

In the third part of the documentation we have put together the testimonies relative to the reputation of sanctity of the Servant of God and its continuation up to our own times. The documentation given here can be divided into three periods or stages.

In the first period, from the death of the Servant of God to the end of 1854, it seems that no one was concerned about writing any biographical account; but nevertheless there are preserved some writings which testify to the continual veneration with which she was remembered (Doc. XXII, pp. 448-453).

The second period, from 1854-1878, begins with the composition of a historical narrative on the origins of the Congregation, and into it have been inserted short biographical notes on the Foundress; the *Memorial* remained at that time in manuscript, but it has great value, not only because it was drawn up from accounts of eyewitnesses, but also because its contents were revised and approved by the Religious who had the highest authority at that time, and were contemporaries of the Servant of God: Mothers St. Teresa and St. Pothin (Doc. XXIII, pp. 454-478). To that period belong the report of M. L. Badiche (Doc. XXIV, pp. 479-483) and the testimonies taken from the correspondence of Claude Mayet, S.M., nephew of the Servant of God (Doc. XXV, pp. 483-492).

The third period covers the years from 1878 to 1896, when the Superiors began to collect in a systematic way information which could serve for the compilation of a definitive work. As the first collaborators and contemporaries of the Servant of God gradually disappeared, the desire was felt more keenly to record for ever the memory of her virtues and her teachings; and in this work Mother St. Pothin, Superioress General from 1867 to 1885, played a distinguished part. All these scattered testimonies have been analysed in Doc. XXVI (pp. 492-520).

The fourth and last period goes from 1896 to 1930. Fifty-nine years after the death of the Servant of God came the publication of a full biography, joined to the History of the Congregation (Doc. XXVII, pp. 521-685). This document is of capital importance for the Cause. Therefore, before reproducing the text, enriched with the corresponding critical notes, in the introduction we have attentively developed the usual questions which precede historical criticism and which serve to facilitate its use and evaluate its importance, also

because the historical consultants will have to give a personal and authoritative judgement on the text. The *Histoire*, which gathers together the memories and testimonies of the first generation of religious of Jesus and Mary, outlines in a certain way and with sufficient characteristic traits the personality of the Servant of God. For a judgement on her virtues, chapters VII, XVIII, and XIX, seem to us to have particular importance.

The publication of the *Histoire* made known the person and work of the Servant of God, and aroused ever more interest both within and outside the Congregation (Doc. XXVIII, pp. 685-701), until from 1926 to 1928 the Informative Process was instituted in Lyon (Doc. XXIX, pp. 701-723), and was completed with an Additional Process from 1930 to 1933 (Doc. XXX, pp. 723-750). From the historical point of view these Processes offer nothing interesting or new, and for this reason only some testimonies relative to the continued reputation of sanctity of the Servant of God are given.

IV — Biographical Profile of the Servant of God

In order to appreciate and do justice to the moral portrait of the Servant of God it is necessary to consider the environment and the circumstances of time and place in which she lived.

Claudine Thevenet was born in Lyon of a well-to-do and pious family in 1774, the year of the death of Pope Clement XIV and of King Louis XV, and of the succession to the throne of Louis XVI. Lyon, second in importance among all the cities of France, enjoyed, in the first years of that reign, a period of prosperity and calm.

The spouses Thevenet-Guyot had seven children, of whom Claudine was the second. Gifted with precocious intelligence, great sensitivity and an upright and peace-loving character, she was the favourite of her brothers, and the one from whom they sought protection and support. The little girl lived happily in the heart of a united family, and was the object of care and affection on the part of her parents, uncles and aunts and maternal grandparents.

