



# In Sion Firmata Sum

Basic Thoughts of  
Father Theodore on



Charism

Religious life

Prayer

Spirituality

Apostolic Life

Apostolic Community

Government

## Basic thoughts of Father Theodore

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## THE IMMEDIATE FOLLOW UP OF ALPHONSE'S CONVERSION IN ROME

Fr. Theodore's reactions to the miracle of the 20<sup>th</sup> January, 1842

Some passages in his many writings:

*"His countenance shone with the joy of having seen Mary. His modest bearing, his serious and humble words, made a deep impression on me. I avoided asking him questions on the miracle of his conversion; I knew how much the mysteries of divine grace operate in silence, and I did not want to risk compromising this state by ill-considered words and gestures."*

(Memoirs)

*"My brother's behaviour is even more miraculous than his conversion; it is the ascetical life of an old Christian, consumed in the practices of the cloister."*

(letter to Madame Stouhlen)

Only one time did the neophyte try to respond to Theodore's desire in recalling the vision of S. Andrea. The intensity of his recollection caused the word on his lips to die and the two brothers, kneeling on the same prie-Dieu – that of Mademoiselle Humann – mingled their tears and their thanksgiving in each other's arms. The interrupted conversation was never taken up again.

("Fr. Theodore's Life")

Before his departure for Rome in June 1843 and before Alphonse's entry into the novitiate of Toulouse in the same month, Theodore writes in his "Memoirs":

*"The sacrifices he had to make were accepted with such heroism that I still feel moved by it. He had generously renounced the joys of family life, and he had already had a foretaste of the hundred-fold promised to those who leave all things to follow Jesus Christ... I can still see him, the evening before he left, joyfully distributing among the Sisters of Charity the few possessions he had; without keeping anything for himself, he went away poor and arrived poor at the novitiate."*

*His actions and attitude reminded me of the first Christians and made me blush with shame. I saw this younger brother striding along ahead of me in the ways of God; and I was embarrassed at receiving an example from one to whom I should have given it."* (Memoirs)

*"I had in front of my eyes for several months the life of a saint. I should not say it because it is my brother; but my heart cries out this truth. One day, I will tell you verbally what he did and what he still does, and you will weep as I did, blessing the power and the grace of God."*

(letter to Madame Stouhlen)

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- 20. Instruction for the Month of Mary, May 23, 1861 and Retreat of September 4, 1859. Unpublished
- 21. Retreat of September 4, 1859. Unpublished
- 22. Rev. 21:3. See instruction, January 2, 1863 and undated instruction on the altar. Manuscript belonging to the Fathers of Sion, unpublished
- 23. Instruction in the chapel, January 2, 1863
- 24. Retreat on the Pater, September 5, 1859. Unpublished
- 25. Manual of the Christian Mothers, Chapter XXXIII: The tabernacle
- 26. Retreat instruction, September 19, 1861. Unpublished
- 27. Instruction in the chapel, August 28, 1857
- 28. Miettes Évangéliques, Thursday of Corpus Christ and retreat to the novices, probably in 1866. Unpublished
- 29. Rayons de Vérité, p.286
- 30. Instruction for the Month of Mary, May 23, 1860
- 31. Instruction in the chapel, May 18, 1859
- 32. Instruction, August 2, 1864 on Saint Alphonsus Liguori
- 33. Instruction to the novices at Grandbourg, September 20, 1864. Unpublished
- 34. Rayons de Vérité, p.169. Letter to the Hebrews 13:8
- 35. Rayons de Vérité, p.151
- 36. Instruction in the chapel, May 31, 1862
- 37. Instruction, January 5, 1865
- 38. Letter from Fr. Theodore to the Children of Mary, May 12, 1870
- 39. Instruction in the chapel, August 17, 1873

## Some Basic Thoughts of Father Theodore on Apostolic Life

1. Letter to Théodorine Randon, August 19, 1866
2. Letter to Épiphané Jackson, February 19, 1862
3. Instruction to the novices, November 18, 1859. Unpublished
4. Talks to the first novices of the Congregation, 1853, p.116
5. Letter to Sr. Benoni de Perthuis, June 12, 1873
6. Talk to the community on the spirit of the Psalms, December 22, 1853
7. Trois Retraites aux Religieuses, p.129
8. Profession, January 6, 1860
9. Talk to the community of Constantinople, August 23, 1858
10. Letter to Louise Weywada, March 31, 1859
11. Letter to Michaël de Folard, March 19, 1874
12. Letter to Louise Weywada, November 9, 1856
13. Minutes of the Central Council, April 11, 1860
14. Letter to Louise Weywada, September 15, 1857
15. Letter to the Mother House, June 6, 1858
16. Letter to Borromée Lagarmite, December 22, 1862
17. Letter to Louise Weywada, November 21, 1856
18. Talk to the community, August 21, 1867. Unpublished
19. Letter to Constantinople, August 29, 1859
20. Letter to Louise Weywada, August 19, 1857
21. Letter to Jerusalem, December 14, 1868
22. Letter to Worthing, June 23, 1863
23. Instruction to the novices, April 19, 1859. Unpublished
24. Letter to Louise Weywada, April 23, 1866

## Synthesis of the Spirituality of Father Theodore

1. Letter to San José, December 2, 1881
2. Instruction, February 2, 1852 and Letter to Marie Claire Blüm, October 9, 1861
3. Instruction, May 29, 1861 and Trois Retraites aux Religieuses, p.301
4. Instruction, January 1, 1866
5. Extract from an autograph letter without date or recipient. Unpublished
6. Instruction at St. Philippe du Roule, 1869 and at Sion, 1873
7. Retreat of September 3, 1859. Unpublished
8. Letter to Benedicta Ligondès, May 6, 1880
9. Letter to Marie Claire Blüm, February 26, 1862
10. Instruction in the chapel, May 17, 1860

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## **I Some Basic Thoughts of Father Theodore on Sion's Charism**

Sion's charism is a gift from the Holy Spirit to the Church and in the Church for each one of us:

*"God who inspired us with these sentiments and who gave us this hunger, this thirst for the salvation of Israel, will also, when the time comes, give fecundity to our work."*(1)

### **A. It is primarily a question of Love**

*"Above all you must love the people of Israel."* (2)

Why? Because God is love. You must therefore love the Jews as God loves them, as it were, and act accordingly.

*"God never stopped loving them. He still loves them because of their Fathers and this people will always be the loved people. It is for this that God chose you so that you may be permeated with God's own love for these souls."*(3)

*"The various sentiments of Jesus Christ are always alive in the Church.*

*Among these sentiments, there is one of which you are the recipients:*

*I mean the love of Jesus Christ for the people of Israel."* (4)

You must love them with the same love as Christ loved them.

To express the reality of this very human love of Jesus Christ for his people, its plenitude, its interiority, Father Theodore uses the expression *"the Heart of Jesus"* about 15 times, and he stressed how much our love is communion in the love of Jesus for His people.

*"This heart contains the fullness and superabundance of love...Here, more than anywhere else, we must return love for love, since the last thought of the Heart of Jesus Christ, his deepest and most intimate desire, was the salvation of His people."* (5)

*"You love as it were with His heart which animates yours."* (6)

### **B. It is a question of hope: God is faithful to his promises.**

There are about twenty texts on this subject and the very name of the Congregation signifies hope in the Promises:

In scripture, He says, Mount Sion is the Symbol of hope and he proposes this act of hope: *"My God, I hope in your mercy and in your divine promises: strengthen my confidence and make it impregnable as the mountain of Sion."*

*"A catechumenate was not enough, a whole work, conforming to the thoughts of the Church, was necessary for the fulfilment of the promises of God"* made to Israel.(6)

29. Talk to the community, August 18, 1861
30. Ibid
31. John 3:8
32. cf. talk on Psalm 68 (69), October 27, 1853

## **Some Basic Thoughts of Father Theodore on Apostolic Community**

1. Talk to the community, August 29, 1856
2. Miettes Évangéliques, Sunday after Pentecost, manuscript copy.
3. Talk to the community on Psalm 132, December 3, 1865
4. Retreat to the novices, undated, unpublished
5. Sermon for the Tenth Sunday after Pentecost, 1840 or succeeding years
6. Talk to the community, December 15, 1858
7. Letter to Electa Valentin, May 23, 1860
8. Letter to Théodorine Randon, June 2, 1867
9. Letter to the Sisters of St. John in Montana, November 26, 1867
10. Talk to the community, January 29, 1863, feast of St. Francis de Sales
11. Letter to Electa Valentin, May 23, 1860
12. Letter to Théodorine Randon, June 2, 1867
13. Letter to the Sisters in Costa Rica, at its foundation, December 23, 1872
14. Letter to the Sisters of St. John in Montana, November 26, 1867
15. Letter to Théodorine Randon, June 2, 1867

12. Plan of sermon given at Saint Philippe du Roule, 1847; homily, August 15, 1849; Month of Mary, 1860, May 16 and 20
13. Month of Mary, 1841, Our Lady of Victories
14. Plan of sermon on prayer, 1840
15. Month of Mary, 1841, Our Lady of Victories, on the Lord's Prayer
16. Talk to the Community, February 25, 1853
17. Plan of sermon for the Twelfth Sunday after Pentecost, 1841
18. Talk to the community, February 25, 1853. See Month of Mary, 1860, May 16: *"As for prayer itself, we must address Jesus Christ because He dwells in our hearts; His spirit whispers to us everything we should say; it is He who in the depths of our heart utters ineffable sighs; it is He you must address: 'Lord teach us pray!'"* Concerning silence, see Instruction of March 23, 1855, and Conférences sur le Directoire, XLII, p.193 et seq. cf. Saint Bernard on The Song of Songs, Sermon XV
19. Homily, January 18, 1852
20. Fourth commentary on the Litanies of the Blessed Virgin
21. Homily, August 16, 1854.
22. cf. Talk to the community, October 25, 1849, and instruction, April 30, 1854. This point of view became more pronounced as time went on.
23. Talk to the community, February, 1847
24. Talk to the community, February 5, 1853, Grandbourg
25. Homily, Passion Sunday, March 13, 1853
26. Letter from Fr. Theodore to the Prioress of the Carmel of Angers, May 9, 1857 (original in the Carmel of Angers)
27. Instruction on the mission with the children, July 15, 1857, Grandbourg
28. Talk to the community, August 18, 1861, Grandbourg.  
See also letter from Fr. Theodore to Sr. Benedicta, August 22, 1868: *"Our Lord tells us in Chapter VI of Saint Matthew: 'When you pray, go into your cell, close the door and pray in secret, and your heavenly Father who sees in secret will hear you.' The cell is your heart; you enter it in silence and recollection, by a simple act of abandonment you expose there all your needs and desires; it is not necessary to express them or put them into words; God sees all, He knows us, He hears us and He understands us. After this method of prayer, taught with so much simplicity by Our Lord, the Gospel immediately adds the words of the Pater which are a subject of perpetual meditation. What more is there? No one can object that he does not know what to say or do during prayer. Our Lord taught us what we must say and do."*  
cf. also, Instruction, March 23, 1855;  
Letter from Fr. Theodore to the community, August 18, 1861;  
Trois retraites, p. 285;  
Rayons de Vérité, p.258 etc...

Elsewhere, he uses the words: *"to hasten them"*(7) or *"to cooperate in the fulfilment of God's promises"*(8)

### **C. It is a response to Jesus Christ's last wish; which includes all the promises that they may be one, since salvation is unity (cf. Jn.11:52)**

*"Love one another as I have loved you, says Jesus Christ, and the Lord loved to the limit of sacrificing His life, in order to re-unite the house of Israel and the Gentile nations, in a single family, in order to gather together all the children of God dispersed throughout the world and to make them into a single flock so as to restore unity to heaven and earth, to re-establish harmony between man and his God."* (9)

### **D. Particularity and Universality**

Everything in our life should be permeated by this special call of God to love his people today and make them loved:

*"The goal which we are pursuing is a predicted goal... we have the certitude that it will be reached. We must certainly cooperate in it by our suffering, our prayers, our work, **everything must be directed to this purpose.**"*(10)

*"We do not exclude anyone from our love; we ourselves have schools for the poor, boarding schools for the rich, but our principal work to which **everything is directed** is the work for Israel. The Spirit of the Congregation must make you **love everything which is directed to this work.**"* (11)  
(The word "work" means Israel.)

As the years passed, Theodore's insistence grew ever stronger. In this connection, the charism impregnated, as it were, the spirit of the Congregation, the vows, prayer, etc... (See other papers). But this special call includes a second requirement, that of never limiting our love and our "apostolic zeal."

### **Why?**

If we worked only with the Jews (supposing that this were possible), we should not be helping others to come close to them, to love them; we would not be advancing the work of unity.

*"The deepest wish of the Heart of Jesus Christ is to establish union among his children, a holy union, a sacred covenant, and that all the souls redeemed by his blood form but one soul, one heart, one unity... That they may be one."* (12)



The God of Israel is a unique God, the God of all people: the reality of the covenant contracted first with men (Noah), made tangible with Israel (Moses), fulfilled in Jesus Christ, includes respect and love for our neighbour, for all our neighbours, especially in emergencies. It is the refrain of the Bible: Remember, Israel, that you were a (stranger) in Egypt...

*"Love all mankind, love even your enemies, love your neighbour as yourself... Love one another because the second commandment is like the first: Love God..... Love, because he who loves fulfils **the whole law**."* (13) And for Father Theodore love was never idle.

