

# AN HISTORICAL MOMENT OF THE CONGREGATION: EXILE FROM FRANCE (1901 - 1904)

## I - FRANCE BETWEEN THE XIXth AND XXth CENTURY

The French historical period we are dealing with is the Third Republic (1870 - 1914). At that time, the struggle against the Church and its institutions was at its height: and the religious Congregations, male and female, are the hardest hit. After centuries of alliance between the throne and the altar, between the State and the Church, in which compromise and collusion between the two spheres were the order of the day, the XIXth century, for freedom ("sacred" principle introduced by the French Revolution), attacks the religious world and in particular the Church and its institutions, considered as something to be defended from and to defend civil society.

On its part, the institutional Church, in the majority of its representatives, saw no other possibility of dialogue with the civil world than the return to the *ancien régime*, that type of relationship between State and Church which characterised the life of the Church in the preceding centuries, without keeping in mind that, now, civil society had taken on its own way, one stopped with great difficulty (this way, one can understand the interventions by the Magisterium like the *Syllabus*, and the arduous but vain, and today we might add futile, defence of the *Patrimonium Sancti Petri*).

In a strongly anti-clerical context, especially typical of the Latin countries of Europe and America, France represents an example of how the impossibility of dialogue brought to a schism of the relationships between State and Church, whose repercussions have touched every field of ecclesial life, especially the religious Congregations.

Hostility towards the Church, in France, already had seen its first great act in the revolution of 1789; now in 1870, with the fall of Napoleon III and the affirmation of the III Republic, it becomes popular once again and brings, in the years that follow, the affirmation of ever more anti-clerical laws that strike the confessional school, religious institutes and Christian structures in general.

On the other hand, the French Catholics did not put up a compact and united front able to face the abuse of power perpetrated by the various anti-clerical and mason governments. In fact, many of them could not conceive of being Catholic without being for the monarchy: reflecting the mentality of the *ancien régime*, these Catholics only saw the possibility of being Christian at the same time as being monarchists. Therefore, they could not accept that France, the Church's firstborn, took on a type of republican government, and that it also proved to be strongly hostile to the Church. Seen from the opposition, these views brought about just one more motive for hating Christianity and the Church, accused of having denied freedoms and the rights of man and trying to return to the throne-altar marriage typical of the preceding centuries. However, it is true to say that Catholics that, even if a minority, recognised the new form of government, that accepted a secularised state, where the Church, no longer counting on the state's protection, had to make every effort with its strengths alone to form, through an adequate pastoral, the consciences of the citizens and, based on this, to root the Christian spirit of justice and charity in society.

The monarchical Catholics never stopped attacking, through the militant press (*Le Pèlerin* and especially *La Croix* of the Fathers of the Assumption), the supposed enemies of

the Church, Protestantism, masons and Judaism, the main causes, in their eyes, of anti-clericalism. *La Croix*, in 1890, publicly stated that it was the most anti-Jewish newspaper in France. This attitude was in contrast with the caution of the pope and the majority of the French episcopate, who wanted to maintain good relations with public power. Pope Leo XIII, conscious of the place and importance of the French in the missions abroad, tried to reconcile the differences between civil power and ecclesiastic power, each “sovereign” in its own field and he also recognised that the sovereignty of a State is not bound by any particular form of politics.

Towards the end of the 1880’s, Leo XIII imposed the “*ralliement*” (adhesion/acceptance) with the Republic, the acceptance of the republican form and its constitution. The Pope intervened on several occasions. In February 1882, with the encyclical *Au milieu des sollicitudes*, he invited the French Catholics to accept the republican constitution, without ambiguities; and in the letter to the French cardinals, the 3<sup>rd</sup> of May 1892, he said: “*Accept the Republic, that is to say, accept the power constituted and existing among us; respect the Republic; submit to it as it represents the power coming from God*”. The policy of *ralliement* desired by the pope, and whose main supporter was Card. Lavigerie, seemed to be successful at the beginning of the 1890’s, thanks to some initiatives promoted by the “*ralliés*” Catholics and to the victory of the moderate republicans in the political elections.

But the tensions continued. Monarchical Catholics and Republican radicals were on the alert to grasp even the slightest signal capable of breaking this Church-State “alliance” wanted by Rome and the majority of parliamentarians and that would have its point of greatest success during the Méline government (1896-1898). In fact, from the summer of 1898, the Dreyfus case (an Alsatian and Hebrew soldier accused unjustly of espionage and attacked by the majority of the Catholic world) would progressively modify the political situation to the detriment of all Catholics, making Leo XIII’s policy of *ralliement* ebb forever and contributing to the exacerbation of the State’s anti-clericalism.

## **II - THE BETHARRAMITE CONGREGATION AT THE BEGINNING OF THE XX CENTURY**

### **2.1 THE INHERITANCE OF FR. ETCHECOPAR**

When Saint Michael Garicoïts died in 1863, the Congregation of the Priests of the Sacred Heart of Jesus lived one of its most difficult moments, capable of compromising the ideals and the works of its founder.

The weak generalate of Fr. Jean Chirou (1863-1873), which however had the merit of having patiently and painfully known how to keep alive the tension towards that type of life wanted by the founder, risked losing the impulse and the dynamism of the young Congregation, striving towards conservation rather than expansion of Saint Michael’s work.

The Bishop, Msg. François Lacroix, contributed greatly to this, for 40 years (1838-1878) at the Episcopal see of Bayonne, the one the Congregation depended upon. In fact, the bishop never wanted, until the end of his life, the Congregation to be officially recognised by Rome and directly subservient to the Episcopal jurisdiction. All this created nothing but disorders and equivocations, especially on the meaning and the duration of religious vows, obligatory according to what the founder taught, but optional, as indicated by the bishop in the Constitutions imposed after Saint Michael’s death (Constitutions that did not even provide for autonomous administration). Also, the presence of the American communities founded

outside of the Bayonne diocese, already at the founder's times, reinforced the confusion and the uneasiness, communities that were not juridically submitted to the authority of Msg. Lacroix and knew how to keep the memory and the ideal of religious life alive.

Therefore on one hand, obedience towards the bishop, always asserted and taught by Saint Michael (and that would constitute for years a kind of fourth vow, next to the three traditional ones), on the other hand, faithfulness to the founder's ideal, joined to the desire to see Rome's recognition and approval of the Society, created a situation that seemed to be without solution. Certainly if the number of those who left the Congregation during these years was relatively low, this was due to the mediating work of Fr. Chirou and to the memory and veneration of the founding father.

It was thanks to the work of Fr. Auguste Etchécopar, first as secretary general, then as vice-general and finally and above all as third superior of the Congregation, if the Congregation itself survived and saw the triumph of Saint Michael's project.

During his lengthy generalate, Fr. Etchécopar set himself three main objectives.

First the approval by the Holy See of the Congregation and its Constitutions. This was not an easy task. Duvignau writes that Msg. Lacroix always seemed deaf to the requests made by Fr. Etchécopar, but "*he finally yielded, but an imposition from heaven was necessary*".

In fact, a young Palestinian sister lived in the Carmel of Pau, Sister Mary of the Crucified Jesus, whose life was marked by exceptional phenomena. Now, on the 2nd and the 4<sup>th</sup> of May 1875, this sister, according to the biographers, in a state of ecstasy, received and transmitted to the bishop the heavenly order to ask Rome for approval of the Betharramite rules. Msg. Lacroix was very impressed that a humble Carmelite should express herself so favourable towards the Betharramite Congregation and on the need for Roman approval. Fr. Etchécopar, kept in contact with these events by Fr. Estrate, spiritual director of the Carmel, soon after received letters of presentation from the bishop with which he could request papal approval for his congregation.

The two priests, invited to Rome with the rules of the Congregation and with the bishop's letter of presentation, met on the 22<sup>nd</sup> of May in the Church of Santa Maria sopra Minerva with the Dominican Fr. Bianchi, general postulator of the Dominicans and one of the consultants of the Congregation of Bishops and Religious, who committed himself to present the text of rules and have them examined. Pius IX, with a decree by the above-mentioned Congregation, on July 30<sup>th</sup> 1875, praised and recommended the Institute of Betharram placed from now on under the protection of the Holy See. The matter concluded in a very quick way: let us keep in mind that the Holy See had approved many other institutes, Italian, French and Spanish, during those years. The most difficult step had been achieved, however.