She was nine years old when her parents suffered a reverse of fortune which obliged them to adopt a more modest life-style. It was probably at that time that she entered the Abbey of St. Pierre as a boarder. These two events undoubtedly made an impression on her through their influence. According to the custom of the time, Claudine

must have received her First Communion and Confirmation at the age of twelve years, in 1786. On the 9th February her maternal grandfather died; her godfather, Antoine Burdet, had died two years previously. Claudine still remained in the Abbey, but in Lyon the situation began to be difficult on account of the great crisis in the silk manufacture and trade. In spite of this the people remained faithful to their religion and to the monarchy, and public order was not disturbed.

In the winter of 1789 it was extraordinarily cold. The River Rhone froze, and the poor especially suffered from the bitter cold of that cruel winter. In Paris events succeeded one another with great rapidity and while the forerunners of the great revolution were evident in the Capital, in Lyon there were some disturbances, but these were not of a political nature.

In these circumstances, Claudine who was fifteen years old, left the Abbey and returned to her family. The revolution had broken out, with its anti-religious policy: a decree suppressing religious orders, the Civil Constitution of the Clergy, the robbing of churches, the inauguration of the Tree of Liberty, the enthroning of the constitutional Archbishop Lamourette, the protest and "Briefs" of Pius VI and the condemnation of anti-religious measures; the "Reign of Terror" with its horrible crimes, beginning on September 2nd, 1792; the emigration of the clergy; the proclamation of the Republic on the 21st September 1792; and the death of Louis XVI on the scaffold on the 21st January 1793.

During this revolutionary period, the Servant of God passed through a critical stage of her life, from sixteen to twenty years of age, which totally changed not only the direction she had given to her life, but also her physical and moral personality. The most terrible times for Lyon in general and for Claudine in particular, were the two months when the city was under siege. The Servant of God had remained at home alone with her mother; her father had gone to Belley with the four younger children, whilst the two eldest boys were fighting for the defence of the city. When the siege of the city came to an end, reprisals began on those who took part in it; on the 21st December 1793, Louis Guyot, her mother's brother, was put to death and on the following 5th January her two brothers, Louis and Francois, were shot, in the presence of the Servant of God, who was terrified and powerless to do anything, but with the words "I forgive" on her lips.

All these horrifying deeds and her acts of heroism accomplished during the siege of the city and the imprisonment of her brothers, in order to procure some solace for them and for her mother, greatly undermined her health. Until then she had a robust constitution and enjoyed good health. She was tall, with regular features, a lively intelligence, a sensitive nature, and it would seem that she believed she was called to found a Christian home like that of her parents. But the terrible blow she suffered ruined her health for ever, made her lose all interest in the things of this world, allowed her to discover in herself an energy unsuspected until then and stirred up the fire of her charity.

Claudine devoted herself to her parents, to her brother and sisters and to the good of souls, as far as circumstances permitted her. She began in a way that was more or less clandestine, and later when she was able to work more openly, she looked for collaborators who would help her to cope — as far as was possible — with the physical and moral needs of the poor, directing her efforts especially to children and young girls. Later, when they were grouped together to form an Association under the direction of Fr. Coindre she founded a *Providence* for young working girls, embarking at the same time on a life of perfection, and directing her associates towards the same end, and, finally, almost without realising it, she became the foundress of a new religious Congregation, which she governed and edified by her work and example until the last moment of her life.

After her religious profession, which took place on the 25th February, 1823, the Servant of God was elected Superioress General of the young Congregation, which numbered, besides the two houses in Lyon, a house in Belleville and another recently founded in Monistrol. As she had now reached the culminating point of her life and of the mission confided to her by God, this seems a good point at which to study her moral portrait and her spiritual characteristics.

1. *Simplicity.* — The Servant of God was simple always and in everything; she was natural, without artifice, sincere, uncomplicated, unostentatious, and a lover of perfection and beauty. Her spiritual life and the life she put before her religious, was of great evangelical perfection. "A pronounced disposition towards extraordinary things was justly suspect in her opinion; she was far from favouring it, and worked to form her daughters to the simple practice of common duties, accomplished with the greatest possible perfection, entirely to please God." (Doc. XXVII, p. 632).