Father Theodore often insisted on the Jewish roots of the Christian faith; every baptized person must be aware of the vital link which unites them in Christ to the Jewish people:

*"Christianity ....is the expansion of the Jewish faith throughout the world, according to the promises made to Abraham and the patriarchs: 'All the nations will be blessed in you'."* (Gen:22:18) (14)

*"The Catholic faith is the expansion of the Jewish faith."* (15)

Theodore liked to stress this promise of universality promised to Abraham which is mysteriously and inextricably bound to the promise made to his people.

**Justice:** Father Theodore never uses this word in the social meaning which we give to it today except in 1828, in the "Essay on moral education." He always uses this word in connection with the Covenant, even when he does not use this latter word. The justice which should characterise our relationship with God necessarily includes the justice we should have in our relations with all persons, and our horror of injustice, because he never separates love of God and love of man. His biblical spirit allows no dichotomy.

*"Because God is just Himself, we ourselves, however unjust we may be, revolt at the sight of injustice. Why? Because God himself has put the principle of justice in us."* (undated instruction)

*"Justice is hatred of evil."* (Talk to the community, September 18, 1856)

Somewhat in the perspective of God's presence among His people (one of his central ideas), Father Theodore liked to emphasize this presence among all mankind:

*"Jesus Christ teaches that he loves his neighbour as himself who loves his God, Father of all mankind, and who sees his God in every person and adores Him in and above all. He who loves God and finds Him in every person, loves his friend and his enemy, the poor and the rich, great and small, the wise and the ignorant, the sinner and the just, because he loves man and in man he finds God."* (16)

## Some Basic Thoughts of Father Theodore on Prayer

1. Commentaries on the Litanies of the Blessed Virgin, preliminary considerations. See also talk on Psalm 73 (74), October 25, 1849. Talk to the community, February 25, 1853
2. Month of Mary, 1841 at Our Lady of Victories. Cf. Directory, p.24  
Conférences sur le Directoire, p.23-24  
Talks to the community: February 1847; February 25, 1853; August 26, 1858. Month of Mary, May 18, 1860: *"When the apostles asked Our Lord to teach them how to pray, notice that Our Lord did not give them any method; He seemed to be recommending the greatest simplicity: 'When you pray, go into your house, and your heavenly Father who sees in secret will give you what you need.'* (Mt.6:6 ) *and elsewhere: 'When you pray, say: Our Father who art in heaven...' I do not see any method in this evangelical instruction... But according to the words of Jesus Christ, it is obvious that the Master of prayer is the Holy Spirit; we must call the Holy Spirit into our heart so that He may suggest our prayer and stir our soul."*
3. Letter from Fr. Theodore to Alphonsine Würmser, July 21, 1847
4. Letter from Fr. Theodore to Alphonsine Würmser, 1852, no other date.
5. cf. Celia Deutsch, "God is Love: Experience of conversion and spirituality in the writings of Theodore Ratisbonne", May 25, 1976, paragraph on prayer.  
cf. Talk to the community, August 26, 1858: *"To meditate is not prayer, it is a spur to prayer."* See also Month of Mary, 1860, May 20.
6. cf. For the aspect of our relations with God: Homily, October 1, 1854; January 1, 1856; Month of Mary, 1860, May 16.  
For progress in the presence of God: Homily for the third Sunday of Advent, December 16, 1849; talk to the community, February 25, 1853. See also plan of a sermon for the first Sunday of Lent, 1841: our whole being must pray. In the same sense: Month of Mary, 1849, May 8; Month of Mary, 1860, May 19.
7. Talk on Psalm 60, July, 1849. See also Month of Mary, 1860, May 16 and talk to the community, June 21, 1860.
8. Plan of sermon, Saint Philippe du Roule, 1847
9. Month of Mary, Our Lady of Victories, first instruction on prayer, 1841
10. Talk to the community, February 25, 1853
11. Preface to Miettes Évangéliques, p.2. Also plan of Sermon, Saint Philippe du Roule, 1847, and Trois Retraites, p.67. *"Man's whole being must pray because he must love with all his soul and all his heart and all his faculties; he must also pray with all the powers of his being; let him pray with his lips, but, above all, he must pray with his mind and his heart: 'I shall pray with my mind but I shall pray with my intelligence', says Saint Paul."* (1Col.14:15)



16. Homilies, December 27, 1856 and December 29, 1860
17. Homily, December 27, 1869
18. Rayons de Vérité, p.278
19. Plan of a sermon for a profession, 1876
20. Letter to Salomé Mougin, November 22, 1865
21. Profession homily, July 26, 1870
22. Letter to Théodrine Randon, June 23, 1860
23. Miettes Évangéliques, Easter Sunday
24. Talk to the Novices, November 28, 1860. Unpublished.
25. Autograph meditation on In Sion Firmata Sum and Trois Retraites, p. 111
26. Letter to Sr. Bernard Georges, December 20, 1857
27. Letter to Marie Félix Dieudonnée, July 2, 1856
28. Conferences on the Directory, p.221
29. Letter to Thérèse Blüm, July 28, 1857
30. Talk to the Novices, June 13, 1866. Unpublished
31. Trois Retraites aux Religieuses, pp.164 and 165
32. Letter to Dilecta Valentin, March 19, 1856
33. Souvenirs of first talks to the novices, p. 103
34. Trois Retraites aux Religieuses, p.100
35. Trois Retraites aux Religieuses, p.130
36. Letter to Esther Lévy, August 25, 1857
37. Instruction, February 19, 1854
38. Letter to Electa Valentin, March 11, 1856 (to Jerusalem)
39. General Chapter, 1872
40. Letter to the house of Jerusalem, December 7, 1859
41. General Chapter, 1872
42. Trois Retraites aux Religieuses, p.128 and Souvenirs of first talks to the novices, p.125
43. Trois Retraites aux Religieuses, p.128 and Souvenirs of first talks to the novices, p.120
44. Manuscript of Miettes Évangéliques, Thursday after the Second Sunday of Advent.
45. Trois Retraites aux Religieuses, p.141
46. Rayons de Vérité, p.263
47. Trois Retraites aux Religieuses, p.140
48. Letter to Théodrine Randon, July 24, 1863
49. Plan of a sermon, 1840
50. Miettes Évangéliques, Pentecost Monday
51. Plan of a sermon, 1873
52. Retreat to the novices, September 26, 1863. Unpublished
53. Talk to the community at Constantinople, September 7, 1858
- 54-58 Missing.

Following Saint Paul, he believes that we are members one of the other and that everything that concerns mankind concerns us:

*“We are members one of the other; glory is for all as are ignominy and opprobrium.” (17)*

In actual fact Father Theodore and the first sisters were much more devoted to the poor than we realize. (See document on Apostolic Life)

## **II Some Basic Thoughts of Father Theodore on Religious Life**

### **A. Scripture**

It was only towards the end of his life and then very sketchily, that Father Theodore spoke of the three vows; on the other hand, he spoke early and often on religious consecration. His basic conviction: **God is Love**, had long prepared him to appreciate the greatness and the demands of a state of life consecrated to love.

*“This profession is nothing less than an act of love which is full, perfect and permanent.” (Homily, Nov.21,1860)*

He found this radicalism of love in three sources:

The Old Testament, the Acts of the Apostles, Saint John.

**Father Theodore stressed that this radicalism has its roots in the Old Testament which so frequently affirms the primacy of God.**

Abraham is an example of this:

*“The voice of God said to Abraham: ‘Leave your country, your family and go to the place where I shall lead you’, and every serious vocation continues and renews this first sacrifice which is the model of all those that we must offer to God; it is God who is waiting for us. In any case, this willingness to leave everything to follow Jesus Christ should animate the religious of Sion.” (1)*

The itinerary of the religious vocation which he traces is in the line of the great biblical vocations. There is the initiative of God who calls, the response and loving acceptance of a completely gratuitous gift, so much so that we can scarcely talk about a gift or offering but rather of a “restitution” which is simple justice:

*“ This gift is merely a restitution because we were created for God; we belong to him; we must not and we cannot live except for him and our life would have no sense, no goal, no reason for existing, if we lived for anything other than him.” (2) (See also quotations 7 and 31.)*

To stress this plenitude of communion in love, Father Theodore liked to use the word “covenant” which embodies the idea of solidarity with the people of God, a sharing in His mission and at the same time a free commitment:

*“ The Lord deigned to call me to His service and I answered His call; I made a covenant with Him.”*(3)

*“ If Jesus Christ called you, He did not force you, He did not violate your freedom, He did not compel your will... You made a decision and among all the objects which might attract your attention, your love or your esteem, you turned to Jesus Christ... You gave your hand to God and soon a covenant will be contracted which will last forever if, as I hope, you are faithful to grace.”* (4)

Even more precisely he drew from the **Shema Israel** this imperative of the absoluteness of love.

*“Listen, Israel, the Lord our God is one God. You will love the Lord, your God, with your whole heart, your whole soul and all your strength,”* (Deut:6:4-5) i.e. *“Let us return love for love.”* (5)

At least ten times he quoted the Shema Israel in connection with religious life; he probably chose it as the theme for a retreat in 1859, according to the instructions which we still have: he spoke of it several times in connection with obedience, prayer, the Word, the Eucharist, justice, the Law, etc...He even said that we must not be surprised if he quoted it so often. Here are three examples:

*“Love is a passion which reaches folly. Our Lord said of Himself that His love for us went as far as the folly of the cross. I told you that a short time ago but it is true... ‘You will love the Lord your God with all your heart, your whole mind and all your strength.’”* (6)

*“Our justice will be full and abundant if we fulfil the Law with all our heart, all our strength, all our faculties, i.e. if we love God with our heart, our thought, our will, our actions and our whole being; everything belongs to God, it is for Him that we must live as Jesus Christ lived for his father.”*(7)

*“ To be in accord with God and to elevate all your feelings, you had to be given the principal note, the key-note with which all must harmonise. What is this note? Here it is: ‘You will love the Lord your God, with all your heart, all your soul and all your strength’! That is our Law, that is the immutable principle according to which we must live: ‘You will love.’ ”* (8)

## VII Footnotes

### Some Basic Thoughts of Father Theodore on Sion’s Charism

1. Letter to Louise Weywada, November 29, 1856
2. Trois Retraites aux Religieuses, p 84-88
3. Clothing, February 2, 1865
4. Trois Retraites aux Religieuses, p 84-85
5. Instruction, June 23, 1854
6. Memoirs, p.10
7. Homily, April 2, 1853
8. Talk to the community, December 22, 1853
9. 5<sup>th</sup> Instruction: the Gospel of Jesus Christ is a Gospel of Love. Unpublished.
10. Homily, September 22, 1853
11. Undated talk to the novices. Unpublished.
12. Instruction, July 10, 1853
13. 5<sup>th</sup> Instruction: the Gospel of Jesus Christ is a Gospel of Love. Unpublished.
14. Notice on the work of the Congregation of Our Lady of Sion, 1851
15. Notice on the work of the Congregation of Our Lady of Sion, 1861
16. 5<sup>th</sup> Instruction: the Gospel of Jesus Christ is a Gospel of Love. Unpublished.
17. Instruction on the Good Shepherd, Dijon, 1844, unpublished.

### Some Basic Thoughts of Father Theodore on Religious Life

1. Instruction, October 23, 1861
2. Letter to Dilecta Valentin, September 1, 1867
3. Trois Retraites aux Religieuses, p.165
4. Profession homily, May 31, 1867
5. Trois Retraites aux Religieuses, p 307
6. Talk to the community on Psalm 110, January 15, 1857
7. Community retreat, September 18, 1861. Unpublished
8. Community retreat, September 3, 1861. Unpublished
9. Letter to the house in Jerusalem, April 28, 1857
10. See Theodore Ratisbonne: Correspondence and Documents.
11. Clothing sermon, August 15, 1866
12. Trois Retraites aux Religieuses, pp.75 and 79
13. Miettes Évangéliques, Monday after Passion Sunday
14. Instruction, October 23, 1861
15. Instruction in the chapel, March 19, 1863

Mary is the daughter of Sion par excellence because she believed in the Word and in the Promises which it announced. In one text, Father Theodore said that she “turned over” the word in her heart. This is a rather exact translation and shows clearly the continual going and coming between life and Scripture; she compared events with the Promises. This was one of Father Theodore’s favourite meditations which with the passing of the years gave a broader meaning to the expression: Word.

*“The Gospel, before the evangelists, had been written by the Holy Spirit Himself in Mary’s heart; she kept it all within her heart: examples, actions, work, all she saw, all that she heard, all the deeds of the Gospel.”* (36)

*“She kept the Word; this says everything. It is not words or phrases that must be kept but things, we must be impregnated with the substance of the Word, we must react to this Word by saying: yes.”* (37)

Above all, she gathered *“all the words of mercy and of hope.”* (38)

The Magnificat is a proof of this; it unfolds the fulfilment of the Promises throughout passing generations: the coming of justice and salvation for all mankind; it closes by stressing God’s fidelity in the accomplishment of the Promises made to Israel. Father Theodore often quoted the last verse: *“He came to the help of Israel, His servant, remembering His promise as he had announced it to our fathers, in favour of Abraham and his descendants forever.”* (Lk.1:55)

Finally Mary, Mother of Emmanuel, Mother of God-with-us, herself becomes for us the great sign of hope through her Assumption. For Father Theodore, the feast of the Assumption was a favourite feast because it is *“the feast of hope”*.

