

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS: FINAL CHAPTER FROM “CONSTANT VAN CROMBRUGGHE (1789-1865) AND EDUCATION: THE GENESIS, EVOLUTION AND APPLICATION OF THE EDUCATIONAL PHILOSOPHY OF A 19TH CENTURY ROMAN CATHOLIC EDUCATOR”  
(Brother Michael, M.Phil, 1996).

In attempting to draw together the many threads of this thesis a line from William Blake comes to mind:

*“He who would do good to another must do it in Minute Particulars.”*

Somehow, everything that has been written here about Van Crombrughe seems to come together in this short line. Above all it seems very neatly to encompass all the multifarious byways of Van Crombrughe's *politesse*.

At the same time there is a paradox. It is not easy to reconcile the author of this notion of *politesse*, of exquisite charity, with a person who could equally be thought of as arrogant, manipulative and overbearing. Fr Jorissen has underlined this sort of double personality to the extent of asking whether there actually were two personalities inside the Founder. He indicates the “up there”; a higher plane from which he could communicate with his spiritual and social equals, and the “down there”, towards which his charity moves almost at arm's length towards the rest.

This “double edged sword” of Van Crombrughe's personality is also reflected in two graphic images. In the first, reproduced in the opening pages, there appear all the qualities one might consider negative. This is almost the face of a bully; maybe a well-meaning man, but a man prepared to trample over others to achieve his ends. There appears none of the compassion which he insisted on in others and one really is led to wonder if he was a truly compassionate man in himself, or rather a man with a deep sense of a “duty of compassion”. It is the face of an older man, of course, with a lifetime of achievement behind him, and years of directing the fate of other people in an autocratic manner. Fr Jorissen has pointed out that most of the early Josephites were not his social equals, and if the Josephites were to be “instruments of mercy” they were also very much the “instruments of Van Crombrughe.”

In a second image, reproduced at the end of this Chapter, there appears a totally different man. There is, of course, a difference of years between the two images but, leaving that aside, this is a different Van Crombrughe; the image shows compassion and energy, coupled with humility and an ability to be wrong.

Which is the real Van Crombrughe? Although undertaking this research has revealed all sorts of information about Van Crombrughe, the answer to this question has not become fully apparent. Although he said, did and wrote much which is appealing, there remains the sense that the real man remains distanced from his achievements. He remains the “self-made man”, hidden behind the formalised façade of his laboriously created personality.<sup>1</sup>

## VAN CROMBRUGGHE THE MAN

Fr Jorissen has posed some useful questions concerning Van Crombrughe which provide a framework for conclusions concerning Van Crombrughe himself:

*1. In spite of Van Crombrughe being, on the one hand a realist to the point of meticulousness, was he also an utopist?*

No, he wasn't. Certainly he had a vision of a certain type of perfection, in life as in education. As a realist he would realise that the short-term goals might not be fully attainable but were useful pointers, to be held as examples to be moved towards and beyond. But as a Roman Catholic educator his ultimate goals, for himself, his congregations and for his pupils, were eschatological and fully attainable in a final union with God. The things of this world, however laudable, would pass. Within the confines of time and space, the best possible had to be achieved, and the best possible means used to achieve them. For Van Crombrughe those means were outlined *par excellence* in the *Règlement des Professeurs*.

*2. Was the attraction of Jesus, even through a man who, captured by his charm, revealed him in an exemplary manner, enough to transport and transform, even haltingly, a religious teaching congregation?*

Yes, it was. Van Crombrughe was a man of strong religious conviction and personal faith. This faith was strong enough to sustain him through the many trials of his educational career and, more importantly, to attract others to the same vision.

*3. Were the experiences of Amiens and Alost so exceptional that they could not support Van Crombrughe's vision and institutions?*

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<sup>1</sup> In all the personal images I have of the Founder, none of them include him smiling.

There is no doubt that Van Crombrugge's experiences at Amiens were quite exceptional and coloured his whole educational life. It would be reasonable to say that he wanted his schools to be reflections of Amiens, his teachers to be reflections of the Fathers of the Faith, and that in some measure his life's work was a pursuit of that ideal. It is true that in his lifetime he did not fully achieve that ideal. Nevertheless, without the vision of Amiens ever-present as a goal to be striven for the whole enterprise might have crumbled and might even never have been embarked upon.

Alost is a different question, or at least a different set of unanswered questions. We do not know how much the success of Alost was due to the relief of parents in having the school back on a stable footing and run by clerics - any clerics - and therefore to them feeling in some way obliged to support it. We do not know how much its success was due to the calibre of the staff, the seminarians, of Fr Valentijns who would re-appear later at Melle. All we do know is that, for whatever reason, it worked and showed Van Crombrugge what could be achieved and what *he* could achieve. In this sense the experiences of both Amiens and Alost did support Van Crombrugge's enterprise.

*4. Did the practicalities of the situation almost defeat a method considered almost unbeatable? Did the Founder have to accept insufficiently motivated candidates in order to press on with the work of education? Did he give too great a responsibility to Josephites who were too young?*

Quite clearly the answer to all these questions is "yes". We know that the vision and the human resources available were almost incompatible. Much of the genius of Van Crombrugge lay in his ability relentlessly to pursue the vision, moulding square pegs into round holes simply because the work had to be done.

