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THE SPIRITUALITY OF REVEREND JEAN-PIERRE MEDAILLE, S.J.
FOUNDER
OF
THE SISTERS OF SAINT JOSEPH

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In calling religious communities to a re-evaluation and adaptation of their way of life, Vatican II has directed that religious make this reappraisal in the light of the Gospel and according to the particular spirituality of their founders.

A spirituality is here understood to mean a combination of spiritual values which permit a man to understand his life and move him to be generous with his life. Every Christian spirituality must be based on the Gospel, but no single one can express the full richness of Christ. Each founder, moved by the Holy Spirit, has emphasized only a few of the many facets in the life of Christ and through his particular collection of values has given his community its distinctive spirit. The Council recognizes the importance of these particular charisms.

It serves the best interests of the Church for communities to have their own special character and purpose. Therefore loyal recognition and safekeeping should be accorded to the spirit of the founders, as also to all the particular goals and wholesome traditions which constitute the heritage of each community. -Decree on the Appropriate Renewal of Religious Life. #26.

The following paper will seek to clarify the spirituality of Father Jean-Pierre Medaille, S.J. (1610-1669) Founder of the Congregation of the Sisters of Saint Joseph, and to present certain new information on the history of the origins of the Congregation.

Is the spirituality of the Sisters today really that of Father Medaille? For the most part it no doubt is, but it is perfectly valid to raise the question, because the history of the origins of the Congregation is better known today, and some inaccuracies and omissions of the past have, in a sense, impoverished its spirituality and diminished some of its original vigor.

In view of the challenge of Vatican II the Sisters might also ask whether the spirituality which proved itself yesterday is still relevant for the apostle of today.

It is in this perspective that these notes have been distilled from a series of lectures given for the Sisters of Saint Joseph in New Orleans in August, 1966 by Reverend Marius Nepper, S.J., of Limoges, France. Father Nepper became interested in the work of Father Medaille when he was asked by the Sisters in LePuy to preach a sermon on the occasion of the tercentenary of the Sisters of Saint Joseph in 1950.

Since that time Father has done extensive research into the origins and spirituality of the Congregation of Saint Joseph, has given retreats and conferences to the Sisters, and has served as a consultant and spiritual advisor to the federation of Mothers General of the European Sisters of Saint Joseph.

We are most grateful to Father Nepper for his work and to the Holy Spirit who has providentially guided him to prepare in advance of Vatican II the valuable materials he has made available for our self study.

This paper is also indebted to the notes published by the Boston Sisters of Saint Joseph following a similar lecture series by Father Nepper there.

II. HISTORY OF THE FIRST CONGREGATION OF SAINT JOSEPH

An interesting aspect of the history of the Congregation has only recently come to light. Research by Father Nepper into several early documents has uncovered the fact that there were two distinct foundations by Father Medaille, both given the name Saint Joseph.

We know that in 1650 Father Medaille, in collaboration with Bishop Henri de Maupas, founded the Congregation of Saint Joseph at Le Puy. What we did not know until recently (c1955) was that as early as 1647 Father had already founded at Saint Flour, a town in central France, a first Congregation of Saint Joseph. Copies of letters dated 1647 are filed in the Roman archives of the Company of Jesus from the Father General to Father Medaille and to his immediate superior, testifying to correspondence about the work already undertaken at Saint Flour.

This new institute had some very distinctive characteristics. The Congregation was a secret and well organized society. The seventeenth century was the epoch of Louis XIII, Louis XIV, and Cardinal Richelieu. Because of the severity of the government and its absolute authority, zealous Catholics organized their apostolic activities by forming secret societies which flourished at this time. One such group was the very active Company of the Blessed Sacrament, whose membership included bishops and members of the French elite. Father Medaille used this company as the model for his little group of women who made up the first Congregation of Saint Joseph.

The members, without adopting a religious habit, lived in small houses in groups of three with one superior controlling all the houses. There were also a mistress of novices, a spiritual directress and other officials. The members elected a priest to serve as ecclesiastical superior. Only the superiors and the

other sisters knew the identity of the members. Their vows were secret; nothing was owned individually. The Sisters' manner of life, food, and clothing were determined by their previous status in society. Everything was organized for the advancement of the glory of God and the perfection of the neighbor. Their anonymity as religious facilitated an extraordinary amount of activity.

Not only were the Sisters a secret community, but they were directed to form in the midst of their occupations similar secret groups of lay women. These groups were also composed of three members who performed works in the service of God.

Among the documents recently unearthed there is a copy of the minutes of a meeting held by one of these secret groups which shows that they met, prayed together, and examined together their manner of fulfilling their duties towards their husbands, their families, and their neighbors.

III. DOCUMENTS OF THE FIRST CONGREGATION OF SAINT JOSEPH

Documents belonging to the first foundation include the one hundred Maxims, the Rulebook, and the Eucharistic Letter.¹

- A. The one hundred Maxims "in which is contained the entire spirit of the Institute and of the Constitutions."²

There are today five or six handwritten copies of the Maxims. They are selections from Father Medaille's Maxims of Perfection for Souls Aspiring to Great Virtue, a book intended for the laity as well as for religious and whose composition antedated the foundation of the first Congregation of Saint Joseph.

The Maxims are the first document of Father Medaille. They were used by the first Saint Joseph group and are still used by the second Saint Joseph. During the seventeenth century maxims were a popular literary form, and Father Medaille chose this form to express his spirituality.³ Such a simple style of writing was well suited to the educational level of the first Sisters. We know that of the seven original Sisters of the second foundation none was able to read and only one could sign her name. It seems probable that a similar situation prevailed among the Sisters of the first foundation.

There are four frequently recurring ideas found in the

¹Cf. Eucharistic Letter, page 4. (At this writing, the complete text of the letter is available only in French.)