Once having obtained Roman approval, Fr. Etchécopar committed himself to the second point of his program: to make the Church recognise the holiness of the founder. For this, he had charged Fr. Basilide Bourdenne to prepare a biography of Fr. Garicoïts, which appeared in 1878; later, he himself would collect and publish, in part, letters and other writings by the founder. Between 1878 and 1879, encouraged by Msg. Ducellier, who had succeeded Msg. Lacroix in the meantime, and by Leo XIII himself, he began the preparations to introduce the cause for beatification of the founder.

Finally, the third point of the Superior General's program, the most important one, was the work of spiritual and material consolidation of the Congregation and its works. After many years of disappointments and bewilderment, a turning point was necessary to once again take into hand the life traced by the founder, to rebuild the spiritual edifice based on the foundations created by Saint Michael.

At Etchécopar's death, correctly considered the second founder, the Congregation of Betharramite fathers had solid and sure spiritual and juridical bases upon which to develop

into being, following the founder, that “mobile camp of picked soldiers, ready to hasten wherever obedience calls them”.

## 2.2 THE CONGREGATION’S WORKS IN FRANCE

The General Chapter held in 1897 elected Victor Bourdenne, a native of Buzy (Atlantic Pyrenées, 1841), and once the master of the novices, director of the college of Bétharram and Fr. Etchécopar’s General Assistant, as the new Superior of the Congregation.

During the twelve years of his generalate, the Congregation endured another dramatic moment, but which in this case never compromised its existence. The solid foundations made by Fr. Etchécopar represented security against any attempt to dissolve it, even the anti-clericalism of the State of Combes which was never attempted.

At the beginning of the century, the Congregation was present in the diocese of Bayonne; in Buenos Aires, Rosario and Montevideo in South America; and in Bethlehem in Palestine. And it counted 13 residences (the complex of Bétharram, Orthez, Oloron, Bayonne, Anglet, Sarrance, Pau, Bethlehem, Buenos Aires - San Juan, Buenos Aires - San José, Rosario, Montevideo, Almagro), of which 7 of these were Colleges. The number of professed religious was approximately 250.

In the diocese of Bayonne, the Congregation included several different works.

The Marian sanctuary of Betharram with the monastery annexed to it, was the seat of the Superior General and his Council and the religious entrusted with the popular missions (for which at the end of the century a house was built called the *maison neuve*). Next to the monastery, the college *Notre-Dame*, founded by Saint Michael in 1837 and built along the borders of the Gave on land in part donated by the diocese and in part bought by Fr. Garicoïts and Fr. Etchécopar. At the moment of the exile, the College counted 300 students and a faculty of 24 professors (of which two religious brothers). Betharram was also the see of the apostolic school of the Congregation.

Next to the complex in Betharram, the Betharramites managed the College *Moncade* in Orthez, founded in November 1849 and the College *Sainte Marie* of Oloron (opened in 1855). Also in 1874, Msg. Lacroix entrusted the Congregation with the College *Saint Louis de Gonzague* of Bayonne. These three colleges, in 1903 before the exile, counted for more than 400 students and 29 Betharramite religious (assisted by diocesan priests and also by lay people).

Apart from these scholastic and educational works, the Betharramite fathers had been entrusted with the religious service in the Marian sanctuary of Sarrance and service in the church of Saint Louis de Gonzague in Pau. Finally, there was the chaplaincy of the *Servantes de Marie* in Anglet.

Next to these stable works, a good part of the religious were also dedicated to the popular and preaching missions. From the point of view of the apostolate, the Congregation was committed on two fronts: education and the popular missions.

The small number of the community and the religious becomes immediately evident, especially if one thinks that in 1903 forty years have gone by since the death of the founder. Many different factors contributed to this small number.

Certainly, first of all, the lateness with which the Congregation received Roman approval (1875), that for twelve years, those after the founder’s death, blocked any initiative, impeding any possible geographical development of the society.

But this does not suffice, if it is true that after the Roman approval things certainly did not change. One element that I believe contributed greatly in creating the above-mentioned

situation is a certain narrow mentality, closed, not open to a more universal character, nor were the superior generals exempt from this, a mentality that can be illustrated with some data: till 1903, due to a certain difficulty in accepting vocations that were not French, American vocations were not looked for; also after the death of the Founder and till the exile (1863-1903), only four new residences were opened (the colleges of Bayonne and Rosario and the residencies of Bethlehem and Almagro). In France, a too literal faithfulness to the founder's charisma, which imposed obedience to the bishop, was concretely translated into faithfulness to the only bishop of Bayonne and this blocked, on one hand, the propagation of the work into other dioceses and, on the other hand, blocked the consciousness of full autonomy (an undoubtedly "diocesan" mentality difficult to erase; the fact that for a lengthy period a promise of obedience to the bishop was included in the vows was significant). Also, the colleges carried great weight, they absorbed the whole life of the Congregation, we must keep in mind that the education of youth, through the proper schools, was an answer given by Saint Michael, among the many others, to a real need of the times; the history of the Congregation instead made it an absolute, making it the only answer. Finally, I believe that "*les Oeuvres*", as they were emphatically called, paralysed the dynamism typical of any Congregation during the first years of life: we can say that our Congregation lived on the laurels and on the greatness of the colleges. The exile, at least in France, certainly woke us from this dullness.

It is also true that, in the difficult moment of the exile, all this had its own decisively positive side. The small number of religious and of communities in France and their presence only in the diocese of Bayonne, located next to a State border, will make the road of exile imposed by the State less difficult and less arduous. Different from other more numerous Congregations as to religious and residencies, the Betharramite Congregation could work with more harmony and more unity according to an established plan to face the present adversity.

### **III - THE LAW OF JULY 1<sup>ST</sup> 1901 AND THE FIRST DECISIONS TAKEN BY THE CONGREGATION**

#### **3.1 THE WALDECK-ROUSSEAU AND COMBES GOVERNMENTS. THE LAW ON ASSOCIATIONS**

Having come into power as a government to end the disorders caused by the Dreyfus case, Waldeck-Rousseau will begin a vigorous offensive against the regular clergy that was accused of having fermented the dispute on the *Affaire*. Combes, who succeeded Waldeck-Rousseau, will finish the work begun by his predecessor, but went beyond, to undermine Catholicism itself, hitting the religious first, then free teaching and finally by creating a basis for the separation of State and Church.

Against the religious Congregations, Waldeck-Rousseau was strengthened by these arguments. First, he was preoccupied about making a strong State. For him, the decisive role played by the Congregations on the national level was explained due to the lack of these prerogatives, the absence of the State. The existent Concordat with the Holy See, established at the time of Napoleon Bonaparte, did not mention religious Congregations, which by that time, as stated by the Prime Minister, due to the lack of legislation concerning them, had developed numerically, accumulating huge goods, resisting fiscal laws, descending on the political field for electoral propaganda, forming youth against the "sacred" rights sanctioned by the revolution, thus breaking the moral unity of the country. For Waldeck-Rousseau, the

Dreyfus case had opened the eyes of government, recognising that there was no defence against the Congregations. Therefore, someone had to end this kind of State within a State.

Therefore, the Prime Minister wanted to limit the power of the religious Congregations and submit them to republican law. For this, he presented a project for a law on associations, that was to regulate the relationship between Government and religious Congregations (placed on the same level as any other public association), that was ignored by the existing Concordat. But if Waldeck-Rousseau wanted this law to block religious Congregations from forming a State within a State, his successor Combes, from the moment he gained power, transformed the law into an instrument to destroy “*congregationalist*” teaching and then the same Congregations.

Combes, an ex-seminarian, was so anti-clerical as to make the fight against religious Congregations the main point of his political battle. If one pointed out to him that one could not reduce the politics of a large country such as France to the only battle against the Congregations, he would answer: “*I assumed power exactly for this*”.