*5. Did he not understand that men with his own strength of character were quite exceptional?*

This is a question whose psychological complexities are beyond the scope of this thesis.<sup>2</sup> As a member of his social class and background he would be familiar with men who were directors of the efforts of others; as such he much well have simply presumed that his own abilities were natural and unexceptional. Whilst the well-concealed "natural" Van Crombrugge might have taken some pride in them, the "artificial" Van Crombrugge would certainly not.

*6. Did he not understand that, in order to be able to fulfil his vision, the men whom he accepted needed long and careful training within already formed communities?*

The short answer is that he must have done, but that the exigencies of the situation made this impossible. It's a chicken and egg situation: at the beginning of an enterprise, where do you find these "already formed communities"? Had the Congregation grown more quickly, or attracted from an early stage a different type of person, or had he lived in a less turbulent time, things might have been different.

## THE BACKGROUND TO VAN CROMBRUGGHE'S ACTION

The two chapters dealing with the history of the region show that as a Belgian, Constant Van Crombrugge lived his life in a period of enormous social and political change. During his lifetime he knew four régimes: occupation by Austria and France, an uneasy and contrived alliance with Holland, and finally an independent Belgium. Did this cause in him any form of struggle for national identity? Probably not. Until 1830 Van Crombrugge would probably have thought of himself as a citizen of East Flanders, and, more specifically, Geraardsbergen rather than anything else. Foreign occupiers would come and go as a fairly major irritation but would not cause any fundamental instability of identity on a personal level. Even after the establishment of Belgium it could be imagined that Van Crombrugge would not really think of himself as Belgian.

As a Roman Catholic, and more specifically as a Roman Catholic priest, he lived through a period where the directing role of the Church in everyday life, and particularly in education, was being questioned and had been dramatically weakened. As has been noted, however, as far as Belgium was concerned this was a questioning and weakening which went hand in hand with foreign occupation and, for many Belgians, the Church remained at the centre of their lives. For many, a rejection of foreign occupation would hopefully mean a return to the ecclesiastical *status quo*. We have seen that at the *Collège d'Alost* Van Crombrugge did not throw himself into the creation of anything radically new: rather he attempted to turn the clock back by re-inventing the Jesuit college of 1773. One could also ask whether this was entirely because he thought it the best way, or was there more than a hint of human nostalgia for his "second family" at Amiens.

As an educator, and as a Roman Catholic educator (for, as we have seen, the two in Van Crombrugge cannot be separated) he inherited a situation in which education in Belgium was something of a wasteland, having been subjected to well-intentioned (but deeply mistrusted) interference by Austria and Holland, and revolutionary manipulation by

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<sup>2</sup>The handwriting analysis suggests that "in reality and inwardly, he was perpetually consumed with a compensatory desire, to be, and to be considered, great."

France. It could be said that Van Crombrugge's insistence on freedom of education at the National Congress came as a reaction to the utilitarian function of education demanded by the unitary states of Joseph II and Willem of Oranje. He characterises the Belgian people as those "who would go without it (education) rather than to see it imposed on them by the administration and at the whim of the civil power." Above all, the fabric of secondary education had been deeply damaged by the suppression of the Jesuits and the suppression or transfer to other authorities of their Colleges.

It could be argued that all of Van Crombrugge's "public" life, a period of only seventeen years lasting from 1814 when he became principal of the *Collège d'Alost* to 1831 when he more or less retired from public life, was lived as a reaction to the situation which he inherited. Thus he was to a large degree, a "righter of wrongs", seeking to re-establish a past order which was seen to have been of value rather than a revolutionary thinker striving after a new order. He was, after all, a member of that Belgian Roman Catholic provincial bourgeoisie whose sensibilities had been offended on all fronts since 1713; as a Belgian by foreign occupation; as a Roman Catholic by the subjection of ecclesiastical to civil authority under an enlightened despot; as a provincial by the notion of centralised government; and finally as a bourgeois by the withdrawal of the traditional rights of the *burgher* in Belgian society. Much of the offence caused by these measures was, as has been noted, due to Joseph II's total misunderstanding of the nature of his subject populace. Joseph sought an efficient state; Belgians remained attached to a rather bumbling *status quo*. Joseph, and later Willem of Oranje, sought a state of religious tolerance: Belgians remained attached to the supremacy of the Roman Catholic faith.

Although Joseph's policies were mistrusted by the Belgians there are some striking similarities between the sort of philosophy for which he stood and Van Crombrugge. It has, for example, been noted that an educational system designed to produce the "useful citizen" should produce "a) honest citizens; b) good citizens; that is faithful and obedient subjects of the authorities; and c) useful people for the Community." In many ways this could be considered as a secularised version of Van Crombrugge's own aims. The quote from Joseph II's ordinance in Chapter Three<sup>3</sup> would sit perfectly well with Van Crombrugge - although with some qualification of the last phrase.

