

Guillaume Pouget, C.M. (1847-1933): A Short Biographical Sketch

Guillaume Pouget was born in Morsanges de Maurines, in the department of Cantal, France, 14 October 1847, the son of Jean and Catherine Besse, and the oldest of six children. Until age 15 he helped his family in their agricultural work, and then entered the minor seminary of Saint-Flour. The good example of the Vincentian seminary directors gave him the idea of joining the Congregation of the Mission. On 7 October 1867 he began his Internal Seminary (novitiate), and two years later, in Paris, he made his vows. After his priestly ordination, 25 May 1872, he was sent to the minor seminary of Evreux where, for 11 years, he taught the physical sciences. It was there, at age 35, that he had his first attack of glaucoma.

During this same time, he began on his own to study Hebrew, and then other ancient near-eastern languages. Later on, he even drew up a Coptic dictionary. He was becoming more and more devoted to scripture studies.

In 1883, he was named superior of the minor seminary of Saint-Flour. There, at the end of the academic year, we encounter the first of Pouget's writings. In it, he set down the essentials of how to study, so that the intellect could be controlled in research. Pouget explained the need for the intellect to never abandon its quest, since to reduce its engagement would be, in fact, to eliminate the transcendent structure that characterizes the intellect. Moreover, since the intellect is intimately involved with feeling and will, he pointed out the need to harmonize them in the formation of the "heart."

In 1886 he was sent to the Vincentian scholasticate at Dax as professor of the sciences, but he actually taught philosophy, history, and Sacred Scripture.

Two years later, in 1888, he was called to the Motherhouse in Paris, to teach the physical sciences, first of all, and then Church history and Sacred Scripture. He did this until 1895, when, suspected of harboring Modernist ideas, he was removed from his position. Shortly after his arrival in Paris, an explosion in his physics laboratory cost him an eye, thanks in particular to a botched operation (he would call the doctor "the butcher"). This handicap hastened the progress of his glaucoma which, by the beginning of 1909, left him completely blind.

By chance, in 1901 Antoine Sévat, a confrere of Pouget's, spoke about him to Jacques Chevalier, a friend of his and a native of his region, and the two were introduced. Chevalier became Pouget's disciple and, between 1906 and 1909, while living in Paris at the Thiers foundation, drew very close to him, spending two or three afternoons with him every week. As a result, Chevalier began to allow young students of the Ecole Normale Supérieure, a graduate school of education, who were keen to debate the problems that philosophy and the physical sciences were posing to faith, to meet Fr. Pouget. With them, the priest began a systematic work of research into questions of philosophy and theology.

These disciples of his were anxious to collect his spiritual heritage and to preserve it from oblivion. They began this in earnest after Pouget's death, 24 February 1933. The best known of all this work is the book that Jean Guitton consecrated to his teacher: *Portrait de Monsieur Pouget* (Paris: Gallimard, 1941). It had already appeared in five fascicles in the *Cahiers du Van*, Lyons, from 1936 to 1939.

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(JOHN RYBOLT, C.M., translator)