Combes was president of the commission charged by Waldeck-Rousseau to study the law project for associations and picked this occasion to force his hand against Congregations. In fact, these, according to the law project, had to request prior authorisation of the government. But the commission, presided by Combes, substituted this authorisation, by decree of the Council of State, with a legal authorisation to be requested of Parliament within three months (making this request for authorisation become a political matter, not only administrative), also adding the prohibition to teach to those who were part of a non-authorized Congregation. This way, the same law guaranteed liberal measures for the lay associations, while it placed the religious Congregations under exceptionally rigid rules; or, in other words, the same law while giving freedom to all associations, also gave the State the faculty of negating it to the Congregations. Despite the opposition of the moderates that asked for tolerance even for the least tolerant, the project, modified in this manner, and accepted by the government became a law on July 1<sup>st</sup> 1901.

Briefly let us look at the content of the law for associations. It is divided into three parts: the first two concern associations in general, the third concerns religious Congregations.

For the associations in general, the new law seems fairly liberal. The preliminary authorisation required by article 291 of the Penal Code is in fact revoked: any association could be recognised juridically by presenting to the prefecture its social see, its title and the object of the association, names, professions and domicile of those signing on (art. 2 and 5).

As opposed to the other associations, religious Congregations instead could not be formed without a law from Parliament, while the closing of the Congregation or the closing of all its residencies could be pronounced by a decree from the Council of Ministers. Also, they could not found any new residencies without a prior decree by the Council of State (art. 13).

The religious of a non-authorized Congregation are not allowed to direct, directly or indirectly, any kind or level of school, and teach in them (art. 14). This way, especially the teaching Congregations were hit and any free teaching was menaced.

All Congregations that formed without authorisation will be declared illegal and its members could be taken to court; the fines will be doubled for the founders and the administrators (art. 16). Thus, a law that was to proclaim and guarantee a new freedom for the associations in general, in reality, restricted the freedom of the religious by creating a new type of crime, *the crime of congregation*.

Finally, it was established that the existing Congregations at the time of the promulgation of the law, if they had not been authorised or recognised in the past, had to

present a request for authorisation within three months, and if this did not occur, the time having ended, they would be dissolved by law (art. 18). The same fate awaited those Congregations whose request was denied. The goods of the dissolved Congregations would then be liquidated by a seller nominated by the court.

Combes' battle against the Congregations would spare no one. The law on associations foresaw, for every Congregation, the presentation to Parliament of a dossier relative to the statutes, the members and the activities of the same Congregation, to obtain the authorisation by the Government. Combes would manage to refuse authorisation to all religious Congregations. Not content with this, Combes will deny the right to teach in any kind or level of school to ex-religious.

The same fate will happen to the Betharramite Congregation.

### 3.2 THE REQUEST FOR AUTHORISATION AND OTHER INITIAL PROCEDURES ADOPTED BY THE BETHARRAMITE CONGREGATION

The first signs of the law being discussed in Parliament in Paris and the possible consequences to the Congregation can be found in the report of the Council General, dated November 28<sup>th</sup> 1900. On this occasion, no decisions were taken, if not the decision to consult some lawyer friends in Pau.

Three weeks later, January 16<sup>th</sup> 1901, the same Council examined the possible measures to be taken against the law being discussed in Paris. It seems evident that the Superiors were waiting for the results of the parliamentary discussion. Still on the 12<sup>th</sup> March, Fr. Bourdenne asks what to do in case of confiscation, in his diary.

At the beginning of March, the bishop of Bayonne, Msg. François Jauffret, published a heart-felt pastoral letter addressed to the entire clergy of his diocese on the occasion of the parliamentary discussions of the law on associations, it outlined the same things as the letter from Leo XIII to the Parisian Archbishop Richard. The bishop underlined the assured guarantees made in the Napoleonic Concordat on religion and in particular the importance of the French Congregations for their role they were playing in France with their charitable and educational works, and abroad with their work of evangelisation and to ensure the maintenance and extension of French influence beyond the national territories. Concluding, Msg. Jauffret invited his clergy to careful reflection on the present events and hoped that the French Government and the Holy See could, through, a new Concordat, regulate the situation of the religious with relationship to the State, for the good of religion, society and the nation.

At this difficult time, Msg. Jauffret, on more than one occasion, manifested his own sympathy and his own attachment to Betharram; as a matter of fact, death will call him right when he was convalescing in the mother-house of the Betharramites.

But any attempt to convince the Government from going on with the law was in vain. In fact, on July 1<sup>st</sup> 1901, as foreseeable, the law was approved and promulgated, inciting a vast echo of discontent in the whole country.

As required by art. 5, the first duty of the Council General was to redact the request for authorisation to be sent to the Parliament for the juridical recognition of the Congregation. After much discussion and after consultations on the opportunity of a request with the fathers in Lourdes and with the Nay Dominicans, between the end of August and the beginning of September 1901 the request was ready. It consisted in a dossier made up of the Statutes of the Congregation, a list of residencies and religious and an explanatory note, presenting the history of the Congregation, placing the accent in particular on the work it was doing in Betharram and abroad and on the spirit that animated it.

Fathers Lullier and Vignau were charged with taking the request for authorisation to Paris. And on September 18<sup>th</sup> it was deposited in the House.

One could only wait now.

The 1902 elections, with Emile Combes attaining power, succeeding Waldeck-Rousseau, exasperated and created more difficulties in the relationship between the Religious and Government. There was little to hope for from the new Parliament. Also, in the department of the Lower Pyrenées, the anti-clerical newspaper, newly founded, *La Frontière*, had already attacked the Congregation several times.

On June 15<sup>th</sup> 1902, the bishop of Bayonne, Msg. Jauffret, dies. Two days later, the chapter of the cathedral elected Diharce and Casseignau as chapter vicars for the entire period of vacancy of the see. At the end of the month, the Subprefect of Bayonne, Viguerie, was nominated as administrator of the episcopal patrimony.

The death of Msg. Jauffret and the duration of the vacancy of the see (until spring 1906) aggravated the juridical situation of the Betharramites in relationship to the diocese. The authorities of the department, and in some ways even some unqualifiable extremes of the diocesan clergy, would work towards facilitating the removal of the Betharramite religious, grasping at the opportunity given by the dissolution of the Congregation to take possession (or repossess) the buildings that they had occupied for some time.

Subprefect Viguerie was therefore charged to manage the works tied to the episcopal patrimony. For this reason, July 20<sup>th</sup> 1902, he sent a letter to all the superiors of the religious communities asking, among other things, on what conditions and by what title they occupied the buildings owned by the episcopate. In a report dated November 3<sup>rd</sup> 1902 sent to the Prefect of the Lower Pyrenées, Francière, Viguerie made his intentions clear:

- \* if the Betharramite Congregation had obtained the authorisation it would have helped normalise the actual situation regarding the buildings they occupied and in case would buy or rent the buildings in which they resided now;
- \* if the Congregation had not obtained the authorisation, the goods of the Congregation would be sold by the episcopal patrimony.

Then Viguerie proposed waiting for Parliament's decisions.

Before its legalisation, or not, from the Parliament in Paris, the Congregation of Betharram faced an alternative: to buy or to rent the buildings (which do not belong to them, but to the episcopate), or abandon them. In such a situation, the bishop who could guarantee the legitimacy of occupying the various houses was missing, a legitimacy that the previous bishops had always recognised. And even if the Congregation were to obtain the authorisation, it is difficult to believe that, lacking the Ordinary, the administrator of the patrimony would act differently. The course of events seems to want, at any cost, the exile of the Betharramites from their works.

In Betharram, the Superior General Bourdenne called all local superiors to discuss the steps to be taken in response to the letter that they had all received. An inquiry, conforming to the Subprefect's requests, and a report on the situation in relationship to the patrimony were decided upon.

It became clear, from the answers sent to Viguerie, as for the houses in Pau, Anglet, Sarrance, Orthez, Bayonne and Oloron, that there were no documents attesting title Betharramite ownership of any sort. Undoubtedly, the houses belonged to the episcopal patrimony. But the point was made that each and every bishop, from Msg. Lacroix on, had always confirmed the presence of the Betharramites in the above-mentioned buildings. Concerning the Moncade College in Orthez, the point was also made that when the



community arrived, for the first time, in 1849, it was completely empty and it was thanks to the founder that it was furnished and structured to make it really a college. In the other residencies as well, most of the furnishings belonged to the Congregation.