#### THE JOSEPHITES - WHY BROTHERS?

Initially this question may seem to have no place in an educational thesis; it does, nevertheless, have some bearing on the nature of the enterprise on which Van Crombrugge embarked. Whether Van Crombrugge right from the first days of the Josephites had visions of the Congregation moving into middle-class secondary education is subject to question. This was, after all, the field with which he himself was familiar, in which he had enjoyed much success, and from which, through Amiens, he had drawn much of his inspiration. It is also clear that Van Crombrugge had the personal charisma which could have attracted around him a group of educated, middle-class priests, or at least aspirant priests, who could have moved into secondary education much more quickly and with less pain than was the case with the Josephites. There is evidence that an Amiens / Alost "old boy network" grew up in Belgian ecclesiastical circles, remaining in touch with Van Crombrugge. It is not beyond reason to suppose that Van Crombrugge could have used his influence within this network to achieve his ends more expeditiously.

However, to take this rather simplistic view would be to misunderstand the evolution of the Josephites as an educational order and to withdraw it from its chronological and social context.

Primarily it has to be understood that the Josephites as they stood at the turn of the 20th century, and therefore much as we see them today, were a long way down the evolutionary line from the Brothers of 1817 and were not an expression of the Founder's original founding intention *per se*. As has been seen, the Brothers evolved out of Van Crombrugge's wish, as the newly appointed Headmaster of a middle-class school, to do something urgently to meet the moral and practical needs of an impoverished lower class, not only for pragmatic reasons but also to attract blessings on the "main work", i.e. the *Collège d'Alost*. Reacting urgently to specific and contemporary needs Van Crombrugge had to work with the personnel he could find and, besides, his career had not yet sufficiently developed to allow him the sort of networking which has been proposed above. There is also the question of priority of needs: whilst the provision of a teaching corps for the middle classes was pressing, relief of the needs of the poor was yet more pressing.

Secondly, the foundation of another order was, in the political circumstances of 1817, a precarious undertaking. In this context the establishment of a confederation of co-workers without vows was much less likely to attract hostile government attention - and be easier to mutate or dissolve - than a full-blown sacerdotal congregation. Who knows whether, if the Josephites had developed right from the start as a clerical congregation, whether Van Crombrugge himself might not have become a Josephite himself, rather than directing their evolution rather "at arm's length" and from above.

Whatever the human material which Van Crombrugge had at his disposal, it is clear that he moulded them into a body of educators dedicated to promoting the ideal vision of education such as he saw it. What were the features of this vision.

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<sup>3</sup> "The schoolchildren should remind themselves constantly that every human being has a moral obligation to develop his intellectual powers as far as possible and that the study by which this is achieved is a duty imposed by God; that every citizen has a similar obligation to make himself capable of serving the state."

## THE MAIN FEATURES OF VAN CROMBRUGGHE'S CONCEPT OF EDUCATION

Reading through all the Van Crombrughe texts, and with an understanding of the vivid Jesuit background to his educational vision, one can isolate a number of threads which go to make up the central core of his educational concept.

1. Competition, *honesta aemulatio*, is a principal means of encouraging effort and minimising the need for punishment. Of all the traits identified in Van Crombrughe's woven cloth of education, the one which might be seen to be problematic is that of competition. It has already been noted that the whole idea of competition is possibly something of a mixed blessing. Even Quintilian suggest that it contains the possibility of evil: "though ambition may in itself be a vice none the less it is frequently the source of virtues." We have also seen that for Compayré competition was a source of ammunition for an attack on the Jesuits: "fostering of ambition" was "the characteristic of the corrupt Jesuitical morality".

In our own times, competition is regarded as a mixed blessing:

*"Competition is, of itself, neither good nor evil, but when it is used to brand children or schools in a way which limits their freedom or potential, it is damaging to human flourishing. It also carries the danger of communicating to children and young people - and, indeed, to the wider community - that a person's value is measured solely in terms of academic, sporting or financial success. When, as St Paul describes it, we try to win the race, we are racing against ourselves. So, in education when a school encourages its pupils and staff to perform to the best of their ability for their own sake, its aim is to enable them to fulfil their God-given potential. If competition sets one school against another, if success in one institution is achieved deliberately at the expense of another, it is morally unacceptable."*<sup>4</sup>

Against the existence of league tables this does, indeed, become problematic. Apart from anything else one would look for the special benefits of a Constantian school almost exclusively among those areas which are usually classed as "value added". The above statement would also seem to condemn the view expressed by Van Crombrughe at the National Congress that:

*"By reclaiming the freedom of education, by demanding for families the quality which is guaranteed by competition, the free right of the father to choose into whose hands he wishes to confide his son's future, what are we asking except to allow parents to exercise a natural prerogative."*

Nevertheless, as a private, fee-paying school, an element of competition has to enter into the equation. St George's College is in competition with other schools to attract pupils in order to survive. One would have to be careful, therefore, of competition on two levels; both within and outside the school. Furthermore, competition would have to be seen firmly in the context both of *honesta aemulatio* as described by Ribadeneira and within the general economy of striving for excellence as part of the generalised notion of fulfilment of human potential: "la nature propose, l'éducation achève".

2. A teacher's authority is based on esteem: the esteem of the pupil for the teacher and vice-versa. A teacher will gain esteem by the virtue of his example, and by his care for and interest in the individual pupil. There is also an element of fear in the sense of *timor reverentialis* which is better expressed as respect.

