a century later, formulated an ideal of self-culture which initiated his experiment at Walden Pond. Cf. Leo Stoller, "Thoreau's Doctrine of Simplicity," New England Quarterly, XXIX (December, 1956), 443-61. Further avenues for research could include both the relationship between cultural reform and the rise of concern for simplicity as well as the relationship between increasing personalism and simplicity.

is indeed a phenomenon of this period of French history, that precisely when the traditional religious communities were disbanded or exiled, a host of new groups was formed, despite the interference and harassment, often fatal, of the various governments in power.⁹

One such community was the Sisters of the Presentation of Mary, of Bourg St. Andéol, Ardèche, France, founded in 1796 by Anne-Marie Rivier (1768-1838). From the very onset, Christian simplicity was an admirable and distinctive characteristic of this particular institute. Reflections from contemporaries who witnessed the foundation of the community as well as the recorded history of the founders themselves enhance this opinion. For example, the testimony of one outstanding contemporary, Sophie Barat, is recalled in a letter she addressed to Charles Francois d'Aviau, Bishop of Mende:

Cet établissement Présentation of Mary m'inspire quelque attrait, de préférence à d'autres fondations plus brillantes, précisément à cause de l'esprit de pauvreté, de simplicité et d'humilité qui y règne: il me semble que cette oeuvre nous rapprochera davantage du coeur de notre divin Maître, et que des commencements humbles et obscurs sont plus propres à attirer ses bénédictions sur notre Société. . . .¹⁰

Other references of the same nature are recorded in the lengthy, unpublished biography of the Foundress by R. P. Cros, S. J.

However, the most adequate and meaningful testimony comes from the awareness of the community itself, a concern carefully preserved in numerous documents at the Archives of the community at Bourg St. Andéol,

⁹An incomplete but impressive list of celibate religious communities founded at this time can be found in Jean Leflon's text, Histoire de l'Eglise, Depuis les origines jusqu'à nos jours, Vol. XX, La crise révolutionnaire, 1789-1846 (St. Dizier, France: Bloud & Gay, Editeurs, 1949), p. 417.

¹⁰Sophie Barat is quoted in the biography of Anne-Marie Rivier written by R. P. Cros, Vol. II, p. 117. This source is treated at length in a later section of this chapter as part of the Manuscript Tradition, p. 28.

France. Included in the listing of records are personal letters, the Annals of the congregation, memoirs, biographies and several valuable manuscripts which include the theological reflections of the earliest leaders in the foundation of the institute.

Several of these documents are of special interest since they reveal a more conscious theologizing and interpreting of the meaning of Christian simplicity as a distinctive ideal and life-style to be fostered by the members of the nascent community. These include the first rule of the institute which is preserved in a series of drafts written and revised over a twenty-five year period, as well as copies of conferences and treatises drawn up or dictated by the foundress, Anne-Marie Rivier.

The purpose of this study is to examine a critically selected cross-section of these latter documents which allegedly depend upon the conscious struggle for unification of mind and heart that characterizes the simplicity of the sons and daughters of God. Hopefully, this thesis will demonstrate the primacy of simplicity in this documentation and subsequently reflect upon its significance.

In our day it is important to further our own understanding of the concept of simplicity, particularly through theological reflection on the experiences of the part. The early manuscripts and texts of the Sisters of the Presentation of Mary offer a unique opportunity for this reflection, emphasizing the return to Gospel simplicity that appears throughout history as an ever-recurring theme of Christian reformation and renewal.

Before the textual analysis of these documents is undertaken, however, two brief inquiries seem necessary. The following chapter

will endeavor to formulate a statement on the meaning of simplicity within a Christian world-view, distinguishing not only the levels of meaning inherent in the concept but also the particular notion of simplicity as fundamental to all Christian activity. A further chapter will trace the theme of simplicity as it developed in the historical perspective of the Christian tradition.¹¹

However, because of the limited scope of a thesis, this study will not attempt a lengthy reflection on the nature of simplicity, either as a condition for human fulfillment or as an essential for the profession of the Christian faith; nor will there be a detailed history of the development of simplicity, either within the Christian tradition or in the broader context of world history.

The fourth chapter will focus on the question at hand. The selected texts of the founding of the Sisters of the Presentation of Mary will be investigated to uncover the theme of Christian simplicity. Attention will center not only on overt references to simplicity, or an equivalent term, per se, but also on the interpretation of those texts where the spirit of simplicity is subtly revealed as an underlying characteristic that identifies this celibate community in a special way.

Two significant and unforeseen difficulties emerged in the present writer's effort to analyze these documents. First, the quality of theological reflection and research on the nature of Christian simplicity proved not only inadequate, but often misleading. In fact,

¹¹ If this method of procedure appears to divert the reader's attention from the central thesis of this study, a textual analysis of documents in order to uncover the theme of simplicity, it should be remembered that, at the present time, reference material is both scarce and shallow. It seems essential, at least to the present writer, to propose some theological and historical perspective in order both to situate and interpret the documents under scrutiny.

the notion of simplicity as described in various books and articles is difficult to isolate and the content of the term is unclear almost from the first reference of any selection. The concept has yet to be seriously treated at length in any comprehensive study. For this reason, bibliographic material, especially in recent years, has proven to be more problematic than helpful.

Secondly, the question of verifying hitherto unexamined sources raised several technical difficulties. The attempt to identify unsigned, undated manuscripts which had been copied into notebooks in a rather fragmentary fashion was extremely challenging to this writer, especially since so much helpful evidence remains an unstudied source in the community archives in France. In some instances, even after extensive research, authorship and date remain tentative.

Both of these issues will be treated at length in the sections immediately following. First of all, an effort will be made to evaluate twentieth-century literature on the notion of simplicity wherever it is available. Secondly, the writer will seek to identify the documents to be analyzed in view of the tradition from which they come.

Evaluation of Bibliographic Material

At the present time, serious theological reflection on simplicity is rare. Most popular references emphasize simplicity in terms of the characteristics of a simple life-style.¹² The writers' concern,

¹² Examples are many. The manifesto drawn up by the priests of the diocese of Pittsburgh is a striking illustration, cf. "Chastity, Yes; Obedience, of Course; but also, 'Simplicity,'" reported by Eugene Lauer and Donald McIlvane in the National Catholic Reporter, February 5, 1971, pp. 10-11. The same concern in relation to the poverty of celibate communities is reflected in Laurent Boisvert's article, "Style de vie simple et modeste," La Vie des Communautés religieuses, mai 1972, pp. 130-42. A

therefore, is directed toward describing a more intense and external witnessing to poverty by the members of the Christian community, especially by those who belong to a celibate community. With such a preoccupation for the plain life and for external identification with the poor of the world, reflection rarely considers the underlying value of simplicity as an interior process of unification, a process that purifies in view of a single ultimate. Man's life-style is only a reflection of his inner strivings. Poverty and the simple life can be the result not only of a desire to eliminate the non-essential but also of an inability to escape from the bonds of overwhelming physical, social and moral complexity. To deal with the notion of simplicity in terms of externals then is hardly a beginning.

The only text the present writer could discover that was completely dedicated to the theological question of simplicity in recent years is the work of Francis Florand, Stages of Simplicity.¹³ Florand's

third very interesting article examines still another dimension of the simple life-style. In an interview, John S. Dunne, a professor at Notre Dame University and noted author, observes that the groups who withdraw from the present, highly structured social system in the United States to establish a more simplified life-style represent a valid reaction against the increasing problems of depersonalization set in motion by the extensive and complex technological culture of our time. What has actually been taking place in America is indeed reminiscent of Thoreau's Walden and the related Transcendental Movement of the nineteenth century. Cf. Sally Thran, "The Simple Life: Alternative to Violent Revolution," Ave Maria, April, 1969, pp. 8-12.

¹³Francis Florand, Stages of Simplicity. Because Florand's text is somewhat unique in subject matter, at least for this century, reviews of the work were consulted. For the most part, reviewers lauded the work for its timely "spirituality." This is somewhat misleading as the study often borders on pietistic moralizing. Out of eight, only one review offered a substantial interpretation. In the brief but insightful criticism of Conon McCreary, we read: "Little enthusiasm is evoked by Florand's old-style presentation of the interesting subject of Christian simplicity. Despite his evident sincerity, Florand brings forth little light, except perhaps in the historical introduction and in the first chapters. On the whole, he lacks theological and particularly

introduction to the subject matter, which points out several major writings of the past treating the issue of simplicity, was a definite contribution as a starting point of reference for research. The remainder of his book, however, fails to offer any significant insight into the understanding or interpretation of simplicity.¹⁴

psychological insight. One cannot escape the conclusion that Florand has oversimplified the complex question of Christian simplicity." American Ecclesiastical Review, CLVIII (June, 1968), 415. A second text from the twentieth century, earlier than Florand's, is The Way of Simplicity by William E. Orchard (New York: E. P. Dutton & Co., Inc., 1935). Like so many other books, this belongs to the category of inspirational literature.

¹⁴ Other recent theological treatises, although valuable in themselves, focus on a single aspect of the issue and are, therefore, less comprehensive and exceedingly brief. Such, for example, is Thomas Merton's collection of sayings of the desert fathers previously cited. In his analysis, Merton highlights the contemporary cultural crisis of meaningless complexity and confirms the anguish that enslaves and destroys interior peace: "In any case," Merton writes, "these Fathers distilled for themselves a very practical and unassuming wisdom that is at once primitive and timeless, and which enables us to reopen the sources that have been polluted and blocked up all together by the accumulated mental and spiritual refuse of our technological barbarism. Our time is in desperate need of this kind of simplicity." What this calls for is not a slavish mimicry on our part but the same striving for self-transcendence that characterizes their struggle. In another section, Merton continues: ". . . we must be ruthless in our determination to break all spiritual chains, and cast off the domination of alien compulsions, to find our true selves, to discover and develop our inalienable spiritual liberty and use it to build, on earth, the Kingdom of God. . . . let it suffice for me to say that we need to learn from these men of the fourth century how to ignore prejudice, defy compulsion and strike out fearlessly into the unknown." P. 24. Another brief, but delightful presentation of the nature of simplicity is offered in the Rule of Taizé written by Roger Schutz (New York: Herder Book Center, 1968), pp. 66-69. The brothers of Taizé are encouraged to deepen meaningful interpersonal relationships which ultimately depend upon the increasing "limpidity" of each member whose existence, caught up in the vision of Christ, is reordered to that radical faith and love which characterize Christian simplicity. A final example of such significant writings is the brief chapter from Transformation in Christ which treats the question of "True Simplicity" with skill as the author strives to clarify the concept through a systematic analysis of the various kinds and degrees of simplicity manifest in the human spirit as well as the ultimate value of simplicity that distinguishes the sons of God. Cf. Dietrich von Hildebrand, Transformation in Christ (Garden City, New York: Doubleday and Company, 1948), pp. 63-89. The chapter on "Simplicity"

A scholarly approach to the subject of simplicity is almost non-existent, with the exception of a few essays published in specialized journals. In most of these cases, however, the author generally treats the theme of simplicity via a textual analysis of some chosen work. These have proven valuable for the present writer, not only from the point of view of content, but especially in terms of methodology.

Such, for example, is Paul Mesnard's article, "La Notion de Simplicité dans l'Imitation de Jésus-Christ."¹⁵ Mesnard's initial development of the historical perspective of simplicity rooted the concept within the context of the Christian tradition. This was both pertinent and provocative. His references to Bernard, John of Ruysbroeck and others were particularly insightful as he clearly linked the multiple threads of a rich and complex tradition. Besides this, Mesnard adequately interpreted the theme of simplicity in a source that was extremely influential in formulating the spirituality of the Sisters of the Presentation of Mary, the Imitation of Christ.

A second essay of import to this thesis was written by Ceslas

from Ronald Knox's text, The Layman and His Conscience (New York: Sheed and Ward, 1961), pp. 159-68, is far less significant than von Hildebrand's study and runs the risk of oversimplifying the question. The same can be said of the pamphlet, Simplicity, written by Jose de Vinck (Patterson, New Jersey: St. Anthony's Guild, 1965).

¹⁵Paul Mesnard, "La Notion de Simplicité dans l'Imitation de Jésus-Christ," Revue d'Ascétique et Mystique, XLI (1965), 325-38. A final debt to Mesnard is his acknowledgment of the dearth of scholarly material available on the subject of simplicity, a fact confirmed by this writer's personal research. An interesting and scholarly article by Paul Antin treats the question of simplicity in view of the writings of the ancient biblical scholar, St. Jerome. However, for Jerome, the emphasis seems to be with a matter of literary style. Antin terminates his study with the following remark: "Nous n'avons pas chez saint Jérôme d'envol métaphysico-théologique sur la simplicité. Sans en méconnaître les aspects louables, il souligne volontiers ses déficiences." Cf. "'Simple' et 'Simplicité' chez Saint Jérôme," Revue Bénédictine, LXXI (1961), 371-81.

Spicq, "La vertu de simplicité dans l'Ancien et le Nouveau Testament."¹⁶ Spicq's thorough study of selected scriptural texts provided a viable hermeneutic for the evaluation not only of the early writings of the first Christian centuries but also for the more contemporary works which attempt to render a meaningful interpretation of Christian simplicity for the modern world.

However, the most significant contemporary source for the understanding of this idea has been the Hymn of the Universe by Pierre Teilhard de Chardin which offers the reader a selection of brief but incisive reflections on simplicity from a cross-section of both published and unpublished material.¹⁷ While the text contains no specific or lengthy analysis of simplicity per se, the entire "vision" of Teilhard de Chardin points to the directedness of the evolutionary process in view of a single, all-encompassing goal: God in Christ. From within the increasing complexity of human life, Teilhard de Chardin foresees neither chaos nor meaninglessness but rather the intense and dynamic unification of all creation.

In sum, therefore, the contribution of the more recent theologians to the clarification of the concept of simplicity is hardly adequate. For the most part, the present writings fail not only to further theological reflection but also to integrate the contemporary problem with the long heritage of Christian thought. Indeed, the subject remains a plausible issue for further research and analysis.

The manuscript tradition of the Sisters of the Presentation of

¹⁶C. Spicq, op. cit.

¹⁷Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, Hymn of the Universe (New York: Harper and Row, Publishers, 1961).

Mary offers a valuable source for furthering the study of simplicity as it emerges from Christian literature. The tradition stems from some of the earliest sources of that heritage and has served that religious community for nearly two hundred years. The following section will therefore endeavor to describe and to identify the manuscripts and other documents which explicate the spiritual tradition of this community.

The Manuscript Tradition

November 21, 1796, marks the official date of the foundation of the Sisters of the Presentation of Mary at Thueyts, France, by Anne-Marie Rivier under the guidance of a Sulpician priest, Louis Pontanier.¹⁸ Within a few years, Régis Vernet, another Sulpician, becomes a prominent figure when he replaces Pontanier and assumes a leadership role in the direction of the nascent community. Some of the earliest letters and documents preserved in the archives of the community were written by these three founders in the earliest years of the institute. Several of these sources were made available on microfilm and photostat copies for the purpose of this textual analysis.

Drafts of the First Rule of Louis Pontanier operative at Thueyts before the turn of the nineteenth century as well as the earliest Schema of the Rule written by Régis Vernet are both primary sources on which this textual study of simplicity depends. In addition, more elaborate treatises from the numerous writings of the foundress, Anne-Marie Rivier, have been scrutinized to uncover both explicit and implicit theological reflection on simplicity. Finally, the tradition of the manuscripts would be incomplete without reference

¹⁸Cf. Appendix, A: Anne-Marie Rivier and the Foundation of the Presentation of Mary.

to the several texts about Anne-Marie Rivier written by both her contemporaries and her biographers. These provide not only the necessary historical perspective for the evaluation of the primary sources under consideration but also offer important evidence to support the hypothesis of this paper.

We will therefore concern ourselves with the identification and description of the documents in the following order:

First Rule, Louis Pontanier
Schema of the Rule, Régis Vernet
Ecrits Spirituels, Anne-Marie Rivier
Recueil des Testaments Spirituels,
 Anne-Marie Rivier
Tiers-Ordre, Anne-Marie Rivier
Le Domaine des Passions,
 Anne-Marie Rivier
La Vie de Notre Seigneur Jésus-Christ,
 Anne-Marie Rivier
De l'Esprit et des Vertus de Madame Rivier,
 André Hamon
"Petites Fleurs" de la Vénérable Anne-Marie Rivier,
 S. M. Saint-Philippe
La Vie de Madame Rivier, André Hamon
La Vénérable Marie Rivier, Fernand Mourret
La Vénérable Marie Rivier, Anatole Moulard
 Unpublished biography by R. F. Cros

The Manuscript Tradition: Drafts of the Community Rule of Life

Two primary sources, in manuscript form, constitute the earliest drafts of the Rule of Life later officially adopted by the Sisters of the Presentation of Mary. Verification is problematic since most references to these drafts are vague and/or inaccurate.¹⁹ While the entire issue relative to the formulation of the first definitive edition, printed in 1821, is discussed in each of the four biographies of Anne-Marie Rivier previously mentioned, any clear information

¹⁹Cf. Appendix, B, for the information concerning the redactions of the Rule as explained by several of the biographers of Rivier: Redaction of the Community Rule of Life.

referring to the documents is overlooked in favor of a summarized and over-simplified account.

The earliest source is a manuscript copy of the first rules entitled: "1iers Règlements." Fait par M. Pontanier, dans le temps qu'il se cachait pendant la Révolution de 1792.²⁰ Authorship is evident enough from the title. However, the document on microfilm used for this essay is not the original but rather a copy written into a notebook and preserved by the community. Some of the material is quite obviously incomplete.²¹

Dating the document has been somewhat more complicated. The date included in the title is misleading. The first meeting between Anne-Marie Rivier and Louis Pontanier (1765-1824) did not occur before 1793 and it was not until June of 1794 that Marie Rivier moved from her native village of Montpezat to begin her teaching apostolate at Thueyts.²² In addition, the formation of a religious community was seriously undertaken by Rivier only under the guidance of Pontanier. Therefore, any compilation of rules before 1794 seems impossible.

²⁰ Louis Pontanier, "1iers Règlements." Faits par M. Pontanier dans le temps qu'il se cachait pendant la Révolution de 1792. Unpublished copy of a manuscript from the Archives of the Sisters of the Presentation of Mary, Bourg St. Andéol, Ardèche, France [c. 1794-1796] (Microfilm). This title has been translated by the present writer as the First Rule.

²¹ Whether or not the original is still in existence and whether the fragmentary nature of the present copy is due to the fault of a copyist or to the inadequacy of the original sources has not as yet been determined by any research or previous study. However, it is clear enough, from penmanship alone, that the copy analyzed is not Pontanier's own script and is therefore the work of a copyist. The subtitle itself indicates the same.

²² Cf. Cros, Vol. I, p. 66 and also, Mourret, p. 89. Both of these biographical studies are treated at length in a later section of the introduction which verifies these sources.

However, by November 21, 1794, when the community was tentatively being formed, a draft of rules was in existence and operative.²³ Three biographers--Cros, Mourret and Moulard--refer to this draft. A most important observation is made by Cros in view of the nature of the draft: "M. Pontanier employa à la rédiger les premiers loisirs qui suivirent la fête de 21 novembre 1796."²⁴ This confirms other evidence that the draft was never considered a permanent or complete document. Rather, it was formulated day by day, as it were, from the living experience of the small community. Under the influence of Pontanier and Rivier, the formulations were an attempt to discover a life-style suitable to the realization of their specific goals and ideals. Revision was a deliberate and necessary part of this experience. The First Rule of the Sisters of the Presentation of Mary, therefore, was not an accommodation of older, established rules of life but the creative endeavor of the early founders to develop an appropriate and satisfying way of life.²⁵

²³Cros observes: "M. Pontanier a écrit de sa propre main: 'Marie Rivier, née à Montpezat, le 19 décembre 1768, a fondé, le 21 novembre 1796, la maison des Soeurs de la Présentation de Marie, en se dévouant, le dit jour, à l'instruction de la jeunesse, se mettant sous la protection spéciale de la Sainte Vierge, et s'associant quelques compagnes, pour travailler avec elle à instruiret sic à former les jeunes personnes à la vertu.'" I, p. 84.

²⁴Cros, I, p. 85. Revision of this kind fostered the kind of freedom and flexibility which enabled the community to survive and to flourish at a time when established institutions and traditional life-styles were banished from France or collapsed.

²⁵The influence of the rules of other celibate religious communities was not, however, wholly absent even in these earliest stages of drafting a rule. In particular, Rivier strongly admired the spirit of the Society of Jesus. Cros points out that: "Marie Rivier a fondé un institut religieux: il lui faut des Constitutions, des Règles: elle en empruntera le fond aux Constitutions et aux Règles qu'Ignace de Loyola donne à ses fils." I, p. 11. Another obvious and important influence though would come quite naturally from the rule of the Sulpicians since both Pontanier and Vernet were members of this order. As a more finalized version of the rule of the Presentation of Mary was

However fragmentary and primitive this source appears, its importance in the formation of the spirit of the early community cannot be overestimated and its value as textual evidence and support is capital. The present copy used for analysis in this study seems to be the temporary rule of the community written sometime between 1794 and 1796. This is also the same text which existed in 1799 when Régis Vernet replaced Pontanier in the direction of the institute. Vernet approved this work wholeheartedly and, in 1801, he used the First Rule as the basis for the provisional rule he presented to church officials for approbation.²⁶

The problem of identifying the second manuscript to be analyzed is far more complex. Entitled: Projet des Règles ou Constitutions pour les Soeurs ou Filles de l'Instruction établies dans le diocèse de Viviers sous l'autorité de Monseigneur l'Evêque pour l'instruction de la jeunesse, the photostated copy in hand indicates neither author nor date.²⁷ Although some information can be gathered from the biographies previously mentioned, none of them can verify the actual document in question. Therefore, the primary means of establishing date and author is from internal evidence.

From the final entry in the notebook, it can be readily

prepared after 1811, however, other traditional sources were tapped as well. Cf. Appendix, B.

²⁶Cf. Appendix, B.

²⁷[Régis Vernet], Projet des Règles ou Constitutions pour les Soeurs ou Filles de l'Instruction établies dans le diocèse de Viviers sous l'autorité de Monseigneur l'Evêque pour l'instruction de la jeunesse. Unpublished copy of an original manuscript, Archives of the Sisters of the Presentation of Mary, Bourg St. Andéol, Ardèche, France [c. 1801]. (Photostat). The English translation of the title used for this textual study is the Schema of the Rule or the Schema.

determined that the present manuscript was copied before 1844.²⁸ Other internal evidence indicates that the original text at least was written sometime between 1801 and 1804. During these few years only, the name of the community founded by Rivier was changed from the Presentation of Mary to the Teaching Sisters or Daughters. Cros observes the exchange several times in his biography. For instance, in the first volume, he recalls that:

Nous verrons plus loin pourquoi, de 1801 à 1804, saintement humble et docile la V. Marie consentit à substituer le titre de Soeurs de l'Instruction au titre de Soeurs de la Présentation de Marie, qui fut dès le premier jour, et qui devait être pour les siècles et l'éternité, le nom de sa famille religieuse.²⁹

The rationale behind this gesture is later explained. During this time the possibility of a merger between the religious community at Thueyts with the community of Marie Sénécroze, the Teaching Sisters or Daughters of Puy, was an imminent probability.³⁰

Such evidence also points to Régis Vernet (1760-1841) as the author of the document since he both encouraged the merger and desired

²⁸This entry is an addition in the notebook, immediately following several fragments which seem to be included in the Schema. The content, unrelated to any point of the rule, refers to several cures or favors attributed to the intercession of Anne-Marie Rivier and is dated April 4, 1844. The signature of Carolyn Payro is affixed to these records. The handwriting of this entry is different enough from the rest of the manuscript to warrant that the Schema was copied by others.

²⁹Cros, I, p. 85.

³⁰Cros explains: "Pour ménager entre les deux maisons un salutaire rapprochement, la V. Marie avait paru subordonner, en 1801, l'Institut naissant de la Présentation à la communauté, déjà ancienne de Demoiselles de l'Instruction, mais sic à l'heure présente, Marie Rivier avait le droit, elle avait l'obligation à sa famille de lui redonner le nom glorieux dont elle l'avait dépouillée, pour un temps. Il fallait que la Compagnie de l'Instruction de 1801, redevint la Présentation de Marie de 1796. . . . les ménagements jugés nécessaires en 1801, n'avaient plus de raison d'être, en 1804. Aussi, lisons-nous dans les Annales, que le mois de mai de cette année, l'Institut reprit, pour le garder toujours, le nom de Présentation de Marie." I, p. 198.

to change the name of the institute. At the same time, Régis Vernet promulgated the official act whereby Rivier, as Foundress, was given the life-long role of superior general of the community and received the name, Sister Anne-Marie. The date transcribed on the document was November 21, 1801, and the name of the religious group was the Institute of Teaching at Thueyts.³¹

Other references confirm this information and help to establish 1801 as the probable date of composition. A provisional rule was certainly written for Bishop Charles François d'Aviau on August fourth of that year by Vernet. Cros reports:

Le saint Archévêque [msgr d'Aviau] disent les Annales, passa quatre à cinq jours au milieu de nous. Il nous édifa grandement par sa piété, son esprit de pauvreté et toutes ses éminentes vertus. Il eut la charité de nous addresser plusieurs instructions. Un règlement provisoire avait été écrit; il l'approuva.³²

The biographies agree that this text was a redaction and perfecting of the First Rule of Louis Pontanier. Thus, while Vernet's composition produced a more complete rule of life, much of the original formulation by Pontanier remained intact. Vernet's own comment is recorded by Cros:

Au mois d'octobre, la V. Marie avait demandé à Régis Vernet, au nom de Mlle de Sénécroze, la Règle de Thueyts. Il n'y avait encore rédigé que le règlement primitif de M. Pontanier: Régis élaborait le reste. Il répondit: Ce que M. Pontanier a fait est très informe.³³

Therefore, although the initial redaction of the First Rule by Vernet was begun as early as 1799 when he first became the director of the community, the bulk of the work was done in the summer of 1801 while he visited Thueyts.³⁴

³¹Cros, I, p. 138. ³²Ibid., pp. 126-27. ³³Ibid., p. 168.

³⁴Cf. Appendix, B.

Therefore, from all of the evidence presently available to this writer, it seems most probable that the manuscript, Schema of the Rule, was written by Régis Vernet in 1801 as a temporary set of guidelines for a community still in the process of becoming. A later reference, from 1807, reinforces this hypothesis. Vernet writes: "Peut-être aurai-je, après Pâques, un peu de loisir pour m'occuper de vos règles, jusqu'ici je n'ai pas respiré."³⁵ In relation to these rules, Cros uses the precise term, "constitutions"; and the same word appears in the title of the document itself. In no other source uncovered from this period of community history does the term occur.

The approbation of the Schema, given by Bishop d'Aviau in 1801, was later endorsed by the Bishop of Viviers, Monseigneur de Chabot, in 1802.³⁶ This same Schema of the Rule subsequently served as the foundation for the finalized version of the community Rule which was completed by 1820 and printed in the following year for all the members of the institute under the title: Règles communes des Soeurs de la Présentation de Marie.³⁷

The Manuscript Tradition: Texts Attributed to Anne-Marie Rivier

The writings of the Foundress of the Sisters of the Presentation of Mary, Anne-Marie Rivier, provide this study with ample material for theological reflection on the theme of simplicity. Various sources were used. Perhaps the most enlightening source is the edition of conferences and letters privately published for the members of the community under

³⁵Cros, I, p. 232. ³⁶Ibid., I, p. 180.

³⁷Cros, I, p. 323 and II, p. 32.

the title, Ecrits Spirituels.³⁸ Although a second edition printed in 1962 presents a somewhat accommodated version, it captures the spirit of the original and has been used for reference in this thesis. The initial "Guidelines" ("Liminaire") defend such a position and also recall the distinctive trait of simplicity as an outstanding characteristic identifying the Sisters of the Presentation of Mary:

Quelques retouches orthographiques étaient nécessaires ainsi qu'une présentation plus moderne, mais la pensée, et même le style, autant que possible, ont été respectés; en sorte que lisant et méditant cet Ouvrage, vous vous sentirez en présence de notre Vénérable Fondatrice et revivrez avec bonheur l'esprit de simplicité, d'humilité, de zèle dont elle a marqué notre Présentation.³⁹

Selections from the conferences cited in this analysis have been compared to the older text by this writer. The present revised edition is indeed faithful to the first publication and serves to facilitate the reading of the text by a contemporary audience.

