

AT THE SERVICE OF THE MISSION /PIERRE-MARIE MERMIER
Translated from the French by Ivo Carneiro, msfs

Foundation of the Missionaries of Saint Francis de Sales

ADRIEN DUVAL msfs

1. *The pastoral missions in Savoy Châtelard en Bauges*, in the mountains of Savoy. If the Village is prosperous the parish is hardly fervent. The Bishop sends the young Fr. Pierre Marie Mermier, born at Chaumont in the present diocese of Annecy, as its parish priest. All attempts of the new Pastor to revive the faith of the people meet with failure, he is sort of paralysed by the apathy of his people. In 1821, in an attempt to rouse up his parishioners from their slumber, he decides to preach a mission in the parish and seeks the help of a young preacher - already renowned in the diocese of Chambéry: Joseph-Marie Favre.

The mission takes off at a poor start in the midst of the crass indifference of the people. One fine morning, the Church bells remain silent, the presbytery empty. Vicar and Missionary have disappeared. To the dismay of the people/they have fled to the Monastery of the Carthusians, there to pray for their obstinate parishioners. This strange behaviour of their priests at last succeeds in shaking the people out of their torpor: they go in search of their priests, bring them back to the parish and the mission resumes in full swing. It's a grand success! It brings together, above all else, in a strong bond of friendship the Vicar and the Missionary. Both decide to give up all other forms of apostolate and devote themselves entirely to the apostolate of preaching and conducting parish missions. Savoy is in urgent need of them. During the French Revolution, the parishes were left without priests and without any religious instruction. Mgr. de Solles, Bishop of Chambéry found it difficult to re-establish his clergy. The country has few resources; people go abroad in search of fortune When they return back home from Paris or Geneva, many among them put on false airs and the good Savoyards, left as they were without any religious instruction are helpless in the face of the least opposition and incapable of resisting the ever widening religious indifference. The trauma left by Jansenism hardly helps the revival of the Christian life of the people.

The need to impart religious instruction is urgent: and to instruct there is no better means than "the powerful voice of the missions" as Fr. Mermier loved to say. Scarcely had the two young missionaries begun their new apostolate then Rome created a second diocese in Savoy, the diocese of Annecy in 1822. The new Bishop, Mgr de Thiollaz wants to keep his fellow country-man close to him: He appoints Fr. Mermier spiritual Director of the Major Seminary Fr. Mermier, however, continues with the apostolate of the missions; he mobilises the help of parish priests and assistants who back to their respective parishes after finishing the exercises of the Missions. But this is not an ideal solution: with the backing of the Bishop, Fr. Mermier gathers around him a select band of priests and already from 1830 they envisage the foundation of a religious congregation.

Mgr. Pierre-Joseph Rey becomes Bishop of Annecy in 1832. This news brings joy to the heart of the missionaries who appreciate the apostolic zeal of the new Bishop. He will be a true Father to the Congregation at its birth, giving it his approval on the 24th October 1838 under the name of the "Missionaries of Saint Francis de Sales".

MISSIONARIES OF SAINT FRANCIS DE SALES.

It was not by chance that the Congregation was placed under the patronage of Saint Francis de Sales. He is in very truth the Saint of the country, Apostle of the Chablais, the Bishop who went about visiting even the far-flung parishes of the diocese, the sure Master of a spirituality impregnated with humanity. His memory is still fresh in the mind of the people: He is loved and venerated throughout Savoy. This popular acclaim and his own personal devotion as a Savoyards priest impels the Founder to choose the Saint as the patron of his nascent Congregation.

In his inaugural address to the Missionaries. Bishop Rey presented the Bishop of Geneva, Saint Francis de Sales, as an example of gentleness and especially as a model of zeal. Fr. Mermier will keep insisting on the study and the meditation of the writings of the Saint; thus the Missionaries will be imbued with the spirit of simplicity, benevolence, serenity and confidence, and this spirit will be the characteristic trait of the Missionaries.

The Congregation received the first official approbation from the Holy See in 1843.

In 1845, the young Congregation comprises of only a dozen priests. Rome, however, entrusts to it the evangelisation of Visakhapatnam, INDIA, on the Bay of Bengal. The mission then counted 2000 Catholics, spread over a vast area and grouped together in 4 different stations, 600 to 800 kilometres apart from each other. To evangelise the whole territory, there were just 5 priests and 2 brothers. Those were, indeed, hard beginnings, the climate deadly. But the seed sprouts. Today the former territory counts 15 dioceses and over a million Christians - literally a thousand fold. We find today well over a 1000 priests belonging to the various dioceses and different religious congregations, hundreds of Brothers and over 4000 Sisters pursuing the missionary legacy of the first Missionaries of Saint Francis de Sales who landed in India barely six years after their Congregation was founded. The Missionaries of Saint Francis now number about 700 members, spread around the world and forming 7 Provinces, one Region and one Mission. The Province of France Switzerland implanted in the dioceses of Annecy, Creteil, Belley (France) and Fribourg-Lausanne-Geneva, and Valais (Switzerland). In India there are the Provinces of Visakhapatnam, South-West, North East and Maharashtra-Goa. Through these Provinces the Missionaries of Saint Francis de Sales serve in about 50 dioceses in India.

A new mission was started in Tanzania, Africa by Missionaries who left India just 10 years ago and which is now an autonomous Region. We then have the Province of England and a Foundation in the United States of America. Finally there is the Province of Brazil.

The Congregation runs several schools and colleges (both academic and technical) in India and two schools in France and Switzerland. Many missionaries work in parishes, but the principal objective remains the missionary apostolate in all its forms: preaching missions, retreats, educational and various other social apostolates, going to the remotest villages and the most neglected areas of big cities, starting new mission centres and so on. In India the Missionaries are involved in all the different activities which are characteristic of a mission territory. There are 3 Bishops who are Missionaries of Saint Francis de Sales (Visakhapatnam, Bhopal and Amravati). In the variety of their missionary activities, the Missionaries of Saint Francis de Sales remain faithful to the intuition of the Founder, and that is to undertake a missionary task in the Church in close collaboration with the local clergy, take root and become a part and parcel of every area in the world in which they work, become INCARNATE in the world which they are called to evangelise today - Europe, Africa, Asia, America and thus spread abroad the spirit of Saint Francis de Sales and his interior life suffused by Love of God and neighbour, his goodness, hospitality, simplicity.

"In fulfilling the longing for the religious life which he had felt for several years, Father Mermier had in mind a community whose goal was perfect charity, learned in the school of Saint Francis de Sales, a master of the spiritual life who was filled with apostolic zeal".(Const.3)

"In setting Saint Francis de Sales before us as our model, Father Mermier commits us to practise the Saint's gentle and patient charity, to imitate his conformity to God's will, to radiate his love of God and neighbour, his humility and simplicity, his joy and optimism, his apostolic fervour, his hospitable attitude, and his sympathy for everything human".(Const.13)

"As true disciples of Saint Francis de Sales, we are to be affable toward all men, accepting their joys and their sorrows, their weaknesses and their strengths. Optimistically, we are to see and reveal the providential meaning of events; the positive qualities existing in people alongside their weaknesses, their good intentions rather than their unworthy motives—the spark ever smouldering beneath the embers. We are to show to everyone a benevolence which is kind, encouraging and considerate. Following the example of our Holy Patron, we are to become all things to all" (Const.80)

THOUGHTS OF FR. MERMIER ON THE RELIGIOUS AND MISSIONARY LIFE

PREFACE : Father PIERRE-MARIE MERMIER, Founder of the Missionaries of Saint Francis de Sales, was a man of the Mission, precisely because he was a man of faith ,filled with the spirit of humility, abandonment to God and serenity.

Humility, abandonment to God, serenity: three traits of the salesian spirituality, which Fr. Mermier put into practice and which profoundly enriched his missionary activity.

In order to accomplish our mission in the world today, it is good for each one of us to come to a better understanding of the thinking of Fr. Mermier, man of God, brought up in the school of Saint Francis de Sales, and to follow his example.

I am particularly grateful to Fr. Adrien Duval, MSFS, for giving us the possibility, thanks to this booklet, to make a new discovery of the thoughts of Fr. Mermier, on certain aspects of our religious and missionary life.

Annecy, 19th April (Easter)1987
Fr. Emile Mayoraz
Superior General

I. THE MISSION In 1836, MGR. PIERRE -JOSEPH REY, Bishop of Annecy, gives a provisional approbation to the Constitutions of the Missionaries of Saint Francis de Sales. He would give the canonical approbation only after the King of Sardaigne signed the decree giving a juridical status to the young Congregation.

The royal document bearing this decree arrives at Annecy on the 5th October 1838. Mgr. Rey wants to carry the good news immediately to his missionaries: he makes his way to La Feuillette, residence of the Missionaries. In order to emphasise the importance he gives to this event, the Bishop takes with him the Reverend Carlin, provost and canon of the Cathedral Chapter and Knight of St-Maurice and St. Lazarus, Poncet archdeacon and canon of the Cathedral, Sallavaud, canon and chancellor, Buttet, canon and vicar of the Church of Our Lady of Annecy and Poncet, secretary to the bishop.

The Superior of the Missionaries, Fr. Mermier, welcomes the Bishop and thanks him, on behalf of his young community, for his visit. In his reply, Bishop Rey speaks of the joy of this meeting and in a few words reminds the missionaries of their duties and responsibilities:

YOUR DUTIES IN THREE WORDS : "I shall speak to you about your duties in three words: Study Saint Francis de Sales, imitate his virtues, build-up your method of direction upon his, be full of kindness towards sinners. You will find this method in his letters. You will find the riches of his heart in his TREATISE ON THE LOVE OF GOD, sublime theology, admirable fabric of comparisons to throw a beam of light on truth and make it penetrate in the most hardened heart. Read these pages burning with the most ardent charity.

People generally speak of the gentleness of Saint Francis de Sales; and they are right. But according to me it does not bring out fully his characteristic trait. His gentleness appears to me to be but a means of exercising his ZEAL. His characteristic trait is zeal.

You are right to take as your motto "**To God alone be honour and glory**" (**Soli Deo honor et gloria**)
Along with gentleness have a strong zeal against vice.

I recommend to you as much knowledge as virtue. You can have zeal without knowledge, but this zeal is incapable of doing any good; it certainly is not what can do any lasting good".

FATHER MERMIER, A MAN OF ZEAL : This call to zeal finds a ready echo in the heart of Father Mermier. It was zeal that inspired him to launch out into his apostolic activities from the very beginning of his priestly ministry; it was this zeal that led him to devote himself totally to the preaching of parish missions and finally to found a congregation of missionaries.

In 1839, he summarises his experiences of about 20 years of missionary activity in a paper under the title of "Utility of a body of missionaries in the diocese of Annecy in Savoy, around 1830" His analysis of the religious situation brings to light the fact of an ever growing indifference to things pertaining to religion. Fr. Mermier proposes just one remedy to combat this situation: RETURN TO CHRIST: "You see the problem, writes the missionary, but where can you find the remedy? In religion, not anywhere else... There is no salvation anywhere else. There certainly lies the supreme remedy: it can never fail. "God's truth lives forever", <My words will never pass>, <Behold, I am with you...> The remedy lies in the proclamation of the Word, it lies in the missionary action."

THE RETURN TO CHRIST : In 1852, Fr. Mermier became more explicit. At the start of summer, the missionaries of La Feuillette come back after preaching exhausting missions in different parts of the country in honour of the Jubilee Year. On the 3rd July, the Superior writes a circular letter to his missionaries in India wherein he speaks to them about the experiences and the findings of his missionaries in Savoy: "Our European societies have reached the extreme limits of errors, of follies, of perversities of all kinds, they have made a full circle in their wanderings, there is no salvation for them except in a prompt and sincere return to the truth: "I will rise up and go back to my father." Poor prodigal son!

But what does God do in his infinite goodness? It is in the very midst of this extreme misery that he proposes to Europe the one and only remedy: What then is this remedy? This remedy is Jesus Christ himself, it is his grace; it is his divine Word which he has confided to his Church when he told his disciples: "Go out and teach" and it is his message that we are called to proclaim to the whole world, to all men, to be apostles, missionaries, to bring Christ's teaching to the people who have never heard about it, never known it, or forgotten all about it, even to people who seem to be fed up with it.