3. A teacher must show a genuine - i.e. real and human, not based on a supernatural notion - affection for his pupils, and will seek their affection in return. The bond between teacher and pupil is characterised by a relationship which goes beyond mutual respect to genuine affection. This affection is based on Jouvancy's "earnestness of a father and the devotion of a mother". In this context education is, for Van Crombrughe, an intensely personal activity undertaken in the context of an ordered institution.

4. Education is aimed at transformation - *Umbildung* - in Jorissen's description a move "beyond" oneself, rather than formation - *Ausbildung*. Central to this is the simultaneous cultivation of the hearts and minds (in that order) of the pupils. This does not in any way minimise the importance of academic excellence, but rather seeks to place it within a broader economy of personal development.

5. No education without religion. Van Crombrughe was quite unequivocal on this point.

6. Gentleness<sup>5</sup>; a key word which keeps re-appearing in Van Crombrughe's writings is "doux" and "douceur". The teacher must have "un air doux et modeste" - a gentle and modest manner. Van Crombrughe was struck by "la douceur

<sup>4</sup> Catholic Education Service (1997) p. 13-14.

<sup>5</sup> This is how I have chosen ultimately to translate "douceur": "sweetness" does not really capture the full meaning.

et affabilité avec lesquelles on nous conduit” - the gentleness and affability with which we are led - at Amiens. Teachers are to win the heart of their pupils by gentleness, and also to correct them in a spirit of gentleness and humility.

7. Appropriateness: the way in which an individual pupil is taught, in which he is disciplined, can only successfully be based on a thorough understanding of the individual. Van Crombrughe was most insistent that his teachers should study their pupils.

8. A good education cannot be achieved without order and method. Nothing can be left to chance and, although education takes place within a framework built on personal relationships, the whole is undertaken within a structure in which everything is subject to meticulous analysis and regulation. There is no place for mavericks in Van Crombrughe's organisation. All is to be justified, not by the yardstick of what is novel and radical, but by what is already proven.

## POLITESSE & FAMILY SPIRIT

This feature has been left until last because it is so central to Van Crombrughe's concept of education that it needs a full explanation. Indeed, it could fairly be said that for Van Crombrughe everything leads to, and is rooted in, this concept of total respect for the other.

The full expression of the good Christian and honest man is based on this *politesse* for which “politeness” is a totally inadequate translation. It would seem reasonable to suggest that the notion of “family spirit” which Josephites have traditionally held as definitive but rather vague should be posited firmly within the context of this *politesse*. So much is family spirit subsumed into *politesse* that a “family spirit” as such is not here cited as an important element *per se*.

We have seen that in the mission statement of St George's College the only specific reference to Josephite values is to the “family spirit”. This is quite wrong, as it seizes on only one small element of Van Crombrughe's philosophy at the expense of so much else. Certainly it is a convenient phrase to latch on to, in wording which is easily understood. One might equally say that it is capable of miscomprehension: family stability is not what it was in Van Crombrughe's day and one wonders what so many products of broken families in this day and age would make of this definition. For too many people their experience of family is of a dysfunctional and even painful framework.

But it is a simplistic view of something which is much broader and richer: distilling the whole thing into “family spirit” is akin to valuing a diamond based solely on one of its facets taken almost at random. Even more simplistic is the notion that it is based on the Holy Family - an entity for whose family values and presumed domestic harmony which there is no empirical evidence at all. Interestingly enough, at the earliest opportunity Jesus went missing and when found three days later in the Temple gave his parent a particularly patronising explanation of his conduct. In Jesus' attitude at this moment one can see strong overtones of Van Crombrughe dealing with his “inferiors” - the first Josephites. To quote Luke: “But they did not know what he meant”<sup>6</sup>

This is not to say that this “family spirit” is not a useful, if simplistic, image. Certainly the image of family as an enduring hierarchical structure permeates Van Crombrughe. The son is in a position of filial duty to parents; parents have a duty of care to the son. The place of the parents is taken over by the Fathers of the Faith in Amiens; the son seeks a continuation of hierarchical structure in the Church; the son becomes parent as Headmaster of the *Collège d'Alost* and as Founder. Within the communities an almost Trinitarian atmosphere is to be engendered whereby the individual religious lives in harmony with his confrères and with his pupils in a symbiotic relationship. It is perhaps this notion of symbiosis which most specifically illuminates Van Crombrughe's concept of family spirit. A particular consequence of this concept is that up until quite recently in Josephite schools there has been little physical separation of “school” and “religious house”: to ask where the “cloister” was would have been a nonsensical question.

In our own time and place this intertwining of the two threads of religious community and school has caused some real problems. Firstly, as has been alluded to previously, it has caused problems of definition. If at St George's College the two are now juridically separated, and if Josephites have traditionally defined themselves in the context of the school, where are Josephites now to look for a definition of self? In many ways it is that very question which has engendered the current research. Secondly, on a purely pragmatic level, there is the pressing question of who owns and/or controls what.