As for the buildings located in Betharram (sanctuary, monastery, college, *maison neuve*), a different and more complex situation existed, especially regarding the *Notre-Dame* college. It was built partially on lands given by Msg. Lacroix in 1837, but also on lands not belonging to the episcopal patrimony that were bought by Msg. Etchécopar. Therefore, the Congregation firmly asserted title to the property.

The report, prepared by the local superiors with the general superior, approved by the chapter vicars, was sent to the Subprefect of Bayonne. But no one had any illusions regarding the outcome. In his diary, August 13<sup>th</sup>, Fr. Bourdenne noted: “*Here we are threatened in our diocesan situation because of the possible sell of the goods of the patrimony*”.

On September 11<sup>th</sup>, the surveyors sent by the patrimony arrived in Betharram to look at the buildings. But, as proposed by Viguerie, the affair had no follow-up for the time being.

In the meantime, a much more serious problem was afflicting the Congregation: the destiny of free teaching in France and the destiny of the same Congregation.

Things could not be left up to the last moment. Too many things needed to be done in view of possible exile: where to send the expelled religious (the Congregation, in fact, had few places capable of welcoming approximately one hundred religious); how to safeguard the search for vocations; how to guarantee the spiritual and theological formation of the religious students; what to do to save what belonged to the Congregation; and still, how to guarantee the students regular participation and finalisation of courses in the colleges, if the Betharramite teachers were sent away.

Many were the questions made to the superior general, whom the entire Congregation depended upon. The only possibility was expatriation. Any attempt at opposition seemed vain.

Foreseeing the worst, Fr. Bourdenne made some dispositions. On October 30<sup>th</sup>, he sent a letter to all the local superiors in which he stated his thoughts, because “*it is our duty to reflect on the ways to safeguard our religious existence during the demanding trial waiting for us*”. In America, the Congregation already had some residencies and ultimately, due to the pope’s initiative, the prospect of a community in Asuncion had opened. America will welcome us with open arms, said Fr. Bourdenne, but he added that not everybody could emigrate there. This obliges the distinction between two categories: the old or sick could continue to live their community lives in one of the countries bordering France (Spain or Belgium); those strong enough could migrate to America or, where possible, stay in the Bayonne diocese, in which case they would receive a *modus vivendi* compatible with the obligations of religious life. In concluding his letter, Fr. Bourdenne invited all the religious to let him know their thoughts on the matter: who wanted to go to America? Who thought they could stay in dioceses without any problems (perhaps staying with their own families in case of a rapid exile)? Who wanted to migrate to near-by countries? This way, the superior general tried to face possible exile while at the same time safe-guarding the obligations of religious life.

In the meantime, the offers of help became more numerous: the Provincial Mother of the Daughters of the Cross were ready to welcome Bourdenne, just like the parish priest of Sainte-Marie of Oloron; the deacon of Lescar and other diocesan priests let it be known that they were willing to welcome some of the religious in their rectories. Fr. Estrate, the superior of Bethlehem, called upon by the superior general several times, was especially ready to

welcome the postulants, the novices and the students. For this, he was already working on the acquisition or building of a new house in the Holy Land; attempts were made in Jaffa, in Emmaus and in Nazareth.

The General Council's reunions were ever-more frequent. The letter of October 30<sup>th</sup>, already foreseeing the dissolution of the Congregation, allowed for three ways out, as seen above: to go to America in the already existing colleges (Buenos Aires and Rosario) and the soon to be opened ones (La Plata and Asuncion); to establish themselves in new residencies in Spain or Belgium; or to remain in the Bayonne diocese, without secularisation, that is without renouncing one's religious state to root oneself in the diocese.

But on more than one occasion, the General Council asked itself about the possibility of secularisation to thus be able to continue to manage and thereby maintain the works of the diocese of Bayonne. Of course the offers proposed by the dioceses were not very attractive: the work of the "secularised" in fact was not paid. The chapter vicars, then, had expressed their ideas. They avoided to take on any responsibility and their ideas were clear: "Do not create problems for us!" Finally, the religious who would be secularised were the object of strict surveillance by the government authorities.

But above all, the young were greatly attracted to secularisation. In a conference on March 15<sup>th</sup>, the superior general declared that secularisation was a delicate and difficult solution and invited all to show courage and generosity: "*America is waiting for you with open arms...*".

Thus, Fr. Bourdenne, after having asked for the views of all the religious, decidedly oriented himself towards expatriation. It was a difficult decision because it implied abandoning those works which had been in the hands of the Betharramites for tens of years, works started with so many difficulties by the founder. But "*...it's time to show our courage and especially our confidence in God and in his Holy Mother. Our Lord bears the Congregation in his Heart, and Our Lady protects it under her mantle. Our brave Founder himself cries to us from Heaven: Always ahead!!!*" (Letter dated October 30<sup>th</sup>, 1902)

## **IV - THE REFUSAL OF AUTHORISATION AND EXILE**

### **4.1 THE CHOICE OF "REFUGES" ABROAD**

Already in autumn of 1902, the General Council searched for new residencies abroad, where the expatriated religious of France could be welcomed.

As demonstrated in the letter dated October 30<sup>th</sup>, the main worry was for the old and the young in formation, the postulants, the novices and those studying. For the last two, novices and students, Palestine was the orientation. Fr. Estrate declared his availability to receive novices and students and to found even a new residence in Bethlehem. In a letter dated April 25<sup>th</sup> 1903, Fr. Estrate spoke of the future residence in Nazareth as a refuge for the expatriates. But the house will only be inaugurated in 1910. In any case, the other residence, in Bethlehem, made larger, would welcome novices from the beginning of the First World War, and the philosophy and theology students of the entire Congregation until its subdivision into Provinces.

The choice of Spain almost seemed obligatory, since the diocese of Bayonne borders, in the south, with the Iberian peninsula. Due to this on October 20<sup>th</sup>, Fr. Lullier and Fr. Castainhs left for Spain to meet the bishop of Vitoria and with the governing authorities of Guipuzcoa. Both these authorities told the fathers that permission from the government in Madrid was necessary to establish a community in Spain.

In this sense, the intervention of Charles Vic was decisive, an ex-alumni of the Bayonne College and now a resident of San Sebastian, who knew important people at the court in Madrid, especially Madame Josefina Merry del Val, the mother of the future Pius X and wife of the Spanish ambassador to the Holy See, and Countess de Mirasol. Thanks to their interest on December 22<sup>nd</sup>, Spanish authorisation arrived but bearing conditions, not to open schools or churches.

Four days later, Fr. Lullier and Fr. Castainhs were back in Spain to look for the right house to receive a more or less large group of religious. Various offers were taken into consideration by the General Council. At the end, in February 1903, it was decided to rent a house located in Irun, belonging to Madame Anatol, the house's name was *Buena Vista*.

The option for Spain was most certainly a happy one. But it is also true that, as often repeated by the superior general, these residencies (including the one in Belgium), were always “refuge” residencies, temporary residencies while waiting to return to France. But there are no doubts that the Spanish option was positive, because it permitted the Congregation to in fact continue the work of searching for vocations, this time not only within the region of origin, but, for the first time, even beyond the restricted boundaries. During the following years, the Congregation will buy two more houses, one in Irun (the see of the General Council) and the other in Fontarrabia (Mendelu, see of the apostolate).

Instead, the Belgian foundation imposed itself for the linguistic affinities that link the two nations. On this occasion, the General Council found valid help in the Mevins family, who had come to Betharram several times for pilgrimages. This family was called upon by Bourdenne.

The first option was for Varres, near Namur. Fr. Lacq and Fr. Abbadie, on January 9<sup>th</sup> 1903, went to Belgium to look at the house that was offered. In the meantime, the General Council received another offer, from Lesves, always in the diocese of Namur. January 19<sup>th</sup>, Lacq and Abbadie returned from Belgium and referred upon their trip: the house in Varres was far from answering the needs of the Congregation, as it was small and difficult to reach (the nearest train station was about ten kilometres away). The Council decided to refuse this offer, while the one in Lesves became more interesting.