"This then is our mission: it is sublime, it has to be spread abroad and it is difficult. You are the light of the world, you are the salt of the earth. This mission should be our main preoccupation, every moment of our lives, just as it should take a complete possession of ourselves."

In Fr. Mermier's perspective, a missionary is one who announces the Word of God to people who have never heard it before or to those who having heard it have practically forgotten all about it.

MISSIONARY ACTION : In 1821, on the occasion of the Mission of Châtelard, Frs. Favre and Mermier heard the call of God: they would henceforth devote themselves to the apostolate of the Pastoral Mission. Both of them are men of deep thought and contact. From the very beginning of their collaboration, they exchange between themselves as well as with other collaborators rich thoughts on the shape that their missionary apostolate will take. 1823 is the year that is rich in these exchanges it is the year when the two missionaries state precisely their objectives, compare their experiences, improve their methods. And they take every possible occasion to meet one another.

The Archives of the Missionaries of Saint Francis de Sales possess 44 letters of Fr. Joseph-Marie Favre addressed to Pierre Marie Mermier and one letter from Favre to Fr. Gaiddon. As for the letters of Pierre-Marie Mermier to his friend Favre, they have all disappeared. However, the letters from Favre to Mermier help us to follow the evolution in the thought of these two men.

A big problem preoccupies the two missionaries: that of religious ignorance and indifference in matters of religion: the conclusion of their exchanges is that the pastoral mission is the indispensable means of announcing the Word of God to those who have never heard it or those who have not sufficiently grasped it: the only means of evangelisation, as we would call it today. The situations and methods have changed today, but the principles remain the same; it is important that we learn to adapt them to the present conditions in the world today

TO PROCLAIM THE WORD : The "Paper" of 1839 gives the conclusions of the experiences and common reflections of these two men of God If God's Word remains ineffective "it is not because of its efficacy; it is because the people who most need it do not feel the need of it". How, then, bring them to listen to God's Word?

The paper says: "Not only through the voice of the ordinary pastors, but by the strong voice of the missions which are the extraordinary means destined to heal, or at least, to bring to light the evils afflicting the parishes, and, in particular, and the danger of indifference".

TEACHING : THE FIRST Fruit of the missions is instruction : In the short period of 4 to 5 weeks we go through all the principal truths of religion. the subjects treated are arranged in a body of doctrine. Prayers, communions, counsels, sermons, all these are used to bring about conversion.

Father Mermier is convinced about the limits of the ordinary methods of pastoral ministry: what makes the ordinary ministry almost useless, at least in some parishes and for some people, is that these parishes these people don't frequent the instructions; and if they do, they do so very rarely and usually badly and without any purpose... "During the big exercises of the mission, in all the parishes of Savoy, from the very beginning, without any notable exception, everybody comes in haste, listens, learns

CONFESSION IN THE MISSION : OUR FIRST missionaries attached a great importance to confession which, on the one hand liberates the conscience and on the other allows the parishioners to form their conscience and solve their difficulties: thus they are persuaded to present themselves frequently and several times at the "Tribunal" as it was then called. "The choice of the confessors is easy; they are not men from the place; people can come again and again several times to the tribunal of penitence, he confession is well prepared by means of examine of conscience often repeated and explained until the end of the mission..."

INTER-PARISH RADIANCE : In those days people didn't speak of pastoral sectors, pastoral Groupings and certainly not of regional missions: the missionaries, however, noticed the influence which one parish exerted over another. Often, in their mission diaries, they noted the presence of several "outsiders" coming from other neighbouring parishes.

The fifth effect or good produced through the Missions, in a given parish, is the dedication of the parish itself as well as of the neighbouring parishes'.

The "Paper" enumerates the factors of edification: assiduity in the performance of the spiritual exercises of the parishioners and the participation of the neighbouring parishes and other outsiders in the sacred "tribunal" of penance, concentration, continual prayer in the whole parish, silence and modesty in the Church, frequent communions.

The Pastoral Mission : "Our primordial activity" Fr. Mermier concludes : "All these advantages are a source of great edification of those who become aware of them or hear of them". **The primordial activity of the Congregation will then be the pastoral mission.**

Apart from the missions lasting from 3 to 5 weeks, the missionaries also give in the different parishes shorter exercises: retreats, especially after 6 or 12 months following a mission, retreats also in preparation for the installation of what Fr. Mermier calls the "Via Crucis" (Fr. Mermier always insisted on the importance of the "way of the Cross".)

B EDUCATION

In their reflections on the religious situation, Frs. Favre and Mermier often speak about the formation of the clergy. Favre is strong in his critique of the formation imparted in the seminaries. The two friends are convinced that formation has to be revamped at every stage and that it is absolutely incumbent to train the teachers. Very gradually the idea takes shape to found a congregation which would be called "Oblates of Saint Francis" Either Fr. Favre or Fr. Mermier drew up a Rule for these Oblates. This Congregation never saw the light of day, but this is the Rule that remained clear and firm in the mind of the founders and was what Fr. Mermier intended to achieve.

In 1838, the number of the members of the Congregation is grossly inadequate: provisionally all the efforts are concentrated on the parish missions; and in order to bring this work to perfection, appeals are made to local priests in the parishes for assistance. Moreover from 1845 onwards, a great part of the Congregation, more than half, is found in India.

SCHOOLS : In 1847, however, the College of Evian is facing a precarious financial situation. Fr. Lamouille, Principal of the College, makes an appeal to Fr. Mermier, but the latter hesitates before giving any positive answer. It is only in 1856 that he finally decides to take up the charge of the institution. In the same period, due to bad administration, the College of Melun is also doomed to close down. The Missionaries take charge of it in the academic year of 1857.

ADVICE TO MISSIONARIES-TEACHERS : FATHER MERMIER reminds his missionaries-teachers that they should love and be extremely faithful in the observance of their religious Rule. They too are disciples of Saint Francis de Sales, and thus should have a fatherly attitude, full of love, peace and gentleness. He insists on the necessity of strict supervision which is nothing but a loving attention shown to the children throughout the day. Such a method demands a total commitment from the masters who should never lose sight of the children, but stay close to them constantly. Be careful, then, says Fr. Mermier, of frequent absences, whether they be for walks, dinners, preaching, confessions, and so on.

Once the Mission of Vizagapatam was founded in 1846, Fr. Mermier showed a special interest in founding, establishing and developing a number of schools in the mission territories.

C THE INDIAN MISSION

The missionary aspirations of Fr. Mermier will be realised with the foundation of Vizagapatam. The correspondence with Joseph -Marie Favre shows that the two missionaries consider the overseas missions as an important element, and of capital interest in the work of renewal in the Church.

The Congregation has only a few members in 1838; in an appeal made to Bishop Rey, Fr. Mermier, in proposing his reasons in favour of the approbation to be granted to the Congregation, mentions the future service of the overseas missions.

THE CALL OF THE HOLY SEE

A few years later, the Holy See requests the diocese of Annecy to send missionaries to Africa. To Fr. Mermier this is a call from divine Providence. Without delay, he offers the services of his missionaries and proposes that he himself lead them to Africa. He writes to the Vicar General : "Convinced as I am that God's Spirit is now speaking to me through the mouth of the Common Father of the faithful, I hasten to tell you that I would like to take this occasion to place the services of the Congregation of the Missionaries of St. Francis de Sales under the direct guidance and authority of His Holiness by accepting the mission of Liberia... and by offering my own person...for this glorious enterprise."

VIZAGAPATAM : After long wait and fresh appeals, the letter comes at last from Rome assigning to the Missionaries the Mission of Vizagapatam: On the eve of the beautiful feast of the Pentecost, in the afternoon, that we have at last received the good and comforting news from Rome, which announces to us that the Sacred Congregation Propagation of the Faith has definitively assigned to us the Province of Vizagapatam in East-India, to establish there a body of missionaries...while provisionally placing us under the authority of the Vicariate of Madras, it places at our disposal services of two missionaries from Savoy, familiar with this place so as to initiate our own missionaries up to the time that our Congregation is able to work on its own.

"The orders of his Eminence, the Cardinal Prefect, are precise and clear and should be obeyed immediately: we are asked for 4 missionaries and two brothers; they should be sent to Paris before the end of May."

THREE FUNDAMENTAL ORIENTATIONS : Fr. Mermier gives three fundamental orientations to the Congregation which he has founded: Pastoral Missions, Education of Youth, Overseas Missions. With a great loving and affectionate solicitude, he endeavours to instil into his brethren the missionary spirit in the manner and in the school of Saint Francis de Sales.

THE MISSIONARY - APOSTLE OF JESUS CHRIST : Missionary action is essential to the life of the Church. Fr. Fr. Mermier, this action requires men of exceptional qualities, it requires men of God.

THE MISSIONARY IS AN EXTRAORDINARY MAN

"One ordinarily looks upon missionaries as extraordinary men destined to combat the greatest disorders, to correct the greatest abuses and to remedy the greatest evils...It is, then, necessary to have men who are well formed, men who are prepared well ahead, men who have been tested from all points of view. "Missionaries have to be extraordinary men, men whom one meets rarely, at only a few periods in history and in circumstances which are deemed to be remarkable".

MISSIONARY QUALITIES At the time of sending out his Missionaries to India, Fr. Mermier enumerated the qualities which make up the personality of a missionary : "This cluster of qualities which renders a man apostolic is **rarely found in one piece**. A vocation in the midst of all kinds of **trials, a total dispossession in** all things, a complete abandonment to the plans of divine Providence, an entire and absolute renouncement of one's own will, so as to seek and to will only what Christ wants of us and from us, through the way of obedience <I do what pleases him and I do it always a zeal that is pure, ardent and well ordained for my own sanctification as much as for the sanctification of others; **a zeal that is constant and determined**, accompanied by all its fruits; all the necessary dispositions of a missionary whom God calls to work for the conversion of the peoples, especially in the overseas missions".

AN AUTHENTIC ZEAL The zeal which Fr. Mermier recommends should not be confused with any natural activity : "It is a dangerous temptation, to all of us, in our ministry, and still more to the youth, to consider that true zeal is some kind of an ardour of the temperament and taste, of self-love, of ambition which makes us choose works of show instead of the common works, in simplicity, modesty after the example of our Lord Jesus Christ".

A DISINTERESTED ZEAL : In Vizagapatam, Fr. Dupont is discouraged because his missionary efforts meet with failure. Fr. Mermier reminds him that true zeal is always patient : "I know perfectly well that in spite of all the good work that you are doing and want to do, you are unhappy because you feel that you can not do more; I think it's a good thing; I thank God for having blessed you with an ardent zeal. I must however tell you that true zeal, a zeal that is perfectly disinterested, is **patient, resigned, serene**,(charity is patient, hopes in all circumstances. It may be that God is using these trials to purify your zeal by burning away all alloys and the craving for self-satisfaction. (Christ did not take delight in himself...); You have to be convinced that conversion is the work of grace...(It is the Lord who illumines the blind, it is he who raises downtrodden). True disciples of Christ **should proclaim with the heart and the mouth** (we are but unprofitable servants); let's learn to wait for the time of harvesting. May God's name be made holy, may his kingdom come and not ours, may his will be done, and not ours. Everything else is temptation, sin and unhappiness".

SUPERNATURAL ZEAL : "Oh God, you have filled your friends with honour"(Ps.138)

"What astonishing proof of God's friendship towards us! Disinterested friendship, generous, tender and attentive friendship; efficacious from the part of this divine benefactor.

Reason for thanksgiving, for zeal! "For a zeal that is holy, humble, disinterested, prudent, gentle, patient, not a zeal **that is passionate, ambitious, impetuous, choleric**, quick-tempered, blind, imprudent, self-seeking, all human, carnal, jealous, curious, full of vanity and so on..."

JESUS, MODEL OF OUR ZEAL : We should understand well the true qualities of zeal. Jesus himself is our master.(I have given you an example that you act like me). "In order to learn from the example of Jesus Christ and from the lessons from this divine Master, we have to start from *a zeal towards our own selves*. If we want that sinners should repent of their sins, we should shed tears over our own sins. (Weep over yourselves!) Example of St. Ambrose. If we want to ignite the fire of God's love in the hearts of men, we should be the first to burn with these divine ardours. It is the zeal we have towards our own selves that will urge us on to have zeal towards others".

