

# History of the Dominican Secular Institute of Orleans

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### Introduction

This Institute had its origins at the end of the nineteenth century. In the history of this disturbed epoch in which very different ideas confronted one another and tried to prevail, it is necessary, in order to understand the birth of what was called the "Little Group", to be aware of certain essential characteristics of

1. French society in this century
  - a) its relationship with the Church and
  - b) the situation of women
2. The consecrated life and its evolution towards a secular form.

### 1. French Society in the XIX century.

#### a) Relationships with the Catholic Church

Up until 1789 the Catholic religion was that of the King and the Nation. But under the influence of the ideas spread by philosophers especially those of the XVIIth and XVIIIth Century a dechristianising process was at work which showed itself in a big way at the time of the Revolution. The Church saw itself divested of its goods and rights. A civil constitution of the Clergy was voted in by which the state took absolute control of the Church of France and an active persecution of the church developed over many years. It was only in 1801 that religious peace was re-established, thanks to the Agreement signed by Napoleon Bonaparte and Pius VII. An agreement which despite its imperfections lasted throughout the XIXth Century.

However anti-clericalism remained active as different regimes succeeded one another and when the Republic was definitively installed legislation effecting the Church in two major domains was enacted i.e. teaching and Religious Congregations. Different Education Laws, between 1880 and 1905, barred all Religious from public teaching, whilst congregations themselves certain of them were expelled in 1888, a good number of others were dissolved and their members returned to the lay state. The law of separation of Church and State in 1905 created a new situation in liberating the Church from its links with power but it was a shock for the Catholic world. In any case the 1914-1918 coming shortly afterwards proved an opportunity for Catholics and unbelievers to exchange ideas and mitigated the effects of the upheavals created by this law which ultimately has proved favourable to the spiritual mission of the Church.

## b) The Situation of Women

This was very subordinate to the situation of men but some movement towards equality developed, helped by some legislation about the education of girls in the middle of the XIXth Century. Among Catholics the influence of Monsignor Dupanloup, Bishop of Orleans, in favour of “intellectual work for women in the world” and of other numerous authors pointing out the “social duty of women” which demanded her social education so that she can in her turn affect popular education.

### 2, Evolution of consecrated life towards a secular form

From the start some lay Third Orders were linked to the Monastic Orders over a long period of time, allowing lay people to live according to the spirituality of their founders but not take the traditional vows.

For those who wished for an evangelical life as a total gift to God outside of a Religious Cloister the only known form possible was that of a “Pious Association”. (Angela Merici of Brescia in Italy in XVI Century and Father Cloriviere at the time of the French Revolution began a secular form of Consecrated Life which rapidly took on the statutes of a Religious Congregations).

However in this same spirit, and under the influence of dechristianisation in particular in France some societies were created in the XIXth Century permitting their members to exercise an apostolate in conditions taking into account varied places and situations. Their founders hoped to obtain recognition by the church and several requests were made in this respect.

The reticence of theologians and Roman congregations were significant and approval for these requests was often withheld. The Church however could not ignore them and by the decree *Ecclesia Catholica* of 11<sup>th</sup> August 1889 it praised and approved them but as “Pious Associations” which must submit to the jurisdiction of the Ordinaries. If the members of these societies pronounce vows these “*must be considered as private vows not public ones which are received by a legitimate superior in the name of the Church*” the Code of Canon Law of 1917 does not mention these new Associations. The status given them “*had not seemed sufficiently mature*” said Pius XII in the preamble to the Apostolic Constitution *Provida Mater Ecclesia* which in 1947 finally gave official recognition, so long awaited, by these groups which now took the name **Secular Institutes**.

# History of the Dominican Secular Institute of Orleans

## First Period

### The Origins: 1885-1928

The life and work of Jeanne Leplatre has to be seen against the background of the situation already described. Born on 1<sup>st</sup> February 1864 at Patay, and wishing to give herself to God, she wanted to enter the teaching congregation of the Sisters of St Agnes founded by Monsignor Dupanloup "*whom I worshipped*" she said but "*I could not see my life in it, nor feel for it any attraction*"

Her mother died in 1882 and Jeanne fell gravely ill in 1884. She foresaw then a different orientation and with some friends who shared her views, made a plan of which some notes in 1912 help us to follow the evolution. She speaks of her interest in the "*intellectual and religious development of women.*" And in 1885 formulates her idea for a "*Centre for an intense interior life*" that she would like to found.

Her project is addressed to people who feel called to make a gift of themselves but who for various different reasons cannot do this in the known forms of consecrated life. Jeanne was not aware of the other initiatives which were taking place during these same years, in particular those of Dominican inspiration concerning people who were searching to live the gospel in a radical fashion in the ordinary conditions of life. Always influenced by Monsignor Dupanloup she oriented her special apostolic vision towards women.

The Order of St Dominic, known through Father Lacordaire, in her search for the truth appeared to her the best guide for her enterprise for which she obtained a blessing from Pope Leo XIII in 1887.

In 1890, Father Boulanger O.P. Provincial of the French Province, came to preach Lent at Orleans came to know Jeanne who immediately felt a spiritual affinity and asked to be received into the Third Order.

She was admitted on 7<sup>th</sup> March and was filled with joy "I will only know later what a great thing Love has done in making me a daughter of St Dominic." she wrote in her private diary. Shortly afterwards she confided in the father her "thoughts of this work" and he saw there "the spirit of God" while exercising a prudent caution.

Father Boulanger is considered as the co-founder of "the Little Dominican Group" which he helped until his death in 1913 with his enlightened support and his teaching.

For him "*the spirit of the little group*" is the life of God Himself... "*this life, this spirit, must be spread to those around you, strengthening you in the greatest measure possible to spread the knowledge of the love of the Father and the Son to all those who approach you ...the rule of the little Group is the Gospel ...You do not need anything else.*"

In 1895, with her father who was going to die three years later, Jeanne went to live at 14 rue d'Illiers in Orleans where she said the little group could both grow and be unknown.

For the members of this group it was a time of activity set in motion by the needs of the times as necessary, catechism, talks, a library but also shopping, housework, youth work and a sewing workshop. As these works developed from 1904, little by little they were taken over by private enterprise, by parishes bringing together young people and adults. The only things remaining for any length of time were the library and the sewing workshop. It became for the group a real School of the Interior Life and at the same time a means of earning their living for those who needed it to live.