But the demanding vision described above of a system based on *politesse* is to a degree ultra<sup>7</sup>-human. This is rather typical for the Founder who seemed to like things which were ultra-human. Something is needed to hold it all together otherwise, as it frequently did with the early Josephites, the structure will crumble. The cement is religion, both in its sense of personal devotion and piety, but also in its sense of re-ligio; that which re-binds. The bricks and mortar are

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<sup>6</sup> Luke 2:50

<sup>7</sup> in the sense of “beyond”.

*politesse* which goes beyond individual human personalities and in that sense is also ultra-human; to be striven for and perhaps never achieved. It is a bourgeois notion, and one can imagine it sitting awkwardly on the first Brothers.

The thread which ties it all together, keeps the individual firmly sighted on these ultra-human goals in spite of the fallibility of human nature, is obedience to authority, both in the context of a religious' duty of obedience to Superiors, and the human and social demands of *politesse*.

So, how can one attempt to define *politesse*?

*Politesse* is an economy of relationships based on Van Crombrughe's bourgeois notions of what is right. It takes in not only relationships in the human sphere, but also the physical sphere and the supra-human or religious sphere.

- Human sphere: relationships between individuals must be marked by urbanity and respect for the other.
- Physical sphere: the physical environment must show evidence of good taste and of being cared for.
- Supra-human sphere: the urbanity and respect for the other which mark the human sphere are firmly rooted in a religious framework based on the reciprocal love of the Father for the Son and characterised by the presumed perfection of the Holy Family as perceived by Van Crombrughe in the context of his own family and later defined by him in the terms of 1 Corinthians XIII.

Although this was expressed by Van Crombrughe in a late eighteenth and early nineteenth century context, the basic values expressed endure. One could, of course, argue that moral and social values are not the same absolutes at the end of the twentieth century as they might seem to have been in Van Crombrughe's time. But this would be totally to miss the point of Van Crombrughe's insistence on the role of the Roman Catholic religion in education, because one can argue that for Van Crombrughe it is precisely the Roman Catholic Church that bears witness to eternal truths and unchanging basic moral and social values. This is the key to the importance of the religious domination of education in Van Crombrughe's philosophy. It also underpins Van Crombrughe's insistence that the best people to undertake the work of education were priests and religious - precisely because they had a canonical obligation to uphold those unchanging truths with "blind obedience, but wise in its blindness."<sup>8</sup>

Of course a cynic could argue that religious were precisely the people that Van Crombrughe could, by virtue of obedience, bludgeon into doing things the way he thought was right.

#### UNIQUE OR DISTINCTIVE?

The notions of "unique" and "distinctive" have already been mentioned. If we look over the features of Van Crombrughe's educational vision listed above, and their fuller ramifications elucidated in the main text it is evident that they can, taken separately, be found in a number of other places. We have already seen how one or other, or a combination of some, are indicated by Quintilian, Jouvancy, the *Ratio Studiorum*, Fénelon, Rollin, Don Bosco, Locke, and Erasmus to name but a few. Any reader will be able to take one or more of these elements in isolation and note that they appear elsewhere. In that context, it cannot be claimed that Van Crombrughe was a unique educator, nor that he formulated a radically unique system. This is not a criticism: it could equally be levelled at the whole gamut of founders of education orientated religious orders right back to Ignatius Loyola. The genius of Loyola and the Jesuits was in the codification of the best of existing practices; the same could be said of Van Crombrughe. There is a difference: for the Jesuits the burden of codification and direction was not shouldered by one man; for the Josephites it was.

The distinctiveness of Van Crombrughe, and the place that we have to look if we are to define a distinctiveness in Josephite education, comes from the way in which he weaved these elements into an elaborated system. Many present-day teaching orders share, with varying degrees of explicitness, the same Jesuit roots. Many of them share the same broad circumstances of foundation, and are rooted in the same European christian-humanist tradition. All of them, however, would claim to have something special, something not quite definable, which will mark the Josephite teacher, the Rosminian teacher, the Salesian teacher and the products of their various schools. This specialness will come principally from the specific genius of interpretation of the broad tradition by their founders, coupled with the way in which their followers have lived out the founding vision.

#### JOSEPHITE OR CONSTANTIAN?

In the Introduction to this thesis a distinction was proposed between "Josephite" and "Constantian", particularly in the light of the Second Vatican Council's insistence on a return to the spirit of Founders. At that point it was stated that "a Constantian school ..... (is) based on the historical person of Van Crombrughe rather than on the lived experience of Josephites since Van Crombrughe". In this context it has been seen that the Jesuits have attempted a focus on Ignatius rather than "the Jesuit tradition".

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<sup>8</sup> Van Crombrughe.

At this stage, however, one could question whether this is necessarily a good concept for the Josephites. Why?

Although Van Crombrugge was heavily Jesuit influenced, albeit at second hand, the Jesuit educational tradition has been formalised by the *Ratio* and is not directly Ignatian. Furthermore, the Jesuits have the quite separate and Ignatius authored *Spiritual Exercises* on which to base a spirituality, and the *Ratio* on which to base a pedagogy. In that sense their spirituality can be called directly Ignatian but not their pedagogy. If you like, the foundations of “how to be a Jesuit religious” and of “how to be a Jesuit teacher” are quite separate.

