

# BREBEUF'S SPIRITUAL JOURNAL

*Kathleen O'Donnell*

THE WELL KNOWN WRITINGS OF Jean de Brébeuf consist of the two lengthy reports included in *The Jesuit Relations*, and several letters. Other works such as the Christmas carol, the Huron catechism, and particularly the spiritual journal, are less widely appreciated. Brébeuf's spiritual journal has not yet been wholly translated and published in English. This work contains thirty-eight entries, thirty-one of which are written in Latin and the rest in French.

The original text of Brébeuf's spiritual writings is included in a manuscript of 1652 entitled *Quelques Graces/Visions. Illustrations et autres/Remarques extraites des/Manuscripts du P. Jean de Brébeuf*. A further source of Brébeuf's spiritual notes is Chapter V of the *Relation* of May 1, 1649 written by Father Paul Ragueneau to Father Jerome Lalemant. More recently, there has appeared a modern French version and study of the original text in René Latourelle's *Etude sur les écrits de Saint Jean de Brébeuf* (Montreal, 1953). His work is the basis on which my English version is made.

Brébeuf's spiritual journal is of interest as a historical document and as a report of the author's spiritual experiences. As entries are dated, there is historical precision in this work. It records, for example, under the date of 11 April 1640, the attack made against the Frenchmen. Brébeuf's voyage to the Neutrals is noted under the date November 17, 1640. On January 16, 1641, Brébeuf refers to Father Coton's defence of the Jesuit Order.

Brébeuf's notes, which extend from 1630 to 1645, reflect his occupations in those years. The first entries were written when Brébeuf was thirty-seven years old. He had already experienced a four-year sojourn in Canada. In 1629, after

Kirk's capture of Quebec, Brébeuf was obliged to return to France. From 1629 to 1633, he remained in France where he was occupied in schools except during a period of illness in 1630. In 1633, he returned to Canada and worked mainly among the Hurons until 1640. He was missionary to the Neutrals in 1640-41, then returned to Huronia, and to Quebec in 1642. From 1644 until his death in 1649, he laboured among the Hurons.

In the first entries of 1630, there are evident the complete dedication and prayerfulness of Brébeuf. He had at this time already experienced disappointment and suffering. These, as much as the ecstasy which is recorded, were the beginning of his spiritual advance.

The progression is marked by three vows. The first of these is the vow of service written in 1631. For the second vow, that of martyrdom, there exists a record in Father Paul Ragueneau's *Relation* of 1649. He reports the vow to have been made by Brébeuf as follows:

My God and my Saviour Jesus, what can I render to you for all the benefits which you have conferred upon me? I will take from your hand the cup of your sufferings, and I will invoke your Name. I then make a vow, — in the presence of your Eternal Father and of the Holy Ghost; in the presence of your most sacred Mother, and of her most chaste spouse, Saint Joseph; before the Angels, the Apostles and Martyrs, and my blessed Fathers Saint Ignatius and St. Francis Xavier, — yes, my Saviour Jesus, I make a vow to you never to fail, on my side, in the grace of martyrdom, if by your infinite mercy you offer it to me some day, to me, your unworthy servant. I bind myself to it in such a way that I intend that, during all the rest of my life, it shall no longer be a lawful thing for me, when remaining at my option, to avoid opportunities of dying and of shedding my blood for you. (Save only that, in some emergency, I should judge that, for the time being, it might be to the interests of your glory to behave otherwise in the matter.) And when I shall have received the stroke of death, I bind myself to accept it from your hand with all pleasure, and with joy in my heart. And consequently, my beloved Jesus, I offer to you from to-day, in the feelings of joy that I have thereat, my blood, my body, and my life; so that I may die only for you, if you grant me this favour, since you have indeed condescended to die for me. Enable me to live in such a way that finally you may grant me this favour, to die so happily. Thus, my God and my Saviour, I will take from your hand the cup of your sufferings, and I will invoke your Name, Jesus, Jesus, Jesus.<sup>1</sup>

The third vow, that of perfection, is dated August 18, 1645, in Brébeuf's spiritual journal. The expression of these vows reveals Brébeuf's great humility and submission before God and before his religious superiors.