*“Daughter of Abraham and of Jacob, Mary, born a Jewess, is the first to enter the plenitude of glory acquired for her by her Son Jesus Christ. In her, the “already” is totally fulfilled; there is no longer place for the “not yet” because she alone has lived totally in the truth of her being as a creature before the absolute Gratuity of the coming of the Saviour God.”* (39)

It would seem that Father Theodore, like Father Mary, loved specially in Mary her sense of the absolute gratuity of God’s gifts, of His fidelity to the Promises; this was the foundation of her humility. This stress of the two brothers was the outcome of the light received on January 20, 1842.

In the Constitutive Rule, written in 1863, are the words:

*“The whole Congregation is consecrated to the Most Blessed and Immaculate Virgin Mary, under the title of Our Lady of Sion. The religious honour her: as the Glory of Jerusalem, the Joy of Israel and the Honour of the People of God.”* (Judith 15:9)

## **Father Theodore found a second source in the Acts of the Apostles.**

*“I urge you,” he said, “to re-read and to meditate often on the first pages of the Acts of the Apostles, because it is there that you will see the constitution of the whole of Sion’s life.”* (9)

From the very first meeting of the Ladies of the Work, on July 3, 1844, he asked them to imitate the early Church of Jerusalem.(10)

At the opening of the first Constitutive Rule of 1863, he wrote these words:

*“Following the example of the holy Daughters of Jerusalem, (the religious) will consecrate themselves with unshakeable fidelity to Jesus and Mary”, and four lines farther on: “The community of the daughters of Sion will reproduce as far as possible the spirit of the first disciples of the early Church.”*

The older he became, the more he insisted on this orientation which he regarded as of primary importance.

Like many others of his time, he took literally the very idealised picture drawn by the Acts of the Apostles of the first Jewish-Christian community; he generalised the fact that some of them distributed their goods and left everything to follow Jesus Christ, that they were united and ready to suffer martyrdom (It was only under Diocletian that persecutions become wide-spread) etc... But for us the important thing is the message which he wished to transmit by means of his personal interpretation of the sacred text, even if in itself it is arguable from a historical and exegetical point of view.

First, he was struck with the fact that the first Christians lived fervently and to the hilt their baptismal commitment.

Now for him, *“The religious life is nothing else than the Christian life lived in its stark reality, its truth, its perfection.”*(11) That is why he did not hesitate to say that *“The early Church is the model of religious life.”*

He also stressed the elements of the religious life which seemed to him to exist already in this first community:

*“We read in the Acts of the Apostles that the faithful, united under the pastoral crosier of Saint Peter, put all their goods, spiritual and temporal, in common; among them there were neither rich nor poor nor any human distinction; they were all brothers living in love and obedience, persevering in prayer and finding their delight in holy communion.”* (12)

The first Christians were closely linked to each other by their attachment to Christ, their Master and Lord. Although they no longer saw Him with the eyes of the body, He was invisibly present in their midst and this presence polarised their whole life. This radicalism of the faith in Jesus Christ is the essential nucleus of the life of every disciple, and so we find continually under Theodore's pen lines which express the primacy of this faith:

*"I choose Jesus Christ" - "We have not seen Jesus Christ but we long to contemplate Him" - "We must be attached solely to Jesus Christ" - "To see only Jesus Christ, to hear only Jesus Christ" - "To live of Jesus Christ, like him, by him, for him" - "The true disciples are those who live intimately with Jesus Christ"*(13)

*"There is....something very deep which makes us refuse nothing, makes us belong completely to God, follow Jesus Christ everywhere, work, suffer and die for him if necessary."* (14)

Thus religious profession is the commitment of the whole being which is consecrated to Jesus Christ by love. Hence it is not surprising that **the final source found by Theodore should be in the Gospel and Letters of Saint John, the beloved disciple.**

*"The spirit of Saint John, drawn from the heart of Jesus, is the spirit of the daughters of Sion."* (15) See (a) below.

*"Saint John was not an exceptional human being, he was the model of interior souls, faithful souls, loving souls, who prefer the love of the heart of Jesus Christ to every other love... He was the only apostle who remained at the foot of the Cross; he shared the anguish of Jesus Christ; he drank the chalice to its dregs and that is why he became the reproduction of Jesus Christ Himself" - "Like Him, he became the cherished child of the Blessed Virgin."* (16)

*"He bent over the heart of Jesus... That is the source of love. He drew love where it is formed and from which it flows. What a loving exchange there was between these two hearts.. they become fused as it were to form only one... It is not a temporal love which lasts only a few years, an insufficient love which ends with death; no, he who finds the heart of Jesus Christ has found everything; it is a permanent love which continues to grow.. The consecration of a heart to the heart of Jesus Christ takes place at Communion."* (17)

(a) the word "heart" expresses for Theodore the reality of Jesus' human love, its plenitude, its interiority.

it, the Eucharist bears no fruit. Obedience in its own way expresses the fulfilment of the Promise: I shall be with you. Said Theodore:

*"Jesus Christ must be Emmanuel for each one of you and this holy, august, intimate union is made perfect by the conformity of all the acts of our will with the will of God."* (31)

The Eucharist helps us to go to the poor: *"When we love the Eucharist, we also love the poor. Why? Because in the blood of the poor there flows the Blood of Jesus Christ. They are members of Jesus Christ."* (32)

Elsewhere, *"It is communion which makes you love the three vows of religion, which fills you with the spirit of chastity because Jesus Christ was chaste; with the spirit of obedience because he became obedient even to the death on the cross."* (33)

## E. The Church

The Church also announces the fulfilment of the Promises. In her are united the "already" and the "not yet". She is always living in expectation of the return of her Lord who will gather all men together in a single flock and will create a single people out of the two. But God is already in her midst:

*"Behold I am with you until the end of time. He is always in your midst, always living in the Church, His presence is invisible to the eyes of the body but it is real, active, permanent."* (34)

Here we recognize Father Theodore's special love for the Church demanded by his thirst for unity and the charism that he received in the Church. The Church has her roots in the Jewish people; a great love for the roots leads to a great love for the whole tree and vice-versa.

## F. Mary

Already in the Commentaries on the Litanies of the Blessed Virgin, Theodore had said that Mary was the heir of the Promises since the Lord had become Emmanuel within her. In *Rayons de Vérité*, he again took up the same idea, and in support of it he quoted Saint Methodius:

*"The Lord is with you because in you he has placed his tabernacle - it is in you that all the promises, all the hopes of our ancestors were fulfilled, in you the Lord became Emmanuel, i.e. God-with-us."* (35)

He in no way objectified the Eucharistic presence but he insisted: *"Put all your hope in the Blessed Eucharist, it is God with us, and since Jesus Christ deigns to dwell with us, dwell in His peace, dwell in His love."* (27)

The name of Sion itself in this perspective assumed for Father Theodore an almost Eucharistic semblance. First, he believed, according to the archaeology of his time, that the Cenacle was on Mount Sion. Then he said in the *Miettes Évangéliques*:

*"The prophet, looking on the Saviour of mankind in the Eucharist, calls Him Emmanuel... O Sion, tremble with joy and sing with gladness, because the Most High, the Holy One of Israel, is in your midst."* (Is: 12:6)

Paraphrasing Psalm 84, he affirmed:

*"The more love you have for the tabernacle, the more you will understand David's hymn: 'Lord, how beautiful are your tabernacles! A single day passed in your tabernacle seems more to me than centuries in the palaces of the world. It is there that I shall build my nest, it is there that I shall establish my dwelling, it is there that I shall say: I am established in Sion.'"* (28)

It is possible to argue the value of these comments, but they reveal to what extent the Eucharistic polarized all Father Theodore's thoughts.

The Eucharist, source of love and charity, is the bread of the promised unity. There again the "already" and the "not yet" are very evident. It is obvious that this aspect was of prime importance for Father Theodore in view of the general orientation of his thought. There are numerous texts - we shall quote only one:

*"The cement of the Eucharist which binds men to God also binds them to each other so that fraternal charity, like the love of God, is the fruit of the Eucharist: May they be one."* (29)

For Father Theodore, the Eucharist was such a summit of love that he saw the Eucharist in everything that approached it. If he believed in the Eucharist, it was because of his faith in the Word. He even went so far as to say, with Saint Augustine, that the Word is already a Eucharist: *"The Word of God may be compared to the Sacrament of the Eucharist."* (30)

He returned to this idea several times. (For the Word, see the books already in print: Book I, p.16 etc...Early Writings, and many pages in Book II)

**Obedience** is also a Eucharist because it brings about a union so deep with God that it unites us to Him as does the Eucharist. Without obedience which prolongs

*"The beloved disciple...does not even try to retrace the events of the Last Supper. He limits himself to those words which contain the key to all mysteries: 'Jesus having loved His own, loved them to the end', to the utmost limits of a love which has no limit. He loves them to the infinite point which is the consummation of love, to the perfect union of the loving god with the beloved soul."* (18)

In a word, Saint John teaches us to remain in love:

*"Remain in Me as I remain in you."* (Jn:15:5)

This quotation is the one used most often by Father Theodore. Saint John also implicitly helps us to see the relationship between religious consecration and the Eucharist. Thanks to the latter,

*"religious profession is a perpetual communion with Jesus Christ within you and you in Jesus Christ: the same life - glory of God - salvation of the world."* (19)

Thus: *"The soul which gives herself to God is giving herself to love since God is love."* (20) Love would no longer be love if it was only temporary.

For Father Theodore, the commitment could only be definitive. (a)

*"There is only happiness in this world, it is to be bound to the heart of Jesus Christ. Where love is concerned, I do not understand the place of the temporal, it must be eternal. Yes or no"* (21)

*"In five years, according to our Rules, you will stamp the seal of perpetuity on what is already eternal in the depths of your heart and in the mystery of your soul. The bonds of love which bind us to the Lord are in essence durable, eternal, indestructible."* (22)

There again the example is from a long way off. The first daughters of Jerusalem were faithful to the end, to the Cross and beyond.

*"The first messengers of the good news were the courageous daughters of Jerusalem who throughout Jesus Christ's public ministry had faithfully followed, served and loved Him.... even when the Apostles failed in confidence and courage."* (23)

With Mary, these women at the foot of the Cross could each one repeat: In Sion Firmata Sum, I am Established in Sion. This is exactly the motto which

(a) on the other hand, Fr. Theodore never rushed things: *"It is better to keep annual vows as long as good spirit has not solidified."* (letter to Rose Valentin, August 24, 1866)

Theodore chose for the Congregation in order to express this radical demand of definitive attachment, this “unshakeable fidelity” demanded by the Constitutive Rule of 1863.

*“In giving us this motto the Holy Spirit wanted to show us the need for permanence, for steadfastness without which nothing is solid,” (24)*

Each sister could say: *“My motto is the motto of fidelity and perseverance. Therefore when Jesus Christ tells me to remain ever in His love: ‘Remain in my love,’ I answer: ‘In Sion Firmata Sum, I am established in Sion’ (25)*

This fidelity often led the first Christian to martyrdom. Father Theodore adopted this perspective showing that there are various kinds of martyrdom. This does not mean that we should scorn human happiness; on the contrary he believed that the touchstone of a true vocation was happiness in living it out:

*“Tell me” he wrote to a young sister, “whether your heart is satisfied, because this satisfaction is the condition of your definitive admission into the family of the daughters of Sion.” (26)*

Concerning another, he said: *“If the postulant blossoms and is happy, she will be admitted to the novitiate.” (27)*

But several time he spoke of martyrdom to underline the primacy of God which is the essence of every religious vocation - martyr means “witness” - to show to what extent the soul is no longer her own in religious consecration:

*“You know that at the birth of the Church, Christians every day received their Lord and Saviour. But they were also souls who were always ready for martyrdom, souls completely devoted who no longer lived for themselves but for Jesus Christ.” (28)*

If love is the soul of religious consecration, there can be no division. It is in deep unity that are bound together consecration and mission, contemplation and action, apostolic life and community life. (See documents on Community Life and Apostolic Life.)

The same held true for the Vows. He hardly ever spoke of them before 1856 and then rarely. He saw them as an entity which holds together as the following concise expression has it:

*“The poor in spirit are those who live of love and obedience.” (29)*

D. The Eucharist announces sacramentally that Jesus has come, that he is there, that he will come

The Eucharist is the culminating point of thanksgiving, as its name indicates, because it is the sacramental manifestation of the fulfilment of the promise of the Emmanuel. In it are expressed both the “already” and the “not yet.” The “already” since it is the memorial of the life-death-resurrection which forever stamps the Covenant between God and man, more than that, which fulfils it. But it also expresses the “not yet” because the mode of the Eucharistic presence is a temporary mode: *“Until he comes,”* says St. Paul. (1Cor.11:26)

Father Theodore only once used the word “Memorial” but often expressed its meaning. Sometimes he insisted on Christ’s haste: *“With desire I have longed to eat this Pasch with you.”* (Lk.22:15) For him this burning thirst was important. Sometimes he stressed His thanksgiving: *“He took bread, giving thanks... He blessed it etc...”* To communicate in it, he asked the sisters to take half an hour for thanksgiving after communion (Directory), a practice unknown in other congregations.

Unceasingly in order to bear witness to his faith in the real presence, he linked it to the promise of the Old Testament repeated by the Apocalypse, which marks its fulfilment: *“Here is God’s dwelling place with man, they will be His people and God-with-them will be their God. By the Eucharist, Jesus Christ, according to his promise, dwells with us until the consummation of the world.”* (22) This reference is the outcome of his attraction to the Shekina - the presence of God in the Temple. The image of the temple is forever recurring in his writing.