20. WE OUGHT TO BE WORTHY OF OUR VOCATION

"(Like the Apostles) we have to strive to **render ourselves worthy of our sublime vocation.** The first condition to do this is to have a true idea of this vocation, to esteem it above everything else, considering all the rest, all other occupations as nothing, as dirt, as dung. Meditating constantly on the lessons and examples of Jesus Christ, supreme missionary, on the Apostles etc.

Doing this, the priest's faith grows stronger, his confidence becomes clear-sighted, his charity overwhelming. Obstacles become sources of courage, problems disappear, sacrifices, death itself become beneficial.

"If then we become conscious that these beautiful dispositions are so rarely found in us, it is because we are not sufficiently interested in Jesus Christ, in his Gospel, in the salvation of souls. All these should be made a part of our daily meditation, the gauge of our behaviour, of all our activity and we shall also become Apostles..."

21 LIKE OTHER SAINT FRANCIS DE SALES

On the 24th February 1849, Fr. Mermier while residing at Allinges, writes to Fr. Gaiddon and shares a few ideas with him on the missionary apostolate. Fr. Gaiddon is struck by the richness of the text, he encircles it with a pencil and notes: <<To read.>> He was no doubt planning to read the text to the community of La Feuillette.

Here is the text:

"It seems to me that now is the time, as never before, to be holy, spotless, apart from sinners, raised up higher than the heavens. Our ministry demands that we show the people, the society, that we are other Saint Francis de Sales, perfectly disinterested, burning with zeal for the salvation of souls, full of compassion at the sight of the evils that afflict the people, without wasting our time in making useless speeches, but imbued with a genuine missionary spirit, an irreproachable doctrine and above everything else a pure life..."

IV RELIGIOUS-MISSIONARY

Sublime as the missionary vocation is, it demands that suitable men be prepared for it with great care and that they be sustained in their work by a religious community. To our Founder, missionary action and religious life are inseparable.

22 AN EXACTING VOCATION.

"Which of us can ever fully grasp the excellence and the eminence of a missionary vocation? And what a perfection it is to belong to the Congregation, to be the perfume of a religious house and build up a community!

What wisdom, what solemnity, what reserve and at the same time what sentiment of feeling at ease, mingled with tact and confidence in our relationships with secular priests, called as we are to work with them and to share our life with them; and then, what consideration, what modesty, what patience, what zeal in our relationships with the people of the world, in our conversations, our journeys, our meals; in social gatherings and social contacts where everyone has his eyes fixed on the missionary!

Who cannot see how difficult it is for a man who is deemed to possess all the virtues and to lead an irreproachable life, without any defects, to come up to the sublime heights of his vocation and not to falter some time or the other"

23 BUTTRESSED BY RELIGIOUS LIFE

Every missionary must be filled with apostolic virtues. It is God who gives them; but to whom? To those who ask for them with all their hearts in an assiduous, constant

and persevering prayer, to those who endeavour with all their might to acquire them, to those who are assiduous to learn from all the experiences they come across in their missionary enterprise, to those finally who prepare themselves to this formidable ministry through the test of a long and laborious noviciate and through the regularity of a life separated from the world, of a life that is serene, devoted to study, totally consecrated to God and to the service of the neighbour.

A CONGREGATION IS THEN NECESSARY TO FORM MISSIONARIES

Already from 1823, the correspondence between Fr. Favre and Fr. Mermier reveals the necessity which the missionary group felt to form a religious congregation. Around 1830, the idea takes on a concrete shape: they speak of the "Oblates of Saint Francis".

In 1842, Fr. Mermier is in Rome: There he seeks to obtain from the Holy See the requisite approbation for the Congregation of the Missionaries of Saint Francis de Sales. He presents to the Holy Father a petition written in Latin; in this petition, he speaks of the desire of his heart: to found a congregation of religious missionaries.

At the same time he prepares the same text in French entitled <Confidential Note, October 1842>.

"In the year 1822" "In 1822, while there was not a single religious existing in Savoy, I started the ministry of the Missions with the approbation from the Archbishop of Chambéry. I continued exercising this apostolate till today in the company of a few priests of this region. . **My desire has always been to form a new congregation of Missionaries.** God has blessed this desire: my companions and myself have evangelised a large part of the diocese of Savoy"

1838

Finally, in September 1838, the missionaries wait for the civil approbation from the King of Sardaigne, without which a canonical approbation could not be granted. Fr. Mermier presents to Mgr. Rey a long petition in which he explains the reasons which have urged him to found a religious congregation:

" Here is what we believe that we should ask His Highness:
"that you bring together a group of priests in a congregation established under a Rule given and approved by you, placed under your authority in conformity with and under the authority of your successors by means of an Episcopal ordinance sealed by your Chancellery, in which you declare that this **Congregation has in fact been existing since a certain number of years** and that it has devoted itself to the work of the Missions and to apostolic ministry under your authority.

A clear wish.

Fr. Mermier explains the motives which he puts forth, in his "paper": wish of the clergy and bishops, success of the Missions, proximity to Geneva, possibility to

recruit vocations in Savoy, the feeling that for them, religious life is a necessity... and he concludes: "It is then their clear wish; they have had twenty years to think over it, the successes and the obstacles they have met with have forced them to think about it; it is now and immediately that they want to receive from God's infinite goodness, through the merits of Jesus Christ and the intercession of the Virgin Mary and of Saint Francis de Sales, their special patron...(this approbation)".

V THE RULE

The framework of the religious life is defined by the Rules which Fr. Mermier considers to be the expression of God's Will. Already from 1822 he has at heart the idea of preparing a Rule of life for his missionaries whom he wants to be Religious. During his sojourn at La Roche-sur-Foron (1834-1837), the whole community comes together to formulate this Rule. Finally, Fr. Mermier goes to Rome in order to present this document to the Holy See for its approbation. Furthermore, extremely solicitous to give a solid structure to the life of the missionaries, he consults a number of theologians, canonists and religious superiors.

At last, on the 10th December 1842 he has the joy of writing to Mgr Vibert, bishop of Maurienne:

"The vote of the Reverend Consultor is the best thing I can expect."

He is more explicit with his confreres at La Feuillette:

"What will the conclusion of this long work be? I believe,

"What will the conclusion of this long work be? I believe that unless something extraordinary happens, that it will be good. The Reverend Consultor has not pointed out any important defect in the Constitutions, he hasn't changed a single word.

"Tell all our dear missionaries and brothers, that since our rules are so wise, so pure, so perfect, **that they endeavour to observe them with an ever greater zeal, fervour and fidelity**".

28 <The cream of the Gospel>

The Rule is for all of us the cream of the Gospel, key of heaven. Let us try our best and we shall understand the full impact of it upon our lives. *Intellectus bonus omnibus facientibus..*

I exhort you with all my strength, to have your Rules constantly in your hands, it has to be the book of the whole Congregation, at least till such time as we have them in all their perfection."

29 Source of perfection

The frequent contact with the Rule is for the Founder himself a spiritual nourishment. He shares this confidence with Fr Neyret in 1847: "I shall end by speaking to you about our Holy Rules. I have been reading them in a very special

manner all this year. The more I meditate on them and the more I explain them, the more do I esteem them and the more I understand their importance and necessity...

We cannot arrive at the perfection demanded of us by our apostolic life without applying the means. It is difficult to find them outside religious Congregations, means that are more sure, more efficacious and more holy than in the holy Rules and Constitutions."

30 Our Fortress

"I can not tell you how important our Rules are! They are like the bull's eye (of perfection) - the final word (of order). Fr. Saint Jure calls them the book of the elect, the key to heaven... I would myself call them our **fortress, our citadel, our armoury..**

31 The temptation to lukewarmness.

Writing to his Missionaries in India, Fr. Mermier warns them against the temptation to lukewarmness:

"As for us (Missionaries in Europe) and for me especially, I should be afraid of being the cause of my own problems (we deserve what we merit). We work, but with what success?

Like so many others, we don't seem to be bothered by anything, we share the common lethargy which is in itself the greatest chastisements, for the one who is afraid of them, seeks the remedies. There is but one and that is to approach God in prayer. The remedy is entirely in God's hands who wants us turn to him in prayer - a prayer coming from a heart that is sincere and pure.

"The spirit that I want you to have is a spirit of humility, a spirit of life and not of discouragement. I pray to God in the little sanctuary of Saint Francis de Sales (Les Allinges) to bless this spirit and to make it fruitful in each one of you".

32 The love of our vocation

" The love, the esteem of your vocation should be like the compass of your earthly pilgrimage, the spring of your soul and all your actions, it is the support, the anchor to sustain you in all your trials. "God wants it, it's my vocation...How beautiful is a Rule to an inspiration such as this! How loving it becomes! The least of the practices merit our attention, demand daily sacrifices to make us reproach ourselves for the least negligence. "The religious soul becomes like an ever burning lamp in the presence of the divine spouse. It is a tree planted on the banks of the streams, always green, always covered with flowers and fruit. It is the fullness of God's love and we cannot pay too great a price to possess a treasure such as this, which is the source of all good things.

33 Fervent in observance

The Missionaries will be fervent, regular, it is absolutely necessary today. Perhaps more than ever before. Seeing the evils that surround us, we should not be satisfied with ordinary remedies:

What then are we to conclude? God is there to help us, Saint Francis de Sales to protect us, Our Lady of Sorrows is there to look tenderly upon us: we shall continue making progress.

"A subject of such comfort to us! After giving you a glimpse that I intend giving you (beginning of the circular) of the society, our own diocese, you will see for yourselves that we need to have men who are really animated and filled with God's Spirit, men who are regular, exemplary and completely apostolic, men who are refashioned and recreated in the image of our holy Rules.

God himself will give us these men if our Congregation and its ordinances are our rule of life, our centre of attraction, our bonds of unity...

"By observing them faithfully, entirely, constantly and with great love, we shall possess the strength of God himself..." I can do everything in him who strengthens me..."

34 Fidelity to the Spirit

To be faithful to the Rule, even when occupied with the work of the Mission is a great matter and a great source of consolation; however, the letter of the law is not enough, often mere external and material obedience becomes difficult to observe; it is rather the spirit of the Rule, the renouncement of self, the sacrifice of one's comforts, one's conveniences, to be all to all everywhere and always, in the smallest things: to be like the grain of wheat thrown into the earth. Charity and gentleness towards our neighbour are the daughters of the love of God. Read often in the letter to the Corinthians the chapter 13th. Charity is patient..."

" You know and you fear your weakness, thank God for it, be attentive to the voice of the Spirit who dwells in you, and take care not to sadden him even when he makes the smallest reproach to you, he is so delicate; be mindful of your behaviour, especially when you are at table and in your talk with outsiders in the tribunal (of confession) and in the pulpit".

35 Nothing is useless in the Rules.

In well made rules nothing should be considered as useless, everything in them is substantial. This is the fundamental characteristic of our Rules. Let us do everything that we can to observe them as perfectly as possible".

36 Mgr Neyret and the Rule.

The example of Mgr Neyret who identified himself with all the religious practices during all his priestly life speaks volumes to you ever since you have had the joy of having lived with him.

"Our Mgr Neyret, filled with God's Spirit and with a rare sensibility, says such lovely things about the esteem he has for our Holy Rules that I am sure that you yourselves will find your delights in them and that the precious advantages that you will gain in them in your solitude will become your riches."

37 <demand>

After the first years of adaptation, Fr. Mermier realises that yet more efforts have to be made in the observance of the Rules, and he writes to Fr. Jean-Marie Tissot, religious superior at Vizagapatam:

"I demand, from this very moment, in virtue of the holy obedience to which we have all vowed, that all the members of the Congregation should make it point to observe with all their heart the letter as well as the spirit of our holy Rules, in conformity with our Institute. I demand that in your quality of Superior of the House, you face up to the responsibilities in the task assigned to you in our house at Vizagapatam, for example concerning the practice of fraternal correction at least once a month, in conformity with the article "of the Commons" for each month, in public or in private".

VI THE COMMUNITY

38 "The sincere and constant wish of the Missionaries has always been to live closely united together and to form a solidly established Congregation".

From the very beginning of their apostolate, the Missionaries felt the need of a common life. During the first years of their existence, they lived as a community in the Seminary of Annecy. But Fr. Mermier aspired towards a greater autonomy. The community is transferred, in 1834, to La Roche-sur-Foron where they live under better conditions; their life there consists of common prayers, collaboration in the preparation of the RULES and continual exchange of views. This community life will further be strengthened when the Missionaries will be housed at La Feuillette.