However when it was suggested that members should take vows many withdrew, says Jeanne *"The religious life of the little group is harder than the ordinary religious life. It is not known, nor esteemed, the religious externals are not there and its purpose is not understood by the world. The clergy themselves ignore it or pretend to do so."* Only Elizabeth de la Rochetrie and Marthe Malderet made the commitment.

Despite that, the group consolidated and a common life was established in 1902 for those who wanted to enter. In 1904 the Bishop of Orleans approved the first rule, a fairly strict life of poverty, penance, obedience directed by a deep religious spirit in a search of truth and study, according to the possibilities of each person.

In 1911 the first perpetual vows were pronounced. During the war 1914-1918 the group dedicated itself to the help of orphans and widows, several of whom joined the group. With the exception of one catechist from Lyon the recruitment remained fairly local until some refugees from l'Aisne discovered the Institute. When the war finished they returned to their department of origin and became the first external group.

In 1918-20 Father Lemmonyer, Regent of Studies at le Saulchoir, developed the constitutions of the Little Dominican Group of Jesus Crucified, *"a group of Dominican Tertiaries" ... "whose first aim is the Glory of God and the sanctification of its members."*

Father Lemmonyer guided the spirit of penance, very much in evidence in the little group towards the penance involved in everyday life.

In 1923 these constitutions were approved by Cardinal Touchet Bishop of Orleans

26<sup>th</sup> October 1928 the death of Mademoiselle Leplatre ended this difficult period of the beginnings of the Institute.

The personality of the founder, intelligent and energetic, but handicapped all her life by illness, had a big influence on what became in 1928 the **"Little Group of Jesus Crucified"**

Nevertheless the seed was sown and it fell to Marthe Malderet to make it grow. Which she did magnificently.

## **What to keep from this period?**

Jeanne Leplatre in order to fulfil her spiritual aspirations only had the classical religious model to go on.

However if she set up a common life for those available, she foresaw a form of consecrated life taking account of the evolution of her time.

She centred her project on the formation of the interior life.

Created a number of activities, especially in accord with the situation of the women of her time and the necessities of their education.

Took as a guide Dominican spirituality.

## **2<sup>nd</sup> Period**

### **The Flowering of the Institute:1928-1952**

In November 1928 the Little Group went through a major crisis on account of the pernicious influence of one of its members but Father Monpeurt, the director of the little group at that time, managed to steer her towards a religious community more in tune with her aspirations. None of the members wanted to be successors to the foundress Jeanne leplatre who had made it clear she was looking to Marthe Malderet and Jeanne Bouget for the future of the group.

It was to Marthe Malderet who was elected unanimously Prioress of the Little Group of Jesus Crucified to whom her companions assigned this difficult task. Patiently thanks to her know-how, her serenity and her strength of will she overcame all the obstacles. Jeanne Bouget was elected as Mistress of Novices in 1929 but her role extended to that of support and counsellor to Marthe Malderet who called her "my Jeanne" and held her in the greatest affection.

In 1928 the group was installed at Bon Accueil , 122 fg Bourgogne at Orleans The house was rented in the first instance and bought from the Lazarists in 1932 which gave great security.

Situated in a lively district Bon Accueil became a real hub of activity: catechism, youth clubs, summer camps, domestic help, theatre group and also anyone could come who needed help and comfort. The chapel, an annexe for the parish of St Mark, was used regularly for daily mass and other ceremonies with the exception of marriages and funerals.

During the war of 1939-1945 the town of Orleans was greatly afflicted by bombings. The bridges were damaged, the town was on fire in June 1940 and the destruction went on until 1944.

The district of St Loup saw the departure of prisoners of war, among whom was the Abbe Bonnard, chaplain of the chapel. There were arrests, in particular that of Abbe Dutaur who had succeeded him, the professor of a large seminary, deported for more than two years to Buchenwald. Several members of the institute were harassed or imprisoned for some days

by the commander or the Gestapo. The situation of Claude Alain, a journalist, was very serious because her activities in the Resistance were discovered and she was arrested in February 1944, deported to Ravensbruck, from where she returned in July 1945 after two months of care in Sweden.

Bon Accueil, officially designated a social centre, became a canteen for social services and provided the district with different activities and supplies which had become very difficult to get for the whole population. The holiday camps being unable to continue at Veules les Roses, now took place at Mezieres in the forest of Sologne. The chalet which had housed them for so many years was moved to Paris, attached to the house of Montjoie, then was brought back to the grounds of Bon Accueil.

### **Composition of the Group, Its Expansion and Organisation.**

At Bon Accueil where some lived permanently others gathered for formation, various meetings, retreats and sometimes for reconciliations. The original members from Orleans and its surroundings met regularly. Members from other regions came as often as their professional activities allowed.

The period between the two wars corresponds to the expansion of Catholic Action and various other youth movements and was favourable to the nurturing of vocations and there were many new entrants originating in all parts of France.

In 1948 the group of Aisne, consisting of ten members began to meet in their area. The group in Paris comprised twenty.

In 1932-34 some teachers at a boarding school at Mily in Algeria, through Pere le Tilly O.P. made contact and applied for membership of the Institute.

The Second World War brought to Orleans two Polish women who in roundabout ways found out about the Institute. One, Louise Radzimska, was admitted and after a brief stay at the centre in Paris went back to Poland in 1946. Because of the political tensions existing in that region, she was given the necessary powers to welcome into the Institute those people showing a secular vocation. Recruitment into the group proceeded very rapidly despite the difficulties of conditions there, with the help of Cardinal Sapieha of Krakow and the primate of Poland, Cardinal Hlond who recommended a very great prudence to Louise.

In fact from 1951 to 1989 the Iron Curtain cut Europe in two and relations with Poland were very much reduced during this time. Occasionally news handed on by a Dominican Pere Pelletier affirmed that the institute had rooted itself in the east and was developing despite the great risks involved.

Outside of Orleans the growth of members demanded an adjustment of the structures to favour regional groupings. It is thus that the Council of the Institute decided on the purchase of a house in Paris. The Montjoie Centre situated at 62 Rue de l'Abbe Groult, in the XVth Arrondissement, became the residence of several persons and the members dispersed around the Paris region met there regularly. From 1954 a Foyer for young girls was

organized in the available space. Charlotte Artaud who was professor of literature at the Lycee Fenelon ran this enterprise until 1980.