More expressly, he linked his faith with the promise of the Emmanuel:

*“This is God in our midst! It is Jesus Christ present in this assembly. He is there! And this truth is so strong, so important that long before Jesus Christ was incarnated, long before the Son of God had taken a human body to descend among men, the prophets, looking at Him from afar, called him Emmanuel.”* (23)

Commenting on the request of the Our Father: *“Give us this day our daily bread,”* he said: *“That is God made man, He has become one of us, He is in our hands as this word so strongly expresses it: ‘Emmanuel, God-with-us.’”* (24)

Elsewhere he added: *“He gives Himself to us and teaches us to give ourselves to Him.”* (25)

Thus: *“Immense love transforms the soul so that each soul united to God becomes Emmanuel, God-with-us.”* (26)

- **How can we live at this depth in the midst of activity?**

How can we find the Emmanuel who is in our heart? Find Him around us? In the world where He is unceasingly coming? Already, in 1848, speaking to lay people in the Church of La Madeleine in Paris, he gave the following answer:

*“All that I see on earth, all that I hear, all that I study, in all my prayers, every breath of the air, everything that strikes my senses, my heart, all leads to Jesus Christ.”*

*“In the street, in your houses, what is there to prevent you from saying a word from time to time to the God of your heart? What prevents you in long outings and even during tedious visits from turning your heart to God, from saying a word of love of gratitude, of self-offering?” (16)*

In the long run, it means simply to walk in God's presence of Jesus Christ: *“There,” he said, “where there is an effort to create union, God is present. In this way is fulfilled the promise contained in the Gospel: where two or three are gathered in my name, I shall be in their midst.” (17)* (See document on Community Life)

For the same purpose, he often insisted on the importance of Sunday, the day *“of rest on the heart of Jesus,”* i.e. the day when more than ever we must dwell in love and fraternal charity: *“On Sunday, you must allow yourself to slip down to the depths of your soul and in the presence of God, renew this spirit of peace.”* This is the plenitude of shalom! It is the spirit of the Sabbath, and twice he compares Sunday to the Sabbath. (18)

He also said several times that the holidays must be a time of renewal: *“It is the time when contemplative life succeeds active life etc...”*

But every day we must pray to the Father who is in secret; the promise is already fulfilled, the Father is there looking at us. That is enough.

Prayer of *“simple abandon,”* of a child who only knows *“how to love silently.”* (19)

Prayer of the Spirit whom Jesus promised and who cries out within us. *Abba, Father.* To listen to Him, repeats Theodore, we must descend to our inmost depths, we must *“find our heart”* where Jesus dwells. (20)

*“To dwell in Jesus Christ is to return as often as possible to our interior centre.”* (21) (See document on Prayer taken from Book 3: Sermons and Talks.)



## B. Religious Life in Sion

### CONSECRATED CELIBACY

He left only four or five texts on Consecrated Celibacy which are rather negative as was the custom of the time. The coordination of his thoughts makes it possible to deduce that it is a consecration to the love of God, but he repeats: the love of God and of neighbour are so closely connected that we cannot separate them; we can never love too much if *“love is controlled”*. (Quotation from the Constitutive Rule of 1863)

*“Religious life is simply preferring Our Lord to all earthly things. When Our Lord is at the centre of a heart, she draws from her love enough to give, more or less, to everyone; she controls her love and once its roots have been fixed in Jesus’ love, the heart grows, expands and the whole of life is ennobled.”* (30)

*‘Remain in my love.’ If you faithfully carry out this request, you will love as Jesus Christ loved; you will, as it were, love with His heart which vivifies yours... This is how you will fulfil in all its perfection the great precept of love:*

*‘You will love the Lord your God with all your heart, all your mind’: this is the first act of Christian justice... You are souls consecrated to love: to love your God and give him glory; to love your brothers and procure peace for them.”* (31)  
(What a program if we took the word ‘peace’ in its sense of ‘shalom’!)

### POVERTY

Here we have between thirty and thirty five texts. Father Theodore spoke of it rather late in life because since there were no financial resources, the sisters were for a long time forced by circumstances to live their poverty very effectively.



### Why did Father Theodore demand poverty with such insistence?

-- To be poor shows that all we need is Jesus Christ. She who has Jesus Christ has everything. (This is possibly for Theodore the chief reason for poverty):

*"when you posses love, you are rich, you have everything ."* (32)

-- Because it is the fundamental spirit of the Exodus and of the poor of the Lord. We must expect everything from God and live in trust.

*"Be truly poor and persevere in expectation."* (33)

*"We are stewards of the gifts of God, not their owners. We have nothing that belongs to us, of ourselves we own nothing – we have received every thing both spiritually and materially."* (34)

*"Every breath is an act by which the human body asks for the alms of our life, and our soul would be unable to live if it did not beg this daily grace. To be aware of this poverty, to feel it, to love it, to take pleasure in receiving everything from the hands of God."* (35)

*"Following the example of the Patriarchs, we must always be ready to fold up and carry our tent from station to station. You have the manna of the desert to console you."* (36)

-- Because Jesus Christ was poor. (See Trois Retraites, p. 170)

### How should this poverty be lived?

#### In Spirit

From the very beginning right until the end Father Theodore insisted on this aspect.

*"This virtue consists in the awareness of our poverty, or nothingness in spirit and soul - our lack of everything - David."* (David is several times held up as a model of poverty of Spirit) (37)

*"Poverty ...consists in dispossession of oneself and all spirit of ownership."* (Directory, 1866)

*"Jesus Christ will posses us when we have ceased to possess ourselves."* (Conference on the Directory, p.6)

His Name became a whole program of spirituality: Emmanuel

*"God loves us, that is why he is called Emmanuel, He is with us to save us."* (13)

For him, the fundamental prophecy realised in Jesus Christ was that of Emmanuel: God-with-us. (Is. 7:14 and 8:8-10) It already underpins the whole Old Testament which unceasingly punctuates the affirmation of this marvellous reality: "God is with you." It finds its perfect fulfilment in the New Testament from the moment of the Annunciation. Theodore noted correctly the inclusion of this promise which opens Saint Matthew's Gospel and closes it with the last line: *"I shall be with you until the end of time."* He attached so much importance to this promise of the Emmanuel that he spoke of it four times in the pamphlet: *Answers to an Israelite*, and four times in *Rayons de Vérité* (1874), without counting numerous references, both implicit and explicit, in many other statements. e.g. In *Miettes Évangéliques*: *"God-with-us! This great truth is expressed in the name Emmanuel which Jesus Christ willed to take in the prophetic books. God-with-us; He is ours, He is in us... 'You in me and I in you,' says the Gospel. 'Remain in my love.'"*

#### • He is in us

The Emmanuel is not only with us, He is there in us, He dwells within us. (Theodore had a preference for the verb "dwell" so dear to Saint John.)

*"'Always be contented,' says Saint Paul - and why? 'Because the Lord is near', answers the Apostle. He is much closer than we think because he is in the depth of our being, in the most intimate reaches of our souls."* (14)

It is often when he referred to the heart of Jesus that Theodore expressed this indwelling, the foundation for him of all our interior life. At first glance, this devotion may seem disconcerting, but in reality it simply brings to light the importance of finding Jesus in our heart and believing in His love. This is Saint John's word: *"Remain in Me as I remain in you."* There is nothing new nor outmoded, it is quite simply the Gospel. What was personal to Father Theodore was the intensity with which he reminded us of this truth and the way in which he linked it to our charism. (See document on Raison d'Être)

*"Remain in my love. If you faithfully carry out this command, you will love as Jesus Christ loved. You will love as it were with His own heart which gives life to your own."* Now *"We know how much the heart of Jesus Christ loved the children of Israel."* (15)

*"Henceforth our whole thought should be centred on the Glory of God, the hope of Israel, the fulfilment of the promises."* (9)

For Theodore, hope and thanksgiving were linked as they are in the Bible; they flowed together one from the other and they co-existed together.

*"I am speaking", he said, "of the spirit of prayer, of the spirit of gratitude, if you like, which should never die out in any Christian heart; I am speaking of this prayer of desire which should be renewed whenever we pray to God."* (10)

*"Indeed, I desire and I hope because in the past my prayers have already been answered. It is because God has already come that I am sure that He will come. He has already poured out the deposit of the accomplishment of all the promises; it is impossible that He will not complete their fulfilment because He loved His own to the end."* (Jn:13:1)

## Conclusion

We are still in Advent: He will come back; this is the closing word of Revelations: *"Come, Lord Jesus, come!"* *"I love the closing of the Apocalypse,"* said Theodore. *"Of all the texts of this mysterious book, it is the only one that I understand."* (11)

*"All are expecting, praying fervently for the glorious coming of Jesus Christ; all repeat the invocation of the apostle Saint John: Come, Lord Jesus."* (12)

## C. He is there - He remains - He is the Promised Emmanuel

### • He is with us

Father Theodore's spirituality was very much centred on the Person of the Son of God who became man.



*"We must present a clean slate to the God of poverty and remember that, in this land where in former times there flowed rivers of milk and honey, Our Lord did not have a stone to lay down His head. However, if on the one hand, we must be ready to lack everything, we must also accept what God gives us, and if, one day, He inspired some generous souls to provide you with an abundance of everything, you would submit to this new regime and congratulate yourselves in having something to share with others."* (38)

*"It is very easy to make a vow of poverty as long as nothing is missing for our comfort; three quarters of the population of Paris would do so on these conditions; we must experience some privations, accept them, even look for them; only then will we share the poverty that Jesus Christ and all the saints practised."* (39)



*"We are not poor in spirit and heart when we complain at the slightest breeze, when we do not accept peacefully the difficulties of every day, when we become anxious, excited, troubled because our wishes, even when legitimate, are not satisfied."* (40)

It is evident that poverty of spirit is linked to the reality of life; it is not disembodied.

## In Truth

*"We want true poverty and not a semblance of poverty; everything that is done in the Church must be done in truth; a soul which has not enough greatness to detach herself from material goods should not make a vow of poverty."* (41)

## Lived "as a people" and in community

Poverty lived as a people, as happened during the Exodus, demands sharing. There must not be a marked disproportion between the powerful and the poor, and for this reason sabbatical and jubilee years were instituted.



*“ You must use the things given to you as if you did not own them, so as to be always ready to abandon everything to render service or be helpful.” (42)*

*“The spirit of Sion requires that they share their goods in every circumstance and everywhere.” (43)*

Sharing began by mutual help among the houses, but the distribution was done by the Superior General. The documents in the archives show that this sharing was practised on a large scale.

### **Poverty is lived as a demand of apostolic life**

*“It is this complete deprivation of all goods and all comforts of this present life that makes us rich and capable of enriching others.” (Manuscript of Les Miettes Evangeliques , Monday after the sixth Sunday of Pentecost. About 1855)*

*“He (Jesus) wanted his disciples to be like Him, completely free of this world’s goods, and He ennobled poverty to such an extent that it has become a condition of the apostolate.” (Printed edition of Les Miettes Evangeliques, 1874. Monday after the sixth Sunday after Pentecost.)*

### **To go to the poor is a prophetic sign of the messianic era**

The disappearance of poverty will be one of the prophetic signs of the messianic era because, he said:

*“The glorification of poverty is one of the marvels which must mark the coming of the Messiah, a marvel predicted by the prophet Isaiah: ‘The poor will take joy in the Holy One of Israel.’ Indeed it is not to the fortunate people of the world that Jesus Christ brings the goods of the Gospel.” (44)*

meeting etc... *“I shall bless THE LORD at all times”*, Theodore constantly repeated at the end of his life. (Ps. 34) Thus life itself is inserted in the texture of a living faith in God’s coming.

### **B. He will return**

Christ came to gather all men together. We must share in this thirst for unity which filled His heart: *“May they be one.”*

This unity already realised in Him is still being sought on earth and in each one of us. We thus enter this painful tension between the “already” and the “not yet”; the “already” of the fulfilment of the promises in Jesus Christ and the “not yet” of their fulfilment among men.

*“Remain faithful in the expectation of the fulfilment of the blessed promises... Live in the certain expectation of God’s signs, live in this expectation until the Lord comes.” (4)*

*“We must live in the expectation of God, our looks fixed on Jesus Christ, crucified, risen and glorified.” (5)*

This is not a passive but a dynamic expectation, it is fundamentally biblical:

*“A voice said to me: Cry! and I said: Shall I cry? It is thus that from the beginning of the world, the prophets of the Lord, placed at various distances along the way of the saints, cried to each other: Behold the Lord, He is coming!” (6)*

*“ ‘Your Kingdom come.’ You see that our Lord, putting this word on your lips and in your heart, wanted us to desire the reign of our heavenly Father and to pray ardently for it. Do we think of this? This word, this prayer, was the prayer of the patriarchs, of David and of the Just of the Old Testament who pleaded with their whole heart for the Messiah who was to establish the Kingdom in the world, not immediately, as Our Lord said to the Apostles: ‘Go and announce that the Kingdom of God is near.’ The Apostles did not say: ‘the Kingdom of God has come’ but ‘the Kingdom of God has come near.’ ” (7)*

*“ ‘Why’ said the angels to them ‘do you stand here staring at the sky? This Jesus, who has gone up to heaven, will come in the same way as you saw him ascend!’ Then, full of inexpressible emotion, the Apostles came down from the mountain... as we see in the Acts of the Apostles... True Christians lived in the expectation of the second coming of Jesus Christ... For Jesus will reappear, no longer in the swaddling clothes of humiliation, but in the splendour of His divine majesty. All the promises will be fulfilled.” (8)*

## VII Synthesis of the Spirituality of Father Theodore

God has come - He is coming - He will come.