In February, Don Martin, the Mevins family preceptor, sent the plans of the Lesves property to Betharram, it belonged to the Baron of Rosey, and consisted in a castle in the middle of a large park. On February 12<sup>th</sup>, Fr. Lullier and Fr. Permasse left for Belgium. On the 21<sup>st</sup>, the General Council gave its favourable opinion to rent the Lesves property. On March 8<sup>th</sup>, Fr. Coumes, momentarily designated as the person responsible for the new residence, with Brothers Louis and Jean-Marie, left for Lesves to prepare the house for the reception of the expelled religious. The Belgian residence would welcome, until its closing, the apostolate of the Congregation.

The choice of the Belgian “refuge”, however, did not seem to be a perfectly thought out choice, from the beginning. Several letters from the first Betharramites in Belgium underlined the difficulties of insertion and the lack of work. The lack of a serious apostolate, a kind of nostalgia for Betharram, the distance from the mother-house, the “refuge” character of the Belgian choice, all of these did not help create authentic incarnation in the territory. After the First World War, the Lesves residence would be closed.

## 4.2 THE AUTHORISATION REFUSAL

The new year, 1903, opens with the waiting for the decisions of Parliament regarding the legal recognition of the Congregation, but there were few illusions about the outcome: Bourdenne invited all the religious to be ready to leave everything by the end of January. In the meantime, as we have seen, at the end of December the authorisation to establish a residence arrives from Spain, and at the beginning of January negotiations began to find a refuge in Belgium. As for the American requests, the foundation of the Colleges in La Plata and in Asuncion, Bourdenne invited the superiors there to wait for the evolution of the events in France before taking any initiatives.

On December 30<sup>th</sup>, 1902 a newspaper in Pau, the *Mémorial des Pyrénées*, had published the text of a protest leaflet, that had been circulating for days in the First District of the city against the Government and in favour of the Fathers of Betharram. In the month of January, the *Patriote* had done the same, publishing another protest coming from Orthez; the authorities were worried and alarmed. But, on the other hand, the accusations against the Betharramites were not lacking: the great political influence in the department, a type of teaching hostile to the authorities and to the kind of republican government; the richness of the works, damaging to the diocese.

In the meantime, while the houses abroad were being chosen, activity in Bétharram became frenetic: the sale of land around the mother house, the division of the buildings of the mother house among the members of the community (the fields to Bourdenne, the monastery to Paillas, the college to Tucou, the houses in Ari and Fourquette to Abel Costedoat, the farm to Florence, etc.) With a public act before a notary public, they became the legal owners.

However it would have been incautious to lean on the protection of the law. More than once, Combes could have cared less about the legality. Thus, fearing confiscation, he decided to make certain of everything that could be taken away. Some friends accepted to take care of much of the furniture of the monastery and the college. On February 12<sup>th</sup>, a wagon full of beds and closets left for Palestine, the remainder, in May, was sent to Belgium and Spain (paying customs as if it were gold). The cellar was entrusted to some neighbours. The heavy library was still to be allocated; the more precious pieces were taken to a friendly family. By now, Betharram, denuded of everything, re-found the poverty of the foundation; there was nothing left but the *four walls of a vast building*.

On March 18<sup>th</sup>, the Parliament voted the suppression of the Congregation that Combes had qualified as a “teaching” one. But until a few days earlier, there was still hope that the government would change its opinion which had already been taken. One of the representatives of the clergy to the Parliament, Don Gayraud, wrote the Superior General inviting him to prepare a new authorisation centred on the importance that the Congregation had regarding the work abroad, especially in the Orient and in Latin America. But, as we know, Parliament decided finally to deny authorisation to the entire Congregation.

The state national bureaucracy began to move. On April 3<sup>rd</sup>, the Prefect of the Lower Pyrénées, Francière, transmitted his orders to police commissioner Tenly. On the 4<sup>th</sup>, the Civil Court of Pau nominated Germain Chateau, lawyer in Pau, liquidator of the Betharramite goods and ordered the placing of seals on all the Betharramite furniture and to make an inventory. On March 20<sup>th</sup>, the superiors were advised that all their mail would be opened.

## 4.3 EXILE

On April 3<sup>rd</sup> at two in the afternoon, Tenly went to Betharram and notified the Superior General that the authorisation request had been denied and that from that moment the Congregation was dissolved: the mother house had three months time to close while it was up to the Prefects' decision regarding the other residences. In the following days, all the other superiors of the other communities received the same notice.

On April 6<sup>th</sup>, the justice of the peace, Parent, assistant to Chateau, arrived to place the seals on the buildings of the mother house. The same thing happened at the other residences. The religious persons' opposition to this was lively. At Orthez, Oloron, Bayonne, Pau, Sarrance, it was pointed out that the buildings belonged to the episcopal administration and not to the Congregation, therefore the liquidator had to speak with the Chapter Vicars. At Betharram, Bourdenne opposed this by appealing, motivating his recourse with the fact that for the State all the buildings of the mother house were private property, that the ministerial decree gave three months and that therefore during that time he was still the rightful owner of the buildings, and finally that the placing of the seals made it impossible for the structures to operate (college, seminary, sanctuary). The superior general was right and the president of the court in Pau vetoed the placing of seals on the buildings in Betharram, Orthez, Bayonne and in part of Oloron.

But this did not stop the inventory of the furnishings. On April 8<sup>th</sup>, Parent came back to Betharram. This time the new protestations were useless: Parent did his job. It is true that, despite the demands of the law, he abstained from searching the families that had the Congregation's goods and nor did he go to the farm. Also, he gave a low estimate of the furnishings to facilitate the sale. Another protestation was made when Chateau decided to inventory the goods of the Sanctuary and the sacristy of Betharram, thus endangering the artistic integrity of the site of the Marian cult; the revolution, protested Bourdenne in writing to the Chapter Vicars, did not go to such extremes. The General Council, however, decided to entrust the case to some lawyers in Pau to maintain their own rights.

In the meantime, the Prefect decided by which date the communities had to be closed and the religious had to be dispersed: the Colleges (Betharram, Orthez, Bayonne and Oloron) had to close by July 15<sup>th</sup> (then moved to August 1<sup>st</sup> to allow for the regular school year), the other residences (Pau, Anglet, Sarrance) by May 15<sup>th</sup>.

If the State bureaucracy was swift, so was the Congregation. By now, the bags had to be packed to leave. Each religious had been told of their future destination: on May 13<sup>th</sup> the novices left for Bethlehem; on May 7<sup>th</sup>, June 2<sup>nd</sup> and 16<sup>th</sup>, July 23<sup>rd</sup> and 30<sup>th</sup>, various groups left for Irun in Spain; Lesves would see the arrival of the religious during the entire month of May; as for America, the departures occurred after the three months conceded to the four colleges. But many were those who decided to remain in the diocese of Bayonne, dispersed as wanted by the authorities. The General Chapter in Irun would decide on this.

In the month of May, the first exiles happened. Between the 14<sup>th</sup> and the 16<sup>th</sup>, the communities in Pau, Sarrance and Anglet had to leave their residences. The case of Anglet is emblematic because it shows the "hurry" that the diocese had in the Betharramites' departure. On April 16<sup>th</sup> 1903, the police commissioner of Biarritz arrived in Anglet to notify the four religious of the community on the authorisation denial and ordered the dispersion of the members of the community in a month. But he added: "*Here there are many buildings: you can separate from one another and settle one in the house you are now occupying, another at the hostel, another by the religious Bernardines, and the fourth in another place. By doing so you will be dispersed; nothing else than this is requested*".

The police officer's advice was clear: they could disperse while still staying in the same house or at least in the neighbourhood. One of the fathers of the community, Marie-

Dominique Descomps, informed the sisters of this possibility: but they answered with silence, no reaction, no sign of protest or satisfaction faced with this possibility, expressed by the police commissioner, of staying in Anglet in the above-mentioned way. Later, a reporter narrates, they found out that a few days earlier M<sup>sg</sup>. Diharce, one of the vicars, had passed through Anglet: it was not difficult to deduce that, always according to the reporter, he had warned the community of sisters that the Betharramite presence could be dangerous for their existence. Meantime, the day for the forced departure had arrived. The whole community of sisters was present and the reporter tells how sad they were, but that they could not do otherwise, being under the “yoke” of the two chapter vicars’ authority that obligated them to separate from their chaplains. The irony of fate: while the four religious said good-bye to the friends at the convent door, from a secondary entry, swiftly nominated by the diocesan vicars, the new diocesan chaplains entered. The religious transferred to Betharram while waiting to leave for abroad.

