

Jean Monod (1765-1836)

Jean Monod was born on September 5, **1765**, in Ambilly, a small village half-way between Annemasse (Haute-Savoie) and Geneva. He was the eldest son of Gaspard Joël Monod (1717-1782), a former pastor and chaplain of the British governor of Guadeloupe, who had retired to Geneva as a translator and man of letters, and his wife Suzanne Madeleine Puerari (1739-1799), whom he had married in 1763. All his life, Jean was committed to Geneva, which he considered to be his home.

Jean received his first school training by his father (he later said that his “first education, of which his father took care, was faster than the one you got in school”). He entered the *Première* in **1776**, and began his literature classes in **1777** and philosophy in **1780**. He then decided to follow the example of his father by becoming a minister. He began his theological studies at the University of Geneva in **1782**, which was also the year in which his father died. He proved to be a brilliant student. In **1785** he defended his thesis on *The gift of tongues*; in **1786** he passed the sermon exam before the Vénérable Compagnie des pasteurs with a sermon on 1 Corinthians 4.5. He was ordained pastor on March 12, **1787**.

In **1790**, the Russian tsar Alexander I appointed one of Jean’s cousins governess of one of his daughters. Jean accompanied her to St. Petersburg. On his trip home, he decided to visit Stockholm and Copenhagen before returning to Geneva. He visited his former fellow student Ferdinand Louis Mourier (1754-1831), who had then become pastor of the local Reformed Church. When doing so, thanks to the “umbrella incident”, he was presented to the family of Frédéric de Coninck, a wealthy businessman of Huguenot origin. Julien-Pierre Monod tells the story: “During a walk in Copenhagen, a rain shower surprises Mourier and his friend . They are before the entrance of the beautiful residence of Frédéric de Coninck, businessman and state councillor, one of the foremost parishioners of Mourier’s church. Mourier goes up in order to borrow an umbrella; the family asks him to stay; he mentions the friend who is at the entrance; “Ask him to come in”, he is told. Thus Jean Monod is presented to the de Coninck family, and this presentation will have very important consequences for him.”

Indeed, Jean fell in love with Frédéric’s daughter, Louise-Philippine de Coninck (1775-1851) who was then sixteen years old.

Having spent several months in Copenhagen, Monod finally travelled to Berlin in **1791** and then returned to Switzerland. He came back to Copenhagen in **1792** and married Louise on January 18, **1793**. He was twenty-even, and his young wife seventeen years old.

The young couple then left for Switzerland. Their first son, Frédéric, was born in Monnaz, not far from Morges, in **1794**. In the very same year, Jean was invited to return to Copenhagen to replace one of the pastors of the French Reformed Church. He was a minister in this church for 14 years. During this period, seven children were born: Henri (1795), Adèle (1796), Edouard (1798), Guillaume (1800), Adolphe (1802), Gustave (1803) and Valdemar (1807).

Jean Monod made a trip to London and Paris in **1798**. He was invited to preach in the Reformed Church of Paris and made a good impression.

In **1799** he lost both his mother, who had followed her son to Copenhagen, and his sister.

In **1807**, the British government pretended that Napoleon and Alexander I had a plan to attack England by means of the Danish fleet; it summoned Denmark to hand over its ships. The Danish government first refused, but it gave in after intense bombings. This had the effect that Danish commerce came to a standstill. The business of de Coninck's establishment was greatly shaken.

At that time, the Reformed Church of Paris had three pastors, all of whom had been appointed by Napoleon: Jacques Antoine Rabaut, also known as Rabaut-Pommier (1744-1820), Paul-Henri Marron (1754-1832) and Jean-Frédéric Mestrezat (1760-1807). Shortly after Mestrezat's unexpected death in 1807, the Council invited Jean Monod in **1808** to become his successor. In view of the misfortune of de Coninck's establishment, Monod accepted this call. His family arrived in Paris on December 1, 1808. Jean was installed on December 26 by Rabaut-Pommier and gave his first sermon on January 8, **1809**. He was presented to the Emperor on January 24, after the latter's return from Spain.

Five more children were born in Paris: Marie (1809), Edmond (1811, who died the same year), Horace (1814), Elisa (1815) and Betsy (1818).

In **1811**, his father-in-law died. According to Jean, Frédéric de Coninck was "one of the best and most lovable men who ever existed".

In **1814**, "it is with the greatest joy that he [saw] the fall of Bonaparte and the return of the legitimate rulers of France, as well as the return of universal peace."

The University of Copenhagen offered him the title DD *honoris causa* in **1817**.

In **1818** he assisted the ordination of his son Frédéric in Geneva. He installed him as a deputy pastor of the church in Paris in **1820**.