We have to remember also that the Jesuits were not explicitly founded as a teaching order. With Van Crombrugge the situation is rather different; he founded specific teaching orders and the two elements of teacher and religious are strongly intertwined and interdependent. Where spirituality and pedagogy in a teaching congregation are based on different sources it is possible for one - pedagogy - to change and be adapted to the exigencies of time and place whilst remaining entirely faithful to the founding spirituality. Taken to its logical conclusion this argument means that the move out of the traditional sphere of “total immersion” in the running of boarding colleges will entail more than an adaptation to new circumstances but almost a “re-invention” of the Congregation.

Nevertheless the concept of “Constantian” is worth retaining and will be used in this chapter as a) it focuses attention on that which can be specifically attributed to Van Crombrugge and b) it indicates what can be experienced by non-Josephites in the concrete situation of St George’s College.

#### FROM EDUCATION OF THE POOR TO EDUCATION OF THE BOURGEOISIE

*“It was in the family at home”, wrote Mgr Van Weddingen in 1866, “that the young Van Crombrugge learned to love the three things to which he was to dedicated his life: God, the poor and the Motherland.”<sup>9</sup>*

This opinion appeared in the *Revue Catholique* of 1865, the year of Van Crombrugge's death. In view of how his career developed, one wonders if he did, in fact, dedicate his life to the poor. That he gave service to the poor cannot be doubted. The original school at Geraardsbergen, the workshop for the poor and the institution of the *proviseur des pauvres* at Alost, the *tweede kostschool*; all these show an undoubted concern for the poor. On the other hand, it has been seen that a duty to the poor was part of Van Crombrugge's social background and the fact that he did give service to them does not necessarily indicate a fundamental life option. The facts of his life would actually suggest otherwise.

One wonders, for example, if the circumstances of the *Collège d'Alost* had not changed, and if Van Crombrugge had been able to spend most of his life there, whether the Josephites would have remained the Brothers of Mary and Joseph and have remained involved solely in the primary education of the poor? Van Crombrugge's need for the company of his own class would have been filled and, at the same time, the duty of helping the poor would have been satisfied.

The years between 1825 (end of Alost) and 1837 (beginning of Melle) were not idle years. He was among other things a member of the Gent Diocesan Council, advisor to the Bishop, a director of the influential Catholic newspaper the *Catholique des Pays-Bas*. After 1830 he was director for Catholic Education in Flanders (and as such was instrumental in returning the Jesuits to the *Collège d'Alost*).

We know that the taking over of Melle was not a sudden move. Discussions had been in hand between Van Crombrugge and Van Wymelbeke for some years previously and the Chapters from 1835 onwards had been geared towards steadily improving the educational standards of the Josephites. At some moment, therefore, Van Crombrugge must have made a conscious decision to move the Josephites away from lower class primary education to bourgeois secondary education. Why?

Part of the reason was undoubtedly financial. Along with problems of personnel, the reasons for the eventual demise of the failed foundations were partly financial. Being for the most part free schools, they, and the Josephites, lived on a financial knife-edge. A move into bourgeois, and therefore fee-paying, education would guarantee the financial stability of the congregation.

Part of the reason was to do with the fabric of Belgian society at the time. Van Crombrugge would have seen the need for a new, educated, Catholic elite to be at the forefront of the nation's affairs after the hectic merry-go-round of occupation of the previous century. The obvious people to do this would have been the Jesuits, but they were still too much in disarray after their period of suppression to be able to undertake the task. Van Wymelbeke's decision to leave Melle and to entrust it to Van Crombrugge must have seemed a felicitous intervention of fate.

Thirdly there was a human factor within the Josephites. Having split the sisters in 1830 into the “upper-class” Daughters of Mary and Joseph and the “lower-class” Sisters of Mary and Joseph, Van Crombrugge feared that the Josephites,

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<sup>9</sup> Pieraerts & Desmet (1936), p.23

seeing themselves aligned for ever with the second league, might be destroyed by jealousy. Whilst the split in the sisters had been possible because of the element of bourgeois ladies already present, the same possibility was not present in the Josephites and the only remedy would be to lift the congregation *in toto* to a new level.

There is, however, a fourth and possibly most important factor, although this is proposed on the basis of educated speculation. Having had one successful opportunity to “re-create” Amiens at Alost, the chance to do so again at Melle must have seemed an extraordinarily attractive proposition to Van Crombrugghe. One should not consider this to be inspired simply by an indulgent nostalgia; rather it was an opportunity a) to move back into the milieu of his own social class and b) to realise his goal of creating the “honnête homme et parfait Chrétien”, the “honnête homme” being a concept heavily laden with bourgeois overtones and a goal which was not going to be easily realised among the gutter children of Geraardsbergen. Not only would a move to Melle allow Van Crombrugghe to work among people of his own class, but it would also allow him to work for them: it has already been shown that at Van Wymelbeke’s Melle there was the beginnings of a commercial side which Van Crombrugghe would expand develop until prevented from doing so by legislation on access to higher education.