Our whole being which is directed towards the promise of this return, must live this time of the New Advent, as Pope John Paul II said in his encyclical. This aspiration seems to be the central axis of Father Theodore's spirituality: God has promised to come, He came, He is always coming, He will return because He loves us.

### A. He has come in Jesus Christ

The promise was already fulfilled in the reality of the Incarnation, in the life-death-resurrection of Jesus, born a Jew, son of David and of Abraham. His presence manifests God's presence in the world: *"The eternal love of the Father is personified in the God-Man."* (Seventh dogmatic instruction, 1841)

Whence:

A spirituality of joy: when love comes, joy is born. Father Theodore often said that this is the spirit of Sion, gladness and cheerfulness.

A spirituality of thanksgiving: *"All our prayers should begin with thanks"; "Prayer should ... always be accompanied with thanksgiving."* (1)

Father Theodore demanded thanksgiving after the particular examen, after confession, before and after the Eucharist, etc.... but especially he insisted in and out of season that the whole day should be a prolonged thanksgiving, *"our whole life must be a perpetual thanksgiving."* *"Sickness lovingly accepted is a grace; the cure is another grace. Everything is a grace along God's way because everything turns to good for those who love God. In other words, we have nothing else to do than to love and thank always."* (2)

To unify prayer and action, he gave this method: live in the dynamism of thanksgiving: *"It is not without good reason that the Church does not say 'prayer' but 'thanksgiving'. Acts, works are necessary... All your actions will be words to thank the Lord our God."* *"Our acts of thanksgiving must be unceasing. I insist on the words 'acts of thanksgiving' because our actions must be united to the overflow of our prayer."* (3)

In this special insistence on thanksgiving, Father Theodore was one with Jewish tradition with requires that we bless God a hundred times and more every day, based on the realities of life, on the occasion of every event, every action, every

## OBEDIENCE

There are so many texts that they cannot be counted. For Theodore, obedience was the "nerve centre" of religious life; it is "the constitutive element of religious life."

*"Obedience makes communion perfect. The Eucharist alone does not produce this effect because union is incomplete if there is a division of wills. 'God's will is a perpetual communion for the obedient soul,' says Saint Vincent de Paul."* (45)

### Why is so much importance given to obedience?

It responds to love by love.

It responds to love because *"God's will is simply the immutable expression of His love."* (46)

It responds by love because *"Obedience is the practice of love, it means remaining united to the loved one."* (47)

*"To obey is to love - it is so joyous to have but one thought, one will with the beloved."* (48)

*"Religious life lives on love and obedience."*  
(refrain found in Father Theodore's Writings)

*"To love is to do the will of the beloved, it is the entire Gospel."*  
(on the back of a picture.)

Because obedience is love, it is free.

*"The model of Christian obedience is that which Jesus Christ practised on earth in His life and in His death. Now, says Scripture, He came to do the will of the His Father, He offered Himself because He willed it. Christian obedience therefore must be freely given (underlined in the text), not slavish, but free, wholly loving. In addition, it must be full and complete; it does not consist in the observation of certain laws, in practice, rule, discipline, action. It consists in entire submission of man's will to the will of God, in his whole being, in his soul, his mind, his body, in union and conformity with Jesus Christ"* (49)

### What does Obeying mean?

It means **to listen**. In the Old Testament, obedience was the basic attitude; God invites Israel to obey, saying: 'Listen, Israel!' Listen to the Word, i.e. to every thing that God said and did through Scripture, events, man.

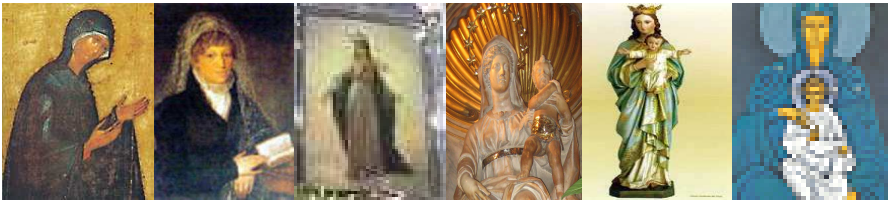


To listen is not simply to meditate, to admire the divine Word and action but to discern what it is asking of us today. e.g. *“The Saviour of our souls asks on our part for a proof of love: this unique proof is the homage of our obedience. To keep the divine Word, to do what it requires: this is the proof that the heart is united to the beloved.”* (50)

### How do we know God’s will?

*“The question as to how we can recognize God’s will?”*

- *The commandments – precepts of the Gospel*
  - *Providence (reading the signs of the times we should say today)*
  - *The inner voice of conscience – our director*
- And if it is necessary, God will send you an Ananias.”* (51)



### Outstanding models:

Abraham:

*“The model of our vocation is Abraham’s; his whole life was one single act of obedience, that is why he earned the name of Father of believers.”* (52)

Mary:

Theodore makes clear her obedience by referring to three texts of the Gospel:

- **Mary kept the word in her heart:** *“The Blessed Virgin, attentive to the great events which were happening before her eyes, withdrew to her innermost heart to meditate on them and to engrave them in her spirit. This is in a few words the whole history of her life: to share in the mysteries of Jesus and to adhere to them by unceasing acts of submission.”* (Manuscript of the Miettes Evangeliques, 6th day in the Octave of Christmas) Elsewhere he says that Mary *“turned over the word in her heart”* as if to compare events with Scripture (1860).
- **May your will be done in me: Fiat!** There are numerous quotations. the Word “Fiat” was one of the Father Theodore’s favourite words. For him it

*“The condition of this unity (among us), inaugurated by Jesus Christ, is the conformity of our will with God’s. It is evident that if we all wish the same thing (God’s Will), we are basically in agreement. The necessary thing is therefore obedience because obedience is the law of harmony.”* (Letter to Bayswater, February 12, 1872)

### D. Some Miscellaneous Texts

*“As for elections, it is wise to explain a little ahead of time so that they are not long drawn out.”* (Before the election of Sr. Rose at the General Chapter of 1872)

*“The Congregation’s government is not a representative government, it is a maternal government for which 6 councillors are enough.”*

*“Our Father insisted on simplicity in administration.”* (General Chapter, 1878)

*“Major Superiors seem to me to be called to envelop with their care and protection the smaller houses placed under their jurisdiction... They should not usurp the place of local superiors.”* (1865) (They were eliminated in 1872)

*“I have not found the word ‘superior’ in the Gospel; on the contrary, I have found the word ‘servants’.”* (General Chapter, 1872)

*“Accept Sister Electa’s remarks in such a way as to encourage her to make others. As for me, I said in the rule of Saint Peter that every Father without exception has the right and the duty to make observations to the superiors in private.”* (To Noemi Humann, September 9, 1857)

*“I admire how the Prince of the Apostles put aside his superiority in the midst of his brothers. You do not see him as a chief; you see only a tender father and pastor.”* (To Noemi Humann, July 21, 1857)

*“It was definitely decided in Council that local superiors would be named for a limited time and that having fulfilled this function, they would return to the ranks in simple and humble obedience...”* Several times he cited the example of the Good Mother, who resigned when she was 70.

*“The Superior General may have to move a sister for reasons that she cannot reveal to the Council without compromising her reputation; however, Our Father put to a vote the question of whether, after submitting her desire without giving her reason, she should ask for the votes of the Council. The Chapter decided that only a consultative vote was necessary.”* (General Chapter of 1872)

sharing, each one could say or write easily what she thought. There was a spirit among them. *"Sion's authority is a paternal and maternal authority; it does not impose, it does not force wills. God Himself does not obligate us in this way, He leaves us the merit of our free acts and we shall do as He does. If you are called to the East, you will answer yes or no. If you answer no, we will make no further mention of it. If you say yes, you will leave with joy in your heart and a smile on your lips like the sisters who preceded you."* (To Désirée Ricardo, January 18, 1858.)

This letter shows how the dialogue for a distant mission preceded any obedience. With Electa Valentin, the dialogue dealt more with the reasons concerning her own and the general good, etc. etc...

### C. His Views on Authority and Obedience

#### Authority

According to the view prevalent at the time, Superiors were *"representatives of God"*. Their role was one of mediation, of interpretation, of linking.

Father Theodore insisted at least as much on seeing in the superiors the **servants** of their sisters. The correspondence with Noemi Humann, 1856 -1859, is very full of Father Theodore's instructions on the manner of exercising authority.

Superiors are at the service of the **person** of the sisters to help them:

- to be happy
- to have time for prayer and renewal
- to love the vocation of Sion (This point is implicit.)

They are at the service of the **community**:

- for interpersonal relations
- for intercommunity relations (numerous examples)
- for relations with the Central Council

#### Obedience

(See Document on Religious Life)

Obedience is clearly linked to mission and apostolic life. Obedience helps to forge unity.

summarized the whole expectation of Faith, hope and love of the Christian mindful of the Word of God in a commitment and deliberate attitude and awareness of her responsibility.

*"Fiat is Mary's whole motto. Fiat! I want what you want."* (53)

- **The Lord is with you.** *"Jesus is with Mary and Mary is constantly with Jesus; she becomes increasingly linked to the life of Jesus by the profound and radical conformity of her will to the will of God. In Jesus and Mary, there is only one single will; whatever Christ wants Mary wants; what the Lord does not want, Mary does not want. There is complete harmony between these two wills so that together they form but one will. This is the way we ourselves should be united to Jesus Christ; Jesus Christ must be Emmanuel (God-with-us) for each one of us... Everything leads to obedience.. Obedience is the beginning, the middle and the end."* (54)

Jesus:

Not only was Jesus Christ obedient to death and death on the cross, as Father Theodore often recalled, but His obedience was linked to His mission: **Lord, here I am.** *"Obedience is the principal characteristic of his divine Mission."* (55)

On this account Father Theodore saw a **very close link between obedience and mission, apostolic life**. Because of this, he insisted on complete availability:





*“Above all, you religious of Sion must go to the ends of the earth if necessary.... be always ready to strike camp, to walk to another destination, to fight on another battle-field, to go from one act of devotedness to another, from sacrifice to sacrifice, always led by God, always with manna from heaven, to the Homeland.” (56)*

There is likewise a link with community life. (See document on Government.) Certainly Father Theodore spoke a great deal about obedience to Superiors, to the Rule, but in numerous occasions he spoke of it in the much broader and deeper aspect which is at the heart of the Gospel. Dialogue was also more frequent than we are disposed to think. (See document on Government.)

## Conclusion

The three vows have therefore a community dimension and an apostolic motive; they are the expression of love, they proceed from love, they lead to love:

*“Religious life is nothing else than the organisation and consecration of this life of love placed in us by baptism.” (57)*

## RENEWAL OF VOWS

Until 1884, there was much more flexibility in the time which separated first profession from definitive commitment. However, the renewal of vows, with few exceptions, took place on September 8.

*“Let us be united very intimately to all the sisters of Paris. Seek each other in depth, restore the bonds of charity at the same time as you renew your bonds of love.” (58)*

respect the responsibility of local superiors, and the local superior the responsibility of sisters in office. He planned some adaptations according to countries and circumstances, but the enormous difficulties faced by successive foundations, and the era of history, made this research very limited and timid.

## 2. Patriarchal type of government

*“Providence willed to attach you to a patriarchal branch through the special work that it confided to you.” (a) (General chapter of 1872)*

*“There are two kinds of congregations in the Church, the patriarchal and the aggregations. A congregation is an affiliation, there is a Father (the founder); it is like a tree, branches give birth to other branches. If a branch wants to live alone without cooperating with the other branches, it becomes dry wood. If God wills that those who come after can say: 'This is what was done thirty years ago; here is what the missionaries were told as they left', this must be passed on; it is the testament, the heritage, the wealth of a community, it is a tradition which the Church respects.” (Talk to the community, August 21, 1867)*

Father Theodore, repeating this several times, thought about the links between generations, which does not exclude adaptations. He would have said ( unfortunately the text is lost, but it was shown in the Mother House about 1964): *“If it happens that the Constitutions are no longer beneficial to circumstances, there is only one thing to do: obey the Church.”* In any case, that is his spirit, when we remember his fundamental confidence in the Church. By “patriarchal” Father Theodore meant, I think, that the government must be a “family” government, another word that he liked and that shows the moral closeness that should exist between the government and the sisters, the care of contacts that the government should have with persons. To work for the union of a body presupposes a knowledge of the situations but also of the persons involved.

It is evident that during Father Theodore’s life there was already a certain amount of consultation, e.g. for the writing of the Directory. He said that it should be the community which should decide whether or not Sr. Marthe should be recalled to Paris. There was dialogue before certain obediences were given out; obediences for distant countries were given only after consultation with the sister involved. (See Constitutive Rule of 1863.) There were frequent visits of Superiors General to houses in distant countries in spite of the time and distance involved at this time (e.g. it took 15 days to go from Jerusalem to Constantinople). Except in exceptional cases, the government made no difficulty about putting all its cards on the table, nothing was hidden, there was great deal of

(a) The word “Work” means “Charism” of Sion, the salvation of Israel.