²Medaille, J. P., S. J. Maximes de Perfection, edited by M. Nepper, S. J., Lyons: Roudil Freres, 3 Quai A-Lassagne, 1962.

³In 1657 Father Medaille published only the first part of his book from which the 100 Maxims were taken. An entire edition was published in 1672, three years after his death.

Maxims:⁴

1. Union with God through seeking His will:
Numbers 16 (16); 25 (26); 38 (39); 67 (72); 84 (92); 91 (99);
92 (100).
2. A preoccupation with perfection which can be capsuled into the word generosity.
Numbers: 1 (1); 2 (2); 4 (4); 58 (62).
3. Constant reference to the example of Christ as a Model in the practice of virtue:
Numbers: 7 (6); 41 (43); etc.
4. A balance between his extraordinarily demanding ideals and a peaceful striving for them in a Salesian spirit of calmness and joy:
Numbers: 40 (42); 45 (48); 50 (53); 51 (54); 52 (55); 63 (68);
64 (69).

- B. The Rulebook (Reglements) of the Sisters of Saint Joseph are the constitutions of the first Congregation of Saint Joseph. Intended for a secret society, the Rulebook cannot be separated from the Eucharistic Letter, which is also characterized by the same references to a society of secrecy and hiddenness.

Father Medaille gives his sisters three great ideals in the Rulebook:

1. They are to be the Congregation of the great love of God.
2. They should profess to do what is most perfect.
3. They are to strive to be the holiest people in the world.

- C. The Eucharistic Letter, of which there is but a single manuscript, was unknown until 1875 when the Abbe Rivaux, chaplain at the mother-house at Lyons, discovered it while doing research for a biography of Mother St. John Fontbonne.

Unfortunately, in publishing the letter, Abbe Rivaux, without warning that he was doing so, suppressed parts of the letter which he did not understand, namely those that touched on the secret character of the first Saint Joseph. He thus launched the idea that the letter was an essential document of the present Congregation. Father Nepper proposes that the letter was written to an individual in the first Saint Joseph and not to the entire congregation. Words of address in the letter are always singular, for example, 'my dear child,' 'my daughter,' etc. Certain exaggerated expressions (e.g. "a congregation without a congregation") further suggest that the letter was written in one sitting, under the influence of a strong emotion.

Putting aside, however, the element of secrecy and the parallelism between the secret of the "Little Design" and Jesus as hidden Victim in the Eucharist (two ideas which Father Medaille himself gave up in founding the second Congregation of Saint Joseph in 1650), there are

⁴ The first number in each set gives the Bourg numbering. Numbers in parenthesis refer to the Maxims as listed in the French edition. These are merely suggestive examples.

values in the Eucharistic Letter that remain pertinent to the second Congregation. The passages which have rich meaning for the present Sisters are those which deal with the effects of the Eucharist, namely, the union of all people with God and the union of all people with one another. These are the two dimensions of charity which Father Medaille proposes and which are especially characteristic of the second Saint Joseph. This basic Eucharistic idea, not the seventeenth century symbolism, is as relevant today as ever. The expressions about poverty, obedience, zeal, striving for perfection of the neighbor, and the love of God are also valuable.

The Eucharistic Letter presents two other difficulties to modern readers. One is the idea of Jesus in the Eucharist as a model of virtues to be imitated: eg. hiddenness, silence, obedience, etc. This widespread seventeenth-century notion persisted in popular preaching even into the twentieth century. However, more recent liturgical and theological studies insist that the Eucharist is given as food, as sign and source of the unity of the Christian community. For a model of virtue we are to look, not to the Eucharist as such, but to Christ in the Gospels.

The other difficulty lies in Father Medaille's frequent use of the word annihilated. The word is an unfortunate translation of the French word aneanti which has no exact English equivalent. The French word suggests, not so much a reduction to physical nothingness (for that notion the French word, like the English, is annihilation), but rather a moral attitude of self surrender, the emptiness of complete giving. It is helpful to note that the Greek word kenosis in Phillipians 2 is translated aneanti in French, but emptied himself in English. Hence, Father Medaille's expression "annihilated institute" would be better rendered in English as "an Institute totally surrendered to God, totally emptied of all but God."

IV. HISTORY OF THE SECOND CONGREGATION OF SAINT JOSEPH

No further documents relating to the first Congregation of Saint Joseph have been found, though Father Nepper conducted a vigorous search for pertinent documents in all the Motherhouses of Sisters of Saint Joseph. It therefore seems certain that the first foundation was abandoned or died out after the second was established. Why it did not survive is a tantalizing question whose answer appears buried in history. Father Nepper theorizes that when, in 1650, the Bishop of Le Puy, Henri de Maupas, asked Father Medaille to assign Sisters to staff the hospital at Montferrand in Le Puy, Father Medaille saw this as an opportunity to establish a group of Sisters as publicly known religious with official, canonical status. The secrecy of the first foundation was no longer necessary; hence, its disappearance.

V. DOCUMENTS OF THE SECOND CONGREGATION OF SAINT JOSEPH

A. THE CONSTITUTIONS⁵

There are, in these Constitutions, three sections which are especially interesting from the point of view of the spirituality of the Congregation:

1. The first chapter of these Constitutions. In the first chapter Father Medaille clarifies the purpose and the devotions of the new Congregation.

PRIMITIVE CONSTITUTION:

It will have the name of Congregation of Saint Joseph, so that the sisters will come to know that they must assist and serve the neighbor with the same care, diligence, and charity which the glorious Saint Joseph had for the service of the Blessed Virgin, his most pure spouse and for the Saviour Jesus.

It will furthermore be consecrated to the Most Holy and uncreated Trinity of God the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit and the created Trinity of Jesus, Mary and Joseph.

Constitution of Bourg:

3,5. It is consecrated to the Most Holy Trinity and is under the protection of the Blessed Virgin and of Saint Joseph.