On May 7<sup>th</sup> in Pau, Commissioner Tenly ordered Fr. Miro, the chaplain of Saint Louis Gonzaga, to cease all functions by Thursday the 14<sup>th</sup>, and told the members of the community to disperse. Before going, the Fathers tried to organise a mass for the dead and living benefactors, but the police intervened and vetoed any type of public manifestation. The eight religious of the community, however, stayed in Pau as guests in private houses or in rented apartments.

The departure of the Sarrance religious came about without incident, immediately substituted by the diocesan priests. One of the two religious who officiated in the sanctuary, originally from Sarrance, stayed there in the house of his family.

#### 4.4 THE LAST ACT: EXILE FROM BETHARRAM

From the beginning of persecution, as the hostility of public power was made manifest, Betharram had been made the object of an ever growing sympathy. People came more numerous than ever to the pilgrimages to the sanctuary. On May 3<sup>rd</sup> 1903, on the occasion of the solemn adoration in the Sanctuary, more than 800 communions were distributed. The clergy multiplied its visits, participated in the funerals of the dead religious during this period. At the funeral of Fr. Cazaban there were 40 priests and there were more than 90 at the funeral for Fr. Vignolle, among which also the Vicar Casseignau together with the entire municipal council of Oloron.

Every day numerous protestations and encouragement from friends far and wide arrived at Betharram. The senator of the Low Pyrénées, Chesnelong, personally came the day after Parliament’s vote, and offered his own home as a refuge. But of all the visits, the one that was most pleasing was that of Don Gayraud, the deputy from Brest, defender of the religious in Parliament.

By now in Betharram, there was resignation. Fr. Bourdenne had asked, however, for a stay, and in a note to the Prefect of the Low Pyrénées he pointed out that Betharram had a school and that it would be absurd to close it on the 1<sup>st</sup> of July, when elsewhere schools were open till the 31<sup>st</sup>. No answer arrived. Therefore the superior of the college, Fr. Abbadie, on May 20<sup>th</sup>, notified all the parents of the school’s students that it would close before the end of the scholastic year. However, Fr. Abbadie’s letter appeared in the *Patriote des Pyrénées* and incited strong reactions. The prefect, on the same day as the publication, accorded the stay necessary for finishing the school year normally.

The four schools of the Congregation were living their last days. At Bayonne as in Orthez, the authorities had ordered the respective superiors Mourot and Bergez to hand in their keys to the establishments to the sub-prefecture within 24 hours from their closing, a decision which left deep questions on the possibility of reopening the schools. The order, however, had incited some protest from the chapter vicars, who, without having warned Fr. Bourdenne, had already chosen the substitutes for the Betharramite religious.

The Oloron school was the first to be closed. Tuesday, July 21<sup>st</sup>, Casseignau, still present in the religious community, presented the new superior, Don Porte. The day after, the same ceremony was repeated in Bayonne. This way, the diocese reassured the families guaranteeing the continuity of the schools.

At Betharram, July 15<sup>th</sup>, studies were ended with the presentation of prizes, presided by the superior general. This was a clear demonstration of sympathy and encouragement. Fr. Cazala, in his diary, tells of a vast presence: there was more people than usual and they counted, in a special way, the presence of 200 diocesan priests.

In the following fifteen days, events precipitated. Friday, July 24<sup>th</sup>, the superior general reunited the Betharramite community for the last time and dictated the last directives: the religious remaining in France momentarily had to retire in their own families until decisions were taken at the next General Chapter, established for the middle of August in Irun.

On the 26<sup>th</sup>, the last Sunday was celebrated in Betharram. On the 28<sup>th</sup>, a numerous group of priests reached Betharram to demonstrate their encouragement to Fr. Bourdenne, on his saint's day. The same day, the prefect of Pau officially communicated the order for exile for the 1<sup>st</sup> of August. On the 29<sup>th</sup>, dispersion began, the houses were almost completely empty. Chateau had nominated the custodians, two during the day and two for the night. Finally, Saturday August 1<sup>st</sup>, Fr. Bourdenne left Betharram for Irun.

In Betharram, despite the warnings of the prefecture and the order for exile, passive resistance was decided on. Those considering themselves the legitimate owners of the buildings stayed: Paillas, J.-M. Tucou; some elderly and infirm religious, Father Barbé and Cathalogue and Fr. Genot and Montesquieu; and Fr. Estantau and Fr. Mainjoulou, as nurses. Deaf to all official warnings, they refused to evacuate the buildings and to give the keys to the liquidator. On August 5<sup>th</sup>, they were called to court for their resistance, but in vain. To ensure the law's execution, recourse to force was the authorities only possibility.

The police force of Coarraze, Nay and Soumoulou were mobilized for August 14<sup>th</sup>. When they arrived, they found Betharram surrounded by thousands of persons, persons who had come spontaneously to defend the monastery and the sanctuary. The liquidator, Chateau, immediately asked for reinforcements. The mounted police arrived followed by whistles and yells of protest. The police charged against the people who reacted with violence. There were many wounded and arrested. The police, however, managed to reach the monastery door and, even in the middle of tumults and fights, proceeded with the exile. Preceded by Fr. Paillas, some of the elderly and sick and other religious came out and found hospitality with some families in Lestelle.

At 7:40 p.m., the Police Commissioner Tenly could telegraph his satisfaction from Lestelle to the Prefect announcing the definite exile of the religious: *"Building evacuated at seven o'clock without too many difficulties but thanks to the mounted police who succeeded in keeping the crowd estimated in thousands of persons crying Long live freedom! Long live the fathers. The sick welcomed by the families despite. Despite falling rain, 200 people insist standing in front of the building."*

## 5 - SUBSEQUENT EVENTS

### 5.1 THE GENERAL CHAPTER IN IRUN

Monday August 10<sup>th</sup> in Irun, the General Chapter of the Congregation was held. In the convocating letter, Fr. Bourdenne listed the arguments that the Chapter had to face and especially that of finding the useful means to safeguard the Congregation in France in such a particularly critical moment.

Of the 23 members by right or elected, at the first meeting Fr. Tounédo, superior of San José of Buenos Aires, was missing, as were Fr. Abbadie and Fr. Mourrot for family reasons. After the usual initial practices, the members of the commission, called “of the four”, were elected, as announced in art. 168 of the Constitutions, the commission entrusted with studying the particular questions and to formulate proposals; Fr. Magendie, Fr. Florence, Fr. Estrate and Fr. Vignau were elected.

From its first meeting, Fr. Bourdenne submitted an urgent question to the Chapter, whose solution needed to be sent to Pau the next day by Fr. Paillas. It dealt with the request made by Chateau to obtain the keys to the buildings in Betharram (monastery, school and *maison neuve*) which had been denied to him on August 3<sup>rd</sup>; and the abandonment of the buildings by the religious still present. In fact it was a question of either peacefully abandoning the Betharramite places or to be expelled *manu militari*. The Chapter was called upon to express itself and decide on this matter. After discussions and interventions, they decided to discuss in the afternoon; meantime, the commission of the four would meet to examine the question and find a solution.

That afternoon, at 5:00 p.m., the meeting continued with the reading of the resolutions adopted by the commission of four and brought to the chapter. The discussions and interventions on the single paragraphs proposed by the commission were many and such as to require an evening meeting. At the end, a text was approved and voted almost unanimously which refused any kind of negotiation with the liquidator; which refused giving the keys of the Betharram complex and abandon the Betharramite locations; which demanded, as a condition, the maintenance of the school as a Catholic school. The General Chapter was for the hard and intransigent approach: almost unanimously those present were in favour of passive resistance.

The day after, August 11<sup>th</sup>, Fr. Paillas left for Pau to give the lawyer the resolutions to be transmitted to the liquidator. He would not return to Irun: the old and sick religious were waiting for him in Betharram, awaiting exile.