39 THAT THEY MAY BE ONE

<that they may be one>

Father Mermier announces to his confreres his imminent return from Rome and concludes:

"I end my letter in asking you, dear Missionaries, to imitate the Holy Trinity, that all may be one- that they may be one as we are one: that is my prayer on this beautiful feast of the Holy Trinity."

40 Perfectly united

Fr. Mermier had already made this exhortation to his confreres at the time of his departure for Rome.

"You will remain perfectly united, at all times showing a warm and cordial regard for one another like brothers who love each other and possess the true zeal of Jesus Christ and of Saint Francis de Sales our glorious and illustrious patron, and who wish to seek nothing else but the greater glory of God, the salvation of souls as well as their own salvation."

41. Across Space

The very nature of their apostolic vocation supposed that the Missionaries had to work in distant places, separated from each other. From 1845 they work several kilometres away from one another. But fraternal love wipes out all distance.

"Nothing new in Hindustan. I am already finding the time too long, even though I am not worried about anything. With great pleasure we receive news from the different stations where our confreres are working in these distant places. We have to go on offering our prayers to the ONE who keeps us united in charity. Distance has not destroyed this love, it admits neither separation nor division"(Mgr. Neyret)

42 A lavish correspondence

To compensate the difficulties caused by these distances, Fr. Mermier writes regularly to his confreres in India: he is not satisfied with small letters, but writes long letters dealing with the spiritual life, the difficulties, problems, and successes of each one. He also gives news about the Congregation and France; he encourages his confreres to write frequently.

Fr. Jean Thevenet has a rare talent to write, but then he hesitates to write. Fr. Mermier encourages him to take up his pen.

"Everybody here asks for more ample news about your Mission, about your work, the difficulties you meet with, about your glorious and difficult ministry. Don't regret the time you spend to write letters as you seem to do. The more they are desired the more are they avidly read and they do a lot of good. If you really knew how much people pray, make sacrifices for our Missionaries! It is then a great work so long as it doesn't come in the way of your essential duties'.

Between the Missionaries in India and Europe a link is established by means of a lavish correspondence made up of delicious details and especially full of humour and love.

43 The isolated

In Savoy, Fr. Mermier's confreres live habitually in communities. Whenever they are obliged to reside in parishes because of the Missions they have to preach, they always make it their duty to observe their daily exercises of piety. On the other hand, in India, some missionaries live isolated lives. To Fr. Mermier, this isolation is an anomaly which he tries to palliate.

44 The isolated are members of the family

Fr. Mermier writes to his Missionaries in India in 1851.

"We live for the Lord. The news of the love that binds you together and makes of you one single unity - that we may be one - even though you live miles apart, is just wonderful.

"Every one of your letters - and in less than a year I have received them from all of you - each of these letters and all of them together tell me in a very persuasive manner

that you are all happy and contented in your vocation, under the leadership and dependence of your Superiors, of Mgr. Neyret, our honourable and good bishop, of the loving and prudent Fr. Tissot, Superior appointed to give a helping hand to the Bishop. How happy your obedience makes me. What is it that you have not been given so as to be able to come together more often in the house of your family to

give one another the strength of this ineffable charity which unites you, even though you are spread out and dispersed.

"How happy you are and contented in the observance of your holy Rules, which are our link, our focus, our direction. Your reports are to us eloquent and persuasive lessons reproaching us for our ignorance and our cowardice.

"Finally, how happy and contented you are in the performance of your ministry in spite of the countless and constant difficulties that you encounter...I shall not speak of this forced isolation in which you are obliged to remain so often and so long alone, away from your confreres. God adjusts his help according to your needs".

B. COMMUNITY - WELLSPRING OF HOPE

45. THE SUPPORT OF A COMMUNITY

Your letters have filled me with joy, especially the letter to Canon Bernex, wherein you speak about the needs of a MISSIONARY called to work for the conversion of pagans, in the midst of dangers of all sorts. What a great strength it gives him to belong to a Congregation which is devoted to him in time and in eternity, which prays for him, works for him, assures him all support, comforts him, helps him with all its strength, which is with him in his difficulties and labours".

Fr. Mermier then goes on to speak of a "**community**" wherein the spirit of religion has to reign, where all the members are brothers, where all pursue the same goal and where all use the same means, where reigns a perfect harmony and where the prayer of Our Lord is verified: That they may be one as we are one. No doubt we are far from this perfection, but our duty it is to aspire to it and to work to attain it.

46 Source of a pure charity

Fr. Mermier writes to Sister Jeanne Belleville about the common and individual happiness of those who live in a
under the sweet yoke of the Rule, in perfect accord of will and action, keeping themselves free from the least of the stains which weaken charity, sadden the soul and makes it slothful in God's service, but preserving the interior joy and confidence which produce harmony and tender cordiality between them"

47 Praying together

On the April 1852, Fr. Mermier sent a circular letter to his confreres in India wherein he touches upon the matter of prayer. He tells them to pray in union with the whole Church.

'Before everything else, you have to train yourself to prayer. It is by prayer that you have to begin and end everything. Train yourself to piety. Mere physical training of the body doesn't mean much, but piety is useful for everything"

"To do so fruitfully, I add a few words on the dispositions: before prayer, prepare your soul; do not tempt God (Ec1.18,23) " Put yourself in an atmosphere of **recollection**

"Bring yourself to have a sincere sorrow for your sins "Humiliate yourself before God... The **supreme disposition** lies in this short prayer: Domine in unione... Lord, in union with the divine intention in which you proclaimed, on earth, the praises of

God. It is to unite oneself to Jesus Christ, to pray with him, by him and through him, for, as St Paul says, all subsists in him, by him, through him. It is to **pray in union with his mystical Body**, the Communion of Saints, it is finally to unite, ourselves, members of our little Congregation through the perfect observance of our Rules and to render ourselves more and more worthy to offer ceaselessly this divine incense which comes forth only from that heart that is pure and burning with love.

"To pray, then, my dear Confreres, to pray all the time, to pray in a worthy manner is a duty and a need for everyone, but especially for a priest. This duty, this need are all the more imperative on us today in our age of trial and desolation; everything points out to it: the malice of the wicked, the cowardice of the good, the voice of our common Father of the faithful crying out in various Jubilees(1851 and 1852), the blindness of your pagans in India, the scandal of our bad Catholics, the persecution of the reformed, finally, my long and sad experience which has convinced me that I cannot recommend sufficiently enough the need of the holy exercise of prayer.

48. With his help, we shall be all powerful

I can do everything in him who strengthens me. Without this strength, we can do nothing without me you can do nothing. A God has prayed...<he passed the whole night in prayer>. Mary's heart prayed during her sleep, and the creature, the sinner will live without prayer? We shall pray, then, in a more worthy manner, in a manner more pleasing to God, more useful to our souls and more effective in our own sanctification.

"My dear Confreres, accept this sign of my care and solicitude for you and since you understand better and better the importance of prayer, don't forget me in this holy exercise so that I may become more worthy of my vocation

49. Saint Raphael: Anniversary of the Congregation

Bishop Rey approved the Congregation of the Missionaries of Saint Francis de Sales on the 24th October 1838, feast of Saint Raphael. This event marked the official birth of the Community. From the very beginning, Fr. Mermier made it a point of celebrating this anniversary regularly in joy and thanksgiving. This day was prepared in prayer: on this day the Community chooses to have Religious Professions or hold other important celebrations.

The three days preceding the feast of the Archangel Raphael have been days of retreat for all the Missionaries. During these days, two confreres were preparing to make their simple and perpetual vows prescribed by the Constitutions of the Congregation: they were Frs. Mabboux and Pissard, seven others renewed them as it is done every three years. The last two who joined made use of these exercises to initiate themselves to the Rules and the Missions.

The profession of two novices and the renewal of vows took place on the 24th, feast. of Saint Raphael.

The friends of the Congregation came to share this common joy:

"On this occasion, we had a small celebration: we invited the Reverend Vicars Tissot and Chalamel who honoured us with their presence; we would have been

delighted to have our Bishop if we had dared to invite him and inform him early enough. This celebration made all our confreres happy.

"I announced to them that Rome had authorised me to offer our Missionaries and Brothers to the service of the Foreign Missions.

"In 1845, the 24th of October is marked by the reception of the first letters from the missionaries who had left for India:

"It is on the feast day of the Archangel Raphael, the 24th October, anniversary day of the canonical establishment of our little Congregation that we received your letters; it is our

custom to make a novena, during this period, in preparation of the diocesan Mission. We had finished it the previous day: it was really a feast day for us; but your dear letters rendered it more solemn than I can ever think of.

"How it fills us with comfort to know that your crossing of the high seas has been happy, prompt, agreeable and useful. As soon as we had read the contents of your letters we went down to the Church to sing the Te Deum in thanksgiving to God.

50 To pray in community

During his sojourn in Rome, Fr. Mermier reflects over the way of animating the prayer of the community and how to associate the faithful who visit the sanctuaries confided to the Congregation to this prayer.

In his INSTRUCTION FOR NOTRE-DAME DE LA GORGE, we can highlight the following points:

"Station two Missionaries or two Brothers, or at least two Missionaries and one Brother, or two Brothers and one Missionary at the shrine.

"Every Friday, an exercise in honour of Our Lady of Seven Sorrows. On this same day a Way of the Cross will be held several times in private or in public.

It is almost necessary to have two Stations of the Cross, one within the Church and the other outside.

"An exercise in honour of the Sacred Heart will be held in public every first Friday of the month.

"These dispositions will also be observed at the chapel of Les Allinges.

At the Mother House at Annecy "Every day Masses are said at different hours of the morning for the convenience of the people living in the city.

"The subject of the morning meditation is repeated in a loud voice at 5 o'clock in winter and in summer at 4.30.

"Every Friday exercises in honour of our Lady of Sorrows. "Every first Friday of the month or the following Sunday, exercise in honour of the Sacred Heart.

Every year, the novena to the Holy Family, before or after the feast.

"Another novena to our LADY OF SORROWS at one of the two feasts in honour of the Mother of Sorrows.

D. THE COMMUNITY - A SIGN

51. JOSEPH-MARIE MABBOUX

J-M Mabboux, curate at Haberes was designated by his Bishop to assist Fr. Mermier's companions in the preaching of several Missions. He was struck by the way of life of the Missionaries. He wrote to Fr. Mermier in 1839:

"I am writing to you to confirm my desire to consecrate myself entirely to the service of God and the salvation of souls and consequently to join your Society. The reason for my intention and my desire is that I believe that the religious life is the best and the surest means of working at one's sanctification and through it for the sanctification of others.

"I may tell you that I came out of the Mission of Viuz with more fervour than from the priests' retreat in spite of the fact that I was in the midst of dissipation: and so, if I felt so uplifted in my heart in so short a time, what would I not feel if I were to live continually in your Congregation!

52 SEBASTIAN-THEOPHILE NEYRET

Fr. Neyret was the chaplain of the Sisters of St. Joseph at Evian. He was a man of a deep interior life, desiring to join a religious congregation. To him a Roman approbation is a guarantee of authenticity; he repeats this often to Fr. Mermier. On his return from Rome, Fr. Mermier hastens to write to him : In the Assembly held on 2nd June 1843, the Sacred Congregation has decided that the Society of the Missionaries of Saint Francis de Sales is worthy of great praise, so also the goal it has set before it.

"It follows from this decision:

"that the Constitutions and the Rules contain nothing that would be blameworthy;

"that the ends and various means are good and ...

"that the Society with all its constituent elements is worthy

of great praises. "Consequently, considering these testimonies and guaranties , my advice to you is that you start thinking seriously of joining us since now you have the assurance that among us you will find the true

spirit and tradition of the Church regarding religious Congregations. The Church approves the end of our Congregation, which is the holy exercises of the Missions.

"We have taken your word into consideration, by which you say that you would join us as soon as you receive convincing guarantees;

"because the offer that I made to the Propaganda... will perhaps be accepted sooner than I thought;

"finally, the fact that you join us will have a good effect on the spirit of the clergy and on many young ecclesiastics who are just waiting for an example such as yours in order to make up their mind to join us.

53, The upshot of a departure for India

"The upshot of the news from Rome (concerning the first departure of the Missionaries to Vizagapatam) and the departure of our confreres is really astonishing in the diocese. The resulting edification appears to be great".