At **Rouen** from 1945 began monthly reunions which facilitated the work of a Centre, Bon Secours for social work two years later. Madeleine Malleville and Marie Guerillon were, from the start, the animators of this initiative.

In 1946 at **Fougeres** a group already formed around Marie Boisbineul and responsible for a Cultural Centre, attached itself to the Institute.

In 1949 several people working at a big boarding school in the town of Angers, whose Principal was Marie Audfray, took the same step and in l'Yonne , at **Brienon s/Armancon** the institute was asked to take on a big existing property with many activities such as a Retreat House and a primary school. Others developed little by little: a rural house- keeping school and a school of Horticulture.

In 1950 five members of a lay Dominican Fraternity in Liege, Belgium, came to know the Institute. Wishing to have a more radical commitment they commissioned their chaplain, Father Draime, to look for the group that would best match their aspirations and after examining the make up of some similar groups they chose the Dominican Secular Institute of Orleans. The first direct contact was favourable and after a short stay they asked to enter the institute. And so the second group outside of France was established. Renee Lex, with Pere Drame's help, became responsible for it in close union with those responsible in Orleans.

At the same time Mary Thorpe an old member of the English Group of Amata Roberts, impressed by the Dominican Secular Institute of Orleans but remaining independent of them, came to France for a year of Formation and stayed ten years.

### **On the Civil Front**

In 1933 a Housing Association was set up with the house of Bon Accueil and the house of the family of Marthe Malderet at Veules Les Roses in Normandie. Received through a legacy, this beautiful house was situated at some hundreds of metres from the beach and became the place for the summer holidays of the St Loup District of Orleans. At Bon Accueil the size of the house was insufficient for the new members who wanted to stay there for different periods of time. In 1936 a new building was constructed, raised in 1946 and extended in 1956.

New legislation caused a change in the Housing Association to **the Association Culturelle et Social Saint Loup** The Centres which had opened in France, in Provence or abroad had to set up Associations which conformed strictly to the laws of the country concerned.

### **Life of the members**

The members of the Dominican Secular Institute of Jesus Crucified lived either in the Centres where they shared in the social enterprises of the house or they led a professional life outside and went regularly to the Centres for prayer and study together. As time went on more and more members kept the life they had been leading when they asked for

admission into the institute, staying with their family or living alone, working in the profession they had chosen. The Centres were a place of meeting for common prayer, teaching and the fraternal life for many.

Despite the different ways of life, belonging to the Institute was the same, everyone living the special secular form of consecrated life proposed by the Constitutions.

This unity of spirit, indispensable to the vitality of the group, was lived out in different ways: staying as long as possible in Orleans either on retreat or holiday periods but also visits from those responsible to the regions allowing them to know the conditions of life lived by each person. It was thus that at the beginning of 1930 Marthe Malderet and Jeanne Bouget set out to visit the members, making two journeys a year to l'Aisne and one to Algeria in 1935

A collective letter was sent all through the period of the war from 1943. It created an indispensable contact between the members who were in countries further and further away.

### **Government of the Institute –Its status in the Church**

This period saw ways of organizing put into action responding to the needs of its members who at this time were considered to be Dominican Tertiaries. The first constitutions from 1921 by Pere Lemonnyer were inspired by the regulations governing the Order of St Dominic.

The growth in membership demanded the election of Councillors in 1945 with the approval of the Dominican Provincial and the Bishop of Orleans. A General Chapter was held in 1951 and then every six years after that.

In January 1942 the institute was officially affiliated to the Order of St Dominic

A Major event came about in this period, **the recognition by the Church of Secular Institutes.**

2nd February 1947 Pope Pius XII responded to the long wait of numerous groups of the life of consecrated secularity which had been founded in a fairly widespread way on the continent of Europe. Through the Apostolic Constitution "Provida Mater," followed in 1948 by the Motu Proprio "Primo Feliciter," these groups, named "**Secular Institutes**", were given an official place in the Church.

1st February 1948 the Bishop of Orleans, Mgr Courcoux, told those Responsible that there was no obstacle to the official request for recognition of the institute and the necessary steps were immediately taken to effect this.

The day of Pentecost 1948 all the members of the Institute renewed their professions, permanent or temporary, in the presence of Mgr Courcoux and in the hands of Marthe Malderet.



Jeanne Bouget announced in the collective letter of June 1948

*“Here then the canonical erection of the institute has been realized. From now on we are “of the Church” and responding officially to the formal desire of the Pope, Vicar of Jesus Christ.*

*We were nearly 60, 38 of whom were fully professed and renewed their profession before Mgr Courcoux. The day of Pentecost 1948 will be noted in the Annals of the institute. Everything was beautiful and simple as are the things of God. There was at the same time a sense of peace and calm, an intimate joy, a very warm family atmosphere and a very strong fraternal joy.*

*Several people had not seen one another for many years. It was amusing to see Marie Dominique from Algeria identify immediately those sisters that she had never met and yet had heard spoken of so often.*

*The Council that was held at this time named a sub mistress of novices. Unanimously Yvonne Breton was chosen for this task and that made me very happy. Did you know that the postulants and novices, simple and professed, are an impressive number, 55, the same as the perpetually professed.”*

In 1950 the Dominican Institute of Jesus Crucified was accepted as an institute of Diocesan Right. This canonical status was “*Ad experimentum*” for seven years. In 1947 the institute was accepted definitively as of “Diocesan Right” by Mgr Picard de la Vacquerie.

The death of Mgr Courcoux in April 1951 was for the institute the loss of “*a father, a friend, a protector*” In November of the same year Marthe Malderet was very ill and in the collective letter prayers were asked for the occasion of her 24<sup>th</sup> year as prioress. “*What this is for us all is an opportunity to praise God greatly for the development she has given to the Institute, for the deep religious spirit she has rooted in the hearts of all who follow the foundress and for the generous and open spirit, reaching out to all she has always shown.*”

An important development came about in France in the domain of the Liturgy. A collective letter of February 1952 informed the members of the Institute that their daily prayer could be enriched by sharing more closely in the official prayer of the Church. “*a version of the Breviary for the Faithful in French. A very beautiful attempt, not perfect, which is trying to accomplish an even more adapted form. While waiting, each Centre or person can replace a part of the office of the Virgin Mary with the corresponding part of the Great Office. Everyone can now say the Office in French in order to grasp its meaning and from which to draw real light and life*” In 1952 the Benedictines of En-Calcat completed the French Book of Hours which was adopted by the institute until the appearance of the present “Prayer of the Present Time”

17<sup>th</sup> July 1952 Marthe Malderet died.