That the greatest part of the journal dates from the year 1640 may probably be explained by the fact that Brébeuf had at that time been commanded to record his spiritual experiences. "He had been commanded to write these extraordinary things which occurred within his soul, — at least, those which he could most easily remember."<sup>2</sup>

The soul of the author shines through these writings. Most apparent are his humility and dedication. The following words of Brébeuf as given in the *Relation* of 1649 show clearly his attitude to suffering and to approaching death.

O my God, why are you not known? [he wrote some time before dying] Why is this barbarous country not all converted to you? Why is not sin abolished from it? Why are you not loved? Yes, my God, if all the torments which the captives can endure in these countries in the cruelty of the tortures, were to fall on me, I offer myself thereto with all my heart, and I alone will suffer them.<sup>3</sup>

The dominant image is that of the cross which is at once a sign of security and a premonition of suffering and death. There are troublesome visions from evil sources, as permitted by God, and also visions of consolation and elation. In perfect submission, Brébeuf accepted these experiences by which he was prepared for martyrdom.

The journal is given here in English. It may be appreciated as a historical document, and as the writings of one of the first mystics of Canada.

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JANUARY 1630 — *I felt an ardent desire to suffer something for Jesus Christ; I fear being reproved because up till now he has treated me with too much mildness; I am afraid especially at the thought that I have grievously offended his divine majesty. Nevertheless, I shall hold firmly the hope of my salvation when occasions of suffering present themselves.*

THE 11TH — *Having considered attentively my sins so serious and so numerous, I believed nevertheless that I saw the divine mercy that extended its arms to me to embrace me with kindness and that pardoned by amnesty all my past sins; it revived the memory of my good works performed in charity, but stifled by sin, and finally invited me to join in close friendship, saying to me as to Paul formerly: "He will be to Me a vessel of election and will carry my name to Nations." Then I thanked God, I offered myself and said: "Make of me, Lord, a man according to your heart. Teach me what You want me to do. In the future, nothing will separate me from your love, neither nakedness, nor the sword, nor death. Did I, a member of your holy company, I, destined to be your apostle of Canada, if I had been faithful, I to whom was given, certainly not the gift of languages, but a great*

facility for learning them, did I have to be so careless! oh evil! oh unseemliness! oh deformity of my conduct!"

I did not find in myself any affection for venial sin that would lead me to commit such with pleasure.

I prayed to God not to cut me down like a useless tree, but to grant me still this year, and I promised to bear better fruits.

FEBRUARY 9 — It seemed to me, being suddenly ravished, that I was deprived of all my senses and united to God. In truth, this ravishing was accompanied by a transitory physical feeling.

On the 25th of March of this year 1630, I shall have passed thirty seven years; in fact, I was born in 1593 on the feast of the Annunciation.

On the 20th of January 1630, I pronounced the vows of coadjutor in the chapel of the college of Rouen, before the Reverend Father Jacques Bertrix, rector.

In the month of September 1631, I received the subdiaconate at Lisieux; then, the same year, the diaconate at Bayeux in December; in 1632, I was ordained at Pontoise, at the beginning of Lent and, on the feast of the Annunciation of the Virgin, I offered to God my first Mass at Rouen.

DURING THE EXERCISES OF 1631, BEGUN ON MAY 12 — Lord Jesus, my Redeemer, you have redeemed me by your blood and your very precious death. That is why I promise to serve You all my life, in the Society of Jesus, to serve no other than You, and You alone. I sign this promise with my blood and my hand, prepared to sacrifice my whole life as willingly as this drop.

ON SEPTEMBER 4, DURING THE EXERCISES — In His goodness, God has provided me with mildness, with gentleness and with charity towards all; with disinterestedness as regards all things and with patience to endure contrarities. His divine goodness wills that by these means I come to perfection and to eternal glory. That is why that will be the matter of my particular examination, to know whether I am using these talents that He has confided to me as I should.

1637 — On the 21st, or the 22nd, or the 23rd of the month of August, and at the time of the evening examination of conscience and the litany of the Virgin, in a vision of the spirit or the imagination, I believed I saw an immense horde of demons who approached me with the intention of devouring me, or at least, of biting me. But not one of them succeeded in harming me. Those that were in front were like horses of strange grandeur, with hair long and curly like that of goats; I scarcely remember the forms of the others, but I know that I had never seen anything so numerous, so diverse and so horrible. This vision lasted perhaps for the space of a Miserere. I do not remember having been afraid, but, placing my confidence in God, I said: "Do all that God permits you; you will not pull out one hair of my head without a sign of His will."

