

## CHAPTER IV

### FROM THE UNIVERSALITY TO THE UPROOTING

#### *MOTHER SAINT CYRILLE*

From Tarragona, Mother Saint Cyrille goes  
to the Province of Sillery

We have already mentioned Mother Saint Cyrille several times. No Superior General had been prepared until now, by such a multiple activity. In fact, she will be, one of the most remarkable, one would willingly say, the most remarkable one after the Foundress, if in writing the pen would not hesitate in remembering Mother Saint Andrew or Mother Saint Therese who resembles her so much... She is of the same age as her predecessor – Mother Saint Eulalie – and she will follow her. But, to a physical vigor better preserved she joins an almost military energy. No doubt she owes this to her father. He, Augustin Reynier, lieutenant pf the police force, later colonel, he had been in the campaigns of Napoleon, and had brought back the Honor Legion. Mother Saint Cyrille was born in the Hautes-Alpes and her mother was Madeleine Clément; an excellent Christian family which had given her, in Gap, a good education by some religious who had been secularized during the Revolution. After that she became freelance governess in Marseille. It was there, her nephew tells us that she felt the missionary vocation awaking in her in seeing a group of Religious of Jesus and Mary embark to go to India. (no doubt it was the second group, that of 1844). On the other hand it is said that she heard Mgr. Borghi preach in Paris in the Madeleine; and on leaving after the sermon she declared to her parents her intention of becoming a missionary since she could not join the army; and when she consulted Mgr. Borghi, he had recommended her to enter in the novitiate at Fourvière. It is necessary to place this incident some time before the encounter in Marseille, that perhaps, it would not have been by chance or accidentally. Whichever it may be, this was not carried out immediately. Her father, who had lost a daughter twenty-one years old in 1833, was afflicted in thinking about a new sacrifice; if it is God's will, he will submit, but not if it is a caprice or "vain illusions". He introduces her into the world, makes her travel, go on an excursion on the mountain, he initiates her in poetry. As Superior General already in her 70's, she still knew by heart parts that she had learnt when young, and she would recite them before the pupils, almost without hesitating, smoothly.

God shortens the trial. Colonel Reynier died that same year 1845; on September 14, Mother Saint Cyrille entered the Novitiate, and entrusted her mother to her brother. She was charged with teaching sewing to the pupils, and she was surprised, since she hardly knew how to hold the needle. “When one wants to become a missionary, she was answered, it is necessary to learn everything, in order to know how to get out of the affair”. The lesson bore fruit: between her classes and her exercises of piety, she made an effort and struggled hard to do her utmost to learn the art that she had to profess, even if her class does not even suspect her ignorance. It happens just the same, to feel embarrassed, as when a certain day a young girl brought her a beautiful veil of silk tulle on which there was a tear; she had the resource of depriving the bewildered thoughtless child from her veil for several days, as punishment for her negligence, until she learnt to make the point to mend the veil; it was necessary to keep it not less than a week. “The child paid attention afterward to take care of the veil, she concluded, in telling about the anecdote, and I still remember that famous point.”

After her Vows she remains as teacher in the Boarding School in Fourvière, and it is she whom we have seen on February 24, 1848, stop the rioters at the entrance of the dormitories. During the dispersion she disguised herself as a domestic maid to go and teach in the families. In September she accompanied Mother Saint Bruno to Rodez. She took the address of the pupils who will remember with enthusiasm the animation of her history and geography courses, with emotion the piety that reigned during the month of Mary. In 1868, the first step toward a foreign land, she was named Superior of Tarragona; she had the new Chapel built and dedicated to Our Lady of the Sacred Heart which Father Jouet, whom she had met in Lyon, propagated and spread the devotion; she assigned to the house of Tarragona the role to propagate this devotion in Spain. Sometime later in 1861, she organized a lottery or raffle in benefit of Pius IX who had just lost part of his States, and Queen Isabelle contributed by sending a prie-dieu on which her daughter the Infanta Isabelle had embroidered the cushions. Every place where Mother Saint Cyrille goes, her spirit of initiative is manifested.