On August 12<sup>th</sup>, the Assembly discussed the necessary means to defend the goods of the Congregation. Three points were underlined by the commission of four, unanimously accepted by the Chapter. First of all, the need to defend with any legal means the patrimony of the Congregation in France, especially the Betharramite complex. For this the commission believed that the most apt legal means was the creation of a civil company with limited responsibilities and with stock options, this last clause, leaving the stockholders in the dark to safeguard them from possible state reprisals: the Chapter would vote the article according to which “the goods of the Episcopal Administration occupied by the Betharramites in Betharram, if put up for sale, would be bought by a civil Company under the auspices and the preponderant help of the Congregation”. Finally, this operation would require the economic help of everybody, especially the American houses.



This way, the bases were laid to resurrect the Betharramite work in France, through the acquisition of the Betharram complex. As for the other residences, no further mention was ever made.

Friday, August 14<sup>th</sup>, the Assembly discussed the “modalities to better use the talents and aptitudes of all the members of the Congregation during the present situation”. Three points were mentioned in the report by the commission of four.

1. Regarding the dispersed religious, the creation was proposed, where communities existed, of small groups of religious “*who will carry out the works of the Institute according to the rules of prudence, depending on the Bishop and in agreement with the Parish-priests*”; the choice was to not totally abandon France; for these religious, the Chapter, in the meeting of August 18<sup>th</sup>, decided on a minimum of regulation to safeguard religious life and the observance of the rules.
2. Regarding the apostolic school, the commission proposed its division into two branches: the eldest to Lesves and the youngest to Irun. The Spanish house in fact was too small to receive the entire apostolate. Also the apostolate in Belgium avoided the acquisition of a new house in Spain, gave work to the fathers resident there, created the possibility of having Belgian vocations “*the most assimilable among all foreign vocations*”.
3. Finally the commission dealt with the problem of new foundations, in the Anglo-Saxon countries (Great Britain and the USA) and in Germany, foundations solicited by some of the chapter fathers. The commission decisively pointed to England, solely for linguistic and cultural reasons; Germany was eliminated.

The General Chapter unanimously voted on these different points, the way the commission of four had proposed them. It should be noted that for the first time in the history of the Congregation, a new foundation was autonomously decided upon.

## 5.2 THE NEW FOUNDATIONS

Exile from France represented, for the Congregation, the providential shaking that awoke it from the torpor of the last forty years. Many certainties and securities became less, one had to face new problems, new cultures, new adaptations. Three new Countries, the day after exile, faced the Betharramite apostolate: England, Italy and Paraguay.

England, as we have already seen, was a choice made by the General Chapter. Three reasons spurred the English foundation: the intention of Saint Michael, who had expressed (according to the witness of Fr. Casedepaix) the desire to do something for England; the advantage in preparing English professors for the schools in Europe and America; the certainty of a secure place, with a stable and non anticlerical government, far from the perils menacing the Church in the Latin Nations during the last years. The General Chapter, however, had not proposed a precise ends for the English foundation.

At the end of the Chapter, Fr. Abel Costedoat was entrusted by Fr. Bourdenne to deal with the new foundation. After having consulted Fr. Gimet, a Franciscan, alumnus of Orthez, now Provincial in Paris (who would have a great role in the English and Italian foundations), Fr. Bourdenne writes: “*We thought to send you alone as explorer and negotiator... You will study the field where we are trying to settle for the interest of the souls and for the extension of our dear Institute*”.

With these directives, Fr. Costedoat, having left Lesves, on July 7<sup>th</sup> 1903 arrived in London and found hospitality, during the first days, from the Marist Fathers of the capital. In London he made friends with the Provincial of the Salesians, Fr. Macey, who would be of great help to the Congregation: in fact, he would be the one to propose the first English aspirants (among which the first English Betharramite, Fr. Robert Eric Basey), certain of the fact that “in England nothing serious could be done without English personnel”. Then, Fr. Costedoat found work as a chaplain for the Clarissan Sisters of Woodchester. This was the first field of Betharramite apostolate in England.

Among the duties of Fr. Costedoat, there was the one of studying the terrain to allow rooting of the Congregation in England. All those consulted in those months were unanimous on one point: in England, there were already so many Catholic schools and this was not the best way to begin new work on English land. Because of this, in December 1903, Fr. Costedoat submitted a project for the development of work to the General Council, a project which foresaw as its goal “*to do what the religious of the communities already in England are doing*”, that is to live in the community being available wherever needed, in the style of the missions, for confession, preaching, spiritual guidance, spiritual retreats, parish help, etc. Due to this, the ideal situation would be to have one’s own work, not a school but a parish, if possible. If this was the goal, the steps to be taken had to be well thought out and without haste. Fr. Costedoat, therefore, proposed the knowledge of the English language and mentality (“*to be able to work in the English works*”) and above all the opening of an apostolate (“*to accept in the Institute English subjects who, later on, will continue our works and will develop them better than we could do*”).

This project was accepted by the General Council in a broad manner. This way, the first years of Betharramite presence in England saw the development of momentary works in several places: Woodchester, Bicester, Princethorpe, Leamington, Moreton Paddox, Monk’s Kirby (Newnham Paddox), Cleobury Mortimer (Mawley), Banbury and finally Droitwich, where in 1908, as requested by the Congregation, the Bishop of Birmingham entrusted to the Betharramites, not something already done, but a work to be done, a parish: “*The mission is in your hands, the church is in your hands... all I expect from you is a mission. All the rest, residence, school, etc. is your business and of your superiors*”. In Droitwich, the Betharramites managed the parish, the apostolic school and, later, a college.

In Italy, the Congregation moved in two directions: in the North with the foundation of Traona (in Valtellina) and in Rome.

The reasons for the foundation of Traona are still obscure, even if it is true to say that the Betharramites went to the North of Italy to open an apostolic school, so as to have new vocations and especially professors of Italian for the South American colleges, where there were many Italian immigrants (these motivations are evident in some letters, especially in that of Fr. Bergez of December 1<sup>st</sup> 1904). From the beginning the choice fell on an Franciscan ex-convent, located in Traona in Valtellina, proposed by don Luigi Guanella, founder of the Guanellian Fathers and “the main person of Providence of our foundation in Italy” (Fr. Marque). Fr. Marque and Fr. Audin were the first to arrive in Valtellina on August 6<sup>th</sup> 1904; they would be followed shortly after by Fr. J.-M. Anduran and Fr. Bergez, who would be the first superior. From the beginning the “French” fathers were well received by the population and they immediately worked by giving confessions, preaching, retreats, winning the esteem of the parish priests of the area and of the population.

Instead regarding the apostolic school, from the beginning there were so many difficulties that finally nothing came of it. Some young apostles were received at the house of Traona (among which the first two future Italian Betharramite priests, Fr. Acquistapace and

Fr. Bernasconi), who very shortly after were sent to Lesves. The house in Traona was closed in 1911: the official reason was the lack of personnel, but one must not exclude the failure of the reason for coming to Valtellina.

The Roman foundation, instead, was because of the need to have a “Procure” in Rome, an urgent need especially for the canonisation of Saint Michael, and a community for the student Fathers. Through the interest of Fr. Saubat, in August 1904, the General Council examined the proposal of the church of the Holy Custodian Angels, at that time being restructured and in need of a chaplain, the church belonged to a confraternity. The dealings with the Vicar of Rome, the Holy See and the confraternity lasted many months; on January 18<sup>th</sup> 1905, a contract was stipulated between the confraternity and the Congregation and on October 2<sup>nd</sup>, having finished the restructuring, the church of the Holy Custodian Angels was re-opened to the public, in the presence of the Superior General, Fr. Bourdenne, the Secretary of Vatican State, Card. Merry del Val and other ecclesial people. Fr. Fargues was the first superior and Procurator.

The church of the Holy Custodian Angels was demolished by the Roman municipality in 1916 for urbanistic needs. But the presence of the Betharramites in the “eternal city” continued in the church of Saint Mary of Miracles, in piazza del Popolo.

The Paraguayan foundation, finally, was due to the direct intervention of the Pope, Leo XIII, but the bishop of Asuncion, Msg. Bogarin, had vastly and tirelessly worked toward this in the dark. Already on other occasions, he had gone to Buenos Aires to propose to Fr. Magendie, the superior of San José, to open a college in the Paraguayan capital; a trip to Asunción had already been made by Fr. Magendie in 1901; but no decision was taken then. So, Msg. Bogarin went higher up. On the occasion of a *visita ad limina* to Rome, he obtained a private audience with Leo XIII and then with the Secretary of State, Card. Rampolla, obtaining a promise to deal with this situation.