## THE VAN CROMBRUGGHE LEGACY

- Starting with his appointment to the *Collège d’Alost* in 1814 and the foundation of the Josephites in 1817, Van Crombrugghe elaborated a distinctive but not unique system of education based on tried and proven sources in the Christian-humanist tradition, taking his inspiration particularly from the Jesuits.
- This system is based around the nine traits noted above:
  - - competition,
  - - authority based on esteem and tempered with mercy
  - - religion,
  - - *politesse*,
  - - affection,
  - - esteem,
  - - gentleness,
  - - appropriateness,
  - - transformation.
- At the same time he founded two religious orders dedicated to education and, for the Josephites, forced a rapid evolution over only twenty years from an order of Brothers working in lower-class primary education into a clerical congregation active in bourgeois secondary education..

## CONTEMPORARY IMPLICATIONS

What are the implications of these conclusions for the contemporary situation of the Josephites and the lay staff, specifically the situation at St George’s College outlined in the introduction?

As has already been stated, the impetus for this thesis arose out of a perceived need of the Josephites for a basis for self-definition and definition of a Josephite “ethos”. Having traditionally defined themselves - if there even was such a thing as a definition - in terms of the school, and furthermore a boarding school, the transfer of power in the early 1990’s combined with a decline in community numbers and the closure of boarding meant that this definition base was swept away overnight. This definition base was rooted in two factors: the total integration of community and school, and the absence of a specific Josephite spirituality which did not revolve around a total saturation in the school. At the same time the school was to continue to operate within the undefined Josephite tradition.

This assertion led to a further question: was this Josephite tradition based on the Founder, or on the lived experience of his successors? From that question arose the current research in an attempt to discover what could be traced back to Van Crombrugghe and could be, in a sense, detached from Josephite mythology. The elements listed above are a distillation of that research.

How, then, does one apply these elements to the contemporary situation? How is St George’s College, and its Josephite community, to maintain a Constantian tradition?<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> The following assertions should be read as having the meaning; “St George’s College cannot legitimately consider itself Constantian, i.e. in the Josephite tradition, unless .....”

1. Constantian education is unashamedly Roman Catholic. This is more specific than being purely Christian. Van Crombrugge is quite clear that education is inseparable from religion. It is part of the function of a Roman Catholic school to provide catechesis and evangelisation and this must necessarily be Roman Catholic in orientation. As the Prefect for the Congregation for Catholic Education said in 1983 when he addressed the Synod of Bishops in Rome:

*"The basic problem of the Catholic school is that of being what it ought to be. Hence, not only a school of high quality, but a Catholic school in the full meaning of the term."*

In claiming to be Catholic, the school must commit itself fully to pursuing the meanings and truths specific to the Catholic faith. Without this, the Catholic school has no reason for existing since the Catholic school is always internal to the Church and must proclaim and live the Catholic faith.<sup>11</sup> In 1996 the bishops of England and Wales set out the key areas of the distinctive nature of Catholic education:

- *the search for excellence as an integral part of the spiritual quest;*
- *the uniqueness of the individual, made in God's image;*
- *the education of the whole person, since human and divine are inseparable;*
- *the education of all, with particular care for the disadvantaged;*
- *moral principles, put into practice in the Christian community.*<sup>12</sup>

It is a tribute to Van Crombrugge that this 1997 list could quite easily have been taken from his own writings.

From what has been written above it follows that St George's College must fully maintain its identity as a Roman Catholic school.

In a Constantian school academic excellence is valued, but not as an end in itself. Rather it is but one part of a striving towards overall human excellence, a lifting of self beyond self. This does not prevent a Constantian school striving for recognition as an academic school, but only in the context clearly stated above. In any hierarchy of aspirations, academic excellence does not come first, but is at the service of the development of the "perfect Christian and the honest man". As is laid down by the Catholic Education Service:

*"The pursuit of excellence is intrinsically good when it is seen as an integral part of the spiritual quest and not simply as a matter of competitive league tables."*<sup>13</sup>

A Constantian school is distinguished by the excellence of its pastoral care and its moral standards. It is quite clear that for Van Crombrugge the moral values of the school, both explicitly taught and implicitly demonstrated by example, and the pastoral ambience of the school were of prime importance. The young people passing through the school are at a vulnerable stage of their lives and it is demanded that teachers "sympathise with their weakness"<sup>14</sup> through the concept of discipline tempered with mercy which Van Crombrugge elaborates in the Easter 1815 speech.

The Constantian school is staffed by teachers who with the active encouragement of the Josephite community accept and promote the Constantian ethos. We have seen that for Van Crombrugge the task of education is undertaken in an intrinsically religious framework and more specifically in a framework of religious life. For him the Josephite as religious and the Josephite as teacher could not be separated. Nevertheless from the early days, and particularly after the move into Melle, the Josephites have worked in collaboration with lay teachers. This collaboration has developed from that early period where there were only a very small number of lay teachers, brought in to teach the optional subjects such as music and drawing, to more recent years where all Josephite schools are staffed by an overwhelming majority of lay teachers and active Josephite participation has been reduced to a minimum. It is clear that from an early stage lay teachers were to be seen as a part of the unity of the Josephite school:

*"Keep yourself in perfect harmony with those of your colleagues who share your responsibilities, so that the same spirit may reign in the manner of leading the pupils, and so that in everything there may be that unity without which nothing is solid."*<sup>15</sup>

Those resolutions made in Chapter concerning education were made known to the lay staff<sup>16</sup> and by 1855 there existed a "*Projet de Règlement des Professeurs Laïcs pour gouverner de nos Supérieurs*" a document of only sixteen paragraphs, which makes it clear that the same qualities were expected from the lay teachers as were expected in the religious, particularly in the realms of christian witness:

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<sup>11</sup> For a broader explanation of this please see the excellent accompanying article at Appendix Eleven by James Arthur.