At the time of the departure of the first Missionaries , Fr. Mermier writes again to his confreres. The letter is addressed to Bordeaux:

"There you are - entirely in the hands of divine Providence, in the charge of Fr. Martin whom I appointed and do so again Director of his brothers. Priests and brothers, with all the powers that I can give him.

"Your vocation is really great: You cannot imagine the effect it is having in the diocese.

"If your departure creates such a sensation in the world, it is also and happily an occasion for numerous and fervent prayers for the Missionaries. Go then, in God's peace, safe in Mary's hands, under the protection of the holy Angels, Missionaries of Saint Francis de Sales.

"Go then, be happy in your voyage. Take care to do your daily spiritual exercises well. Obey, meditate on our holy Rules: don't forget us; the bonds which unite us, know no distance. Once more, may you be blessed."

7. SAINT FRANCIS DE SALES

54. HOW I WISH...

"Oh! How I wish to have something of the patience, the gentleness of Saint Francis de Sales. I wish that you too should have them and I implore our holy Protector to inspire them in you, to obtain them for you, so that we become like him and that like him we become worthy ministers of Jesus Christ."

55 "IMITATION OF SAINT FRANCIS DE SALES

"In prayer I ask our Lord, his Blessed Mother, Saint Francis de Sales and all our holy Protectors to fill you more and more with the spirit of our holy Rules and to make you grow, as he grew, in the likeness of Jesus Christ, in making himself, like him, all to all'.

56 "IN THE SCHOOL OF SAINT FRANCIS DE SALES

"Your new Provincial (Fr. Neyret) is quite satisfied with your good beginning in your new post (Religious Superior): he praises especially your humility, your deference to him; I am not at all surprised to hear that, knowing you for a long time and knowing your way of going about not only with your superiors and confreres but also with strangers however uncouth they may be; you have a great facility in this regard and even excellent habits.

"Here is a counsel that I'd wish to give you and ask you to take it with a grain of salt, to warn you against the poison of vain glory: Go ahead in the same way without looking behind you, always strive to become more and more simple; be simple like the doves, purify your intentions...if your eye is simple... yes be like Saint Francis de Sales".

57 IN DAY TO DAY LIFE

On the 19th June 1848, a group of Missionaries is about to depart to India. Fr. Mermier gives them some "prescriptions for the voyage". Here are some of his counsels:

In your bearing: although you are to be kind and understanding nevertheless be modest, reserved, willingly bearing up with the faults of the people you meet; never have disputes in your discussions.

At meals: while maintaining sobriety and temperance, be all to all in the example of the divine Master, of Saint Francis Xavier, of Saint Francis de Sales whose simplest actions were a kind of preaching - so eloquent and so persuasive.

During the recreations: With regard to yourselves and others: observe the four great laws of charity according to the precept of the Prince of the Apostles: Before everything else have love for one another which means, esteem, respect, loving service, sympathy and understanding - supporting one another in such a way that no one can even imagine the smallest hint of differences between you. How important this counsel is! It is like the one Joseph gave to his brothers; what can I say? It is the one Jesus Christ himself gave to his Apostles.

At the customs, police departments: each time you have to deal with civil and public officials, and with everybody else, be very polite and open, don't offend anyone, but be good to all"

58 A LITTLE BIT OF THIS SPIRIT

Since the departure of Fr. Martin for India, Fr. Neyret is put in charge of the constructions at the Allinges - it is there that Fr. Mermier writes to him:

"Yes, it is out of respect for the holy Apostle of the Chablais that we are using this shanty of the castles; his great admirer Bishop Rey began it. To us it is a happy necessity to continue it; let's do so with perfectly pure intentions so that our Congregation may obtain from this perfect model a bit of his spirit of zeal and kindness which *will* make us die to ourselves so as to live for God alone and for the happiness of our brothers as other Saint Francis de Sales. Fiat. Fiat."

59 THE NAME AND THE MEMORY

The name of the loving Saint Francis de Sales is venerated everywhere, wherever it is known; his bright and burning writings which consumed his own person have been spread abroad so much and esteemed so much; his memory and his cult so universally acclaimed, that all the faithful children of the Catholic Church who venerate the Saints and especially Saint Francis de Sales, Bishop of Geneva and glorious Apostle of the Chablais, all of them will be happy to learn about the birth of a Congregation of the Missionaries of Saint Francis de Sales in Savoy - Saint Francis de Sales, a man who was friendly with all his fellowmen and filled with concern and compassion for all their miseries.

The Mother House of the Congregation is at Annecy, close to the tomb and relics of its illustrious and glorious patron and protector; it is from there as its centre that it hopes to spread throughout the diocese and even further, if it is the good pleasure of the Sovereign Master of the Harvest to bless it and to protect it."

60 "WHAT GOD WANTS ."

"No, God who is almighty, who has need of no one, does not ask us to perform miracles it's not in our power to do so, he wants certain works or at least our good-will; may he deign to give it to us, this good-will which is the source of

interior peace and which prepares the soul to receive the communications of its God who disposes it for even greater sacrifices: **how great a soul is when it wills only what God wills, when he wills, where he wills, with regard to whom he wills...** This is the kingdom of the soul. The Kingdom of God is among you. God wants to give it to us, this good-will and Jesus Christ has brought it to us. As **Saint Francis de Sales has brought it out in the blazing light of day** in his writings and his deeds. May he obtain for us this grace which he possessed to such a great degree of perfection.

61 A MORE STRINGENT OBLIGATION

On the 29 May 1857, Fr. Mermier writes to Cardinal Gabriele della Genga Sermattei, Prefect of the Sacred Congregation of Bishops and Regulars in order to obtain the final approbation of the Missionaries. He concludes his petition by saying: "In confirming by this solemn approbation, the title of the Missionaries of Saint Francis de Sales, we shall bind ourselves by a more stringent obligation to study, and acquire his spirit, to acquire and imitate his virtues; I would dare to say, if Your Eminence deigns to permit me to do so: we shall have hearts which are more docile and more grateful towards our benefactors".

8. THE LOVE OF GOD

As a faithful disciple of Saint Francis de Sales, Fr. Mermier places the love of God at the centre of all spiritual life. A letter to Fr. Jean Thévenet (28th July 1852) summarises Fr. Mermier's teaching on this fundamental aspect of salesian spirituality.

62. THE ONE THING NECESSARY

"Unum est necessarium". One thing alone is necessary.

"There it is - the right remedy to all our illnesses, all our spiritual infirmities: there it is - the answer to all objections, practical doubts which can spring up all along the road of our painful pilgrimage, there it is - the safe port against all the storms which the temptations of the demon unfurl upon us, the scandal of the world and the enticements of the passions.

"What use is it for a man to gain the whole world, if in his own soul all he finds is destruction?"

"To love God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your spirit and with all your strength and your neighbour as yourself.. Love the Lord your God...

"To love the neighbour, I would say with the divine Master, in the beautiful discourse after the Last Supper, more than yourself, even to give up your life after the example and in imitation of Jesus Christ. Here is the one thing necessary, here is the missionary, here the apostle, here lies the happiness, the true happiness, the only happiness of heart in our world today.

"Outside of it, all is vanity, vanity of vanities, all is vanity except to love God and serve him alone.

"No, my dear confreres, in time and in eternity, for Europe and for India, there is no life, no wisdom, no happiness outside of this word: One thing alone is necessary."

63 LEAVE ALL THE REST.

"But what is to be done to find this one thing necessary?

"Before everything we must leave all the rest: we cannot serve two masters: no one can serve two masters. The eternal Truth tells us that ~ and it adds: whoever does not renounce himself and give up everything he possesses cannot be my disciple".

64 To see God alone

"But, to find this one thing necessary, to possess it and to preserve it, is it enough to detach oneself from all disordered and useless attachments? Can the heart of man which no creature can satisfy, remain and live in this void, this isolation?

"No, it requires a nourishment adapted to its needs and desires. This nourishment is God himself. God is a part of my heritage and my cup. Saint Augustine understood it well when he said: My heart is restless until it rests in thee. And the Apostle of the Nations when in the enthusiasm of his heart, defied all the hostile forces by saying: who then will separate us from the love of God?".

65 HOW TO UNITE OURSELVES TO GOD

"How are we then to seek and attach ourselves to God? We have to seek him and be united to him with all our strength. By the **union of understanding, with** a knowledge that is true, exact, entire and perfect - a knowledge that has to be like a living image of the nature and perfections of God, a mirror in the words of St. Paul(2,Cor.3,8). All of us, with unveiled faces, beholding his glory are being transformed into his image from one degree of glory to another, by the Lord who is Spirit.

"By the **union of the will** which precedes knowledge and which is made through an effort of faith, which embraces the goodness which it has experienced, the lover taking delight in it and desiring to delight to the fullest possible measure. That is the fulfilment of the great Commandment: You will love... from there, the affections...

"By the **union of imitation and conformity** to the divine will: it is the likeness, having but one will in all things, be it in adversity or in prosperity.

"What union! what knowledge! what happiness! whoever has found it, cries out with the spouse: I have found the one who loves my soul and I will not let him go."

66. A CONSUMING FIRE

God's Love is productive; it is a tree which we can recognise by its fruit; it cannot live and remain sterile; there is nothing as strong, as active as love: it is a consuming fire; love covers a multitude of sins"(1,Pet.4,8).

"We are called to live our vocation as Christians and still more as priests and the responsibilities that go with it; but we are also called to live by the observance of our religious vows and thus work for the advancement in our spiritual life."

67 "ALL IN GOLD."

Don't refuse any office, any kind of work however Base it may be, however repellent it may appear; obedience, Love of God change everything into gold." 6~i
Too little loved

68. TOO LITTLE LOVED

At 63, Fr. Mermier reflects over his life, his apostolate, his foundations: in all humility he reproaches himself for not having loved enough:

"Arriving as I do at an advanced age and getting worn out, I

would like to share with you the feeling of a profound regret that I have for not having loved my God and even of not having spoken enough of divine love. On the other hand what could I have said about this divine knowledge?

"The love of God is a practical knowledge which we acquire and which we cannot preach effectively except through our works.

"Only he can be said to be learned in God's Love, who knows to love truly, effectively and forcefully. What good is it for a farmer to talk a lot about agriculture if he were to leave his fields uncultivated?

"That is what distresses me the most."

All these texts show us that for Fr. Mermier God's Love is something active, effective, productive.

9. CONFORMITY

69. ADHERE TO GOD

"My dear Confrere,

May God be blessed. In spite of your poor health, you are doing well and I think you are really doing fine; "when I am weak then I am strong" (2Cor.12,10). What perfection! What a great blessing to be able to say: I die each day.

In this state of humiliation, nothing please the soul as God's will united to its divine model: all happiness consists in becoming like him: to adhere to God is a good thing for me. The world, with its joys, its praises, its goods mean nothing. The world is crucified in me and me for the world.

"My dear François, have courage... if suffering fills us with terror, the reward is there waiting for us...for we belong to Him, because in the Lord is mercy and abundant redemption.

"You are doing much; if you think that you are doing less, don't be sad about it. The servant who received only two talents, is not rewarded less by the Master than the one who has received five, for both have been faithful. Because you have been faithful in little things, I shall give you a responsibility over many.

70 FIDELITY IN ALL THINGS

"It is then uprightness, purity of intention, fidelity in all our works that the Lord asks of us: not so much to do more but to do much better. Before the Supreme Judge, it is a question of the quality of work and not of weight. The world looks for sensation - for glory which comes from men.

The true disciple of Jesus Christ should seek to be ignored, to hide away from the eyes of men.. as for you, get inside your room."(Mt.6,6).

61. THE LESS THERE IS OF US THE MORE THERE IS OF GOD

"I am telling you all this, dear François, only to tell myself to do better and to join you in thanking the Lord for the grace he has bestowed upon you in calling you so early in life to share his chalice of bitterness: Can you drink of the cup that I shall drink? It is there that we find the principle and the fullness of virtue; he who follows me does not walk in the darkness.

"Our strength lies in God alone: I can do everything in him who strengthens me, and this strength lies in infirmity. **In all works, the less there is of us, the more there is of God.**' The missionary, even though he be infirm, is a powerful force, if he is really dead to himself and resigned to God's Will"(To Fr. François Decompoix, 17 April 1855).

72 GOD.

"God alone is all powerful, he needed but a word to bring this vast universe from nothingness into existence: Dixit et facta sunt. God alone is infinitely wise, he governs all things through his divine Providence: "You have ordered all things according to their measure, their number and their weight. God is infinitely good. You love everything that exists and you do not hate the work of your hands."