*expense will be given greater blessing by God than correspondence.*" (Letter to Désirée Ricardo, December 19, 1861)

*"Our various branches of sisters, Arabs, Turks, English, French etc... must remain united to each other like the branches of a tree and must take their nourishment from the same source, from the same vitality, from the same spirit and the same life! May they be one! Sint Unum! That was the last word of Jesus and it is the supreme echo of Sion."* (Letter to the Mother House, March 26, 1863)

*"The tree of Sion can only thrive in conditions of unity, first because this unity is its life, its rule and its distinctive character, then because its branches stretching from East to West are separated from each other by great distances, and so if they cease to communicate with each other, it will not take long for their vitality to slow down and they will finish by being strangers to each other."* (Circular, Christmas, 1875)

Father Theodore insisted especially on links with the Mother House: *"It would certainly benefit all our missionary sisters to come back to the mother country at least every two or three years (mother country: Mother House) to steep themselves in the good spirit of Sion."* (Letter to Suzanne Picard, July 8, 1857) From this perspective of unity, the general government therefore shared a very important service: to help to put all in communion with each other, to make them share the same spirit.

There was a very small beginning of decentralization and of respect to the principle of subsidiarity. Father Theodore foresaw that there would be provinces, the



principle of which received unanimous approval at the General Chapter of 1872. He liked to pair neighbouring houses; he demanded that the Superior General

Here is his deepest thought:

*"I belong to you. I give myself in such a way that I can never give a second time. For me, I do not say 'Lord, I offer myself to you' because that would mean that I could dispose of myself; I say 'I belong to you.' We cannot give a thing twice; we must give in such a way that we no longer belong to ourselves."*

(Unpublished text, instruction to the novitiate, June 13, 1866)

### **III Some Basic Thoughts of Father Theodore on Prayer**

Between 1840 and 1854, Father Theodore often spoke about prayer either to lay people or to the Sion community. The prayer that he recommended is essentially biblical, centred in the presence of Christ in the heart, contemplative and apostolic.

#### **A. Biblical prayer**

Biblical prayer demands first of all poverty of heart:

*"So that prayer may be the expression of a true and deep feeling, we must recollect our thoughts and plunge into the depths of our conscience in order to feel intimately and profess loudly the poverty of our soul, because only poverty has the right to help from heaven."* (1)

It is therefore a fundamental attitude of the whole being.

Expressing the truth of the being before God, there must be something filial, spontaneous about prayer; it is abandonment to the Spirit. Scripture shows us people who pray, sometimes it reports prayers, it suggests the paths to prayer, but nowhere does it give any methods of prayer. In 1841 Father Theodore said very explicitly:

*"no rigorous methods... interior freedom... follow one's own attractions."* (2)

Elsewhere he said:

*"the best means of meditating is to abandon ourselves humbly to the impulses and dispositions that God himself puts into our souls."* (3)

*"To pray is to love. Any manner of loving is good as long as one loves and loves well; love brings us to humility, to self-forgetfulness, to fraternal charity and to devotedness and self-sacrifice."* (4)

However, he advised that one take as a starting point meditation on the Word of God. For that, he gave some indications of classical methods and examples of meditation: on the Pater, the Ave. etc. But for him, meditation (5) was only a *“preparatory form of spontaneous prayer, or repose of the heart.”* (a)

It was biblical, too, in its way of communicating with God:

- It is a going forward in his presence (6), without any fixed rules either of time, place or situation:

*“The day should be a long succession of prayers.  
Our various actions should be a series of acts of love.”* (7)

*“ Our whole person should pray.”*

- It is listening : an answer to God’s call which echoes throughout the Bible:

*“ ‘Listen Israel!’... We must often address God, listen to Him in the depths of our soul: ‘Speak, Lord’, said young Samuel, ‘your servant is listening.’ ”* (8)

- It is also to converse:

*“ Prayer is the communication of our heart with God... To pray is to speak; to pray is to listen; to pray is to receive, to give, to love, to desire, to hope, to be moved.”* (9)

- Finally, it is to love:

*“ To pray is to love and when I speak about prayer, I am speaking about love. Thus standing, sitting or kneeling, you can always pray. You don’t need to tell Our Lord you are praying, just glance at him with love.”* (10)

A final quotation shows how this prayer is rooted in the Bible:

*“Prayer answers love with love. You love with all your heart, all your strength, all your mind. Such is the law of life. Hence, to live life truly, all the powers of your being must come together in prayer.”* (11)

(a) the word “repose” is used in its etymological sense: to place again, to establish definitely the centre of our life in God.

Jesus Christ, to hasten their definitive fulfilment.

He wanted to make sure of this unity by the means used during his time and the ideas of the Church of the XIX th. century. Today we must retain only the spirit which inspired the choice of means.

Thus, he wanted only one general assistant because the Pope, as Bishop, has only one vicar general:

*“This organization of the Congregation is in any case based on the Roman constitutions: in Italy, Bishops have only one vicar general; the Pope has only one vicar general.”* (General Chapter, 1872)

By means no longer valid, he sought unity by making the houses uniform thanks to the superiors!

But on a deeper level, he sought to strengthen the unity of the Congregation on a more vital plane and this touched the Constitutions. This led to his growing preoccupation with having the Congregation deeply rooted in the church:

*“At the time that Sion tended to expand its chains, I understood the need to strengthen even more the roots of the Mountain (his word for Sion) by burying them ever deeper in the powers of Rome”. That is why he asked for the Church’s approbation. (Letter to the Mother House, July 25, 1856, immediately after the foundation of Jerusalem.)*

*“Sion is a large family which must keep in its integrity its family spirit as the branches of a single tree keep the same sap and vigour. This is the greatest wish of my heart and the chief preoccupation of my ministry: to keep you all together in this unity.”* (Letter to Constantinople, January 29, 1869). The simile of the tree recurs over and over.

*“ I recommend that the various houses of Sion maintain relations with each other, that together they form only one family, one soul and one body. Charity must flow without interruption as blood flows among the parts of the body: no*



In the Miettes Évangéliques, he wrote:

*"May the thought of the Reign of Jesus Christ take possession of our heart, our mind, all our faculties; may it pursue us always and everywhere."*

But he also knew that *"Charity is preparing new devotedness to respond to new deeds."* (Notice on the Congregation, 1851)

## **VI Synthesis of Father Theodore's teaching on Government**

### **A. Preliminary Remarks**

Father Theodore seems to have wavered among several systems, probably because he wanted primarily to build on **experience** and not on theories:

*"Until now, I have always found it wise to follow the divine model who began by doing, then taught doctrine. If God gives me time and wisdom, we shall later fix on paper what we shall have first of all practised."* (Letter to Louise Weywada, May 12, 1858)

He emphasized that to write Constitutions, one must first of all **look to the future**:

*"When drawing up Constitutions, one must not direct them towards the present personnel and time but must look to the future."* (Letter to Marie Paul Hibon, November 19, 1874)

He said several times that in future **our houses will be very dispersed**, hence the need of an even greater union; the method of government must take this into account.

### **B. His Essential Concerns**

#### **1. To assure great unity in the Congregation:**

This, not only because, like every founder, he feared schisms in the future, but because of the **spirit** of the Congregation which takes its inspiration from the ideal of the first church in Jerusalem, according to the Acts of the Apostles, and because of the **charism** of the Congregation which demands this spirit. The words: *"A single heart, a single soul"...* *"May they be one"* recur frequently under his pen. The community must strive for this but so should the Congregation both as a body and for the same apostolic motive: to make tangible Christ's presence in its midst, to witness to the fact that the Promises have already been fulfilled in

These implicit allusions to the "Shema Israel" help us to grasp how much prayer was, for Father Theodore, the permanent orientation of our whole being, a very simple attitude, a source from which all life flows.

His prayer was also very much centred on the permanent presence of Christ in our heart, and this gives it an existential quality, since for Theodore Christ is essentially Life:

*"Heaven itself is within us, in the depths of our heart, when we know how to penetrate there through prayer."* (12) (b)

*"The Kingdom of heaven is within you."* To plunge into the depths of our heart is to find again the essential core of our being, the secret place which God alone can penetrate, where we live the very Life of God, where the Spirit of Jesus cried: *"Abba"*.

When he says *"To pray is to breathe"* he is speaking about prayer in terms of life: to pray is to live of the Breath of the Spirit:

*"Prayer in the complete sense of the word is the breath of the soul, communion with God, the interior act by which we attract and breathe in the life of the thou"* (13)

He adds:

*"Affective prayer is the best of all - the sigh of the soul which attracts God, breathing God... tasting God in the depths of the heart, looking at Him with love - the Holy Spirit breathing within us - this is the source of all prayer, the food which nourishes mental and vocal prayer. When this is so, we pray always - because the will can always remain in the same disposition, however various the tasks that we must perform."* (14)

Because *"in Him we are, in Him we move, in Him we have our being... In any case heaven is in our heart since Jesus has come to live there - there is life, there is the mysterious ladder."* (15)

(b) A text of Andre Louf helps us to actualise the pages of Fr. Theodore: *"It is clearer now that the heart, in the old meaning of the word, is not identical with the discursive intelligence by which we reason, nor with the feelings which attract us to one another, nor with superficial affectivity which we call sentimentality. The heart lies much deeper within us. It is the most secret core of our being, the root of our existence or, if one prefers, it is its apex... In everyday life, our heart is normally hidden. The conscience is scarcely aware of it... To find again the path to one's heart is man's most important task... Man is a pilgrim in search of his heart, of his deepest being. Everyone bears within himself, according to the marvellous expression of St. Peter in his first letter (1 Peter 3:4) 'the man hidden in the depths of his heart'"* (Extract from "Seigneur, apprends-nous a prier," 1973, p.24)

More often he says quite simply: *"To pray is to love"* (16) There again he points out that prayer is a communion with the very Life of God, that it helps us to share in the Life of the Spirit of Jesus Christ: *"To live is to love"* he affirms. It is not then a question of merely affective behaviour - although this is included - but of an existential attitude which involves the depths of the being. (17)

This existential prayer is by this very fact contemplative. Its food is neither ideas nor words but the very Life of God:

*"to find oneself before God, to sink into His depths, to lose oneself, as it were, in Him."* (18)

*"It is 'repose' because it is the unconditional acceptance of God's will, 'peace' because it gives us the 'taste' of God's plenitude, 'silence' because it is the adoration of the inexpressible. A few words are sufficient to keep it alive, sometimes just one word from time to time, like the Name of Jesus."* (19)

Through the intermediary of Saint Bernard especially, Theodore loved this prayer. *"You know"* he said, *"the name of Jesus is such a prayer of hope that when we do not know how to pray, it suffices to breathe the name of Jesus. How many graces we obtain when we call upon Jesus! There are souls who say scarcely any other prayer than the repetition of this name 'Jesus! Jesus!'* This name reminds them of the Good Shepherd, the Saviour full of mercy."*"* (20)

Elsewhere he said. *" This Name is the seal of our Redemption, it expresses both the goodness which bends down to our level and the power which raises us to God"*(21)

Bearer of the whole Christ, this Name introduces us to the total presence. Beyond presence it brings union. When we pronounce it, we enthrone Jesus in our hearts, we put on Christ. It is a continual memory of Jesus Christ in His incarnation and a very concrete actualisation of the theology of the Mystical Body.



## Freedom of conscience and respect for truth

*"The fundamental rule of the Institute is respect for conscience."*

(Notice on the Congregation, 1862)

He had trouble forming the sisters (class mistresses) on this point on which he insisted absolutely. However:

*"In matters of doctrine, there must be no giving in."* (24)

*"You must avoid arguments and hurt no one but above all, you must never hurt truth."* (to Worthing, June 23, 1875)

## Respect for other cultures and civilizations

*"You must speak respectfully of Turkish morals."* (to Louisa Weywada, December 17, 1856) He praised the qualities of ten peoples.

*"Another essential point is to allow the Arabs to keep the customs and dress of the country."* (to Louise Weywada, October 17, 1864)

## He insisted, without too much success, that the sisters learn the language of the country

Arabic, Turkish, Greek, Spanish, etc. Sr. Suzanne (an Alsatian) knew Arabic fairly well and the sisters of Costa Rica knew enough Spanish to be able to go to confession after a year. He wanted a novice, Sr. Cleophas, to teach Arabic to the other novices and Sr. Christopher to teach Turkish. (Letter to the Mother House, November 9, 1858)

## Conclusion:

The spirit of the Congregation came to apostolic maturity with **the foundation of Jerusalem**. This was a turning point of capital importance, but from the very beginning Father Theodore was pursued by the Reign of Christ; this explains the importance of the *"Laudate Dominum omnes gentes"*, *"Praise the Lord, all you peoples"*, in the prayers of the first ladies. In 1844, the neophytes prayed a great deal for the Jews, but also they said the Our Father for the whole world and added an invocation to Saint Francis Xavier.

In the plan for a sermon (about 1840), Father Theodore wrote:

*"Each time that we say: 'Thy Kingdom come', let us glorify God with the souls of all the faithful and let us raise with our blessings the blessings of the whole of nature – let us unite with those who do not know God."*

getting to Mass; frequent epidemics (cholera, smallpox etc.), nervous depression; often extreme poverty; frequent riots and even revolutionary movements: several times there was question of abandoning a country on this account. There were threats of invasions and wars, religious hostility in several countries. They were baffled by the morals of the children, the parents, the workmen who were building their houses, business men and even the clergy.

It is easy to see why Father Theodore could say: *"I wish you were a community of men, not of women;"* and: *"May the daughters of Sion have a manly and apostolic courage"*(19) or again: *"We should not leave the battle-field when danger approaches."* (20)

He insisted that patience was necessary in new beginnings but it must be dynamic and virile patience.