A second source important to this analysis is the Recueil des Testaments Spirituels de la Vénérable Mère Marie Rivier.⁴⁰ No date is indicated in the present edition. The original text, however, seems to have been printed for the community sometime between 1838 and 1862. Evidence to this effect is found in the introductory letter written by the second major superior of the congregation, Mother Marie Arsène, who was in office during these years. The editor of the work is unknown and

³⁸Anne-Marie Rivier, Ecrits Spirituels (Toulouse, France: Imprimerie Fournie, 1962). The English translation of this title used for the study is Spiritual Writings.

³⁹Mère Marie Sainte Jeanne d'Arc, quoted in Ecrits Spirituels, "Liminaire."

⁴⁰Anne-Marie Rivier, Recueil des Testaments spirituels de la Vénérable Mère Marie Rivier (Bourg Saint Andéol, France: By the Communauté de la Présentation de Marie [c. 1838-1862]). References to this text will be translated as Spiritual Testament or will refer to the French in an abbreviated form, Testaments spirituels.

unmentioned in any of the texts or manuscripts used for this study. The undated copy presently in hand is certainly a later edition than the original.

Other important works of Anne-Marie Rivier, formerly considered relevant to this study, have yielded little or no insight into the theme of simplicity as developed by the early community. Such, for example, is the undated manual written by Rivier for the sisters devoted exclusively to prayer within the community, Tiers-Ordre.⁴¹

Another difficulty emerged in discovering that certain works are not the original inspiration of the Foundress but rather depended upon other sources, as, for example, Le Domaine des Passions.⁴² Even though such authors as Cros insist on the originality of Rivier, as well as on her own theological and psychological insight, the text has been omitted from analysis by this present writer for two reasons. The work does not explicitly reflect upon simplicity, although an analysis of the references to duplicity or hypocrisy would certainly lead to an implied understanding of the value of simplicity. This, however, only extends the scope of the paper and relies upon inferences that at this time are not substantiated. Secondly, the aim of the present writer has been to work with those sources which are original to the insight of the Foundress, particularly in view of establishing simplicity as a distinctive characteristic of the Presentation of Mary.

⁴¹ Anne-Marie Rivier, Le Tiers-Ordre (Privately published by the Communauté de la Présentation de Marie, n. d.).

⁴² Anne-Marie Rivier, Le Domaine des Passions (Avignon, France: Aubanel Frères, Librairie-Éditeurs, 1858). Although there is no reflection on the theme of simplicity, per se, included in the allegory, the presentation of duplicity or hypocrisy should prove insightful if it were to be analyzed.

A second book, usually attributed to the Foundress, La Vie de Notre Seigneur Jésus-Christ, is also a redaction of another source.⁴³ However, this three-volume text seems more relevant to the hypothesis of this thesis. Rivier's inclusion of the meditations of the Jesuit, Charles Borgo, highlights an entire chapter on simplicity as essential to perfection. This is the only detailed and explicit reflection by Rivier on the nature and theological implications of Christian simplicity that has been found by the present writer in any of the sources, and, as such, it deserves much attention. This chapter on simplicity, although not original to the founders of the community, was published in 1834, four years before the death of Rivier, and certainly betrays the foundress' ideal of and hope for simplicity. In addition, the text is linked directly to a long heritage of sources revered in the Christian tradition through copious footnotes and quotations chosen by Rivier to strengthen the theological principles enunciated.⁴⁴

The Manuscript Tradition: Biographical Studies

In addition to the writings of the foundress, Anne-Marie Rivier, and the early drafts of the rule of life by Louis Pontanier and Régis

⁴³Anne-Marie Rivier, La Vie de Notre Seigneur Jésus-Christ, 3 vols. (Avignon, France: L. Aubanel, Imprimeur -- Librairie de l'Archevêché, 1830). It seems clear enough from the introduction, written by Régis Vernet, and from the text itself, that although the organization of the material may be attributed to Rivier and the content of the sources has been adapted by her to relate to the needs of the community, the work is heavily dependent upon several Jesuits. The three-volume text, then, is overtly inspired by the meditation on the life of Christ by Fr. Nouet and, in the latter half of the third volume, by the manuscripts of both Charles Borgo and Fr. Giry.

⁴⁴Beyond the biblical allusions which are the most numerous, the names which frequently recur include Theresa of Avila, John of the Cross, Thomas à Kempis and Francis de Sales. From the literary world, the names of Bossuet and Fénelon also appear.

Vernet, other sources seem relevant to this thesis as they contain not only information related to the historical perspective of the times, but also because they often cite letters and sources of the founders and their contemporaries that are presently unavailable in any other form. Such, for example, is the small volume, De l'Esprit et des Vertus de Madame Rivier by André Hamon.⁴⁵ Although neither author nor date is clearly indicated in the text itself, the introduction, dated December 8, 1937, names Hamon:

M. Hamon, curé de Saint-Sulpice, fut le premier biographe de Madame Rivier. Après avoir succinctement raconté les premières années de la Vénérable, démontré l'accroissement presque miraculeux de l'oeuvre qu'elle avait fondée sous les auspices de la Très Sainte Vierge, il édifie encore ses lecteurs en traitant uniquement "des Vertus et de l'Esprit de Madame Rivier". . . . Nous reproduisons ici ces pages substantielles.⁴⁶

The date of the original work, then, is sometime after the publication of the biography of 1842. The original, however, was not available to this writer.

The present version used by this writer seems to have been published in 1937, as the Imprimatur and date of introduction indicate. However, the official letter of the Bishop of Viviers, Alfred Couderc, included in the volume is dated March 25, 1938, six months later. The date included in the bibliographic entry will follow the latest entry, 1938.

Another valuable work that strengthened the position of this thesis is the "Petites Fleurs" de la Vénérable Anne-Marie Rivier

⁴⁵André Hamon, P. S. S., De l'Esprit et des Vertus de Madame Rivier (Paris: Déclée et Cie, n. d. Imprimatur 1938).

⁴⁶Ibid., p. 7.

published at the close of World War II.⁴⁷ The introduction, written by J. B. Bord in 1942, indicates that the present volume was prepared for French publication in the following year. A letter of Alfred Couderc, Bishop of Viviers, dated January 10, 1943, confirms this intention. The present copy, however, was published in Canada and the only date recorded is that of the Imprimatur, 1946.

Authorship is attributed to Soeur Marie Saint-Philippe, a companion of Anne-Marie Rivier, who later testified to the authenticity of the content of her memoirs. Cros affirms this:

Sous le titre de Fioretti, une soeur ancienne, la soeur Saint-Philippe groupa, sous divers chefs, des traits de vertu de la Mère Rivier, qui n'avaient point été, pour la pluspart, produits ou suffisamment développés dans les dépositions juridiques.⁴⁸

The original work, therefore, dates back to sometime before 1878, since a revised manuscript, written and edited by Sister Saint-Philippe, was presented to the third Mother General, Mother Saint Maurice, who was in office from 1862-1878. The Introduction of the present volume states this:

La main pieuse d'une de ses Filles, Soeur Marie Saint-Philippe, a glané une riche gerbe de ces fleurs spirituelles dans la vie de Marie Rivier. Elle l'offrait à la Révérende Mère Marie Saint Maurice, Supérieure Générale de la Congrégation de 1862 à 1878.⁴⁹

Other sources confirm this information. For reference, however, the

⁴⁷ Soeur Marie Saint-Philippe, "Petites Fleurs" de la Vénérable Anne-Marie Rivier (Montréal: Imprimerie Populaire, Limitée, n. d., Imprimatur 1946).

⁴⁸ Cros, I. p. 4.

⁴⁹ J. B. Bord, Introduction, "Petites Fleurs," p. 10. The Prologue of the text confirms this information: "Eh bien! Ce sont les petits épis glanés ça et là, épars et perdus pour ainsi dire autour des gerbes qui couvrent ce champs si riche, que j'ai la consolation d'offrir à notre Révérende Mère St. Maurice sous le titre gracieux de Petites Fleurs de la Vénérable [sic] Mère Rivier," p. 17.

Imprimatur date of the present edition will be indicated.

Three published biographies of Anne-Marie Rivier add relatively little information on the theme of simplicity to be analyzed in the textual study of this thesis. However, they present valuable background material and situate the writings of Rivier, Pontanier and the other contemporaries in a vital context wherein the role of history cannot be slighted. La Vie de Madame Rivier was written by André Hamon and published in 1842, only four years after the death of Rivier.⁵⁰ In 1898, Fernand Mourret wrote and published an outstanding biography, La Vénérable Marie Rivier.⁵¹ Finally, in the twentieth century, Anatole Moulard's work, La Vénérable Marie Rivier, was printed in 1934.⁵²

However, the most valuable source of information for this study has been an unpublished manuscript on the life of Rivier.⁵³ Recently

⁵⁰ André Hamon, La Vie de Madame Rivier (Avignon, France: L. Aubanel, Imprimeur de l'Archévêché, 1842). Research indicates that an earlier biography had been written prior to the death of the Foundress: "La Mère Rivier, dit un témoin, raconte à soeur Sophie l'histoire de son enfance, et successivement tout ce qui s'était passé, jusqu'à l'établissement de la Congrégation. En sortant de chaque entretien, soeur Sophie allait coucher par écrit tout ce que lui avait été dit, et revint ensuite en donner lecture à la Mère, pour s'assurer si tout avait été mis exactement. . . . La soeur Sophie atteste elle-même que cet écrit demeura dans un coffret fermé à clef, jusqu'après la mort de la Vénérable Mère." Gros, I, p. 4. A recent, accidental discovery seems to have uncovered this short but interesting memoir written by Soeur Marie Sophie. However, it remains another untapped, historical document.

⁵¹ Fernand Mourret, P. S. S., La Vénérable Marie Rivier (Paris: Déclée de Brouwer et Cie, 1898).

⁵² Anatole Moulard, La Vénérable Marie Rivier (Lyons: Librairie Catholique Emmanuel VITTE, 1934).

⁵³ R. P. Cros, S. J., La Vie de la Mère Rivier, 2 vols. (Unpublished manuscript, Archives of the Sisters of the Presentation of Mary, Bourg St. Andéol, France, c. 1880). (Microfilm). The biographies of both Sulpician founders, Louis Pontanier and Régis Vernet, were not used by the present writer in this study since it seemed that the importance of these men in relation to the texts to be analyzed is adequately treated in all of the above sources pertinent to the texts.

typed for easier reading, the two-volume biography of R. P. Cros has never been published because of what was considered an unfavorable presentation of the Sulpician priests responsible for the guidance of the institute during its founding years.⁵⁴ The present writer used a microfilm of the typed copy.

Accurate dating of the manuscript is presently impossible. However, in the first volume, a completion date is indicated after the final chapter: October 20, 1880. No date is included in the second volume. A listing in the archives claims 1877 or 1878. In view of the later date included in the first volume, this reference seems unlikely. Further research would probably indicate some date after 1880 for the completion of the second volume. For the present time, this date will be used for reference.

Conclusion

From the information given above, it seems clear that the texts to be analyzed in this study of the theme of simplicity emerge from a rich and complex tradition whose literary and historical value are

⁵⁴ It is precisely this information which renders this version of the life of Anne-Marie Rivier not only more interesting but also extremely valuable to the community today. The so-called negative presentation, particularly of Régis Vernet, reveals to some extent, the in-depth struggle for the truth that was experienced by the early community leaders. The primary point of contention revolves around the profession of vows, which Vernet felt was simply a legal restriction inhibiting the quality of personal freedom essential to authentic dedication. The result was that the community continued for nearly a full century without canonical vows. From this point of view, at least, Vernet might appear as a hero to some contemporary leaders. A second reason for the importance of Cros's biography is the discovery of several unpublished letters which reveal the developing concern of the community for simplicity. Finally, the text gives the most detailed account (over 500 pages) of the community and includes references to numerous verifiable sources which, when threaded together, present an unquestionably exceptional picture of Anne-Marie Rivier and the community she founded. Some of these sources are the unpublished letters, diaries, testimonies, and annals of the community presently located at the Archives of Bourg St. Andéol, France.

pertinent to theological reflection. The present writer will attempt to trace the theme of simplicity as it is recorded in the reflections of these primary sources.

However, from the onset, it is necessary to establish a clear understanding of the notion of simplicity as it appears in the human condition and as it is related to the Christian world-view. The following chapter, therefore, will seek to elucidate this concept and to formulate an understanding of the meaning of simplicity that can serve as a basis for a valid textual analysis of the primary sources presented for evaluation.

CHAPTER II

THE MEANING OF SIMPLICITY

Theological Reflection on the Nature of Christian Simplicity in Relation to Faith, Hope and Love

It is not sufficient to place yourself daily under God. What really matters is to be only under God: the slightest division of allegiance opens the door to day-dreaming, petty conversation, petty boasting, petty malice--all petty satellites of the death-instinct.

Dag Hammarskjöld¹

In a world where man's only experience has been that of the complex, it is curious indeed that what most profoundly characterizes the strivings of the human spirit is the constant struggle to reformulate the problem of the one and the many: man's insight and search for simplicity. The record of history adequately testifies to such speculation.² The question remains, however, whether it concerns the metaphysical dimension or whether it refers to the descriptive analysis of a cultural or personality trait.

Simplicity, then, is most evidently a multileveled concept. It is also a notion which evokes both positive and negative dimensions. In this respect, for example, one can refer to simplicity in the

¹Dag Hammarskjöld, Markings, with a forward by W. H. Auden (London: Faber and Faber, 1964), p. 99.

²An excerpt from Sacramentum Verbi which outlines the historical background leading to the biblical formulation of simplicity can be found in the Appendix, C: Historical Background to the Biblical Understanding of Simplicity.

philosophical sense, which speaks in terms of an absence of composition or as the principle of unifying the multiple dimensions of being. Or again, one can discuss simplicity in sociological terms, referring to the cultural characteristics of a life-style, indicating, on the one hand, the notion of a primitive and somewhat over-simplified interpretation of the meaning of life and human existence, or, on the other hand, an interpretation of values which flows from the highest levels of aesthetic experience. From the psychological frame of reference, one can significantly refer to the interior disposition of a personality which, negatively speaking, indicates the simpleton but in a positive sense describes the interior harmony of a person who is serene and self-possessed.

Theological reflection on the notion of simplicity can deal with any of these levels and dimensions. Indeed, in the present attempt to enunciate a theology of simplicity, the weight of past studies seems, at times, stifling, not so much because of the quantity of past records but rather because so much of what has been written is utterly inadequate and subtly misleading. If, as Pierre Mesnard affirms, past studies on simplicity per se are not methodical, it is no wonder that the problems of language, doctrine, levels of meaning and history remain so acute for the inquirer.³

Be that as it may, a point of departure is necessary, and, at least in the mind of the present writer, clarification as to what simplicity is not seems crucial in the initial description of theological reflection pertinent to Christian simplicity.

³Pierre Mesnard, "La Notion de Simplicité dans l'Imitation de Jésus-Christ," 325-26.

Definitions of Simplicity

Many definitions of simplicity begin, quite understandably, with the negative aspect inherent in the concept, and from this, develop a positive description. Although in these instances, simplicity is defined in terms of absence (absence of composition, of duality, of deceit, etc.), such a definition is only a half-truth. Partial insight of this nature often deceives and can be more destructive to human understanding than obvious error. Indeed, the only absence pertinent to the interpretation of simplicity is the import of the relationship of absence to presence. Perhaps what Teilhard de Chardin relates is meaningful here:

One must have felt deeply the pain of being plunged into that multiplicity which swirls about one and slips through one's fingers if one is to be worthy of experiencing the rapture that transports the soul when, through the influence of the universal Presence, it perceives that reality has become not merely transparent but solidly enduring. For this means that the incorruptible principle of the universe is now and forever found, and that it extends everywhere: the world is filled, and filled with the Absolute. To see this is to be made free.⁴

Thus, the achievement of simplicity conceived of as either stoic withdrawal or aimless passivity and immobility, does not contribute any meaning to the concept. What simplicity accomplishes is very far indeed from this vague idea of nothingness that is so often evoked. Other pejorative concepts such as simplemindedness or childishness are equally unacceptable to the sense of simplicity as a humanizing power.

The history behind the use of the term simplicity illustrates quite uniquely and ironically the kind of intellectual chaos that can be wrought through the careless use and equivocation of terms. For the

⁴Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, Hymn of the Universe, "Pensées," 25, p. 98.

purpose of this essay in view of Christian theological reflection, perhaps the brief introduction on the meaning of simplicity as stated in Bible Themes is most pertinent:

Simplicity is the absence of composition. God alone is absolutely simple; in Him there is no composition of any sort. He is the One and Only, pure Spirit. . . .

The creature, on the contrary, is essentially composite. Confining ourselves to man, we note that he is at once both body and spirit, intelligence and will. Each of these faculties performs different acts every instant.⁵

Simplicity, then, is truly identified only with God; hence, in the development of Christian tradition, simplicity is essentially related to and understood in terms of perfection or wholeness. Simplicity is the utter integrity of the One.

As a distinctive feature of the human condition, then, the notion of simplicity needs some qualification. Man's entire history, in this respect, seems to be a ceaseless uncovering of this single truth: he is not God and therefore, he is not perfect, not whole. Man's history is also and equally the story of his noblest pursuit: the achievement of simplicity within his own being and within the world. In the same reference to Bible Themes, Thierry Maertens continues to elaborate on this phenomenon:

Simplicity--a moral virtue--endeavors to imitate something of this absolute simplicity of God. The simple man is he who unifies his entire life around one great idea: the love of God in uprightness,

⁵Thierry Maertens, ed., "Simplicity," Bible Themes, 2 vols. (Notre Dame, Indiana: Fides Publishers, Inc., 1964), II, p. 319. Further clarification is made by C. Spicq who makes the following etymological observation: "Simplex viendrait de sine plica, sans pli, et suggérerait bien, au moral, l'attitude signalée dans ce verset. On pourrait traduire vulgairement: cela ne fait pas un pli, pour désigner une intention droite inspirant un don généreux." Cf. "La vertu de simplicité dans l'Ancien et le Nouveau Testament," 10, footnote. What Spicq's word-play highlights is the quality of totalness essential to simplicity: the absolute reduction of the many to the one.

truth and charity toward his brethren. He is a man whose concern is to act only in good conscience.⁶

Simplicity, in this sense, can be used to describe and to characterize an attitude, a spirit, an action or an intention of man. In this sense, simplicity is conceived of as a virtue.

Another aspect to consider in coming to an understanding of possible variations in meaning inherent in simplicity is the fact that even the terms simple and simplicity can predicate more than the integrity that results from inner harmony and can also include the entire vision and life-style of the just man as the divine-human relationship informs his world-view. It is precisely this overall attitude toward life which, Georges Lefebvre reminds us, becomes so deeply rooted in the soul that it quite literally defines that which is natural and spontaneous to man.⁷

However, contemporary writers often fail to clarify their notion of simplicity and much of the modern question, for example, revolves around the consideration of simplicity as an expression of a particular, ecclesial life-style, characteristic of both the celibate and priestly ministry.⁸ While such an identification of evangelical simplicity with poverty is not wrong, it is, in fact, inadequate. In such instances, the authors fail to formulate an underlying theology and the reader's attention is exclusively drawn to the material forms of poverty.

⁶Idem

⁷Georges Lefebvre, "La Simplicité," La Vie Spirituelle, XCVII, No. 431 (août-septembre 1957), 119.

⁸Eugene Lauer and Donald McIlvane's article referred to in the introductory chapter as well as Laurent Boisvert's essay on celibate poverty.

More difficult to interpret, however, are analyses which confuse the issue of simplicity and its doctrinal implications. In particular, certain reflections from Pierre Mesnard's essay, "La Simplicité dans l'Imitation de Jésus-Christ," are misleading. For example, Mesnard describes the identification of truth and love via simplicity:

Nous avons tout de même appris, du sommet de cette contemplation fragmentaire, la vérité la plus profonde de cette religion, l'identité entre VERITE et CHARITE. C'est le rôle fondamental de la simplicité que d'établir entre ces deux valeurs une corrélation positive.⁹

To so situate simplicity as an essential correlation is somewhat problematic and the inclusion of the identification between truth and love only further confuses the issue. One can, in fact, question Mesnard's conception of the very nature of Christian simplicity.

In reality, Mesnard fails to distinguish between the simplicity of God and the simplicity of man. As previously mentioned, God alone is absolutely simple. In Him, truth and love are one. God is truth as He is love. Any reference, in this sphere, to internal composition, division or correlation is meaningless. But man is a creature, hopefully in the process of simplification. For man, simplicity is the activity which strives to integrate his entire life in terms of both a vision of

⁹Mesnard, "La Notion de Simplicité," 333. Although Mesnard's interpretation raises a question for the present writer, the text of the Imitation of Christ, to which he refers, appraises the subject more incisively. In the Imitation we read: "Until all things become One for you, traced to the One source and seen in One act of vision, you cannot find anchorage for the heart, or rest calmly in God. O God, you are truth. . . . Once a man is integrated, once his inner life becomes integrated, all of a piece, he begins to attain richer and deeper knowledge--quite effortlessly, because the light he receives comes from above. Freedom of heart is his, and simplicity of intention, and fixity of resolve, and he finds that he is no longer distracted by a variety of occupations; he acts now, only for God's glory, and he does his best to get rid of all self-seeking." Cf. Book I, chapter 3, Imitation of Christ, translated by Ronald Knox and Michael Oakley (New York: Sheed and Ward, 1959), p. 20.

and a conversion to the Absolute. Both vision and conversion are progressively simplified as man increasingly corresponds to his call for union with God. The act of simplicity in man, therefore, is not one of sheer identification or of correlation between values, but of integration.

With the man who so strives to integrate both intellect and will and to order his entire life in terms of a single point of view, the dynamic process of simplification begins. What Francis Florand writes of Theresa of Lisieux applies to all men who are captivated by a single enterprise:

This is how her life was definitely simplified, not only because she was, from that moment, brought back to a single point of view, but also because that point of view was integrally true, even lending itself to changes governed by circumstances.¹⁰

For Theresa, the single point of view is both simple and true because it was so wholly focused on the Christian vision of God and nourished by an overwhelming desire to procure His glory alone. This decision, to strive uniquely for God's glory, is the formal expression of the desire for wholeness by the Christian who knows both God and man.

Christian simplicity, then, is much more than the correlation between truth and love in man, as Mesnard indicates. Rather, simplicity progressively makes actual in man the "immense simplicity" of God as man is transformed in Him.¹¹ It is a depth experience and, in a certain sense, unifies true wisdom and integrity because man henceforth endeavors to conform and order his life in terms of a vision of the One who is wisdom and truth.

¹⁰Francis Florand, Stages of Simplicity, p. 81.

¹¹Teilhard de Chardin, Hymn, "Mass on the World," p. 25. He writes: "I thank you my God, for having in a thousand different ways led my eyes to discover the immense simplicity of things."

Obviously though, merely man's vision of this One in no way guarantees personal simplicity. The integration of man is more difficult to come by since man is, by nature, complex. Dag Hammarskjöld expresses this inherent tension perfectly in his spiritual diary, Markings. What is of added interest is that Hammarskjöld employs the analogy of the eye which is rooted in the biblical tradition and which, as such, is a symbol of human intention. The comparison thus incorporates the dual consideration inherent in simplicity: its relationship to wisdom and to truth. He writes:

The purer the eye of her attention, the more power the soul finds within herself. But it is very rare to find a soul who is entirely free, whose purity is not soiled by the stain of some secret desire of her own. Strive then constantly to purify the eye of your attention until it becomes utterly simple and direct.¹²

Clearly then, man becomes simple as he becomes free from his own selfishness and unites his mind and heart to the absolute simplicity of God.

Essential, then, to this study is the recognition of simplicity as process: man's call to union with the Absolute requires progressive purification of the human spirit. And, as such, a dialectical process is in operation. "What is brought about," Teilhard de Chardin asserts, "is more than a simple union: it is a transformation, in the course of which the only thing our human activity can do is, humbly, to make ourselves ready and to accept."¹³ If man is conscious of himself as caught up in the multiple, his experience also makes him aware of an inner impulsion toward ordering and synthesizing whatever is complex. Everywhere we are reminded of the phenomenon:

¹²Hammarskjöld, Markings, p. 98.

¹³Teilhard de Chardin, Hymn, "Pensées," 80, pp. 153-54.

This crumbling away, which is the mark of the corruptible and the precarious, is to be seen. And yet, everywhere, there are traces of and a yearning for, a unique support, a unique and absolute soul, a unique reality in which other realities are brought together in synthesis, as stable and universal as matter, as simple as spirit.¹⁴

All human life is involved in such a process of simplification which, far from ignoring or destroying the many individual perfections of experience, enriches the human spirit by taking everything up into a single thrust toward a universal, overwhelming goal in which no impoverishment, no reduction, no loss occurs.

More is involved than a sort of aggregate or fusion of the multiple. Even the concept of union fails to uncover the true nature of simplicity conceived here. Christian simplicity is such that the unity envisioned transcends the sum of its parts and what actually occurs is a radical transformation of all things in Christ. The centrality of Christ is therefore crucial to any theological reflection on simplicity.

The Christian perceives himself as a man called to holiness and redeemed by Christ. The measure of his acceptance of both, forms and is formed by the measure of his insight into the Gospel formulations. But there is a moment of import: that of the decision or radical conversion of mind and heart to the Absolute, described by the Gospels as metanoia. Mesnard refers to this decision in terms of a dialectic:

Il y a donc eu, dans la dialectique de simplicité, un moment capital: celui où la bonne volonté suit l'élan de l'intelligence enfin éclairée, en entrant résolument dans la voie de sainteté.¹⁵

As man takes this leap, he begins the simplification of his whole life

¹⁴Ibid., "Pensées," 25, p. 98.

¹⁵Mesnard, 335.

in terms of his relationship to the One and, from this moment, the process is obviously a matter of intensifying the original decision.

At first, the process appears circular: one is called, one accepts, one re-orders his life; then, one listens more attentively, hears anew, reaffirms and strengthens his commitment. One is soon to discover that the more one attends to the Word, the deeper the experience gouges itself into the human heart and intensifies the response. However, at some point of the experience, one moves out of the circle and is thrust into the dynamics of the divine; at some point, the union of man with the simplicity of God is entire, if not entirely perfect; at some point, the simplification of man is accomplished.¹⁶

It can be seen, then, that the hunger for simplicity is a positive value and a distinctly creative force. Florand does not overestimate the essential value of simplicity for the human spirit:

As for discovering where this tendency is most deeply rooted, it seems to be related to the fact that we are human beings directed to an ultimate goal; beings on the march; in other words, beings who look to the future. We must go that far to establish the specific nature of human simplicity, which can only be a simplicity of perfection and plenitude, and not a simplicity of impoverishment.¹⁷

In this light, simplicity most radically humanizes man. As it draws together the diverse richness of the multiple, it strengthens and intensifies all that is good into a single and awesome newness. What is multiple is herein dramatically ordered and focused upon an open,

¹⁶As T. S. Eliot affirms of this, the still point: "And the fire and the rose are one." Perhaps, as he implies, the mystical experience is precisely this unparalleled alliance of insight and grace operative in man, the "... condition of complete simplicity/ (Costing not less than everything)." Cf. "Little Gidding," in Four Quartets, The Complete Poems and Plays, 1909-1950 (New York: Harcourt, Brace and World, 1962), p. 135.

¹⁷Florand, p. 28. Florand gives a brief and somewhat superficial treatment, although some insights are valuable, especially pp. 34-37.

ultimate future.

In particular, simplicity energizes the entire pursuit of man in terms of such transcendence: man reaching beyond himself to the incomprehensible Other. For the Christian, the man who experiences himself as a "pilgrim of the Absolute," is vitalized in terms of sonship.¹⁸ And it is precisely at this level of consciousness that theological reflection becomes relevant since it is here that man recognizes the primacy of faith, hope and love in effecting the simplification of his life.