The institute bears the name of CONGREGATION OF SAINT JOSEPH, The Sisters shall strive to serve the neighbor with the same diligence, charity, and cordiality with which their glorious Patron served Jesus, his adorable Foster Son, and Virgin Mary, his most pure Spouse.

The editor of the first printed edition of the Constitutions (1693) changed Father Medaille's text, and the Bourg edition is representative of the altered text. The ramifications of changing the basic consecration of the Congregation will be explained later.

2. The Act of Consecration to the Two Trinities. This Consecration appears in full twice in the primitive Constitutions, with the recommendation to "read it at the beginning of the year and every three months," proof of the importance which the Founder attached to it. In the Consecration each one of the Persons reminds the Sisters of a virtue to imitate, and the six together constitute a code of perfection.

5. Before the appearance of the Code of Canon Law in 1917 the Constitutions in most of the Congregations were preserved in editions basically faithful to the original.

7.
3. The "Protestations." The original Constitutions is divided into six parts:

- a. The spirit of the Congregation and the persons who are its members.
- b. The end of the Congregation and the means to obtain it.
- c. The qualifications required of persons who desire to be admitted into the Congregation.
- d. The rules concerning officials.
- e. The directory.
- f. Means to make the little Congregation subsist.

In the Sixth Part the means which help keep the Congregation alive are treated. Father Medaille realizes that throughout history internal dangers have menaced religious groups. These dangers could hinder his not yet fully established Saint Joseph, so he warns the infant Congregation. After describing the perils in some detail, he draws up a formula, which he calls "Protestations," which lists the dangers to be avoided and the appropriate remedies to be used. The Sisters are directed to recite the "Protestations" each month. The dangers Father Medaille lists are historical dangers, one might almost say "classical" dangers to religious institutes--ambition, intrigues, cliques, etc.

In the first printed edition of the Constitutions (1693) the connection between the formula of the "Protestations" and the sixth part of the Constitutions was suppressed. Consequently the "Protestations" appear as a separate, unrelated piece, interesting no doubt, but cut off from the main line of Father Medaille's work. For this reason, no other Medaillian formula has been more widely misunderstood. It has undergone numerous and diverse modifications in the different Congregations of Saint Joseph in the course of time. Moreover, the dangers listed in the "Protestations" are, for the most part, less pertinent for the twentieth century than for the seventeenth. Consequently, The Mothers General in France requested Father Nepper to develop a common and contemporary formula. In making the revisions, Father Nepper was guided by these principles suggested by the Mothers General:

- a. Maintain the idea Father Medaille had in mind in writing the original "Protestations," namely to present a resume of the dangers menacing the Congregation and the remedies for them.
- b. Cite contemporary rather than "classical" dangers; group them around the social aspect of life--community and apostolate.
- c. Present the "Protestations" with a positive orientation rather than as warnings and prohibitions.

A translation of Father Nepper's revisions is found at the end of this paper on page 28. The first two points of this version, corresponding to the first and third of the Bourg edition, concern fidelity to the law of the Gospel and to the spirit and ideals of the founder. The remaining "protestations" concern community and apostolic life.

A year after the almost universal acceptance of Father Nepper's formula, another version was proposed by the Sisters at Lyons. The text is good, but it expresses a different idea from the Nepper work. The Lyons edition is more traditional, for it retains, as much as possible, the phraseology of the original, whereas Father Nepper's is drawn up in reference to the wishes of today's Sisters.

The word protestation presents difficulties since today it connotes hostility and aggressiveness. Father Medaille used it in its etymological sense, "to affirm something, to declare it publicly." No substitute word has been found, so the word "protestation" is used with quotation marks to indicate its use in a sense other than the common one.

- B. The one hundred Maxims. As he had done for the Sisters of the first Saint Joseph, Father Medaille recommended the hundred Maxims with equal force to the second foundation. These Maxims, in Father Medaille's words "contain the whole spirit of their Little Institute and of the Constitutions." Fidelity to the spirit of these maxims, familiar to almost all Congregations of Saint Joseph, has preserved a basic unity in the spirit of the Sisters, despite other differences.

The Bourg text contains 92 Maxims whereas the original text lists 100. Actually only one maxim is missing in the later text, for in some cases two or more have been telescoped into one. The missing maxim fits between Bourg numbers 57 and 58. Father Nepper's French edition lists it as number 61:

Seek also with all your heart a tranquil, intimate union with God, a very cordial charity and support of the neighbor, a very innocent purity of heart, a perfect love and fidelity to grace--accompanied by a peaceful death of your sinful nature--a very lowly humility, an altogether sincere simplicity and candor, the obedience

of a child which does not reason, a perfectly denuded poverty, and a continual joy of heart, as most proper to your Institute. In a word, have a pure and perfect love of God.

VI. COMPARISON BETWEEN THE FIRST AND SECOND CONGREGATIONS

Father Medaille gave the name Saint Joseph to both of his foundations. However, there is a marked difference in the way in which Saint Joseph is to be imitated. In the first Congregation he is appropriately the model of the hidden life, as is Jesus in the Eucharist. In the second foundation, publicly and canonically established for the service of the neighbor, Joseph became the model of cordial charity.

Another important area of difference between the two foundations should be noted. In both Congregations devotion to the Eucharist and consecration to the Holy Trinity are present. The Eucharistic orientation, however, is much more dominant in the first (Cf. Eucharistic Letter) principally because the hiddenness of Jesus in the Eucharist parallels the secrecy of the first Saint Joseph. In the second Congregation devotion to the Eucharist is recommended in an important passage of the Constitutions which the editor of 1693 unfortunately suppressed.