DURING THE EXERCISES OF 1645.

AUGUST 18 — Henceforth, I shall make, every day at the time of communion, with the consent of the superior, the vow to do all that I know will contribute to the greatest glory of God and to His greatest service.

*This Vow will have two rules: (1) When I myself, reasonably, with clarity and without any doubt, shall judge that something is for the greatest glory of God; (2) the superior or the spiritual director whom I must consult when in doubt if I can.*

*I add as explanation: (1) This vow extends to all that is concerned with the rule, so that where there would be mortal sin in virtue of the precept, there would also be sacrilege in virtue of the vow; (2) in things which are of simple counsel and not of precept, but which are important and of grave consequence for the glory of God, this vow binds me under pain of mortal sin. If the thing is less important, it binds me only under pain of venial sin; (3) in order that in a thing of small importance I be held by this vow under pain of venial sin, I must see clearly, with certitude and without hesitation, that it may contribute to the greatest glory of God, whether I judge it according to the law of God, or according to the rules of decision given in the Exercises, or finally according to the lights of my reason and the grace of God, or whether I take as rule the judgment of the superior or of the spiritual director.*

*DURING THE EXERCISES OF 1640 — On the day before retreat, after the examination, while I was confessing, and afterwards while I was performing my penance, two suns appeared to me, shining with a bright light, between which there was a cross whose arms, head, and foot seemed of the same dimension. I did not see what material this cross was made of, but each extremity ended in a fleur de lis or in the face of a cherubim. On the upper part of the cross there appeared, if I am not mistaken, the image of Our Lord Jesus Christ. Afterwards I had doubts, asking myself whether it was not the image of the Blessed Virgin Mary. From that time, I felt myself called interiorly to the cross and to mortification.*

*The following day, it was February 12, during the first exercise, I endeavoured to be in God in a thought of pure love and I thrust aside the sight of every creature: also I was pursued by all sorts of distractions and burdened with aversion. Then I believed I heard within myself: "Turn towards Jesus Christ crucified and He will be henceforth the base and the foundation of your contemplations." At once I felt devoted to Jesus Christ.*

*The same day, I believed I saw a truly terrible figure resembling the lion head that is seen, I think, in a picture of Father Joseph Anchieta, but larger at the first and increasing little by little. I believed it to be the devil; however, I did not experience any fear, but I said: "Act if God permits you." I made the sign of the cross, it seems to me, and at once the spectre disappeared.*

*On the 14th, at the time of the meditation, I believed I saw Our Lord Jesus Christ, fixed to the cross, who came towards me to be relieved of the burden and to place it on my shoulders; willingly I offered my shoulders, but I do not know what happened. I know only that a dead body appeared to me, separated from the cross, not as it had appeared previously, but entirely covered with leprosy, without form or beauty. All the time I thought that it was the body of Our Lord Jesus Christ because I saw the wounds in His hands, and I understood that we must not*

think of Jesus crucified as we ordinarily imagine, but rather as a leper in whom there was neither form nor beauty.

The same day, in the evening, as I prepared to meditate on the perfections of Jesus Christ, on His various communications with me and my misery before Him, thinking that all His other titles must come together, as to a centre, in His extraordinary love for us, I at once believed I saw an immense rose, marvellous in size and kind, with all its beauty radiating from such a centre.

On the 18th, I seemed to see the Blessed Virgin Mary carrying the Infant Jesus as on an azure blue cloud, and golden rays of rare beauty sprang out of this cloud. I hoped that the Virgin would present me to Christ, but nothing happened.

On February 23, during the evening examination, I thought I saw something like the face of a Spaniard, wearing a pleated ruff and a Spanish hat. At once the thought came to me that the devil was hiding under this form, seeking to distract me from prayer. I quickly turned my thoughts to other things.

On the 26th of the same month, at night, during the recitation of the rosary, I believed I saw the tabernacle of the Sainte-Marie residence on which seven angels are painted, and I felt myself urged to prayer. Then it seemed to me that I was in the house and in the chapel and that I saw the relics there: I was greatly inspired to invoke all those saints.