She who had believed in the future in 1928, considered the second founder of the Institute, received general homage. Her collaborator at all times Jeanne Bouget said this “*She presented herself with such a beautiful smile, showed herself so welcoming, that you could not help but be struck and appreciate the spiritual capital of the Institute she represented*”

PereTilly, great friend of the Institute, summed up her life like this *“Marthe Malderet never wanted to be anything other than a servant of the Lord She left the institute a great example She had the intelligence of intuition, that which comes from her love of God, of her sense of the Providence which follows always the means adapted to the times and to different cultures, that comes also from her goodness towards souls, and of her mercy for all situations.*

*Through this she was able to be a pioneer in apostolates in the church ever new. Knowing how to accept respectful advice from competent authorities she could admit when she made mistakes, she could take bold decisions with a supernatural prudence that the times could only confirm. It requires a great humility and a perfect forgetfulness of self to become such an instrument of God.”*

### **What to keep from this very rich period?**

The recognition of the “Dominican Secular Institute of Jesus Crucified” as a Secular Institute of Diocesan right. In 1950-57

Its official affiliation to the Order of St Dominic 14<sup>th</sup> January 1942

The expansion of the Institute in France with the creation of Centres in several regions.

The beginning of its spread outside France’s borders into other countries of Europe: England Belgium, Poland.

The adoption by the institute of the breviary in French, the Office of the Blessed Virgin.

The very great riches of the diversity of its members , under the leadership of a remarkable personality Marthe Malderet whose motto “**Conscience and Confidence**” became the guiding words of the members of the Institute.

### **3<sup>rd</sup> Period 1952- 1988**

#### **Assemblies- Constitutions-New Directions**

During this period two General Moderators were appointed, each one re-elected twice, as the Constitutions allowed. Jeanne Bouget from **1952 to 1970** and Yvonne Breton from **1970 to 1988**. Very different personalities, they knew how to lead in close collaboration the necessary evolutions of the institute during this fertile time in the events in society and in the Church.

The recognition of secular institutes was the point of departure for great changes. First of all there had to be set in motion the work of the Constitutions which had to be presented to Rome in 1947 and approved by the Sacred Congregation for Religious (Which became subsequently the Congregation for Institutes of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life; the CIVCSVA).

The Elective Chapter foreseen in the in the constitutions drawn up by Pere Lemmonyer to ensure the regular renewal of the persons in charge of the different offices and counsellors

had never taken place. The date of the first chapter was fixed for 1951 but because of the death of Marthe Malderet it did not take place. It opened on 1<sup>st</sup> November 1952.

**Jeanne Bouget** was elected as General Moderator by the delegates of the six regions into which the members of the Institute were divided. Orleans and its environs, Angers , Fougères, Laon and the department of l'Aisne, that of the North, and of Aveyron, North Africa , Paris, Rouen and Normandy.

Jeanne born 28<sup>th</sup> May 1891 in Orleans where her father was Professor of Mathematics, joined, in 1913, the Little Group of Jesus Crucified where she was received by Jeanne Leplatre and Pere Boulanger who died shortly afterwards. Although living with her parents who found her vocation hard to accept, she experienced a demanding life with the Little Group but one sustained by the prayer centred on Christ and the Church. She became little by little, the animator and the architect of its evolution.

The very strong personality of Jeanne Bouget is the object of numerous witnesses collected together at her death at the age of 104 on 29<sup>th</sup> October 1995.

Solidity in the faith “ *God has always been for her the Lord on whom one can build as on a rock*” “*Her moral energy was as strong as her iron health* ” “*She always preached joy, as a prelude to everlasting joy.*”

*Her sense of welcome was recognized by all, as well as her openness of spirit, her extreme simplicity and her total dedication to the Institute. She had, above all, a sure intuition which helped her to recognize the sense of the direction to take and to give to the Institute.*

Before her election Jeanne had assumed the office of “Mistress of Novices” forming new members in a spiritual life based on the doctrines of St Thomas Aquinas. For those who spent any time at Bon Accueil this study was complemented by taking part in the multiple social activities of the Social Centre, ideal territory for contacts with all generations present, parish life, catechism, youth work , help with domestic work, leisure activities and theatre.

Aware that real competence in work was indispensable in a secular vocation Jeanne encouraged all those who could to acquire diplomas in their chosen profession. She was open to initiatives and knew how to raise them.

Finally it is noted that from the beginning of their spiritual lives in the secular world, members were invited to take as their model Catherine of Siena who in the midst of the duties of her active life found the time to withdraw into her” inner cell”

All the questions relating to the development of the institute were addressed to the Assemblies which underlined the importance of study for all, the unity of members in the diversity of their situations and by prayer through the office of the Blessed Virgin Mary and after 1952, the Prayer of the Church in French.

In the 60's at the the Vatican the Church underwent an important moment in its history. The Vatican Council, desired by John XXIII and announced in 1959, was opened on 11<sup>th</sup> October 1962, closing in 8<sup>th</sup> December 1965 under the presidency of Paul VI. The Church then experienced a long period of renewal. The influence of ideas, set in motion for many years

in the church had a big influence on the Institute and reverberated in the work of its Assemblies. There was a strong emphasis on the necessity of taking into account the realities of secular life which had an effect on the decisions taken at the Assemblies from 1958. The Constitutions were simplified as were the customs which ruled the details of life at the Centres which up until then had been dominated by the traditions inherited from religious life.