When she wrote, she did so correctly; her style was good, but it did not exclude that naturalness which revealed her warm heart and supernatural spirit. The Rule puts it this way: "In their correspondence they shall not use affected expressions, worldly assurances of merely natural affection, or ridiculous and exaggerated demonstrations."

From this same point of view, there is a significant contrast between the wording of the Registers of the Congregation kept during her life, and those kept after her death. She advised speaking "with simplicity, rather from sincerity of heart than with a vain search for words" (Rule).

2. *Equilibrium.* — As one advances in the study of the soul of the Servant of God, one is surprised to find oneself confronted with an unsuspected moral greatness which a superficial glance would not have revealed, concealed as it was on the one hand by her simplicity and on the other by her wonderful equilibrium. Those who were accustomed to deal with her expressed their judgement in words such as these: "She has such a good head" (in a letter of her niece Melanie); "She is a capable woman"; thus spoke the Vicar General Barou after a canonical visitation of the community, wishing to express in these words his unreserved admiration for Mother St. Ignatius.

She was docile and ready to follow the voice of God and of ecclesiastical authority, but she would not allow herself to be carried away by the wind of novelties. In this regard, it has been observed that Lyon had become one of the principal hotbeds of the "Petite Eglise", and the most important place for fostering the propagation of the cult of St. Philomena, which at the time of the Servant of God had so many followers among priests and religious communities, but the Servant of God and her community kept on the periphery of these movements.

We think that it is possible to say that, at the centre of that indisputable balance which constitutes one of her most signal characteristics, charity was the dominant virtue of the Servant of God and prudence presided over all her actions.

3. *Fidelity to her vocation.* — There is no doubt that the Lord destined the Servant of God to consecrate her life to works of charity and to found a new religious Congregation, and that she gave herself without reserve. But what characterizes her vocation is the way in which the Lord led her, as it were by stages to the knowledge and

fulfilment of His will. It seems that one can see as it were five steps 01 calls in this spiritual journey of the Servant of God.

a) She believed that she was called to found a model home like that of her own parents. At nineteen years of age, faced with the tragedy of the "Terror" and the death of her brothers, despising the world she gave herself entirely to the Lord, striving in all things to accomplish His will. But the circumstances existing in France obliged her to remain at home, sacrificing herself for her parents, her brother and sisters, and collaborating, as far as she could, in the secret apostolate and cult, b) In 1802, when a certain amount of freedom was allowed for public worship, the Servant of God felt called to a greater secular apostolate, amongst all classes of poor people and those in need, c) The third call, to a life of greater personal perfection, was realized in 1816 when, with her collaborators, she formed an association, d) The fourth stage came when God called her through the mediation of Fr. Coindre; this was the call to leave her home and found a Congregation of religious destined to work for the education of the young of all social classes, and, in Lyon in particular, for the young who were working in the silk trade, e) The fifth stage began in 1823, after her religious profession, when her collaborators elected her to be Superioress General. She accepted the charge as coming from the hand of God, zealously devoting herself until her death, to the government and direction of the works, to her own sanctification and that of the souls entrusted to her, struggling with heroic energy until her last breath to preserve for the Congregation the spirit she believed she had received from God.

4. *Evangelical Spirit.* — The Jesuit theologian Fr. Jose M. Bover, in his introduction to the Spanish translation of the biography of the Servant of God, written in French by Fourier Bonnard, expresses himself in this way: "Looking at the personal sanctity of the Foundress, I was really surprised by the evangelical spirit which informed and inspired her. At a time when the Sacred Sciences, both biblical and theological were so little studied and appreciated, it is marvellous to see that spirituality, so delicate and carefully pondered, so solid and at the same time so sensitive, which can be explained only by the action of the Holy Spirit who directs the souls of his chosen ones in all wisdom and security". (Cf. FOURIER BONNARD, *La vida de la Sierva de Dios M. Maria de San Ignacio*, Barcelona 1947, p. XIII).