But it is in America where she gave all her energy and herself. We have already said how the first Provincial Superior Mother Saint Cyprien, had asked Mother Saint Pothin, for her to replace her. And we see her leave in 1869, to those far-away missions to which she had always wished to go. To say the truth, it was something completely different, she had not seen them: instead of India, of the tropics, of the unchanging Asia, it is Canada, the snow, the birth of a new people. But a missionary vocation has nothing to do with tourism; it is not such and such a trip that attracts her, it is the action on souls. She will deploy on the banks of the Saint-Laurent, the same zeal that she wanted to take to those of Ganges.

And of her first dreams she keeps the notion of solidarity among the Provinces of Jesus and Mary; she will make the blood circulate; with her, each establishment, once it is solidly implanted, becomes a reservoir from where the new foundations will draw. Immediately, she sends to India two Canadian Religious in 1869, Mother Saint André and in 1871 Mother Saint Agnes. The Canadian earth, moreover, had been prepared by Mother Saint Joachim, companion of Mother Saint Therese and who had entered with her from the East, and then arrived in Levis with Mother Saint Cyprian. The pupils of the missionary from India, her recruits, had frequently mentioned her visions of the country of the Brahmans. But no doubt it appeared to them as wonderful stories beyond their possibilities; but the wonderful becomes a reality, and young Canadians embark to go to the end of the world, and the New France, yesterday a land of missions now is transformed into a missionary land. And the movement is extended, another Canadian Religious, Mother Saint Catherine, will leave for India in 1882, and four before the end of the Generalate of Mother Saint Cyrille, 1901 and 1902; at the same time six will go to England and twenty-three to France, the cradle to which its grown children come as support for the new families.

Missionary in the soul, she baptizes the houses opened in the Quebecois countryside as “missions” and that was sufficient to confer a particular spirit when leaving for those “missions”; it is the same missionary spirit that will make her leave to conquer New England. on her signature, she adds to the initials R.J.M. the word “missionary”. Builder in addition; it was she, we have seen, who on arriving there decided to transfer the Provincial House to Sillery. Things do not function all alone, there is a lack of personnel and of comfort; it is necessary to take the broom in the hand, to make the children jump over the rope to warm them up. The nights when there was a storm, Mother Saint Cyrille went through the dormitories, covered the children warmly, makes the sign of the cross on the forehead and leaves them reassured. Sometime later, in 1876, the house needed some repairs and to be enlarged; the workers hesitate to run the risk, and the religious also hesitate to risk the life of the Chaplain since the workers ask for his presence; this is an occasion for the Superior, to proclaim her trust in God, who takes care of His spouses: “Fear nothing, my Sisters. As long as we practice holy Poverty, no evil will arrive to us...”. This is also an occasion to show her cold blood. one morning, when at four o’clock, they announce the presence of an individual who was stealing the bricks: she dressed up quickly and, followed by some of the religious, she climbed on the cart of the individual, and with them, she unloads the cart without saying a word, satisfied then with dismissing him, ironically with these words: “The goods which are acquired badly are never profitable. Do not come back”.

There are so many anecdotes in which are revealed, at the same time, both her energy and her goodness! One day she closes the road to three sailors who ventured to go on her land and in

incomprehensible talk, mixing English and French, she tries to prevent them from passing; but seeing the tears in the eyes of one of them, because she makes him think of his mother whom she resembles, she softens, and takes him to the chaplain where the three of them were received paternally. She helps the victims of the fire that devastated Quebec in June 1879; she lavishes consolations on the afflicted, help and relief to the sick, alms to the destitute persons; she feeds the beggars with her own hands and then gives them a medal and a scapular. She knows how to reproof, but also to forgive even for a small sign of repentance; if she gives in to some brusqueness or quick-temperedness, she would ask pardon from those who had witnessed it; she would distribute to others little treats and the gifts that she received; and she only wore the mended robes out of love for poverty which she associated with charity. She had horror for inopportune visits but she accepts them as a sacrifice, and receives them with a perfect good grace. And when it is a question of finding someone for an embarrassing uncomfortable task, she takes it with an original good-heartedness: in visiting Trois-Pistoles in 1870, she expresses her uncertainty regarding the choice of a Superior for Saint Michel. A young religious, Mother Saint Croix, answered somewhat amusing herself: Oh! I, Mother, I would do well for that”; she hears the response du tit for tat: “Let it be, my daughter, I take you at your word”; and that was the prelude of the functions which would last during the whole life of Mother Saint Croix.