The assembly of 1964 determined to act decisively in the matter of the direction of the institute:

**“The General Chapter holds to the directive which has been given by the church to underline the Secular Orientation of the Institute.**

**Without losing sight of the profound values without which no-one is truly an apostle, we must have a constant concern for our presence in the world, for an evangelical life communicable to all through a spirituality of the essentials, through discretion about our consecration and the abandoning of all forms of address or religious titles, through openness to others, professional competence and devotion to our work.**

**In the Centres our life will have a familial style, distinct from that of convents and conceived in such a way that our presence in the world is not hindered but on the contrary favoured...”**

The name of the institute became **“The Dominican Secular Institute of Orleans under the term Jesus Crucified. The Patronal feast is the Exaltation of the Holy Cross, become “Feast of the Glorious Cross” the 14<sup>th</sup> September.**

Thus, as it said in the collective letter of January 1965, *“It means now that through the General Chapter there must be a renewal, an adaptation of the Institute in the spirit and grace of the Council.”*

The institute had at its origin had a particular devotion and reparatory prayer figured thus in the Constitutions presented to Rome in the request for recognition of the Institute in chapter XIX. *“The institute has a special devotion to reparation to Jesus crucified, not through works or any special exercises but through its religious life in total.”*

This devotion was widely shared at the end of the Nineteenth Century in France The Assembly of 1964 orientated this devotion towards a sharing in the even greater victory of the Resurrection

***“The Members of the Institute will strive to honour Jesus Christ especially by the union of their lives to his redemptive offering and paschal victory.”***

Jeanne Bouget having assumed three successive mandates Yvonne Breton assisted by Beatrice Prax 1<sup>st</sup> Assistant and Jeanne Bouget 2<sup>nd</sup> Assistant was elected as Responsible General in 1970.

Entering the institute in 1935 Yvonne began her professional life in Banking. Her office was a privileged terrain for observation and action, putting to work what inspired her active participation in a Catholic Action group “Young City Dwellers.” She developed there the

ability to listen, availability, the generosity which she displayed for the whole of her life, particularly in her contacts with young people from 1941.

Nominated a Counsellor in 1949 *“for her competence in the domain of external works”* this office was renewed at different chapters preceding that of 1970 and her election as Responsible General.

At this date she was still active in professional life at la Mutualite Sociale Agricole of the Loiret where she was Monitress- in- chief of Rural Domestic Skills. She obtained lodgings at her work to enable her to carry out these double functions until her retirement in 1973.

An indefatigable traveller (Claiming to be able to sleep anywhere) she often accompanied Jeanne Bouget on her travels in France. Then later with Marie Antoinette to Belgium, England, Poland after the opening of the iron curtain. She equally loved an atmosphere of relaxation and organized little holidays in particular at Veules les Roses before the sale of the house became unavoidable. Yvonne’s personality was always a model of openness, welcome, dynamism, joy, compassionate and understanding in the face of the difficulties of each person, qualities linked to a great faith, a real humility and a very great generosity.

Yvonne was re-elected in 1976, assisted by Marie Antoinette, 1st assistant, and Marie Guerillon 2<sup>nd</sup> Assistant as first and second assistants.

She was re-elected in 1982, with Marie Antoinette and Helene Penloup as first and second assistants respectively.

In the assemblies as well as the study of questions concerning the life of the institute, the essential principles of the secular Life and the organization of the Institute were confirmed and its functioning in its expansion *“It is desirable that more consideration should be given to the idea of, collegiality regionalization and participation Collegiality should especially be exercised at the higher level of the Responsible General, the two Assistants and the Council where the different regions are represented.*

In 1976 the development of the institute in European countries other than in France and on other continents led the chapter to construct a text to be inserted in the Constitutions *“In different civilisations it is up to the local responsables to adapt the constitutions without changing the spirit. The text will be translated as faithfully as possible with the approval of the General Moderator and her Council.”*

In the course of the same Assembly it was decided that *“a copy of the Constitutions will be given to each member to facilitate their study from the time of their first profession “*

The rapid evolution of society demanded soon that an Intermediary assembly be held between the elective assemblies in 1979 and 1985.

Several other important decisions were taken, in 1979 concerning the organization of the institute. **The Belgian Group was accorded the status of Province.**

This group comprising up to 30 members which, said a report in 1991, knew *“this, slightly mysterious body through a link person, maybe a priest, a Dominican, a member, great discretion being exercised at this time, not allowing any publicity in the light of day.”* Renee

Lex was the Provincial Responsible to whom succeeded Josette Brisbois elected by the Provincial Council 31<sup>st</sup> March 1985.

The group met at the foyer St Jean d'Arc, 18 Fond St Servais, acquired in 1952, until the house had to be abandoned. Thanks to the perseverance of Pere Draime and the members of the Group, this beautiful house retrieved its eighteenth century charm for students who flocked to it until 1983 in such a way as to necessitate a "Lodge" which was linked by a communal court to the Foyer. After the closure of the educational side, the house became a monthly meeting place for groups but its residents welcomed visitors and voluntary groups.

The English group is **recognised as a Province in Formation.**

Mary Thorpe, a member of the institute since her perpetual profession in 1956, returned to England in 1960 and founded a little group there of which Maureen Riley and Kathleen Head, both ex-members of the Amata Roberts group, became a part. A branch of the Institute began to be born in England, Jacqueline Collicott being appointed as responsible in 1970.

From Poland news reached Orleans in roundabout ways, in particular through Pere Pelletier, the old novice master, who had formed many Polish Dominicans, but also through those who were visiting those abroad. Thus Wanda Brominska whose mother lived in Switzerland came several times to France after 1958. Another member, Anna Minkowska, a widow, having children in Switzerland and in America, communicated numerous bits of information on the life of the group during her stays outside of Poland.

The situation was difficult but the group grew under the leadership of Louise Radzimska. In 1957 the acquisition of land at Nowa Weiss, in the environment of Warsaw and the building of a house near the forest, allowed regular meetings to take place, protected by important precautionary measures to avoid attracting the attention of the authorities.

The visit of Pope John Paul to Poland in 1979 allowed police regulations to be relaxed and voyages to be organized in which two members of the institute from France took part.

In France collegiality was reinforced by the three-monthly meetings of the Council and the monthly meeting of the three elected officers: Yvonne Breton, Marie-Antoinette Perret and Marie Guerillon.

Elsewhere the role of the regional leaders established in 1979 was established and the spirit of fraternity was reinforced by the fact that meetings were organized on a regular basis. In Paris which had a great number of members from 1971, teams were formed to organize activities: study, prayer, visits to isolated members. Commissions on different questions relating to secular life were put in place with the participation of volunteers from different regions. Particular attention was given to prayer study and liturgy.

The Assembly which took place in November 1982 addressed numerous questions concerning

The interior life of the Institute together with the work of the commissions ; prayer, liturgy, poverty, obedience, the spiritual and prayer life, and the fraternal spirit. A wide-ranging look at all the groups in France and outside Provinces allowed all aspects to be included.