They will have an immense love for this adorable Mystery, and they will remember that the Holy Sacrament of the Eucharist, having given birth to their little Congregation, should also preserve it and make it grow more and more in all grace and virtue. -Primitive Constitutions

The relationship here indicated between the Eucharist and the birth of the Congregation suggests more, it seems to Father Nepper, than the mere fact that the second foundation somehow grew out of the first. It seems to imply also that some of the members of the first foundation passed over into the second, otherwise no one would have understood how the Eucharist gave birth to the second. The suppressions of this allusion to the Eucharist left all the Congregations of Saint Joseph without any specifically Eucharistic orientations until the discovery of the Eucharistic Letter in 1875.

The Consecration to the "Two Trinities" became the dominant characteristic of the second foundation. Father Medaille recommended it to the members of the first Congregation, but he emphasized its importance for the second by specifying that it is to be said four times a year.

VII. SYNTHESIS OF FATHER MEDAILLE'S IDEAS

After this brief analysis of the separate documents left us by Father Medaille, there remains the task of synthesizing the essential elements of the spirituality they reveal. Five dominant themes, plus an important but less dominant sixth element, pervade all of Father Medaille's writings. These themes possess a logical interrelationship which indicates the fundamental unity of Father Medaille's life-vision.

A. Love of God

The Sister of Saint Joseph is called to the practice of the greatest love of God.

Primitive Constitutions:

They must live in such a way that they could be called the Congregation of the great love of God, since in all they do and through all they do they practice this very great love of God.

Constitution of Bourg:

(Omitted in this edition)

This greatest love must be lived, not only in theory, but also in practice. As she grows more deeply in love, the Sister will more easily rise above basic human weaknesses.

Primitive Maxims-(1962 edition):

92. Do not imagine that you have reached a true love of God until this holy love has emptied you of all sorts of vanity, of cowardice, of carelessness, of sensuality, of wordly attachment and affection; in a word, all of fallen nature, in order to make you live by the movements of grace and by the maxims of the Church and of the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

Maxims- (Bourg):

85. Do not believe that you have attained a high degree of love for God for His own sake until this holy love has destroyed in you every kind of vanity, pettiness, carelessness, sensuality, attachment and affection for things of the earth, that is to say, all the evil movements of nature, so that you live by the maxims of the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

B. Love of Neighbor

There can be no separation between the love of God and the love of neighbor, for whom the Sister of Saint Joseph resolves to "live, work, suffer and die" as Jesus the Savior did for her and for all mankind. The apostolic work presented to the Sisters by Father Medaille is by no means limited. It rather embraces the whole of mankind. The Sisters are directed to care for the sick in their homes or in hospitals, the insane, orphans, fallen girls; they are to teach the young and to visit prisoners. All their work should be done in the same spirit of cordial charity which Saint Joseph had for Jesus and Mary.

Father Medaille proposes as the end of the Congregation the twofold law of love presented in the Gospel. He draws on Saint John's Epistle (1 John 4) for inspiration when he writes in his Eucharistic Letter:

Primitive Eucharistic Letter

21-25 This, then, my dear Sister, is the end of our humble (aneantie) Congregation. It tends to procure this double, total union of ourselves and of all our dear neighbors with God, of ourselves with all others, whoever they may be, and of all others among themselves and with us; but all in Jesus and in God His Father.

May the Divine Goodness make us understand the nobility of this end, and help us to be instruments likely to make it succeed.

Please notice that I have called this double union TOTAL. I mean by this that both the kind of love and the exercise of love in regard to God and to the neighbor is to be as full and complete as possible. God grant that we may contribute, as a feeble instrument, to the re-establishment in the Church of this total union of souls in God and with God.

Bourg Eucharistic Letter

Page 258--This, then is the purpose of our annihilated Congregation. It strives to procure this twofold total union of ourselves and our dear neighbor in general, but all in Jesus and in God His Father.

May the divine Goodness reveal to us the sublimity of this objective and enable us to become suitable instruments for its realization!

I call this union total because this word expresses all the perfection comprised in the nature and exercise of the love of God and our dear neighbor. God grant that we may be able to contribute, as feeble instruments, to the restoration in the Church of this total union of souls in God and with God.

listening to Him attentively, obeying Him promptly, and entirely, giving to Him, as is most just, the honor of success in your good actions.

guidance of the Holy Spirit, listen to Him attentively, obey Him promptly and entirely, and give to Him, as is most just, all glory for the success of your good actions.

The chapter on the novice mistress, which contains many key Medaillian ideas, also stresses the importance of docility to the Holy Spirit.

Primitive Constitution:

She shall try to learn the attractions of the Holy Spirit and the path by which He wishes to lead each of the Sisters, in order that she might aid them to follow the divine call without trying to have them follow her own virtues or to form them according to her own ideas or practices.

Bourg Directory:

376- She will endeavor to recognize the action of the Holy Spirit in each soul so she may help each one to follow His inspirations. She will likewise be very careful not to substitute her own lights and personal suggestions for those of the Divine Spirit.

E. Humility

The call to tend constantly to perfection in love of God and love of neighbor demands a correlative call to humility. The recommendations of Father Medaille to His Sisters reflect his meditation on a passage of Saint Augustine in the breviary:

Do you want to erect a high building? Think first of the foundation of humility. The higher you want to raise the structure... the deeper you must dig the foundations...

-Office for Abbots

In treating of humility Father Medaille reveals a penchant for multiplying striking adjectives. Thus in the Second Part of the Primitive Constitutions, he writes: "The Sisters will strive to have a self-effacing humility, professing in all things to practice the littlest, most profound, and most genuine humility." Every official is told to practice the "greatest," or "most profound" humility. In one place Father Medaille even advocates "an abysmal humility." The adjectives are admittedly redundant and are perhaps offensive to modern readers. However, without them we would never know the tremendous importance Father Medaille attaches to this fundamental Christian virtue.