At that time, Jean Monod was a highly respected pastor; in 1820 he was awarded the Cross of the Legion of Honour.

The last years of his life were overshadowed by sorrows and tensions with those of his sons who had chosen a pastoral career.

Jean was a helpless observer of Adolphe's great crisis from 1824 to 1827. When Adolphe adopted the ideas of the Awakening movement, his father, who was a representative of the religiosity of the Enlightenment, found it hard to understand. Julien-Pierre Monod, one of Adolphe's grand-sons invokes a "gulf of misunderstanding that cannot be explained by the generation gap alone".

Tensions between Frédéric Monod – who also was a follower of the Awakening movement; he even left the Reformed Church in 1848 – and his father appeared when Charles-Frédéric Grawitz (1804-1852), who had studied theology in Montauban, wanted to be ordained in the Temple de l'Oratoire in Paris. His request was granted in **1827**. Frédéric Monod and his colleague Henri François Juillerat-Chasseur (1781-1867) declared that "their conscience did not allow them to assist in this ordination". They sent an open letter to all

pastors of France and Geneva in which they accused Grawitz to “profess wrong fundamental doctrines that contradict Holy Scripture”. This was a very painful experience for Jean Monod, who had approved of the ordination of Grawitz. He wrote to Adolphe:

“You have received the letter sent to all pastors of France and Geneva, signed by Monod the Younger, wherein it is established that Monod the Elder leads souls to perdition. I am telling you this without complaining. Eleven or twelve years ago, when I was told that Malan had pronounced the damnation of his father, I have vigorously protested against this monstrous extravagance, and I would not have believed that it could happen again, close to me. Today I receive this with great sadness, and I believe it is a sad omen for our churches, but I accept it as a testing that Providence has kept in reserve for my old age, and I find it to contain two reasons to be satisfied: the first is that I can truly say before God that I do not feel the slightest bitterness in my heart; the second is that it strengthens my beliefs and makes me happy that I do not hold those who declare themselves judges over the salvation and damnation of other men. As the life and the teachings of the Methodists – *NB: this was the common moniker for the followers of the Awakening movement* – (very fortunately) are but a composite of contradictions, I have no doubt that my sons will be to me until my end what they have always been – the best of sons.”

As to Guillaume Monod, he displeased his father by adopting the doctrine of predestination. Guillaume was appointed pastor of the Reformed church in Saint-Quentin (Picardy) in **1828**. He appears to have been somewhat exalted in the exercise of his ministry, which created tensions, and announced more serious trouble to come.

The problems Adolphe faced as pastor of the Reformed Church of Lyon from **1829** on also were a source of deep sorrow for his father, who disapproved of Adolphe’s hard doctrinal stance.

The year **1832** was particularly eventful:

On March 19, Adolphe was deposed as a minister of the Reformed Church of Lyon, by royal ordinance. His father greatly disapproved of his son’s subsequent activities in the evangelical reformed church of Lyon.

On May 5, Guillaume was committed to a psychiatric facility after he had presented himself at the Tuileries Palace in order to transmit a divine warning to the king Louis-Philippe. After a six-month stay in the lunatic asylum in Vanves, he was transferred to the asylum in Fishponds near Bristol (England) where he was locked up for four years, until after the death of Jean Monod, whom he held responsible for this situation.

When the president of the Council of the Reformed Church of Paris, Paul-Henri Marron, died from the cholera on July 31, Jean Monod was appointed as his successor. Frédéric became a pastor in title.

In **1835**, he made a last trip to Geneva for the celebration of the Reformation Jubilee. His health rapidly declined during the winter.

Jean Monod was pastor of the reformed Church of Paris until his death on April 23, **1836**, at the age of 70, as a result of a heart disease. A huge crowd of about 3000 persons, comprising 57 pastors, attended the funeral at the Père-Lachaise cemetery in Paris.

During his lifetime, Jean Monod had allowed the publication of only one single sermon, celebrating the peace of 1814, but his family has kept a collection of 51 sermons in six volumes, which it has given to the Vénérable Compagnie in Geneva. The publication of a selection of sermons had been envisaged by his widow and his four sons who had become pastors (Frédéric, Adolphe, Guillaume and Horace) but the idea has finally been abandoned.

Jean Monod has also left a translation of the letters of the German theologian Franz Volkmar Reinhard (1753-1812), on his studies and his career as a preacher. He has also contributed about fifteen articles to Louis-Gabriel Michaud's *Biographie Universelle*, one of which dealt with his father.

Main sources:

- Gustave Monod, *La famille Monod*, 1890
- Julien-P. Monod, *Jean Monod (1765-1836)*, Bulletin de la société de l'histoire du protestantisme, 1936, p. 117-142