5. *Religious Spirit.* — When the Servant of God embraced the religious life in its fullness on making profession in 1823, she had already applied herself for years to living it with the perfection and courage that marked all her works. She was consistent in her conduct, always logical and prudent, so that we never see her showing inconsistency. If occasionally she seemed to give way, it was not so in reality; on such occasions she was practising acts of virtue that we can call extraordinary, such as the abandoning of the *Providence* of St. Bruno or the work of Belleville. "The Foundress Mother St. Ignatius, grew up during a tragic period, in anguish and heroism; serious and silent, she decided 'Never to speak about herself, neither good or ill.'" She was a lover of austere virtues, attached to humility, to poverty, good besides, with that kind of goodness, sensitive to suffering, which is practised by those who have suffered. Never sad, she decided on the contrary, to make the children of whom she took charge, blossom forth. She was affable and gentle towards the poor, to whom she devoted herself with unflinching patience and delicate charity; but when it was a question of religious life, she did not look kindly on caprice and fantasy, or soft and weak sentiment. She herself gave an example of firmness and energy of soul, governing with order and good sense, and maintaining her docility and abandonment to Providence and her sound equilibrium through all the events which went against her." To these observations of Mons. Blanchet, Rector of the *Institut Catholique de Paris*, who some years ago made a study of the life of the Servant of God (cf. AUGUSTE VIATTE, *Histoire de la Congregation de Jesus-Marie*, Quebec 1952, p. 8), one may add as principal traits of her spirituality, her love of silence and of prayer. "The founders of religious orders have so strongly recognized and appreciated its advantages that, although the Rules on their Institutes vary, some being based on mortification, others on poverty, others on zeal, etc., all are united on this point, namely prayer, because without it the spirit of fervour cannot be maintained, nor can any virtue be practised with constancy." (IV, 2 18b).

"Fervour cannot be maintained in religious houses except in so far as silence is observed, and with still greater reason piety cannot continue to exist except in persons who avoid using a great number of words." (*ibidem*, 9b).

So thought and spoke the Servant of God regarding these two points which she esteemed to be of capital importance for religious life.

Finally, we point out her great devotions: to the Sacred Heart of Jesus and to the Immaculate Heart of Mary, and the spirit of St. Ignatius which she made her own, and desired for her Congregation.

The examples of the virtues of the Servant of God, Mother St. Ignatius, and the beneficial effects of the Religious Congregation which she founded have extended through time and space. Today (1966) the religious of the Congregation of Jesus and Mary number 2,500, and there are 210 novices. They are dedicated to the education of youth in 130 houses spread over five continents, with a total of 72,000 pupils.

V. — Doubts put before the Historical Consultors

It does not seem that the documentation of the *Positio*, taken as a whole, presents particular problems of historical criticism. Often, especially in the first two parts, official documents are in question, the authenticity and veracity of which are beyond doubt, apart from a few cases relating to legislation, and these are presented with objective explanations. Unfortunately the same official style of the information deprives the documents of human warmth and that richness and freshness of personal data that a biographer prefers; and in fact, the private and intimate life of the Servant of God frequently remains in obscurity. In order to fill up the gaps and make up for the scarcity of full contemporary biographical accounts, a great deal of research and presentation of particular events was necessary, but always in connection with the central subject of our investigation. The aim of this latter research, which may at times seem too minute and excessively detailed, was precisely to reconstruct without important omissions, the itinerary of the Servant of God, and to throw light, as far as possible, on the historical, social and religious environment in which she carried out her work, and consequently to be able to evaluate better her human personality and her Christian and religious virtues.

The historical and biographical elements scattered in different parts of the documentation are found in systematic order in the *Summarium de vita et virtutibus*. As is customary, this part of the *Positio*, put together with praiseworthy care by Mother Gabriela Maria under the direction of the Historical Section and with the efficient co-operation of Fr. Candido de Dalmases S.J., contains a summarized and orderly exposition of the life and virtues of the