External life: CNIS with participation in different commissions : Evangelical Counsels, Call, Session at Chantilly, -CNV- CMIS-Dominican Secular Institutes. Etc...

In France a meeting, attended by about eighty members, identified five themes of work to study

The charism of the Institute-prayer-study-review of life and information.

The activity of the formation group was taken up with a report and then a document emanating from the Sacred Congregation of the Religious in 1981 on "*Secular Institutes and the Evangelical Counsels*"

In 1980 there was a meeting of seven Dominicans or secular priests regularly accompanying French groups (the sixth being Austin Gaskell who sent a report on his relations with the English group.) This meeting enabled the participants to have a wide-ranging exchange of views on the lay vocation.

Relations with the Dominican Order were very important and had been ever since the beginning of the institute in France. If there was no designated chaplain nevertheless talks from the Brethren were requested on numerous occasions, accompaniment of the group, teaching at monthly meetings and for several years help in the conduct of the debates at the Assemblies. Thus Pere Antonin Motte was a faithful and true advisor up until his death in 1989, replaced then for the following assemblies by P. Raffin, Lintanf, Toxe.

An exception was Belgium where Pere Draime during his whole life had a particular role as a close counsellor to the group following his involvement in its origins in that Province. The same cooperation was sought from the brothers in England and Poland.

### **Remaking the Constitutions**

In a pastoral and ecumenical spirit the Council profoundly reshaped the Church and in what concerned the consecrated life, the religious congregations and the secular institutes were asked to redo their constitutions, integrating the new perspectives and insights of the Council, something which those responsible in the institute were also keen to do. New texts were produced in 1968, then in 1974, approved by Mgr Riobe in 1975.

### **Extension of the Institute**

Towards 1976 thanks to the initiative of a charity "*Les Mains Ouverte*" begun in Belgium, a group began to form in **Haiti**. Jeanne and Yvonne followed this closely and with discernment from its beginnings, facilitated by the coming from Belgium of two pioneers, Dominique Fraigneux and Claire Mahe, but also some young Haitians attached themselves to the work. Some members of the institute from France or Belgium went out there, allowing a direct knowledge of the people drawn to the Secular Institute and of the conditions of life in this developing country with a very difficult political situation.

To her great regret Yvonne never knew this country.

### **The Evolution of Numbers of Members.**

The statistics are fragmentary but those there are enable us to see the numerical growth of the Institute of which in France the members had very diverse occupations: teaching , private or public- medical-social: nurses, social assistants, doctors , pharmacists,- secretarial, business agricultural etc

From 110 members in 1948, the number went in 1954 to 186 members in France and Belgium

In 1965 the institute consisted of about 230 members but by 1980 the total is just 179 members. In France during these years three retreats gathered members together in July August and September, retreats marked in general by a ceremony in the course of which entries were made into formation or various commitments.

In Poland the group grew steadily from 4 members in 1948, to 16 in 1954, then to 25 in 1980.

The vocations crisis which hit the church after the Council and the events of May 1968 had a big effect on the institute. The entries into formation in France diminished greatly between 1970 to 1990 They ranged between 0 and rarely, 3 or 4.

The exceptional number of 18 entrants in 1946 went to 2 twenty years and there was not a single entry in 1976.

The evolution was identical in England and Belgium. On the other hand there began to emerge new countries especially outside Europe.

### **Participation in Inter-Institute life**

This period was fruitful in developments. After the promulgation of the Apostolic Constitution of 1947 Institutes began to see the need to put together their research on points of interest.

On the national level meetings of the Generals took place regularly to deepen their understanding of Secular Consecration, an authentic lay vocation.

It was in 1971 that the name National Conference of Secular Institutes was adopted. Its aim was to *“Facilitate exchanges, research and collaboration between institutes without ever imposing directives upon them. It assures a link with the International Conference without ever committing to representing every single Institute.”*

In fact at the international level the same need for exchanges and for research made itself felt. After several attempts at partial encounters the first meeting organized in Rome addressed the subjects of consecration, secularity and apostolate.



It assembled more than four hundred participants from 92 Institutes . the World Congress of Secular Institutes was born officially in **1972**.and every four years a new subject for reflection is proposed to the Assembly of Institutes which from then on began to multiply in every country on the planet.

The Dominican Secular institute of Orleans took part in this Assembly and brought its contribution in view of the general synthesis given for the following Congress.To respond to this concern some study commissions set in motion for the assembly of 1976 “ *it is particularly desirable that the members of the institute should put together in common any findings relative to their consecrated lay life and the life of the institute.*”

The Institute was officially affiliated to the Order of Preachers and it was not the only one to adopt its spirituality. An **Association of Dominican Secular Institutes** was created in 1957 with the aim of exploring the riches of belonging to what later became called “**the Dominican Family**”

Study days, retreats in common,and joint publications cemented the unity which existed between the members of these institutes in the reality of their Consecrated Secular lives. The two Generals responsible Jeanne Bouget and Yvonne Breton who succeeded her up to 1988, were very active in these inter- institute occasions and were watchful that the institute as a whole contributed to the study and activities organized by these meetings.

### **Statutes of secular institutes**

The official place of secular institutes in the church was confirmed in 1983, when they were included in the third part of section I of the new **Code of canon law** treating of “**Institutes of consecrated Life.**” Some common norms are described in the Title I ( **Can 573-606**) Religious life is the subject of Title II (**Can 607-709**) Title III (**canons 710-730**) relates to secular institutes. In any case ( 1978) the French National Conference of Secular Institutes says “ *the former legislative texts from now on are abolished and have ceased to have any force from 17<sup>th</sup> November 1983 but it is necessary to refer to them as the source of the new legislation in all that is not contrary*”

### **What to keep from this very rich period?**

From 1092 The organisation of Election Chapters every 6 years.

A Deliberative Assembly following the elections every three years from 1979.

From 1958 then in 1064 affirmation of the secular orientation of the institute abandoning all the signs and language of religious life

The institute took the name The Dominican Secular Institute of Orleans with the Patronal feast of the Glorious Cross 14<sup>th</sup> September

In 1979 Belgium became a “province” and England a “province in Formation” The group in Poland was growing in an underground fashion (17 in 1952).

The organization of the Institute was strengthened, regular Council Meetings, Moderators for regions and the Centres.

A commission to study different aspects of the secular life.