"He is the heavenly Father whose very nature is goodness itself(St. Leo): Not a hair of your head will fall without his permission(Luc.21,18). Our fate is entirely and uniquely in his hands: "Your Father in heaven knows that you need all these things."

73. GOD IS JEALOUS OF HIS GLORY.

"Everywhere and in all things, especially in great undertakings, God is jealous of his glory. God chose what is weak in order to confound the strong: Not unto us, Lord, but to your name, give glory; learn of me, for I am meek and humble of heart. This fundamental base is so necessary and so essential in all our undertakings for God's glory, that Jesus Christ, the sovereign Missionary, his Apostles and all apostolic men never deviated from it. If the Lord does not build the house... on the contrary, God rejects the proud; and so, trust in him and distrust in yourself

74. AS GOD WILL

"What is a vocation if not a choice, in the way of salvation, of creatures...

"It is indeed quite immaterial whether you are in Savoy or India (or anywhere else for that matter).but to be in Savoy when God calls you to India, is perhaps an abominable thing. And so **to be where God wants us to be, and to do the things that God wants us to do, to bear up with the trials he sends us, to obey those he wants us to obey, therein** lies the true wisdom, and that was the way Jesus Christ himself behaved. **That is vocation.**"

75. WHATEVER YOU DO, DO IT WELL.

"Remember this well: It is not important to do much. What is important is to do well whatever you do. It is important that our day be fully occupied. But how? By doing all for God, seeking his glory alone and the salvation of our neighbour, forgetting ourselves entirely".

76. FATHER MERMIER'S EXAMPLE

In 1858 Fr. Mermier is almost disabled: he writes to Sister Marie Péclet:

"A few days back I was thinking of paying you a visit, the day after tomorrow; but seeing that my infirmities are still afflicting me, I felt that it is better to give up the idea.

"Don't think badly of me that in spite of my afflictions I find myself happy and contented to make myself useful to our good scholastics and Brothers. I find happiness in being able, without too much difficulty, to celebrate the holy Mass, to hear the confessions of the Sisters and to follow the little exercises of our small community.

"I also have a little more time to pray for you. Oh, yes, my sisters, I am happy that I am no longer able to do much, so that I can do better in doing less.

"True wisdom does not consist in doing many things, it consists in doing them well".

77 DOING MUCH IN DOING LITTLE

"We should never doubt that sickness is a blessing coming from God's goodness to all those who accept it in a spirit of sacrifice and love. Saint Francis de Sales tells us that the suffering through which he passed did him a lot of good. This of course should not prevent us from taking a reasonable care of our health. And so, take care of yourself; what is important is that in all things we do the will of God.

"We do much in doing little, if we do it for God, when and as he wills it.

"On the contrary, in doing much, we do little and even nothing, as we run the risk of doing it without upright and pure intentions. They have already received their reward and am nothing...what does it profit a man...How comforting this doctrine is to humble souls, how catastrophic to vain and ambitious people. Poor Pharisees, they have laboured in vain.

"Nothing can bring the soul to embrace these sentiments except sickness...God knows well, Saint Francis de Sales used to say, what is good and necessary for us.

78 REPLETE DAYS.

"In a short span of life he accomplished the work of long years."

"Let us admire the eloquence of divine wisdom: In a short compliment, it shows us the meaning of a life of God's servant. In his eyes, it is not necessary to live for a long time, but to live well not long but well. It is not necessary to live long years of life, not even long days, just so long as we live them to the full.

10. ABANDONMENT, HOLY INDIFFERENCE

79. INTERIOR SORROWS AND AFFLICTIONS

"Interior sorrows are an excellent cross which we should carry in a spirit of resignation and even of joy. Fear is the beginning of wisdom. Happy is the servant who lives constantly in fear. When St. Paul tells us to rejoice, he adds: <in the Lord.> True joy is never without thorns and without sacrifices".

80. GREAT DAYS

"You are seeing great days, days which have practically no nights, no rest, no recreation, days which St. Paul calls days of salvation, brimful days, destined to fill the emptiness of other days, to make great profits which prepare the consummation.

"Come on, this talk is too serious for a sick person. What do you say? I say no, for if the fever is high, the head is fine."

81 IN THE COMPANY OF THE BEATITUDES

"I find you today just like on the day when I was separated from you in the hard but salutary company of the beatitudes: let us console ourselves, the roots are bitter, but the fruit delicious, its maturity difficult, painful, but the harvest is abundant; it is necessary that it be so: It was necessary for Christ to suffer and thus enter into his glory We too must pass through the one and the other, otherwise we shall never arrive at our destination..."

82. YOU KNOW WHAT .SHOULD BE DONE

"What is it that I hear? One of these ordinary observations: Yes, but don't I know to suffer as I ought to? What! you don't know, you cannot, if not with your heart, at least with the mouth to say: yes, yes, my excellent doctor, you know what is needed for the make-up of your spouse: wash her in cold water or in hot, as you wish, so long as she is beautiful."

83 EVERYTHING CO-OPERATES... WORKS TOGETHER FOR GOOD

"Our religion is divine. .it is the work of God, it is his blessing

"From man's side, what is great, worthy and consequently perfect is adoration, this entire and absolute submission to the supreme Will of God, this universal conformity of our thoughts, our feelings and our actions to the commands, dispositions of the divine Providence, to his good pleasure.

"Benefit from this new and terrible trial which this divine Providence sends you.

"Don't waste your time trying to scrutinise God's impenetrable designs. Adore and kiss several times a day God's fatherly hand which strikes you, it is infallibly for your greater good.

"The great St. Paul assures us this when he says that everything works for the good of those who love God. And St. Augustine adds to this inspired message: everything

- even evils, even sins like those of Magdalen, of St. Peter, when one profits from them, as they did, to become more humble and more penitent.

84 BE A DAUGHTER OF THE CROSS

"It is good that the divine Master asks greater sacrifices from you.

"Even if it were your life itself, don't refuse him anything; in the example of the Divine Model, say to him: Yes, my Jesus, as you wish and not as I wish.

"Your whole life has been restlessness and trial, it is the life of the true servants of Jesus Christ, who, after his example, do not seek after relaxation in this vale of tears. What great consolations when you have endured everything out of love for Him! Continue as you have begun. Always be more a daughter of the Cross, unite your sufferings with those of Jesus dying on the Cross of Calvary and with those of our Mother of Sorrows standing by his Cross."

85. ALL THE CROSSES ARE NOT MADE OF WOOD.

"You know, if you can remember it, that I am passionately fond of ordinary proverbs: I am going to tell you one which is quite trivial: *All the crosses are not made of wood.* All your anxieties, perplexities are crosses, God's gifts, talents of the Lord, arid land which has to be made fertile by the sweat of your brow.

"Since those are your crosses, you have to carry them all the time - let him carry his cross each day - but with patience, submission and even with love."

86 KISS THEM - DON'T BITE THEM

"I end with the nice words of a venerable vicar whom I knew well: *you have to kiss the crosses, not bite them*

"and I add;" in kissing them you are healed, they become sweet, you learn to love them"

11. PIERRE-MARIE MERMIER, MODEL OF CONFORMITY TO GOD'S WILL

87. MAN PROPOSES AND GOD DISPOSES : Fr. Mermier is in Rome in 1843: he meets with several unforeseen obstacles in his attempts to obtain the official recognition of his Congregation. He writes to his confreres on the feast day of Saint Francis de Sales:

"Man proposes but God disposes; our lives are in his hands; he is a good Father, we couldn't be better off anywhere else except in the arms of his divine Will. I say then: May the most high and the most loving will of God be done."

88 TO PLEASE GOD ALONE

After a pilgrimage to La Salette, Fr. Mermier notes in his diary:

"How does Mary make her appearance?

"I cannot answer: nothing extraordinary, if you wish, for I need to live in humility and modesty; I don't deserve any favours, I wouldn't know how to keep them. No, I hardly think of them, All I wish is to please God alone, is that not all I need?"

"Already a year has passed after my cure, what blessing!

"I should thank my benefactress and hope that I become gentle before everything else and all other good things will be granted to me."

89 IT IS GOOD FOR ME TO BE HUMILIATED.

"My present condition is infinitely consoling because in this condition I feel that it is good for me to be humiliated: 'It is good that you have humiliated me'. This state of humiliation lasting one full year is the greatest favour which the Holy Virgin has obtained for me."

90 AS IT PLEASES GOD.

"If I appear to ask for something better, it is mainly because of my work. "It will be as it pleases God" but finally, from this time and always I remain small and miserable, repeating in spirit and in the heart: it is good to have been humiliated."

91. IN A CONDITION OF HELPLESSNESS.

"Thanks to God, I am still there, I feel neither worse nor better. I write rarely. Do you know why? It is because I don't know.

"If I don't reach the stage of quietism, I could well fall into a state of laziness, I am practically doing nothing, but then, I know that I have to work."

92. DEO GRATIAS.

"1860. Deo Gratias.

"It's long time now - several weeks - that I don't write - I feel neither worse nor better.

"My eyes can't see and I cannot write. When I try to read I suffer from severe headaches and I cannot understand what I write. Long discussions cause me pain. At this moment, given the state of my health, I have to learn to restrain myself: my food, my work, my outings."

93. WHAT IS BETTER FOR ME...

"I don't know about the exact state of my health, I think it is more or less the same. I still have the same difficulties to read and write. People think that I am improving, some of them say that to me, perhaps to please me; I thank them for it, what is better for me, is suffering."

94 FOR THE GREATER GLORY OF GOD.

"I hope that it will be thus for the greater glory of God, for my improvement for the past and future and if it please Jesus, Mary and Saint Francis de Sales."

95 TO MAKE MYSELF A LITTLE LESS BAD.

"I desire to go and visit our Sisters in their different stations.

"But I must hasten to add that man proposes and God disposes. My health has not improved yet, I feel a great need to make myself less fussy; this applies to things, to external works: God alone knows what is worthy of love or of hate.

'To God alone honour and glory, praise to Mary".

96. GOD BE BLESSED.

"I have just written you some lines, but not without pain. I couldn't do any better. God be blessed.

"I feel good today, I am writing freely to you. What would you say to me? God be blessed, you would say, and me too. But then, would you believe that I ought to, or least that I should have wanted to prefer these sufferings if I did not have my responsibility. I hasten to leave everything to the Will of God."

97. A HOLY DEATH.

On the subject of a dying religious (nun) "After a holy life, death is a necessary trial. But what happiness, what consolation to die in the joy of the Lord! May the Lord Jesus and his Blessed Mother obtain that grace for all of us."

98 DEATH AND GLORY.

(On the death of Father Sermet) The news you give me of your dear departed and their precious death is so lovely and worthy of envy that I have not been able to regret their departure.

"Happy these fortunate men who received through God's grace and his infinite mercy to keep themselves pure and who went to wash themselves from the least stains in the long and painful pilgrimage to India. Their charity grew to the heights of God's own charity. They died for the Lord; today they live in the life of God himself.

"How great our joy should be when we learn that one of our brothers has arrived at the final port which is there to welcome all the others; once again, we are crossing this short passage only to reach the haven of this port. It is there, our concern. It is the concern of all the members of the Congregation.

"It will always be a consolation for me when, learning about the death of any of you, I will be able to say: Precious in the eyes of the Lord is the death of his Saints."

12. HUMILITY

A. FATHER MERMIER'S HUMILITY

In the writings of Fr. Mermier, a great number of passages reveal his deep humility and the great esteem he had for his interlocutors. We cite a few of these passages below:

99. "I EXHORT MYSELF..."

"When I exhort you to perfection, to love, to the esteem of your holy Rules, to fidelity in their observance, I exhort myself at the same time. I reproach myself for my

infidelities and then my courage is rekindled, my confidence grows, I count on the purity and the fervour of your prayers and sacrifices."

100 "WHAT YOU WANT THAT I SHOULD BE.

"I really have some desire to be what you would want me to be. Doesn't matter, I accept heartily the honest and respectful procedures you follow towards your Superior.

"I am convinced that he ought to be more capable, more holy, more loving and more perfect. However, his subordinates owe him respect, submission and love even when he is only what he is."

101. "The degree of reputation....

"As for Reigner, and for the smiles lavished upon me by these ladies and gentlemen, I was quite touched at the moment, but God granted me the grace to make in some way or the other my little sacrifice.

