

11. Memorial to the Sovereign Pontiff Pius VII

December 4th, 1804

Clorivière, at the beginning of his time in prison in 1804, learning that the Pope would come to crown Napoleon, decides to write a "Memorandum to Pius VII" to give him news of the Societies¹ and to send it secretly.

From Historical Documents adapted by Maureen Halissey. Doc 20, p. 210-211.

Most Holy Father,

It is not as a man completely unknown to you that I respectfully come before Your Holiness. In fact, I am the priest whose supplication was brought to the Apostolic Holy See three years ago (1801) by two French priests because I myself was prevented from coming personally to Rome by various impediments. That letter expressed, on the part of (numerous) faithful men and women, the ardent desire that they be granted the permission to follow a certain path of evangelical perfection which I had described to them according, as it seemed to me, to God's good pleasure. Several of them, at the end of the required period of probation, had already emitted vows, not of absolute tenure but vows which would have value under the condition that our plan, submitted to Your Holiness, would one day obtain your approbation.

In fact, it was not without grave reasons that we seemed to fear that we had proceeded in vain by having trusted to our own prudence and we had before us this word from the Book of Wisdom: "Such a road seems straight to man, but the end of it leads to death."

Most Holy Father, that is why, with faithfulness and simplicity of heart, I placed before Your Holiness the rules, writings, letters – in a word, everything that can serve to give a better and deeper knowledge of the nature, the discipline and character of both Societies. They are not yet completely formed. Nevertheless, they already have a certain form (of what they will be). In fact, I had imagined² two Societies adapted to the diversity of two sexes, and distinct from one another, so that – even in the world and outside the cloister – they would be open and accessible to all of Christ's faithful, suited to embracing the Counsels and called to this vocation by Christ our Lord, the path of evangelical perfection. This was particularly true for men already enrolled in the clerical militia.

At this point, it would be too lengthy and superfluous to repeat everything concerning these Societies. It will suffice to say what follows. The observance of the vows of religion is

¹ Let us recall that he had sent emissaries to Rome in 1801 who had brought back an initial oral approval from the Pope on the life form of Societies.

² In the Memorial of 1800, the inspiration of July 19 is seriously mentioned in these words: "What I can say with some assurance is that God inspired in us the first idea of this work, at a time when we were far removed from having such a thought." Cf. also Plan of the Society of the Heart of Jesus, 1792, containing an identical sentence.

regarded highly (in the two Societies). The rules are so disposed (in the two Societies) that, by keeping the essence of religious life, everything can be observed without great difficulty, no matter what the condition (which must not be alien to Christian customs) by anyone who is aided by God's grace. And, on the other hand, everything tends in both Societies towards enabling the members to carry out very exactly the duties of his or her personal profession.

These matters were maturely thought out, as was proper, for several weeks. And on January 19, 1801, Your Holiness benevolently received the two priest-emissaries of the Society, manifested your thought to them, and declared to them (the following):

- 1) That Your Holiness approves the form of life described in the Supplication and grants to all the faithful the authorization to embrace it. This approbation is not a solemn one, but only a private one. Your Eminence will grant a solemn approbation when better and more favourable days will come.
- 2) That among us, there would be only vows in the depth of the soul and under the authority of the Ordinary.

Then, after having granted your Apostolic Blessing to the emissaries, as well as to all united to them by the bonds of the Society, you took leave of them, but not without having given them the most precious sign of your benevolence. On leaving Rome, they received a very complimentary letter from His Excellence, the Secretary of State, Cardinal Consalvi.

As regards the above declaration of Your Holiness, the two emissaries have here made, under oath, a deposition to Bishop Gabriel Cortois de Pressigny, then Bishop of Saint-Malo. As for ourselves, we received the declaration, as it merited, most respectfully as a pontifical word, as if it had come forth from the very mouth of Christ; and we resolved to attach ourselves to it with a constant fidelity. We are not aware of ever having failed in that resolution.

But now, it is proper and I believe it is also my duty – which undoubtedly will be agreeable to you, most Holy Father – to present briefly what has been, and what is now, the state of one and the other family.

Almost on the very day when, in Rome, Your Holiness was so benevolently granting our families the above-mentioned approbation, permission and apostolic blessing, here in Paris a most violent tempest raged against us as if the very evil spirit of darkness, who bears the name of Prince of this world, enraged by your approbation, foresaw and feared that it would result in great harm to him and to his kingdom. In fact, that very worthy servant of Christ, a woman very dear to all pious persons, who was head of the Society of the Most

Holy Heart of Mary,³ was brought before the court and cast into prison as indicted for a crime against the State, feared for life. All the wicked persons and the worst enemies of our Religion sought only to destroy her and to cause her death. But the good and merciful God, urgently implored by the prayers of His people on her behalf throughout France, returned her to us safe and sound. After the horrible cloud was dissipated, her victorious innocence shone forth more brilliantly after the darkness. Despite this, she was not, however, left at peace as we had hoped; and when God disposed thus to show forth her virtue, she still remained exposed to the traps and the darts of the impious.

As for me, even though my conscience was not marked by the least fault against the State or its Sovereign Head, our Emperor, for whom – as God is my witness – I have always had a certain sentiment, I was obliged to flee because of immediate danger. During almost all this time, I have lived in hiding, or at least I have carried on the evangelical ministry far from this city in the most remote provinces of France.

Finally, having returned here after about three years, and strong in my innocence, I functioned in broad day light and involved myself entirely in the divine matters which pertain to my ministry. On May 5 last, feast of Saint Pius V, and the date when, in memory of the approbation you granted us, prayers for Your Holiness are mandated in our Societies, I was all at once seized at my home; my writings were taken, and I was cast into the place of detention where I am still held captive today.

³ Mother de Cicé's name evidently could not appear in a written document which could possibly fall into strange hands. But Father de Clorivière wanted to recall Mother de Cicé's role in the Society of the Heart of Mary.