Christian Simplicity in Relation to Faith, Hope and Love

The theological virtues radically order the whole being of man to the triune God and thus, of their very nature, simplify the striving of the human spirit for perfection. In and through them, man is taken up in the salvific process. Man encounters God, trusts in his Word and surrenders to his will. Thus, man's experience of himself as gifted with a capacity for self-transcendence from God's self-communication of Being becomes actualized and operative in the measure of man's affirmation of this God who calls him to life.¹⁹

¹⁸The phrase is Florand's.

¹⁹Karl Rahner and Herbert Vorgrimler, "Faith," Theological Dictionary (New York: Herder and Herder, 1965), p. 164. As a virtue, faith is supernatural and infused, thus making possible the act of faith. Briefly and technically, the following reference summarizes the threefold implication of this single endeavor: "In the Christian faith God's disclosure to the human person is not mere intellectual information, where God is merely an external motive of faith; rather the disclosure appeals to all the dimensions of man so as to order them all to God . . . and its complete fulfilment is love. At the same time, God the revealer communicates himself in such a way that this ordering of man to God lays claim to all man's subsequent life; discloses himself both as a lover and as man's surpassing (supernatural), final goal, containing in itself the perfect fulfilment of all hope."

Simplicity is born of this faith. "In real fact," as Teilhard de Chardin perceives it, "it /faith/ has God as its principal agent, its source, its milieu."²⁰ A fifth-century homily of Philoxène de Mabboug describes the faith of Zacchaeus precisely in terms of such simplicity. The faith of Zacchaeus was simple per se: he encountered and responded to Christ directly and totally, effecting a blatant simplification of his entire life. The choice of God in Christ for Zacchaeus was supreme and allowed no compromise. The Bishop of Mabboug makes this understanding quite clear:

Car Dieu est le seul bien de la foi, et elle ne consent pas à posséder d'autres biens avec lui; tous les biens sont de peu d'importance pour elle, en dehors de ce seul bien durable qui est Dieu. Elle a été mise en nous pour trouver Dieu et ne posséder que lui, et pour voir que tout ce qui est en dehors de lui est à notre détriment.²¹

Because of his conversion to God in Christ, Zacchaeus not only gave away his goods, but he even made restitution for past transactions which seemed incompatible to his new world-view. As the homily states:

La Simplicité répandait de part et d'autre ce que la ruse avait amassé, et la pureté de l'âme dispersait ce qui avait été acquis par les pensées de l'astuce. La foi renonçait à ce que l'injustice avait trouvé et possédé, et elle proclamait que cela ne lui appartenait pas.²²

In this way, the past was dramatically incorporated into the present for the little man of the Gospel narrative. All was healed and transformed through the simplification of life-style for Zacchaeus who had singled out the ultimate essential.

²⁰ Teilhard de Chardin, Hymn, "Pensées," 23, p. 96.

²¹ Philoxène de Mabboug, "La simplicité de la foi de Zachée," Homélie IV, Sources Chrétiennes, XLIV (Paris: Editions du Cerf, 1956), extracts. See Appendix, D, for the selections quoted in this paper.

²² Idem

Fundamental to this faith experience of Zacchaeus is the process which underlies the conversion of heart of all men. The human consciousness becomes aware of the Absolute as available for man and experiences this Being as simple and simplifying. With the advent of Christ, the Word, in the world, however, the formulation of the meaning of this human experience is perfectly uttered and, by Christ's life, death and resurrection, concretely and wholly affirmed.

By Christ, God is named, "Abba," and as named, is intimately "known," experienced as personal. Christ, therefore, intensifies the process of simplification because through his incarnation, he effected a transformation in the relationship of man to God. Christ frees man from selfishness, opening forever the dimension of self-transcendence toward the Other--once adored as Source, now loved as Father. In Christ, man's faith and adoration are mutually perfected.

Simplicity emerges from this Christian experience of God as the essential dynamic that focuses awareness on the reality of God as Father, and responds to this realization both in a positive and negative way. The affirmation of the will proclaims the joyful prerogative of sonship and carefully cuts away at whatever impinges upon or destroys the possibility of living out this relationship.

The innate human tendency to order, to become whole, is then brought to ultimate potential. What is utterly human and implicitly desired is explicitly realized, however imperfectly, in time and space.

Christian hope is formulated from this experience where the simplicity of man is understood as rooted in his humanness and, therefore, in his awareness of limitation. Hope posits a future without loss, without any disparity between vision and reality. In this,

Christian hope presupposes and affirms faith since it rises from the encounter of the man who experiences the presence of God as He who is faithful to his promises. Obviously, faith can in no way guarantee the affirmation it holds to be true and hope, of its very essence, is rooted in the radical faith which affirms the future of man--every man--because of the promise of God.

Faced with the fundamental paradox of the human condition, however, man's great temptation is to despair. The possibility of hope appears particularly absurd as man confronts, for example, both the reality of evil and the inevitability of death. All man knows is touched by death, yet man struggles without ceasing for life.²³ When this longing of the human heart is caught up in a faith-experience of the Absolute and his person is transformed by the abiding presence of the living God, man accepts God's promise to confirm him in life.²⁴ Man's hope, therefore,

²³Nowhere in human experience has man uncovered a possible semblance, let alone a guarantee, for what he has described as eternal life. Man has, in fact, consistently created myths in order to express his deep, universal anxiety when confronted with the fact of his mortality. In this area, the problem of evil is no less disturbing to man. E. L. Maschall observes that: "When the evil occurred it mattered indeed; in the end it will matter no longer. If we find it difficult to believe this in the face of the horrors of Auschwitz, the reason is, I suggest, that we find it difficult to recognize that God can do anything which greatly exceeds what we can do ourselves" Theology and the Future (New York: Morehouse-Barlow Co., 1968), p. 64.

²⁴As hope is defined in the Theological Dictionary, we read: "In the NT sense, hope is ultimately constituted by the intercession, on the one hand, of that divine predestining plan for man whereby the love of God--which, being incarnate in Christ, has become human history--has efficaciously and permanently affected man, and, on the other hand, of the responsive attitude towards this plan shown by the person. . . who confidently awaits the final consummation of the divine economy of salvation in the coming of Jesus Christ in reliance on the saving plan which has already and irrevocably been initiated by God" p. 216.

affirms the absolute power of the Word of God.²⁵

The nature of such hope is intrinsically simple. Hope is both a single pursuit and a unique goal, serenely, confidently, intensely unifying the complex strivings of the human spirit for the utterly impossible: life without end. Today, man needs no hope other than this which affirms his impossible desire. The role of hope in the secular experience therefore becomes crucial since the phenomenon of atheism in our time categorically negates the possibility of a future for man and thus often tends to foster despair.

The simplicity of the Christian who looks forward in terms of a personal future holds out to the secular world the prospect of another dimension: life out of time. The incarnation and resurrection of Christ inform such hope with both direction and power, sustaining the present in a single, overwhelming point of view. It is the experience of the man Jesus, in the context of evil and the intimacy of personal death, that

²⁵Indeed, of the three theological virtues, hope is perhaps the most incomprehensible. In hope, man's assertion of the power and glory of God depends not on what is now present and possessed but rather on what shall one day come to be. What Charles Péguy describes in his text seems to summarize this Christian insight into the essential and unique role of hope in human experience. The Christian, Péguy rightly observes, is conscious of the experience of God's grace as incomprehensible and the enigma of man's seemingly dauntless capacity to hope: "Mais l'espérance ne va pas de soi./ L'espérance ne va pas toute seule. Pour espérer, mon enfant, il faut être bien heureux, il faut avoir obtenu, recu une grande grâce" p. 536. Péguy also recognized that what is operative in the experience of Christian hope is, in truth, a fruition of that faith in which man's believing in the God of Jesus Christ is simply hope itself. He writes: "L'espérance voit ce qui n'est pas encore et qui sera./ Elle aime ce qui n'est pas encore et qui sera./ Dans le futur du temps et de l'éternité" p. 538. Further, he unifies the themes: "Il faut espérer en Dieu, il faut avoir foi en Dieu, / c'est tout un, c'est tout le même./ Il faut avoir cette foi en Dieu que d'espérer en lui./ Il faut croire en lui, qui est d'espérer" pp. 600-601. "Et le facile et la pente est de désespérer et c'est la grande tentation" p. 536. Cf. Charles Péguy, "Le Porche de la Deuxième Vertu," Oeuvres Poétiques Complètes (Paris: Librairie Gallimard, 1957).

describes for man the essential theological implications of hope and the role of simplicity in that reality. In particular, such hope defines the ultimate meaning of self-transcendence as man becomes aware of being graced in life through his encounter with the Holy. The future of man is thus opened to and filled with a single, simple prospect: the future of God.

More than faith or hope, however, the crown and completion of Christian simplicity is, according to Florand, charity; so much so, that charity both defines and determines the intrinsic character of Christian love.²⁶ This unique experience of love establishes man in a personal communion with God which transforms man's entire being since the very meaning of such a relationship transcends human potential.

It is simplicity which, both positively and negatively, defines the essential character of this love. In a positive context, God goes out to man and shares his own life with man. In Christ, this communion is perfected and an identification of the human and the divine is actualized in the person of Jesus. God, in Christ, heals the human anguish of separation, division, disorder and death. In the throes of personal encounter, it is God who first touches the human spirit, who quickens the intense strivings of the human heart with his own power, who, in Christ, bridges the awful gap and who, ultimately, ratifies man's infinite longing for the plenitude of God. Saint John's Epistle

²⁶ To so describe charity reiterates what is contained in the more technical definition of the Theological Dictionary: "It is fundamentally a distinctive mode of love, once it is realized by the Spirit of God; God's part is realized in working out the plan of salvation, in his will to create that which is other than himself, to become that other, and to communicate himself to it; man, for his part, realizes charity in his response, which itself is a gift of the Spirit of God, establishing him in communion with God and with his fellows" pp. 72-73.

thematizes the drama and describes the experience of grace: "We are to love then, because he loved us first" (1 John 4: 19).

The negative dimension of simplicity appears only in the human context. In man, the experience of God's love depends upon the intense purification of his being. Human energy, dissipated and in a condition of tension amidst a diversity which weakens and falsifies, nonetheless hungers for the plenitude of being which is achieved only through the unification of all his inner powers toward a single, indivisible goal. Man must, therefore, "let go" of all that fails to focus on God.²⁷

Only in the measure that man reaches out, beyond self and without selfishness, toward the Other of God, is Christian simplicity operative in his own person. The quintessence of Christian simplicity is exactly this human surrender which affirms the absoluteness of the Other and

²⁷Teilhard de Chardin sensitively observes that for the saint, God is everything and the purification of the human spirit is the unique process which energizes the complex and multiple life-forces toward the simple, single, all-consuming goal: life in God. In sum, he states: "Thus the activity proper to purity (in scholastic terms, its formal effect) is the unification of the inner powers of the soul in a single act of appetition of extraordinary richness and intensity. In fine, the pure heart is the heart which, surmounting the multiple and disruptive pull of created things, fortifies its unity (which is to say, matures it spiritually) in the fire of divine simplicity" "Pensées," 49, p. 125. This single act of appetition is obviously Christian charity or love. However, what man constantly recognizes is that while all human energy is somehow caught up and consciously driven to exactly this point of unification with the Holy, man is personally powerless to realize self-transcendence, to so integrate and thus complete the forces of his being. The distance between God and man, the "intolerable gap," is indeed without measure: man, who is always and only human, waits before God who is wholly other. Raissa Maritain reflects upon this experience in her poem, "De Profundis," where she decries the "intolerable distance" that exists between man and God: "Dieu mon Dieu la distance entre nous n'est pas tolérable/ Montre-moi le chemin droit et nu et totalement véritable/ Le chemin de mon âme à votre esprit sans aucun intermédiaire/ De ce que les hommes ont construit entre le ciel et la terre" Lettre de Nuit--La vie donnée (Bruges, Belgique: Déclée de Brouwer & Cie, 1950), p. 21. The plea for absolute simplicity is clear: the straight path, stripped bare and utterly true, the thrust of the soul toward God alone without any human mediation.

resolves multiplicity in the immensity of a union which transfigures man with the fullness of Being Itself. In The Dark Night of the Soul John of the Cross describes the effect of God's love as a process of purification that brings about ineffable unity; "God leads into the dark night those whom He desires to purify from all these imperfections so that He may bring them further onward."²⁸

In conclusion, both positive and negative dimensions appear in the single thrust of man's being toward God that characterizes the experience of Christian love. The personal interaction within this relationship between God and man is both informed and intensified by the unifying power of divine simplicity and in turn, Christian simplicity as human process is constantly purified through the redeeming activity of such unselfish love.

Christian love, then, unites faith and hope in a single experience of encounter. Faith is the vision of God and hope is openness to what will come. But love is the simple action of giving and receiving, of call and response wherein God and man see each other and affirm a future together. All that matters is each other.

Conclusion

The earliest records of the Christian tradition that reflect upon the experience of simplicity are found in the New Testament writings. The New Testament deals with this issue both implicitly and explicitly. The entire Gospel is obviously rooted in a fundamental call

²⁸St. John of the Cross, The Dark Night of the Soul, translated and edited by E. Allison Peers (Garden City, New York: Doubleday and Company, 1959), p. 44. Other passages indicate a conscious concern for simplicity and purity of heart as well, for example, cf. Book I, iii, p. 45; or, Book II, xi, p. 133.

to a simple life in imitation of that life adequately lived out by the one man, Jesus. Christ, in fact, overtly upholds the value of a simple or pure intention and he counsels followers to be "as simple as doves." Of far more importance than explicit reflections, however, are the redeeming acts of Christ's life, death and resurrection which actualize for all men the means to achieve the progressive simplification of human life and thus, focus man's attention on the unique goal of all human endeavor: the sharing of a life of glory in the divine unity.

In addition to the Gospel formulation and to the Christ-event, the Christian heritage has added a long, if somewhat complicated, history of theological reflection upon the significance of simplicity. The following chapter will deal with this tradition in the church in an attempt to indicate, however briefly, the historical maturation of a doctrine of Christian simplicity as evaluated in the light of human experience.

Of primary concern in such an interpretation is the explication of those Gospel texts which give insight into the notion of simplicity. This study naturally requires an awareness of the Jewish tradition from which the New Testament insight emerges since the significance of Christ to the human condition cannot be comprehended unless Jesus is seen as the fulfillment of those first promises of God to man: creation and covenant. The following chapter will therefore begin at this point in history and attempt to draw upon some of the more important historical figures who subsequently dominated the Christian position concerning the nature and importance of simplicity.

CHAPTER III

SIMPLICITY IN HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE

Simplicity in the Christian Tradition
Prior to the Foundation of the Sisters of the Presentation of Mary

There is, it seems to us,
At best, only a limited value
In the knowledge derived from experience.
The knowledge imposes a pattern, and falsifies,
For the pattern is new in every moment
And every moment is a new and shocking
Valuation of all we have been.

T. S. Eliot¹

History records reflection upon experience. Theological reflection upon Christian simplicity is part of that human process and, as such, is subject to the same measure of fallibility that characterizes whatever is human. And along with other concepts which seem to elude definition, such as freedom and love, simplicity can be classified as a particularly difficult notion to grasp and to describe, despite its deep and universal roots in human experience.

Consequently, reflection upon the experience of Christian simplicity in the past has been extremely ambiguous and the term has been unduly prone to equivocation. Taking this into account, the present writer will endeavor to examine the concept of simplicity as it has been defined and incorporated into the spirituality of the Christian tradition of the West.

¹T. S. Eliot, Four Quartets, p. 139.

The point of departure for this survey, then, will be the insight of the writers of the Old Testament. Subsequent material will highlight the transformation of this ideal in the light of the Christ-event. Finally, the reflections of Christian believers interpreting the meaning of simplicity will be traced from the apostolic era to the post-reformation period, as it is from this spirituality that the manuscripts to be studied emerge.

Simplicity in the Biblical Formulation

Two technical terms are of particular interest to this study: *άπλος* and *ἀπλογής*, respectively translated as "simple" and "simplicity" in various scriptural readings of the New Testament.² Bauer indicates that in such interpretations, the two terms denote

... not simplicity in the sense of silliness, but rather the virtue of a straightforward, upward and wholehearted disposition, which is immune to any kind of duplicity or deceit. This attitude, which has the stamp of union of God with men, is called *haplotes* by the Greek translators of the bible and by the New Testament, and for this the most favored translation in Latin in *simplicitas*.³

However, it is not only this specific Greek term, *haplotes*, which evokes the concept of simplicity in the reading of scripture. The words single, one, unity, alone, entire, total, and other terms as well, in certain passages at least, suppose, as an underlying dynamic, the principle of simplicity.

²O. Bauerfeind, "simple," Theological Dictionary of the New Testament, ed. Gerhard Kittel (Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1967), I, 386-87. The synonyms included by Bauerfeind consist of the following: for simple: open, without ulterior motive, unambiguously, wholeheartedly, free from inner discord, innocent, upright and pure; for simplicity: the noble simplicity that characterizes the psyche of heroes, purity, and singleness of heart.

³Johannes B. Bauer, ed., "Simplicity," Sacramentum Verbi, 6 vols. (New York: Herder and Herder, 1970), III, 847-48.

An important distinction is made by Paul Meagher who clarifies the difference between the virtue and the counsel of biblical simplicity. Meagher writes:

As a necessary quality, it simplicity⁷ is a disposition firmly opposed to deceit, double-dealing, hypocrisy, dissimulation, and duplicity of every kind. . . . As a counsel of perfection, simplicity signifies the indivision of heart and singleness of purpose of those who are free from voluntary imperfection and who seek God with great purity of intention. By those who lack this quality God is not loved perfectly, ex toto corde; the eye of the soul is not full of light (Mt 6: 22); and intentions that are less worthy, even if they are not strictly opposed to the love of God, clutter the heart.⁴

This twofold awareness is both warranted and valuable as it helps the contemporary reader to rescue the notion of simplicity from the ambiguity caused by some authors.

However, one must go further than the above-mentioned New Testament texts and hermeneutics to appreciate the concept of simplicity as it developed in the Christian experience. The New Testament understanding grew in terms of its Judaic heritage. Bauer claims that the derogatory sense of simplicity as hinted at by Meagher is unknown in the Old Testament. There seems to be evidence, though, that the ancient writers were very conscious of the foolishness that characterizes the simple-minded. The Book of Proverbs, for example, continuously, although not exclusively, reproaches such inadequacies:

The simpleton believes what he is told,
The man of discretion watches how he treads.

Simpletons have folly for their portions,
Men of discretion knowledge for their crown.

Proverbs 14: 15, 18

⁴Paul K. Meagher, "Simplicity," New Catholic Encyclopedia, ed. William J. McDonald, 15 vols. (New York: McGraw-Hill Book Company, 1967), XIII, 229.

Other references indicate the same concern, warning Israelites against the dehumanizing folly of simplistic ignorance and imprudence.

In the Old Testament, however, the full meaning of simplicity is obviously not so limited as these references might imply. What the faith of the covenant effected was, in fact, a reversal of such an understanding. The insight of Israel was rooted in the relationship engendered in her encounter with the One God, Yahweh: creature before creator. The experience was radical and, in the presence of God, the men of the Old Testament stood quite simply and without pretext, "known" by God and loved.

In the light of this faith, the terms simple and simplicity were transformed from the derogatory sense of simplemindedness or of childish behavior to the virtue embodying that disposition of a man who has probed the depths of his own being before and with God, and so recognizes the truth of that relationship and its implications for his moral life.

Fundamental to the spirituality of ancient Israel, then, was the notion of simplicity as it relates to wisdom and integrity. The Book of Wisdom counsels:

Love virtue all you who are judges of the earth,
let honesty prompt your thinking about the Lord,
seek Him in simplicity of heart.

Wisdom 1: 1

In addition, the witness of the patriarchs and the prophets only emphasizes the valor of the upright man, of whom Job remains the classic figure:

Did you notice my servant Job?
There is no one like him on earth; a sound and
honest man who loves God and shuns evil.

Job 1: 8

Furthermore, the Israelites even dared to call upon God as a witness

for their integrity, believing that evil cannot truly harm the innocent man. The Maccabees, for example, unflinchingly challenged their enemies:

Let us all die innocent; let heaven and earth bear witness that you are massacring us with no pretense of justice.

1 Maccabees 2: 37

The same defiance of the enemy is echoed from another voice:

Far from admitting you to be in the right,
I will maintain my innocence to my dying day.

Job 27: 5

What these citations reveal is that in the Old Testament, the concern for simplicity certainly emphasized its character as a virtue of the moral life and that, consequently, the simple heart acts in accord with true wisdom and with a just intention. Spicq specifically defines the capacities of the simple heart, according to the Hebrew insight, when he writes: ". . . une âme loyale, percevra sans ombre, pleinement, la lumière de Dieu, car rien en lui n'y saurait faire obstacle."⁵

In reading other Hebrew texts, it soon becomes apparent that the imagery used by Israel to express the experience of simplicity includes two important symbols: the heart and the eye. Lagrange explains the rationale behind this choice:

⁵Spicq, "La vertu de simplicité," 16. Spicq also reflects upon the meaning of such an understanding in his essay on the concept of simplicity in the scriptures where he commends the radical witness of one's life for the truth of interior integrity:

"C'est pour rester fidèles à la loi de Dieu et pour garder leur conscience pure que les Juifs acceptent la mort. Ils prennent Dieu à témoin de leur droiture, convaincus que la malice des persécuteurs ne saurait leur nuire vraiment. Mourir dans la simplicité du cœur, c'était attendre à Dieu seul la récompense de l'intégrité de leur conduite. Cette simplicité dans l'intégrité allant jusqu'au martyre est le plus bel exemple de droiture que nous offre le peuple élu." 21.

Chez les Hébreux le cœur était le symbole de l'intelligence. Il était donc très naturel d'expliquer la souveraine importance de la disposition du cœur en l'assimilant à une connaissance. Quant à la connaissance elle-même, elle a été souvent comparée à la lumière, et par suite à l'œil. . . .⁶

It is precisely these basic symbols which carry over into the New Testament hermeneutics, clearly linking the two worlds and pinpointing the development of understanding.

The eye as the symbol of intention, specifically a "simple" intention, is adequately described in the Sermon on the Mount:

The lamp of the body is the eye.
It follows that if the eye is sound simple⁷,
your whole body will be filled with light.
But if your eye is diseased, the whole body
will be in darkness.
If then the light within you is darkness,
what a darkness it will be!
Matthew 6: 22-23⁷

In addition to the textual interpretation per se, the relative position of the Matthean logion in the Sermon furthers Bauer's claim that Christ demands entire and undivided self-giving to God's will whereby one becomes free from ulterior motives and self-interest. Christ therefore counsels his hearers to act with a single intention: to give alms, to pray, to fast in secret and the Father, who knows the depths of the heart (motive as well as act), will reward the just (cf. Matthew 6: 1-6, 16-18).

Furthermore, Christ teaches men how to pray in a simple way

⁶G. Lagrange as cited by Spicq, 15.

⁷There is, in this imagery, a meaningful echo from the Old Testament: "Man's spirit is the lamp of Yahweh, searching the deepest self" Proverbs 20: 27. Also, in the Latin version of the Gospel text cited, the term "sound" is a translation of "simplex": "Si oculus tuus fuerit simplex, totum corpus tuum lucidum erit." Cf. Biblia Sacra, Vulgatae Editionis (Romae: Sumptibus et Typis Friderici Pustet, MCMXIV).

(cf. Matthew 6: 7-13); and finally, Christ makes the essential link between theory and commitment perfectly clear when he says: "For where your treasure is, there will be your heart also" (Matthew 6: 21).

In this context, then, Christ refers to the simple intention which, like the eye of the body, allows light to penetrate darkness. And, in the final analysis, this intention is reduced to a single choice:

No one can be the slave of two masters;
he will either hate the first and love the second,
or treat the first with respect and the second
with scorn.

You cannot be a slave of God and money.

Matthew 6: 24

Christ therefore offers a single option--a life impregnated with the light of God or a life overpowered by darkness and the material (money). The treasure, the option, the radicality of the choice result from both mind (wisdom) and heart (will); and simplicity indicates the single and ultimate choice of light over darkness, of God over the material.⁸ The

⁸St. Augustine: Commentary on the Lord's Sermon on the Mount with Seventeen Related Sermons, translated by Denis J. Kavanagh, O. S. A., in The Fathers of the Church (New York: Fathers of the Church, Inc., 1951), XI. Augustine analyzes the Matthean text quite adequately. The thirteenth chapter of his commentary on the "Sermon on the Mount" considers the logion in question. The eye is compared to the intention and the light symbolizes knowledge, etc. He refers to singlemindedness explicitly in several instances; for example, "This passage is to be understood as meaning that we know that all our works are pure and pleasing in the sight of God, if they are performed with a single heart; that is, if they are performed out of charity and with an intention that is fixed on heaven, because 'charity is the fulfillment of the Law'" p. 153. For Augustine, even an act of "charity" could be misleading since it is the motive or intention (which need be single and pure) that transforms the meaning. In the same section, he states: "However, that same light is darkness when the intention is not a single intention directed toward heavenly things, but is deflected toward the things beneath; it is as though it were causing an eclipse when the heart is divided" pp. 154-55. Spicq reaffirms this understanding:

"Le résultat de ce choix est la simplicité de l'âme et de toute la vie au service de Dieu.

Dès lors Dieu qui est l'unique appui des âmes saintes se doit

interpretation of this understanding of simplicity as the radical and ultimate choice of God becomes more explicit in the light of the entire life of Christ.

The effect of Christ is precisely this: he redeems and he sanctifies. Francis Florand's remark that "The interior life of Christ was simple because it was wholly dedicated to the dynamism of the redemptive plan. . . ." clearly assumes that such simplicity is rooted in the integrating power of the redemptive process as personally appropriated by Christ.⁹

Although such reflections concerning the simplification of one's life occur frequently enough in the New Testament, perhaps the Johannine Discourses most clearly and incisively pull the multitudinous threads into a single whole. In John's theology, Christ reveals himself in terms of that process which truly unifies the whole of life. And, in Christ, all men can achieve this integrity:

I am the vine,
you are the branches.
Whoever remains in me, with me in him
bears fruit in plenty;
for cut off from me you can do nothing.
John 15: 5

Such unification or simplicity is not a deliverance from complication; it is not the fostering of withdrawal from life which inadvertently denies the stark reality of the human condition. Rather, in this passage, simplicity, as true insight into the underlying mystery of existence,

de les protéger contre tous les maux qui les menacent. Il assurera la sécurité et le triomphe de leur simplicité. Ce que l'Ancien Testament avait si souvent affirmé, le Nouveau le confirme." Cf. Spicq, 19-20.

⁹Florand, Stages of Simplicity, P. 91.

penetrates into the ultimate meaning of human life: united in the brotherhood of Christ we are one; we are sons in the One Son.

When Christ prays to the Father for those who are one with him, he further clarifies the meaning and the effects of this union:

I am not asking you to remove them from the world,
but to protect them from the evil one.

• • • • •
Consecrate them in the truth;
your word is truth.

John 17: 15, 17

What is true redeems and thus unifies. In this union of man with God in Christ, the one essential is fulfilled. John summarizes his insight:

May they all be one.
Father, may they be one in us,
as you are in me and I am in you,
so that the world may believe that it was you who sent me.
I have given them the glory that you gave to me,
that they may be one as we are one.

John 17: 21-22

In Christ, man is transformed by God. Interior wholeness comes from this impact. Almost tenderly, Christ, as John portrays him, reiterates throughout the Farewell Discourses that this experience is not to be feared:

Do not let your heart be troubled.
Trust in God still, and trust in me.
John 14: 1¹⁰

Thus, although John does not elaborate upon the concept of simplicity via metaphor, as, for example, the synoptic gospels do, the entire Johannine Gospel is formulated in terms of the effect of simplicity when wholeheartedly endorsed. Christ is simple: he is the one sent by God to redeem. Thus empowered, the glory of the Father is his. The man

¹⁰Cf. 14: 18, 27; also, 16: 1, 6-7, 33. This same understanding had been developed earlier by Paul, cf. 1 Corinthians and is especially clear in the Pauline prayer on behalf of the Ephesians, 4: 14-21.

who can see (with a simple eye) believes in Christ and adheres to him, thereby acknowledging in his own life the redeeming power of the risen Lord and sharing in the glory that is his. All human endeavor is thus taken up, purified and reordered by man to God in Christ.