Such was the teacher and woman who had governed the Canadian Province during twenty-two years, and she had added to its four houses, nine others of which eight in the United States (the two last ones, Claremont in 1889, Centreville in 1890 which was not destined to last a long time) In Sillery itself, her initiatives were not counted, since the creation of a circle of studies with the religious, the “Cassiacum”, until that in 1890 of a Literary and Philosophical Society with the pupils. Now she is going to transfer her action on the universal plan where the unanimity of votes is calling her.

***Mother Saint Cyrille obtains a Cardinal Protector  
for her Congregation, a Procure in Rome,  
a foundation in Switzerland.***

One of the first steps of Mother Saint Cyrille, Superior General, was in fact to confirm the universality, the “Catholicity” of the Congregation in postulating or applying for it the nomination of a Cardinal Protector at the Seat of the Catholic Church. Cardinal Mazella, Jesuit, was delegated. He takes wholeheartedly the interests of these daughters of Saint Ignatius and helps them in opening a Procure in Rome. This was done in 1895. On September 14 of the following year, a small group

of three religious arrived in the Eternal City: Mother Saint Cyrille joins them three weeks later, after having embarked in Genoa three other religious for India. And on October 31 she names a Spanish Sister, Mother Saint Virginie Superior of the house. She leaves Rome in December, taking with her the first Italian recruit. Two Spaniards, two Canadians and an Irish form the initial group of the house. In 1897, two Spaniards, a German, and a French will be added to the group, a symbolical heterogeneousness, is this also of that universalism that Cardinal Mazella was pleased to underline recalling the text of Saint Paul: "There are no longer Jews or Greeks, or Scythians, but you are all one in Christ". Poorly installed in a neighborhood which had a bad name, the community will find something better, thanks to Father Jouet, the one about whom we have already spoken concerning Our Lady of the Sacred Heart. That same year, 1897, the community obtains its official admission in the Diocese, and a private audience with the Pope. They will not take care of a boarding school to avoid concurrence with the Italian religious, but will only take care of the poor, and private lessons in the foreign languages will be given.

Even before, in 1893, Mother Saint Cyrille had opened a house in Montreux: possible asylum (less sure than what one can imagine) in case of persecutions in France; and above all a new field of apostolate, in this French speaking Switzerland which speaks French but which has become Protestant. Tourism begins to develop, on the banks of the Lemman Lake and to attract some Catholic families. They can become for the Province of France what New England became for Canada. In Montreux, some ladies from Lyon took refuge there in 1877, and not finding the religious help, they had financed the construction of a Church; but the Catholic school was missing for the Catholic population, almost three-fourths of it of Italian origin that at the end of the century had already reached two thousand souls. A Religious of Jesus and Mary, Mother Saint Maurice, had made her first Communion in Montreux, during the heroic times, in the small apartment of the Swiss Hotel which served as an Oratory at the beginning; and it was from Fourvière that the Priest Grand received and accepted the proposition to open in his Parish, a Catholic School for young girls. The Congregation of Jesus and Mary will assume the direction and the charges. According to the international formula which she loves, Mother Saint Cyrille sends, to inaugurate the place, two Canadians and a German; they converted a shed into a class room on the ground floor of their small house, and they began a free elementary teaching to poor children, a teaching on which later was grafted a secondary course, and especially catechisms and pious works such as the Congregation of the Children of Mary.