On March 9, after the evening examination, I was reading a spiritual book near the fire. Then I saw, near the little house of Sainte-Marie, an enormous streaked serpent that seemed to come out of the river and creep towards the house. It appeared to be five or six cubits long. When it was near the house, it rose and threw itself on one of our Frenchmen that it seemed to seize by the ears and the hair, until one of our Fathers, running behind, seized the serpent and crushed it against the ground. All then began to tramp on it and the vision disappeared at once.

Next I saw, behind the gable end of the little house of Sainte-Marie, four dogs of astonishing size, with long ears. They were resting on their haunches and looking towards the house. Two were smoke-coloured, and two were dark brown. I did not see any more than that.

On March 11, as I began the morning examination before the blessed Sacrament, I saw a Jesuit — I do not know which one — elevated in space, in the manner in which we ordinarily paint our Fathers, with the head surrounded by a great light. Shortly after, antennae like those of a crab projected from the head of this Jesuit, then the whole head changed into a river crab, evident from the numerous feet, and he hung down towards the earth. This vision was brief but it frightened and upset me greatly, at the thought that I might be this unfortunate Jesuit in whom such a terrible change would be produced.

On March 21, being at the residence of Saint Joseph, during my night prayer, I saw a human form arise above the altar. It had wings and, moving them, balanced and supported itself in space, but could hardly go forward, held as it was by a cord or by some other means. I believed at first, when it appeared and attempted to fly, that it had four wings, but then I saw only two. This vision signifies, had I thought,

that I or some other person tries to rise to the contemplation of celestial things, but finds himself prevented from attaining them by worldly affections.

On March 30, after my Mass, as I was recollecting inwardly to listen to Christ speaking within me, I believed I saw a hand that anointed my heart and my whole spirit with oil. This sight filled me with extreme peace and tranquility.

On April 11, at the residence of Saint Joseph, a sedition arose, during which Pierre Boucher's arm was injured, while Father Chaumonot and I were stricken with blows; burdened with injuries and greatly frightened, we were all ordered by Ondihoahorea and the other captains to leave the village. At night, as I was thanking God for all that had happened, forcing myself, although very upset and distressed, to conform my will to God's, I believed I saw the Blessed Virgin Mary—as she is represented in pictures—greatly afflicted and her heart pierced with lances. I felt inwardly a voice saying to me: "The Blessed Mother of God, although greatly afflicted, was always perfectly submissive to the will of God and she must be an example for you in adversities."

On May 9, in the town of Saint Joseph, I was enraptured in God by flights of vehement love that urged me to strain towards Him with effort. Then something appeared to me under the form of an old woman who, hastening to embrace me, struck her head against mine so violently that I was hurt. Then I suspected this old woman to be the devil; I fortified myself with the sign of the cross and at once the old woman, remaining at a distance, did not dare to approach me any more.

During the days when I was at Teanaostaiaie, I was often carried to God by flights of love.

On the seventeenth of the same month, during the day, while I was praying to God, I felt my spirit raised while I was considering a cross made like the one at Sainte Marie in which relics from the holy land are enshrined, or like some crosses that are made of stars. This vision lasted a long time, and during it I had no other thought but that God wanted to send me some new cross.

On August 4th, having returned from the burial of our late Chrétien, in the evening during the examination, I had various visions. I remember nothing at all of the first. The second presented to me a pavilion or dome that descended from the sky and rested over the grave of our Chrétien, and next it seemed to me that his same pavilion was pulled up by the two ends and drawn on high as if it were to be raised to heaven. I did not see however that it was raised, nor the persons who drew it. This vision lasted long enough and ended there. The sentiment that I felt from it is that God wanted to make understood the state of the soul of this good Chrétien.

On the 12th or 13th of August, I seemed to see a high mountain entirely covered with women saints. I do not know whether some men saints appeared, but more truly it seems to me that there were only women saints. They were disposed on this mountain in the way of an amphitheatre, in such a way that from the foot of the mountain up to the summit the ranks diminished until they were reduced to unity that was Our Lady, who was seated on the peak of the said hill. Then I thought

of our Joseph Chiwatenhwa, but I did not see him on that hill. I believed that this vision signified the excellence of the Blessed Virgin over all the saints.