### Struggle against prejudice and nationalism

*"I admit that every race has defects, but no defect is incorrigible and no race is incurable; otherwise Our Lord would not have sent His disciples to all the nations of the earth."* (21)

*"I have taken the resolution to see in men themselves only what is good and appealing. I want to see them all as elect. If I am wrong, God will correct my judgment in the valley of Josaphat."* (In 1858, before leaving for Jerusalem.)

He was very severe against nationalism:

*"Do you think,"* he said, speaking of the apostles and the disciples after Pentecost, *"that faced with the great responsibilities put upon them they were bothered by petty national vanity?"* (22)

To help develop this apostolic openness and make the union of hearts more tangible, he wanted **international communities**. Thus one year at Ein Karem, there were 8 sisters, of 6 different nationalities. When Sr. Afra, who was black, entered, he wrote to Rose Valentin, on December 9, 1860: *"We need every colour at Sion."* The Jewish-Christian nucleus of the community embodied the call of the charism, its internationalism the universalism to which it was linked.

*"Religious communities must fulfil with perfection the great idea of the unity of the body of the Church; they put in common all their talents, the gifts of God as well as the qualities and advantages to be found in every nationality."* (22 also)

### B. Apostolic Prayer

Apostolic prayer for Israel and the whole world:

*"We must ask for everything since we have nothing. Ask for yourselves, for your families; you know their needs... Pray for the Church, especially for the Church of Paris. But a Catholic heart cannot put bounds to its prayers, because there are no barriers which can stop the rays of charity."* (22)

Prayer is involved with life:

*"Always walk in the presence of life, often saying to yourself: I am working with my saviour".* (23)

Again he says:

*"I must make another recommendation to you and that is to always keep in mind the goal for which you are suffering and working; this goal is the work of Sion, the salvation of Israel. Offer all your actions and sufferings for this intention."* (24)

*"Is it enough to listen very carefully to the Word of God? No, it must then be put into practice, made the rule of our life."* (25)

In his humility, Theodore sometimes complains of not being able to pray. He writes, for example, to one of his spiritual daughters who had become prioress at the Carmel of Angers:

*"I have often begged Saint Teresa to join with Saint Joseph to obtain the gift of prayer, but alas! I don't think she granted my request."* (26)

However, it would seem that he lived in a state of prayer and knew how to descend into the depths of his heart to find God there. Once a confession escaped him which tells us a great deal about his interior life:

*"When I come among you,"* he said to the sisters, *"I do not make a long preparation to find what I ought to say to you, and yet I do prepare. I go down into the depths of my being to a place where thought does not exist; it is a dark place; it is very dim; but when one is happy enough to remain there for a few instants, one plunges into the very substance of God"...*(27)

Later numerous texts perhaps give us an inkling of how he set about praying:



*“ I do not give you the method of other saints, I do not criticise them, but I prefer the method of Jesus Christ... Pray to the Father who sees in secret; do not use many words. The heavenly Father knows better than you what you need! You must expose your heart to God; it is filled with desires, needs, weaknesses, afflictions. We would like to express our love in a magnificent manner but our heart is so dry! Let us say to the Lord: You see what is in my heart; I am dry, it is true, but strike this heart lightly and something will come out of it.” (28)*

He ends: *“In the lesson of the Gospel, the Lord gives us the means of stopping the restlessness of our mind which cannot settle down, and to fix our thoughts, He teaches us the Lord’s prayer.” (29)*

*“The words of the Pater are another method... say each word and stop at it for a while, repeating several times the same words... Nothing is as fruitful as the prayer of Jesus Christ.” (30)*

The prayer of Father Theodore was therefore Trinitarian: he was profoundly convinced that it was the Spirit of Jesus Christ that was praying to the Father in the secret of the heart, whence his expressed will to leave each one completely free to pray as the Spirit suggests:

*“ The wind blows where it will and you hear its voice, but you know neither where it comes from nor where it goes.”(31)*

How then could he not believe that prayer (if it is animated with confidence) can do all things since it is the Spirit Himself at work?(32)

#### **IV Some Basic Thoughts of Father Theodore on Apostolic Community**

##### **A. The Source**

Everything flows from the conviction that God, because He is **love**, is **Trinity**. The Community has its source then in the Trinity.

##### **B. Lived Experience**

All his life, Father Theodore was nostalgic for the community in which he had lived with Miss Humann and her disciples. There he found human warmth, sharing on every level, help in the discernment of apostolic tasks. In spite of the difficulties caused by events, he drew there the strength to remain faithful to the Church as well as the vigour to become the founder of the Congregation.

- Especially for Theodore, his experience and his relationships had shown him that there are all kinds of poverty and a great deal of spiritual penury among the rich.
- Several notable women educators had given the boarding schools a good reputation and many Bishops appealed to Sion.

Father Theodore was ready to enlarge apostolic activities: soup kitchen, care of wounded soldiers in Paris, Constantinople, Romania, hospitality to pilgrims in Jerusalem; in 1853, he had listened to the appeal for help for emigrant Irish in Palestine; he had accepted a foundation at Lyons where the sisters would care for deaf-mutes, etc... In his time, people came of their own accord to our houses, even if they were not Catholics, because governments had not yet organized works of charity and social welfare. He said to the sisters: *“Go to the four corners of the earth.”*

Today he would say: *Go, not to the ends of the earth, but out of your house, into your professional milieu, to witness to God’s love.* What remains is the vigour of his sending which always requires that the sisters leave everything, as it were, to give a truly evangelical answer; material distance was less important:

*“There are no true disciples of Jesus Christ wherever there is not a willingness to abandon everything to accompany the Master wherever He sends us.” (Talk to the community, October 23, 1861)*

#### **3. WHAT BEHAVIOUR AND ATTITUDES DID HE DEMAND?**

##### **Complete availability and generosity**

*“ We are going to celebrate the feast of Saint Bartholomew: this apostle gave his skin; Our Lord Himself stripped him of it, his flesh was torn....Saint Bartholomew loved Our Lord immensely; he followed Him along the most painful paths of the apostolate... The daughters of Sion are apostolic religious; the apostolate of Jesus Christ and the apostles continues, you have been given the apostolic spirit like the sisters who remain behind because the latter are always ready to leave.” (18)*

##### **Strength and patience**

Many of the sisters who went on mission were not French nor were they nationals of the countries to which they were sent (e.g. the many Germans). They therefore experienced a double uprooting. They never returned to their native land and often not even to the Mother House. Since they were often sent to new foundations they had language difficulties (Confession etc.), isolation (slowness of mail service; often they were the only female congregation in a city ), difficulties in

the delinquent girls at the Good Shepherd home, twice to workmen, to the blind. For three months he spent two hours a day with the rebels who were imprisoned after the Revolution of 1848. He wrote to Father Renard on December 16, 1857:

*“the Archbishop has given me the spiritual direction of the religious who are in charge of a detention home for about 100 young inmates. In addition we have the work of the servants of Mary in which there are more than 600 servant girls. There is a great deal of good to be done there.”*

So Father Theodore had the experience of all kinds of miseries and loved the poor of every category. His numerous sermons to the society of Saint Vincent de Paul express this affection.

At the general chapter of 1872, he said that the Congregation was for the poor. The first foundations were poor places: (in the beginning) Thann: a working class area; Marais: small shopkeepers, many did not know how to read so evening classes were held for them; Palestine: two orphanages, a school of arts and crafts, a free dispensary where 200 people were treated every day; the boarding school only came later; the house of Smyrna was founded for the poor; Evry: poor school, visiting the sick; Holloway, the same thing:

*“Cardinal Manning... is very preoccupied with the number of poor children who are lost in London. I think that he will found some works and confide them to devoted communities... It would be wise to tell the prelate that Sion would be glad to co-operate in the carrying out of this pious plan.”* (Letter to Nazarena Antoni, in 1865)

In 1873, Theodore agreed to let three sisters live at Drury Lane from Monday to Saturday to look after the “Ragged Schools” into which 350 children were crowded. Galatz began with a poor school: *“Our job is not to seek out the aristocracy... the Gospel is primarily announced to the poor. Let us make our own the sentiments of Jesus Christ Himself.”* Saint Omer began with an orphanage and a workroom of lingerie for working girls, etc. Wherever a middle-class boarding school was the first foundation he wanted to have always a poor school for as many children as possible; often, as at Constantinople, this wish was realised almost immediately and on a large scale, but he remarked that people spoke much less about these schools than about the boarding schools in spite of their importance.

#### After 1872, Sion also went to the rich. Why?

- Because they are more influential and can help at every level; they can radiate around them interest in the salvation of Israel.
- There are rich Jews as well as poor ones.

Jesus himself wished to live out the mission he had received from the Father in the midst of an apostolic community. And the Apostles likewise. Gathered together in community, at Pentecost they received the Spirit who sent them to evangelise the world.

There was general coming and going, ebb and flow between apostolic life and community life; that is why Father Theodore was fond of the term Apostolic Community.

### C. The Model: Some Forms

It was the community of the first Christians “who had but one heart and one soul”, expressions that Father Theodore repeated hundreds of times: *“God tells me repeatedly that he wants the Congregation of Sion to reproduce as far as possible the spirit of the early Church; it is the first article of your Constitutions. Now this spirit is charity: ‘See how they love one another,’ people said.”* (1)

#### 1. Community is the communion of Life

If Father Theodore insisted on uniformity and regularity in community life, it was simply because these were the methods used during his time, but his stress does not lie there. In the Acts, the first Christians did not all live under the same roof, or follow the same time-table or kinds of work. But all lived in Christ, of His



Eucharistic presence, His Word, bearing witness to the Resurrection, putting all things in common...(a)

*"The multitude of believers was composed of men and women of various countries, temperaments and conditions. But all were animated by the same spirit which bound them to one another, so that none lived for himself; there was no longer mine or yours, I and you."* (Words underlined in the manuscript.) (2)

(a) Like many people of his time, Father Theodore took literally the idealized portrait of the early Church of Jerusalem depicted in the Acts.



*"If two or three are gathered together in my name, I am in their midst." (Matt.18:20) On this occasion Jesus was speaking of the most central, the most radical union imaginable here on earth, a union which fuses several souls so that they have only one life, one heart, one thought. This is what the Christians of the Church in Jerusalem told each other ..." ( 3)*

– **Same life in Jesus Christ** : hence the importance of the Eucharist , the centre of the community. (See document on Spirituality )

– **Same vocation:** the point was to give a common response to the same call under various forms and to love our sisters because of this same charism received from the Holy Spirit :

*"You will love your sisters because they are like you – sisters of Sion... Each one is a sister of Sion , a cooperator... The goal is always the same: whatever you do... you are doing for Israel; this is your goal, your vocation, your particular mission. " ( 4 )*

– **Same spirit** : because we all have the same Founder. It is in this sense that Father Theodore speaks about "family spirit".

– **Life of sharing** on the material and spiritual levels : *"We read in the Acts of the Apostles that the faithful... put in common all their spiritual and material goods." ( 5)*

In Father Theodore's time, there was:

- Sharing of events thanks to collective and individual letters passed on from one to the other.
- Sharing of prayer: e.g. In the community meetings, every sister gave her reflections on the psalm chosen.
- Sharing through mutual aid, but also on account of the interest taken in the neighbour's work: *"We must help each other, care for each other: 'Let the members give an example of mutual help.' (1Cor.12:25) The members working for the group work for each other since all live the life of the group; hence they owe themselves to one another."* (6)
- *"You must take an interest in the work of others, of those who sweep as well as those who write."* (7)
- *"You must not be bored with each other, but you must amuse and edify one another."* (Edify means to raise, to construct) (8)

He wanted to open a second high school at Constantinople (at Stamboul), ready to pass it on later to "Muslim Mistresses" after they had been formed, and this was to help in the development of the country. (Letter to Rose Valentin, February 25, 1870)

### C. Next: foundations were made in Christian countries where there were interdenominational differences.

There were 6 houses, 3 in England, 3 in Romania( as well as Turkey). Strictly speaking we cannot talk about Father Theodore's "ecumenism" because his purpose in making numerous foundations in Protestant and Orthodox countries was to convert them. If building was on such a large scale, it was with the intention of rescuing Muslim and Jewish children! But if he fought against Protestantism and Orthodoxy, he was often very hospitable with persons and this without any hidden motive.

*" I am persuaded that reconciliation between separate branches will not be brought about by discussions, however learned they may be. It is charity which brings hearts together and when hearts touch, all else is unified. Now this attractive charity is to be found among women more than among men; I think that the desirable work of reconciliation with the Greeks, a very difficult work, will be begun by women; all things are possible with God."* (Letter to Constantinople, August 24, 1863) (a)

### D. Foundations in countries which were dechristianised or without sufficient religious culture.

This was the case in Thann (Alsace) where morals were degraded, the Marais (Paris) where the great majority of parents saw no reason to send their children to catechism lessons in preparation for their First Communion, Grandbourg where only 5 % of the people including children went to Mass. There was insufficient religious formation in Costa Rica and even in certain parts of Saint Omer....

### 2. MISSION TO POOR AND RICH

Personally, Theodore worked much more with the poor than appears on the surface. As a young man, he worked with the poor Jews in Strasbourg, then with the 200 orphans of the Sisters of Charity on rue Oudinot (this was free service), and with a catechumenate composed of poor children. He regularly visited the old men at the Saint John of God home. He preached retreats to servant women, to

(a) *"Reconciliation takes place imperceptibly as people come together, as they learn to know and esteem each other."* (Letter to Worthing, June 23, 1863)

*the house of Israel. Consequently, your charity must envelop the world, it must be as broad as the Church.”* (Profession, October 15, 1882)

## B. Next in importance: foundations in Muslim countries.

At Father Theodore’s death, 7 of the 21 houses were in Muslim countries! Ishmael held this very privileged place in the concerns of Father Theodore because of its links with Israel.