F. Salesian Spirit

Striving for perfection in the love of God and of neighbor, even if pursued under the influence of the Holy Spirit and in an attitude of genuine humility, may well create an atmosphere of struggle and unhealthy tenseness. Consequently, to temper the "spiritual battle," Father Medaille introduces a Salesian note of serenity, of sweetness and gentleness, of abandonment to Providence, of unhurried calm and of joy.

Primitive Maxims-(1962 edition): Maxims- (Bourg):

60- Above all else, love and seek interior gentleness of soul, living in calm, undisturbed by passion, outwardly doing all things without hurry, and bearing what you have to suffer without complaint or murmur, or anxiety.

57- Cherish only interior peace of soul, living in calm, undisturbed by passion, outwardly performing all your duties without eagerness, and bearing what you have to suffer without complaint or anxiety.

Maxim 61 (1962 edition)⁶ is perhaps the finest example of this characteristic. In it Father Medaille speaks of "tranquil and intimate union with God," or a "peaceful death of lower nature," of "continual joy of spirit."

The passage from the chapter on the novice mistress quoted above brings out many of the same ideas.

Important as this Salesian note is, Father Medaille does not seem to emphasize it as strongly as he does the other elements of his spirituality. His main concern is to spur his daughters on to mount the summits and to do it quickly. Hence the frequent recurrence of words like "more," "higher," "faster," "further," "the greatest perfection," "the most cordial charity," etc. In this context the tempering influence of Salesian expressions will be appreciated all the more.

G. Summary

The essential elements of Father Medaille's spirituality, then, are these: love of God, love of neighbor, the pursuit of perfection, devotion to the Holy Spirit, humility, and a certain Salesian sweetness and gentleness. It is important to see the inner logic binding these elements into a unified whole. The first two points - love of God and love of

⁷ This maxim is not found in the Bourg edition. For the complete maxim cf. page 8.
cf. page 13.

neighbor--are inseparable and demand a willingness to seek perfection because the measure of a Christian's love is to love without measure. Only under the influence of the Holy Spirit, the Spirit of love and of perfection, can the Sister of Saint Joseph hope to love perfectly. Further, the attainment of such a high ideal necessarily involves the practice of humility, since it is the humble whom God exalts. Finally Salesian calmness, joy, and dependence on Providence are necessary to temper an unhealthy tenseness and an unnatural preoccupation with one's own efforts.

In a word: Love perfectly in the Spirit, with humility and joy of heart.

VIII. EXPRESSIONS OF THE SYNTHESIS

There are three brief and important formulas in which Father Medaille expresses his spirituality succinctly. Only one of these, the Consecration to the Two Trinities, is complete, since it alone contains all six principal ideas. Yet, the others, despite their incompleteness, are significant.

A. The Formula of Vows

Included at the end of the Act of Profession is a pledge to practice humility and charity. These two virtues parallel points five and two in the analysis of Father Medaille's spirituality given above. For him, charity to the neighbor which the Sisters profess is composed of two elements: zeal and cordiality, both of which appear again in the Consecration to the Trinities.

B. Maxim 38 and the conclusion to the Eucharistic Letter

A second expression of the synthesis of Father Medaille's spirituality can be found in Maxim 38:

Primitive Maxims--(1962 edition): Maxims--(Bourg):

39--Be nothing for yourselves;
and be all for God and for the
neighbor.

38--Never live for
self, but let your
life be dedicated to
God and to your
neighbor.

The same formula occurs at the conclusion of the Eucharistic Letter:

Primitive Eucharistic Letter:

42--Our Little Design and the
persons composing it will be
nothing for themselves, but
rather wholly lost and humbled
in God and for God, and thus

Bourg Eucharistic Letter:

Page 260--... the per-
sons comprising it
(must) be nothing to
self but rather they
must be wholly lost and

all for the dear neighbor.

annihilated in God and for God, and they will likewise be completely devoted to their neighbor and detached from self,

Here, "nothing to self" is an expression of humility, of self-abnegation whose sole purpose is to make possible perfect magnanimity towards God and neighbor, a generosity impossible without love. Hence, this formula contains the first, second, third, and fifth points of Father Medaille's spirituality. The focus, however, is on perfection in magnanimity and generosity.

C. The Consecration called "To the Two Trinities"⁸

By far the most significant of the formulas containing the spirituality of Father Medaille is the so-called "Consecration to the Two Trinities." It seems to have been particularly precious to Father Medaille. It first appears as a summary of Part I of Spiritual Maxims for Souls Who Aspire to Great Virtue. Here Father Medaille speaks of it as containing "the principal lights of the maxims." Having modified it slightly for religious, he proposes it in about the same words in the Rules of the first foundation and in the Constitutions of the second. Its importance in the second congregation is evident from two facts: 1) it appears not once, but twice, in the Constitutions; 2) the Sisters are directed to make the Act of Consecration on New Year's Day and to renew it every three months.

The Consecration is an expression of the two most fundamental Christian devotions - to the most Holy Trinity and to the Holy Family. It is obvious that these devotions are not specific to the Sisters of Saint Joseph; they are indeed common to all Christians. Rather, it is the ensemble of virtues built around these devotions which is characteristic of the Congregation.

In composing the Act of Consecration, Father Medaille was guided by two basic principles of the spiritual life. First, it is impossible to practice virtue for virtue's sake, or even for the sake of one's own perfection. The practice of virtue must always be related to a well-loved person. Jesus Himself followed this principle in His teaching: "Be perfect as your heavenly Father is perfect"; "Learn of Me, for I am

⁸ It was common in Father Medaille's day, and even later, to refer to the Most Holy Trinity as the "uncreated" or "heavenly" Trinity and to the Holy Family as the "created" or "earthly" trinity. In our day Pope Pius XII used the latter expression in a prayer he composed to the Holy Family.

meek and humble of heart". Secondly, love expresses itself in action. Contemplation of the virtues of the Persons of the Two Trinities must, if it is serious, lead to imitation.