In 1896, the year when the Procure of Rome is opened, Mother Saint Cyrille founded elsewhere two new Spanish houses, that of Alicante and that of Murcia, on both sides of Orihuela. And the Congregation prepares itself to celebrate the Golden Jubilee of its Superior General. She

celebrates it in Fourvière with some delay, since, always active, she visited Spain on the day of the anniversary, and will not return without inspecting, in passing by, Rodez and Le Puy. On July 6, 1897, she received touching greetings from all parts, among which were distinguished those from her dear Sillery; she responded by a circular letter in which she reproduced a pastoral letter of the Archbishop of Lyon on the duties of teaching religious, - personal sanctification, piety, action; this text will occupy in the directives of Jesus and Mary, a special place, which is ceded only to the writings of Mother Saint Ignatius and of Father Coindre.<sup>1</sup> This already long life seemed in this way to end in apotheosis; but God reserves for her, for her last chapter, a trial in which Mother Saint Cyrille must expend all her energy and her qualities of a chief.

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<sup>1</sup> See the text in the Appendix

*The houses of France  
under the religious persecution*

The events are still quite near to us and so it is not necessary to tell them in detail. The cabinet of Waldeck-Rousseau, which ascended into power in 1899, has in its program an extreme anticlericalism: it decided war on the Congregations. The law of June 28, 1901 demands to ask for authorization under penalty of being dissolved; later, Combes, going beyond the intentions of his predecessor, will reject in block all the demands. In the meantime, what should we do? The religious have only until September 1 to conform themselves to the Law. Mother Saint Cyrille made the trip to Rome, in spite of her old age, and then she sent two Councilors to consult the Cardinal Protector, but she obtains nothing more than the “invariable response”: “The Pope does not want, especially in a document of that nature, to impose or even advice explicitly either the resistance or the submission. The religious Orders have, in fact, different interests, different Constitutions, different tendencies and diverse chances to obtain or not the legislative authorization. It seems difficult in those conditions that they have a uniform way of behaving. Then, examine before God and you yourselves judge which is the interest of your Institute”.<sup>2</sup>

In France the opinions contradict one another. Some think that to refuse “is more dignified and honorable,” and that an acceptance would gain nothing; others, like a correspondent of Mother Saint Mechtilde, Superior in Puy, think that it is necessary “to try all possible means for, if not to save, at least to prolong the existence of the Congregation”.

These divergent opinions reflect opposition of temperament, sometimes of political opinions and also of perspective, according if one considers the evident bad will of men who are in power or the possibility to allow the storm to pass in a France that can never bear intolerance for a long time. The Jesuits, the Benedictines chose the immediate exile; their example acts on Mother Saint Cyrille, since she cannot, more than they, be illumined about what awaits them: does not an article of the law stipulate that authorization will be refused to all Congregations in which the members belong in a notable proportion to foreign nationalities? And is this not now the case of Jesus and Mary with its international expansion? Therefore, it is necessary to solve this: the Mother House will leave Fourvière for Rome. The normal evolution of the Congregation will end, sooner or later, as was the case for the Propagation of Faith, another Lyonnaise work, but that evolution was a surprise attack, and caused suffering.

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<sup>2</sup> According to R. Father LECANUET, *Les Signes avant-coureurs de la Séparation* (Paris 1930), p. 293. See in the following pages a good summary of arguments in favor of and against.

Frequently these afflicting scenes have been described, the same everywhere, the house that is emptied little by little, the exercises that continue, just the same, but with a more reduced assistance every day; the tragic-comic trying of the secular costumes of which still they thought they would not need them. The final dispersion took place on September 30, who to the home of the merchant who sells potatoes, who with the grocer, who with the pharmacist while waiting to go abroad...

“It was decided, says one of those expelled, that we will go two by two to the house of purveyors or of friends of the house, while waiting for other orders. In leaving, the Bernard ladies... had to take four, two for them and two to leave them on Street Saint Jean in the house of Mr. Derieux. Sister Saint Robert had her ticket for this last address. The poor Sister, she was deeply distressed that she forgot to put on her shoes; at seven o'clock in the evening she leaves the house in the midst of a heavy rain just with her cloth slippers full of holes, and when her companions saw it, they returned to the house to look for a pair of shoes. Sister Robert had taken with her a piece of bread, some croquets of chocolate and four irons, this was all her luggage. “I did not want, she said, to leave *my irons*, to those good for nothing devils, who will come to turn up-side-down everything”.