On August 27th, at night, while saying the litanies, I saw the form of a man who was suspended in air, but inverted so that his head was below and his feet above. It seemed to me that his feet were not attached to anything, but only that this man was upheld in air in this posture. I could not distinguish who this person was. But immediately afterwards, I saw and knew distinctly a certain man, whether or not he was the same as the first, who was seated with his face turned towards the earth, and was totally covered with big postules, like some ill people who, during the contagion, were seen to be covered, not with a flax pox, but with large grains. And not only was he covered in face and body with this leprosy or pox, but also the air around him. And I do not doubt that there appeared someone a little distance from him, already infected with the same contagion. The idea came to me that that vision signified the sad state of that unfortunate soul and the contagion that communicated itself to others following contact with that man.

On August 31st, at night, during the litany and the examination, I first saw a woman's garment of a ravishing beauty, as much because of the material that appeared admirable as because of the ornaments and embroideries of gold and pearl that were on it. A lady, whom I do not doubt was Our Lady, was dressed in this garment; but I did not see her face at all, and my spirit was entirely occupied and ravished by the sight and consideration of this rich and marvellously ample garment. Then the question having come to me of why I did not look at this lady directly, I raised on high the eyes of my spirit, and seemed to see a high statue, covered with a veil and with a crown above, in the way in which we are accustomed to represent the glorious Virgin. But this vision hardly lasted and was not very distinct.

In the second place, beside Our Lady there began to half open a great globe the interior of which was decorated with many and diverse beauties more surprising and ravishing than I can conceive, and than I know how to explain. I had never seen or read anything of the like. The first idea that came to me on the opening of this globe was that it was the same vision that I had of a clock with infinite springs. But it was entirely different. The sentiments that I had at the time were admiration, love of God and fear of being wrong.

On November 17th, on my way to the Neutral Nation, at night, before arriving, while praying to God, I believed I saw a multitude of angels placed before me.

On December 13th, being at Andachkhroeh Chenusolahissen, it seems to me while making my examination, I saw a skeleton fleeing from me: did it come from me? or rather, coming from elsewhere, was it simply close to me? I do not know. I know only one thing: when I saw it, it held fast to my sides, and it disappeared at once.

On January 16, 1641, in a dream, I believed myself in the company of blessed Father Coton: he told me that the following day he had a case to plead before the judges; in my turn I told him that I also, in the following days, had a case to



*defend and that however I had not yet thought of my defence. In retrospect, I thought that the Father would give me his kind help in the defence that I had to make.*

*On February 7th, there appeared two hands joined as in sign of pact. Also at this moment, it seems to me, or a few days after, during the night prayer, there appeared to me a quantity of crosses that I accepted willingly. The following night, while at prayer, as I tried to conform my will to God's, saying to him: "Lord, your will be done", I heard as it were a voice say to me: "Take and read." The day having arrived, I took up the Imitation of Christ, and I happened on the chapter of "The Royal Way of the Holy Cross." Thereafter, there ensued in my spirit a great peace and repose concerning the trials that would come to me.*

*On October 8, 1644, in Huronia, in the chapel of the Blessed Virgin Mary, at night, during prayer, before the meal, I seemed to see violaceous or red blood stains on the clothes of all our fathers, as well as on mine, without anyone being excepted. As I was filled with wonder, the thought came to me that justice protected us all as with a garment of blood.*

I, the undersigned, priest of the Society of Jesus, delegated by Reverend Father Paul Ragueneau, superior of this mission, affirm under oath that the present writings, contained in the leaves from page 217 to 250, have been read with great care and attention, and conform totally to the autographs of Father Joseph-Marie Chaumonot, of the surgeon Francois Gendron, and to the manuscripts of Father Jean de Brébeuf.

Dated at Quebec in New France, August 25, 1652.

JOSEPH PONCET, S.J.

I affirm the same. — PAUL RAGUENEAU.

FOOTNOTES

<sup>1</sup> "Relation of 1648-49," *The Jesuit Relations*, ed. Reuben Gold Thwaites (New York, 1959), XXXIV, p. 167-169.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.* p. 163.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.* p. 189.