This, then, is the rationale of the Consecration. In it Father Medaille presents six names of well-loved Persons (not six Persons, since God the Son and Jesus are the same).⁹ To each name he attaches a characteristic virtue which the Sisters are to practice. In each case the virtue proposed is the one most obviously and immediately suggested by the Person named.¹⁰ Thus, Father Medaille skillfully draws up an expression of his whole vision of the spiritual life of an active religious in such a way that it could be understood and easily remembered by all.

The formula represents, also, a complete code of perfection, drawing together all that is essential in the spirituality of an active religious. It contains the two ends of the Sisters of St. Joseph: tending to perfection, and working with zeal for the salvation of the neighbor. Also present are the two classic means of tending to perfection: humility and love. The two indispensable dispositions for attaining the ends are also there: docility to the Holy Spirit, the "Spirit of Perfection, which leads naturally toward perfection; cordial charity, which opens the heart of the neighbor to receive the message of salvation."

If any one point is to be singled out as most characteristic of the spirituality of the Sisters of St. Joseph, it would be the sixth item of the Consecration. Although St. Joseph is the least important of the Persons in the Consecration, he is the model of the virtue which should be distinctive of the Sister of St. Joseph: cordial charity. Father Medaille urges the Sisters to serve others with the cordiality Joseph had for Jesus and Mary-- a cordiality born of his increasingly conscious wonder, reverence, and love over his inconceivable destiny of being husband of such a wife and father of such a son. The cordial charity of the Sisters of St. Joseph can be understood only by prayerfully contemplating Joseph's consciousness of his role in relation to Jesus and Mary. Fundamentally a matter of the heart (hence the very word cordial), it is rooted in inner dispositions of esteem, reverence, respect, concern which alone provide motivation for a life which constantly pours itself out in service to all sorts of people.

9. The editor of the first printed edition of the Constitutions (1693) from which the Constitutions of nearly all the present-day Congregations are derived, united the parts relating to God the Son and Jesus and suppressed the reference to Jesus. In so doing, he obscured the harmony and inner logic of the Consecration.

10. CF. Appendix pp. 26, 27 for text of the Consecration and schematic diagram.

To be efficacious, apostolic work must be grounded in and animated by cordial charity. The manner of giving is worth more than the gift. There is a way of presenting the truth which is more convincing than the reasons or proofs alleged on behalf of the truth. There is a manner of being cordial and open to the needs, interests, and desires of others which makes them want to believe and love as the apostle does. This is the ideal Father Medaille preposes--an ideal as living and needed today as in the 17th century.

IX. TRANSITION FROM YESTERDAY TO TOMORROW

A. A Family Problem

The spirituality of Father Medaille has undoubtedly done much good and through the years has guided many Sisters of Saint Joseph to a life of great holiness. Can, however, a spirituality developed three hundred years ago have the same appeal, the same moving force for a religious of the twentieth century? Can it still attract a following? Is it still valid?

These delicate questions perhaps arouse fear and even pain. And yet the Sisters are called to face them squarely and with confidence. Because this is a family problem, it should be faced in dialog as a family. In this time of swiftly moving world change, everything is called into question, even the most hallowed traditions. Nothing is to be gained by evading the issue.

B. The Climate for Investigation

With what sentiments and attitudes should the Sisters approach this study?

1. With great deference and respect for the Sisters who, in the past, have worked in the vineyard of Saint Joseph and whose work was undoubtedly inspired by the Holy Spirit.
2. With complete confidence in the guidance and inspiration of the same Holy Spirit, who stimulates today's apostles.
3. With sympathy for young religious, who are uncomfortably situated between yesterday's values, which were good though probably imperfect, and tomorrow's values, which will no doubt be better but which are not yet ours.

C. Method of Investigation

Vatican II has called for the appropriate renewal of religious life by means of two simultaneous processes: 1)

"an adjustment of the community to the changed conditions of the times..."¹¹

The manner of living, praying, and working should be suitably adapted to the physical and psychological conditions of today's religious and also, to the extent required by the nature of each community, to the needs of the apostolate, the requirements of a given culture, the social and economic circumstances anywhere, but especially in missionary territories. (DARRL 3)

2) Secondly, the Council recommends "a continuous return to...the original inspiration behind a given community." (DARRL 2) Pope Pius XII some 15 years ago suggested a question Sisters should ask themselves: What would your founder do today? By studying what a religious founder did in his own day, one can arrive at an answer, at least in a general way.

What then are some trends current in our post-conciliar world, and what facts in the life and works of Father Medaille can provide guidelines in adapting according to his spirit?

WE SEE IN THE WORLD TODAY:

1. An immense concern for the poor and for underdeveloped lands.

How would Father Medaille respond in such an era? Without much hesitation one can answer that he would be deeply troubled today by misery and suffering of body and soul, just as in the 1600's he was concerned for the poor and sick, the insane, prisoners, fallen women, girls in danger of falling, the ignorant. His Sisters were directed to engage actively in works of mercy for all such persons.

2. An ecumenical movement toward Christian unity.

Father Medaille would be no more consoled today than he was in his own day by the disunity of Christians. Living at the time of the religious wars, when divisions among Protestants and Catholics were an enormous scandal and a great concern to him, he proposed in the Eucharistic Letter that his Sisters seek a twofold total union.

11. Walter M. Abbot, ed., The Documents of Vatican II, "Decree on the Appropriate Renewal of the Religious Life," New York: Herder and Herder, 1966, #2. Hereafter cited as DARRL.

of men with God and of men with one another. He deeply regretted Christian disunity and the forgetfulness of

Primitive Constitutions:

Bourg Constitutions:

Page 10... "the esteemed virtues of the gospel and of the rigorous demands imposed by cordial charity, humility, simplicity, and sweetness which in so many places seem to be banished from Christianity."