In conclusion, one could emphasize that the notion of simplicity as a fundamental concept both implicitly and explicitly thematized in the New Testament is a notion more deeply entrenched in the "good news" than any single selection can indicate. While the Old Testament traditionally affirmed the simple heart in terms of sincerity and integrity, and the just man as one who walked before the Lord with a clear conscience, New Testament reflections remain more subtle than defined.

Despite this fact, however, the entire thrust of Christ's teachings as well as the ultimate significance of his life, death and resurrection was the efficacious realization of justification for all men through him. And, in the light of this reality, the actualization of simplicity itself was transformed. Thus, what is understood from the New Testament experience is that to be simple is to be as Christ was and is: totally united with the Father.

The single goal of the Christian life is to share in this relationship, to share in the life of God in Christ. In this, simplicity becomes the distinctive characteristic of those who adhere to Christ. The New Testament, therefore, links integrity with sanctification and in this way, the understanding of simplicity evolves. Prior to the Christ-event, perhaps Micha's answer to the question of how man is to present himself to God already held the seed of the New Testament insight:

--What is good has been explained to you, man;
This is what Yahweh asks of you:

only this; to act justly,
to love tenderly
and to walk humbly with your God.
Micha 7: 8

Devoid of all sham or pretext, without holocausts and libations, the goodness of man was indeed seen as an affair of the heart, the interior disposition of his spirit and the moral integrity of his life. Moral rectitude, in this sense, reflects the inner reality of shalom; man at peace with his God.

What the first Christians experienced was recorded throughout the centuries after the death of Christ. In the following sections of this chapter, the present writer will endeavor to draw from these literary sources the meaning of simplicity as understood by some of the more renowned leaders of the past.

Theological Reflection on Simplicity in the First Christian Centuries

During the apostolic and patristic periods, the struggle to formulate and to reflect upon the Christian experience is recorded in a multitude of sources. The notion of simplicity was often enough the subject of concern and, according to the basic assumptions of each writer, the interpretations vary. Depending, therefore, on the predetermined point of reference, simplicity came to mean many things.

Co-extensive with the biblical references to simplicity as integrity of heart, as purity of intention or as the dynamic process of integrating the totality of personal existence in view of the glory of the Father, the writers' preoccupation wavers between the question of an ultimate choice (for good or evil, for light or darkness), and the question of adopting a simple life-style.

The image of the eye in relation to simplicity continues in

this tradition well into the fifth century and somehow seems to summarize many of the related themes that surface in various, extant literary sources. From the homily of Philoxène de Mabboug, "La simplicité de la foi de Zachée," we read:

L'oeil de la foi, avec la pupille de la simplicité, reconnaît la voix de Dieu aussitot qu'il l'entend. La lumière de sa parole se lève en lui, il s'élance joyeusement au-devant d'elle, et il la reçoit, comme l'a dit notre Seigneur dans son Evangile: Mes Brebis entendent ma voix et elles me suivent (Jn 10, 27). Car partout où la foi naturelle a été gardée dans son intégrité, celui qui l'a gardée est la brebis du pasteur. . . .¹¹

If the initial false predication jars the reader, further identification between God's spoken word and light clarifies the issue somewhat. What the author finally exhorts his flock to do is to make the choice that characterizes the true Christian: the singling out of the one, final good (God), here and now, and the subsequent relegating of all other goods as indifferent, unnecessary or even harmful to the authentic life of the soul. No obstacle to the presence of God within the soul can be tolerated. A faith which so simplifies life on earth spares the soul, and, stripped of all other concerns, the word of God (life) is openly and freely received.

This entire homily reformulates the essential choice originally proclaimed in the Sermon on the Mount and it is precisely this option which is continuously emphasized in the teachings of the Christian community. A much earlier audience who listened to the letter of Clement of Rome heard the same message:

The all-merciful and beneficent Father has compassion on them who fear Him, and with gentleness and kindness bestows His favors on those who approach Him with a simple heart. So let us not be

¹¹Philoxène de Mabboug, "La simplicité de la foi de Zachée," quoted in the Appendix, D.

double-minded, nor let our souls form false ideas about His extraordinary and glorious gifts. Let that Scripture be far from us where He says: 'Miserable are the double-minded who doubt in their souls. . . .'¹²

Bouyer, who refers in his text to this letter, observes that such teaching is remarkably consistent in Apostolic sources and that the question of simplicity is obvious, "since the choice of God in Christ is the choice of a 'simple mind,' a mind which is not divided (double-minded) and which has chosen truth (free from false ideas)." Bouyer also refers to the "Shepherd of Hermas" as an indication of the tenor of the times. In this case, Bouyer continues;

The Shepherd for his part, continually puts us on guard against dipsuchia. To this dividedness it opposes true faith together with aplotes, hence the gravity of sin after the definitive choice which baptism presupposes as already made.¹³

Perhaps the text of the Twelve Mandates from the "Shepherd of Hermas" most explicitly reveals this insight of the Christian experience. For example, in the Second Mandate, the Shepherd says to the narrator of the text:

Hold fast to simplicity of heart and innocence. Yes! Be as infants who do not know the wickedness that destroys the life of men.

Further in the Ninth Mandate, we read:

Every man of divided purpose will be saved with difficulty unless he repents. Cleanse your heart, then, of divided purposes, clothe yourself with faith, because it is strong, and put your trust in God, confident that you will receive every request you make of Him.

Finally, in the last Mandate, the Shepherd says:

¹²"Letter to the Corinthians," translated by Francis Glimm in The Apostolic Fathers, ed. Ludwig Schopp, The Fathers of the Church (New York: Cima Publishing Co., Inc., 1947), I, p. 21.

¹³Louis Bouyer, The Spirituality of the New Testament and the Fathers, translated by Mary P. Ryan (New York: Deselee Company, 1960), p. 189.

You will keep them [mandates], if your heart is made pure to the Lord. All those, also, who cleanse their hearts of the vain desires of this world will keep them and will live to God.¹⁴

Thus, the choice of the Christian way is seen as a radical severing from what the early writers came to call the "way of the world." It had to be one or the other; there was no room for an in-between set of values. Tertullian, also, as so many others, affirmed the all-encompassing dimension of the Christian's choice:

It is with men from your own midst that the jail is always bulging, with your own that the mines are always humming, with your own that the wild beasts are always fattened, with your own that the producers of gladiatorial shows feed the herds of criminals. No one there is a Christian--unless he is merely that; if he is something else, too, then he is no longer a Christian.¹⁵

As long as there was a division within the heart of a man, there was room for conversion to the absolute, to God. For this reason, the "Letter of Barnabas," one of the earliest Christian sources, emphasized the importance of conversion of heart understood as the choice between two extremes:

Let us now turn to another kind of Knowledge and Teaching. There are two ways of Teaching and Power: that of Light and that of Darkness; and there is a great difference between the two ways. Over the one are stationed the light-bringing angels of God; over the other, the angels of Satan.

The letter continues to describe what the choice ultimately means:

The Way of Light, then, is this: . . . Thou shalt love thy Creator, thou shalt fear thy Maker, thou shalt glorify Him who redeemed thee from death. Thou shalt be simple in heart and generous in spirit.

¹⁴"Shepherd of Hermas," translated by Joseph M.-F. Marique, S. J., in The Apostolic Fathers cited above, pp. 259, 273-74, 285. Bouyer briefly explicates a section of this passage noting that aplotes corresponds to the Hebrew tam which means simple or integral. Dipsuchia refers to the state of a divided soul, op. cit., p. 189.

¹⁵"Apology," Chapter 44, translated by Sister Emily Joseph Daley, C. S. J., in Tertullian, ed. Roy Joseph Defarrari, The Fathers of the Church (New York: Fathers of the Church, Inc., 1950), X, p. 109.

Thou shalt not join those who walk in the way of death. . . .¹⁶

That the values of the church were irreconcilable to those of the world seems to be an unquestioned assumption and the experience of this division is a constant theme that reappears in Christian writings.

Entrance into the Christian community, then, necessarily involved the choice between two standards, between two sets of values: the spirit of the Gospel over that of evil, or, as tradition later formulated the latter choice, the "way of the world." What had been the foundation of the primitive Christian gathering, therefore, was the inherent simplicity that characterized conversion to Gospel standards: radical adherence to God in Christ. In some of the churches, the initial spirit was manifest in a desire to imitate the early apostolic fervor through a life-style that eminently witnessed to evangelical simplicity, not only in singling out the ultimate goal, God in Christ, but particularly in the telling choice of the means to achieve this goal, in the choice of a way of life which assured its fulfillment.

In later years, the movement of certain Christians to the desert and the experience of a solitary life was a further attempt to affirm

¹⁶"Letter of Barnabas," translated by Francis Climm in The Apostolic Fathers, pp. 218-19. Bouyer affirms the conclusiveness of the Epistle in referring to a later chapter, XIX, 2 and 5. The importance of aplotes is stressed and this condition of the soul is, of course, directly opposed to the divided soul (person) who evades a choice and remains torn between two opposing value systems. Cf. Bouyer, p. 189. Those who choose the way of light ultimately achieve perfection. Clement of Alexandria links this with purity of heart and as such, it has become embedded in the Christian tradition. Clement states: "They become pure of heart, and near to the Lord, there waits for them restoration to everlasting contemplation; and they are called by the appellation of gods, being destined to sit on thrones with the other gods that have been first put in their places by the savior." Stromata, Book 7, chapter 10, The Teachings of the Church Fathers, ed. John R. Willis, S. J. (New York: Herder and Herder, 1966), No. 1036.

the choice of life over death. To build cities in the desert represented, it would seem, a striving to restore order after the experience of chaos and division. The gradual simplification of mind and heart was soon formulated in the ideal and life-style practiced in the first celibate communities who imitated, in a special manner, the way of the apostles.

The monastic pursuit remains an outstanding fact in the history of Christianity. The present writer will examine some of the sources of this specific life-style where there is evidence that simplicity was considered a primary value. The subsequent development of the university schools which followed the breakdown of feudalism and the growth of the city also provides this study with relevant information concerning the place of simplicity in the developing Christian life.

Theological Reflection on Simplicity: The Monks and the Scholars

What has been recovered of the religious literature from the middle ages gives ample evidence that simplicity, in all of its dimensions, continued to be a concern of spiritual writers. Explicit textual references are numerous even though many theological treatises remain untapped sources. In this section, we shall attempt only to illustrate the recurrent theme of simplicity as it appears in selected passages which, because of their place in the spiritual tradition, are relevant to the textual study about to be undertaken.

The development of theological reflection during these many centuries resulted from one of two major emphases: the monastic tradition which began with Benedict at Subiaco in the fifth century and later grew into the Benedictine and Cistercian life-styles; or, the scholastic tradition which began in the cathedral schools and soon developed under

the auspices of the universities.

It is through the monastic tradition that the concern for simplicity becomes crucial to the understanding of Christian life. It would even seem that the ideal of simplicity, in a unique way, characterizes the monastic pursuit. Leclercq describes the monastic tradition as it was built upon the choice of the Christian to live out the most "simple" way of life. In quoting William of St. Thierry, Leclercq emphasizes the importance of the will in choosing God alone:

Simplicity in fact is properly the will fundamentally turned towards God, asking of the Lord only one thing, seeking it with fervor, with no ambition to multiply itself by becoming dispersed in the world. Simplicity is also, in the conduct of life, the true humility which has the virtue of attaching more importance to the evidence of conscience than to reputation.

Furthermore, William of St. Thierry succinctly defines this total thrust of a person: "Holy Simplicity is an unchanging will in the pursuit of a changeless good."¹⁷ Essentially, therefore, simplicity is understood in terms of a single choice of the one, final good and the activity of the will is seen as clinging to this one so that every other good, reputation included, is re-evaluated in terms of this total endeavor.

Bernard of Clairvaux reiterates the same principle, emphasizing again the efficacious conversion of heart by which a man radically adheres to God, not only as a primary object of the will but especially as the unique desire of the honest man who recognizes himself as creature before the all-holy Creator.¹⁸ Leclercq's study of monastic

¹⁷Jean Leclercq quotes William of St. Thierry in The Love of Learning and the Desire for God, translated by Catherine Misrahi (New York: Fordham University Press, 1961), p. 254.

¹⁸Mesnard, 328. Several of Bernard's theological reflections are incorporated into Mesnard's analysis. Bernard is emphatically clear in his teaching on the conversion of the mind and heart to God alone. From the Opera, f° 1164C, Mesnard extracts the following insightful

theology in The Love of Learning and the Desire for God also includes reference to some of the more practical aspects of implementing this ideal. For example, when confronted with the learning experience of exaggerated intellectual tactics practiced at the universities, the monk had to choose anew:

To offset these undesirable effects, the mind must be brought back to a single occupation and preoccupation. A single quest and a single search must be substituted for all these questions. To seek God, not to discuss Him, to avoid the inner turmoil of overly subtle investigations and disputes, the manifold arguments, to flee from the outer noise of controversies and to eliminate futile problems, such as sic the foremost role of simplicity.¹⁹

What Leclercq hints at is far more than a choice between two goods, the monastic pursuit of the experience of God or, the scholastic method of reflection upon the nature of God. In this practical question, the life of the monk, as simple, is seemingly put at odds with the life of the scholar, or at least the pseudo-intellectual. This would require a more detailed study than the scope of this essay can allow. What is certain, however, is that tension was experienced by the monk and that the drive for simplicity and for a simple life, as it was then understood, often required the sacrifice of some intellectual development. Such can only appear as a deviation and Bernard himself is an outstanding example to the contrary.

It seems almost inevitable, from the historical perspective, that theological reflection should become an academic discipline.

passage: "Vel simplicitas est sola ad Deum conversa voluntas, sed nondum ratione formata ut amor sit, id est formata voluntas; nondum illuminata ut charitas, hoc est amoris jucunditas. Simplicites ergo initius aliquod in seipsa habens creaturae Dei hoc, voluntatem simplicem et bonam, quasi futuri boni hominis informem materiam, in primordio conversionis suae offert, auctoritati suo eam formandam."

¹⁹Leclercq, p. 254.

Simplicity, as a theological question, was soon treated in the method that characterized the scholastic system. In his essay on simplicity, Spicq highlights the reflections of Thomas Aquinas as the finest expression of theological insight. Spicq observes that:

Dans la Somme la simplicité est synonyme de vérité, vertu annexe de la justice; opposée à la ruse et au mensonge, elle règle nos rapports avec autrui et consiste à se montrer, par ses paroles et toute sa vie, tel qu'on est; elle est donc opposée à la duplicité, ce qui est bien un aspect de l'enseignement révélé.²⁰

In the texts to which Spicq alludes, Thomas does not, however, emphasize or insist on an identification between truth and simplicity. The point at issue is the nature of truth. Therefore, the relationship between goodness and truth as well as simplicity and truth comes to the foreground.

In fact, Thomas clearly indicates that truth and goodness are not synonymous. Astutely, Thomas objects that

. . . truth seems to be the same as simplicity, since hypocrisy is opposed to both. But simplicity is not a special virtue, since it rectifies the intention and that is required in every virtue. Therefore, neither is truth a special virtue.

The reply follows in this fashion:

Simplicity is so called from its opposition to duplicity, whereby, to wit, a man shows one thing outwardly while having another in his heart: so that simplicity pertains to this virtue. And it rectifies the intention, not indeed directly (since this belongs to every virtue), but by excluding duplicity, whereby a man pretends one thing and intends another.²¹

²⁰Spicq, cf. footnote 4, 14-15.

²¹Summa Theologica, II^a, II^{ae}, q. CIX, a. 2, obj. 4 and ad 4, translated by the Fathers of the English Dominican Province, 3 vols. (New York: Benziger Brothers, Inc., 1947), II, pp. 1161-62. Spicq concludes his appraisal of Thomas' interpretation by observing that the shift from the Old Testament to the New Testament understanding can be summarized in the change of terms used to explicate the experience. Where the Old Testament used the word simplicity, the New Testament substituted the term truth, cf. Spicq, 25-26.

Simplicity as Thomas defines it pertains to truth inasmuch as simplicity rectifies the intention. Simplicity, then, orders the will to truth. With simplicity so considered, its link to perfection or to sanctity is clearly stressed. In this sense, simplicity and sanctity almost seem indistinguishable.²²

In addition to the Summa of Saint Thomas, the scriptural commentaries written by the various scholars of the medieval schools are important in any analysis of simplicity, particularly those which deal with the "simple eye" passage of the Matthean and Lukan texts. In his essay on "La Notion de Simplicité dans l'Imitation de Jésus-Christ," Pierre Mesnard remarks that the scholastic theologians who formulated a theory of intelligence based on a comparison with natural vision, would quite naturally turn to these sources for biblical support. As in previous documents from both apostolic and patristic sources, the glance of the eye is compared to a person's intention. Mesnard defines such intention by quoting the following: "l'intention est l'acte de l'intelligence ayant en vue de manière constante, d'atteindre un bien, par

²² Lefebvre, cf. footnote, 115-16. It is interesting to note Lefebvre's remark as he elaborates on the doctrine of Thomas:

"On pourrait rappeler ici que cette identification entre perfection et simplicité est l'intuition qui est à la base de la philosophie de saint Thomas. La théorie de l'acte et la puissance n'est que d'autre chose que cette affirmation: l'être infiniment parfait n'est pas seulement celui qui est 'plus' que les autres, mais, plus profondément, celui qui est 'mieux' que les autres: qui ne possède pas seulement plus de perfection, mais le possède selon un mode plus parfait, qui est précisément un mode d'infinie simplicité. Et plus la perfection s'éloigne de sa source, plus s'éloigne aussi de ce mode de simplicité pour devenir multiple, complexe, composée d'éléments divers qui se complètent les uns les autres."

The kind of multiplicity referred to by Lefebvre indicates a pejorative notion of an unhealthy dualism of the human spirit which is contrary to the wholeness experienced by an integrated personality whose mind and heart are purposefully directed in terms of ultimate values.

des moyens appropriés."²³

Certain Pauline texts exegeted by medieval theologians also demonstrate a fine understanding of the role of simplicity in the Christian life. Spicq again refers to Thomas Aquinas' interpretation of Paul's second letter to the Corinthians:

Il est intéressant de noter que, dans ses commentaires scripturaires, saint Thomas traduit toujours simplicitas cordis par: intention droite: "in simplicitate cordis id est rectitudine intentionis" in II Cor. 1, 12; "simplicitas cordis referatur ad voluntatem quae debet in Deum objectum suum totaliter ferri." in Joan. XIV, lec 7, cf. II Cor. IX, 11; Eph. VI, 5, Rom. VII, 8.²⁴

From these commentaries and the scriptural allusions, then, simplicity is interpreted as that principle which rectifies the intention and, therefore, justifies man.

While this kind of theological reflection was consistently fostered in the schools and universities, it was not the only formulation of Christian spirituality available. From the tenth century onward, the dual current that had begun in the early middle ages took definite shape with two specific emphases in the nature of theological reflection and subsequent teaching.

Alongside the scholar, as, for example, Thomas Aquinas (d. 1274), the teachings and writings of the preachers and mendicants dramatically shaped spiritual traditions. Men such as Francis of Assisi (d. 1226), in Italy, incarnated the "conversion of heart" into a life-style soon imitated by thousands. In the North, later still, John of Ruysbroeck (d. 1381, Flanders), wrote some of the most influential

²³ Mesnard quotes this definition from a late nineteenth-century text, La Doctrine du Livre De Imitatione Christi by a Father Puyol (Paris, 1898, p. 222), 327.

²⁴ Spicq, cf. footnote 4, 14-15.

sermons and treatises which would become directly responsible for the literary classic of the Christian heritage, the Imitation of Christ by Thomas à Kempis (d. 1471).

John of Ruysbroeck is of particular importance because of the influence his writing had on the spirituality of religious communities. Like so many others, he employs the terms simple and simplicity equivocally; for example, he refers to a simple light, or a simple heart, a simple manner and a simple intention. The importance that Ruysbroeck attached to simplicity, however, indicates a much deeper sense than any of the above illustrations. In the following analogy, Ruysbroeck reverts to the traditional biblical image of the simple eye:

... les yeux simples de l'âme n'ont rien d'autre devant eux que l'image que Dieu est en Lui-même. Ils voient Dieu et toutes choses comme si elles étaient un avec Dieu, en un regard simple. Pour l'âme, c'est assez. Cela s'appelle ²⁵Contemplatio, ce qui veut dire: regarder Dieu dans un mode simple.

What rises out of the experience of the mystic as exemplified by Ruysbroeck is the crucial question: is simplicity to be identified primarily with the intention of the person who already contemplates God alone, or, is it the result of the union of such a soul with God who, by nature, is simple?

In other words, what seems to be confirmed is that in the total conversion of man toward God, which transformation involves a complete reversal of forces, a sense of identification with the divine is achieved. "I have been crucified with Christ," says Paul, "and I live now not with my own life but with the life of Christ who lives in

²⁵John of Ruysbroeck, Les douze Béguines, quoted by Mesnard, 330.

me" (Galatians 2: 20).²⁶ In another treatise, Le Miroir du Salut Eternel, Ruysbroeck elaborates more adequately upon this experience wherein he describes simplicity as the characteristic which qualifies the perfect union of the soul with God. Here, the soul discovers

... la vérité éternelle qui inonde notre vue nue, c'est à dire l'œil simple de notre âme, dont l'essence, la vie et l'opération consistent à contempler, à voler, à courir et à dépasser toujours notre être créé, sans égard ni retour en arrière.²⁷

In the formulation of Christian spirituality writings such as these by John of Ruysbroeck remain an outstanding contribution and represent not only an aspect in the development of thought but also the beginning of a tradition perhaps best exemplified in the work of Thomas à Kempis. That a link exists between Ruysbroeck and à Kempis is confirmed through various studies noted in Pierre Mesnard's article. In particular, Mesnard traces the development of the concept of simplicity in terms of both historical influences, such as Ruysbroeck and Bernard of Clairvaux, and theological principles underlying the Imitation.

Basing himself on a textual analysis, Mesnard clearly illustrates that a distinction is made by Thomas à Kempis between purity of intention and simplicity of intention:

1 Two wings allow man to fly
above and beyond earthly attachments:
to be trained in simplicity and purity.

2 Simplicity is a function of the will,

²⁶Pierre Teilhard de Chardin's experience, like Paul's, confirms this insight. In "The Mass on the World," he prays: "What I want, my God, is that by a reversal of forces which you alone can bring about, my terror in the face of the nameless changes destined to renew my being may be turned into an overflowing joy at being transformed into you" p. 29. This theme repeats itself constantly throughout the Hymn of the Universe, particularly through the development of the concept of transformism.

²⁷Ruysbroeck, in Mesnard, 330.

Purity of the affection.

3 Simplicity seeks God,
Purity finds God and delights in Him.²⁸

Another observation by Mesnard brings to light the dialectical nature of simplicity as developed in the Imitation. When all is given back to God by the soul, that is, when the enlightened intelligence and graced will unite in the actualization of simplicity through self-gift to the Absolute, then the purification of man results in his own beatitude:

Il y aura donc une double simplicité du fait que la direction de l'intention sera désormais assurée par la préoccupation unique de la gloire de Dieu, et que la possession de la béatitude sera confirmée par la dilatation spontanée de l'amour divin.²⁹

The movement is, therefore, patterned: God first loves man and man, through the conversion of his heart, returns his whole being to the Father. Nothing is held back. The gift is confirmed and the heart of man experiences the wholeness that characterizes Christian peace. This interaction operative between God and man in the act of conversion initiates a life-long orientation and the entire thrust of the Imitation

²⁸Thomas à Kempis, Imitation of Christ, Book II, translated by Ronald Knox and Michael Oakley (New York: Sheed and Ward, 1959), p. 65. The problem of authorship in reference to the Imitation is briefly indicated in Knox's Preface. Whatever the source(s) which feeds into the final version of the Imitation, the text as it stands is the concern of this study.

²⁹Mesnard, 336-37. Mesnard concludes that: "L'idée très simple mais très féconde de Thomas à Kempis c'est une espèce de mouvement circulaire par laquelle les dons de Dieu remontent à leur source après avoir purifié la créature spirituelle." 337-38. Cf. 1 John. Also, Gerard Manley Hopkins, "The Leaden Echo and the Golden Echo," A Hopkins Reader, ed. John Pick (Garden City, New York: Doubleday & Company, 1966), pp. 68-70. The theme of this poem clearly emphasizes the underlying attitude that permeates a Christian interpretation of life. Hopkins is concerned with the significance of hope alone when all is given back to God: "Give beauty back, beauty, beauty, beauty, back to God, beauty's self and beauty's giver."

is in terms of intensifying this relationship.³⁰

The importance of the Imitation of Christ to the spirituality of succeeding generations should not be underestimated.³¹ Perhaps no other book, with the exception of the Bible, has been so widely read and appreciated since its first appearance. Certainly, for this study, the work of the Imitation is of specific importance due to the formulation of a doctrine of simplicity. In addition, the text was a decisive influence in the spiritual formation of the founders of the Sisters of the Presentation of Mary of Bourg Saint Andéol, France, as will become evident in the following chapter.

It is at this point, therefore, that a meaningful, although brief, historical survey concludes since it is primarily from these sources that the spiritual heritage of this religious community was drawn. Although the Reform and Counter-Reform movements intervene and mark a turning point in the development of the Christian tradition, particularly in view of simplifying the existing structural patterns

³⁰To quote the Imitation itself:

"My son, walk without pretense in my sight, ever seeking me in singleness of heart. The man who so walks in my sight will be shielded from the assaults of evil; the truth will free him from those who would lead him astray and from the backbiting of the wicked. If it is the truth that frees you, you will be free indeed; the vain words of men will leave you unconcerned."

P. 88.

³¹A man such as Pascal, for example, was an avid devotee of the Imitation. His keen awareness of the role of simplicity in the Christian life seems important since, after his dramatic experience of conversion, several of the reflections recorded in his Pensées testify to the significance of simplicity in terms comparable to the Imitation. Mesnard quotes the following from Pascal: "Ne vous étonnez pas de voir des personnes simples croire sans raisonner. Dieu leur donne l'amour de soi et la haine d'eux-mêmes" 334. Other men of letters, such as Bossuet and Fénelon, are equally influenced by the Imitation and they in turn are incorporated into the documents of the Presentation of Mary which are to be studied in the following chapter.

of the church through re-emphasizing evangelical formulas, the small villages of Ardèche where the community was born remained catholic.³² It would, perhaps, be unfair to assume that southern France was virtually unaffected by this religious upheaval in the sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries. To some extent, however, this seems true. The dissenting voices of the Huguenots as well as other reformers made a significant sound only in the larger cities. For more than a hundred years, the situation remained the same.

Of far more importance to these rural areas was the French Revolution and the subsequent reign of Napoleon. From the experience of social and cultural chaos of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, the French strove to rebuild political, economic and religious ideology and structures. The effort to rechannel, to revitalize and hence, to reform, indicates both the recognition of loss and the inner drive to excel. And, as the pattern of history clearly illustrates, such periods of crisis and reform are characterized precisely by the human struggle to simplify.

In the following chapter we will endeavor to reflect upon the

³²Cf. Ronald H. Bainton, The Reformation of the Sixteenth Century (Boston: The Beacon Press, 1952), Introduction, pp. 4-5, 21. This is not to evade the importance of this movement in history. The reform was indeed a process of re-ordering and an attempt to return to the primitive simplicity of the initial Gospel formulations. However, for the purpose of this essay, investigation into the Reform Movement would only digress from the issue of simplicity as it was incorporated into the sources of the Presentation of Mary. Another, and far more important influence, has also been omitted due to the very limited scope of this study: the possible relationship between the ideas bred in the Jansenistic tradition and the spirituality of the Presentation. The French community was certainly and seriously handicapped by the negative principles of its ideology. Yet, since the link to simplicity is not clear and since the theological formulations of the Founders on simplicity do not implicate this erroneous ideology, it has been left aside for possible investigation in the future.

expression of simplicity as it emerges from this historical setting and as it is considered by the Founders of the Presentation of Mary. This study of simplicity will seek to uncover, in documents selected from the community archives, both the explicit and implicit awareness of the first members of this institute. Therefore, the present writer will deal with the question of simplicity wherever and however it is handled in the documents under scrutiny.