<sup>12</sup> "Principles, Practices and Concerns". Statement of the Bishops of England and Wales, September 1996.

<sup>13</sup> Catholic Education Service, (1997), p.13.

<sup>14</sup> *Règlement des Professeurs.*

<sup>15</sup> "Conservez-vous dans une harmonie parfaite avec ceux de vos collègues qui partagent votre charge, afin qu'il règne une même esprit dans la manière de conduire les élèves et qu'il y ait en tout cette unité sans laquelle rien n'est solide." Guide Pédagogique, No. 14.

<sup>16</sup> De Geeter (1971) p. 236.

*“Every teacher attached to this establishment must above all fulfil his duties as a good christian, and to conform to everything that the best catholic families are entitled to demand from those who are appointed to educate their children.”<sup>17</sup>*

and of submission to the general “method”.

*“They will conform precisely to the methods of teaching, the authors to use and the instructions of the Headmaster.”<sup>18</sup>*

A rather longer document, undated, entitled the “*Guidon des Professeurs Laïcs*”, appears in the same file in the Archives. It is a lengthy elaboration of the *Projet* and contains quotes from the *Règlement des Professeurs* and the *Guide Pédagogique*, underlining just how fully the lay teachers are to be involved in the maintenance of the Constantian ethos of the school.

In our own day, St George’s College is committed to seeking to “promote our Josephite (Constantian)<sup>19</sup> tradition”<sup>20</sup>. It is committed to doing so with a staff which is 99% non-Josephite and more than 50% non-Catholic, and a pupil body which is also approximately 50% non-Catholic. This makes it even more essential a) that the tradition be defined, since it can no longer be transmitted by a process of “osmosis”, b) that those responsible for the appointment and induction of staff be aware of and committed to the tradition, and c) that the Josephite community, whether still actively involved in teaching or not, be aware of their own responsibility in the matter. In a worst case scenario there could come a point where, however “good” a school St George’s College might be, even as a Catholic school, it could grow so far away from being a Josephite / Constantian school that the community might feel obliged to withdraw its endorsement of the product. Thus, in a very real sense it is even more important for the community to be aware of the definable elements of the tradition now that they are promoting it rather than living it in the traditional way.

## DEFINITIONS

So, then, how is all this to be distilled? As both a conclusion and as a basis for debate the following statement is proposed:

“St George's College cannot under its present constitution lay a valid claim to a *Josephite* ethos in the traditional sense, but could and should aspire to a *Constantian* ethos which is rooted in the distinctive, but not unique, characteristics synthesised into a coherent whole by Constant Van Crombrugghe, and which takes its impetus from the ongoing mission of the Roman Catholic Church and the historical witness of the Josephite Congregation.”

The distinctive features of a school with a Constantian ethos are that it is:

- a truly Roman Catholic institution which promotes
- the development of the whole human being according to the individual abilities and needs of each pupil
- in an environment marked by “politesse” both human and material
- in which pupils are led by “douceur”
- and a genuine mutual affection and esteem between themselves and their teachers.”

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<sup>17</sup> “Tout professeur attaché à cet établissement doit avant tout s’acquitter de ses devoirs de bon chrétien, et de se conformer à tout ce que les meilleures familles catholiques sont en droit d’exiger de ceux qui sont proposés à l’éducation de leurs enfants.” *Projet de Règlement des Professeurs Laïcs pour gouverne de nos Supérieurs*, No. 1.

<sup>18</sup> “On se conformera exactement pour les méthodes d’enseignement, les auteurs à employer et aux prescriptions du préfet.” *Projet de Règlement des Professeurs Laïcs pour gouverne de nos Supérieurs*, No. 13.

<sup>19</sup> My parentheses.

<sup>20</sup> Mission Statement.

## ENDNOTE

At the end of the opening chapter of this thesis it was suggested of Van Crombrugge that although “he cannot be placed amongst the highest class of original thinkers on education, he has an indisputable claim to stand with those whose actual concrete services to educational administration have been very considerable indeed.” It would be my contention that what has been discovered in this research has indeed validated this assertion. Outside the bounds of those who have come into contact with the Josephites his name is largely unknown. Nevertheless over the past 183 years countless young people in Belgium, England, California and Congo<sup>21</sup> have benefited from the “minute particulars” of his inspiration. The numerical decline of the Josephites and the transfer of power from religious to lay hands does not mean the death of this inspiration, but rather a new contextualisation of Van Crombrugge's vision whereby his educational philosophy, defined as Constantian rather than Josephite, continues as the defining principle of the new order.

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<sup>21</sup> The country which was Zaire when this chapter was started, but the “Democratic Republic of Congo” by the time it was finished.