Omitted

3. A preoccupation about progress.

Throughout his works one finds in Father Medaille a concern that his Sisters make constant efforts to grow toward the greatest love... the most... the best. They should be the poorest, the humblest, the purest. His challenge is always in the superlative! The Sisters are instructed to form in a Christian manner the lay women with whom they work, very much as the novice mistress forms novices. Here again is seen Father Medaille's concern, not only for the salvation, but also for the greater perfection of the neighbor, at least of those capable of tending toward higher perfection, for he recognizes that all are not so called. In his concern for the salvation and perfection of the neighbor, he does not overlook the need to work towards improving social conditions (See next section). He who appreciated spiritual perfection so well would have understood and appreciated today's passionate drive for progress in all spheres of human life.

4. A heightened sense of the need for organization.

Father Medaille would probably be quite at ease with the modern world's respect for efficiency and organizational techniques. He himself was an extraordinarily well organized man. He did not see the apostolate of the Sisters of Saint Joseph as an individualist sort of thing with each one doing her own little good in her own little way. Not only was the work of the Sisters well planned, but also the work of lay collaborators. He had a concern for spreading the work among lay people - for "multiplying the multipliers." In the rules which he gave to the directress of the lay groups who formed confraternities of mercy, he urges her to develop in the members a conscious responsibility for the spiritual well-being of their family, their servants and their neighborhood. (Primitive Constitutions, p. 60)

An example of his bold concepts was this instruction to the Sisters:

Primitive Constitutions:

Bourg Constitutions:

They will divide the town into

omitted

several sections. By visiting the sick and through the help of persons associated with their Congregation, they will try to learn what disorders exist in each section. Wherever they can, they themselves will remedy these disorders; otherwise they will seek the help of persons who have power or influence.

5. An interest in new methods to solve problems and a certain impatience with old systems that no longer serve.

Father Medaille's very founding of an active congregation available for the diverse needs of the times, in the mid-seventeenth century when such institutes were first coming into being, is evidence of his detachment from past methods and his courage in experimenting with the new.

He would undoubtedly be very much interested in all that is new today. He would not be distressed over the present movements in the Church but without difficulty would have entered into the mind of the conciliar Church --he who desired that his Sisters live

Primitive Maxims (1962 edition): Maxims (Bourg edition):

92--...by the movements of grace and according to the maxims of the Church and of the Gospel of Jesus Christ. (Emphasis added.)

84--...by the movements of grace and the maxims of the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

It is noteworthy that in his instructions to the Sisters working with the confraternities of mercy (see above) Father Medaille directed his Sisters to remove the causes of misery, if necessary by making needs known to the proper authorities.

6. An emphasis on the positive.

Present day climate emphasizes the positive and frowns upon prohibitions or a negative approach. Perhaps the negative element seen in Father Medaille's writings would be accepted more readily if seen in the context of his less secular day. The positive element was, in former times, more often understood than expressed. The negative was a means. If there was renunciation, it was so that something better be accomplished. If the Sister was to be nothing for herself--it was so that she might be all for others.

7. A spirit of freedom.

Characteristic of our times is a restless desire for greater freedom, a need to have burdens eased and to be respected as adults and allowed individual initiative and responsibility. There are tensions and risks involved in such a time of change, whether one changes anything or whether one changes nothing. It is difficult to know how Father Medaille would have proceeded in this situation. However, it is safe to say that Father Medaille encouraged personal initiative and responsibility, as when he advised his Sisters involved in social work to make whatever decisions might be necessary, informing the superior afterwards.

Primitive Constitutions:

Bourg Edition:

Page 21 - On visit days they will have a great liberty to do what they will judge proper for the greater glory of God and solace of the poor, but on returning, they will give an account to the Superior of all that has been out of the ordinary.

Omitted

8. A respect for the dignity of the human person.

We today have a much clearer concept of the rights and duties of the individual and of the respect we owe to one another as persons. No human being may be used as a means. With increased education there is an irreversible movement among people toward an intensified consciousness of being persons. The writing of recent popes and of the Council have all taken account of this movement. Certainly, Father Medaille's admonitions to his Sisters that they be all for the neighbor and deeply concerned to help him indicate his spirit of respect.

Finally, a word about the style of Father Medaille's writing. In addition to the use of negative phrases on occasion, Father sometimes couches his ideas in expressions which appear rude to us. Here one must remember that Father Medaille was simply writing in the context of the seventeenth century and that if he had lived in the 1960's, he would readily have suppressed some expressions and changed others. On one point, however, he would remain firm: that his spirituality, his mystique, found in the Consecration to the two Trinities, be retained in its essence.

D. Projections into the future.

We have seen that there have been two foundations of the

Sisters of Saint Joseph, the first hidden and modeled on Jesus in the Eucharist and on the humble life of Saint Joseph; the second, consecrated to the two Trinities and actively committed to serving in cordial charity,--the present congregation.

In both of these foundations the same wind blew, the same spirituality prevailed, though they were different in organization. Vatican II has invited religious to reconsider their mode of life (#3), formation of young religious (#3), observances and customs (#8), works (#20), and manner of governing the institute (#3). (DARRL) It seems quite possible then, that through the years, in adapting traditional positions to entirely new ones in keeping with the demands of modern living, some day, somewhere, a third Congregation of Saint Joseph might arise. But this is an "enormous, far distant hypothesis," according to Father Nepper.

Perhaps this projection into the future, troubles some and causes anxiety for the future of the Congregation that has flourished for three hundred years. If in this new development, however, one could find Father Medaille's characteristic points, there would be no need to be concerned. If this new group were to include in its spirit such values as

1. an overwhelming desire which pushes the individual to work and to give of herself even to her death, like Christ and with Him for impoverished man;
2. a certain quality of gentleness and reverence for others such as Saint Joseph had for the Child and His Mother;
3. a concrete love of the Word Incarnate, whose inconceivable example of emptying Himself and leaving heaven for earth inspires in them a desire to humbly imitate their Lord;
4. a moving under the direction of the Holy Spirit, following the directives of the Church, which has called religious to a time of renewal. All this inflamed with the Spirit of Love, which carries it towards the Father and His most abandoned children;
5. a climate of progress which, rising above routine or mediocrity, stimulates the individual toward what is better or more perfect.