Hopefully, the documents will reveal that Christian simplicity, considered to be an outstanding characteristic of the Sisters of the Presentation of Mary, is indeed a value of primary theological import which reflects the deepest integration of the mind and heart in view of an ultimate concern.

CHAPTER IV

SIMPLICITY: A TEXTUAL ANALYSIS

Simplicity Revealed as a Primary Theological Concern in the Early Documents of the Sisters of the Presentation of Mary

There is a point at which everything becomes simple and there is no longer any question of choice, because all you have staked will be lost if you look back. Life's point of no return.

Dag Hammarskjöld¹

The founders of the Presentation of Mary were three: Anne-Marie Rivier, Louis Pontanier and Régis Vernet. Although each was concerned with the value of simplicity as a virtue inherent in the call to celibate religious community, it becomes immediately apparent in perusing selected documents written by these leaders that there is no specific treatise on the notion of simplicity that is original to any of the Founders.² However, the theme of simplicity, even if not academically

¹Dag Hammarskjöld, Markings, p. 70.

²In the three-volume text, attributed to Rivier and treated in the Introduction to this essay, La Vie de Notre Seigneur Jésus-Christ, a Jesuit, Charles Borgo, reflects upon the nature of Christian simplicity. The source is extremely valuable since it is the only reference available which overtly indicates the understanding of the Founders on the question of simplicity. The worth of this source is also enhanced by the present textual analysis since this interpretation of the documents and manuscripts points out that the primary reflections of the Founders on simplicity include all of the dimensions indicated in the treatise of Charles Borgo. Cf. Appendix, E, On Simplicity, where the entire chapter is included for reference. The themes of simplicity as purity of intention, as the imitation of Christ and as the simple life-style are apparent.

analyzed in the writings of the founders of the Presentation of Mary, is a constant refrain that persistently focuses the reader's attention on the question of simplicity itself: to be simple, to speak simply, to imitate the simplicity of Jesus Christ, and, to reflect, in every detail of life, the simply life-style that characterized the way of Jesus.

This recurrent and overt reference to simplicity as an evangelical ideal to be wholeheartedly pursued by the members of the community seems to indicate two things: first, that the members were conscious of a fundamental experience of simplicity as essential to the Christian life; and, secondly, that the community believed that this experience, when incorporated into the celibate community tradition of the church, ought to be expressed in a radical and definitive manner.

In addition, the texts which are to be studied infer that such Christian simplicity is clearly understood by the Sisters of the Presentation of Mary to be an outstanding characteristic of their own life-style, and, in a real sense, a source of personal and communal identification. In a letter to Sister Vincent de Paul, Rivier upholds the primacy of such simplicity to the spirit of the community:

La simplicité a bien disparu de partout, et souvent on n'apprend pas le nécessaire aux élèves, pour leur donner toutes ces leçons de vanité qui ne servent qu'à les rendre orgueilleuses. . . . Je suis désolée et je pleurerais toujours de voir tant de têtes remplies de vanité, et qui mettent tant d'abus dans nos établissements. Oh! que l'esprit primitif a dégénéré: il n'y a plus de simplicité. Cette idée me fait sanglotter: ah! nous méritons bien notre destruction.

Cros, II, 202-203³

³All of the primary sources used in this textual analysis on simplicity have been discussed in the Introduction of this paper under the heading, The Manuscript Tradition, pp. 14-28. For this reason, identification of these sources will be included in the body of the text proper, instead of in footnotes. N. B.: Both the First Rule and the Schema of the Rule are copies of manuscripts with alternating pagination. Therefore, the pages will be cited as 1 and 1^v respectively.

Although expressed negatively, that is, in terms of loss, it is evident that for Rivier, simplicity is consciously incorporated into the spirit of the Presentation as an essential ideal without which the community identity disintegrates.

One of the first members of the institute also witnesses to this deep-rooted attitude in recalling Rivier's ideal:

Notre Mère, dit Soeur Arsène, était ennemie de tout ce qui ressentait le luxe ou la superfluité; elle n'eut jamais à son usage rien qui ne fut conforme à la simplicité et à la pauvreté, et elle exigeait la même chose de ses filles. Dans ses visites d'établissements, elle témoignait une joie très marquée lorsqu'elle s'apercevait que toutes choses étaient selon la simplicité première.

Cros, II, 171-72

Other sources also confirm that this striving for Christian simplicity was an integral part of the initial experience of Rivier and her companions who came together to live the Gospel through the celibate, apostolic tradition.

The present study will attempt to discover the meaning of simplicity through a textual analysis of some of the earliest sources available from the Archives of the Presentation of Mary at Bourg Saint Andéol, France. The oldest documents to be so considered are the First Rule of Louis Pontanier and a later draft, the Schema of the Rule compiled by Régis Vernet probably during the summer of 1801. In addition to these, however, selected conferences, treatises and letters of Anne-Marie Rivier offer substantial evidence that the underlying, primitive spirit, essential to the tradition of the Presentation of Mary and revealed in these documents is indeed a profound concern for the primacy of simplicity.

To facilitate this textual criticism, a threefold thematic division will be followed, demonstrating the relationships developed in

the documents between, first of all, simplicity and purity of intention; secondly, between simplicity and the imitation of Christ; and finally, between simplicity and the simple life-style. There are several reasons which suggest such an interpretation of the texts to be studied. Of primary consideration in any analysis of simplicity is an awareness of the identification of Christian simplicity as purity of intention. In the three-volume work, La Vie de Notre Seigneur Jésus-Christ, the meditation on "The Presence of God" by Charles Borgo concludes:

[La] Simplicité . . . n'est d'autre chose qu'un acte de charité pure et simple, qui fait que nous ne regardons et n'avons d'autre vue en toutes nos actions, que le seul désir de plaire à Dieu.

III, 342

This interpretation from Saint Francis de Sales, which describes simplicity as purity of intention, is the only formal definition gleaned from any of the primary sources available for the present analysis. Its authority for Rivier, as well as for Pontanier and Vernet, is unquestioned since the entire presentation of simplicity in this text is based on Rivier's concern to offer the members of her community the finest in Christian spirituality.

Such a definition is doubly important, however. Not only does it clearly enunciate the theological interpretation that underlies the Founders' point of view, but also through the description of simplicity as purity of intention, the concept is linked to the long heritage of the Christian tradition, previously discussed in this study. The "simple eye" of the Gospel which symbolizes the pure intention, the interpretation of Augustine as well as the reference to the simple faith of Zachaeus in the Homily of Philoxène de Mabboug are only the beginnings of that literary heritage which, culminating in the Imitation of Christ, defines simplicity as the dynamic process which purifies one's intention

from all selfishness and dramatically leads a man to abandon all irrelevant pursuits in order to seek out the one essential: the glory of God. It is precisely these positive and negative dimensions of simplicity, to purify in order to find, that recur as a constant and compelling theme in the documents relevant to the foundation of the Sisters of the Presentation of Mary.

A second reason which validates the threefold thematic division of this textual analysis is the Christ-centered consciousness of the Founders, especially Anne-Marie Rivier. This seems to be of particular importance since it is this kind of awareness which, in the depth experience of simplicity, transforms the concept in terms of the life, death and resurrection of Jesus. Therefore, Christian simplicity ought to be different from a more humanistic interpretation of reality, not only in degree but also in kind.

The simplicity of Rivier, then, is the simplicity of Jesus Christ. Indeed, the whole story of Christian simplicity is the telling of man's striving for the simplicity that characterizes the Christ. The Gospel call to metanoia is the call to that tremendous reversal of life-forces made possible through the incarnation of Jesus and described as the re-ordering of values because of the dimension of self-transcendence actualized in Christ. Empowered by the spirit, the Christian as son and brother is incorporated into the simplicity of God. Therefore, to be conscious of Christ as the One who comes from the Father to save in the Spirit is to be aware of the way in which our lives are quietly taken up into God and to know ourselves as simple men and women.

Finally, the threefold thematic division in view of studying the manifestation of simplicity in terms of a simple life-style seems

necessary since it is this external expression of inwardness that is explicitly alluded to in the documents under evaluation. While the relationship of simplicity to poverty can be ambiguous, it seems clear that the Founders and early members of the community were aware that this external form of simplicity was a positive means of radically affirming, in time and space, the inner disposition of mind and heart. The consciousness of the early community, therefore, emphasizes the primacy of the simple life-style and the constant need that such an external reflect the deeper levels of experience.

If there is any weakness in the development of a theology of simplicity by the Founders of the Presentation of Mary, perhaps it is that this emphasis on the overt and simple life-style seems, at times, to fall short of accepting other viable means of implementing the virtue of simplicity. However, this excessive concern can, to some extent, be explained by socio-cultural factors and, the development of a positive theology in view of simplicity as purity of intention and as the imitation of Christ, indicates without a doubt the Founders' awareness of the full implications of the dynamics of Christian simplicity.

Returning, then, to the threefold thematic analysis of simplicity through a textual interpretation of selected documents from the Archives of the Sisters of the Presentation of Mary, the following sections of this chapter will be divided so as to facilitate reference, treating, first of all, simplicity as purity of intention; then, simplicity as the imitation of Christ; and finally, simplicity as the simple life-style.

I Simplicity as Purity of Intention

The notion of simplicity as purity of intention is most clearly delineated in the work of Régis Vernet whose chapter, "Purity of Intention," in the Schema of the Rule is a careful analysis of the virtue in the style of the theological manuals of the time.⁴ In his description, which will be the principal source for this section, one finds the academic tone of the scholar's pursuit of precision and clarity that is often absent in the other sources. For this reason, Vernet's reflection will be of outstanding value to this textual study. The chapter on "Purity of Intention" not only defines the scope of the question but also serves as a basis for evaluating other community documents. In addition, Vernet's text, drawn up in view of the concrete experience of the community and in conformity with the ideals cherished by the Foundress, succinctly expresses both the goals of the community and the specific means proposed in order to achieve them.

After an investigation of the Schema of the Rule, the First Rule of Louis Pontanier will be studied in view of uncovering the theme of simplicity as purity of intention. Although the draft is an earlier document, its value in contributing to this theme is quite limited since of its very nature the First Rule served as an initial set of guidelines and regulations for the nascent community. However, the text cannot be overlooked since it contains the earliest formulation of the spirit of the Presentation of Mary and the Schema itself builds upon these ideals.

In the same way, the citations from the conferences and correspondence of Anne-Marie Rivier, which echo the principles elaborated upon

⁴Cf. Appendix, F, Purity of Intention. Chapter XIII from the Projet des Règles is quoted in its entirety.

by Vernet in the Schema, will be incorporated into the thematic interpretation inasmuch as possible.

Simplicity as Purity of Intention in the Schema of the Rule

In the Schema, purity of intention is categorically defined as a virtue, an act of love through which a person directs everything to God who is man's final goal. Included in this understanding, which is reminiscent of Francis de Sales' definition as previously quoted in La Vie de Notre Seigneur Jésus-Christ, is both a loving intention and the desire to integrate all of one's activities toward this ultimate purpose. It is interesting to note that the verb "rapporter" in the French text denotes a "turning back" or a "bringing home," and hence, indicates a sense of restoration, of returning to rightful ownership or origin.⁵

Furthermore, a specific relationship is drawn by Vernet between purity of intention and simplicity:

Si votre intention est simple et pure toute la conduite de votre vie sera pure, sera sainte; mais si l'intention, avec laquelle vous faites toutes vos actions, n'est pas simple, n'est pas pure, toute votre vie ne sera qu'un dérèglement continual.

Schema, 170^v

This statement seems to indicate an identification of terms. According to Vernet, the pure intention is simple. The definition of "pure" in French seems to intensify this understanding: pure signifies that which is unadulterated, unmixed, and can refer to a person who is simple and sincere, a person without guile.⁶

In addition, Vernet proposes that the intention which is not pure or simple is a definite threat to the spiritual life; Vernet

⁵"rapporter," The New Cassell's French Dictionary, edited by Denis Girard, 1962, 616.

⁶"pur," Cassell's French Dictionary, 603.

describes such an intention as a "disorder," an "irregularity."

Obviously, what is not simple is complex and in Vernet's outlook, complicated. Therefore, an intention encumbered by unnecessary goals which deter a person from the more intense pursuit of a single, all-consuming endeavor--personal sanctification--is undesirable.

Finally, the implication in Vernet's proposal is that intention and purpose, ultimately concretized in act, give value and meaning to these actions. Thus, with a pure, or simple, intention, all a person's activity is directed toward one end, and, without this singlemindedness, all of one's life becomes disorderly and dissolute (dereglementé).

Vernet justifies his formulation on simplicity of intention through biblical references. Christ is cited by Vernet as warning his followers against duplicity; Christ also presents purity of intention as the essential motivation to please God alone, especially through good works. In Vernet's text, Christ is said to make this kind of choice clear:

Il assure que pour ne point s'écartier des voies de la justice et de la vérité, il ne faut chercher uniquement que la gloire de Dieu, et il attribue l'incrédulité des scribes et des pharisiens à la vaine gloire, qui était le principe unique de toutes leurs actions et de tous leurs desseins, et à la passion qu'ils avaient de chercher leur propre gloire, au dépens de celle de Dieu.

For Vernet, the example of Christ's own life adequately confirms his teaching, for above all else, Christ sought to procure the glory of his Father. In addition, Vernet observes that with Jesus there was no discrepancy between motivation and action. Vernet indicates that in the concrete situations of his life, death and resurrection Christ actualized his intent:

... il déclare qu'il met tout son soin à chercher, en toutes choses, le bon plaisir de son Père, et à procurer sa gloire; qu'elle est le but de tous ses desseins, et le motif de toutes ses actions;

et ce qu'il dit, il l'exécute.

For Vernet, therefore, the example of Christ is of prime import and purity of intention is understood as both the motivation and actual striving of the individual to seek in all things the glory of God. This is the unique principle underlying the evangelical calling to justice and truth that sanctifies man.

Further in the chapter on "Purity of Intention" Vernet reflects upon both the positive and negative dimensions that such striving necessitates. On the one hand, Vernet suggests that a person should seek a single goal: God's glory through the salvation of souls; on the other hand, a person needs to subordinate all other causes in view of carrying out this one essential. Without the negative process of purification, the positive ideal can never be reached.

In the text of the Schema, this detachment is basically understood as a struggle to overcome self-centeredness both in relationship to others and also in terms of one's self-understanding:

L'intention de la gloire de Dieu, qu'on doit se proposer dans ses actions, pour être parfaite, doit être pure; et cette pureté d'intention consiste à se détacher tellement des créatures, qu'on ne les aime point pour elle-mêmes, mais pour Dieu; qu'on ne les ait point en vue dans ses actions, mais Dieu seul et sa gloire. Elle consiste à se détacher tellement de soi-même, qu'on ne cherche point dans tout ce qu'on fait, son intérêt, son plaisir, sa propre satisfaction, sa gloire, mais uniquement l'intérêt, le bon plaisir et la gloire de Dieu.

Schema, 170

Through such detachment, God alone becomes the center and the source of one's life and actions.

Vernet continues to set forth four qualities that characterize a simple and sincere intention: it must be universal, actual, sovereign and pure. From the text, it is clear that this intention is all-inclusive and deliberate, affirming the ultimacy of God's glory as well as the

relativity of all created goods. However, the choice is not offered because of a contest between good and evil, but rather, the consideration involves the singling out of the Final Good as supreme in one's life here and now. All other values are ordered in view of this primacy.

From this interpretation of detachment, Vernet develops, in another section of the Schema, the notion of poverty of spirit. The person who focuses his desire uniquely on the spiritual values of life is authentically detached from all else. Vernet's commentary on this is almost eloquent for his insight emphasizes not mere negation or purification. He especially extols the confident serenity of those who instinctively unify all things in God:

La pauvreté, au contraire, est la source de tous les biens et de toutes les vertus. Un homme qui est pauvre d'esprit, vraiment détaché des biens de la terre est toujours sincèrement humble. Il n'a rien autour de lui qui lui inspire de l'orgueil; il est dans un exercice continual de patience et de mortification. Il supporte sans plainte, sans murmure toutes les privations, convaincu de la fragilité, de la vanité des biens de ce monde; il les possède sans souci, sans inquiétude de les perdre; il s'en sépare sans peine: tous ses desirs sont pour les biens du ciel, tous ses efforts sont pour les acquérir, toute sa volonté est de plaire à Dieu et de lui être uni; il ne cesse de dire avec le roi prophète "le Seigneur est tout mon héritage; il est tout mon partage, et que veux-je, Seigneur, au ciel et sur la terre sinon vous?"

Schema, 154^v

The sincere, straightforward person finds that his quest for sanctity is uncomplicated because it is one: God's will always. The communion of God and man is essentially simple. In this, all converges. Any diversion mutilates the experience. Succinctly, Vernet summarizes:

Les Soeurs de l'Instruction seraient bien à plaindre, si au milieu de leurs pénibles travaux, elles se proposaient des vues humaines; elles se verrait privées des jouissances et des plaisirs du monde dont leur vie retirée les sépare, et elles se verrait privées de la joie que goute une âme droite qui ne cherche que Dieu, et de cette assurance que donne la vue des récompenses promises au serviteur fidèle.

Schema, 189

Purity of Intention in the First Rule

The First Rule of the Sisters of the Presentation of Mary, written by Louis Pontanier before the turn of the nineteenth century, affirms that the single motivation which ought to characterize the Presentation sister is the love of God. A person enters a religious community for this reason alone and the life-style of the Presentation of Mary is entirely geared to procuring the glory of God. What Pontanier emphasizes is that purity of intention ought to be a primary and conscious concern for each sister:

Dans toutes leurs actions et dans tous leurs desseins, elles éviteront tout sentiment de vanité; elles ne recherchent point les louanges et les applaudissements des hommes; elles examineront souvent si elles n'agissent pas par orgueil, par respect humain. Avant de commencer quelque action, elles purifieront leur intention et auront soin de ne se proposer jamais que des motifs sur-naturels, surtout la gloire de Dieu, l'accomplissement de sa sainte volonté.

First Rule, 422

One notes that the process by which a person becomes wholeheartedly involved in seeking the glory of God inevitably includes the necessary detachment from a multitude of other desires.

Even in this early text, the reader detects that Pontanier is aware of a tension between two worlds, between heaven and earth. The call to metanoia that characterizes the Christian vocation implies a singling out of the one way to achieve perfection or sanctification, the way of Christ. Such an interpretation is rooted in the initial formulation of the Gospel choice between light and darkness, between good and evil.

Pontanier again infers this kind of deliberation when he reminds the members of the community that the choice of a celibate life in the religious tradition of the church has only one rationale. Any other

motive is self-destructive. Pontanier reiterates that what is essential to the religious life-style is the personal consecration to God within the community framework. In view of this ideal, purity of intention is self-actualizing:

Toutes les Soeurs ne perdront jamais de vue qu'elles ont quitté le monde, qu'elles sont entrées dans la Compagnie pour travailler à procurer la gloire de Dieu, pour instruire la jeunesse, la former à la vertu et pour se sanctifier elles-mêmes. Pour arriver à une si heureuse fin, elles auront toujours dans l'esprit ces paroles de Jésus-Christ à ses disciples: "Soyez parfaits comme votre Père céleste est parfait." Dans toutes leurs actions, elles auront en vue l'amour de Dieu; elles imiteront autant qu'elles le pourront la vie de Jésus, Marie et Joseph, en pratiquant fidèlement leurs vertus, en se rendant si conformes à eux qu'on puisse dire d'elles que ce n'est plus qu'elles qui vivent, mais que c'est Jésus qui vit en elles, comme il vivait en Marie et en Joseph.

First Rule, 415^v

The entire thrust of the sister's life is simplified and intensified through apostolic dedication and surrender to the will of God.

The choice of religious life-style initiates a process of purification at the deepest levels of being. Detachment from self, from "worldly" gain and joy, is only the beginning of a life-long adventure to consciously and consistently re-order all to the one God from whom all comes.

Both the positive experience of communion and the negative experience of purification, especially through poverty of spirit, are unremitting. There is also something in the dynamics which seems to be irrevocable. The faithful servant proves to be a monumental fool if his dedication is in any way half-hearted because the self-surrender required of each instant encompasses nothing less than a totality of being directed in love to the Father.

What occurs in Christian simplicity is the tremendous transformation of the human spirit when united to God in Christ. To summarize,

then, in the Schema of the Rule, Vernet interprets this as an interior process of integration: the whole complex of life-forces is unified in view of an ultimate concern, namely, personal self-surrender to God through the Christian celibate tradition. Pontanier's First Rule expresses precisely this insight in a single sentence: "to purify the intention to consider only one supernatural motive, the glory of God through the accomplishment of his holy will." (Cf. First Rule, 422.)

Purity of Intention in the Writings of Anne-Marie Rivier

From the onset, it seems important to recognize the distinctive character of the various writings of Anne-Marie Rivier. Compared to the works of Vernet and Pontanier, these texts immediately strike the reader as more informal, more personal, more impassioned even. What is gleaned from the works of Rivier is perhaps best described as the dynamic charism which isolates her not only from her companions and followers but also from Pontanier and Vernet. For despite the profound influences of both these Sulpicians, the Presentation of Mary and the formulation of its specific spirit is the fruit of a single genius, Anne-Marie Rivier.

In studying the works of Rivier, the reader is immediately impressed by both an explicit and implicit concern for purity of intention. Such an understanding is rooted in that desire to seek wholeheartedly the one essential which characterizes Christian simplicity. From the following citations quoted in the biography of Rivier by Cros, it is interesting to observe that the same theme persists, in fact intensifies, throughout the course of Rivier's life. Writing to Sister Xavier some time before 1819, Rivier encourages her: ". . . ne vouloir, en ce monde, que le bien tout pur, et bien pâtir pour le faire; ne chercher en rien sa consolation, sa satisfaction, son repos. Laissons

tout cela pour le ciel, ma chère fille" (Cros, I, 292). A few years later, in 1821, she again brings the issue to light, further clarifying the positive and negative aspects inherent in the process of re-ordering one's life:

N'ayons jamais que des vues de foi et des pures intentions, en toutes choses: prenons bien garde que l'amour-propre ne prenne la place de la gloire de Dieu dans les choses car il veut toujours avoir sa bonne part, en tout et partout.

Cros, II, 23

Ten years later Rivier formulates her ideas in a manner which hints at both a maturation process in her own life as well as a kind of theological training:

Pour vous, ma chère fille, je crois et j'espère que vous serez fidèle à la grâce pour tout ce que Dieu demande de vous, pour devenir une grande sainte. Mettez, pour cela, en pratique les trois avis du Père Jesuite: Dieu seul en vue, --Jésus-Christ en pratique, --et vous en sacrifice.

Cros, II, 99

This final letter to Sister Xavier summarizes the emphasis Rivier gives to purity of intention in all her writings. For Rivier the threefold dimension highlights the character of the Presentation as she envisioned it. The explicit and concrete expression of simplicity is actualized through the interior dynamic of an increasingly selfless motive and the exterior manifestation of a simple life-style.

A variety of sources confirm this opinion. For example, in a selection from the Ecrits spirituels, Rivier encourages the community:

Ranimez donc votre ferveur pour l'accomplissement de ce grand précepte dans lequel est renfermé toute la loi: aimez Dieu de tout votre coeur, et prouvez-lui que vous l'aimez de la sorte, en vous quittant de votre mieux de vos exercices de piété, en vous rappelant fréquemment de sa divine présence, en faisant toutes vos actions pour lui plaire, en observant exactement la règle; sans cela vous n'aurez pas pour lui un amour véritable.

Ecrits spirituels, 192

God is thus seen by Rivier as the source and center of one's life. All

else becomes secondary as a single passion dominates motivation: to love God and to glorify his being through the self-surrender of daily activity. The same motif is repeated in another passage:

N'ayez donc, je vous conjure, au nom de toute l'affection que je porte à vos âmes, n'ayez d'autre vue, d'autre motif, d'autre ambition, dans toutes vos œuvres que de faire la volonté du Seigneur et de lui plaire.

Ecrits spirituels, 127

For Rivier, only one view is significant, only one desire. The entire rationale underlying the apostolic endeavors of the Presentation is the simple, single love for the will of God in all things.⁷

In another instance Rivier's Spiritual Testament to the members of the community records her reflections on purity of intention in terms that emphasize the kind of radical choice that commitment to God through community entails:

Ma Fille, une religieuse ne doit toucher à la terre que par le point de la nécessité, et n'y avoir d'autre ambition que celle de glorifier et de faire glorifier Dieu. Soyez donc une fille du ciel et non de la terre, de Dieu et non du monde; vous seriez bien aveugle si vous travailliez pour lui et si vous faisiez cas de ses maximes.

Testaments spirituels, 67

These lines clearly echo the apostolic and patristic sources which refer to the choice of the Christian by comparing the way of light to the way of darkness. From the text it is also evident that Rivier singles out

⁷Several other citations reiterate what seems to be a constant theme. In the "Petites-Fleurs," for example, Rivier is quoted as follows: "Je désire ardemment de connaître la volonté de Dieu. Je veux tout ce que le Bon Dieu veut et je ne veux que ce qu'Il veut. . . . Les âmes religieuses travaillent pour Dieu seul." p. 21. The same can be uncovered from the souvenirs of Sister Apollonie as recorded by Cros: "Que de fois, dit Soeur Apollonie, j'ai entendu notre Mère s'écrier: 'Je ne comprends pas comment on peut demeurer un moment sans travailler à la gloire de Dieu et le salut des âmes!'" Or again, "Elle nous disait: 'Je ne vois en moi aucune vertu, mais je crois avoir le zèle: si vous n'avez pas faim de la gloire de Dieu et le salut des âmes, vous n'êtes que des moitiés de Soeurs de la Présentation.'" Cros, II, 185.

only one concern worth living for: to love God and to focus one's attention on him through the purification of intent.

Another theological insight that appears in these sources is a rather subtle perception of a causal relationship between purity of intention and sanctification. Rivier perceives that a pure intention effects a re-ordering of values in the Christian life. In the same manner, a pure intention engenders apostolic zeal and ultimately sanctifies. These dynamics can be clearly traced in the texts since for Rivier sanctity is the direct result of a sincere apostolate. For example, Rivier counsels:

Ma Fille, avec l'aide de Dieu et la bonne volonté qui vous anime, vous ferez beaucoup de besogne, et vous procurerez sa gloire dans vos écoles, en y répandant une solide piété. Pour cela, soyez humble et n'ayez que des intentions pures. Quand on ne cherche que Dieu et qu'on ne compte que sur lui, il ne cesse de faire des miracles et de répandre ses bénédictions sur les œuvres que l'on entreprend pour lui. . . .

Testaments spirituels, 19

Further clarification of this same idea is found in another section of the Testament:

Ma Fille, un des meilleurs et des plus sûrs moyens pour avancer dans la perfection, c'est de bien faire chacune de ses actions; car la sainteté ne consiste pas à faire des actions éclatantes, mais à faire le plus parfaitement possible ce qui nous est prescrit par les devoirs de l'état ou Dieu nous a placées. Or, pour qu'une action soit bien faite, il faut qu'elle soit faite dans l'ordre et selon la volonté de Dieu, avec toute l'application d'esprit et la perfection dont nous sommes capables, et surtout avec une grande pureté d'intention.

Testaments spirituels, 103-104

Thus, Rivier aligns a pure intention with a single intention for when one is "humble and has a pure intention" the Foundress presupposes that one "seeks God alone and counts only on Him." Sanctity is not, therefore, rooted in the performance of the spectacular but rather in doing all things well, "according to the will of God--as perfectly and as carefully

as we can, particularly through purifying our intention."