Thus the house of Fourvière is closed. The Residence for Ladies survives, under the direction of friends and with the cooperation and help of secularized religious; an Association of former pupils who maintain the spirit and serve as a link of union between the past and the future. The other houses also go to their end. That of Rodez ended in 1901, on order of the General Council of the Congregation; the buildings were rented to a house of Christian education for young people, the Institution Sainte-Marie. At least, the Superior, Mother Saint Emilie, was able to spend her last days in an annex close to the Chapel, until her death in 1907. The house of Puy which had asked for authorization was refused in 1903 in the report of Fernand Rabier, pell-mell- in great disorder with the other eighty similar petitions. The same can be said of Remiremont; but there the Superior Mother Saint Lucie, put on the secular dress and went with her mother, while the classes continued with freelance teachers. After one year, she goes to the house as assistant teacher. Still one year later in 1905, she officially becomes the Directress. When in 1907 the convent was put in auction, she protests and prays to God; some Catholics form a Real Estate Society, which is represented secretly by a Jew financier, M. Nathan and who takes this piece, thanks to this subterfuge. It is thus that the house of Remiremont alone will last up, almost without interruption, until our days.

Abroad those dispersed will not remain inactive. The older ones will be gathered together in Italy, in Palestrina, then in Albano, in Aricia, in Alassio near Ventimiglia, and the last place in



Diano Marina, always in the same corner of the Riviera Liguri. Others, with Mother Saint Leon go to Geneva, groping around in the dark, blindly; they only have the address of a former pupil and they hardly suspect the harassment that can arouse a cold sectarianism. They were obliged to hide that they were religious and to pretend that it was a lady accompanied by three servants, they were taken as adventurers or for “some ruined marchioness” with her faithful. In spite of the kindness and good will of the Parish priest of the Parish of Saint Anthony, at the beginning they only found a place to install themselves miserably, almost without any furniture; to live they have to work in an ironing shop; was this worthwhile to go into exile, and would it not have been possible, during the worse moments, to live in France? Finally they rented a villa, and receive boarders. But it was in Feldkirch in Austria that the establishment will be founded which will be more in accordance to the spirit of Mother Saint Ignatius; those who go accepting the offering of Father Hausle will find a Chapel for them, and will be able to open a school, to group the Italian workers to teach them, at the same time, catechism and manual work, they will benefit from the sympathy which will be expressed by gifts of every kind. The sale of the villa which they occupied in 1909 will oblige them to interrupt their activity very soon, not without having been able to recruit in the meantime four postulants.

All these events, which are added to her age, break Mother Saint Cyrille. In the General Chapter of 1903, she refused a reelection. For the first time, that General Chapter was held in Rome; it was as to say, a crowning, in spite of the trials. “Your Congregation has been beatified, her protector, Cardinal Vivés told her, now it is canonized”. Once Mother Saint Cyrille was assigned to her place, the former Superior General has only one dream, to see Canada, that America, theatre of her more fruitful apostolate. She embarked with Mother Saint Norbert, a Canadian, who had come to take her Sisters to Feldkirch; she visits the house of New York which she founded in 1902, that of Fall River, that of Providence; she aspires for the peace of Sillery; but she feels very tired, and delays in Providence, R.I., to try to recover her strength. The “good old grandmother”, as the children called her, still mixes up with them in their games, and speaks about assisting to their examinations. Her spirit of poverty edifies; she wears old worn clothes in which one could see the weft yarn across the fabric. All the gifts that she receives go to those in exile on whom she sheds tears, It is there in her convent of Providence that during the Mass she was struck by an attack on June 3, 1904; she survives some days, aphasic and paralyzed on the right side and she dies on June 15 at eight o’clock in the morning.