If these qualities are present, then, no matter what manner

of living this new group might adopt in its consecrated service to God for the salvation of the neighbor, we can reassure ourselves that this group would be rooted in the spirituality of Father Medaille and would be by full right a Congregation of Saint Joseph.

Respectfully submitted,

The Medaille Committee

Sister Marie Louise, chairman
Sister Theresita, secretary
Mother Aloysius
Sister Ann Bernadette
Sister Dorothy
Sister Eugenie
Sister Immaculata
Sister Jane Louise
Sister Joanna
Sister Justin
Sister Miriam Therese

Sisters of Saint Joseph of Bourg
New Orleans, Louisiana
Spring, 1967

Consecration

(Called "To the Two Trinities")

To You, Most Holy Trinity, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit; and to You, Trinity of the Earth, Jesus, Mary, and Joseph, I wish to make a total consecration of all that I am.

Holy Father, I offer myself to You. Give me the grace to do always in Your honor what I see to be most agreeable to your eyes, and to tend always to greater perfection in order to realize Jesus' desire: Be perfect as your heavenly Father is perfect.

Son of God, I offer myself to You. Help me to abase myself for love of You, by practicing the most profound humility, by generously mortifying my sinful self, in order to imitate the humility You willed to live for love of us.

Holy Spirit, I offer myself to You. Grant me in Your honor to profess the most pure and perfect love of God in all things, and to be all love, as You are all love.

I offer myself to You, Jesus, my Savior. Permit me in imitation of You, to live, suffer, work unceasingly and die, for the salvation and perfection of souls, as You did during Your earthly life.

I offer myself to you, O Virgin Mary. Teach me to imitate your perfect fidelity to grace and to the inspirations of the Holy Spirit.

I offer myself to you glorious Saint Joseph. Guide me by your example to practice a perfect and cordial charity towards all.
(toute sorte de prochain)

Most Holy Trinity, and you, Trinity of the Earth, graciously bless this Consecration which I make of my whole being, and grant me the light and strength to live this offering each day of the year.

Amen.

New Orleans, Louisiana
August, 1966

The Consecration
(Called "To the Two Trinities")

27

The Holy Trinity

God the Father

"Be perfect as..."
Matt 5:48

Tend towards
perfection

God the Son

"He emptied Himself..."
Phil 2:7

by humility

God the Holy Spirit

"Substantial love of the
Father and the Son"

and love

(3)
The two clas-
sic means
(negative and
positive) ef-
ficaciously
tending to-
wards perfec-
tion.

Jesus

Savior: "He will save
His people" Matt 1:21

Work for the glory
of God and salva-
tion of souls

(4)
The two ends
of the Sisters
of St. Joseph

Mary

Docile spouse of the
Holy Spirit

Docility to the Holy-
Spirit "The Spirit of
Perfection" will lead
you naturally towards
perfection.

Joseph

Tender spouse of the
Virgin of Virgins
Respectful and affec-
tionately devoted
Father of the Word
Incarnate

Cordial charity

(5)
Two disposi-
tions to faci-
litate the
attainment of
the two ends.

"Trinity of the Earth"
(Father Medaille p. 202 and Pius XII)
(Prayer for Families)

(1) The two Christian devotions

(2) Characteristic
virtues of the
Sisters of St.
Joseph.

OUR PROTESTATIONS

O most Holy Trinity, we come before You, humbly recognizing our weakness, but confident in the help of Your grace, the intercession of the glorious Virgin Mary, of our father St. Joseph, and of all the heavenly court.

We promise:

- | | |
|---|---|
| I. Fidelity to the law of the Gospel | 1. to work above all else at preserving the union of our souls with God by being filially docile to His will and affectionately attentive to His presence; and at maintaining among ourselves a cordial charity, the visible proof of our love of God. |
| II. Fidelity to the spirit of our Constitutions | 2. to strive, as much as God gives us the grace, towards what we see as the most perfect in all things, especially in the practice of our Constitutions and our Spiritual Maxims. |
| III. Community Life | <p>3. not to be preoccupied solely with our own perfection and with our personal responsibilities, but to cooperate according to our talents, in the smooth running of the community by a joyous participation in its life and activities.</p> <p>4. to live the true humility of the "Servant of the Lord," happy with simple and unassuming work but willing, also, to accept responsibilities in the same spirit of service.</p> <p>5. never to speak of the faults of others except to those who may be able to remedy them, but to dwell instead on the good and the beautiful; on that which unites, rather than that which divides.</p> <p>6. to be sincerely, but discreetly, interested in the lives of others, without seeking any affective compensation incompatible with our total consecration to Christ and the requirements of universal charity.</p> |

IV. Apostolic Life

7. to work for the glory of God and the good of our brothers, filially docile to the directives of the Church, giving God credit for all success, accepting failures and contradictions in a spirit of faith.
8. to watch carefully that our great concern to be engrafted for Christ "in the world" be as evident as our prudence to guard ourselves "from the world".
9. to accept wholeheartedly the conditions of all common action: keeping in mind the spirit of initiative of others, facilitating collaboration and responsibility, with a filial care to work in harmony with and under the control of our Superiors.
10. to work together to make our Community itself radiate Christ, by our constant concern for justice loyalty, by our genuine but gracious poverty, by our joyous availability to all, especially those most in need.

My God, give us the grace to be faithful to these promises in order that we, in our Congregation, may better serve our holy Mother, the Church.

Amen.

Tentative translation approved by Father Nepper, S.J.

New Orleans, Louisiana
August, 1966