It seems, in these instances, that a pure intention is a unifying power, a purifying process which perfects the will. When man is wholly given to God, he is sanctified in grace ("blessings" or "miracles"). Rivier consistently affirms that a simple heart is identical to a pure intention:

Ce ne sont pas les œuvres d'éclat qui sanctifient: les aumônes, le service des malades, les souffrances, les travaux, la pénitence la plus austère, tout cela n'est pas la sainteté. La sainteté est dans le cœur, dans la pureté d'intention qui ne cherche et ne veut que Dieu.

Esprit et Vertus, 13-14

Thus, the very possibility of sanctity is rooted in a pure and single intention and it is this belief which she fostered in the primitive community of Thueyts.⁸ The more detailed formulation, as verbalized by Vernet in the Schema and Pontanier in the First Rule, only enhances the Foundress' concern that such a vital understanding of spiritual perfection be explicitly and clearly defined for each member of the institute.

II Simplicity as the Imitation of Christ

In the rules of Vernet and Pontanier, it is difficult to uncover theological reflection upon the relationship between the virtue of simplicity and the imitation of Christ, although such insight is not entirely absent from these documents. It seems that the very nature of both sources as temporary directives for a new community during the French

⁸A brief reference from the Schema of the Rule also confirms this impression since, by implication, it links simplicity with perfection and sanctity. Vernet gives the following directive: "Le quatrième, c'est de quitter son Directeur sans de bonnes raisons, de courir après plusieurs, pour leur faire ouverture de son âme. Ces communications multipliées semblent être contraire à la perfection." Schema, 153^v. No elaboration on this has been found by the present writer.

transformation. In other words, Rivier proposes that Christ is more than an exemplar:

Un autre motif, qui doit encore nous persuader la même chose, c'est que Jésus-Christ est notre voie, et une voie qui conduit droit au ciel, droit à Dieu. Il est impossible de s'égarer en le suivant; il est notre voie dans l'enfance, dans l'âge mûr, et encore dans la vieillesse; notre voie dans la pénitence, notre voie dans la pratique des vertus; notre voie dans la contemplation; et notre voie dans la vie unitive.

C'est lui qui nous élève sur le sommet de la perfection; c'est lui-même encore qui sert de guide, qui nous détourne et nous éloigne de tout ce qui pourrait nuire à notre avancement spirituel; c'est lui qui nous fait connaître la vanité de ce que le monde recherche, la vanité des grandeurs des emplois éclatants et de l'estime des créatures.

Ecrits spirituels, 21

The love of Christ for man and the acceptance of this love by man sets into motion the redemptive forces of a transcendent power. Although Jesus does establish himself as the unique and exemplary man for all ages, Rivier believes that Christ is indeed the Son of God and in this faith the Foundress pursues a process of imitation that unifies being with being, man with Christ. Man's affirmative response to imitate Christ, therefore, actualizes a radical transformation of his personal being in self-transcendence that is effected through the life, death and resurrection of Jesus. Ultimately Christ both mediates and sanctifies:

D'où je conclus que, quand une fois Jésus-Christ est entré dans un cœur et qu'il y règne, il y brûle et consume tout ce qu'il y a d'impur et d'étranger à sa grande sainteté; il en éclaire tous les plis et replis, il le purifie, il le sanctifie, il y répand son Saint-Esprit comme il le répandit autrefois sur ses Apôtres; et cet Esprit Divin les remplit d'une sainte joie, les établit dans sa force et les enrichit de tous ses dons.

Ecrits spirituels, 25

In this process of sanctification, Rivier indicates both a positive and negative movement through fire imagery.¹⁰ Thus, the process by which

¹⁰ In the Testaments spirituels, Rivier again reformulates the same principles: "Ma Fille, videz-vous de vous-même et ne vivez plus que pour Dieu. Marchez à la suite de Jésus-Christ, par le saint renoncement

Christ "takes over" a human heart involves man in a relationship which is controlled by the concept that Jesus, as the Son of God, as One with his Father, truly effects the total purification of man's person through the powerful redemptive capacity of his life, death and resurrection.

Christ, then, is the way of perfection and sanctification and as Son he is the only way. No other means are available. Rivier expresses complete confidence in this mediation.¹¹ Christ effects the simplification of the human heart precisely at that point where man's imitation of Jesus is transformed by grace: "Méditez bien Jésus-Christ, et voyez comment il a sauvé le monde; si nous voulons nous sauver et sauver des âmes, il faut suivre la route de Jésus-Christ" (Cros, II, 147). Thus, the relationship between simplicity and the imitation of Christ as interpreted by Rivier suggests several important considerations. To imitate Christ is to understand that such a process involves a personal encounter and demands a total surrender. In addition, to follow Christ is to realize that Jesus is not only the source of simplification of mind and heart but also the one who gives meaning, purpose and significance to such a pursuit.

et toutes les vertus de cet aimable Sauveur. . . ." p. 45. In an earlier passage, Rivier implores: "Ma Fille, là où est la croix, Jésus-Christ préside. . . Courage, aimez la croix, aimez Jésus crucifié, faites tout pour son amour, ne travaillez que pour lui gagner des âmes, ne vous recherchez jamais vous-même, et que ce soit ainsi jusqu'à votre dernier soupir." p. 29.

¹¹ Again we glean from the Testaments spirituels: "Il n'y a pas d'autre voie, ma fille, pour aller au ciel que de suivre Jésus-Christ, et notre sainte vocation nous y oblige d'une manière particulière. Je vous recommande de hâter votre perfection par tous les soins possibles." p. 42. A final reference from the following section of the Testaments records: ". . . quand il s'agit de procurer la gloire de Dieu ne reculez devant aucun sacrifice: travaillez, vivez et mourez pour l'amour de Jésus. Qu'en tout et par tout, votre devise soit celle des enfants de saint Ignace: 'Tout à la plus grande gloire de Dieu.'" p. 43.

Essential, therefore, is the experience of Christ. Rivier strongly encourages the sisters to a prayerful life with Christ and insists upon an authentic relationship that vitalizes one's entire life.¹² In the following selection, the reader can perceive the totalness of consecration envisioned by Rivier:

L'empereur Trajan interrogeant saint Ignace, martyr, lui demanda s'il était cet homme qu'on appelait porte-Dieu; il répondit que oui, et il lui demanda ce que signifiait ce mot: il signifie, répondit le Saint, celui qui porte Jésus-Christ partout, qui l'a toujours dans son cœur, dans sa pensée, dans sa bouche; qui ne pense qu'à lui, qui n'aime que lui, qui ne parle que de lui, qui n'agit, ne travaille et ne vit que pour lui. En sera-t-il ainsi de nous toutes, mes chères Filles?

Ecrits spirituels, 12

No compromise is admissible. The call of the Gospel is the word of Jesus, a call to be simple and to respond radically to Christ's word of holiness. It implies a concentration of all personal energy in the pursuance of a single, ultimate ideal, namely, to become perfect as the Father is perfect.

It is Jesus who loves his Father simply, completely and forever. In Jesus, man's faith and hope are finalized in love since he is of one mind and heart and since he has prayed that all men should be one with him in his surrender to the Father. Therefore, when man meets Christ in the depths of his being, human life is ordered anew. Through Christ the wholeness of the human spirit is achieved and, for the Sister of the Presentation, to become one with Christ is the single reason for consecration:

¹²In her essay, "On the Knowledge of Jesus Christ," Rivier proposes the necessity and the significance of prayerful encounter with the Lord: "C'est la connaissance de Notre-Seigneur qui a fait tous les Saints, qui a fait les Martyrs et qui peut seule faire des heureux. C'est la science des sciences, la seule qui nous apprenne la vraie sagesse. Que sont toutes les autres sciences sans celle-là?" p. 18.

Je sens si fort la nécessité de nous former en Jésus-Christ, et de pratiquer ses vertus toute notre vie, que je veux désormais vous parler que de lui; et ce bon Sauveur m'y porte lui-même, parce qu'il veut être aimé et servi par nous d'une manière particulière.

Ecrits spirituels, 17

The Gospel proclaims that Christ desired one thing alone: the glory of his Father who frees man from the power of evil. It is precisely this capacity that Christ gives to the sons and daughters of God, the power to become simple as he is. In living out the paschal mystery, Christ's life and death, consecration and purification are united in the single action of affirming the will of the Father for all men. This is the direction of the heart of Christ. This is the orientation that the Sister of the Presentation desires: "Mes enfants, vous devez vous appliquer à agir dans les mêmes intentions qui faisaient agir Notre Seigneur, et dans les mêmes desseins que Dieu a, en vous ordonnant cette action" (Esprit et Vertus, 15-16). In another passage, Rivier is even more specific:

La gloire de Dieu a été le principal motif que Jésus-Christ s'est proposé en venant sur la terre; mais il n'est pas l'unique: il avait tellement en vue le salut des hommes, que ce seul motif aurait été capable de lui faire entreprendre tout ce qu'il a fait.

Ecrits spirituels, 49

The text seems to indicate that for Rivier the glory of the Father was achieved by Christ through the redemptive character of the Incarnation. Other texts would support this. The glory of God is the salvation of man or, in an older phrasing, "the glory of God is man fully alive."

Jesus gives man the power to become incorporated into this process. In this way man's desire to procure the glory of God, to imitate Christ, to save souls and to bring the knowledge of Jesus to all men, are all goals and motives that mingle and overlap not only in the texts presently under consideration but also in the literary heritage of

the entire Christian tradition. The imitation of Christ, when it refers to the transformation of being effected through the life, death and resurrection of Jesus, is the way in which the human endeavor is actualized since, in Christ, the paschal mystery is the single and complete expression of the creative, redemptive activity of God in human history.

Rivier therefore emerges as the foremost figure in the history of the Presentation of Mary who consciously directs all energy into the simple, single undertaking: the personal transformation of the human spirit through Christ. In a letter to Sister Presentine, dated 1822, Rivier writes:

Pour vous ma chère fille, je ne doute pas que vous n'alliez toujours croissant dans les vertus de Jésus-Christ, qui demande de vous un zèle et un amour brûlants pour sa gloire, et une charité à toute épreuve pour le prochain. . . . Ah! que je voudrais que le monde se convertît, et que notre Congrégation portât le feu de l'amour de Dieu et la connaissance de Jésus-Christ partout!

Cros, II, 183

From the experience of the imitation of Christ the heart of man becomes apostolic and zeal becomes the formal characteristic of the apostle's heart. The love of Christ therefore simplifies as it signifies the unified life accomplished through the total integration of man as son of the Father.

In summation, what the texts contain is Rivier's constant affirmation: the simplicity of mind and heart is achieved through the imitation of Christ. Negatively expressed, she refers to the Christian's choice to elect either the standard of the Gospel or the "vanity of the world." Whatever weakens or destroys personal consecration to Christ needs to be gradually weeded out through a continual process of purification that begins with a conversion of heart. From that moment on a person

positively moves forward in the life of Christ.

For Rivier, the unification of all human energy is therefore realized through the imitation of Christ, a simple pursuit which effects the total reversal of forces in view of a single goal, self-surrender to the Father: "Ou servir Jésus-Christ ou mourir; ou travailler à faire connaître Jésus-Christ et lui gagner des âmes ou mourir; ou nos écoles et le salut de nos enfants, ou mourir. . . . (Ecrits spirituels, Frontispiece).

III Simplicity as a Simple Life-Style

Throughout history the manner in which the ideal of Christian simplicity was interpreted and finally concretized varied not only according to religious insight but also in conformity to the cultural climate of each era. What is immediately apparent in such a process is the inherent tension in any attempt to establish a meaningful relationship between the virtue of simplicity and the simple life-style indicated by the Gospel. However, although a constant struggle exists, a simple life-style ought to characterize the celibate community in the Christian tradition.

In the documents being analyzed, the concept of simplicity has been interpreted as purity of intention and as the imitation of Christ. Both dimensions have been adequately treated by the Founders. In every case, simplicity, described as a deliberate singling out of the ultimate has been uncovered as essential and normative in establishing the distinctive spirit of the Sisters of the Presentation of Mary. It is also evident that such an interpretation of simplicity as a pure or simple intention rooted in the imitation of Christ was concretely expressed by the community in terms relevant to creating a simple life-style.

The sources unanimously uphold that the Presentation of Mary as envisioned by Pontanier, by Vernet and by Rivier is characterized by this simple life-style. The theme of simplicity as the implementation of Christ's call to community is repeated in many ways as the Founders seek to elucidate what can sometimes remain an ambivalent concept.

Simplicity is developed in the texts as the life-style manifest in the relationships developed between persons, places and things. In studying simplicity as the simple life-style it is important to recognize corporate as well as personal involvement in witnessing this life which originates in the experience of the Gospel call to metanoia. Finally, it is also necessary to notice that, in these texts, a simple life-style requires both a negative and positive dimension since dedication to the evangelical celibate community ultimately demands the renunciation of what is seen by the members as non-essential.

To begin, then, the explicit use of the term simple to describe speech and manner is so frequent in these documents that it is a striking defense of a conscious desire on the part of the Founders and of the early community members to express through word and gesture the evangelical spirit of simplicity. Vernet's Schema, for example, encourages the sick to a fuller understanding of obedience: ". . . ce qu'elles feront en suivant exactement, par esprit d'obéissance, tout ce qui leur sera prescrit, après qu'elles auront exposé, avec simplicité, tout leur état aux personnes chargées de les diriger" (Schema, 148^V). Other references to obedience also include the same indication for each sister to simply state her needs:

Si elles ont quelques raisons pour ne pas accepter les places qu'on leur propose, ou pour ne pas aller aux endroits où on les destine, elles les proposeront avec simplicité et humilité. . . .
Schema, 181

In another instance, Vernet repeats this concern:

Si quelque fois, on croit avoir de bonnes raisons pour ne point faire ce qu'on commande, on doit les exposer avec simplicité, et si on insiste, il faut se taire et exécuter promptement et sans aucun délai ce qui est prescrit, soumettant son jugement. . . .

Schema, 150v

In much the same manner, Pontanier advises the community councillors: "Elles exposeront avec simplicité tout ce qu'elles jugeront être plus utile au bien commun qu'elles doivent toujours avoir en vue" (First Rule, 394v). And in the chapter dealing with the "Instruction of Novices," Pontanier advises the teacher:

On s'appliquera aussi à leur expliquer avec simplicité et clarté l'Oraison Dominicale, le Symbole des Apôtres, les Commandements de Dieu, et de l'Eglise, parce que c'est là où est renfermé tout ce que nous devons croire, pratiquer et faire pour arriver à la vie éternelle.

First Rule, 431

Such external forms of simplicity appear both as a goal and as a principle of activity. Rivier, for example, encourages the members of the institute:

Allez au bon Dieu, ma fille, comme à un bon Père, et agissez avec lui comme un enfant. Beaucoup de confiance, de droiture, de simplicité, de paix, mais surtout d'humilité et d'obéissance. Il en a bien coûté aux Saints pour avoir le ciel. Pourquoi ne ferions-nous pas ce qu'ils ont fait, pour nous assurer le même bonheur?

Testaments spirituels, 14

Finally, in a reference concerning prayer, Rivier urges: "Allez à Dieu tout simplement, ne cherchez uniquement que lui dans la pratique de la piété, sans quoi vous en perdrez tout le mérite" (Ecrits spirituels, 121).

These texts clearly indicate that the Founders were aware of a cultural attitude which expressed a certain frame of mind in relation to person and place. To have a simple attitude was, for the community, a manifestation of a natural, unaffected personality and revealed an inner serenity that stemmed from self-acceptance. That the community

wanted to be simple in this respect is certainly obvious and in many instances, this conception of simplicity could possibly indicate a concern for mere social grace or an escape from the kind of mannerisms associated with certain class distinctions. However, there is substantial evidence, even in the above selection of texts, that the attempt to foster a simple life-style was more than a cultural or psychological need. The consideration of simplicity in terms of life-style is deeply rooted in the evangelical formulation to imitate Christ. There is a real link between the virtue of simplicity and its manifestation in concrete formulas. In the First Rule, for example, Pontanier counsels the sisters:

Elles parleront peu; elles ne seront cependant ni précieuses ni guindées; leur vertu doit être unie, aisée, simple; elles doivent être humbles sans affectation, pieuses sans bigoteries.

First Rule, 419^v-420

Pontanier admires virtue that is simple and in this way, a moral dimension is expressed through a characteristic attitude of authenticity. An unaffected, appropriate manner and life-style, therefore, can truly symbolize the ideal envisioned. This is what Rivier affirms:

Une grande règle, c'est de ne jamais parler de soi ni en bien, ni en mal, et lorsqu'on parle des autres que ce soit toujours en bien, mais avec sagesse et discréction, et jamais avec exagération, c'est à dire, qu'il ne doit point sortir de la bouche d'une Soeur ces compliments affectés, ces paroles de flatterie si ordinaires aux gens du monde; tout cela est ennemi de la simplicité dont nous devons faire profession.

Ecrits spirituels, 159

The religious profession of each Sister of the Presentation is summarized in the community motto: "Tout pour Dieu--Tout par le saint Amour!" At some point, this simplicity of heart becomes visible and concrete. What can be observed in these texts is a definite awareness on the part of the Founders that externals are ultimately the expression of an interior

disposition. In a letter occasioned by the death of Sister Cécile in 1834, Rivier's concern for the inner aspect of simplicity is stressed: "Sa prière [Sister Cécile's] était continue. Aussi, gardait-elle toujours cette simplicité et bonne humeur qui la rendait si agréable à tout le monde" (Cros, I, 220).

The primary concern of the Founders for simplicity of heart distinguished, however, between the "way of the world" and the "way of the Gospel." The simplicity of the Presentation was not always admired by the people of France. The following letter to Sister Vincent de Paul in 1835 is both a reproach and a reminder of the radical implications of the Gospel call to live out, in fact, a simple life-style:

... vivons simplement avec nos bonnes filles simples, avec nos orphelines, nos gratuites surtout, nos externes: ce sont les arbres qui portent de bons fruits dans l'enclos que Notre-Seigneur nous donne à cultiver.

Les brillantes pensionnaires attirent leurs parents, c'est-à-dire le monde et son esprit; on devient musquées, comme des enfants qu'on soigne. Deux bonnes soeurs instruisent et mènent à Dieu cent élèves pauvres ou du commun: il faut quatre ou cinq soeurs pour vingt pensionnaires mijaurées; encore les parents ne sont-ils pas contents; ils critiquent nos manières, notre langage, enfin notre simplicité; mourrons-y, dans cette simplicité, et inspirons le mépris du monde et de ses vanités à nos compagnes.

Cros, II, 117

Therefore, the simplicity which can be observed in speech and action underlying the moral life of the individual and pointing in a distinctive way to the life-style and ideal of the Presentation of Mary is indeed far more than a mere concern for externals; it is completely rooted in the evangelical dimension that transforms the meaning of human life.

A consideration of poverty of spirit in these sources demonstrates the emphasis placed on simplicity as a life-style. The most striking examples can be uncovered in the community's struggle for simplicity in dress and lodging. In the First Rule, Pontanier advises the sister in

charge of supplies in the following manner:

Elle tâchera toujours d'avoir pour le vêtement des Soeurs une certaine provision en étoffe, en toile et autres objets nécessaires. Elle aura soin que ces choses soit bonnes, mais qu'elles soient communes et conformes à cet esprit de simplicité et de pauvreté évangélique dont elles doivent faire profession.

First Rule, 410^v

An interesting reference in relation to the construction of one of the houses reiterates the same principle. Vernet, implementing Rivier's instructions concerning the building, writes the following:

La Mère revient toujours à son voeu que l'on ne néglige rien pour que les constructions avancent et que l'on fasse tout marcher de front autant que possible; mais au nom de Dieu, que tout soit très simple; la Mère l'exige. Nous avons d'ailleurs besoin d'économiser de toutes les manières, plus nous avançons, plus les embarras augmentent, étant obligés d'emprunter de si grosses sommes sans savoir à quelle porte il faudra ensuite frapper.

Cros, I, 281

While the question of finances was problematic, Rivier's desire was to build a house reflecting the simplicity of life-style that corresponded to the Gospel ideal. Vernet affirms this in a subsequent letter where he recalls that Rivier was opposed to ornamentation which she considered a violation of evangelical simplicity (Cros, I, 281). Rivier exacted simplicity everywhere.

These emphatic and rather detailed prescriptions concerning the material, can, at times, become disconcerting and appear contrary to authentic simplicity by the very fact of minute and multiple regulations. However paradoxical it may seem, though, the contrary is true. The very preoccupation with detail is in itself an attempt to simplify, to eliminate ambiguous and faulty interpretations as to how the Gospel should, in fact, be lived out in the celibate community. In other words, what is experienced in the concrete situation is the tension between ideal and practice, and the lengthy formulas are an effort to clarify.

This difficulty, inherent in the fallible human condition, provides the occasion in which simplicity of mind and heart can be realized in deed. It is precisely here that purity of intention is concretized through the actualization of the imitation of Christ. Vernet, who admits of the tension between the ideal of simplicity and its practice in everyday life, also stresses the necessity of interior simplicity:

... on trouvera qu'il y en est peu qui soient faites avec une intention tout à fait pure; qu'il en est peu dont le Seigneur soit l'unique principe et l'unique motif; qu'il en est peu, même quelque fois des plus saintes, ou l'humeur, ou la passion, ou le respect humain, ou la vanité, ou quelque autre mouvement de l'amour propre ne se glisse, et souvent sans qu'on s'en aperçoive, par le défaut de vigilance sur soi-même et sur tous les mouvements de son cœur.

Schema, 163^v-164

Rivier is equally adamant: "Le 'moi' prend presque toujours la place de Dieu; moi premièrement, moi secondement, et puis Dieu . . . est-ce juste? n'est-ce pas Dieu que nous devons toujours chercher et avoir toujours en vue?" (Esprit et Vertus, 13). The Founders of the Presentation hunger for the One God alone. This is the underlying thrust in the emphasis on simplicity and it is this which necessitates both a pure intention and the imitation of Christ.

Therefore, the rationale for a simple life-style is rooted in a faithful interpretation of the Gospel. And, it is this rationale that is most clearly directed by means of a simple intention:

Il faut surtout, je vous le répète, surveiller la pureté d'intention, car l'intention est comme la racine de l'action. Si l'intention est bonne, l'action le sera aussi, et si l'intention est mauvaise, l'action le sera aussi; quelqu'excellente qu'elle puisse paraître.

Esprit et Vertus, 15

As far as Rivier is concerned, then, the performance of an action is only as valuable as the personal motivation that inspires it. The criterion for such evaluation follows from the theological insight that what is good conforms to the will of God:

Or, pour qu'une action soit bien faite, il faut qu'elle soit faite dans l'ordre et selon la volonté de Dieu, avec toute l'application d'esprit et la perfection dont nous sommes capables et surtout avec une grande pureté d'intention.

Esprit et Vertus, 15

Important in this passage is the explicit admonition to order one's life in view of accomplishing God's will. Such ordering requires a total effort, particularly through purifying one's intention. However, it is only Christ who makes it possible for man to become simple in this way since he has transformed the meaning of human life.

Here, then, the cycle is completed: to be simple is to be conscious that, called to grace, man's final end is God and his glory, and in Christ, this pursuit is perfectly actualized and made explicitly available for the community of man; and furthermore, to be simple is to embrace this commitment for oneself, to become wholly and uniquely involved in the imitation of Christ, freely choosing the will of God over every other option.

Thus, the simple life-style so ardently advocated by the Founders becomes the explicit expression of the dynamic process of simplicity. This is subsequently translated into the concept of apostolic service. A simple life-style rooted in prayer is wholeheartedly apostolic and universal in its scope. It is this which the community pursues. Such concentration of personal and communal energy towards the realization of a single goal seems especially significant. A twofold awareness is indicated by this choice to simplify: first, a consciousness of human limitations and secondly, an intense desire to perfect the single undertaking. In Ecrits spirituels, Rivier writes:

Je ne sais ce que je voudrais faire pour vous obtenir un peu de solidité et de sagesse; je voudrais avoir des adoratrices continuellement prosternées au pied des autels pour attirer sur vous toutes les bénédictions du Seigneur, pour vous obtenir un zèle

brûlant pour la gloire de Dieu et le salut des âmes. Oh! mes chères Filles, si ce feu divin s'allumait dans vos âmes, vous en seriez bientôt éclairées, et vos paroles, vos démarches, vos rapports se dirigeant vers ce but, vous feriez tout avec réflexion, par dépendance de l'esprit de Dieu, par un motif de pur charité, et nous n'aurions plus à gemir sur tant de fautes qu'occasionne votre légèreté ou votre peu de lumières.

Ecrits spirituels, 139-40

In some ways, the above passage summarizes the entire vision of Rivier. Every aspect of Christian simplicity as interpreted by the Founders is subtly interwoven into a comprehensive whole: purification, prayer, poverty and an uncompromising love for God in Christ.

Rivier desired that the simplicity of the Presentation of Mary be incarnated in the simple life-style of the community. Every dimension of living was included: dress, lodging, personal character, manner of teaching, sharing in the poverty of mankind, and, in an authentic sense, the kind of self-identity that stems from an inner disposition that recognizes oneself as simple, humble and poor in the presence of the Father. In every instance, the powerful, motivating dynamism is the experience of the Christian faith in Jesus as the way to God. In this simple hope, every human heart is purified for love.

Conclusion

In the sources relevant to the foundation of the Presentation of Mary, one discovers that the concern for Christian simplicity is a consistent and an outstanding characteristic expressed in the writings of the Founders through both explicit and implicit reflections upon the notion of simplicity as it is related to purity of intention, to the imitation of Christ and to the witness of a simple life-style.

The early community, therefore, was aware that Christian simplicity was rooted in the interior dynamic of the mind and heart of

the man who sought to establish, in fact, the primacy of the Ultimate in his life. To live, to act, and to become human, therefore, included the conscious re-ordering of life in Christ: one becomes man in terms of sonship. This process includes both a positive and negative experience since the person who simplifies chooses of necessity from among other options. Man must let go in order to transcend.

In an outstanding way, Anne-Marie Rivier formulated a clear picture of the role of Christ in the process of man's simplification. Christ makes actual in each person what he effected through the redemptive character of the incarnation and for man, the imitation of Jesus is the most simple and direct manner in which to become one with the Father of all men. For it is only in Christ that we are healed. To be simple is to be whole in this way, where all of one's life is unified in a dramatic thrust toward the Absolute that is finalized in Christ.

To be simple, then, is to love God utterly and to love one another without protest, without guile, and with a simple heart--because in Christ God is our Father. To have such a generous heart requires, in practice, what the manuscripts and other sources clearly demonstrate: a healthy detachment from possessiveness in relation to persons, places and things. Finally and concretely expressed, simplicity of heart calls for a pure life-style which allows for and feeds the freedom of the human spirit. To be simple as Christ was is indeed to be poor in spirit, to purify one's relationships and to live surrounded by and loving an uncluttered world.

CHAPTER V

CONCLUSION

Yahweh, my heart has no lofty ambitions,
my eyes do not look too high.
I am not concerned with great affairs
or marvels beyond my scope.

Psalm 131

In an age of future shock, the relevancy of simplicity is unquestionable. In fact, one of the first methods suggested by authors for the rediscovery of selfhood and serenity is the unification of the increasingly complex dimensions of life. Such a tendency to simplify recognizes both the limits of adaptability and the inner desire for intensifying the personalizing processes of the human spirit. Indeed, man's urge to integrate the multiple has a rich and varied expression with roots deeply embedded in universal human experience.

Our present understanding of simplicity is formed, therefore, not only from our involvement with the present situation but also from a meaningful interpretation of the experiences of the past. The relationship of Christian simplicity to these socio-cultural factors which lead men to raise the question of simplicity receives expression in the man for whom this world is full of grace. In this light, investigation into and reflection upon significant documents of the Christian heritage enable the contemporary to come to terms with the religious tradition of western man which has consciously and unalterably shaped his present world. Such insight should breed men capable of directing the future in

a more salutary fashion.

What history reveals is that certain eras emphasize different aspects of the human condition. As for simplicity, it is difficult to come to terms with traditional notions because the concept is unavoidably complex. One needs to consider, for example, the many-faceted connotations of the word as well as the inadequate interpretations which color most essays. This implies the necessity of carefully weeding out tedious oversimplifications, misleading implications, overtly false concepts and erroneous conclusions.