"Let us purify our intentions. The judgements of the Divine Master against the pomp and glory of this world are like thunderbolts.

"God knows the degree of reputation that I need, would I merit a higher degree than the one shown to me? I don't know, I should think not. It is God, the Supreme Good, who is my judge.

B. TEACHINGS ON HUMILITY.

102. GOD IS JEALOUS.

"Everywhere and in all things and especially in great undertakings, **God is jealous.** He has chosen the weak to confound the strong. Not to us but to you may glory be given forever and ever. Humility and gentleness are all that are required in an apostolic man. "Learn of me, for I am meek and humble of heart."

"This foundation is so necessary and so essential in the performance of God's work that Jesus Christ himself, the Sovereign Missionary, his Apostles and all apostolic men never deviated from it. If the Lord does not build... on the other hand, God rejects the proud... trust and distrust."

103. THE KNOWLEDGE OF SELF.

(Without this knowledge of self) what does an apostolic man become, what is the zeal that animates him and sustains him in the exercise of his formidable ministry? It is a reed shaken by the wind, a tower built on shifting sand...

"That is what a man is, especially a missionary, who does not know himself, who has not gained a profound knowledge of his weakness. of his nothingness, of his misery, his numberless defects, his daily faults, in a word, a missionary who does not take pains to know himself better each day and all the days of his life and so to understand the words of the Lord: "Without me you can do nothing" and the magnificent words of St. Paul: "I can do everything in him who strengthens me ".

104. TO PLACE ALL OUR CONFIDENCE IN GOD ALONE

"On the contrary, the one who possesses this practical knowledge, who knows himself, who is conscious that he knows nothing, that he is worth nothing in himself, 'what have you that you have not received?' this one **places all his confidence in God**. "I can do everything". What power! what courage! He knows that all success in his apostolic ministry comes from God's infinite mercy, from the efficacy of God's grace, from the power of his divine Word. "At your word I will cast out the net"; he keeps calm and tranquil in the midst of adversity as in the midst of prosperity."

105. SELF LOVE

"Where then does the idea that in all things we have to depend on ourselves alone, come from? That is because we are continually blinded by our self-love, it is because that we do not know ourselves in depth, we have not yet attained the practical knowledge which persuades us and which produces the conviction in the apostolic man that he can achieve nothing on his own, that the success of his mission depends on the action that comes from above. "Without me, you can do nothing."

106. HUMILITY IS ESSENTIAL.

"The fears founded on your humility and the consciousness of your nothingness are but legitimate, they are essential to an apostolic man. But they have to be tempered by confidence in God and guided by obedience, without which, they degenerate into failure and could well become a stumbling block".

107. HUMILITY AND CONFIDENCE.

"To you, my dear confreres, I would say that continually making efforts to renounce yourself, <<let him deny himself,>> so as to hate yourself, <<he who does not hate himself>> you have all the same to dilate your heart and say with the prophet-king: "he who puts his trust in the Lord is like the Mount Sion", you have to base yourself firmly in this confidence which made the same King say "he who resides in Jerusalem will be invincible."

"Trust in God and distrust of self, Saint Francis de Sales used to say, are like the two basins of a weighing-scale: as soon as one mounts the other descends.

"As soon as the distrust of ourselves is complete and absolute, our trust in God will be perfect and we will be in a position to say with St. Paul: I can do everything in him who strengthens me, without fear of deluding ourselves. "In you, Oh Lord, have I hoped, I shall never be disappointed.

108. OUR SOLIDITY.

From God's side, we have nothing to fear but everything to hope for, have no doubt about it. His goodness, his mercy, his power are infinite, his blessings are ineffable, he has given us his only Son, we are his children, nothing is lacking to us in this world nor in the other; he wills, he commands that we ask him for the glory of his Paradise and all the help that we need to reach it: believe and you will receive.

109 DISTRUST OF ONESELF

But , on the other hand. you will tell me, ought I not to distrust my weakness? Oh, yes, certainly, for in spite of the infallible promises of the Lord and the abundance of his graces, a great number of men stagger and perish.

"But why do they stagger? It is precisely because they don't distrust themselves enough, it is because they rely too much on their prudence, that they lean on a reed instead of leaning on God and placing themselves in the arms of divine Providence: my fate is in your hands: There lies the source of evil; all men are like the prodigal son, they wander away from the Father's house where there is abundance of good things in order to follow their own whims and fancies , in search of creatures, where they find only misery and death: and "as for me, I am dying of hunger."

110. HAVE CONFIDENCE .

"You, who are struggling relentlessly at this perfect and complete renouncement and have to continue doing so till the death of self, to the total destruction of this self-love without which there will never be any distrust of self, Oh, yes, I can tell you with certainty: have confidence; may this confidence grow in the midst of trials, difficulties. God wants it. **"You will be stronger, more powerful, more holy in the measure that you will consider yourself weak, poor and useless.** We are but unprofitable servants. Rejoice, then, in your infirmities. "I will take glory in my weakness."

C. EXHORTATION TO HUMILITY.

111. "I FEAR THE MEN WHO CONSIDER THEMSELVES IMPORTANT. <We are but unprofitable servants>

Fr. Mermier writes these words with regard to a Brother who was rendering great service.

112. WITHOUT DISCOURAGEMENT.

"The Vicar of Chaumont has given me your news, it is quite a consoling news to me, it is a compliment to your zeal and the confidence you know that you deserve. "God is constantly making you aware of your misery, you see only your defects, you are oppressed by the consciousness of your ignorance and your incapability's, I thank the Lord for his divine Mercy; it is a precious grace provided that these feelings don't lead you to discouragement; in this case these feelings are excellent and they will lead you to a more fervent and assiduous prayer and reception of the sacraments, they will make you more prudent and humble; what leads us to our perdition is excessive self esteem and presumption."

13. INTERIOR LIFE

113. <<SPIRITUAL EDIFICE>>

After Fr. Martin's departure for India, Fr. Neyret is given the charge of the constructions at Les Allinges: Fr. Mermier writes a long letter to him and in conclusion says:

"Well, that's enough for today, dear confrere, to give you a break from your work with the mortar; **but don't forget the spiritual edifice**".

114. THE IMPORTANCE OF THE <SPIRITUAL>.

"It is quite certain that virtue is not found in external ceremonies if these are not accompanied by a spirit of faith and piety. Even confessions and frequent communions are not enough to render souls more perfect; one can make a wrong use of them. You have to consider good works; it is by the fruit and not by the flowers that one knows that a tree is good.

"These are sure principles: the divine Master repeats them constantly in the Gospel: it is not the one who says: Lord, Lord, who will be saved, but the one who does the will of my Father.'

115. A MAN OF PRAYER: FR. GAIDDON.

"It is difficult for me to tell you how much joy and comfort you give me when you confide to me about the need and advantages of prayer in your life, to make others pray and to pray always, that's a great grace which Jesus grants you. Oh, yes, without this help, we can do nothing, with this help we can do everything.

A CIRCULAR LETTER FROM FR. MERMIER: ON PRAYER.

116 NECESSITY OF PRAYER.

"After the example of the divine Master(Luke 18,1) I should tell you that you must pray all the time. "He prays always who acts according to God"(Beda). "He prays always who performs good deeds(glossa). "Let nothing come in the way of prayer"(Ecl.18,22). "Pray at all times"(Eph.6,18). Pray without interruption"(I Thes.5,17).

Prayer, to each one of us, is a need, a duty, the means of obtaining the unique grace and all other graces proper to our vocation: "Ask, and you shall receive"(Jn.16,24);"All that you ask for in prayer, believe that you will receive it and it will granted to you"(Mc.11,24). God, in his mercy and his infinite bounty begins the work of our sanctification without us: he calls us; it is up to us to cooperate with his loving designs for us: not me, but God's grace in me"(I Cor.15,10)- <if you did not operate, says St. Augustine, God would not cooperate>

The great means, is prayer, continual prayer, the spirit of prayer. Thus had understood the Apostles, brought up in the school of Jesus Christ:<As for us, we will devote ourselves to prayer and the ministry of the Word."(Acts, 6,4) That is how the first Christians had understood it and all of them together had formed one body and one soul. "

117. THE PRIEST, A MAN OF P PRAYER.

"Our soul is like a barren and sterile land : "in terra deserta" which cannot produce fruit unless it is irrigated; more than our body, it is subject to all sorts of illnesses and infirmities. It is ceaselessly under attack from a thousand enemies. This condition of weakness is the consequence of our corrupt nature. God assures us that his grace is sufficient for us: my grace is sufficient for you.(2.Cor.12,9). The means of obtaining it, is prayer: Ask and you shall be given".(Mt.7,7).

"This means, that what is necessary to all the faithful is much more necessary to the priest, to the apostolic man. The priest, by his ordination, has become a man of prayer. "Between the entrance and the altar, the priests will weep"(Joel,2,17). The Church binds him to recite the canonical office. "What happens to the apostolic ministry of a priest who is not a man of prayer? As weak as he is in his nature as other men, it is a sterile ministry, fruitless, even harmful, it's a dead ministry, which instead of enlightening, blinds, instead of healing, kills.

But in a man of prayer, it is a life-giving ministry, it is virtue, it is God's omnipotence, it is a living ministry, it is Jesus Christ himself alive among men. "As the Father has sent me, I also send you", because prayer is all powerful: <There's no man who is more powerful than a man who prays>(St.Chrysostom).<Prayer is efficacious, it pierces the heavens> (St. Augustine).

118. OBSTACLES TO PRAYER.

"We pray, you will tell me.

"Yes, undoubtedly, but do not all those numberless obstacles render this exercise difficult?

The preoccupations of a difficult ministry, a more or less imperfect preparation of lessons, ignorance and study of different and difficult languages, all these are certainly obstacles to the spirit of prayer, and one cannot surmount them except by a deep interior life, working seriously at the death of self and to unite oneself closely to Jesus Christ.

"It is the fruit of a well performed meditation, it is the kingdom of God active in man, it is the interior self, it is a man of prayer, the priest, apostolic man.

Thence I conclude that before everything and always you must train yourself to a life of prayer; it is by prayer that you have to begin and end. "Train yourself to piety. Physical exercise is useful for very few things, whereas the exercise of piety is useful for everything."

119. PREPARATION FOR PRAYER.

"Before beginning to pray, prepare your soul so as not to tempt God"(Ecl.18,23). 1.- Recollect yourself - distance your spirit from all preoccupations and cares foreign to prayer.. 2.- Induce a sincere sorrow of your sins... 3. Humiliate yourself before God, considering on the one hand God's sovereign majesty and on the other, your own nothingness and deep misery.

"**The supreme disposition** lies in this short prayer: "Domine in unione"..Lord, in union with the divine intention in which, Jesus proclaimed, on earth, the praises of God..." It is to unite oneself to Jesus Christ, to pray with him, in him and through

him, for, as St. Paul says, all subsists in him, by him, through him. It is to pray in union with his mystical Body, the Communion of Saints, it is finally to unite ourselves, members of our little Congregation through the perfect observance of our Rules and to render ourselves more and more worthy to offer ceaselessly this divine incense which comes forth only from a heart that is pure and burning with love.

120. EFFICACY OF PRAYER.

With this help(of prayer) we shall be all powerful. I can do everything in him who strengthens me. Without this strength ,we can do nothing. A God has prayed...<He passed the whole night in prayer>. Mary's heart prayed during her sleep, and the creature, the sinner will live without prayer?

"We shall pray, then, in a worthy manner, in a manner more pleasing to God, more useful to our souls and more effective in our own sanctification."

THE LIFE OF PRAYER

121. FORMATION TO PIETY

"This is the first time that I write to you, dear Decompoix, and I would remind you that the life and work of a priest can be resumed in three words: piety, seriousness, ministry.

To train yourself in piety through the faithful observance of the spiritual exercises, first of all in the annual retreats, then through the daily practice of meditation, examens of conscience, spiritual reading, habitual recollection and a greater purity of conscience."

122. FILLED WITH GOD'S SPIRIT

To acquire the knowledge required for ministry: what are the means?

"You have look for them in God's spirit. The Spirit of the Lord: the Apostles received it in abundance and were immediately filled with knowledge: they were all filled with the Holy Spirit.

"Evangelical ministry is God's work and not man's. God is jealous of his glory. I will not give my glory to somebody else. But, to obtain it, this gift of knowledge, you have to ask God for it, you have to draw it down upon yourself through a prayer which is humble and full of confidence.