The remaking of the constitutions:1975 approved by Mgr Riobe.

The expansion of the institute.

Outside Europe: the beginning of the group in Haiti.

In Europe: significant growth up to 1970 then a diminution of the number of members.

Participation in Inter-Institute life.

French National Conference of Secular Institutes created in 1971.

World Congress of Secular Institutes in 1972.

Association of French Dominican Secular Institutes 1957.

In 1983 secular institutes appear in canons 710-730 of the New Code of Canon Law in the third part the treating of the Consecrated Life.

#### **Fourth Period 1988-2003**

An important step was taken at the Assembly of 1988.

From this date France became a Province endowed with a Provincial Moderator and a Council. This was because the responsibility had become too much for the General Moderator and the Assistants who had to implement the decisions taken by the Assembly, be present on the numerous occasions their participation was required and also follow their lay commitments in the world .Above all it appeared necessary to provide the Institute with an opportunity to devolve responsibility to the provinces and regions.

The Assembly defined the different offices and counsellors as well as defining the different modes of participation in the various provinces.

The elections of this time were taken in two stages.

1. The election of the General Moderator, Marie Antoinette Perret and two assistants Françoise Lhotte and Mireille Prouillet
2. Provincial Moderator Helene Penloup

Seven counsellors were elected among whom four were chosen as General Counsellors to take part in a General Council, assembling each year the Provincials and Counsellors of all the Provinces.

The new General Moderator, Marie Antoinette Perret originating in St Etienne, lived for a long time at Bon Accueil before her profession as a social worker took her at last to Paris. Counsellor from 1970 she was elected first Assistant in 1976 and re-elected to this responsibility in 1982.

Helen Penloup, first Provincial of France, originally from Angers, the town in which she lived for the whole of her professional career in teaching, replacing Marie Audfray, Directress of a private school, named Joan of Arc

Counsellor in 1976, she was elected as Second Assistant in 1982. From the Date of this election Orleans was no longer the place of residence of those Responsible in the Institute, a step which was to be further accentuated in 2003.

A year after this Assembly in 1989 the fall of the Berlin Wall which had divided Europe into two blocs, allowed for the establishment of normal relations with Poland. Their Provincial Moderator and Counsellors could now take their place at the Assemblies and General Council.

Numerous exchanges took place and a great collaboration began between East and West. The meetings of the officers took place at Orleans but in August 1995 a Council was held at Nowa Weiss near Warsaw then a General Council was organised in Liege in June 1998 and anew in Poland in 2002.

In 1994 Janina Slominska was elected as First Assistant of the re-elected General Moderator Marie Antoinette Perret. Her role as University professor in Warsaw and in several faculties enabled her to make known the secular institute vocation in the university milieu and several enquiries surfaced in Lithuania, Hungary and the Ukraine. A new impulse towards the development of the Institute in the countries of the East made itself felt.

The Provincial Moderators in 1994 were

In France **Helen Penloup** re-elected

In Poland **Stanislawa Zdebska** replaced Louise Radziminska in 1990. In 1996 **Maria Kostecka** followed her.

In **Belgium Josette Brisbois** succeeded Renee Lex

In **July 2000** new elections took place but the constitutions only allowed for two mandates for the General Moderator and the Provincials. A dispensation from the Bishop prolonged the office of the Moderator General for another three years. Janina Sloska was re-elected for the same amount of time and Josette Brisbois became the Second Assistant.

The Provincials were

France: Bernadette Vilaine

England: Ann Hamilton (who succeeded Jacqueline Collicott in 1992)

Belgium: Madeleine Dufour (succeeded Josette Brisbois elected in 1984 replacing Renee Lex)

Poland: Maria Kostecka

### **Constitutions**

These were frequently updated to reflect the changes in society and the Institute. In 1998 the new constitutions approved by Monsignor Picandet took account of the code of the

1983 can.723 to extend the three years of temporary profession between the first commitment and final profession to five.

In 1999 a General Assembly took place for the preparations of the new constitutions which were approved in January 2000. Some modifications were brought to the Assembly of 2003.

### **Spiritual life and a deepening of the faith**

Ever since 1982 a theme was given to the Assemblies. This theme, of which some examples are given, was studied by all the members in the course of the year preceding the Assembly:

1982 Witnesses to the absoluteness of God in the world of today.

1997 The Dominican charism and the consecrated life.

2003 Following Christ the source of Truth.

Furthermore the Apostolic Exhortation of Pope John Paul II “*Vita Consecrata*” of 25<sup>th</sup> March 1996 and the instruction “*Repartir du Christ*” published by the Congregation of the Institutes of Consecrated Life and the Societies of Apostolic Life on 19<sup>th</sup> May 2002, constituted a solid base of study and a means of deepening the foundations of the fundamentals of the vocation.

Great attention was paid to the formation of the members for which a programme of study was established and sessions organized by the National Conference of Secular Institutes. In France several people, charged with accompanying members followed and also sessions organized by the National Conference of Secular Institutes.

In Poland a program of formation was established in association with their National Conference of Secular Institutes.

### **State of the Institute**

This period was characterised by a double movement: the reduction of the number of members in France and in Europe in the west and the large geographical expansion in the east and in the rest of the world.

In 1988, the effective total was 149, the presence of the Institute outside of Europe was limited to Haiti, whose beginnings were promising but the socio-political conditions were such that the lives of the members of the group were very difficult. Setting aside Reunion, near the continent of Africa, in an area of overseas French influence, the Ivory Coast started to get to know the Institute in that Continent.

Then in 1998 its presence became more important there. Through the intermediary of a Belgian Dominican whose Congregation was withdrawing from the Democratic Republic of the Congo Gertrude Tundu-Kialu was put in touch with the institute General and after a brief stay in Belgium and in France asked for admission into the institute. Rapidly a little group was organized in the RDC in the region of Mbujimayi.

In Western Europe the Institute saw its strength diminish while in Eastern Europe the Polish group grew and the institute spread to several neighbouring countries. As a result In 2003 the composition was very different but the numbers of the institute remained the same.

## **Organisation of the Institute**

The results of the decisions taken in the course of the Assemblies of 1958 and above all 1964 began to be felt little by little. In fact life at the heart of the Centres became increasingly difficult to maintain, each member staying in their own milieu: familial, professional and neighbourhood.