In addition, the notion of simplicity has also been subject to a transformation in meaning due to the Christ-event. Profoundly changed by this reality, man's simplicity is thereafter formulated in terms of sonship. In effect, our process of becoming human is altered through the life, death and resurrection of Jesus. The faith of the New Testament affirms that it is in Christ and through Christ that man is redeemed and healed. Christian simplicity, therefore, transforms the human spirit since man's will is directed toward its ultimate goal through the radical conversion of mind and heart to the will of the Father of Jesus Christ.

Such an understanding of simplicity receives its rationale from a radical faith in Christ and its truth is not easily embraced. The Christian, as a "new man" can, however, recognize simplicity at its most profound and personal level. In our secular culture, this dimension of faith is positively significant since present-day patterns in historical development have taken a turn toward interpreting simplicity in terms of simplifying life-styles. Although this is a reaction to over-stimulation, over-choice and other symptoms of technological superstructures, it characterizes both secular and religious orientations. Central to the

trend, however, is the innate hunger of man to order, to give meaning and significance to the complex and diverse elements of experience.

What seems to be crucial to the theological question of simplicity at this time is the present inclination to reduce all human experience to the finite, concrete and empirical. What emerges from this context is a verifiable experience of simplicity which tends to glorify the uncomplicated life-style "close to nature." In this sense, the notion of simplicity is understood only in terms relevant to recent sociological phenomena. The element of faith is quietly overlooked. Christian simplicity, however, begins only in the faith that Jesus, our only brother and our unique lord, simplifies the interior man. All other possibilities of simplification are peripheral.

In the end, therefore, although the process of integration assumes many guises, correlating to the needs of men in time and space, the experience of simplicity and the search for integrity and wholeness transcend all this. Ultimately, history reveals that man is always faced with possible chaos and his life and development depend upon his genius to integrate and to transcend.

The purpose of this thesis has been to reflect upon the notion of simplicity contained in selected historical documents which emerge from a spiritual tradition dependent upon Christian simplicity for its rationale. These sources, relevant to the foundation of the Sisters of the Presentation of Mary of Bourg Saint Andéol, Ardèche, France, date to the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries and offer a unique opportunity to investigate the question of Christian simplicity through an analysis of primary sources.

If the question of simplicity is most critically raised during

periods of social upheaval, as historical records seem to indicate, the choice of these particular documents seems especially justified. First of all, the cultural climate of the time, epitomized in the French Revolution, decidedly reflects the sort of chaotic setting which acutely enhances the struggle for simplicity. Secondly, the documents themselves, in reaction to the revolutionary spirit of the times, foster a community spirit which claims to be imbued with the character of Christian simplicity. In view of the present desire of Christian celibate communities to "return to the sources" in order to discover a sense of communal identity, such a claim is worthy of investigation. Finally, although this present essay is limited in perspective and purpose, the textual analysis leads the reader to raise those questions pertinent to simplicity in our own time.

What this analysis plainly confirms is the primacy of Christian simplicity in the formation of a communal character essential to the identity of the Sisters of the Presentation of Mary. The scope of such simplicity, as envisioned by the Founders, depends upon the conscious struggle for the unification of mind and heart best indicated in the Gospel: "Blessed are the pure of heart, for they shall see God." This simplicity, demonstrated in the textual analysis as purity of intention, as the imitation of Christ and as the call to a simple life-style is neither a complete nor an adequate thematization of the theological reflections of the Founders on the issue. The dynamics of unifying are far more deeply entrenched in the mysterious workings of the human spirit and the texts remain an open source for future reference.

However, through this textual analysis, the original hypothesis is confirmed. The present writer also believes that from this study a

new horizon is open to the members of the religious community of the Presentation, a congregation that now encircles the globe. For the recognition that Christian simplicity ought to be a radical expression of the essential identity of the Presentation of Mary is a renewal of the insight, once valiantly cherished by Rivier, now crucial to community renewal and reform: to express in spirit and in truth the simplicity of the sons and daughters of God in an age when men all too readily assume that such sonship is impossible.

The problem of Christian simplicity in our time, then, seems to be intensified by the experience of the technological culture and its unbridled energy. Perhaps more than any other writer of the West, T. S. Eliot reflected upon the significance of the experience and affirmed, particularly in his later poems and plays, the single truth of Christ and his Word, unspoken and unheard in this broken world. Through man's faith and hope, purged in the journey to the still center of the human heart, man becomes open to the divine. What the Gospel characterizes as the choice between two ways, between light and darkness, Christ and the world, is quite simply resolved for the man who moves inward toward the still point of his own being, centering himself in Christ. Such convergence calls for the courage to let go, to begin again as wanderers in the pursuit of truth. But the promise of Christ endures:

And all shall be well and
 All manner of thing shall be well
 When the tongues of flame are in-folded
 Into the crowned knot of fire
 And the fire and the rose are one.¹

What Eliot so eloquently expressed and what Rivier so vehemently embodied was the single, saving insight that man's humble longing cannot be

¹T. S. Eliot, Four Quartets, p. 145.

oversimplified or interpreted as an attempt to eliminate tension and to reduce the multiple. To be simple of heart requires only the tremendous energy and stamina of the man who is willing to purify his being and to seek God alone.

APPENDIX A

Anne-Marie Rivier and the Foundation of the Presentation of Mary

The several biographies of Anne-Marie Rivier agree on almost every detail. The third child of Anne-Marie Combe and Jean-Baptiste Rivier was born in the village of Montpezat, Ardeche, France, on December 19, 1768 and christened Anne-Marie two days later in the chapel of "la Bastide."¹ Almost all of Rivier's education was informal and the only considerable amount of time she attended school was from 1780 to 1782 when she resided at the convent school of Pradelles. Prolonged poor health not only forced a premature withdrawal from school but later, in 1786, was the reason given by the religious community of Pradelles for not accepting Anne-Marie Rivier as a candidate for religious life.²

This refusal, initially disappointing, led Rivier to consider other ways of achieving her goal. Records are unanimous in recording her determined reply to this refusal: "Puisqu'on ne veut pas me laisser entrer au couvent, je ferai un couvent moi-même." She was not as naieve as these reports might sound. Her choice in literature, for example, sought out the most revered writers of Christian spirituality: Thomas à Kempis, John of the Cross, Theresa of Avila, Francis de Sales, et al. Indeed, her own insight was mature and realistic. Rivier rarely brooded over circumstances, and, in view of the impossibility of entering the community of Pradelles, she went foward and accepted the opportunities that life began to offer. The resultant way of life, which she could not have forseen in 1786, became a dynamic, challenging process of redemption and self-realization -- not only for Rivier, but also for all who knew her and, in particular, for those who chose to work with her.

By 1789, Marie Rivier had opened a school in her own village, collaborating with the local pastor.³ At the same time, she sought companions who desired to share the life-style that characterized the active

¹The specific information included in this section is taken from the biographies of Anne-Marie Rivier by Hamon, Cros, Mourret and Moulard which have been referred to at length in the Introduction of this paper under the title, The Manuscript Tradition, pp. 27-8.

²The problem was due to several crippling falls which permanently scarred Rivier, not only in physical appearance but also in causing a general condition of poor and susceptible health which, later in life, led to serious internal disorders.

³Traditionally, Rivier was called "Marie" rather than "Anne-Marie" until her religious profession in 1801. At this time, the name Sister Anne-Marie was formally and legally adopted.

celibate communities. The social condition of France was, at this time, quickly moving toward the great revolution that would tear the nation apart for more than a decade. The storming of the abominable and appalling Bastille on July 14 of that year seemed to incarnate the spirit of the times. Within only a few months, on the second of November, the property of the churches was taken over by the state. The formal decree from the government which suppressed the profession of monastic vows was issued soon after on February 13, 1790.

The village of Montpezat was not unscathed. On July 14, 1792, the parish rector submitted to the schismatic laws of the government. This might appear as a small incident when compared to the sordid madness that terrorized the cities. However, with this factor, the influential and previously established position of Anne-Marie Rivier as a teacher in the community took a new turn. She now became the single representative of ecclesial authority and, in this role, she soon exercised new leadership and power.

The successive governments of France were active. By August of 1792, the dispersion of all religious communities was fairly assured; on September 21, 1792, the Republic was officially proclaimed. With the execution of Louis XVI on January 21, 1793, the Reign of Terror was inaugurated until the death of Robespierre on July 27, 1794. During this time, Rivier's school remained open. She also assumed the spiritual guidance of the villagers and, within a few years, she gave retreats, conducted a variety of religious ceremonies and hunted out the faithful priests in hiding, bringing them, in secrecy, to administer to the dying what life had denied and what she herself could not confer: Penance and the Eucharist.

In 1793, Marie Rivier met Louis Pontanier, a Sulpician secretly in residence at the home of his aunt, Elizabeth Bosc, at Thueyts. Rapport was immediately established and Rivier found, at last, the kind of spiritual assistance and support essential to the realization of her desires. The following year, therefore, marked another turning point. On June 14, 1794, Marie Rivier arrived at Thueyts to begin a new life. What was formerly the Dominican convent served as the first residence for the religious community she would now begin to direct.

The trustworthy and reasonable character of Louis Pontanier encouraged and guided Rivier. With his helpful insight in the formulation of goals and in fostering a prayerful life, Rivier and four companions founded the Sisters of the Presentation of Mary on November 21, 1796 at Thueyts. The first rules were written by Pontanier and presented to the small community in the following year.

A significant change occurred in 1799 when Pontanier had the opportunity to return to a more active apostolate at the Sulpician seminary. He accepted a new position and Régis Vernet, a confrere, was appointed to replace him. Vernet remained the spiritual director of the Presentation until his death in 1843. His influence on the developing community is especially profound. Vernet's advice was seriously sought and followed, even when personal preferences led Rivier to hold another

point of view. His theological training and insight is clearly revealed in the numerous and careful revisions in finalizing a rule of life for the community.

Along with Rivier, both Pontanier and Vernet are considered to be Founders of the Presentation of Mary. Rivier always esteemed these men as the first superiors of the Congregation. Both Sulpicians, conscious of Rivier's tendency to rely on their judgement, encouraged her to exercise her natural talent for leadership and to assume the responsibility of governing the women and the schools under her care.

By the time a more lasting peace existed in France, the community of Thueyts, although small, was prospering. By 1802, a more complete rule of life was being drafted by Régis Vernet. Rivier's collaboration was essential and no statement was included in the document unless she endorsed it.

The subsequent history of the life of Mother Rivier and the foundation of the Presentation of Mary is the story of a series of struggles, with both success and failure as a part of the scheme. The growth of the Institute throughout France, particularly in the rural areas and amidst the poor, is a matter of record.

Perhaps this oversimplifies the exciting and magnificent history of Rivier and the Presentation. The archives of the community, at Bourg St. Andéol, contain countless letters, diaries, annals and other mementoes which recount the many moments of those troubled times. The years from 1796 to 1838, when Rivier lived, were filled with growth and activity, and the spirit of the Presentation is rooted in whatever is timeless of these events.

Public acclaim of Rivier and her work did not begin solely with her death on February 3, 1838. Ecclesial encouragement was always present as was the support of an anti-clerical government. However, with her death, praise became eloquent. The title of "Vénérable" was conferred by Pius IX on May 12, 1853. It was at this time that the epithet, the "Woman Apostle," was first attributed to Rivier by the Holy Father: "La Mère Rivier, c'est la Femme-Apôtre." In 1890, Leo XIII, in a Decree of the Sacred Congregation dated June 13, confirmed the opinion of his predecessor: "Autant que la condition de son sexe le lui permit, elle eut le rôle d'un apôtre." This emphasis on the apostolic character of Rivier followed the declaration that declared the heroicity of her life:

... la Vénérable Servante de Dieu Marie Rivier avait pratiqué les vertus théologales de Foi, d'Espérance et de Charité, de même que les vertus cardinales de Prudence, de Justice, de Tempérance et de Force, et leurs annexes, au degré héroïque.

Such praise indicates to some extent the magnitude of what had happened in a few short years.

What can be clearly seen is that the historical processes of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries were more than a mere background for the life and work of Rivier. Inadvertently, the signifi-

cance of her life was transformed by the tragic violence of the French Revolution and the subsequent shifting patterns of social history. The geographical distance between the villages of Ardèche in southern France, and the more important cities involved in that upheaval proved advantageous. The kind of religious persecution characteristic of Paris, for example, was not seen in the rural sectors of France and the foundation and growth of a new religious community, although beset with difficulties and the need for shrewdness and secrecy, was not impossible.

This is not to underestimate the struggle. No one was immune from exile, from the prisons, from the all-too-quick judgement and death elicited by the voice of the peoples' court. It is indeed ironic that what the revolutionaries sought vehemently to destroy was quietly cared for and the celibate religious tradition of the Christian church, purged in tragedy, began to witness anew to the authenticity of the Gospel life-style in community and to the redemptive power of Jesus Christ in a broken world.

In spite of insurmountable obstacles, therefore, what was ultimately achieved by Rivier is surely comparable to the work of some of the most influential leaders of the Christian tradition, men such as Bernard and Francis. That this should have happened to Anne-Marie Rivier is amazing. But the time for reform in France was ripe. And the woman, Rivier, was there.

APPENDIX B

Redaction of the Community Rule of LifeI From La Vénérable Marie Rivier by Fernand Mourret

La vénérable Supérieure profita de cette situation favorable pour mettre la dernière main à la rédaction des Règles de l'Institut et pour préparer la grande cérémonie, depuis longtemps attendue, de la distribution solennelle de ces Règles à sa Communauté.

M. Pontanier, dans la retraite qu'il avait trouvée à Thueyts pendant la Terreur chez sa respectable tante, M^{me} Bosc, en avait ébauché la première rédaction. Le pieux Sulpicien s'était contenté de noter les usages qui s'étaient peu à peu établis depuis la naissance de la Communauté, en s'inspirant des Règles et de l'esprit de la Compagnie de Saint-Sulpice.

Dès sa première entrevue au Château de Chomérac avec Marie Rivier en 1799, M. Vernet s'était préoccupé de compléter et d'adapter aux besoins nouveaux de la Communauté le premier travail de son confrère. Ce projet fut réalisé en partie en 1801, lorsque le grand Vicaire de Mgr d'Aviau vint passer huit à dix jours au couvent de Thueyts; mais il se convainquit en même temps que les développements de l'Institut exigeaient une refonte plus complète. Le 4 décembre 1801, il écrivait à la Mère Rivier: "Je ne perds pas de vue vos Règles. Je lis en ce moment les Règles et Constitutions de la Visitation, de Sainte-Ursule, de Notre-Dame, et j'y fais mes observations pour perfectionner les vôtres." -- En juin 1815: "Dès que je serai un peu à moi, je reprendrai le travail de vos Constitutions." -- En mars 1807: "Je pense, après Pâques, avoir un peu de loisir pour m'occuper de vos Règles." En 1813, l'expulsion des Sulpiciens des grands séminaires lui donna ces loisirs si avidement recherchés: "La Providence fait tout servir à ses fins, écrit-il à la Vénérable Mère; ce que nous regardons comme un malheur devient une faveur pour nous." Retiré au collège de Thueyts, le bon Supérieur communiquait, au fur et à mesure de leur rédaction, chaque point de la Règle à la Vénérable Mère, laquelle y ajoutait les remarques que lui suggéraient son expérience personnelle ou les lumières spéciales dont Dieu la favorisait. Suivant le témoignage de la très révérende Mère Arsène, un bon nombre d'articles furent écrits pour ainsi dire sous la dictée de la sainte Fondatrice; plusieurs autres, d'après une lettre de la Vénérable Mère elle-même, ne furent que le résumé de réponses qu'elle avait dû faire à des consultations de ses Soeurs.

Le travail terminé fut communiqué, en mai 1814, à un certain nombre de Soeurs anciennes et aux Supérieures des principaux établissements, avec prière d'y joindre leurs propres observations. Durant ce temps, les Soeurs récitaient chaque soir le Veni Creator, pour obtenir les lumières du Saint-Esprit.

Les observations des Soeurs dont on avait demandé l'avis donnaient lieu à minutieux travail de revision, lequel exigea plusieurs années, M. Vernet tenant essentiellement à ne rien faire d'une manière définitive sans avoir longuement consulté Dieu par la prière, soumis chaque innovation au contrôle de l'expérience et mûrement réfléchi.

Le 14 juin 1820, le conseil des Soeurs délibéra que le livre des Règles serait, avec la permission de Mgr l'Evêque, livré à l'impression; l'autorisation épiscopale fut accordée le 8 décembre, fête de l'Immaculée Conception de la Sainte-Vierge, et l'impression commença au mois de janvier 1821.

"Toutes nos Soeurs, disent les Annales, se réjouissaient à la pensée que les Règles allaient enfin leur être solennellement distribuées"; et la Vénérable Fondatrice comptait sur cet événement pour donner une nouvelle impulsion à la ferveur de ses filles.

Quant à M. Vernet, sa profonde connaissance des voies de Dieu dans les œuvres entreprises pour sa gloire lui dictait, au moment même où il recevait les épreuves des premières feuilles, le 16 janvier 1821, les graves lègnes suivantes:

"Prions, ma chère fille. Tous ces jours-ci, je me suis tenu un peu plus uni à la Sainte-Vierge, étendant son manteau de protection sur vous, sur moi, sur toutes vos filles, mais il faut des croix; c'est le sort de toutes les bonnes œuvres Du reste, je ne doute pas que ce soient là vos pensees."

(pp. 311-13.)

Les Règles de la Présentation de Marie sont comme l'épanouissement des Constitutions qui furent établies par la Vénérable Mère Rivier et M. Vernet, bénies au berceau de la Congrégation par Mgr d'Aviau du Bois de Sanzay, et approuvées en 1802 par Mgr de Chabot, évêque de Mende et de Viviers.

(p. 324.)

II From La Vénérable Marie Rivier by Anatole Moulard

Ces règles ne sont pas l'œuvre d'un jour: elles ont une longue histoire. En 1796, M. Pontanier rédige le premier règlement encore en vigueur en 1803 et que M. Vernet à cette date déclarait très informe. En 1801, celui-ci passe huit à dix jours à Thueyts à le perfectionner et Mgr d'Aviau l'approuve comme le feront Mgr de Chabot en 1802, et Mgr de Mons en 1805. Pour la partie organique des Constitutions, M. Vernet s'inspire des statuts de la Compagnie de Jésus, de la Visitation, de Sainte Ursule, de Notre-Dame, et pour la partie disciplinaire, concernant les écoles, du règlement des Frères de Jean-Baptiste de la Salle, et des Soeurs de la Doctrine chrétienne de Nancy.

M. Vernet prend l'avis de la Supérieure sur tous les points, et quand il n'est pas à Thueyts ou de longues heures se passent en tête à tête à les discuter avec lui, elle lui propose par lettres ses idées. M. Pontanier et les soeurs les plus judicieuses ne sont pas exclues de ces laborieuses conférences. Cependant les Règles communes, bien que la Mère Rivier y ait une très grande part, sont principalement l'œuvre de M. Vernet. Il ne les perd jamais de vue et, pendant une vingtaine d'années, surtout quand à plusieurs reprises il faut les rédiger et les modifier pour les soumettre à l'approbation du gouvernement, il ne cesse d'y travailler. Jamais toutefois il ne fixe un article sans le consentement de la Supérieure. On peut discuter et on ne s'en prive pas de part et d'autre, mais aucun texte ne devient définitif sans sa décision. Aussi, dans une lettre du 13 novembre 1807, peut-il lui dire, à propos des observations sur les statuts qu'elle avait cru devoir faire à Mgr de Mons: "Il voit bien qu'il est dans l'ordre que vous ne soyez pas étrangère dans tout ce qui tient à une œuvre qui vous est personnelle."

En 1812, après la dispersion sulpicienne, les loisirs de M. Vernet sont plus nombreux et il vient se fixer à Thueyts où il s'occupe d'une révision complète des Constitutions, des Règles communes et du Règlement des écoles. M. Pontanier étant curé de Meyssse, on le tient au courant du travail et l'on sollicite ses lumières. Dans les premiers de 1813, la Règle des écoles est achevée et l'on se met aux Règles communes et au Directoire. Leur mise au point est terminée à la fin de janvier 1814 et l'on s'attaque sans délai aux règles particulières de chaque emploi. En décembre 1815, tout le travail paraît assez définitif pour qu'on pense à imprimer bientôt. En attendant, le manuscrit ne sort pas de Thueyts et il y reste quelques années, les travaux du Bourg-Saint-Andéol ayant fait remettre à plus tard l'impression et les frais qu'elle devait entraîner.

Ce ne fut qu'à la fin de 1820 qu'on envisagea l'impression immédiate. La Mère Rivier envoie le précieux manuscrit à l'évêque de Mende avec une lettre qui en justifiait la longueur: "La soeur Xavier a eu l'honneur de vous présenter nos règles. J'espère que vous aurez eu le loisir de les lire, et il me tarde de savoir si elles ont mérité votre approbation. Elles sont longues et minutieuses au premier aperçu. Mais je peux assurer Votre Grandeur qu'elles ne renferment rien d'inutile, qu'elles ne sont que le résultat d'une expérience de vingt ans,

que ce n'est presque que le résumé des réponses qu'il m'a fallu faire à des lettres sans fin. Notre établissement est bien étendu. L'éloignement et la variété des positions donnent naissance à mille doutes pour des personnes qui aiment leur devoir. L'arbitraire est meurtrier en de pareilles positions.

"Aussi, toutes nos soeurs soupirent ardemment après le moment où ces règles seront imprimées. Et il me semble qu'alors ma place sera allégée de moitié. Je me hâterai donc de les mettre dans les mains d'un imprimeur de confiance aussitôt que Votre Grandeur aura daigné m'en accorder la permission, mais je mettrai à profit ses observations. On les imprimera en secret, et tous les exemplaires nous en serons remis, car nous ne voulons pas les rendre publiques."

Mgr de Mons approuva le manuscrit qui fut aussitôt livré à M. Aubanel, d'Avignon, pour l'impression. On devait tirer à mille exemplaires. Le travail fut un peu long, l'imprimeur aimant à prendre son temps, et ne se termina qu'un septembre 1821. La distribution des exemplaires s'en fit solennellement au Bourg. (pp. 336-38.)

APPENDIX C

Historical Background to the Biblical Understanding of Simplicity

For Plato and Aristotle this concept coincides with those of truthfulness and uprightness. For adherents of the Stoa it is the idea of being faithful to what is natural and unfalsified that is most emphasised. The simplicity of the cynics and the naturalness of their way of life are recommended. A philosopher who comes closer to the biblical concept of simplicity is Marcus Aurelius: in the virtuous man all must be honest and simple and full of good will (3,4,3). He decides for the good from a disposition that is simple and free (3,6,6). But Marcus Aurelius' 'simplicity' is strongly and decisively conditioned by the stoic concept of impassivity as an ideal. One must be simple in the sense of refusing to allow oneself to be perturbed by anything (4,26,2). 'Simple' is related to 'immune to suffering', 'free from illusion' (4,37). In 1 Macc 2: 37 the doomed Jews encourage themselves by saying: 'Let us all die in the innocence of our hearts!' The ancient translations of 1 Kings 9: 4 and Josh 24: 14 may be compared with this. 'Simple' comes to express the inner meaning of all virtues as is seen in the case of the *vir simplex et rectus*, Job (Job 1: 1). Such is the simplicity of the heart with which one must seek the Lord (Wis 1: 1).

APPENDIX D

La Simplicité de la Foi de Zachée

L'oeil de la foi, avec la pupille de la simplicité, reconnaît la voix de Dieu aussitôt qu'il l'entend. La lumière de sa parole se lève en lui, il s'élance joyeusement au-devant d'elle, et il la reçoit, comme l'a dit notre Seigneur dans son Evangile: Mes Brebis entendent ma voix et elles me suivent (Jn 10,27). Car partout où la foi naturelle a été gardée dans son intégrité, celui qui l'a gardée est la brebis du pasteur . . .

Tous ceux qui ont été appelés ont obéi sur-le-champ à la voix qui les appelait lorsque le poids de l'amour des choses terrestres n'était pas suspendu à leur ame. Car les liens du monde sont un poids pour l'intelligence et les pensées, et ceux qui en sont liés et entravés entendent difficilement la voix de l'appel de Dieu. Mais les apôtres et, avant eux, les justes et les pères, n'étaient pas ainsi: ils obéirent comme des vivants, et ils sortirent légers parce que rien du monde ne les liait de son poids. Rien ne peut lier et entraver l'âme qui sent Dieu: elle est ouverte et prête, en sorte que la lumière de la voix divine, chaque fois qu'elle vient, la trouve en état de la recevoir.

Notre Seigneur appela Zachée du sycomore sur lequel il était monté, et aussitôt Zachée se hâta de descendre et le reçut dans sa maison: il espérait le voir et devenir son disciple avant même d'être appelé. Et c'est là une chose admirable, qu'il ait cru en lui sans que notre Seigneur lui eût parlé et sans l'avoir vu corporellement, mais seulement sur la parole des autres, car la foi qui était en lui avait été gardée dans sa vie et sa santé naturelles. Il a montré sa foi lorsqu'il crut en notre Seigneur en l'entendant annoncer; et la simplicité de sa foi et apparue lorsqu'il promit de donner la moitié de ses biens aux pauvres et de restituer au quadruple ce qu'il avait pris frauduleusement. Car si l'esprit de Zachée n'avait pas été rempli à ce moment-là de la simplicité qui convient à la foi, il n'aurait pas fait cette promesse à Jesus et il n'aurait pas dépensé et distribué en peu de temps ce que son travail avait amassé pendant des années. La simplicité répandait de part et d'autre ce que la ruse avait amassé, et la pureté de l'âme dispersait ce qui avait été acquis par les pensées de l'astuce. La foi renonçait à ce que l'injustice avait trouvé et possédé, et elle proclamait que cela ne lui appartenait pas. Car Dieu est le seul bien de la foi, et elle ne consent pas à posséder d'autres biens avec lui; tous les biens sont de peu d'importance pour elle, en dehors de ce seul bien durable qui est Dieu. Elle a été mise en nous pour trouver Dieu et ne posséder que lui, et pour voir que tout ce qui est en dehors de lui est à notre detriment.

APPENDIX E

On SimplicityFrom La Vie de Notre Seigneur Jésus-Christ

Alors aussi, vous marcherez en assurance, parce que vous marcherez simplement; car vous cherchez le Seigneur avec un coeur simple, de cette simplicité qui conduit les justes heureusement (Prov. 10.9; Sap. 1. 1; Peov. 11.3); "Simplicité qui n'est d'autre chose qu'un acte de charité pur et simple, qui fait que nous regardons et n'avons autre vue en toutes nos actions, que le seul désir de plaire à Dieu," (S. Francois de Sales, 12. Ent. p. 165 et 166).

* * * * *

Telle est la conduite d'une personne qui est véritablement intérieur, et c'est ainsi qu'elle parvient à une admirable simplicité.

Simple à l'extérieur, dans ses meubles, dans ses habits, dans sa nourriture, elles en bannit la superfluité, la mondanité, la délicatesse.

Simple dans son mantien, dans sa démarche, dans toute sa personne, elle évite la singularité, l'affection, ou un air composé.

Simple dans ses entretiens, dans ses discours, dans toutes ses paroles; loin de se rendre coupable de médisance, de mensonge, de duplicité, de ruses, de détours, de finesse, d'équivoques; elle ne se permet ni emphase, ni exagération, ni flatterie. Elle s'abstient d'expression recherchée et de tout ce qui ne peut servir qu'à faire paraître les talens, l'esprit, les connaissances qu'elle peut avoir; elle réprime la démangeaison de parler, sans un vrai besoin, d'elle-même ou de qui la regarde. Si elle est obligée d'en parler, elle le fait tout uniment et sans affecter l'air de modestie, de réserve, d'humilité de ces personnes "qui ne veulent pas montrer ce qu'elles ont de bon, mais qui sont bien aises que les autres le découvrent, pour avoir l'honneur tout ensemble et de leurs vertus et du soin de les cacher," (Fenelon, Œuv. spirit., t. I, p. 185). Toutes ses paroles, en un mot, ne respirent que la sincérité, la franchise, la candeur, l'ingénuité.