123. TO KNOW JESUS CHRIST.

"He who follows me, will not walk in darkness, but will have the light of life. From there emerges the fundamental obligation of a *priest* (more than that of a simple layman) and especially of an apostolic man, to know Jesus Christ perfectly, to study his life, to meditate on his divine teachings, to copy his virtues, to imitate his example".

124. THE HOLY SCRIPTURES.

"Study the Scriptures: they render witness to my name"

Saint Ambrose: The Scriptures are a sacerdotal book. All of us have it in our hands, we find it in our office, in the ordinary of the Mass, in all our prayers: we are kind of submerged in them and yet we do not know them at all or know them very little. It is really a prodigy, not to say monstrosity. A small time teacher knows his grammar!

Take note of the use the Fathers of the Church, the Apostles, Jesus Christ himself made of them: <it is written> he used to say, <examine the Scriptures>
I consider this study so necessary that I want all of you have a copy of the Bible."

"The spiritual exercises and especially the examen of conscience and meditation, are really our two eyes, two arms, two feet. They are like the compass of our external operations; they are the family sanctuary where God speaks to the heart the secret language which is not heard elsewhere.

"It is there that the heart feels the effects of the promise which Our Lord makes in these words of the Prophet:

"I will lead the soul to the secret place and there speak to her heart"

126 FIDELITY TO THE EXERCISES.

In June 1848, Frs Larive, Bénistrand, Sermet and Gavard arrive in India. Fr. Mermier confides these young confreres to the care of Mgr. Neyret, the Pro-Vicar Apostolic.:

"These new subjects, who I know are filled with good intentions, need especially to be strengthened in their vocation: the surest and the most effective are to be found in the practice of the spiritual exercises. It is there that you have lead them, it is there you have to bind them.

"It is there that we have to draw the waters of the interior life, spirit of mortification, apostolic spirit, spirit of Jesus Christ.

RETREATS AND SOLITUDE

127. RETREAT. AT THE CENACLE.

You ask for some days of saintly rest which Our Lord frequently proposed to his disciples: Come to a lonely place. Rest a while. This request is quite in line with your piety.

"When Our Lord himself had to spend 40 days in solitude and suffer trials, what then should we ourselves think?

"It was in obedience to God's command that the Apostles went to the Cenacle: it was under the guidance of the Holy Spirit that they spent those holy days which rendered them worthy of so sublime a vocation. The ways of divine Wisdom don't change, they are the same always: like the Apostles, we have to retire to the Cenacle.

Come, then, with the desire to imitate these great models; they gather together and remain in the Retreat and they disperse, not on their own, but on the command of the Lord."

129. THE ANNUAL RETREAT.

"If our daily exercises are so useful to a priestly soul, not to say necessary, how important should an annual Retreat be? I recommend it to you with all my force. Take as your guide the little book of the Exercises. It is ever new and I would say, ever difficult; But we are well rewarded for our pains, after making a good retreat by following it.

129 RETREAT AT LA FEUILLETTE

"On the feast day of St. Peter, I finished the annual retreat which I preached to six of our Missionaries and two of our Brother novices. The Scholastics, especially the two who have been chosen to be sent to Vizagapatam, followed it in part...

Of the five exercises per day, I consecrated two to the reading and explanation of the Constitutions and the Rules. I have said practically everything on the Rules for each month chapter 3, of the 'commons' They understood rather well; I hope we shall be more regular.

"After the vows **the essential thing for apostolic men, is the exercise of abnegation, as it is indicated in this section of the RULES:"**

130 THE EXERCISES OF SAINT IGNATIUS.

"For your Annual Retreat, I recommend to you to follow the book of the Exercises entitled: *Exercitia spiritualia S.I.*" It's a treasure, but it has to be followed. closely and carefully. It is God's Spirit: to understand him, you have to involve him, you have to listen to his voice, you have to obey him. "If we live by the Spirit, we shall also walk in the Spirit"

131. SOLITUDE

"Speaking of Our Lady of La Salette, the principal idea: La Salette preaches a retreat to us and in the retreat, solitude: *I will lead her to a secret place and there I will speak to her heart.*" I am still half-blind and infirm in so many ways that it's much better for me to go into solitude".

132 SOLITUDE: LES ALLINGES

"On the top of the rock, I feel relaxed, in solitude, since I have no one with me except the Brothers who are at work."

133. ENTIRELY AT PRAYER

"My occupation ought to be entirely at prayer and at meditation. All the rest is almost nothing to me and still less to others."

14. OUR LADY

134. NOTRE-DAME DE LA GORGE

"What does the sanctuary of Notre-Dame de la Gorge say to you when you are at the feet of the august Lady who deigns to dwell there, when you confide to her your needs and ours, when you pray to her, when you make the vaults resound with your song while chanting her praises.

"While speaking to you about your desirable solitude, I feel surging in me a longing to go and visit you"

ROME (1842-1843)

135. SAINT MARY MAJOR

"22nd October, Saturday, I said Mass at Saint Mary Major, in the chapel housing her statue. I profited from this lovely occasion to recommend, in a very special manner, to this loving Mother all my Missionaries and other persons... How beautiful are the litanies to the Holy Virgin. What a detailed and pious explanation of the qualities, greatness and glorious titles of Mary! Oh, Virgin Mary, seat of wisdom, obtain for me the grace of reciting your litany in spirit and in heart".

136 THANKS TO MARY

"May God, with all the celestial court, be blessed. Thanks to Mary, to the Holy Apostles Peter and Paul, to Saint Francis de Sales. After nearly two months of waiting and labours, it is only today, after the second novena made especially to Our Lady that I can at last begin to breathe.

"It is then today, Feast of the Presentation of the Blessed Virgin that I have learnt that His Eminence the Cardinal Prefect, has consented to examine the Constitutions and Rules of the Congregation of the Missionaries of Saint Francis de Sales and that he has ordered that they be transmitted to a Consultor of his Congregation.

We have to thank Jesus Christ for it and also his Mother."

137 OUR LADY OF SORROWS

"Today, Feast of the Presentation, I received an authorisation for the canonical erection in our chapel, of a confraternity of Our Lady of Seven Sorrows: it was the devotion of Saint Francis de Sales."

LORETTO (1843)

138. <I KEEP HOPING...>

"I hope that I shall have the joy of passing through Loretto on my journey back: if it pleases the Blessed Virgin, I desire so ardently that she deign to accord this favour to me."(21.11.1842).

"I shall have the joy of passing through Loretto to offer to our common Mother the wishes of her children and to implore her to look upon us with tender eyes. Turn on us your eyes of mercy."(5.1.1843)

139. WHY LORETTO?

"The blessed Mother whom I am going to visit in her own house, will welcome me, unworthy as I am to receive such a favour, perhaps I will not have any offering to make to her but the vows of my poor heart; but I implore her and will implore her to render these vows ardent, to multiply them according to the extent of my needs and according to the number of people to whom I am indebted."

140 AT LORETTO

" Tuesday morning, 23 (June 1843) we arrived around 5 o'clock at Loretto. There, I had the joy of celebrating the holy Mass in the shrine of the Blessed Virgin. Here the Word was made flesh: these words are written in big letters above the altar of the Santa Casa. I had the consolation of seeing, touching and kissing the part of the wall which is behind the altar of the holy chapel and which is not like the other parts of the wall covered with

tears of gold within and a beautiful marble without. I had just a few moments to implore, thank and meditate.

"How great are the goodness and mercy of God. It was not enough for Jesus Christ to show how much he loved us to give us his own Mother to be our very own; look and contemplate what he has done at Loretto to make us know her and love her. If only I had more time, more leisure, more piety to meditate at my ease on the ineffable love of Jesus and his Holy Mother. It was such a great consolation to think that Saint Francis de Sales had come to this same sanctuary. It was during the celebration of the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass I recommended myself to this powerful protector and model that deigned to allow me to offer to our August Lady of Loretto the great sentiments of piety, fervour with he visited her in the past. "How beautiful the countryside of Loretto - so pleasing and so rich. I took delight in meditating on the beautiful canticle of Our Lady of Loretto: Magnificat."

LA SALETTE.(1859)

141 OUR LADY'S FAVOURS.

"A long, costly, painful, dangerous pilgrimage...undertaken under the inspiration of OUR LADY OF LA SALETTE after my cure and after the innumerable favours which I received and which I receive each day from this loving Mother, graces among which I consider to be the most remarkable the one that she deigned to uphold me before God and before men after a life of dissipation and vanity, grace which continues to bring forth the same effects with which she started: in such a way that when I wanted to go faster, it would be impossible for me."

142. A CONVERSION.

"Mary, by teaching me to be another man, a more humble, more gentle, more mortified man...my new state forces me to be so: this loving Mother, ever since my return to this new state, obtained for me enough strength, enough light to uphold me and to act in spite of my new state.

143. ALL FOR HER

I can say in summing up, that the most holy Virgin has practically forced me and continues to force me to belong entirely to her and to continue doing so; I have utter trust now and I will continue always with still more trust.

15. FORMATION

144. IMPORTANCE OF FORMATION

"What happiness and what boon to send forth Missionaries in the flower of youth provided they are true Missionaries, men worthy of their sublime vocation, new Apostles, other Christ's full grace and truth. Men who are totally detached from this world and from all its false goods.

"Such men are an immense blessing from the Divine Mercy, an infinitely precious resource for our little Mission. Do not fail in any manner whatsoever to come up to these expectations.

145 FORMATION TO INTERIOR LIFE.

"In order to succeed in this, here is a summary of the counsels I love to give you:

"Work seriously and constantly at your own sanctification.

"Beware of easy illusions: many forget their own sanctification, their salvation, their own perfection under the pretext of working for the salvation of others, for performing works of zeal. What folly! as if man were so necessary, as if the Almighty could not bring his designs to fruition without us... we are but unprofitable servants.

The security against this great evil is found in the strict, careful and constant observance of our holy Rules. They immolate the whole man; through them you do not belong to yourself any longer, you belong entirely to God."

146. STUDY.

"Apply yourself to study before everything else, the things essential to your ministry. Moral and dogmatic Theology, well grasped and analysed contains all these essential factors, holy Scriptures and Tradition, the Councils, the Fathers of the Church...have a thorough grasp over the matter that you teach everyday in your catechism lessons.

Study of languages, the knowledge of the world, of men, of the human heart, the training in preaching, all these things play a great role in the life of a Missionary.

You have to train yourself to the exercise of this saintly ministry.

147. WORK. THE FIELD IS VAST.

"But then, possessing a zeal that is truly apostolic, a great purity of intention, love for work and a spirit of observation, **even men** with mediocre talents, succeed.

"Take careful notes, everyday, if possible.

148. DOCILITY TO THE HOLY SPIRIT.

"Here, then, dear confrere, are some counsels to help you to form yourself without any further delay, to piety, to knowledge, to the exercise of your saintly ministry so that you may work ceaselessly to become, after the example of the divine Model holy, blameless, unstained, separated from sinners, exalted above the heavens(Heb.7,26). This will be the work of the Holy Spirit who will work in you in the measure that you are more faithful or less faithful."

149. THE ESSENTIAL KNOWLEDGE.

"To form oneself in the knowledge that is essential and useful to the exercise of such an important ministry whose success entails grave consequences. What then are means to succeed?

"You ought to seek them in God's Spirit(cf.No.122)

"They are to be found in the holy Scriptures(cf.No.124)

"They are found in theology that is studied, meditated, analysed, compared with practical sciences. The great means is to profit from your experiences, even to take notes so as to cover them at leisure, to consult them in times of doubt."

150. AN OPEN SPIRIT.

"I SAY NOTHING ABOUT the other means offered by other branches of science all of which are useful to apostolic men, considering the almost infinite connections they can have with all sorts people and in all sorts of circumstances.

151. TIME TO STUDY.

"Take as much trouble as you can to reduce the work-load of your young Missionaries, so that they can have enough time to make progress in and to improve their knowledge. Help them as much as you can.

"It is a tremendous boon to have around you robust young men in the flower of their youth, men on whom the Congregation relies for the future advancement of this beautiful Mission.

But then, what misfortune if these young men given a mediocre training were to turn out to be mediocre subjects! Consequently, I have to tell you that you are in duty bound to exercise a strict supervision on them. «Studies, thorough studies are absolutely necessary for our Missionaries."

152. THEOLOGY.