*“Ishmael must be fused with Israel in Catholic Sion”* (14)

*“I have a soft spot in my heart for the children of Ishmael; we are more or less cousins.”* (15)

He very often recommended that sympathy be shown to the Arabs: *“Before God, there is neither Greek nor barbarian nor Arab, evangelical gifts are given to all and indeed we see that there are many Arabs in the list of saints.”* (16)

He also insisted on having Arab vocations and was ready to make it easy for them to enter (e.g. he asked neither dowry nor trousseau etc...) For many reasons he attached special importance to Constantinople and the foundations of Chalcedon (Cadi-Keuil) and Smyrna in Turkish Muslim territories. *“Your mission in Constantinople is important in a different way from Grandbourg; it opens up a new era.”* (17)



– **Attention to the person** and this in the midst of the pluralism of different nationalities, which was not easy!

*“Charity is the capital virtue of the daughters of Sion; maintain it at the cost of every sacrifice. May every one of you live for others and not for herself.”* (9)

– **A great deal of kindness:**

*“Be foresighted to help each other.”* (10)

– **Gentleness:** *“We can never love too much,”* Father Theodore repeated several times. He spoke of *“Sionian gentleness”* which should characterise the community. (11) If he feared excess in specific attachments, it was because of some friendships what were too exclusive, sisters who scandalised lay people and left Sion. But there was a great deal of warmth in the community of his time in Paris as well as in distant houses

## 2. The community is essentially Apostolic

Directed towards the goal of the Congregation, not only is the community bound by the charism of Sion, but it signifies what is to be found within it.

- In its **members**, since in every community, even at the foundation, there was always one sister of Jewish origin. (Document on Apostolic Life)
- In its **activities**: In addition to other works and contacts, there was always an effort to establish a catechumenate or at least to have some relations with Jews.
- In its **concerns** and its **community prayer**: At a time when many lay people frequented our chapel, they saw the sisters praying in the way demanded by their vocation (Pater Dimitte Illis, litanies for the Jews, the holy patrons (St. Abraham, etc), God of Goodness, etc).

## 3. Small communities

Besides the foundations and small communities of Evry and Ein Karem, Father Theodore accepted the idea of small communities for an apostolic purpose. On a loose autograph page before the General Chapter of 1872, he wrote that there should be at least three sisters. He wanted to have several such communities in the Holy Land:

*“You must employ your Arab subjects in all kinds of work, even in cooking, because if we found small communities in the Holy Land, it is a good thing for missionary sisters to be able to do everything and to be able to teach as well as do other work.”* (11)

In Rumania, the Bishop proposed a small community at Backüm and Father Theodore wrote about this:

*“The spirit and the Rule of Sion makes no provision for small isolated communities. A small group of three or four sisters cannot form a choir for the Office and follow the community rule. However, the wish of your good Bishop appeals to my heart, and if circumstances are favourable, we shall accept Backüm.”* (12)  
Shortly after, favourable circumstances made possible the foundation of Galatz.

According to several other statements, we see that he hesitated because of two inconveniences particular to the time:

1. Semi-cloistered life would be difficult, and between 1860 and 1880 the church tightened enclosure for Congregations like Sion.
2. Because of the Office, which was then said in Latin and reserved to the choir sisters. This shows the extent to which he insisted on community biblical prayer.

He knew that charity was very demanding in a small community, but I do not think that this stopped him, rather the contrary. It was not because of the scarcity of capable superiors, because he easily attached a small community to a larger one; this was the case, at certain times, of Ein Karem which was attached to the Ecce Homo, Drury Lane to Holloway...

*“Living so closely together, one can also see defects more easily. Be indulgent with them, waiting until they disappear. Be helpful and attentive to one another, lighten each other’s burdens. Fill your hearts with all the tactfulness of the Heart of Jesus.”* (13)

*“Nothing is more important in a small community than a great spirit of charity.”* (14)

I also think that Father Theodore’s thought was directed by another motive very closely linked to the goal of the Congregation. It was particularly centred on the Presence of God among His People (Shekina). We must live in this Presence and show it. Jesus Christ promised that He was present wherever two or three gathered in His name. The community is based on this promise; it already has the beginnings of it; it must strive to become, as much as possible, a tangible and permanent witness of it.

#### **Did he foresee that sisters could live alone?**

No. This was partly due to the times in which he lived but also because he saw apostolic life as coming from within a community. (See Apostolic Life)

Foundations were in places where there was a hope of having a catechumenate: Grandbourg (which was “an apostolic and missionary school” for the formation of the sisters), Saint Omer, Holloway, Worthing... But “before creating a catechumenate, there must be a boarding school,” (12) “because we cannot write on the facade of a building: ‘Here Jews are converted.’” (13)

There were two exceptions: Bel-Air (Paris, 15th ward) for the sick and Costa Rica to help a developing country but also to gain a foothold in America where it was hoped to have a foundation in New York (where there are numerous Jews). Three attempts were made to go to Poland and two to Russia.

Father Theodore had the intuition that later more direct contacts with Jews could be possible, but obviously from the viewpoint of conversion according to the pastoral perspectives of the times. Today we know that this is an error.

*“More than ever, I have a perspective given to me by God which shows me, in a future more or less distant, the chief reason why Providence has raised Our Lady of Sion. Sooner or later there will be events which will show us that we have come not only to sanctify ourselves and to raise some souls for heaven (boarding schools) but that we have a mission for the conversion of the Jews.”* (General Chapter 1872)

Sometimes he situated our special mission in the area of universalism; sometimes, on the contrary, he situated it in the area of particularism which will open the Congregation to universalism. Regardless of the way, the important thing was the constant reference of our apostolic life to our charism at the same time as its expansion in a “catholic vision” in the universal sense of the word. Israel is not an entity, but it is formed by its vocation: “A people in communion”. Particularism must therefore expand into universalism. (See document Raison d’Etre)

*“You must make Jesus Christ known and loved by the whole world.”*  
(3, continuation of the proceeding quotation)

*“Your heart must embrace everything, stretch out to the outermost limits of the world. Nothing must hinder or halt the radiation of Sion’s charity since your principal vocation is to recall in the heart of the Church the scattered sheep of*



### 3. Reading the Signs of the Times

When the Congregation began, active congregations had been in existence only for about thirty years; Theodore saw in their appearance an answer to the needs of the times:

*“In our times, it seems to me that a women who knows how to renew her energy in love should aspire to the evangelical apostolate, much more than a desire to rest in her solitude... For new needs, Providence provides new helps, new means of sanctification.”* (11)

Generally speaking, it was events (or a positive call from the Church) which decided the acceptance of a new foundation or the commitment of a sister. Following this plan, the history of the first foundations is very instructive. Father Theodore stated in a notice on the Congregation: *“charity calls forth charity.”* (1862)

#### C. How was the Apostolic Life lived from 1847 to 1884?

##### 1. TO WHOM WERE THE SISTERS SENT?

###### A. To the Jews first.

With the passage of time, Theodore insisted more and more frequently on the **urgency** of our mission, even when circumstances seemed unfavourable.

To embody the charism of the Congregation and recall the constitution of the first community of Jerusalem, he wanted to have in each community or foundation, without exception, a Jewish sister. This Jewish-Christian nucleus was present from the very first foundation in Thann (Alsace), which was also an international nucleus as in the Church of the Acts after Pentecost. There were only two sisters: Louise Weywada, French and Christian by birth, Maria Heumann, German and Jewish by birth (1847). To Costa Rica he sent Sr. Rachel etc...

The first foundations were in places where there were numerous Jews, as in Thann (Alsace), in the Marais, the Jewish quarter of Paris (1849-1855), in Jerusalem (1856), where they constituted more than one third of the population, in Constantinople (1856), in England (1860), in Ramleh (1880), Tunis, Trieste (1883) and Royan in France.

*“The saintly Bishop (of Moldavia) would like to have sisters to direct village schools; indeed, this would be an excellent means of reawakening piety everywhere. But this work is not for our religious because they cannot live alone. A special work would be needed for this important apostolate in Moldavia. I had thought of placing some teaching sisters under your care so that they might be trained at Iassy with some from Sister Electa’s house (Galatz). Officially they would be under Sion’s jurisdiction but they would form a separate little community. They could be called Sionist sisters; they could be given a simple religious costume etc...”* (15) Although this project was under consideration for several months, events prevented its realization.

### V Some Basic Thoughts of Father Theodore on Apostolic Life

*“Zeal for the glory of God ought to dominate over all human considerations.”* (1)

#### A. Did Father Theodore intend to found an essentially Apostolic Congregation?

1. A certain number of sisters would have preferred **a more contemplative life**. From the beginning Father Theodore believed that there would be a “contemplative branch”, when the propitious moment arrived, but he wanted the congregation to be in essence apostolic.

*“There are many contemplative souls in the active life and many active souls in the contemplative life; both must practise the two types of life, of Martha and Mary, simultaneously at varying degrees. These two types are not so different that they must be separated to make two distinct orders. Mary Magdalen was contemplative at the foot of the Cross; she was active at the Resurrection. Martha was active at Bethany; she was contemplative in the Cenacle... These two vocations are fused together in the spirit of Sion.”* (2)

The more active the apostolic life, the greater the demand for continual prayer. With the years and the development of the works, Theodore became increasingly distrustful of activism, therefore he insisted more and more on interior life, i.e. on the fact that the sisters should continually tend - in the broadest sense of the word - to a state of continual prayer (Union with God.) The stress on the apostolic character therefore demands deepening of the contemplative spirit but without any confusion with a monastic style of life. (a)

(a) Certain monastic customs found in the Congregation were due to the customs of the age in every convent and not to the choice of a life-style.

In a sort of spiritual testament at the last community assembly over which he presided, on November 28, 1883, he said:

*"We are not sufficiently attached to the interior life which is the life of Jesus Christ. Scripture tells us: 'The Kingdom of God is within you.' But we do not retreat within ourselves enough; our life becomes more and more exterior and is not sufficiently imbued with the life of Jesus Christ."*

2. Father Theodore laid great stress on community life, but the Congregation was not first of all founded on community made fruitful by the apostolate; on the contrary, it was **primarily and essentially apostolic**. This is its purpose, but this purpose demands a community life of great value to nourish, authenticate and express each one's apostolic spirit. The more apostolic life is demanding and difficult (and our charism is difficult to live), the more it needs to be anchored in a true community life.

*"I should like to awake in us the apostolic spirit, the broad spirit which knows no limits. It is especially in the community of Sion that this must be developed because God sends us in every direction, we must love all nations. For that we must all be fused together to form but one heart and one spirit. If you do that, you will be more united, stronger, firmer."* (3)

In addition, the community has within itself an apostolic finality. Theodore repeated incessantly that the members must *"have but one heart and one soul"*, like the first Christians of Jerusalem and he often added: *"Even the pagans said about them: 'See how they love one another.'"* He commented on this, in the style of the nineteenth Century:

*"If like the first Christians of the early Church you have but one heart and one soul, you will see a repetition of the marvels of conversion of the early ages."* (4)

Elsewhere he says:

*"Unity of hearts and minds proves the reign of charity, that is, the reign of Jesus Christ."* (5)

3. In the Vows. Every religious life is impregnated with the apostolic spirit

A few examples will suffice:

**Prayer** is centred on the Word and especially on the Psalms because of our charism:

*"If you meditate on the Psalms in view of the Work to which you belong, how many passages will speak to you of Israel; your vocation binds you to these truths."* (6)

**Obedience** is linked to the mission as is Jesus Christ's, about which he says:

*"Obedience is the chief characteristic of His divine mission."* (7)  
(See document on Religious Life)

**Poverty** assumes some nuances of the Exodus. (See Religious Life)

**Formation.** He insisted on speaking a great deal to the novices about apostolic life and forming them for this life. At his death, out of 75 novices, 26 were in the missions. Almost always some were sent for foundations not only because of a penury of personnel but for their own good.

## **B. Why did Father Theodore want such an intense Apostolic life?**

1. He made "apostolic charity" coincide with its source: God is Love. He situated the apostolate in the path of the Shema Israel:

*"Everything must be brought to Jesus Christ, everything belongs to Him, you must offer Him all that you have, all that you are and in this way you will fulfil the great commandment:*

*'You will love your God with your whole heart,  
your whole spirit, all your strength!'*

*The daughter of Sion does not seek her own happiness in her consecration to God; just as the Magi returned to their various countries to bring the good news of the Gospel, to spread light, as the word 'Epiphany', 'Manifestation of light' signifies, so the daughters of Sion, after having searched for Jesus Christ and found Him, go everywhere where holy obedience sends them, to the East, to the West, everywhere, to cast around the light which has enlightened them."* (8)

2. As always, he started with the model, idealized by the Acts of the Apostles, of the early church of Jerusalem.

*"This spirit of the early Church is the spirit of our Rule; it must be reproduced among us. The daughters of Sion are the apostles of the Apostles, the evangelists of the Evangelists. Indeed they were the first to announce the Resurrection of the Saviour; they performed the first missions of charity: we must then bring to life this spirit embodied in the name of "daughter of Sion". It is to them that Jesus Christ confided the duty of praying for His people; they shared the works of the Apostles."* (9)

*"The Apostles, the holy women scattered throughout all the countries of the world."* (10)