Thus, right in the middle of the storm arising from the Combes’ law, on October 13<sup>th</sup> 1902, Card. Rampolla, in the Pope’s name, wrote the Superior General Fr. Bourdenne: “*The very sad religious conditions, in the Paraguayan Republic, have always made one feel the vivid and urgent need for a Religious Congregation there, dedicated to teaching... His Holiness, therefore, would see with great satisfaction that such a work be taken on by the Fathers of the Sacred Heart of Betharram, who are already established with such advantages in the neighbouring Republic of Argentina, and has ordered me to vividly call upon Your Most Reverend Father for this holy enterprise of spiritual redemption of that people...*”

The General Council, despite the difficulties of the moment, accepted without hesitation the Holy See’s proposal. On October 23<sup>rd</sup>, Fr. Bourdenne wrote Fr. Vignau, general assistant, during those weeks visiting the residencies in South America, entrusting him with the situation, along with Fr. Magendie.

The two Betharramites visited the Paraguayan capital in December of 1902, bringing Msg. Bogarin the news of the happy conclusion of the attempts made by him during the last few months. But there was no lack of difficulties: the Betharramite project foresaw the momentary leasing of a house to install the first community, while waiting to buy land and build a college on it. The availability of the bishop was such that, through his initiative a special local commission was nominated to study the project and help the new Congregation in the search for the house and the land. But when on February 20<sup>th</sup> 1904 Fr. Sampay and Fr. Lhoste, the first nucleus of the future community, arrived in Asuncion, nothing had yet been done: it seemed like everybody in the capital wanted to sell not to lease. So, the Fathers went without a house. However they were lucky and found lodgings in a villa, freely made available to them by a rich local family, the Palmerolas.

On April 24<sup>th</sup> 1904, the future superior, Fr. Tournédo, arrived in Asuncion; very soon, he realised that the original project had to be modified: there was nothing else to do but buy a building already existing, the most apt for the needs of the community and that could also be used as a college. On May 8<sup>th</sup>, Fr. Tounédo left for Buenos Aires to obtain from Fr. Magendie, Delegate to the Superior General, the permission to buy and the necessary funds. Thus on June 4<sup>th</sup>, accompanied by Fr. Bacqué and Fr. Lousteau, he returned to Asuncion with the permission in his pocket and a check for 70,000 francs to buy “Villa Rosa”, owned by an ex-president of the State.

The following days saw the entire community busy in adapting the house to receive the first students: everything had to be bought, chairs, desks, notebooks, pens, closets, tables, mattresses, blankets, dishes... A new financial contribution was urgently requested from Buenos Aires. Finally, after great difficulty, on July 1<sup>st</sup> 1904, in the presence of 15 students, the college of San José of Asuncion was opened.

These new openings broadened the horizons of the Congregation, thus permitting the overcoming of the narrow vision of things, stopped at the diocese of Bayonne and the American colleges.

## CONCLUSION

The exile of the Fathers of the Sacred Heart from France is one of the episodes of the long and painful battle between the Church and State, with its roots in the French Revolution and in anticlerical attitudes. The French State considered the presence and the action of the Church as an obstacle and a defilement of social life. Anticlericalism, common to all the Latin countries in Europe and in America, believed that religious life and religious Congregations were the main subjects to be ridiculed, scorned and attacked.

The reasons for this attitude are well known. As said by the historian Martina, in France the religious made up a notable force as to the number of religious, the extension of their properties and the breadth of their activities, especially schools, which in France were numerous and guaranteed by the laws, and the hospital works. Another historian, Dansette, underlines some reasons for the hostility towards the religious: they form an homogenous group separate from the State, almost a State within a State; often they are not well seen by the secular clergy; their riches, that cannot be denied, are reasons for criticism and attack as they are strenuously defended by the Congregations even by recurring to exemptions and evading taxes. All this clashed with the principles established by the revolution of equality of all before the law. These reasons were more than enough to attack the religious, whose vows were not even understood, seen as denials of the “sacred” liberty established by the 1789 revolution. If next to these considerations we add an anticlerical mentality, that saw in religion, and especially in the Christian religion, a useless and particularly damaging burden for the Republic, to be eradicated at any cost, here is why the attack on all that is sacred, that seems clerical or “congregationalist” is easily explained.

Certainly, in France, the battle against the religious Congregations was sharp, hard and carried out with violent tones and acts. From the advent of Jules Ferry during the III Republic (1880) to the separation between State and Church (1905), we see a whole series of provisions that, for the religious, mean exile and abandoning the works.

From this moment, for the religious Congregations and for the Church more in general, a new type of presence in society and a new type of apostolate open up. The anticlerical

persecutions divested it of everything: from persecution a poorer Church came forth, less rich in material means, a Church less involved in temporal affairs and that must, forever, renounce to the attempt to create a Catholic State; but at the same time a more spiritually rich Church is born, closer to the people, more independent from political power, more involved in a pastoral aimed at the formation of conscience. Martina says: “*Just these battles ended up by breaking, definitely, that tight solidarity that linked the throne and the altar in the old régime, which often used each other*”. In other words, a poorer Church, but a freer Church!

Instead the battle of the State against the Church, in general but especially against the religious Congregations, in the long run was a useless battle, already lost from the beginning. It was unthinkable and absurd to uproot and cancel, through the power of laws, the vitality of the Church, in all its manifestations. Also, confiscation and the sale of the goods of the religious did not bring the State coffers that patrimony foreseen at the beginning. Rather, irony of fate, that same law that hit the religious Congregations so hard, was used by the same to in fact return to France and buy back everything, or almost, that they had lost. Even the Betharramite Congregation, as decided by the General Chapter in 1903, instituted, through the 1901 law, a civil association, the *Société Pyrénéenne*, which within a few years bought back the majority of goods in Betharram. In 1907, Fr. Croharé could thus reopen the college in Betharram.

As for the Congregation of Betharram, the effects of exile were all in all positive. Certainly, seen through the eyes of the protagonists, those events could but seem painful: years of work disappeared in a few weeks; realities to which one had attached to sentimentally disappeared forever (the Betharramites would never return to Orthez, Oloron, Bayonne); the abandoning of those places dear to memory and linked to the activities and the work of the founder. Seen from far, thinking about it later, those events instead had positive aspects that went beyond the contingencies even if painful at the present moment.

In fact, the Congregation, from the moment of exile, could take on a universal characteristic. Lesves in Belgium, Irun in Spain, Traona and Rome in Italy, various locations in England; and still La Plata in Argentina and Asuncion in Paraguay, to which we can add the community of Nazareth: all in eighteen months, that is more than what was done in the preceding fifty years. From this moment on, the Congregation really “wakes up” and becomes international; even the new people will belong to different nationalities, Belgium, Argentinean, English, Italian, Spanish also French. Thus exile allows the Congregation to loose that “provincial” and “diocesan” characteristic that denoted it till then: thanks to the work and farsightedness of Superior Generals such as Fr. Bourdenne and Fr. Estrate, despite the brevity of their mandate, apostolic schools were opened for the English (Droitwich), Italians (Traona), Americans (Pereyra); Belgian and Spanish children were received in the provisional “French” apostolates in Lesves and Mendelu. And if the residences in Belgium and Spain had the characteristic of a momentary “refuge”, such was not the case for the non-French vocations. Of notable importance for the history of the Congregation was the opening of the school in Palestine, a school that very quickly became international. The same process, in course, of canonisation of Saint Michael and the development of a vast Betharramite bibliography would contribute to make the Congregation known and thus underline even its international characteristic. Finally, one must not forget that in the months following exile and in the future developments of the Congregation, the South American colleges were of great moral and economic help: undoubtedly, it is thanks to them that the Congregation could survive and develop in Europe.

*All over in Europe, in America and in Asia, the children of St Michael Garicoits find in the melting-pot of persecution, if not a new spirit, at*

*least a more enterprising dynamics. Pulled out of the torpor of the cradle by the exile, Betharram embarks on the conquest of the world.*  
(Miéyaa)

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