The Centres, previously hubs of activity in their areas, where members lived, became meeting places or places to stay briefly, but that made them a heavy burden financially to maintain. Also we saw the Centre at Rouen close in the eighties and Abbey Wood in England in 1990, the Foyer St Jeanne D'arc in Liege in 2002. In 2001 a part of the property at Bon Accueil was rented out to an Association of handicapped adults and in the course of the same year Montjoie in Paris was sold to be replaced by an apartment better suited to the needs of the group.

However the life of the members was marked by regular meetings, as frequent as possible organized in each region, which were joined sometimes in France by members of other Institutes.

The collective letter, sent monthly, maintained the link between everyone, as well as the visits of their Provincial.

The General, Marie Antoinette Perret, made numerous journeys which allowed her, in company with another member of the institute, to come to know something of the culture and environment of each of the lives of the members. These journeys were very frequent to England and Belgium, then to Poland and finally to other continents, Haiti, Reunion, Ivory Coast and the Democratic Republic of the Congo. The direct contacts, thus established, reinforced the unity fundamental to the Institute, despite the dispersal of its members and the diversity of their commitments.

This 4<sup>th</sup> period was equally marked by a very important event organized in 1991 for the hundred years anniversary of Jeanne Bouget and of the institute. This double centenary was the occasion for celebrating one who had given so much of herself to the institute and renewing hope for the future, despite the difficulties experienced and the end of a century.

The Assembly of 2000, beside entering into the third millennium was a real event because for the first time the International aspect of the institute was realized.

Although the number of members in Central America and Africa did not allow for the possibility of participating in the Assembly, the General and her Council wished that a delegate should represent them, bearing a direct witness to their way of life and afterwards becoming Ambassadors to the fraternal life of the Institute. The opening thus created proved fruitful for all the participants who discovered the faces of people now identifiable and with whom durable contacts could be established.

## External Relations

These followed different paths in different countries.

In England , Belgium , France and Poland the Provincials and their delegates took part in the work of the National Conferences of their Institutes.

The different provinces sent a representative to the World Congress of Secular Institutes which assembled nearly 200 Institutes every four years and their themes were sent for study to all the members of each Institute e.g. *The responsibility for institutes towards a World in transformation...How to be an Experimental Laboratory in the perspective of the Third Millennium...The Formation of members of secular institutes,,,, Welcoming God's initiatives and putting on the sentiments of Jesus Christ to address the discernments of the Cultural Challenges of the Third Millennium.*

*These congresses were held in Rome with the exception of the one held in the area of Sao Paulo Brazil in 1996.*

In France the Institute participated actively in the meetings and sessions of the Dominican Secular Institutes on themes such as *Presence in the means of Communication and the Media- The decline of religion and the boom in spirituality-Reading the Bible Today, finally We believe in One only God, a Christian look at Judaism and Islam.*

In addition a member of the Institute took part in a Dominican Justice and Peace Commission which organized two conferences in 1991 "Justice Mysticism and Peace" and in 1997 "Conflicts , Authority, Democracy"

In 2000 the Association of Dominican Secular Institutes sent a delegate to represent them at the First Congress of the Dominican Family in Manilla.

In 2001 several members of the institute from Belgium, France, Poland participated in Assisi at the Congress organized jointly by the Franciscan and Dominican families around the theme "*We and others : dialogue, truth, identity* "

Each year the presence of the institute was assured at the Rosary Pilgrimage in Lourdes. Also members of the Institute from the provinces of England and Poland represented the institute in Dublin and Bari at meetings of **Espace** a Dominican initiative for a spiritual Europe.

Efforts were made to make the institute known through flyers and leaflets, widely distributed. In Poland the First Assistant wrote an article on Secular institutes and had it translated into several languages.

Finally in June 2000 an edition of CERF appeared **A Paradoxical Vocation - Secular Institutes for Women in France XIXth and XXth century.**

### **:On the civil front:**

The situation was different in each country



Orleans Monsignor Fort came to Paris to the little sisters of the Assumption , Rue Violet 75015, to preside over the elective assembly . Philippe Toxe oversaw the rest of the work.

A new step was taken. The international nature of the institute was confirmed because for the first time the General elected was not French,.

**General: Ann Hamilton (England )**

**1<sup>st</sup>assistant Annick Masson,(France)**

**2nd assistant Maria Kostecka (Poland)**

The Provincials were

France: Bernadette Vilaine

Belgium: Madeleine Dufour

Poland: Maria Kostecka

New problems face the Institute now and its leaders. The Holy Spirit who makes all things new will help them to resolve them. The rest is still to be written....

### **Conclusion**

This brief history of the institute , based in great part on the official texts published after each assembly finds its complement written in the lives of each of its members, a rich history of which echoes are found in the collective letters, the life of the centres, the contribution brought by each one through the life and evolution of the institute related and this important mine of information remains to be explored.

This return to the past shows us the path of the institute for more than a century and is made up of contrasting strands. A difficult start followed by happier times in its development, followed by a glorious moment when the recognition of the church gave the institute its legitimacy with the assurance of being a *“Gift of the Holy spirit to the people of this time.”* Other more difficult times followed but with the assurance that the Paschal Mystery, this passage from death to life, remains present and central to everything that is.

To the image of all Christian spirituality this dimension of transformation remains essential because the important task for the institute and for all its members is to discern the call of God in this world of constant change.

A paragraph from the letter of 15<sup>th</sup> January 1965, written by Jeanne Bouget after the important affirmation of the secular institute vocation by the assembly, can perhaps be the conclusion of this historical journey which is not meant to be limited to the past but also to envisage the future.

*“ It has to be said that the greatest force, the first objective and aim , if you want the institute to be renewed, is to promote in all its members an authentic life, consecrated to God. a profound interior life of union with God ,a personal life with the living Christ. It is necessary for each one to make a personal effort through reading, , reflection, and open=ness to the Holy Spirit.*



*If the members of the Institute vowed to the mixed life, as St Thomas named it, tend with their whole being to this principal end of the consecrated life, if they search in every thing they do to live very simply under the gaze of God , if they love him truly for himself and desire ardently to contemplate him, then they will receive from him the light to see everything as He sees it, in their personal life, in the institute and in their apostolate.”*

There is then no place to ask what is the future of the institute. The Holy Spirit builds it each day with us when we participate actively in the realisation of what His love inspires in us daily.

Paris 19<sup>th</sup> November 2005

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