Simple dans ses jugemens, elle n'en forme aucun sans nécessité, et lorsqu'elle croit devoir juger de quelqu'un, elle ne le fait ni témérairement, ni avec légèreté. Si elle propose son avis, si elle décide, ce n'est qu'au besoin, et du ton le plus modeste. Elle se contente d'exposer ses sentimens, quand cela peut être utile; mais elle ne les défend pas

avec opiniâtreté, et n'aime qu'à céder à ceux d'autrui dans les choses, où elle peut le faire sans déplaire à Dieu.

Simple dans ses reflexions et ses pensées, elle est particulièrement attentive à ne s'arrêter volontairement qu'à celles qui sont nécessaires ou véritablement utiles, et à laisser tomber et disparaître toutes les autres pour éléver son esprit à Dieu, et se disposer, par ce retour vers lui, à recevoir et à suivre toutes les impressions de sa grâce.

Simple jusques dans sa prudence, elle s'interdit toute prévoyance soupçonneuse, inquiète, empressée ou inutile. Elle borne tous ses soins au moment présent, pour connaître ce que Dieu demande d'elle dans ce moment-là, et pour accomplir fidèlement sa volonté.

Simple dans ses vues et ses motifs, c'est à Dieu seul qu'elle désire de plaire, et de plaire en toutes choses. Elle s'applique à faire pour la gloire de Dieu tout ce qu'elle fait, a rapporter à cette fin toutes ses peines et ses souffrances, toutes ses paroles et ses actions, toutes ses pensées et tous les mouvements de son cœur (Col. 1,10; 1 Cor. 10,31). Si elle aime toutes les vertus, si elle veut les pratiquer, c'est principalement parce qu'elles "sont agréables à Dieu," (S. Francois de Sales, Amour de Dieu, 1.II, ch. 4.) et par amour pour lui (Gal. 5,6): et si elle ne néglige rien pour suivre tous les mouvements de la grâce, c'est dans la vue d'accomplir en toutes choses la volonté de Dieu, et de tâcher de la faire comme J. C. l'a faite.

Simple dans la voie par où elle marche, et dès-là même, sagement précautionnée contre les pièges de Satan, et à l'abri des illusions de ce prince des ténèbres, qui quelquefois se transforme en Ange de lumière (2 Cor. II, 14), elle ne fait pas consister la perfection dans les extases, les ravissements, les visions, les révélations, ou dans toute autre voie extraordinaire. Au lieu d'en estimer davantage, et, pour cela seul, les personnes qui sont dans ces états; au lieu de se laisser éblouir par le merveilleux de ces états singuliers, de s'en occuper et d'en repaître son imagination; au lieu de les envier, de les rechercher, de les désirer, elle craint toute voie extraordinaire, elle s'en défie, et lui préfère sans hésiter la pratique constante de toutes les vertus.

Simple dans les moyens qu'elle emploie pour avancer dans le chemin de la perfection, son principal soin est de se tenir étroitement unie à Dieu, en s'appliquant à ne le perdre jamais de vue volontairement, persuadée que cette fidélité à marcher ainsi en la présence de son Dieu est la manière la plus simple et le moyen le plus sûr d'attirer le secours surnaturel de la grâce, dont elle a besoin sans cesse pour connaître et pour faire en toutes choses la volonté de Dieu, ce qui est bon, ce qui est agréable à ses yeux, et ce qui est parfait (Rom. 12,2).

Simple dans la manière de se comporter, lorsqu'elle est tombée dans quelque faute; s'il s'élève en elle des sentiments de découragement, bien éloignée d'y consentir, elle ne leur donne pas même d'attention volontaire. Et parce qu'il est ordinaire à "l'orgueil de se dépêter à la vue de ses fautes," elle ne garde de "prendre pour un sentiment de

pénitence ce dépit de l'orgueil, ses réflexions amères, inquiètes et chagrines," si elle éprouve cette tentation (Fenelon, OEuv. spirit., t. 1, p. 94, p. 95). Car, si Dieu permet qu'elle ressente ces "dépits intérieurs, elle les regarde comme "de pures croix, des sources de grâces, des épreuves par lesquelles il veut la purifier ou la perfectionner" (Ibid., T. 2, p. 124 et 125). C'est pourquoi, fidèles à "ne pas les écouter, à ne pas s'y laisser aller volontairement, elle ne fait que les souffrir sans y adhérer, et sans se les procurer par des réflexions d'amour-propre" (Ibid.). Elle ne perd pas un instant pour "se tourner simplement vers Dieu seul," bien convaincue que "ce retour vers Dieu après ses fautes," lorsqu'il est "simple, paisible et soutenu par la confiance, lui facilitera sa correction, plus que tous ses dépits sur les défauts qui la dominent" (Ibid., T. 1, p. 96).

Simple enfin dans toute sa conduite, c'est par cette application constante à tenir son esprit et son cœur élevés vers le Seigneur, qu'elle tâche non seulement de ne se permettre volontairement rien d'inutile, pas un action, une parole, une pensée inutile; mais encore de s'interdire toute intention et tout désir, tout réflexion et toute pensée, toute parole et toute action, en un mot, toute opération libre et volontaire dont Dieu n'est pas et le principe et la fin.

(pp. 341-52.)

APPENDIX F

Purity of Intention"Purity of Intention" in the Projet des Regles

La pureté d'intention est un acte de charité, par lequel nous rapportons tout à Dieu, comme à notre dernière fin; car, la charité ne consiste pas seulement dans une pieuse affection, qui nous porte à nous unir à Dieu, mais encore, dans une inclination généreuse qui nous porte à agir pour lui, et à faire tous ce que nous faisons pour sa gloire.

Cette intention de la gloire de Dieu, pour être parfaite, doit avoir quatre qualités; elle doit être universelle, actuelle, souveraine et très pure.

1.. -- L'intention de la gloire de Dieu, qu'on doit avoir dans ses actions, doit être universelle; de sorte qu'elle s'étende, non seulement à toute la conduite de notre vie, en général, mais encore à chaque action en particulier; de sorte qu'il n'y ait pas une seule de nos actions, même les plus indifférentes, même les plus basses, qui ne se rapporte à Dieu et à sa gloire selon l'exhortation de l'apôtre: "Soit que vous mangiez soit que vous buviez, soit que vous fassiez quelque autre chose, faites tout pour la gloire de Dieu." En effet, puisque nous sommes entièrement à Dieu, par plusieurs titres, savoir par ceux de la création, de la rédemption et de la régénération spirituelle que nous recevons dans le baptême, n'est-il pas juste que tout ce que nous avons, venant de Dieu, tout soit rapporté à sa gloire?

2.. -- L'intention de la gloire de Dieu qu'on doit se proposer, dans toutes ses actions, doit être, autant qu'il se peut, actuelle; c'est-à-dire, qu'il ne suffit pas de rapporter, le matin, à Dieu, tout ce que l'on fera dans la journée; de plus, on doit avoir soin de renouveler cette offrande plusieurs fois dans la journée; de se proposer, à chaque action qu'on commence, la plus grande gloire de Dieu, l'accomplissement de sa sainte volonté, parce que cette manière de faire ses actions les rend plus méritoires devant Dieu, et oblige de les faire avec plus de ferveur; parce que cette habitude d'offrir toutes ses actions à Dieu, par une intention actuelle, est un des moyens les plus aisés, des plus solides, pour se tenir en la présence de Dieu; car agir continuellement dans la vue de Dieu, c'est avoir toujours Dieu présent, parce que enfin, comme nous avons un grand fond d'amour propre, il est très difficile, qu'il ne nous échappe pas mille vues humaines, mille retours sur nous-mêmes, et sur nos intérêts; mille mouvements de vanité, de sensualité, de désir de plaire aux hommes; mille respects humains, si nous n'avons beaucoup d'attention sur nous-mêmes et de vigilance sur tous nos mouvements; si nous ne sommes pas fidèles à rapporter à Dieu, par une intention actuelle, tout ce que nous faisons.

3.. -- L'intention de la gloire de Dieu qu'il faut se proposer dans ses actions, doit être souveraine; de sorte qu'on préfère la gloire de Dieu, à tous les autres biens du monde.

4.. -- L'intention de la gloire de Dieu, qu'on doit se proposer dans ses actions, pour être parfaite, doit être pure; et cette pureté d'intention consiste à se détacher tellement des créatures, qu'on ne les aime point pour elle-mêmes, mais pour Dieu; qu'on ne les ait point en vue dans ses actions, mais Dieu seul et sa gloire. Elle consiste à se détacher tellement de soi-même, qu'on ne cherche point dans tout ce qu'on fait, son intérêt, son plaisir, sa propre satisfaction, sa gloire, mais uniquement l'intérêt, le bon plaisir et la gloire de Dieu. Elle consiste à se proposer toujours et en toutes choses, la plus grande gloire de Dieu, conformément aux sentiments de saint Ignace qui avait toujours dans le cœur et dans la bouche ces paroles: A la plus grande gloire de Dieu! C'était là sa devise, c'était aussi celle de sainte Thérèse, qui avait fait voeu de faire ce qui lui paraîtrait le plus parfait; et c'est à ce degré de perfection auquel doivent tendre tous les chrétiens, et en particulier les Soeurs de l'Instruction.

Les motifs qui doivent engager à aquérir sic une grande pureté d'intention sont:

1.. -- La doctrine de Notre-Seigneur: "Prenez garde, dit-il, de ne pas faire de bonnes œuvres dans la vue de vous attirer l'approbation des hommes; car si vous le faites, vous ne devez attendre nulle récompense de la part de Dieu auquel seul vous devez vous mettre en peine de plaire. Si vous ne cherchez qu'à lui plaire, vs. vous cacherez quand vous jeûnerez, quand vous prierez et ferez les autres bonnes œuvres; car vous êtes sûrs qu'il perce dans les lieux les plus cachés, et qu'il voit tout ce qui s'y passe. Si votre intention est simple et pure toute la conduite de votre vie sera pure, sera sainte; mais si l'intention, avec laquelle vous faites toutes vos actions, n'est pas simple, n'est pas pure, toute votre vie ne sera qu'un dérèglement continual. Il assure que pour ne point s'écartez des voies de la justice et de la vérité, il ne faut chercher uniquement que la gloire de Dieu, et il attribue l'incredulité des scribes et des pharisiens à la vaine gloire, qui était le principe unique de toutes leurs actions et tous leurs desseins, et à la passion qu'ils avaient de chercher leur propre gloire, aux dépens de celle de Dieu.

2.. -- Les exemples de Jésus-Christ doivent engager à acquérir une grande pureté d'intention -- il déclare qu'il met tout son soin à chercher, en toutes choses, le bon plaisir de son Père, et à procurer sa gloire; qu'elle est le but de tous ses desseins, et le motif de toutes ses actions; et ce qu'il dit, il exécute. Il se sacrifie entièrement à la gloire de son Père, et son sacrifice fut continual dans sa durée; il le commença dans sa circoncision, dans sa Présentation au temple; il le continua dans toute sa vie. Son sacrifice fut encore universel; il sacrifia à la gloire de son Père, son corps, son âme, ses opérations, ses biens, ses intérêts, son repos, sa joie, ses plaisirs, sa gloire, sa vie et enfin tout son être. Voilà jusqu'où un homme Dieu a poussé le sacrifice qu'il faisait de lui-même à la gloire de son Père; voilà ce qui

doit nous faire concevoir ce que c'est que la gloire d'un Dieu et ce qu'on doit faire et ce qu'on doit souffrir pour la procurer; car rien ne nous fait tant comprendre de quel prix est la gloire de Dieu, que de voire un homme-Dieu sacrifie jusqu'à l'anéantissement, pour la réparer.

3.. -- Le troisième motif qui doit engager à rapporter toutes ses actions à la gloire de Dieu, est qu'on y trouve les plus grands avantages qu'on puisse souhaiter, parce qu'il n'est pas une seule action, même des plus indifférentes, qui étant faite pour Dieu, étant rapporter à sa gloire, ne devienne surnaturelle; et étant faite en état de grâce, ne mérite la possession de Dieu et un degré de gloire éternelle. On doit juger par là, du trésor, de merites qu'amasse une personne qui a soin de rapporter toutes ses actions à la gloire de Dieu; quelle pertes, au contraires, ne fait pas une âme qui néglige une aussi sainte pratique, qu'on peut dire être un des plus grands secrets de la vie spirituelle, pour amasser, en peu de temps, des trésors immenses de mérites.

Mais quels moyens doit-on prendre pour acquérir et pratiquer cette pureté d'intention? Les voici:

1.. -- Il faut travailler continuellement à détruire son amour propre; c'est à dire, cet amour déréglé qu'on a pour soi-même, et cette attache qu'on sent par rapport aux biens de la terre, aux plaisirs, aux honneurs, qui fait qu'on se cherche en tout, et empêche de chercher uniquement Dieu et sa gloire;

2.. -- Il faut continuellement veiller sur soi et sur tous les mouvements de son cœur, pour en retrancher tout ce qui ne serait pas selon Dieu;

3.. -- Il faut avoir une application particulière, pour ne commencer aucune de ses actions, surtout des principales, sans les rapporter auparavant à Dieu, par une intention actuelle, qu'on aura soin de renouveler souvent pendant d'action, si elle dure un peu de temps;

4.. -- Il est bon, pour s'accoutumer à une pratique si sainte, et si utile, de faire, pendant un temps considérable, son examen particulier sur la manière dont il faut faire ses actions, pour les rendre méritoires, et sur la manière dont on les fait; car, ordinairement la cause de la plupart des fautes, c'est la défaut de réflexion; défaut dont se plaignait le Roi-Prophète, lorsqu'il disait: qu'il n'y avait personne qui fit le bien, parce que personne ne réfléchisse.

(pp. 169v-172.)

APPENDIX G

The Knowledge of Jesus ChristFrom the Ecrits spirituels of Anne-Marie Rivier

Voilà ce que doivent être les épouses de Jésus-Christ, ce que nous devons être nous-mêmes, mes chères Filles, pour nous rendre digne d'être la demeure de Dieu, le temple de Jésus-Christ, et l'organe du Saint-Esprit.

Il faut qu'il habite en nous par la foi, qu'il y agisse par l'exercice des bonnes œuvres; il faut qu'il y repose par la tranquillité de nos passions, et que l'humilité et la crainte du jugement les tiennent dans le devoir; il faut qu'il y règne par la charité et qu'il y exerce un empire d'amour sur toutes les puissances de l'âme.

Nous devons faire toutes nos actions dans cette vue, dit saint Ignace, martyr, comme Jésus-Christ; comme Jésus-Christ habitant en nous, afin que nous soyons son temple et qu'il soit notre Dieu: il faut qu'il parle en nous comme il parlait en saint Paul; il faut qu'il y agisse et qu'il y vive, afin que nous puissions dire comme ce grand apôtre: Je ne vis plus à moi-même, c'est Jésus-Christ qui vit en moi (Galates, chap. II, v. 20); mon cœur est le lieu de ses délices, et il est le paradis de mon cœur.

En sera-t-il ainsi de nous toutes, mes chères Filles? Jésus-Christ fera-t-il nos délices, et fera-t-il notre paradis sur la terre, jusqu'à ce que nous le possédions éternellement dans le ciel? Il veut que nous nous attachions fortement à le connaître, à l'étudier, à le méditer et à devenir ses imitatrices; il veut que nous le fassions connaître, et que nous le portions partout où sa Providence nous appelle; que nous l'enseignions dans toutes nos paroisses par nos instructions, que nous le fassions voir en toutes nos œuvres, qui doivent être les œuvres de Jésus-Christ. Et d'où vient que nous avons si peu de ressemblance avec lui, que nous sommes si froides et si tièdes à son service?

Ne peut-on pas dire en vérité, mes chères Filles, que nous ne nous appliquons pas à connaître et à méditer Jésus-Christ. Nous ne pensons pas à Lui, et de cet oubli viennent tous nos désordres et les pertes que nous faisons des consolations divines, par la privation d'une infinité de grâces et de faveurs que nous pourrions mériter par l'union et la familiarité que nous devrions avoir avec Jésus-Christ; c'est bien nous qui devrions être des porte-Dieu. (pp. 13-14)

APPENDIX H

The Simplicity of RivierFrom De l'Esprit et des Vertus de Madame Rivier

La simplicité, cette vertu qui plait tant à Dieu et aux hommes, qui embellit tous les mérites et relève toutes les grandes qualités, n'était pas moins admirable en Madame RIVIER que ses autres vertus. On peut même dire que c'était là, en elle, comme un trait caractéristique; c'était ce qui frappait et édifiait le plus ceux qui l'approchaient, ce qui rendait sa société si douce, ce qui lui ouvrait tous les coeurs et lui gagnait la confiance. Regardant cette vertu comme la compagne inseparable de l'humilité aussi bien que de la vérité, elle l'avait en estime singulière et s'attachait à la pratiquer dans toute sa conduite, dans toutes ses paroles, dans sa devotion.

Sa Simplicité dans sa Conduite

La simplicité est une vertu qui a pour objet l'esprit de droiture et de franchise, la fuite de toute recherche et vanité. Madame RIVIER a réuni les deux à un degré remarquable. Tout d'abord, elle a eu l'esprit de droiture et de franchise. Ennemie de tout détour, de toute ruse ou duplicité, elle procédait, en toute circonstance, avec une candeur et un esprit de simplicité incomparable. La droiture de ses intentions, son amour de l'ordre et de la vérité pouvaient se montrer au grand jour; jamais elle ne se sentait le besoin de se cacher sous aucun déguisement. Si elle avait quelques torts, elle était la première à les reconnaître, et toute sa conduite était empreinte de la même franchise qu'elle portait au tribunal de la pénitence et qui lui faisait dire: "Je crois m'être toujours bien confessée, parce que je fait toujours ce que j'ai pu pour me faire connaître ou comprendre."

Elle n'était pas moins ennemie de tout ce qui ressent la recherche et la vanité: tout son extérieur était simple, ses manières bonnes et aimables, mais bien éloignées de l'affectation. Elle avait en horreur toute singularité, tout ce qui s'écartait de la vie commune et tendait à attirer l'attention des autres. Sa nourriture, son vêtement, l'ameublement de sa chambre, ses livres et tout ce qui était à son usage, respiraient la plus grande simplicité. Elle ne trouvait de son goût que ce qui était simple, et avait en aversion jusqu'à la moindre apparence de luxe et de la vanité. Dans la visite de ses maisons, rien ne lui faisait tant plaisir que de trouver chez ses filles un repas simple, une chambre et un lit simple; au contraire elle les reprenait fortement si elle y trouvait la moindre chose qui s'écartât de cet esprit de simplicité, disant que cette vertu de simplicité devait les distinguer et les faire connaître partout pour ses filles. Elle en vint même, une fois, jusqu'à quitter

brusquement la table, en répandant beaucoup de larmes, et à partir sans manger, parce que la soeur chez laquelle elle était, lui présenta une vaisselle très belle qu'elle avait empruntée pour la recevoir.

Sa Simplicité dans ses Paroles

Madame RIVIER, dans ses instructions, parlait à ses soeurs avec simplicité d'une mère qui s'adresse à ses enfants: elle n'y mettait ni art, ni recherche; point d'expressions étudiées. Sa seule étude était de tâcher de se faire bien comprendre, d'exciter l'attention et l'intérêt; et, pour cela, comme Jésus-Christ, son divin Maître, elle usait fréquemment de comparaisons et de paraboles qui récréaient en même temps qu'elles instruisaient, et employait toujours les locutions les plus simples, les plus à la portée de son auditoire, si bien que même les plus jeunes enfants la comprenaient et l'écoutaient avec plaisir.

Dans ses entretiens privés, elle usait de la plus grande réserve et parlait peu: "Je m'étudie, disait-elle quelquefois, à ne dire juste que ce qu'il faut, parce que je pense qu'il faut ménager ma langue, mon temps et mes paroles pour les choses les plus essentielles: dans ma place, il y a tant à faire et à dire!"

Elle disait d'une manière douce, bonne et agréable tout ce qu'il fallait soit pour l'affaire dont on l'entretenait, soit pour ne point manquer aux devoirs de la charité et de la civilité. Mais elle n'ajoutait rien au delà, laissant volontiers ciscourir les autres sans introduire une matière nouvelle d'entretien, sans avancer rien d'elle-même, sans faire des questions sur ce qui ne la regardait pas, et se bornant à dire, de temps en temps, un mot à propos, à faire dans l'occasion, un sourire agréable pour ne pas donner aux autres lieu de penser qu'elle ne prenait ni part, ni intérêt à ce qu'ils pouvaient dire.

Dans les visites que lui faisaient ses filles pour l'ouverture de leur âme, elle procédait avec la même simplicité, écoutant tout ce qu'elles avaient à lui dire, en silence, avec attention, douceur et union intérieure à Dieu, sans montrer aucune surprise des tentations, faiblesses ou fautes même les plus graves qu'on lui exposait. Après qu'on avait fini de parler, elle disait en deux mots ce qu'on devait faire ou réformer; et encore, ces avis si courts, les donnait-elle avec tant de circonspection qu'on eût dit qu'elle craignait de dire un seul mot qui ne vint pas de la grâce ou de l'esprit de Dieu. Car sa grande règle pour diriger l'intérieur de ses filles était de suivre en tout la direction de l'esprit de Dieu sur chacune d'elles; et, véritablement, toutes croyaient reconnaître que l'esprit de Dieu l'éclairait de sa lumière pour lui faire voir, comme dans un grand jour, l'état intérieur de chacune, le degré de franchise et d'humilité avec lequel on lui parlait, les sacrifices que Dieu demandait, et, en même temps, pour lui inspirer les avis propres à ranimer la confiance, à reveiller le zèle; à démasquer l'orgueil et découvrir les illusions de l'amour-propre.

Dans la manière d'enseigner, elle était également simple, éloignée de toute prétention au savoir du bel esprit, et voulait que ses filles

fassent de même, qu'elles revinssent souvent aux premiers principes en tout genre et apprissent parfaitement le nécessaire avant de passer au superflu. Elle redoutait pour elles l'amour des sciences et de tout ce qui flatte l'esprit en enflé le cœur. "Il vaudrait mieux pour le salut de plusieurs, disait-elle quelquefois en gémissant, qu'elles ne sachent qu'l'a, b, c;" et elle combattait, dans les novices, cette vanité qui les porte à préférer ce qui brille au solide, ce qui a de l'éclat au nécessaire.

Enfin dans les récréations, sa simplicité accompagnée d'une douce gaieté faisait le charme de sa compagnie. Elle ne pouvait souffrir dans ses filles, des airs tristes et mélancoliques, leur répétant souvent qu'elles devaient faire bon visage à tout le monde, que ces airs sombres étaient contraires à l'esprit de leur vocation, et qu'elles devaient toujours avoir un air de paix, de douceur et de joie du ciel. Fidèle à leur donner l'exemple en ceci comme en tout le reste, elle aimait à faire rire les autres, à leur faire passer des moments agréables; et des riens lui fournissaient matière pour ces aimables enjouements. Cette gaieté si pleine de charmes se soutint même au milieu de ses souffrances, et jusque dans sa dernière maladie. Alors encore, elle savait récréer les soeurs qui l'entouraient, les distraire de la douleur que leur causait son état. Et si quelquefois le poids de la souffrance l'accabloit, elle joignait les mains pour adorer les desseins de Dieu, lui renouveler sa soumission; se plaignait à lui avec simplicité de son peu de courage, réclamait à grands cris da grâce et reprenait ensuite son aimable gaieté.

Sa Simplicité dans la Devotion

Madame RIVIER était extrêmement simple dans sa devotion. Pour l'intérieur, elle la faisait consister dans la pureté de cœur, l'imitation de Jesus-Christ, l'attention à n'avoir d'autre volonté que celle de Dieu et d'autre désir que celui de répondre à ses desseins. Pour l'extérieure, rien de remarquable dans tout son mantien, sinon le respect profond avec lequel elle s'acquittait des moindres exercices de religion, et les larmes abondantes, les gémissements et les sanglots qui lui échappaient quelquefois, malgré elle. Elle priait le corps droit, les yeux sur le livre dans lequel elle suivait les offices; point de posture, ni de gestes singuliers: en tout, c'était la manière de prier du commun des fidèles. Hors le temps de la prière, sa dévotion était également simple. A part quelques mots courts et pleins de sens qu'elle entremêlait dans la conversation, elle s'accommodait à tout ce qu'on y disait, des qu'elle n'y voyait point d'offense de Dieu; elle n'y faisait point de grands discours de pieté, en parlait peu et ne s'occupait que de faire plaisir aux autres.

Cette âme humble et droite estimait que la simplicité dans la dévotion est la voie la plus sûre pour aller au ciel. Toute autre lui semblait suspecte, et elle ne redoutait rien tant que les illusions de la fausse pieté, fruits de l'orgueil et de l'amour-propre. Aussi, ne négligea-t-elle rien pour en préserver ses filles, et ce fut dans cette vue qu'elle composa son excellent livre du "Domaine des passions". Elle

leur recommandait d'éviter toute singularité dans le service de Dieu et dans la manière de prier, de ne point désirer ni rechercher les voies extraordinaires qui ne se sont pas la vraie pieté. "La vraie et solide dévotion, leur disait-elle souvent, c'est la pratique du renoncement et de l'humilité, l'esprit de compunction, l'amour généreux et actif qui, l'action de Marthe jointe à la vie intérieure de Marie, s'oublie et s'immole pour accomplir en tout la volonté de Dieu. C'est l'esprit de foi qui fait qu'on se demande souvent: Que dit Jésus-Christ et son Evangile sur ce que je vais faire ou dire? Que me dit la foi en telle ou telle circonstance? Voilà, ajoutait-elle, ce qui vaut mieux que toutes les extases et toutes les consolations de piété."

Elle avait en horreur ces vaines complaisances qu'on tire de certaines faveurs sensibles ou de certaines œuvres extérieurs, et qui font qu'on s'attache à sa propre dévotion au préjudice de ses devoirs les plus essentiels, qu'au lieu de servir Dieu pour amour de lui, on se recherche soi-même en tout, jusque dans les choses les plus saintes. Elle était douée d'un tact tout particulier pour discerner la véritable ferveur de ces illusions de l'amour-propre. Elle n'approuvait point ces lamentations et ces pleurs auxquels se laissent aller certaines personnes à la vue de leurs défauts: "Tout cela ne vient que de la paresse et de l'amour-propre, qui voudraient avoir de la sainteté sans qu'il en coûte. Je voudrais bien me corriger, dites-vous, . . . si vous le voulez, montrez-le en faisant le contraire de ce à quoi vous portent vos défauts; et, au lieu de vous laisser abattre, priez, mais aussi, combattez: car la prière, sans combattre nos passions et nos vices serait vaine."

Madame RIVIER s'élevait également avec force contre l'illusion de certaines dévotes qui, dans les conversations, parlent beaucoup de pieté, de direction, de confessions et de confesseurs, et, hors de là, ne font rien de ce qu'elles disent; qui s'occupent beaucoup des autres et presque jamais d'elles-mêmes; qui sont toujours prêtes à donner des leçons sur les matières les plus relevées de la perfection et qui, en pratique, ne connaissent pas les premières lettres de l'alphabet du renoncement.

"Ne faites pas tant de bruit avait-elle coutume de dire, mais portez du fruit par vos œuvres; ne parlez de vous ni en bien ni en mal c'est le meilleur; ne vous ingérez pas dans tout ce qui ne vous regarde pas. La plus belle musique me ferait moins de plaisir que d'entendre dire que nos soeurs ne se mêlent de rien que de leur classe . . ."

Formée par de pareilles leçons, la communauté offrait un spectacle ravissant: Ah! disait une personne de piété qui en était témoin, je n'avais jamais connu la vraie vertu que depuis que j'ai vu cette maison."

Et comme des étrangers, étonnés de ce langage demandaient à une soeur ce qu'il y avait donc de si extraordinaire dans ce couvent: "Je n'y ai rien vu de particulier, répondit celle-ci, que l'exactitude

avec laquelle chacune remplit ses devoirs, et l'union et la charité qui règnent entre toutes les soeurs". C'était sans doute le plus bel éloge qu'elle put faire de la communauté et du bon esprit qui l'animait.

(pp. 161-71.)

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